

The Tale of the Early Career of Rescriptor Bao

Newly Printed, Completely Illustrated,
in Prose and in Verse

Let's not sing about the Three Lords or the Five Thearchs,¹
But of the Humane Ancestor, a ruler embodying the Way.
For a period of forty-two years he was the Son of Heaven,
Repeatedly he thanked Heaven for Its Grace in the suburbs.

Ten times he sacrificed in the suburbs: that is thirty years;
Four times he sacrificed in the Bright Hall — that's twelve.²
For forty-two years he ensured the flourishing of the state,
Relying on the civil officials and military officers at court.

Among officials there was pure magistrate Rescriptor Bao;
Among officers you had Generalissimo Di of Hexi fame,³

¹ The Three Lords (*sanhuang*) and Five Thearchs (*wudi*) are a general reference to the earliest rulers who established civilization.

² The Song emperors offered sacrifices to Heaven once every three years. They initially did so on a suburban altar outside the city walls of Kaifeng. In 1050, Renzong decided that from then on the sacrifices would be conducted in the Bright Hall. The Bright Hall (*mingtang*; also translated as Hall of Light or Hall of Enlightenment) is a ritual edifice that is mentioned in the Classics, but its precise design and function are much debated by scholars. During Renzong's lifetime no Bright Hall was constructed — on the occasion of the sacrifice, one of the palace halls was designated as the Bright Hall. The Bright Hall sacrifices were an exceedingly grand affair as hundreds of deities were included in the sacrifices. By the end of the Northern Song over 18,000 people took part in the ceremony.

³ Generalissimo Di is Di Qing (1008–1057), who rose from the ranks to the highest offices in the land because of his courage on the battlefield in the wars of 1038–1044 against the Xixia. Hexi refers to the area of Gansu to the west of the Yellow River, which in the eleventh century was controlled by the Xixia.

And it was thanks to all civil officials and military officers
That the Humane Ancestor could establish Great Peace.

Listen as I sing about that pure magistrate, Rescriptor Bao:
He hailed from Baoxin Garrison in Luzhou prefecture —
From Little Bao Village, by the side of the Phoenix Bridge,
Eighteen miles outside the capital of Luzhou prefecture.

His father was Millionaire Bao who was loaded with money,
His mother was addressed by the title of “Her Ladyship.”
The family owned three-thousand *qing* of irrigated fields,
And constantly employed several hundreds of farm-laborers.

They kept several hundreds of water buffaloes for plowing:
The sounded gong was the signal for those who herded cows.
Millionaire Bao had been blessed with the birth of three sons,
And the two sons who had been born first were outstanding.

But it happened that his youngest Third Son was very ugly:
For eight parts he looked like a ghost, for two parts a man.
From birth he had three-cornered eyes with three eyebrows:
As soon as the old man saw this, his rage turned to anger.

Speak:

As soon as Mr. Bao saw that his third child was born so ugly and repulsive,
he ordered his servant to take it to the foot of the southern hill and
drown it in the mountain brook so as to avoid later harm for a thousand
years.

Sing:

If this had startled other people, it would have been a minor matter,
But this startled, in that mansion, his great personal benefactor.
It startled his great personal benefactor, his eldest brother’s wife;
She stepped forward and addressed Mr. Bao in the following way.

Speak:

When his eldest brother’s wife saw that Mr. Bao wanted to drown the third
boy, she begged him with a bow not to drown the child.

Sing:

His sister-in-law presented herself in front of the steps of the hall,
And making a deep bow, she addressed her father-in-law as follows:
“Even though your third boy may have been born very ugly indeed,
And even though his eyebrows and eyes are both equally strange,

The hair on his head is sturdy and thick and resembles black clouds,
His two earlobes reach to his shoulders, and his teeth are like silver.
His nose is straight, his mouth square, his heavenly storehouse full,⁴
And his face shows the lines of bringing law and order to the nation.

Father-in-law, if you are determined you don’t want this third boy,
I beg you, please give him to me, so he can be my son or grandson.”

She looked after him and raised him in her own room for ten years,
And by and by he had grown up and turned into an adult man.
Then one day he left her room and passed in front of the hall,
Where he was spotted by Millionaire Bao — now listen to the story!

Speak:

When Mr. Bao saw that his Third Son had turned ten, he said: “You bastard! You have eaten rice for ten years in the room of your eldest brother’s wife, but today your father will give you a job to do!” When Third Son heard this, he ran to his sister-in-law to tell her: “Today my father will assign me a job to do.” When his eldest brother’s wife heard this, her heart was filled with joy: “If he doesn’t order you to study the books, he will definitely dispatch you to the southern farm to become a cowherd.”

Sing:

When Third Son came to hear the words of his father,
Tears streamed down his cheeks in great profusion.
At the door of her room Third Son [cried:] “Dear sister,
My father sends me away with the job of a cowherd.”

[Hearing this, she then said to the third] brother:
“[Don’t be worried] on any account at this juncture.
Your good fortune has not yet come, so please accept,
[And wait for the moment that your luck will arrive.]”

⁴ The heavenly storehouse refers to the forehead.

Third Son thereupon did as his father had told him to do,
 And went to the farm to be a cowherd for the time being.
 [He thought he might be gone for only a] few months —
 Little did he know he would be gone for a full five years!

But this day it was the thirtieth night of the final month,
 So he went home for a while to celebrate the old year.

Speak:

Third Son thought to himself: “I am a full son of Mr. Bao! But when I return home tonight, I don’t dare greet my father and mother — I will go and see my eldest brother’s wife!” When his eldest brother’s wife saw Third Son, she was overcome by joy, and asked him: “How are you doing now you have come back home tonight?” Third Son told her: “If you have the clothes, allow me to borrow some so I can wear them when I wish people a happy new year.” She asked him: “Whom do you intend to wish a happy new year?” Third Son then asked her: “Whom do you want me to wish a happy new year?”

Sing:

“First bow in front of your father and your mother,
 And secondly bow in front of your two elder brothers.
 Thirdly you must bow in front of your sisters-in-law,
 And finally you can make your bows to other relatives.”

