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The Mediaeval Epic Narrative of 'Ji Bu Ma Zhen' (李布罵陣) 'Ji Bu Insulting the Enemy'

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Abstract

My essay is a historical and cultural interpretation of the Chinese mediaeval epic poem '*Ji Bu Ma Zhen' 'Ji Bu Insulting the Enemy*' (李布罵陣) within its cultural environment of the Tang period. Following a brief presentation based on Chen Yinke's observations, I succinctly expose the various Eurasian communities that contributed to the cultural landscape of that period, especially Indian Buddhism, a multi-faceted landscape that fashioned the poetic form of Ji Bu as recited by the wandering Buddhist monks or laymen. I conclude my essay with a dialectical discussion of the underlining Confucian and the Buddhist values that I believe to be present in the poem, whose composition, hence, can be called hybrid: linguistically, issued from a combined scriptural and an oral culture, sociologically, forged from the melded Confucian and Buddhist values, the very hybridity that marks the Tang period as a remarkable one in Chinese History.

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Key words: Tang Dynasty, Mediaeval Poetry, Knighthood, Oral Culture, Errant Literature, Liu Bang

Introduction: Scripture and Oralture

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907) extraordinary cultural exchanges amongst the nations of Eurasia that fought, traded and exercised diplomacy with the Tang government were undertaken and developed. The polyglot and historian, Chen Yinke (陳寅恪) (1890-1969), stressed that the ethnic minority peoples that lived in China during the Tang period all contributed to its political and cultural landscape, shaping a remarquable ethnico-cultural mosaic within the framework of a dominating Han culture because all these ethnic identities were equal, culturally, with the Han, and because of this equality, a Chinese national spirit gradually took form. He further wrote that thanks to this ethnic contribution and melding within the Han political landscape the universal concept of a nation, constituted by its ethnic particularities, came into being, which indeed prevented the mass homogenization of the very distinct communities, be they endogamic or exogamic to the Chinese nation in gestation. Chen spoke in terms of an 'empathetic understanding' of History in which particular ethnic (hi)stories comprise the History of a nation, albeit one prevailing ethnic group, in this case the Han, dominates. Similarly, if the varied and diverse textures of the ethnic (hi)stories contributed to Chinese mediaeval History, and consequently to Chinese modern History, it then goes without saying that China has contributed to a world History since its particular (hi)story, however remote it may seem from other nations, also comprises world History ...[1]

It is thus ethnic mélange that I shall stress in this article, out of whose fine blend the life of *Ji Bu*, the chivalrous knight, was recorded, first as a document during the Han dynasty, then recomposed and recited in poetic form during the Tang dynasty. Indeed, if the thread of the narrative drew inspiration from an historical figure of the Han period, as chronicled in the *Royal Annals* of Sima Qian, the form of its mediaeval poetics drew its underlay from the oral techniques of the erring Buddhist missionary monks who had been crossing over into Western China from Northern

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1 Read for example, 陳寅恪 Chen Yinke's '*Draft Outlines on the Origins of the Sui and Tang Institutions*' 隋唐制度淵源略論稿 and his '*Draft Outline of Tang political History*' 唐代政治史述論稿: Shanghai, Guji Chubanshe, 1980).

India and Afghanistan since the first and second centuries A.D. In the epic tale of Ji Bu, we read the story of a Han knight articulated within a poetic framework of the Tang period by the rather ingenious splicing together of a royal document and Northern India storytelling-techniques ! In sum, *Ji Bu Ma Zhen* 'Ji Bu Insulting the Enemy' is an artistic combination of a scriptural narrative, transformed, centuries later, by the Art of Oralture.[2] The mediaeval composition marks the epic tale as a valuable example of the mosaic culture of the Tang Dynasty (of mediaeval Eurasia as a whole) at its highest osmotic achievement of diplomacy and art.

The Ji Bu Ma Zhen Narrative: The Historical Document

Ji Bu (李布), the hero of our story, belongs to two worlds: the Han of Confucian tradition and the Tang of a rapidly spreading Buddhist faith, a faith embraced both by the masses and several emperors and empresses of the Tang Dynasty. In -206, the grand Emperor of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang, built royal institutions filled with a highly educated body of men, recruited through a system of strict examinations in order to form a political hierarchy gauged on merit, and whose recruits were motivated by prestige, honours and power:[3] a vertically construed society with at the very top the Emperor himself. This feudal organisation assured a social cohesion based on absolute obedience towards one's benefactor or superior. An obedience which in fact reflected the family structure, whereby the father wheeled absolute authority since he was indisputably the head of the household, a position, as the Emperor's, which brooked neither refute nor contention …

Filial value is what characterizes Confucian social harmony. An exoteric harmony where all conscious energy is channelled into social adhesion, beginning with the family, a miniaturized mirror of the ideal Confucian society as a whole. There is little doubt that this filial obedience and its influence on Confucius' thinking has its distant origins with the Shamanist social structure which pervaded (and still does pervade) Han History. It is to this Shamanist substratum and the Confucian evolution of it that our hero Ji

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2 By Oralture I mean an orally delivered narrative that, gradually, has been scripturally composed to be read aloud.

