

Beefy Outlaws: Beef Consumption in *Water Margin* and Its Song-Yuan Antecedents

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Abstract

When it comes to the favorite food of the outlaws of Mount Liang, beef is the undisputed champion. The 120-chapter edition of *Water Margin* has nearly 50 scenes that depict the heroes feasting heartily on beef. The next most frequently evoked type of meat is mutton, but the number of times it is mentioned is only half that of beef and the relevant scenes are depicted with far less detail. Because cattle slaughter and the sale of beef were strictly forbidden during the Song dynasty, an expanding community of researchers considers this choice of food as a subtle reflection of the bandits' defiance of law and order. However, this school of thought has yet to sufficiently take into account several elements, including the extent to which this law was enforced during the Song dynasty, when the adventures of Song Jiang and his sworn brothers took place; society's attitude toward beef consumption during this same period; the compilation of the novel in the Ming dynasty and the author's awareness of historical facts; and the limited presence of beef in the Song-Yuan antecedents of the novel.

Taking these points into consideration, this article reexamines the motif of beef consumption in *Water Margin* and the development of this theme through a historical lens. To do so, it first focuses on the legal issues pertaining to cattle slaughter and the sale of beef during the Song dynasty. Particular attention is paid to the enforcement of relevant laws and the circulation and popularity of black-market beef during this period. Then, it highlights the discrepancies between the way in which beef consumption is presented in the Ming novel and historical facts, followed by a discussion of the portrayal of meat consumption in Yuan dramas featuring Song Jiang and his gang of outlaws. In the end, by thoroughly considering the presentation of food in the developmental history of *Water Margin*, from Yuan dramas to the Ming novel, this article sheds light on the importance of this subject as a literary motif in medieval Chinese literature.

Keywords

beef consumption – cattle slaughter – mutton – *Water Margin*

The *Songshi* 宋史 [*History of the Song Dynasty*] includes this story of Emperor Renzong 宋仁宗 [r. 1022–1063], who once stayed up all night craving the taste of roast mutton. Although it was within his power to wake up his kitchen staff at any given time, he was too considerate to do so. Instead, he tried his best to suppress his hunger and ended up with insomnia.¹ The point of this story is obviously to illustrate the virtues of the emperor as a magnanimous leader; but, at a more subtle level, the way in which it presents mutton as the ultimate irresistible food is also worth highlighting, as it reflects the uniquely high position of mutton in gastronomic culture during the Song dynasty [960–1279]. This reading is corroborated by Wang Zengyu, who notes: “Among the meat eaten by people of the Song Dynasty, lamb was notable in the north. During the Northern Song, ‘the imperial kitchen only used mutton’ in the palace, and in principle ‘no pork should be used.’”² His research demonstrates that mutton simply has no equal when it comes to being the preferred protein of Chinese royalty.

Unlike the emperor, who had vast resources, ordinary people in the Song era did not have wide culinary choices. However, their unanimous preference for mutton is still indicated in contemporaneous documents, such as *Evening Remarks from a Cold Studio* [*Lengzhai yehua* 冷齋夜話] and *Record of a Dream of Paradise in the Eastern Capital* [*Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄]. In the first text, Cheng Tianzhen 承天珍 famously declares mutton “a great delicacy that has no peer in this world.”³ In the second text, the number of lamb-based dishes listed as popular local delicacies, ranging from snacks such as steamed buns with mutton [*yangrou xiao mantou* 羊肉小饅頭] and mutton rice [*yangfan* 羊飯] to grander dishes such as oven-grilled lamb [*rulu yang* 入爐羊], far exceeds that of any other meat.⁴ But perhaps nowhere is the

1 Toqto'a 脫脫, *Songshi* 宋史 [*History of the Song Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 12.250.

2 Wang Zengyu, “Food (Part 1): The Food of Song,” in *A Social History of Middle-Period China: The Song, Liao, Western Xia and Jin Dynasties*, ed. Zhu Ruixin et al., trans. Bang Qian Zhu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 69.

3 Hui Hong 惠洪, *Lengzhai yehua* 冷齋夜話 [*Evening Remarks from a Cold Studio*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 10.76.

4 According to a survey by Gao Wenmin 高文敏, *Record of a Dream of Paradise in the Eastern Capital* contains a total of 183 lamb-based dishes, in “Qianxi Songdai shiyang wenhua 淺析

universal appeal of mutton revealed as clearly as in the experience of Su Shi 蘇軾 [1037–1101] while in exile in Huizhou 惠州. In a letter addressed to his brother, Su Shi writes:

Even in the undeveloped market of Huizhou, one sheep is slaughtered on a daily basis. But I dare not compete with the local gentries for its meat, so I ask my servants to purchase only the vertebrae. There are scraps of meat stuck between the bones. Cook them in boiling water but do not overcook (Su Shi's note: if you wait too long, the meat will become mushy). For consumption, dip them in wine, sprinkle some salt on top, and lightly char their surface.⁵

Despite being poverty stricken, miserable, and in exile, Su Shi could not resist his craving for mutton even if it meant scraping meat off the bones. His inability to overcome this temptation, together with the fact that even an underdeveloped market such as Huizhou could manage to sell one lamb per day, offers a fascinating view at the degree to which lamb was embraced by Song consumers, regardless of social and financial status.

In his PhD dissertation on mutton consumption in the Song dynasty, Wang Qiping 王啟屏 not only reaffirms this observation but traces the origin of this gastronomic fascination back to the late Tang [618–907] period. However, as with many Tang customs adopted by Song society, its impact and scale of penetration in the Song era far exceeded anything experienced in the Tang period that preceded it.⁶ Wang's research leaves no question regarding the status of mutton as the de facto symbol of fine dining for Song consumers. But for scholars of *Water Margin* [Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳], this is problematic because the outlaws' preference for beef over mutton is clearly established both descriptively and quantitatively.

Water Margin, also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, is a vernacular novel from the Ming dynasty [1368–1644] based on the historical rebellion led by Song Jiang 宋江 against the Song government. The oldest extant edition of the novel was published in 1589, but most scholars believe it to be based on an earlier version, published in the 1520s, if not earlier. Also in question is

宋代食羊文化 [A Preliminary Analysis of the Culture of Mutton Consumption in the Song Dynasty], *Kaifeng daxue xuebao* 開封大學學報, no. 3 (2015): 34.