Third Son thereupon did exactly as she had told him,
 And went off the next morning to make all his bows.
 When the fifth watch had arrived and the sky was bright,⁵
 Five hundred farm laborers all had arrived at the gate.

After he had bowed to his benefactor, his sister-in-law,
 She then set out a large banquet and served him wine.
 But before he was able to drink only a few cups,
 Mr. Bao, in the hall, gave out his orders to his sons.

Speak:

Mr. Bao dispatched his eldest son to the houses of the relatives who were living far away to congratulate them in turn, and he dispatched his second son to the houses of the relatives who were living closer by to congratulate them in turn, but the third, that bastard, was sent nowhere!

⁵ In traditional China, the night was divided into five watches of equal length.

Sing:

“Take off all those fine clothes you are wearing for now,
And go off to the southern farm to be a buffalo plowboy.
If you cannot finish plowing the southern farm’s rice fields,
You are not allowed to go back to the farm after sunset.”

When Third Son, timid as he was, had heard this in person,
He lowered his head and his tears flowed down in profusion.
Carrying a plow on his shoulder and leading a buffalo he left,
Going to the southern farm to become a buffalo plowboy.

Upon arrival at the southern farm, he [sat down] in the fields.
And this startled the Star of Great White up in the clouds.⁶
He immediately dispatched a god down to the world below
To go and become a buffalo plowboy, replacing Third Son.

Speak:

Third Son was very tired, and resting his head on his plow, he laid down in the fields and soon fell asleep. When he woke up, he saw that the fields had all been plowed. He thought to himself: “This must have been my eldest brother’s wife — because she saw how much I am suffering, she had the plowing done for me.”

Leading his buffalo he went back, [and ran into] a fortuneteller. When Third Son had greeted him, the latter asked: “May I ask you for your surname?” Third Son replied: “My surname is Bao and I am [the third] of us brothers.” [When the fortuneteller] then asked: “How far is it from here to the prefectural capital of Luzhou?” he replied: “That is one hundred and eighty miles.” The fortuneteller then said: “Don’t you want to know your future?” Third Son said: “My father has condemned me to be a buffalo plowboy here on the southern farm, so what good would it do me? And I have no money to pay you for your computations.” The fortuneteller said: “You told me the distance to Luzhou, so I will read your future. What are the year, month, and day of your birth?” Third Son told the fortuneteller: “I was born on the hour of *mao* of the fifteenth day of the Second Month of the third year of the Chunhua reign period.”⁷

⁶ Great White is the planet Venus. In popular literature, the astral god of the Great White often comes down to earth in various guises, for instance as an old man, to help people in need.

⁷ The Chunhua reign period lasted from 990 to 995.

Sing:

When the fortuneteller had heard what Third Son said,
 He did not say a single word for more than a full hour, so
 Third Son crossed his arms and stepped forward, asking:
 “Dear Mr. Fortuneteller, you’re some cheating charlatan!”

Speak:

Third Son said: “I told you to read my future, so why don’t you say a word?” The fortuneteller said: “Dear sir, don’t be so hasty!”

Sing:

Not only were you born in a *mao* year and also in a *mao* month,
 But you were also born on a *mao* day and also at a *mao* hour.
 [You’ve been born] under a combination of four *mao* characters,
 [And this rare combination predicts a brilliant official career.]⁸

At thirty-two you will become a district magistrate in Haozhou,
 At thirty-four you will then rule the common people in Chenzhou.
 [At thirty-six] you next will rule the capital prefecture of Kaifeng,
 Judging at daytime the world of light, at night the world of shade.”

When Third Son heard this, he at first did not know what to say,
 [But then he cursed] the fortuneteller: “You must be fooling me!
 If I have to be a civil official, I don’t even know a single character;
 If I have to be a military officer, I’m not trained in martial arts.”

The fortuneteller again stepped forward and spoke as follows:
 “Dear sir, on no account should you be worried about such details.
 And please remember the fortuneteller who figured out your fate
 Once later you will have risen to that noble rank and great glory.”

Speak:

Third Son told the fortuneteller: “I have no other thing for identification
 but this handkerchief which I will give to you for that purpose. When I
 have obtained an office, come and see me, bringing this handkerchief, and
 I will pay you for telling my fortune.” The fortuneteller then said goodbye
 and left.

⁸ The rhymes indicate that one line here must be missing in the original.

Sing:

After he had said goodbye to Third Son, he went a few steps,
Then rode on a cloud and sauntered off to the gate of heaven.
From the top of his cloud he cried out at the top of his voice;
Calling to him, he said: "Literature Star, man surnamed Bao,

I am not some common mortal [from the world here below],
I am the god of the Great White Star of the southern regions."
When Third Son heard this, his heart was filled with great joy;
Lifting both his hands high, [he bowed down before the god.]

"How grateful I am that the divine immortal told my fortune,
Later I am bound to become an official at some future date.
So I will not plow these fields anymore, but go back home,
Go and see my personal benefactor, my eldest brother's wife."

As soon as she saw him, she was filled with greatest joy:
"My dear brother-in-law, you should be [quite happy] today.
Today is New Year, the very first day of the whole new year,
Why did your father condemn you to be a buffalo plowboy?"

Speak:

His eldest brother's wife said: "Dear little brother-in-law, every day you came back home you were annoyed, but today you are happy and joyful. You must have found some rare treasure!" "Dear sister-in-law, I met a fortuneteller, who told me my fate, and said that I would pass the examinations at the age of twenty-nine as Top-of-the-List, and become a district magistrate in Haozhou Prefecture, that next I would become governor of Chenzhou, and that later I would be promoted to be prefect of the capital prefecture of Kaifeng." Hearing this, the eldest brother's wife was very pleased. But when she told it to the second brother's wife, the latter said: "If he obtains an office, they really must have no official left to send down to Huaixi!"⁹

Sing:

Hearing this, his eldest brother's wife was annoyed in her heart,
She told her little brother-in-law diligently to study the books.
"We will not spend any of your father's money or treasure,
But find you a teacher who will teach you in his classroom."

⁹ Huaixi here probably is short for Huainan xilu, the Song administrative region which included both Luzhou and Haozhou.