3 These State examinations became obsolete in 1905.

Bu belonged, according to the *Bibliography of Historical Persons of the ancient Dynasties*.[4]

The Han document is informative, without any rhetorical devices, save the imagined dialogues. There is hardly any 'verbal jousting', which enriches Ji Bu's oratory talents in the mediaeval poem, and hence deepens his relationships towards friends and foes. Ji Bu's winged words of wisdom remain aground by lack of literary effort of the chronicler to transmit Ji Bu's deeds ; deeds that are rhetorically exploited and engrossed in the mediaeval narrative, the foremost of which being the practice of non-violence through the efforts of a very subtle diplomacy.[5] A diplomacy whose very words saved thousands of warriors from death, convinced Lord Zhou, Ji Bu's friend, to hide him in his house, persuaded Duke Zha Jia to arrange an audience with the two noblemen at Liu Bang's court -Xia Hou and Xiao Xiang-, and finally to overcome Liu Bang's seething revenge, who, after an initial refusal, welcomed the doughty knight back into the folds of the government, and consequently back into honour and self- and social- respectability. Before we read these winged words of wisdom, enshrined within their mediaeval epic imagery, I shall endeavour to paint, succinctly, the backdrop out of which this mediaeval enhancement was effected by examining those exogamic and endogamic communities that forged the poetic composition and transmission of *Ji Bu Insulting the Enemy.*

The Tang Period: a Period of Intercultural Exchange

The Tang period was brought to such lofty cultural summits both by the vast array of so many endogamic ethnic groups within the realms of the dynasty's territories and the many exogamic ethnic groups trading with, marrying into or settling within the Han territory, that one may have the impression that they all, over the centuries prior to the Tang dynasty, had been gradually converging into the territorial confines of the Han emperors with the aim of settling down to farm or to trade, and by this consciously undertaken migration and settlement, create a

4 The text contains twenty vertical lines read from right to left, each with 42 characters.
5 It should be noted, however, that the royal document was not written to be read aloud, much less before an audience, large or small.

'national spirit' founded upon the principals of migration and integration as a means of nation-building ...

Han, Indian, Gandharian, Uyghur, Tibetan, Persian, Turkic, Arab, Sogdian and Byzantin (Nestorian) provided the mediaeval ethnic threads in the weaving of the Tang social tissue. In no other period of Chinese History had such experiments in commerce, diplomacy, religion and languages been observed. It is no wonder that Chen Yinke believed this period to be the foundation of the modern Chinese nation.

The first Nestorians arrived from Byzantium to China in 628 where they found refuge after being chased from Asia Minor following the theological decisions of the Concile of Ephesus in 431.[6] In the capital Chang'An (Xi'an) they founded their first church in 635, financed by Emperor Taizong (626-649). From Tazi (Middle and Near Eastern Arabic nations) were sent the first ambassadors to Chang'An in 651, invited by Emperor Baozong, whose diplomatic exchanges opened trade routes between Western China and the Arabic-speaking lands. Japan and Silla (Korea) also sent many delegates to Chang'An.

Persian diplomats, traders and travellers followed in the tracks of the Nestorians and the Arabs from the West: Emperor Gaozong (649-683) approved the dogma of Zoroastrianism and of Manichaeism, teachings which hastily opened the sluices to a flow of Persian artists, who having been converted to Buddhism, and working in Afghanistan, brought with them the art of mural and ceramic painting. The use of cobalt for the deep blue colours[7] found, for example, on the walls of the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang, and copper, iron and manganese minerals for colouring either in mural or ceramic painting are of Persian import.[8] Of Persian stamp, too, are vegetal motifs such as palmettes, acanthe leaves and strings of pearls painted on amphorae, ewers and rhytons, all of which were produced by Persian or Sogdian artists working under the auspices of the Tang administration. Gold and glasswork are also of Persian origin, so too, several musical instruments such as the *pipa*[9] and the luth.

6 In 2006 another Nestorian stela was discovered at Luoyang, dating from 829. I remind my readers that what Western civilization calls the 'Nestorian Church' was in fact called the Syro-Oriental or Persian Church by the Eastern Christians themselves.