5 Su Shi 蘇軾, "Yu Ziyou shu 與子由書 [Letter to Ziyou]," in *Su Dongpo quanji* 蘇東坡全集 [Complete Works of Su Dongpo], ed. Deng Lixun 鄧立勳 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1997), 601.

6 See Wang Qiping 王啟屏, "Songdai de shiyang wenhua 宋代的食羊文化 [The Culture of Mutton Consumption in the Song Dynasty]" (PhD diss., Taiwan Normal University, 2003).

its authorship, which is commonly attributed to Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 [1296–1372]; this is highly unlikely because of the novel's many references to cultural and historical events that postdate the Jiajing 嘉靖 [1522–1566] era.⁷ The novel contains numerous scenes depicting the protagonists' diets, among which the following two are exemplary in offering a glimpse into the extent of the characters' inclination to upset the prevailing gastronomic norm.

The first scene occurs in an early episode, in which a travel-weary Wang Jin 王進, along with his mother, who is ill, wanders into the estate of Shi Jin 史進 to seek help. Shi Jin's father is a noble and generous man. Seeing how hungry and tired the travelers are, he invites them inside and offers them food and shelter. He orders his servants to prepare a meal made up of "a tray bearing four vegetable dishes and one of beef."⁸ The following morning, the elderly Shi learns that Wang's mother did not sleep well because of her illness. He quickly sends someone to town to procure some medicine and insists that Wang and his mother prolong their stay as his guests. Wang ends up becoming Shi Jin's martial arts teacher and plays an instrumental role in molding the young Shi into one of Mount Liang's 梁山 most celebrated heroes. The purpose of this episode is obviously to emphasize the kindness and hospitality of the elderly Shi. His decision to present his guests with a plate of beef (rather than mutton) is worth highlighting, as it shows the degree of his reverence for this type of meat.

The second scene revolves around Lin Chong 林冲, who, under similarly desperate circumstances, walks into an inn run by Zhu Gui 朱貴 to order some food. Hungry and cold, Lin is presented with a choice of "raw and cooked beef, fat goose, and crisp fried chicken" and unhesitatingly orders "two catties of cooked beef."⁹ At the time, Lin had just been given some money by Chai Jin 柴進 and has no financial concerns. His choice is therefore informed purely by his culinary preference and indicates that, like the elderly Shi, he has a very high opinion of beef.

Beyond demonstrating that the author of *Water Margin* likes to use beef as a signifier of both honor and refined taste, scholars who see beef as a symbol of defiance also point to these two scenes as evidence of the outlaws' disregard for law and order. To support this view, readers are reminded of the

7 For more information on the dating and authorship of *Water Margin*, see Andrew H. Plaks, "Shui-hu Chuan and the Sixteenth-Century Novel Form: An Interpretive Reappraisal," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 2 (1980).

8 Shi Nai'an 施耐庵, *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 [*Water Margin*] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 19; Sidney Shapiro, trans., *Outlaws of the Marsh* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1988), 28.

9 Shi Nai'an, *Shuihu zhuan*, 128; Shapiro, *Outlaws*, 180.

statewide ban on beef throughout the Song dynasty, which is used to reinforce the idea that these outlaws are rebels, who could not care less about the law. Zhu Yuhang 朱宇航, for example, argues that “the heroes of Mount Liang are a treacherous lot. Killing and arson are their way of life. Therefore, when it comes to their diet, beef, which is outlawed, is their only choice.”¹⁰ More recently, a similar conclusion was reached by Vincent Goossaert, who surmises that “the slaughter of bovines and the eating of beef had been a sign of rebellion or voluntary marginality.”¹¹ Zhu and Goossaert represent an expanding group of researchers who sees beef as an intentional symbol of defiance in *Water Margin*. Other scholars who subscribe to this view include Guo Jian 郭建, Li Jianhua 李建華, and Lü Xianghua 呂祥華.¹² Because this premise is well supported by historical sources, it is necessary for us spend some time contemplating its relevance to the author’s intention in *Water Margin*.

First, it should be made clear that the Song ban on beef was an important factor that contributed to the popularity of mutton. By limiting the availability of beef as an alternative source of protein, people had little choice but to embrace mutton as the only legally available red meat on the market. The *Song Dynasty Manuscript Compendium* [*Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿] and the *Collection of Grand Imperial Edicts and Decrees of the Song Dynasty* [*Song dazhaolingji* 宋大詔令集] present more than fifty documents detailing legislators’ attempts to ban the sale of black-market beef. *The Song Dynasty Criminal Law* [*Song xingtong* 宋刑統] is even more specific in stating that “any unauthorized slaughter of cattle is an offense subject to one year of imprisonment.”¹³ These laws exist to augment the sense of importance traditionally assigned

10 Zhu Yuhang 朱宇航, “Zaofan jiuyao chi niurou 造反就要吃牛肉 [Not Forgetting to Eat Beef during a Rebellion],” *Baike xinshuo* 百科新說, no. 12 (2008): 17.

11 Vincent Goossaert, “The Beef Taboo and the Sacrificial Structure of Late Imperial Chinese Society,” in *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*, ed. Roel Sterckx (Basingstoke, UK: MacMillan, 2005), 245. In this chapter, Goossaert also discusses the importance of religious ideas on beef consumption, but, due to the constraints of time and space, this is not something that this present article is able to address.

12 See Li Jianhua 李建華, “Yangliu shu, tonggang bian he niurou: Shuihu zhuan suoxie santi 楊柳樹、銅鋼鞭和牛肉：水滸傳瑣屑三題 [Willow Tree, Metal Club, and Beef: Three Random Topics on *Water Margin*],” *Heze xueyuan xuebao* 荷澤學院學報, no. 4 (2017); Lü Xianghua 呂祥華, “Shuihu zhuan yanyin miaoxie yanjiu 水滸傳宴飲描寫研究 [Studies on the Descriptions of Banquets in *Water Margin*]” (Master’s thesis, Shandong University, 2008); Guo Jian 郭建, “Liangshan haoan chi shenme rou 梁山好漢吃什麼肉 [Meat Eaten by the Heroes of Mount Liang],” in *Zhongguo fa wenhua manbi* 中國法文化漫筆 [*Random Notes on Chinese Law*], ed. Guo Jian 郭建 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 1999).