Fig. 1.1

Upper picture: Mr. Bao orders his son to go and plow the fields.

Lower picture: Third Son meets a fortuneteller while plowing the fields.

During the day he plowed the fields, at night he went to school, After three years of study ready to jump across the Dragon Gate!¹⁰ “How grateful I am to you, my brother’s wife, my benefactor, For your support today of me, now I have become a student!”

Speak:

His eldest brother’s wife thought to herself: “My little brother-in-law has no one to look after him at school. I will take some presents to the teacher, so he will choose him a fitting name as a scholar.” She then ordered the farm laborers to carry her sedan chair, and off she went to the school at the southern farm with her serving girls and female servants following behind her. When the teacher saw the Missus, he came out to welcome her, and after they had drunk a cup of tea, he asked her: “Dear Mrs. Bao, what business brings you here?” She replied: “I hope you will provide my nephew with the proper instruction. I have brought [some small presents as a gift to] you, because I would like to ask you to choose a fitting name for him as a scholar.”

Sing:

“The name he will use for official [purposes will be Bao Zheng],
And his studio name will be Civilized and Right, surnamed Bao.”
The teacher had chosen an official name and a scholarly name —
[His sister-in-law then tested Third Son’s talent at composition.]

Speak:

His eldest brother’s wife said: “Little brother-in-law, why don’t you compose a poem now you are studying the books?” Third Son said: “Please [look around you and select] an object as my topic.”

The poem reads:

*If you set to work with a steel ax, everything will be accomplished;
Even though it may be lowly and mean, it has a lofty reputation,*

¹⁰ Fishes that could jump across the rapids of the Dragon Gate in the Yellow River were believed to become dragons. This became a common image for passing the state examinations and becoming an official.

*Because as soon as it will be picked up and is selected for use,
The empire's mountains and rivers will be pacified at one stroke.¹¹*

[*Sing:*

When she heard this poem, she was extremely pleased;]
When the teacher had seen it, he was very happy indeed.

Speak:

The teacher also told his student [to compose a poem, and pointed to a] tree. Scaring him he said: "I assign these reeds to you as a topic."

The poem reads:

*The pine tree, still small, hasn't yet shown its nature,
So my teacher scares me by taking me for reeds.
But if one day in the future I will rise to glory,
I will be able to be a new pillar that supports the sky!¹²*

Sing:

"As a civil official [he will become a minister or a chancellor,]
As a military officer he'll be the commander-in-chief or a general.
'Civilized and Upright', he will be a pillar that supports heaven,
And no other officials will be able to even stand in his shadow."

When the eldest brother's wife heard this, she was filled with joy,
And after taking her leave of the teacher, she returned home.
Upon her return home, she prepared all he needed for the journey,
And thereupon told Third Son to leave in order to seek office.

When Third Son heard this, he was filled with joy in his heart;
He was overcome with gratitude towards his great benefactor.
"I will leave for the Eastern Capital to earn high status and glory;¹³
Allow me to thank you upon my return, I'll never forget your help."

¹¹ The text of the original is too damaged here to make sense, and the quatrain translated here is the one found in "Bao daizhi chushen yuanliu" (The Origin of the Career of Rescriptor Bao) as printed in the *Baijia gong'an*. An Yushi (1999). *Baijia gong'an*, ed. Shi Lei, Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, p. 7.

¹² This quatrain, like the preceding quatrain, is too damaged to make sense in the original, so I have again relied on the text of "Bao daizhi chushen yuanliu" of the *Baijia gong'an*. An Yushi (1999). *Baijia gong'an*, ed. Shi Lei, Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, p. 7.

¹³ The Eastern Capital is Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song dynasty.

While on the road he traveled on and on, for a number of days,
And one day the sky was turning dark — dusk had already fallen.
“Ahead of me I see no village, there’s nowhere an inn in sight —
Where will I be able to lodge tonight so I can sleep in peace?”

Speak:

Third Son then saw a temple of the Eastern Marchmount.¹⁴ “Tonight I can only sleep here.” At midnight, in the third watch, he saw an associate judge who entered, holding a register. The temple supervisor then asked: “Who will be next year’s Top-of-the-List?” The associate judge replied: “The number one will be a person from Huaixi; the number two will be a person from Hanshang in the Western Capital prefecture; and the number three will be a person from Fujian.” The supervisor next asked: “There are forty districts in the nine prefectures in Huaixi, so who is he?” The associate judge replied: “It will be Wenzheng, the Third Son of Millionaire Bao of Little Bao Village in Hefei district of Luzhou prefecture. That man will be the Top-of-the-List.”

Sing:

[Before] the fifth watch [had ended], while the sky was still dark,
Third Son had already set out on his journey, making large steps.
He had heard that the Eastern Capital was rich in glorious sights:
It had twenty-four establishments offering musical entertainment.

All day long he did nothing but take in the many fine sceneries,
Without noticing that the red sun was slowly sinking in the west.
When our student noticed that the sky was already getting darker,
He realized he should find a place to lodge as quickly as possible.

The big inns did not take in those who had no companions at all,
The smaller inns did not take in those who were traveling all alone.
Our student at this moment had no place where he could stay —
“Where will I be able to lay down my head and rest for the night?”

¹⁴ The Eastern Marchmount is Taishan, in Shandong. From early on, it was believed to be the abode of the dead. By Song times, the god of Taishan was widely venerated as the Great Thearch of the Eastern Marchmount, and his temples were found all over China. Many of these temples sported paintings or three-dimensional depictions of the courts of the underworld in which the underworld judges and their associates judged the dead and determined the fate of the living.

Speak:

Standing on the bridge across the Bian River, Third Son heaved three heavy sighs. This startled the Great King of the City Walls,¹⁵ who said to his subordinate: “The Star of Literature has come here to seek office, but there is nobody in the Eastern Capital who is willing to take him in for the night. Guide him to the house of Top Courtesan Zhang on Misty Flowers Lane so he can stay there.” His subordinate said: “He is a recommended scholar of the state — that would ruin his reputation!” The Great King said: “She is an immortal maiden from the world above, who has been sent down to the world below because of her worldly longings.” When the subordinate heard this, he feigned to be a night watchman of the mortal world, and went to the bridge across the Bian River, where he asked Third Son: “Who are you?” The latter replied: “I am a state student.” “Why don’t you stay at an inn if you are a student?” “There is nobody who is willing to take me in.” The subordinate then asked: “Who are you?” “I am the Third Son of Millionaire Bao.” The subordinate then guided him to the establishment of Top Courtesan Zhang.