7 Generally called Persian blue.

8 The three-colour glazed pottery (三 彩 sàn cài) is also of Persian import.

9 In Chinese ' 琵 ' or '琶' .

The Tibetains, descending from the heights of the Himalayas, attacked and sacked Chang'an in 751, allied with horsemen of Arabic descent. In 763, the Tibetains again overran the capital and pillaged the city, this time without the aid of the Arabic forces, who had been engaged in continous warfare against the Uyghurs in Northern Xinjiang, there converting many former Nestorian Christians or Buddhists to Islam. The Tibetain warriors also captured Dunhuang and held that town between 787 and 851 before they were defeated by the combined forces of the Tang armies and the Uyghurs, forcing the Tibetains back into their mountainous retreats. Before they did retreat, however, they had introduced the art of playing polo to the Han, an art that they themselves had learned from the Persians, and because of its dexterity and grace of gestures became an exercise even for the emperors, for example, Emperor Xizong (874-888). The game must have had a large impact on the Chinese population because in the epic poem Ji Bu is said to excel in the art of playing polo:

> « *He (Ji Bu) exerted his hand at polo: seated upon his horse he drove the ball in the fray// striking quickly here and there, anon outplaying all the lords noble.* »

As to the Turkic peoples, the majority being the Gökturks (VI°-VIII°) and the Uyghurs (VIII°-IX°), either nomads roaming the Northern steppes of Mongolia and Central Asia, or those sedentarized Turkic kingdoms of the Orkhon Valley at Tsaidam and Karbalgasun, they too benefitted from the stability and open policy of the Tang administration. They traded their horses and horse accoutrement for tea and tools. Also of capital importance was the Chinese *jimi* system which contrived to defend the Northern frontiers of China by using « *barbarians to control barbarians* »; in other words, Chinese officials appointed Uyghur governors to rule over their respective territories with the aim of « *pacifying and sinicising the submitted non Chinese.* »[10] Many gifts were exchanged between the two peoples as tokens for mutual defence and, if required, military alliances. According to Lydon Arden-Wong, the Uyghur élite adopted Tang forms for their military defenses and their funerary complexes. Their urban developments drew inspiration from Chinese

10 Quotations (in italics) from Yihong, Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan, Sui-Tang China and its Neighbours* : (Bellingham : Centre for Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 1997), pp. 198-199.

engineering and workmanship.[11] It was, however, the marriage-alliances between the Han and the Turkic peoples that drew both into intimate contact with one another: out of the twenty-one Han princesses who were married to foreign sovereigns, the majority were Khans or the sons of Khans from the Gökturk and Uyghur aristocratic ruling class.[12] According to Chen Yinke, the practice of inter-ethnic marriages by the Tang emperors drew its initial inspiration from the inter-tribal marriages amongst the Turkic tribes ...[13] The Turkic nations (Uzbekistan?) also introduced the Suffi 'whirling dance' which, although divitalized of its Islamic fervour once introduced in China, became quite popular, none the less, throughout the kingdom.

By far, however, it is the profound influences of the Indian Buddhists on the Han that prompted so many social transformations during the Tang period, first and foremost, Buddhism itself with mass conversions amongst the dense populations, as well as spiritual and financial support from many of the Emperors and Empresses. Buddhism spread into China in the first century A.D. by way of the Taklamakan Desert along the chain of oases from Central Asia until reaching Xi'an, before it crept up into Tibet. Buddhist sacred art and architecture, much of it in ruins today, bears witness to this expansion from Kashgar to Dunhuang, via Kucha, Khotan and Mina, before taking a more southernly route: three-headed Shivas, the S-shaped naked bodies of dancing women, adepts of the Buddha, flying asparas and lotus-sitting disciples translate the profound iconographic, hence religious influences borne into China by the Indian, and by the Chinese artist converts.

The Han converts travelled to India to follow the sacred steps of the Buddha: Lumbini, Sarnath, Pataliputra, Bodh Gaya, etc., to learn Pali or Sanskrit, and to bring back manuscripts to the Buddhist temples and monasteries that were under construction throughout China: Faxian spent thirteen years in India (399-412) and recorded his long pilgrimage in *A Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*.[14] Another Chinese monk, Yijing (635-713) voyaged to Bengal, Varansi and Nalanda for four years (671-674), during which time he wrote his *The Record of Buddhism As Practiced in India Sent Home from the Southern Seas and the Memoirs of Eminent*

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11 See Arden-Wong, Lydon, *Tang Governance and Adminstration in the Turkic period* : (Den Haag : Journal of Eurasian Studies, Vol. vi, 2, 2014), pp. 8-19.
12 Yinke, Chen, *Draft Outline of Tang Political History,* loc. cited.
13 *Sui and Tang Institutions*, loc. cited.
14 For this voyage see James Legge's translation, A *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms: Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-Hien of his Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399–414) in search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline* : (New York : Dover Publications, 1965).