13 Dou Yi 竇儀, *Song xingtong* 宋刑統 [*Song Dynasty Criminal Law*] (Taipei: Wenhua chubanshe, 1964), 15.483.

to cattle in China's agriculture-based economy. Emperor Zhenzong 宋真宗 [r. 997–1022], for example, made this very clear when he tried to end the illegal slaughter of cattle in 1016, stating:

The bovine is a pastoral animal and an agricultural resource. There are already strict laws forbidding the killing of this animal, and it would be a great tragedy to kill or harm a bovine just when a bountiful harvest is within reach. It may not be a capital offense to kill or steal this farm animal, but punishment by imprisonment must still be delivered swiftly and harshly to those who commit this crime.¹⁴

The substantial influence of this way of thinking is also seen in the *Book of Agriculture* [*Nong shu* 農書], which states:

Aside from its ability to pull a cart, the bovine exists strictly for the benefit of the farmer. It can be herded on the pasture or used on agricultural lands. An industrious farmer will take care of this animal, and a lazy farmer will ignore it and expose it to hunger and thirst, heat and cold, a life-threatening disease, or other physical harm. But they should know that agriculture is the foundation of the state, on which our clothing, food, economy, and other needs depend. Without the bovine, we cannot have agriculture.¹⁵

Given the importance of cows in agricultural work, it is easy to understand why Song authorities would want to restrict its use to the plow and not the kitchen.¹⁶ Along with the level of gastronomic reverence for sheep, it is not difficult to see why some researchers are inclined to highlight the consumption of beef in *Water Margin* as an act of rebellion against both the contemporaneous culinary conventions and the rule of law.

Yet, as sensible as this reading may be, it paints only a partial picture. One of the problems with this reading is the fact that Song law is very specific about criminalizing cattle slaughter but is much more lenient when it comes to beef consumption. For example, in 1014, in recognition of the increasingly widespread sale of black-market beef, Emperor Zhenzong declared that “unless

14 Song Minqiu 宋敏求, *Song dazhaoling ji* 宋大詔令集 [*Collection of Grand Imperial Edicts and Decrees of the Song Dynasty*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 199.736.

15 Chen Fu 陳旉, *Nong shu* 農書 [*Book of Agriculture*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 15.

16 For an excellent analysis on the importance of agriculture in the Song economy, see Bao Weimin and Wu Zhengqiang, “Behind the Form: A Historical Analysis of the Agriculture Encouragement System in the Song Dynasty,” *Frontiers of History in China* 3 (2006).

the butchering of the bovine was premeditated, anyone who by chance purchases beef for consumption shall not be prosecuted.¹⁷ Later, in 1037, a famine in Sichuan forced many farmers to slaughter their oxen for food. The court had no problem with offering these farmers a swift pardon.¹⁸ These events and other similar ones show that beef consumption was not perceived as a serious offense during the Song dynasty. They also give us reasons to question whether the author of *Water Margin* truly intended the outlaws' meal choice to be an extension of their rebellious attitudes. If the author had genuinely wanted to highlight the bandits' disrespect for the law through food, why not depict them as producers of beef, rather than consumers, or both? Especially since slaughtering a cow carried a much harsher sentence than the consumption of beef?

There is no easy answer to this question, but the following must be considered thoroughly. First, was it in fact the intention of the author of *Water Margin* to use food as a symbol to reinforce the idea of rebellion? Second, did this intention originate with the Ming dynasty author of *Water Margin*, or did he/she simply inherit this motif from the novel's antecedents in the Yuan dynasty [1206–1368], when the situation was different? Third, did unfamiliarity with history and legislation lead to the mistaken belief that cattle slaughter and beef consumption were equally reprehensible during the Song dynasty?

Let us consider the first point. As stated earlier, throughout the Song dynasty, there was a universal obsession with mutton that neither social status nor wealth could relieve. When the heroes of *Water Margin* deviate from this gastronomic norm by regularly consuming beef and little else, their choice is often attributed to an authorial intention to establish a correlation between their identity as outlaws and their choice of food. However, the following scene in *Water Margin* shows at least one other possibility in explaining their choice. The scene in question depicts the initial meeting between Song Jiang and Li Kui 李逵, which is arranged by Dai Zong 戴宗. In order to celebrate their new-found friendship, the three men decide to share a meal. Dai Zong leads his companions to a beautiful riverside tavern called the Pipa Pavilion 琵琶亭. According to Dai, this place had been frequented by the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 [772–846], and its name came from one of his famous poems. When the three men sit down, they each order a bowl of fish soup and some wine. Song and Dai quickly decide that they do not like the taste of the soup and

17 Dou Yi, *Song xingtong*, 483.

18 Li Tao 李燾, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 續資治通鑑長編 [*Long Draft of the Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Governance*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 120.2843.

decide not to finish it. Li not only gulps down his bowl of fish soup but helps himself to the leftovers of his new friends.

Song Jiang watched Li Kui demolish three bowls of fish soup, including bones. He summoned the waiter.

"I think this brother is still hungry. Bring him two catties of sliced meat. I'll pay you when you have added up the bill."

"We've no beef, only mutton. You can have all the fat mutton you want."

Li Kui flung the remnants of his soup in the man's face, slopping his clothes.

"What are you doing?" Dai Zong yelled.

"This sassy villain has the nerve to pretend I eat nothing but beef and won't give me any mutton."

"I only asked," the waiter protested. "I didn't say anything."

"Go slice the meat," said Song Jiang. "I'll pay."

Swallowing his anger, the man sliced two catties of mutton and served it on a platter. Li Kui didn't stand on ceremony. In a twiddle of thumbs, he chomped the whole thing down.

"You're a good man," Song Jiang said admiringly.