Sing:

When the little servant lit the lamp and came to the gate to look,
His frightened soul fled his body — his gall was shaking with fear.
“Now the night has come to its end and the watches are finished,
The first thing that enters the house as I open the gate is a ghost!”

When he told Bao to leave and depart, he refused to leave again,
So the servant got his cudgel from inside and started to beat him.
Our student who got such a terrible beating cried out for mercy,
And this startled the top courtesan, the person surnamed Zhang.

Speak:

The top courtesan asked: “Who is crying for mercy?” Little servant Wang informed the courtesan: “There was a student who was knocking on the gate for a room, but when I opened the gate to let him come inside and lit a lamp to have a look, he was so revoltingly ugly it was scary. I refused to let him in, and then he cried for mercy.” The courtesan said: “There’s

¹⁵ The Great King of the City Walls is the city god of Kaifeng. The city god is often seen as a local representative of the Great Thearch of the Eastern Marchmount.

no harm in letting him have a room. Where is he from?" Her little servant said: "He is from Luzhou."

Sing:

When the courtesan heard this, her heart was filled with joy:
"He hails from the same province and same prefecture as I do,
So I will allow him to stay here at my place for the moment,
And I'll deal with any problems first thing tomorrow morning."

When the fifth watch had passed and the sky had turned bright,
The top courtesan dressed herself to see her hometown visitor.
Third Son at this time also made haste to get dressed properly;
His head was wrapped in a "free and easy straight-line turban".

Third Son wore a white and unlined gown covering his body.
As soon as the top courtesan had the opportunity to see him,
She saw that Third Son was indeed extremely ugly, but that he
In the future, favored by fortune, would rise to be an official!

"The Third Month of the next year, at the peach-blossom exams,"
She thought to herself, "Nobody else will be the Top-of-the-List."
On the eastern side was seated the host, Top Courtesan Zhang;
On the western side was seated the guest, the man surnamed Bao.

When the boiled water was served and the tea had also arrived,
The courtesan asked the visitor from her own home province:
"In which prefecture were you born and in which district?
And in which local village have you been living since birth?"

Third Son at that time answered her in the following manner:
"I was born and raised in Little Bao Village, in Hefei district.
My father is Millionaire Bao who is loaded with money,
And my mother is addressed by the title of 'Her Ladyship'."

When the courtesan heard this, her heart was filled with joy
Because she had now met a person from her own hometown!
"I am a daughter of Eldest Son Zhang. [When a few years ago]
We went out in the First Month to watch the red lanterns,

In the crowd on Nine Masters Bridge I lost my companions,
And I was abducted by some people to the Eastern Capital.
[There I fell into] the windy dust and became an entertainer,
Acquainted with the eight gentlemen of the southern court.

May I ask you, my hometown friend, how old you are?"
Third Son thereupon answered her in the following manner:

“This year I just happen to have turned twenty years of age.”
Thereupon they swore friendship as full brother and sister.

“Thank you very much, dear sister, Top Courtesan Zhang,
For enabling me to again continue my study of the books.”
She escorted him to his study, where he stayed for six years;
Overcome by longings for home, he then shed many tears.

Speak:

The serving girl reported to the courtesan: “That student in his study does not answer any questions. Why is his brow always furrowed? Why does he never smile?” “Could it be that the serving girl does not serve you in the proper manner, that your teacher does not teach you all you need to know, or that I am in any way deficient?” “Dear sister, how could that be? You have been so kind as to become my sister because we are from the same hometown, and you have me study the books, so I am overcome by gratitude. But yesterday I went for a spring walk. I have been away from home for many days and would like to go back home. That’s why I am so unhappy.”

Sing:

When the courtesan heard these words of her younger brother,
She lowered her head and her tears poured down in profusion.
“If you are thinking of your relatives, close like flesh and bone,
You make me feel even worse, adding frost on top of snow.”

Speak:

“If you would write a letter and on the Bian River Bridge would give it to a traveler from Huaixi to deliver it to your family on your behalf, that would be the same as if you would go home.” Third Son wrote a letter and went to the Bian River Bridge to find a traveler who could deliver the letter to his family.

Sing:

All rivers flow to the east, but the Huai goes to the west —¹⁶
He went to the Bian River Bridge to have his letter delivered.

¹⁶ A little bit of untranslatable wordplay: *Huai xi qu* may be rendered both as “Goes to Huaixi (West of the Huai)” or “The Huai goes to the west.”

Before he had called out once, he had already found his man:
A yamen runner carrying letters sped away like a cloud.

But he dropped a heaven-sealed document from his bag,
Which Third Son picked up, holding it in his hands.

Speak:

Third Son said: "I've picked this up but it has no use for me, but the runner will be in trouble, so I will wait here for his return." When the runner arrived in front of the temple to the God of the City Walls, he noticed he had lost that document, so he prayed to Sharp Eyes and Keen Ears: "Because of my own carelessness I have lost a document, and I have no idea who may have found it." Sharp Eyes and Keen Ears told him: "A student clad in white on the Bian River Bridge has picked it up." When he went back with the speed of fire, he saw that student, and bowed to him with lowered head. Third Son asked him: "Why do you bow to me?" "Dear sir, because of my own carelessness I lost a document." Third Son then said: "I indeed picked up a document, but how do I know it is yours? Let's open it and have a look, and then I will give it back to you." The runner said: "You are not allowed to open it, because that would expose the secrets of Heaven. It's against the regulations of Heaven, I'm afraid. It is a communication of the upper world to the Great King of the City Walls — you are not allowed to open it!" Third Son said: "I cannot give it back to you unless I open it." So they could only open it to take a look.