Monks who Visited India and Neighboring Regions in Search on the Law during the Great Tang Dynasty.[15] Xuanzang (596-664) studied seventeen years in Central Asia and in India, several of which at Nalanda in the modern state of Bihar. He was the first Han to establish diplomatic ties between the Tang administration and the Kingdom of Harsavardhana in Northern India. He brought back 657 manuscripts which he housed at Luoyang in the temple that he founded there. His translations of them proved invaluable. His pilgrimages are recorded in *The Records of the Western Regions visited during the great Tang Dynasty*.[16]

Emperor Gaozong sent the Buddhist Han Xuanzhao to India in order to collect and bring back medicinal plants. His journeys are recorded in Yijing's biographies of Han Buddhist pilgrims to India. Emperor Xuansong (705-710) established a translating school at Chang'An out of which hundreds and hundreds of texts were disseminated.[17] In 684, Empress Wu (624-705) approved the new Indian methods of mathematic calculation, and the seven-day calender was introduced.[18] Indian tradesmen also introduced the concept of auctioning and pawnbroking. It was the Indians, through linguistic exchange and textual translations, who revealed to the Chinese that their language was tonal, and thus quite distinct from the Indian tongues to which more and more Chinese, especially Buddhist monks were exposed. For example, the Buddhist monk Kumārajīva of Indian (Kashmiri) descent (344-413), although born in Kucha (Xinjiang, China), studied Buddhism in Kashmir, especially the texts of Nagarjuna, after which he travelled throughout today's Xinjiang region to Turfan, Kucha and Khotan, teaching at many monasteries there before settling down in Chang'an, where he spent the rest of his life translating Buddhist doctrines.

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15 For a study on this Han pilgrim to India read Takakusu, J., *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671–695)* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1982).

16 Huanzang's recordings have been examined by Rongxi, Li, *A Biography of the Tripitaka Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery of the Great Tang Dynasty :* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995).

17 For these hardy voyageurs read Levy, André, *Les Pèlerins bouddhistes de la Chine aux Indes* : (Paris, Editions Jean-Claude Lattès, 1995.)

18 Prior to this innovation, the Chinese week was either five or ten days. The Empress Wu, who reigned from 690 to 704, financed the colossal Temple of Ancestral Worship, where the seventeen-metre Buddha of Brightness (Sambhogakaya) sits at the Longmen Grottoes in Henan Province.

The Buddhist monks and artisans sculptured gigantic figures of the Buddha or of His disciples on the faces of mountains (Long Men, Maijishan, Yun Gang), painted vast iconographic programmes in the grottoes of Kizil (Kucha), Bezelik (Turfan), Mogao (Dunhuang), and at Khotan preached the stories of the Buddha (jātakas) in the form of what has since become a 'literary genre', the *bianwen* or *adapted texts* of Indo-Buddhist origin. The *bianwen* (变文) or *errant-text* has its distant beginnings in Northern India within the circles of the ever-expanding Buddhist communities whose stories of Buddha, of Mulian, or of other worthies of Buddhist tradition in India, served as either artistic material or religious instruction. The singularity of this literary genre lies not only in the contents of the stories told, but the form in which they were narrated: whilst the storyteller unravelled his tale to the public, an assistant monk or layman would display colourful illustrations of the heroes' gestures or dramatic scenes from the story on wooden panels, flipping them as the vocal-thread of the story thickened. Thus the Art of Oralture (说唱艺术 shuō chàng yì shù)[19], combined with iconographic support (图画 tú huà) produced what were called at that time *variable texts* (转 变 zhuǎn biàn), and which were narrated theatrically with or without the accompaniment of musical instruments.[20] According to some sources, 78 *bianwen-scrolls* were discovered by Paul Pelliot and Aural Stein at Dunhuang,[21] of which *Ji Bu Ma Zhen.* Several scroll-versions of *Ji Bu Ma Zhen* were then deposited at the Musée Guimet in Paris and at the Beijing Public Library by Paul Pelliot. The first scholarly edition was edited by Wang Chong Min and five other researchers at Beijing in 1957.[22] It is this version that I have translated and commented on. There exists a more modern version: 李布 诗咏 (*Ji Bu Shi Yong*) 'Ji Bu's chanted poem' in 'Dun Huang Bian Wen Jiao'.[23] However, this edition only contains 38 verses.