"Brother Song can read my friggin' mind. Meat's much better than fish."¹⁹

This episode makes it clear that these outlaws do not dislike mutton. In fact, judging by Li Kui's reaction, they seem to enjoy it a great deal. So why do these outlaws not consume mutton on a more regular basis? The reason is actually disclosed in Li Kui's response to the waiter's question, which he perceives as a sense of reluctance to sell mutton to his party. Li considers it an affront because, compared to beef, mutton was prohibitively expensive throughout the Song dynasty. The waiter's demeanor suggests that he does not think Li and his friends can afford it.

Indeed, the high cost of mutton had been a problem for Song consumers since the early days of the dynasty. When the Song dynasty's founding emperor, Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 (Emperor Taizu 宋太祖, r. 960–976), passed away in 976, one of his greatest regrets was his inability to recapture the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun 燕雲十六州 from the Khitans. The loss of these sixteen prefectures put the Song state not only at a military disadvantage but also an economic one because what remained of Zhao's kingdom (vast though it was) lacked suitable and sizable grazing land for raising sheep and horses. As

19 Shi Nai'an, *Shuihu zhuan*, 453–54; Shapiro, *Outlaws*, 601.

a result, in order to procure enough mutton to satisfy the growing needs of the population, the Song had to engage in costly trade practices with the Khitans and the Tanguts (and later the Jurchens).²⁰ According to a proposal submitted in 1074 to centralize the buying and selling of mutton in Kaifeng, the proposed price for one catty of mutton is 130 coins. However, the actual retail price was likely to be much higher, as the goal of this proposal was to allow the government to regulate the price of mutton and make it affordable.²¹ For comparison, one *dou* 斗 (approximately four pounds) of rice in the same region cost no more than eight coins.²²

After ceding control of northern China to the Jurchens and retreating to the Southern city of Hangzhou, the increased distance from the northern grasslands resulted in a corresponding increase in the price of lamb. According to one account, the cost of one catty of mutton rose sharply to 900 coins in the early years of the southern Song period.²³ This exorbitant price prompted an unnamed official, who longed for the taste of mutton but could not afford it, to voice his frustration in a poem:

The price of one catty of mutton in Pingjiang is 900 coins,
Would an official with a meager salary dare make a purchase?
The alternative is to make two meals out of fish and shrimp,
And turn my stomach into a little pond.²⁴

平江九百一斤羊
俸薄如何敢買嘗
只把魚蝦供兩膳
肚皮今作小池塘

This economic reality also explains why mutton was often listed as the centerpiece of the emperor's reward given to his armies throughout the Song

20 Li Tao, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, 211.5136.

21 Li Tao, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, 256.6251. In addition, in his study on the economic value of goods in the Song dynasty, Cheng Minsheng 程民生 estimates that 1 catty of mutton cost around 120 coins during the Northern Song period. Although Cheng's calculation is based on a joke by Su Shi, who did not specify which type of meat he was referring to, the number seemingly matches the one in the 1074 proposal. See Cheng Minsheng 程民生, *Songdai wujia yanjiu* 宋代物價研究 [*Studies on the Value of Goods in the Song Dynasty*] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), 170.

22 Cheng Minsheng, *Songdai wujia yanjiu*, 122.

23 Hong Mai 洪邁, *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 [*The Chronicles of Yijian*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981).

24 Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi*.

dynasty.²⁵ For example, in 968, Emperor Taizu “graced the calvary camp with his presence and rewarded his troops with money and mutton wine.”²⁶ Later, in 980, Emperor Taizong 宋太宗 [r. 976–997] similarly awarded his army with tea, mutton, and wine.²⁷ The prohibitive cost of mutton might also explain why Pu Zongmeng 蒲宗孟 [1022–1088], who is well known for his extravagance, customarily slaughtered ten sheep on a daily basis as a way to show off his wealth.²⁸ Mutton was indeed a kingly gift during the Song dynasty.

By contrast, black-market beef was much more affordable during this period. According to one eyewitness report published in the *Song Dynasty Manuscript Compendium*:

Every day, I see ignorant citizens slaughtering cattle and selling their meat for profit. Even our increasingly stringent law cannot prevent this situation. A cow costs as much as 5,000 to 7,000 coins. But each catty of beef can be sold for 1000 coins, and a cow can easily weigh as much as 200 to 300 catties. This huge margin of profit spurs many people to disregard the law and its consequences.²⁹

Because of this price discrepancy between the cost of a living cow and a dead one, the same report recommends passing a law to set the price of beef at twenty coins per catty.³⁰ It is uncertain whether this suggestion was ever taken seriously.

Although this reality regarding the economy of beef does not preclude the correlation of beef consumption with the theme of rebellion, it certainly adds another dimension to the historicism of the novel and its portrayal of gastronomy. The fact that the majority of the scenes of beef consumption in *Water Margin* take place at “roadside inns in remote areas where government control and law enforcement are weak,” as Liang Yan pointed out, shows not only the limited enforceability of Song law in rural areas but also the appeal of affordable meat in these settings.³¹ In other words, the outlaws’ preference for beef may have been as much a message of rebellion as a reflection of

25 For more information on how food became a coveted if expensive marker of social status in the northern Song period, see Isaac Yue, “Coarse Tea and Insipid Rice: The Politics of Food in the Northern Song Period,” *Chinese Historical Review* 24 (2017).

26 Li Tao, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, 9.204.

27 Li Tao, *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, 21.479.

28 Toqto’a, *Songshi*, 328.570–72.

29 Xu Song 徐松, *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿 [*Song Dynasty Manuscript Compendium*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 52.

30 Xu Song, *Song huiyao jigao*, 52.

31 See Yan Liang, “Beef, Fish, and Chestnut Cake: Food for Heroes in the Late Imperial Chinese Novel,” *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 5 (2018): 123.

contemporaneous economic reality. As outlaws hunted by the government, our heroes are unlikely to have been able to afford mutton on a regular basis. This leads us to the second issue: As the novel was not compiled until the Ming dynasty, could the author of *Water Margin* have been aware of this Song economic reality so as to deliberately integrate it into the novel? If not, how did this perfect marriage of historical fact and literary motif come about?