Sing:

When the student saw the contents of the heavenly-sealed document,
It wrote out the truth, clear and without any chance of mistake:
The man who was to pass the exams as the number one, Top-of-the-List,
Was a person hailing from Baoxin Garrison in Luzhou prefecture.

The man who was to pass the exams as the number two on the list,
Hailed from one of the fifty-four prefectures of Xichuan province.
The man who was to pass as the number three, the Flower-Snatcher,
Was a person hailing from Fujian district in Huaidong province.¹⁷

So he told the runner to put the document back into the envelope,
And to deliver it to the Prefectural Lord and Ruler of the City Walls.

¹⁷ This combination of place names does not make sense to me.

But let's not sing about how the student picked up this document,
Let's sing about the Humane Ancestor, a ruler embodying the Way.

“During last night, [We] had a dream,
Dear ministers, now please listen to Us.
Last night at midnight We had a dream,
But We [don't know] what it might mean.”

Speak:

In front of the steps (leading up to the palace hall) Grand Tutor Black Wang stepped forward, and holding his tablet of office in front of his breast, he approached and said: “Your Majesty, what did you see in your dream last night?” “In Our dream we saw a boat that arrived in Luzhou; on that boat there was a golden peck, and in that peck appeared the character ‘Bao’.” The Grand Tutor replied: “If Our King arrived in Luzhou, there is a Luzhou within the passes. If there is a golden peck (*jindou*) on that boat, it is because Jindou is most powerful among the local notables.¹⁸ And if there is a character ‘Bao’ in that peck, it must mean that the student who passes when the examinations are held will be surnamed Bao.” The Humane Ancestor nodded in agreement.

Sing:

And when after three years the capital examinations were held,
The imperial brush declared the selection of the man surnamed Bao.
At his first attempt he passed the exams as the Top-of-the-List,
And he appeared before the golden steps, greeting the emperor.

For one question he had ten answers in front of the golden steps,
For a hundred questions a thousand solutions — such intelligence!

First of all he received three thousand strings of cash as a gift,
And secondly he received a sedan chair for free and easy roaming.
Thirdly he received a three-tiered pure and cool parasol as a gift,
To go and parade through the six streets and the three markets.

And next the imperial brush of the Humane Ancestor appointed him
As the district magistrate of Dingyuan to rule the common people.
Three years he was to stay there as the magistrate of the district —
After properly bowing to the Humane Ancestor, he left the palace.

¹⁸ The translation of this line is utterly tentative. In *zaju*, Judge Bao is often said to hail from Lao'er village in Siwang township in Jindou commandery.

He went and saw his sworn sister, Top Courtesan Zhang,
And when the top courtesan saw him, she was overcome by joy.

Speak:

His sister asked him: “Top-of-the-List, how many people will you take with you when you go home now that you have been appointed as the district magistrate of Dingyuan?” He answered: “I will not take anyone. I will tell you, sister: my father does not know that I studied the books and will not believe that I obtained an office, so I will only take little servant Wang with me when I go home.” So they called for the little servant, and he did not know what it was about. The top courtesan told him she loaned him out [to Third Son] to go to Huaixi. When the little servant heard this, [he said:] “I don’t dare to go! I am afraid he will take revenge for the beating I gave him in the beginning!” When the courtesan heard this, she informed the Top-of-the-List, but he said: “Sister, don’t worry! A gentleman does not punish a person of limited understanding. My father is the richest man of all of Huaixi, and is called the Millionaire — he is the Tathagata of Many Treasures from the world above!¹⁹ It will not be to his disadvantage if he accompanies me!” The Top-of-the-List said to the little servant: “While on the road you cannot address me as Top-of-the-List or Mr. District Magistrate.” The little servant asked: “So how should I address you?” “Just address me as Third Son Bao.” His sister then asked: “Why does he have to call you this way?” “My father does not know that I obtained an office. We’ll scare him — just call me Third Son Bao.”

Sing:

When the Top-of-the-List was addressed like this, he was pleased,
And together with the little servant he set out to return to his home.
After saying goodbye to his elder sister, Top Courtesan Zhang,
He headed straightaway for Baoxin Garrison in Luzhou prefecture.

But let’s not sing of the Top-of-the-List on his way back home,
Let’s rather sing of the runners announcing the examination results.

Coming to the Bao mansion, they loudly announced their arrival,
And the scared Mr. Bao was shaking with fright all over his body.
With the speed of fire he ran away from the gate, back inside,
Calling out to his daughter-in-law: “We’re attacked by bandits!

¹⁹ Tathagata is one of the many designations of a Buddha.

Speak:

The bandits of Purple Brush Mountain are in front of the gate and demand admittance!” When the wife of the eldest son heard this, she said to her father-in-law: “No problem, let me go and take a look.” It turned out these men were runners announcing the examination results, who presented themselves to request a reward: “Madam, we have come here from the Eastern Capital: the Third Son of this family has passed the examinations as the Top-of-the-List! We have come here on purpose to inform you of this happy news.” The wife of the eldest son then said: “Father-in-law, little third brother has passed the exams!” He promptly asked: “Whose Third Son?” “Dear father-in-law, your own Third Son!” Mr. Bao laughed heartily: “Now you are fooling me! He never studied the books and has always been a simpleton, so how could he become an official?” “Dear father-in-law, I had him study the books. I’ve also heard that in the Eastern Capital he became the sworn younger brother of Top Courtesan Zhang, who also had him study the books. So now he has become an official.” Hearing this, Mr. Bao was very pleased, and said: “If he has become an official, then matters can be arranged.” After the elder son’s wife had again inquired with her father-in-law, he invited the runners to the western hall for a banquet, and he rewarded them for their exertions on the long journey.

Sing:

For three days he treated those messengers to a banquet,
 And now he liberally rewarded them with precious gifts.
 Let’s not sing of the messengers, who brought the news,
 Let us rather sing of Mr. Bao and his nine hundred men.