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19 Or in Chinese '俗讲' (sú jiǎng)

20 For example, the 25-string plucked Indian-made instrument called the *kǒnghóu* ' 箜篌 '.

21 *Bulletin du Comité de l'Asie française,* 1910. Paul Pelliot arrived at Dunhuang in 1908. He believed that the scrolls were hidden by the monks during the Tangut invasions in 1036. Of the 40.000 manuscript-scrolls discovered in cave seventeen at Dunhuang, 13,700 are today found in London.

22 See Pimpaneau, Jacques, *Chine* : *Littérature populaire* : (Paris : Philippe Picquier, 1991). This excellent and sympathetic study includes an unversed French translation of *Ji Bu Ma Zhen* but without any linguistic commentary or philological apparatus. However, a brief historical analyse is provided. See pages 90-108.

23 Edition Zhong Hua Su Ju Chu Ban, Beijing 1997, pp. 1,197-1,200.

It was thanks to the discovery of the Dunhuang cave-library by the Taoist priest Wang Yuanlu at the beginning of the 1900th century that *Ji Bu Ma Zhen (李布罵陣)*, after nine or ten centuries of dormancy, saw the light of dawn once again, now as an object of scholarly study (but very little to tell the truth), now in the form of a chanted narrative by errant storytellers.

The Mediaeval Epic Narrative

The Tang period during which *Ji Bu Ma Zhen* was recited or chanted, experienced a slow but steady transformation of a very esoteric nature : Buddhism provided the new converts with the psychological and spiritual tools to develop a more introspective vision of one's Self in relation to the world; provided a more individual vision of an after-world founded on otherworldly wisdom, shifting thus the Confucian value of self-improvement or self-cultivation as the means of social harmony and edification of communities, by which prescribed rites and ceremonial repetitions not only inscribe common men, morally, within the social tissue, but more important still, remind them to rememorize religious experiences whose Principal Source is the very fountain of all morally-bound societies. This radical shift was not only accomplished in the mountain monasteries; Buddhism penetrated the hearts and minds of the large families living in the towns and villages, too. Indeed, the community-minded spirit of Buddhism, which included those 'brothers' and 'sisters' from India, Tibet and Afghanistan henceforth, became more and more prevalent within the Confucian-dominant spirit of a Han society. From a conceptual point of view, a vertically orientated society had slowly transmutated into a more transversal one.

The highly valued belief in institutional hierarchy held neither ontic nor existential value for Buddhists who perceived worldly phenomena as essential for existence, inasmuch as existence, or mundane or conditioned reality, paved the Way for the final release from the Round of Births within the absolute or unconditioned Reality. Where Confucian authority imposes rites and ceremonies upon individuals which fashion a community-minded

spirit, and in the same token, instil a sense of reverence to the authority of those rites and ceremonies, inversely, the Buddhist views these rites and ceremonies as ephemeral, since he or she seeks to transcend worldly matter, or our mundane nature, the very matter and nature that constitute the rites and ceremonies of the Confucian social organization.

Whence the open conflicts between the Neo-Confucians and the Buddhists: the proscriptions, the closing of monasteries[24], the secularization of the monks and nuns[25]. As J. Brousse has stated: « Le Bouddhisme, étant de par sa nature même aux antipodes de l'idéologie confucéenne, ne pouvait qu'entrer en conflit avec elle. »[26]

The most notorious of the Neo-Confucians, Han Yu (768-824), unleashed his disdain of and hate against those marginals and idol-worshippers who sit in their monasteries atop remote mountain plateaus without serving either the State or the society. Han Yu reasoned that the spiritual energy orientated inwards served absolutely no purpose or utility to the Confucian orientated society built upon the ethic and moral principals as practiced and preached by Confucius : '名教 míng jiào'. For Confucianism is not a world of Self-examination but of outward coercion ; whereas according to Han Yu, Buddhism, being monastic, broke up the organic naturalness of the Chinese family since the eldest son had to be given up to monkhood. Furthermore, instead of supporting the closely-knit family as the precept of the natural base of the Confucian society, under the divinely conducted guidance of the Emperor, father to all and sundry, who imitates the Great Master himself, Confucius, Buddhist dogma propagated the imaginary, unknown divine guidance of a god-like figure, the Buddha, whose so-called divineness tore sons apart from their fathers, and consequently, tore the members of the natural, communal society from their true Father, the

24 The Neo-Confucian movement was most active and productive between 960 and 1126. Approximately 40.000 monasteries were closed or transformed into public institutions.

25 260.500 monks and nuns were forced to secularize. For these issues see Gernet, Jacques, *Le Monde Chinois* : (Paris : Armand Colin, 1990).