To address this problem, let us turn our attention to the developmental history of *Water Margin* and consider the presence of beef and mutton in some of its antecedents. The oldest extant work that has a direct influence on *Water Margin* is *Old Incidents in the Xuanhe Period of the Great Song Dynasty* [*Da Song Xuanhe yishi* 大宋宣和遺事; henceforth referred to as *Xuanhe Period*]. This text is written in ten sections, with the entire fourth section devoted to the story of Song Jiang and the thirty-six heavenly spirits who are reincarnated as outlaws on Mount Liang. (Curiously, Song Jiang is not listed as one of the heavenly spirits according to this text.) It features many of the storylines elaborated further in the novel later, including the robbery of the convoy carrying Cai Jing's 蔡京 [1047–1126] birthday gifts and the death of Yan Poxi 閻婆惜 at the hands of Song Jiang. It also features an event called the Gathering of Cattle Slaughter [*shaniu dahui* 殺牛大會], where the heroes gather to celebrate their camaraderie.³² The name of this event suggests that at least one cow is slaughtered to commemorate this occasion; and although there is no mention of what happens to the slaughtered animal afterward, we assume that its meat is more likely to end up on the protagonists' plates than to be allowed to go to waste.

As cattle slaughter was strictly prohibited by Song law, this act of slaughtering a cow conjures an unmistakable impression of the heroes' disdain for the law. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether the author of *Xuanhe Period* had intended it to be read in this light, for this scene is short and its description brief. We also know that later authors did not care enough about this scene to elaborate on it or to expand it into a proper literary motif for rebellion. In fact, as can be seen in Table 1, this tradition of using cattle slaughter as a symbol of rebellion, if there ever was one, effectively started and ended with *Xuanhe Period*.³³ Not only do cows remain unharmed in Yuan dramas in the *Water*

32 *Xinkan da Song Xuanhe yishi* 新刊大宋宣和遺事 [*The New Edition of Old Incidents in the Xuanhe Period of the Great Song Dynasty*] (Shanghai: Shanghai gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1954), 43.

33 Later plays – such as “Liangshan wuhu da jielao 梁山五虎大劫牢 [A Jailbreak Organized by the Five Tigers of Mount Liang],” “Liangshan qihu nao tongtai 梁山七虎鬧銅臺 [Seven Tigers from Mount Liang Wreak Havoc at the Bronze Tower],” “Wang Aihu danao dongpingfu 王矮虎大鬧東平府 [Wang the Diminutive Tiger Causes Trouble in Dongping Prefecture],” and “Song Gongming pai jiugong baguazhen 宋公明排九宮八卦陣 [Song Jiang Sets a Trap According to the Principle of the Nine Squares and Hexagrams]” – are

Margin tradition, but the word for cattle or beef is mentioned so few times in these works that they are barely noticeable. It is evident that later dramatists had very little interest in associating the outlaws of Mount Liang with beef. Unlike *Xuanhe Period* and the later Ming novel, in these Yuan plays, Song Jiang and his sworn brothers were invariably portrayed as consumers of mutton, with little interest in beef.

TABLE 1 Beef and mutton in early *Water Margin* plays

| | Author | Play title | Text |
|---|-------------------|---|---|
| 1 | Gao Wenxiu 高文秀 | “Double Accomplish- ment from the Black Hurricane [<i>Hei xuanfeng</i> <i>shuang xiangong</i> 黑旋風雙獻功]” | [Li Kui] “There is an entire pot of rice with mutton here. If you don’t want it, I will eat it all by myself!” [一罐子羊肉泡飯。哥哥不吃，我自 家吃] ^a “[Song Jiang] gives order to bring out some wine and mutton. Hence begins the celebratory feast with Sun Kongmu and Li Shan’er.” [寤下酒，臥番羊，與孫孔目、李山 兒共做一個慶喜筵席者] ^b |
| 2 | Li Wenwei 李文蔚 | “Yan Qing Gambles with the Fish [<i>Yanqing</i> <i>boyu</i> 燕青博魚]” | “[Song Jiang] orders his men to kill the bovine, slay the horse, slaughter the lamb, and brew some wine. A celebratory feast is in order!” [一面敲牛宰馬，殺羊造酒，做一個 慶喜的筵席] ^c |

Notes:

a Yang Jialuo 楊家駱, ed., *Quan Yuan zaju chubian* 全元雜劇初編 [*Volume One of the Complete Dramas of the Yuan Dynasty*] (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962), 7:3215.

b Yang Jialuo, *Quan Yuan zaju chubian*, 7:3215.

c Wang Jisi 王季思, ed., *Quan Yuan xiqu* 全元戲曲 [*Complete Dramas of the Yuan Dynasty*] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1999), 3.132.

excluded from this study because their circulation overlapped with the compilation of *Water Margin* and as such could not have influenced the composition of the latter. For more information on the composition and dating of these dramas, see Liu Jingzhi 劉靖之, *Yuanren shuihu zaju yanjiu* 元人水滸雜劇研究 [*Studies on Yuan Dynasty Water Margin Dramas*] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1990).

TABLE 1 Beef and mutton in early *Water Margin* plays (*cont.*)

| | Author | Play title | Text |
|---|--------------------|---|--|
| 3 | Kang Jinzhi 康進之 | “Li Kui Makes Amends [<i>Li Kui fujing</i> 李逵負荊]” | [Lu Zhi'en 魯智恩 brags to Wang Lin 王林]: “My base is full of mutton wine! Let me ask my subordinates to bring you twenty to thirty sheep along with forty to fifty picul of fine wine!” [我那山寨上有的是羊酒，我教小僮 儼趕二三十個肥羊，抬四五十擔好 酒送你] ^d [A song at the end of the play] “To have a feast in the middle of Dongping Lake; to slaughter a lamb under the flowery tree; and to pur- chase more wine after we are done with our current stash.” [夢兒窩裏開筵待，花標樹下肥羊 宰，酒盡呵拚當再買] ^e |
| 4 | Anon. | “Lu Zhishen Enjoying the Scene at the Yellow Flower Valley [<i>Lu Zhishen</i> <i>xishang huanghuayu</i> 魯智深喜賞黃花峪]” | [Song Jiang] “I am about to slaughter a horse and butcher an ox, in order to prepare a celebratory feast.” [俺這裏敲牛宰馬，做個慶喜的筵席] ^f |

d Kang Jinzhi 康進之, *Yuanqu xuan: Liangshan Po Li Kui fujing zaju* 元曲選·梁山泊李逵負荊雜劇 [*Selections of Yuan Dramas: Li Kui of Mount Liang Makes Amends*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 16.
e Kang Jinzhi, *Yuanqu xuan*, 20.
f Wang Shifu 王實甫 et al., ed., *Guben Yuan-Ming zaju* 孤本元明雜劇 [*Unique Copies of Dramas of the Yuan-Ming Period*] (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1977), 3.10.