Speak:

But later Mr. Bao thought to himself: “I have had my two eldest sons study the books from their earliest age but without any success. And now this simpleton, who has never studied the books, achieves the rank of Top-of-the-List!” So he ordered his two eldest sons to come back home. One of them managed a pawnshop in Luzhou, and the other managed a pawnshop in the Southern Capital, but he told them to come back. Mr. Bao then cursed them out: “You two are my eldest sons, but you are only good for the show, not for the eating. You have wasted my money

studying the books, and went to the Eastern Capital to seek office, but you've only written essays that fell to the ground. Now look at your younger brother: he obtained the rank of Top-of-the-List!" The two of them thereupon asked: "Which younger brother?" "That simpleton, Third Son! He obtained the rank of Top-of-the-List. Messengers came here with the news. I had to reward them before they left." The two of them laughed heartily: "Dear father, you know his behavior — how could he become an official? He must have been staying at an inn in some distant place and have owed the owner of the inn quite a lot of money, so he has connived with the owner of the inn to put on this charade as if he had obtained an office and they brought you the news to cheat you out of your money and to divide it between them." Mr. Bao said: "You must be right!" He promptly wrote out a notification, offering one hundred strings of cash as a reward for whoever arrested his simple son and brought him back home.

Our story goes that Third Son while on the road told the little servant: "Never call me Top-of-the-List. My father will not believe it. Today we will go and stay for the night at the house of old Mr. Wang. He is the manager of our farm, we can safely lodge there." Late at night, [in the third] watch, they arrived outside the gate of old Mr. Wang. Mr. Wang was soundly asleep, so it was his son Wang Wu who came out to the gate and opened it. When he saw that it was the simple son of his boss with some other guy standing in front of the gate, he said to his father: "One hundred strings of cash have arrived in our house!" Mr. Wang said: "What do you mean by saying that one hundred strings of cash have arrived in our house?" Wang Wu told his father: "The boss has issued a notification offering a reward of one hundred strings of cash for the arrest of his simpleton son. He has now arrived at our gate, so let's arrest him and claim the reward!" When Mr. Wang heard this, he cursed him: "You oaf! The wife of the eldest son treasures him like a pearl in the palm of her hand, and expects us to get up and welcome him in." As soon as Mr. Wang saw the Top-of-the-List, he bowed down. "You are so old you should not bow to me!" Mr. Wang said: "You are the parent who provides me with food!" Third Son smiled sarcastically: "How could I obtain that office?" "Your father has issued a notification offering a reward of one hundred strings of cash for your arrest." [Mr. Wang] also asked: "Who is that guy there with you?" "That is the little servant of an inn in the Eastern Capital who has accompanied me here, because I owe him three hundred strings of cash, so he has come here to claim that amount." When Mr. Wang heard this, he said: "Master,

please speak softly. Let the little servant stay here, then you can go home and see the wife of your elder brother, get the money and send him off!”

Sing:

Let’s not sing about Mr. Wang, what happened at his place —
Third Son set out on his journey and traveled all by himself.

When he arrived in the flower garden of his elder sister-in-law,
He called out to her: “Dear sister-in-law, please open the door!”
When his eldest brother’s wife heard her little brother-in-law,
She went out and saw her little brother-in-law, that plowboy:

The headscarf that covered his crown was torn on the edges,
And the hemp sandals on his feet lacked a heel at the back.
He was dressed in an unlined gown that was torn to tatters —
His appearance like this was quite terrifying, to say the least.

“I had hoped you would become an official, pass the exams,
I had hoped that you would establish your name in the world.
Earlier, people came to report that you were Top-of-the-List.
So now let your sister-in-law know the facts of the matter.”

“You were so kind as to give me much money and treasure,
Which I used indeed to go and travel to the Eastern Capital.
But today, after all that time, all that money is fully spent —
My gown and my shirt are worn and torn, a saddening sight!”

Speak:

The eldest brother’s wife asked her little brother-in-law: “Where is your luggage? Is this all your luggage?” Third Son said: “Please get me something to eat.” As his eldest brother’s wife went to the kitchen to prepare some tidbits, Third Son took his green gown and ivory tablet, and his black hat and fitting headscarf, and hid them all in the room of his elder sister-in-law. “Dear little brother-in-law, just refresh yourself for a while. But it is not safe for you to stay here in my room. I will loan you three thousand strings of cash, so you can go to the Western Capital and open a pawnshop there. You’d better not stay in the Eastern Capital. Your two elder brothers will go to the Eastern Capital once every three years to take the exams. If they see you, I am afraid they will want to take a share of your goods. When your father has lived to the age of a hundred,²⁰

²⁰ That is, after your father’s death.

I will send someone to fetch you back home, so you can have a fair share of the inheritance. But don't stay here at home. Tomorrow fifty laborers will be cutting wheat at the southern farm. You better go there and supervise them. I will get the money together, and in a few days send it over to you." When Third Son heard this, he was deeply grateful to his sister-in-law. "Tomorrow morning I will go to the southern farm to cut wheat!"

When he arrived at the gate of Mr. Wang, he called the little servant out, and said: "I have borrowed some money from my sister-in-law, and she will send you on your way." The little servant said goodbye to Mr. Wang, and the two of them left. When they had walked for about half a mile, the little servant asked Third Son: "When will you go to Haozhou to assume your post?" The Top-of-the-List replied: "My official gown is now in the room of my sister-in-law. As long as I cannot get it out of there, we'll have to go to the southern farm to cut wheat."

Sing:

They cut wheat from the early morning till the morning break,
They cut wheat from the morning break till the hour of noon.
Then the runners dispatched by Dingyuan in Haozhou arrived,
And asked the wheat cutters at the southern farm for directions:

"To which township must we go to find District Magistrate Bao?
We have come here on purpose to welcome His Excellency!"
The Top-of-the-List pointed with his hand and shouted loudly:
"Ask for your magistrate at that big mansion down the road!"

The forty-two people in that party were all very much pleased,
This morning they would be able to see their new superior!
When they arrived before the gate building of the Bao mansion,
They loudly shouted three times, roaring just like thunder!

When Mr. Bao heard this, he was overcome with trepidation,
Bumping with his head into everything, he ran like a cloud!
When he had run back to the main hall of the house, he shouted:
"The bandits and robbers of Purple Thorn Mountain are here!"