26 Brousse, J., *Le Bouddha* : (Paris : Pygamalion, 1997) page 211. 'The very nature of Buddhism, being diametrically opposed to Confucian ideology, could not but come into direct conflict with it.' (My translation).

Emperor ![27] As this dichotomy became more and more salient, it became more dangerous to the Confucian functionaries. For, indeed, Buddhism preached monastic life and introspection in lieu of State service responsibilities and obedience towards the Emperor. It exhorted the worship of the Buddha instead of piety towards the family nucleus, especially paternal piety...[28]

The mediaeval Ji Bu belongs to this radical social transformation, propagated as such by the errant monks or by the professional errant-bards, for it combines Confucian hierarchal obedience as exercised during Liu Bang's rule,[29] and Self-introspection and inner meditations expressed quite clearly in the knight's non-violence strategies when confronted by Liu Bang's armies and the Emperor's trackers during the man-hunt. Inner meditations that gave rise to the perfect mastering of his Self by word and by deed, couched in a tale of non violence within a world of terrible violence, rarely recited and recorded in Chinese History (in any mediaeval History for that matter). The voice of Ji Bu is dual because the source of that voice is dual: scripturally documented and orally recited.

The *Ji Bu Ma Zhen bianwen-scroll* contains 320 verses read vertically from right to left, cleft into two hemistiches of 14 sinographs, except verse 298 which only counts eight. In all, the epic poem contains 4,475 sinographs. This is quite an epic engrossment of the twenty lines and 42 characters of the historical Ji Bu! What highlights the mediaeval narrative is of course the very title of the poem: Ji Bu insults (罵 mà) Liu Bang before his warriors when the Chu armies of Xiang Yu and the Han armies of Liu

27 In Chinese the expression ' 出 家 人' 'to become a monk or a nun' literally means 'to leave (出) the family (家 人)' ...

28 It was especially during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) that this renascent Confucianism pursued a deeper political and social revival. Several historians believe that Neo-Confucianism integrated many Buddhist values into their renascent doctrines. On this interesting point, see for example, Shu Hsien Liu, *Understanding Confucian Philosopy : Classical and Sung-Ming* : (Westport CT : Praeger, 1998), especially page 114.

29 Confucius' doctrines, however, became an official State doctrine in 136 B.C. under the Emperor Han Wu.

Bang aligned themselves on the banks of the Ju River, feverish to join battle.[30]

The poetic prowess of the storytellers unfolds through striking metaphors and orotund hyperbole, enhanced by colourful details of the physical traits and even the psychological make-up of the personages, generally voiced through Ji Bu's critical or praiseworthy tongue. It must be said that if the narration portrays the exciting adventures of a knight-errant '游 侠 yóu xiá', whose destiny lies in the hands of fate, this fate is finely expressed in many articulated tinges of under and overtones of a philosophical and religious nature. Religious because Ji Bu outmanoeuvred all his foes by the use of discourse, by deeds that require the strength and wisdom of words, and not the warrior's 'natural' animal penchant to take up arms. Philosophical because our hero *reasons* in the most reflexive[31] manner to win over his friend Lord Zhou ; *outsmarts* the retainer Zhu Jia in the most malign manner when he disguises himself as a slave and is bought by the unsuspecting nobleman ; *cajoles* in the most seductive tones the noblemen Xia Hu and Xiao Xiang who are sent out to capture him, but instead who plead his case before the emperor ; and finally by his relentless *quest of the truth*, softens Liu Bang's heart of stone when the emperor yields to Ji Bu's wise words, ennobles him and offers the repentant knight a position of responsibility worthy of what Confucius would call 'a complete man' (文人 wèn rèn). Ji Bu's initial insult, however humiliating it be to Liu Bang, is forgiven and his grandeur of spirit and heart once more recognized by all and sundry.

Because poetry is the association of sounds which convey meaning, the translation of *Ji Bu Ma Zhen* must be a poetic rendering; that is, besides the two-line end-rime scheme -heroic couplets-, the second of which being the

30 It is the same Xiang Yu who, in -206, burned down the palace of the Emperor Shihuangdi, according to Sima Qian's *Historical Memoirs.* He also attempted to murder Liu Bang by inviting him to a banquet. Liu Bang divined the trap and escaped the ambush. Xiang Yu's army is called the snake (蛇 shé) and Liu Bang's, the dragon (龍 lóng) in the poem.