TABLE 1 Beef and mutton in early *Water Margin* plays (*cont.*)

| Author | Play title | Text |
|--------|---|---|
| | | [Cai Jing 蔡淨 talks to a monk] “When I return, I expect you to prepare some wine and a lamb skull for me. Make sure you pluck the skull clean and braise it till the meat falls off. I would also like some duck eggs to go with the wine.” [我買下些好酒兒好羊頭，退的乾淨，煮的爛著，鴨蛋買下些，我來便要吃酒] ^g |
| | | [What appears to be an idiom at the end of the play] “It’s like a sick lamb falling into the hands of a butcher. There is just no way this will end in peace!” [病羊兒落在屠家手，咱兩個怎肯平休] ^h |
| 5 | Anon. “Three Tigers Descend the Mountain to Repay a Kindness [<i>Zheng bao'en sanhu xiashan</i> 爭報恩三虎下山]” | [Guan Sheng 關勝 talks to an attendant in a small roadside tavern] “I want you to slaughter one lamb for me and also to bring me some wine made from glutinous rice.” [今日個宰肥羊斟糯酒] ⁱ |

g Wang Shifu, *Guben Yuan-Ming zaju*, 3.10.
h Wang Shifu, *Guben Yuan-Ming zaju*, 3.11.
i Yang Jialuo 楊家駱, ed., *Quan Yuan zaju sanbian* 全元雜劇三編 [*Volume Three of Complete Dramas of the Yuan Dynasty*] (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963), 4.1531.

TABLE 1 Beef and mutton in early *Water Margin* plays (*cont.*)

| | Author | Play title | Text |
|---|----------------------------------|---|---|
| 6 | Anon. | “In Wind and Rain, the Minister Finds Himself in Prison [<i>Doukongmu fengyu huanlao mo</i> 都孔目風雨還牢末]” | “[Song Jiang] orders his men to slaughter the lamb and brew some wine for a celebratory feast.” [一面殺羊造酒，做個慶喜筵席] |
| 7 | Zhu Youdun 朱有燉 [1379–1439] | “The Leopard Monk Decides to Return to Normal Life [<i>Baozi heshang zi huansu</i> 豹子和尚自還俗]” | [Lu Zhishen, with sarcasm] “I ate some insipid rice with astragalus herb. It is better than fatty mutton with wine!” [喫了些啖飯黃蘗，抵多少肥羊法酒] ^k “[A minor character named Little Liu] sells fatty mutton.” [小劉屠賣著肥羊肉] ^l |

j Wang Jisi, *Quan Yuan xiqu*, 3.132.
k Liao Kebin 廖可斌, ed., *Xijian Mingdai xiqu congkan: Zaju juan* 稀見明代戲曲叢刊（雜劇卷） [*Rare Dramas of the Ming Dynasty: The Scroll of Poetic Drama*] (Shanghai: Dongfang chubun zhongxin), 1.46.
l Liao Kebin, *Xijian Mingdai xiqu congkan*, 52.

Among the seven plays featured in Table 1, the Chinese word for cattle or beef [*niu* 牛] is found only in [1], [2], and [4]. In [1], the word appears twice and is used respectively as a metaphor for Li Kui’s personality and a reference to an actual (living) animal. In [2], it also appears twice; the first time as part of the name of a temple [*Niutwang miao* 牛王廟] and the second time as part of the phrase “slaughter a horse and butcher an ox” [*qiaoniu zaima* 敲牛宰馬] (more on this later). The word appears several times in [4], first to describe a small path used by cattle and sheep and then two more times to describe a person’s ill temper. However, the middle of the play has a scene in which Song Jiang describes his intention to “slaughter a horse and butcher an ox, in order to prepare a celebratory feast,” which is almost identical to the second example in [2]. At first glance, this sentence is reminiscent of the Gathering of Cattle Slaughter depicted in *Xuanhe Period*, but it is more likely to be a popular idiom evoked by both dramatists. In another play, titled “Guan Yu Travels Alone for One

TABLE 2 “Slaughter a horse and butcher an ox”

| Play Title | Text |
|---|---|
| “Lu Zhishen Enjoying the Scene at the Yellow Flower Valley” | “slaughter a horse and butcher an ox, in order to prepare a celebratory feast.” [敲牛宰馬，做個慶喜的筵席] ^a |
| “Guan Yu Travels Alone for One Thousand Li” | “slaughter a horse and butcher an ox, in order to prepare one celebratory feast.” [敲牛宰馬，做一個慶喜的筵席] ^b |

Notes:

- a *Xinkan da Song Xuanhe yishi*, 10.
- b Yang Jialuo, *Quan Yuan zaju sanbian*, 1.350.

Thousand Li [*Guan Yunchang qianli duxing* 關雲長千里獨行],” written at around the same time as [2] and [4], is a line that is almost identical, as shown in Table 2.

In addition, in another play titled “Liu, Guan, and Zhang: The Tripartite Oath of Brotherhood in the Peach Orchard [*Liu Guan Zhang taoyuan sanjieyi* 劉關張桃園三結義],” a truncated version of this phrase also appears when the three brothers decide to celebrate. They declare their intention to “slaughter a horse and butcher an ox.”³⁴ Although the origin of this phrase is unknown, its presence and similar use in all three plays suggest that the writers of [2] and [4] are simply using an idiom, rather than specifically describing the characters’ penchant for beef. Further proof can be found in another scene in [4], which describes the characters’ craving for mutton in a much more elaborate fashion. Although part of this scene is quoted in Table 1, to facilitate our discussion, a more detailed excerpt follows:

[Cai Jing:] Little monk, clean my room thoroughly. I will be heading out to get myself a drink. When I return, I expect you to ready some wine and a lamb skull for me. Make sure you pluck the skull clean and braise it till the meat falls off. I would also like some duck eggs to go with the wine. If you fail to do a decent job upon my return, I am going to smack your head fifty times! Off I go now!