When his daughter-in-law heard him shouting in this manner,
[She asked:] "My dear father-in-law, what may be going on?"
The father-in-law then replied to his daughter-in-law, saying:
"They are all violent thugs who rob people of their wealth!"

Speak:

Old Mr. Bao said: "The robbers of Purple Thorn Mountain are standing outside our gate!" His daughter-in-law said: "No problem! Let me go out and have a look!" When she saw the men, they were no robbers at all, so she asked them: "What are you people doing here?" The people who had come to welcome the new magistrate told her: "We have been dispatched by the prefect of Haozhou to welcome the district magistrate of Dingyuan." She replied to them: "There is no district magistrate in our house." "Madam, it's the Third Son in this family, the Top-of-the-List, who received his appointment as district magistrate in the Eastern Capital." "Dear father-in-law, here are people who have come all the way from Haozhou, saying that Third Son has obtained an office." When old Mr. Bao heard this, he started to curse them: "It's one scare after another here in this house! The last time you cheated me out of three hundred strings of cash, and now you come again! Of my three sons, two studied the books, but they never got an office, and the third one is a simpleton who did not come home for many years. Now today people are telling me that with some other guy he is cutting wheat at the southern farm. How could there be an official in this house? It must be the Bao family in the village down the road, because they study the books." When these people heard this, they promptly left to go to the Bao family in the village down the road.

On the highway they saw two people cutting wheat, and the runners asked them: "Brother, if you take us to the Bao family in the village down the road, we will give you some wine and money." The Top-of-the-List replied: "I don't have the time to come with you. My boss wants me to cut this wheat. I can only go with you once that is done." The runners said: "Can you take us there if we will cut all the wheat for you?" The Top-of-the-List said: "Of course. I can take you there if you cut all the wheat for me." When the runners heard this, they all together cut the wheat. The Top-of-the-List then said: "We'll go there tomorrow morning." The runners said: "How do you dare fool us? You told us to cut all the wheat of this farm, and now you refuse to go!" And they set out to give the Top-of-the-List a beating. The little servant then cursed: "How can you show such disrespect towards your magistrate!" But the Top-of-the-List immediately said: "Don't let the secret out! Take them to the house!"

Sing:

The little servant took the runners to the main gate in front,
While the Top-of-the-List entered through the garden door.
He then straightaway went to the room of his sister-in-law,
Where he put on his green gown, and took his ivory tablet.

Speak:

While he was dressing up as an official in the room of his sister-in-law,
these forty-two runners once again announced their arrival outside the
gate by their shouts. Old Mr. Bao called for his daughter-in-law: “All
things come in threes — there is once again a nasty crowd!” He then
went to the door of her room to call her, but when he peeped into the
room there was a dog, and he screamed: “A ghost!” When his daughter-
in-law asked what kind of ghost, he said: “It has stolen your green skirt to
cover its body!”

Sing:

Then the eldest son’s wife entered her room to have a look,
To see for herself what kind of person was hiding in her room.

Her little brother-in-law was seated in her room, all dressed up,
A green gown covered his body while he held his ivory tablet.
The Top-of-the-List took his seat in the main hall of the house,
To receive those forty-two runners who had come from afar.

They loudly shouted three times and bowed with lowered heads.
Four times two, eight times they bowed before their magistrate.
When afterwards they rose to their feet and looked at the man,
He closely resembled the guy they earlier saw cutting wheat!

The Top-of-the-List lit a candle of incense from Guangnan;
Facing the Eastern Capital, he thanked the emperor for his grace.
He thanked the Humane Ancestor, the ruler embodying the Way,
And he next thanked his parents for the favor of giving him life.

His father there in the hall said to him at the top of his voice:
“Please don’t remember those earlier years, don’t carry a grudge!”
The Top-of-the-List stepped forward with folded arms, saying:
“My dear father and my dear mother, please listen to my words!

How would I ever be able to pay back the favors of my parents,
My mother’s sufferings of the three years of nursing and feeding?”



Fig. 1.2

Upper picture: The runners beat up Magistrate Bao by mistake.

Lower picture: Magistrate Bao bowing to his parents in full official dress.

As soon as he had finished bowing to his two elder brothers,
He bowed eight times in front of his sister-in-law, his benefactor:
“You were the one who supported and raised me, here back at home
And in the Eastern Capital there was the woman surnamed Zhang.”

Speak:

From the hall he asked: “How long was the journey for you, who came to
welcome me here?” “Your Honor, that was one thousand three hundred
miles!” He also asked: “Who are the runners for recording the
documents?” The reply was: “That’s us, Dong Chao and Xue Ba.” The
magistrate then asked: “Do you recognize the man who cut wheat? If you
can recognize him, I will spare you!”

[*Sing:*]

Dong Chao and Xue Ba stepped forward and bowed down deeply,
And said: “Your Honor, please still your rage and halt your anger.
In our memory the man cutting wheat at the southern farm
Looked exactly the same in all respects as Your Honor yourself!”

When the district magistrate heard this, he was filled with rage,
And he shouted: “You had the nerve to beat up your magistrate!”
Dong Chao and Xue Ba were stripped of their headscarves and belts,
To receive the punishment of thirty blows with the heavy cudgel.

When his eldest brother’s wife heard this, she lowered her head,
She laughed sarcastically a few times, and said: “Dear little brother,
Before you even assume your post and become an official,
You already have two innocent people beaten and bastinadoed!”

The little brother-in-law repeatedly asked his elder sister-in-law:
“How do I have two innocent people beaten and bastinadoed?”

Speak:

His eldest brother’s wife said: “You show no understanding at all! How
can you give them a beating after they cut all the wheat on the farm
for you?”

Sing:

The little brother-in-law took the advice of his elder sister-in-law,
So did not administer a beating to the runners who welcomed him.

Only after three days of festive banqueting came the day of parting,
When he was to leave for Haozhou to become a district magistrate.

He said goodbye to his father and mother and elder sister-in-law;
Relatives and neighbors brought wine to see him off on his journey.
After he had been on the road, traveling on, for a number of days,
He eventually arrived at the capital city of Haozhou prefecture.

He paid his respects to the prefectural governor, Prefect Wang,
And then served as magistrate in his district for a full three years.