31 'Reflexive' as conveyed in the Chinese philosophical binominal '自觉' (zì jué), 'the self-awakened'.

riming one,[32] an iconic and aural technique of transferring mediaeval imagery and orality into alliteration, iterated verses, reduplicated words,[33] pleonasms, synonymous couplets,[34] echo-words, flamboyant figures and tropes puts the translator's talents to the test. Parataxis moves the verses along at a galloping pace, as galloping as the story plot itself. Violence indeed may jolt the target language during the *translation* (in the Latin sense of the word), yet the translator is beholden to offer his or her reading public a slight taste of the Chinese original, whereby a Chinese mediaeval, epic discourse transcends its 'Chinese' lilt to blend with one of the translated language's errantry. To this effect, the translator should have recourse only to words of early or late mediaeval stamp which will resonate their Chinese equivalents.

Conclusion: Words are Mightier than the Sword

Ji Bu never unsheathed his sword. Yet he was deemed as a man of culture; that is, one versed in military art and in letters: '能文能武' (néng wén néng wǔ). Our hero, through his oratory talents, won a battleless and thus bloodless victory, one that had been recommended by Chinese strategists, notably Sun Tzu, and the more enlightened Western ones.[35] The very

32 The Chinese poem does not follow a regular rime scheme : the rising tone falls on every fourteenth character of each verse. I have chosen an end-rime or an assonanced pattern which alternates every ten or twenty verses. My poetic translation, thus, does not follow any 'classical' rythmic pattern, but follows more an aural experience where the 'signifier' begets the 'signified'...

33 Which in Chinese is called ' 垂 疊 ' (chóng dié) or ' 疊 子 ' (dié zī)

34 In Chinese these syntaxic binary rhythm-makers are called '转注' (zhuǎn zhù).

35 For example, Sun Tzu's (550?) : 孙子兵法 *The Art of War* : « To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence » (translation Yuan Shibing, 1993), Sun Bin's (?-316 B.C.) *The Art of War 孫臏兵法* and Mo Zi 墨子: 479-392 B.C.), whose philosophy (Mohism) condemned war on the principal that the body of our supposed enemy is part and parcel of our own body, and so the harming of another's body would harm our own ! He purported universal love (兼愛 *jiān ài)* because it is the will of the Heavens (天 志 tiān zhì) that all humanity strive for peace. Could our hero, Ji Bu, have been an adept of the Mohist movement ? In the West, Maurice de Saxe wrote : « Je ne suis pas partisan de livrer bataille, surtout au début d'une guerre. Je suis même convaincu qu'un général habile peut faire la guerre toute sa vie, sans se laisser contraindre au combat. »('I am not in favour of delivering battle, especially at the beginning of a war. I am even convinced that a clever

breadth and depth of Ji Bu's oral deliveries form a veritable strategic paradigm; namely, a paradigm of non-violence, or to use a more commonplace term: diplomacy.[36] Violence should always be the last recourse of diplomacy. Ji Bu's diplomacy persuades others that words bear meaningful messages when followed by acts as meaningful. Words cannot be separated from the deeds they announce and seek to accomplish. Ji Bu's discourses, thus, are not void of meaning because firmly carried out by acts that seal his words: Is he not beholden to both his friend Zhu Jia and his former foe Lord Zhou for believing in his integrity, virtue and honesty?

« Secretly he acknowledged Zhu Jia's kindness//

Overtly he acclaimed Lord Zhou's notorious name. »[37]

His promises are kept, for he is a man of his word, and as a man of his word or of promises he forged the continuum between the Ji Bu of the Han and of the Tang … His poem might have even forged an existential continuum between Confucian and Buddhist existential values...

Ji Bu's words of wisdom derive from experiences encountered in the world, brooded over within the solitary intimacy of his existence; they gush forward in guise of a learned method of persuasion. To persuade by word of mouth instead of the drawn blade requires a mastering of one's Self that can only be effected by cultivation of forbearance, endurance and unbounded compassion for one's fellow beings. A solitary meditation upon one's Self now in the world (mundane or conditioned reality) now detached from it (absolute or unconditioned reality) exacts from the individual a lucid awareness of the existence of the Other. It were as if the strength of the sound word swelled up from the myriad inner voices that beckon and solicit

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general could make war all his life without ever being constrained to give battle' (my translation). On this point see Poirier, Lucien, *T.E. Lawrence : Stratège* : (Paris : Aube, 1997).

36 Readers here may argue that Ji Bu's insults to Liu Bang constitute a violence in themselves, given the fact that they prompted a raging desire in Liu Bang's heart to avenge himself ! However, Liu Bang pardoned Ji Bu's scathing words, which in itself is an act of non-violence ...

37 Ji Bu intensifies his gratitude towards Lord Zhu linguistically by doubling the adjective 'míng' '明 明', literally 'clear clear', 'bright bright', which I have translated adverbially as 'overtly'.

the mediator as he strides towards oratory heights; as if these voices descended from the Heavens in the form of a chorus of celestial voices whose resonance joins those murmuring voices from within at some midway point within the human heart. This midway point designates the Encounter between the exoteric and esoteric worlds … between the Self and the Other...