34 Wang Shifu, *Guben Yuan-Ming zaju*, 5.10; Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, trans., *Battles, Betrayals, and Brotherhood: Early Chinese Plays on the Three Kingdoms*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012), 35.

[Subordinate monk:] Fine! You have given me a long list of duties, it is a good thing that I know some meat vendors. As your pupil, I shall now sweep the floor, make the bed, hang the drapes, set the table, and prepare the wine and food. What choice do I have as long as I am under your roof? However, when I cook your mutton, I am going to withhold a few pieces of bones for myself.³⁵

This scene begins with Cai Jing ordering his subordinate monk to buy him some wine and a sheep's head, which represents his idea of a perfect meal. But he is not the only one with a strong craving for the taste of mutton. The subordinate monk decides that, before serving Cai Jing, he is going to keep some of the bones for himself to satisfy his own appetite. By using their desire for mutton to set up this interplay between the two characters, the dramatist's perception of mutton as having universal appeal is unmistakable. This idea is further reinforced in a song that is sung at the end of the play

It's like a sick lamb falling into the hands of a butcher.
There is just no way this will end peacefully!³⁶

病羊兒落在屠家手
咱兩個怎肯平休

When we view this together with the prior exchange between Cai Jing and his subordinate, it is clear that the dramatist views mutton, not beef, as the most desirable food for the characters. In the rest of the plays examined, not only is the absence of beef similarly prominent, but there also appears to be a universal predilection for making lamb the focal point of the outlaws' meals. Examples include Li Kui's interest in the pot of rice with mutton in [1] and Guan Sheng's 關勝 specific demand for an entire lamb in [5]. This attraction to mutton is an indication of the dramatists' lack of interest in the cattle-slaughter scene in *Xuanhe Period* and lack of concern about the economy of beef and mutton in the Song dynasty. More importantly, it signifies an interruption in mentions of beef consumption between *Xuanhe Period* and *Water Margin*, thus contradicting the possibility that a tradition had been, even unconsciously, passed on from the former to the latter. As for the reason for this shift in tone, the answer is once again found in the economic landscape at the time. Unlike the Song's shortage of pasture, which affected the supply of lamb, the Yuan government has no such problem, thanks to widespread

35 Wang Shifu, *Guben Yuan-Ming zaju*, 3.10–11.

36 Wang Shifu, *Guben Yuan-Ming zaju*, 3.11.

conquests by Genghis Khan 成吉思汗 [1162–1227] and his descendants. Primary material about the Yuan economy is scarce, but, according to one document excavated at Khara Khoto, one catty of mutton in China Proper cost only twenty-five coins in 1327.³⁷ The fact that mutton is also regularly featured in contemporaneous cookbooks, such as *Notes on Food and Drink* [*Yinshi xuzhi* 飲食須知] and *Principles of Gastronomy According to Yi Ya* [*Yi Ya yiyi* 易牙遺意], suggests that mutton had become a common food that even bandits running from the law could afford. Therefore the Yuan dramatists' decision to focus on lamb is likely just a reflection of this new economic reality.

In all the Yuan dramas examined, the portrayal of food seems to be nothing more than a simple and straightforward reflection of the contemporaneous economic/culinary landscape. Therefore, the intention to associate beef consumption with the idea of rebellion could only have originated with the writer of *Water Margin* alone. The only question is whether the author of the Ming novel could have been knowledgeable enough about the Song economy to articulate this theme in his/her writing. The answer, as indicated in Yu Yunguo's 虞云國 examination of the historicism of *Water Margin*, seems to be a resounding no. As Yu has discovered, despite having inherited its plot from Song history, *Water Margin* contains too many historical misrepresentations and inaccuracies to suggest that its compiler was a keen student of history.³⁸ For example, the opening chapter of the novel reads:

That day, the third day of the third month of the third year of the Jia You period, at the third interval of the fifth watch Emperor Ren Zong mounted his throne in the imperial palace.... A prominent minister stepped forth and asked to be heard ahead of his turn. The emperor saw that it was Fan Zhongyan, his deputy premier.³⁹

However, as Yu has correctly pointed out, the third year of the Jiayou 嘉佑 period is 1058, which is six years after the death of Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 [989–1052]. In other words, this meeting could not have taken place with Fan's participation if the author of the novel had paid attention to history. Similarly, in chapter 24, in which Ximen Qing 西門慶 first meets Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, the narrator states:

37 Quoted in Li Chunyuan 李春圓, "Yuandai wujia shenbao zhidu xiaokao 元代物價申報制度小考 [A Small-Scale Study on the Value of Goods in the Yuan Dynasty and Its Reporting System]," *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究, no. 3 (2016): 123.

38 See Yu Yunguo 虞云國, *Shuihu xun Song* 水滸尋宋 [*Searching for the Song Dynasty in Water Margin*] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2020).

39 Shi Nai'an, *Shuihu zhuan*, 2–3; Shapiro, *Outlaws*, 4.

A man was passing by. As the old saying goes: "Without coincidence there would be no story." The pole she was holding slipped and landed right on the man's head. Angrily, he halted and turned around, ready to blast. But when he saw the lissome creature standing there, he promptly cooled down. His rage went sailing off to Java, and he smiled.⁴⁰

The destination of Ximen's rage, Java, is written in Chinese as Zhaowa 爪哇. This name comes from its Sanskrit name Yavadvipa but was not used in China until the Ming dynasty. In a Yuan dynasty geography text titled *A Concise History of the Islands of the Barbarians* [*Daoyi zhilue* 島夷志略], this place is referred to as Shepo 閩婆, which is the same name used in the *History of the Song* to describe this "kingdom located in the South Sea."⁴¹ Therefore, had the author been scrupulous about historical facts, Shepo would have been used instead of Java. These errors lead us to conclude that the author of *Water Margin* was rather careless when it comes to history. That being the case, how can we explain the novel's accurate depiction of bandits and beef consumption during the Song dynasty?