Cases submitted in the morning were judged that same morning;
Cases submitted in the evening were clarified by lamplight.
The thirty-three strokes of the cudgel were administered sparingly,
And no case was referred to the prefecture, no person sent up.²¹

The prefect of Haozhou thereupon was overcome by rage, and
He reported him to Commissioner of Transportation Zhang.
When the commissioner saw this, he also was overcome by rage,
And in his report to the Humane Ancestor he cursed Judge Bao!

Speak:

Commissioner of Transportation Zhang came to Dingyuan for the transfer
inspection. The magistrate welcomed him in the hall, where the
commissioner of transportation promptly said: "You are the district
magistrate. You have failed to handle your cases timely."

Sing:

The district magistrate folded his hands, stepped forward and said:
"Commissioner of Transportation, please be so kind as to listen!
I pronounce honest judgments, based on the three thousand rules,
I govern the people on the basis of the regulations and the law."

Hearing this, the commissioner of transportation became enraged,
In front of his sedan chair the district magistrate was forced to walk.

²¹ In this way robbing his superior of a chance to extract squeeze. The sixteenth-century *Baijia gong'an*, a one-hundred chapter compilation of Judge Bao's cases, narrates in Chapters 79 and 80 that while serving as magistrate of Dingyuan Judge Bao executed the notorious criminal Li Ji without requesting permission from higher authorities as he should have done. Judge Bao also administered a beating to an arrogant prefectural runner, thus causing the ire of the prefect.

And when the district magistrate had walked for three or five miles,
He was allowed to go back by the commissioner of transportation.

When the district magistrate returned to his office, he was angry;
He promptly invited Prefect Wang and the assistant-prefect, saying:
“I have been humiliated by the commissioner of transportation,
That man is a person who lusts for riches and covets treasure.

The three hundred people who were following him in his train,
Were only concerned about precious goods, treasure and pearls.”
When the runners in the yamen were inspected, they all had been
Robbed of their loads — thus he reported to the Eastern Capital.

Reading the report the Humane Ancestor was filled with rage,
And fired Commissioner of Transportation Zhang from his post.²²

Our lord and king in his palace transmitted an edict and order:
“My dear ministers, please listen to what We will have to say.
Which person is capable of governing the prefecture of Kaifeng,
Of managing the mountains and rivers, establishing Great Peace?”

His Excellency Black Wang stepped forward and spoke:
“May Your Majesty be so kind as to listen to this humble servant!
The only suitable man is the governor of Chenzhou, Judge Bao,
He will be capable of presiding over the prefecture of Kaifeng!”

Our King immediately accepted the advice of this minister, and
A golden plaque was sent to summon the man surnamed Bao.
The officials in Chenzhou all came together in the prefecture
To receive the Grace of His Imperial Majesty, the Sagely Ruler.

Having thanked His Grace, they discussed the imperial edict,
But Bao did not dare procrastinate and go against the imperial will.
When the common people of Chenzhou heard about the matter,
They wanted to keep Judge Bao, that incorruptible upright man!

²² According to the account in Chapters 81 and 82 of *Baijia gong'an* Judge Bao's behavior greatly impressed the Humane Ancestor, who had him called to court and appointed as censor. The ballad-story, however, abruptly moves forward to Judge Bao's appointment as prefect of Kaifeng following his administration of Chenzhou. This switch is so abrupt that one wonders whether perhaps some part of the original text is missing. One would at least expect to have seen a reunion of Judge Bao and the fortuneteller, and some kind of reunion of Judge Bao and Top Courtesan Zhang.

Lord Bao at that time promulgated an order in which he informed
The common people of all the streets and wards in the city
That he would only leave temporarily to see the Son of Heaven,
And then would come back here to govern the common people.

When none of the common people succeeded in detaining him,
All of them shed many tears, and shed tears in great profusion.
His Excellency left, seated in a “free and easy” sedan chair, and
A refreshing parasol, carried aloft, covered him with its shade.

After he had been on the road, traveling on, for a number of days,
He eventually arrived outside the gate of the city of Kaifeng.

He presented himself to his guarantor, Chancellor Black Wang,
Who explained to him the situation once they had finished their tea.
“The imperial brush of the Humane Ancestor has summoned you
And promoted you to the office of prefect of Kaifeng Prefecture.”

Speak:

Lord Bao stepped forward and informed the Grand Tutor: “If I am going
to be the metropolitan prefect of Kaifeng Prefecture, I want eight officials
as guarantors.” The Grand Tutor asked: “Which people?”

Sing:

“The first is you, now in the Secretariat serving as the chancellor;
Then General Fan, who controls the River and builds fortifications.²³
Working for the state, protecting the dynasty — Prime Minister Shen;
Firming up the dynasty, pacifying the nation — Generalissimo Di.

Inside the city the man holding the rank of King Li’s crown prince; (?)
The grandson and heir of the former kings of East- and West-Zhe.²⁴
On top of these the imperial son-in-law Chai to the east of the city,
And in the southern yamen, the Sixth King, the emperor’s uncle.”

These eight high officials, all together serving as his guarantors,
Vouched for the suitability of Judge Bao as prefect of Kaifeng.

²³ This General Fan is most likely Fan Zhongyan (989–1052), whose distinguished career included active duty in the wars against the Xixia.

²⁴ This is Qian Hui or Qian Xuan, sons of Qian Weiyan (d. 1033) and grandsons of Qian Chu (929–988), the last king of Wu-Yue, who in 978 had submitted to the Song. Qian Hui was favored by Emperor Renzong.

Once His Excellency took up his position as prefect of Kaifeng,
The empire's mountains and rivers all were as level as could be.
Year after year the foreign countries came and offered up tribute,
Year in year out these exotic nations offered up the biggest pearls.

Listen as I sing to you all the full story of Dragon-Design Bao —
May it circulate as an admonition for the people of this world!

The Tale of the Early Career of Rescriptor Bao, Newly Printed, Completely Illustrated, in Prose and in Verse.

Zhu Yixuan (ed.) (1999). *Ming Chenghua shuocang cibua congkan*, Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, pp. 113–125.