Ji Bu Ma Zhen may be one of the finest forms of oratory art of mediaeval China, not, of course, in guise of some handbook in rhetorics for professional speakers, but rather in its poetic form which enshrines the non-violent acts with creative rhythms and melodies ; enhaloes it with an aura of wondrous hope, tinged with the many hues and nuances of a good story that invites listeners to reflect upon their own life story, and in doing so, inspires them to evoke the hero or heroes of their own daily hardships in order to overcome conflict, tribulation and injustice by means other than violence …

If non-violence be the moral message that the errant-Buddhist storytellers preached in mediaeval China, then *Ji Bu Ma Zhen* would have achieved the perfect union of Confucian and Buddhist values, and Ji Bu himself, because chosen as the very epitome of this union, would have represented knighthood in its most noble form; that is, obedience to one's Lord, the Emperor, generosity of heart and compassion of all sentient beings …

For these reasons I believe this is why the Confucian Ji Bu of the Han Dynasty had been chosen to be recited in mediaeval China by the wandering storytelling-Buddhist monks: it was by no means an arbitrary choice.[38] For contrary to what several historians have written, it seems quite obvious that Confucianism and Buddhism are far from diametrically opposed, and their doctrines do bear comparison within the framework of certain concepts. For example, the *Way of the Mean* or the *Middle Way* (中 道 zhōng dào) eschews extremes in thinking and in acting, and both Buddhist (Mahayana) and Confucian concepts extol the believer to draw inspiration from and submit to Heaven: '听天 由 命 tīng tiān yóu mìng', as instructed by the

38 This being said, Ji Bu's narration was undoubtedly also orally executed by professional storytellers of Confucian belief.

Buddha, and '高高 在上着' 'gāo gāo zaì shāng zhě' 'one who is on high', as taught by Confucius. When his or her nature '性 xìng' fails to respond to God's nature with which man has been bestowed, man must then strive harder to emulate it. As Shu- Hsien Liu has formulated: « *If one learns to return to the original nature endowed by Heaven and Earth, then it will be preserved.* »[39] The Confucian ethnical code '名教 míng jiào', if not perfectly enshrined in the Buddhist belief of retribution or *karma* '因 果报应 yīn guǒ bào yīng', does share similar moral properties whose deeds of kindness will be accounted for in the near or distant future. In the words of Mou Tsung-san (1909-1995): « *Confucius taught a humanism without cutting off its ties with a transcendent creative source in Heave*n.[40]

As to our hero Ji Bu, he overcame the common bent of man's natural instincts - hatred, revenge, war – through the heroic use of Discourse. His Self-Accomplishment was put to the try by struggling through the miry bog of Real politics, and he decidedly achieved his goals, which despite the road being quite a crooked one, nevertheless gained them. This was his victory, his heroism amidst war, revenge, envy and hate.

And for this Self-Accomplishment, and its effects on both friends and foes, Ji Bu's celebrity reflects the Confucian wisdom of:

« ...一值 千金 »[41]...

The mediaeval storytellers revived a knight whose articulate word elicited the most colourful images, and their chosen hero, Ji Bu, embodied now the values of the Confucian *outer governance principales* '夕王' (wài wáng), now those of *inner introspection '内深" (nèi shēn)* as practised by Buddhists because they are what compose the ultimate realization of the mediaeval knight in his quest for mundane and transmundane wisdom ...[42]

Bibliography

39 Loc. cit. Page 162.
40 Cited from *Understanding Confucian Philosophy : Classical and Sung-Ming,* loc. cit. page 182.
41 '*yī zī zhí qiān jīn*'...one word is like a thousand pieces of gold.'
42 In other words, an exoteric and an esoteric vision of Humanity.

The Mediaeval Epic Narrative of 'Ji Bu Ma Zhen' (李布罵陣) 'Ji Bu Insulting the Enemy'

1) The full epic poem is found in the edition *Ji Bu Ma Zhen* (*李布罵陣) :* 敦煌 文 學 作品選 Dun Huang wèn wué zuò pǐn xuǎn, edited by Wang Chong Min, Beijing, 1957).

2) 李布罵陣, dans *Dun Huang bianwen ji* 敦煌變文集, 2 vol., Zhong Hua Shu Ju Chu Ban, Beijing, 人民文學出版社, 1997 (Anthologie des *bianwens* de Dunhuang). This version only contains 38 verses.

3) Pimpaneau, Jacques, *Chine. Littérature populaire: Chanteurs, conteurs, bateleurs: (Paris:* Philippe Picquier, 1991.