As it turns out, there is a surprisingly straightforward answer found in Ming cuisine. In 1368, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 [1328–1398] founded the Ming dynasty after his capture of Beijing and the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun. Afterward, the early Ming emperors made many attempts to expand the border northward, most notably, Zhu Di 朱棣 [1360–1424], who unsuccessfully launched five massive military campaigns in present-day Mongolia. After the failure of these campaigns, the Mings became more or less content with what they could control within the boundary of the Great Wall. Although control by the Ming of the lush pastoral lands of the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun ensured that it would have access to a healthy supply of horses and sheep, as its population increased, mutton was quickly re-established as a comparatively expensive commodity. According to Zhou Hui 周暉 [b. 1546], in the early Ming period in Nanjing, where some of the oldest extant editions of *Water Margin* were published, one catty of mutton cost a little more than forty coins. In the same document, Zhou also states that beef and donkey meat were also popular at the time; and at twenty coins per catty, they cost only half as much as mutton.⁴² This means that although mutton had become more affordable than in the Song era, less affluent households (including bandits on the run)

40 Shi Nai'an, *Shuihu zhuan*, 280; Shapiro, *Outlaws*, 376.

41 Toqto'a, *Songshi*, 489.14091.

42 Zhou Hui 周暉, *Jinling suoshi shenglu* 金陵瑣事剩錄 [*The Last Remaining Tales of Jinling*], vol. 1 Reprint (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 2007).

are still likely to have preferred beef as their primary source of protein. And, as with their Song predecessors, Ming lawmakers' efforts to curb the illegal slaughter of cattle were futile. For example, in the eleventh month of 1469, the government reiterated its goal to combat the illegal slaughter of cattle, giving the following reason:

Recently, ministers, officers, and civilians can be seen slaughtering cattle illegally both within and outside the boundary of the capital city. They know only greed and do not fear the law, selling beef openly and without any restraint. If they are not stopped soon, the situation will deteriorate rapidly.⁴³

This quotation makes it evident that illegal beef was as big a problem for the Ming as it was for the Song. But the Ming rulers not only recognized the futility of trying to combat illegal cattle slaughter, they also appeared ready to accept it as inevitable. As observed earlier, cattle slaughter may not have qualified as a capital offense in the Song dynasty, but jail time was unavoidable. However, according to another document, written in 1424, when Emperor Yongle 永樂 [r. 1403–1424] was asked to increase punishment for those who committed this crime, he decreed that “anyone who slaughters an ox without permission shall be fined ten times the cost of the ox.”⁴⁴ In other words, punishment for this offense was lowered from jail time to a fine, and in 1499, the fine for the same crime was reduced to five times the cost of an ox.⁴⁵ This decrease in the severity of punishment is not the only sign that the rulers were losing control over the situation (and recognized this to be the case). *Miscellanies of the Bamboo Islet Studio* [*Zhuyu shanfang zabu* 竹嶼山房雜部], a cookbook at the time, had several recipes with beef as the primary ingredient, ranging from hotpot to stir fry. This indicates that by then beef had become widely available and was no longer taboo, as far as cookbooks were concerned.⁴⁶ Even the *Compendium of Materia Medica* [*Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目] contains a section

43 Dai Jin 戴金, ed., *Huangming tiaofa shilei zuan* 皇明條法事類纂 [*Compilation of the Legal Code of the Imperial Ming Dynasty Arranged by Topic*] (Tokyo: Koten kenkyūkai, 1966), 30.746.

44 Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 et al., ed., *Ming Renzong shilu* 明仁宗實錄 [*Record of Emperor Renzong of the Ming Dynasty*] (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1962), 3.119.

45 Huang Zhangjian 黃彰健, ed., *Mingdai lili huibian* 明代律例彙編 [*Compilation of Laws of the Ming Dynasty*] (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1979), 16.707.

46 Song Xu 宋誦, *Zhuyu shanfang zabu* 竹嶼山房雜部 [*Miscellanies of the Bamboo Islet Studio*] (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1983), 3.150.

on beef and advises readers about which foods complement beef and which to avoid in combination with it.⁴⁷ These documents and others show the extent to which beef had become a common food for the masses to enjoy.

The shift to beef as the focal point of culinary narratives in *Water Margin* is likely a reflection of Ming food culture, rather than the result of any conscious attempt to capture the essence of Song gastronomy. The fact that the author of *Water Margin* was inattentive to historical facts offers sufficient evidence for this conclusion. In this sense, the observation of Katherine N. Carlitz on *The Golden Lotus* (also called *Plum in a Golden Vase*; *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅) – that it “is nominally set in the last reign period of the Northern Song, but it was of course recognized as a chronicle of the Ming” – also applies to *Water Margin*, especially where food is concerned.⁴⁸ However, we are still left with our original question of whether the consumption of beef as part of the theme of rebellion was by design or by coincidence. The answer can be found through a comparison: specifically, the evocation of beef in *Water Margin* occurs at a much higher frequency than in other Ming dynasty novels. As Zhu Yuhang notes, among the numerous scenes of feasting in *The Golden Lotus*, beef is only mentioned once; in *Stories to Caution the World* [*Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言], which has more than twenty episodes that revolve around food and drink, only two scenes feature beef; and in *Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World* [*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳], the word “beef” does not appear at all.⁴⁹ This shows that the description of beef consumption was clearly not part of the convention of novel writing at the time. More importantly, as the sale of beef, despite its increasing popularity, remained illegal throughout the Ming dynasty, its evocation in *Water Margin* helps confirm the theory of Zhu Yuhang and Goossaert concerning the authorial intention to establish a symbolic link between its consumption and the outlaws’ identity. The only caveat is that the nature of this connection is purely coincidental, rather than by design, given how the author of *Water Margin* is apparently unaware of Song history. But thankfully, enough similarities in the gastronomic landscape existed between the Song and the Ming that the portrayal of the latter can lend sufficient credence to a story set in the time of the former.

47 Li Shizhen 李時珍, *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 [*Compendium of Materia Medica*] (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1983), 2.378.

48 Katherine N. Carlitz, “Family, Society, and Tradition in *Jin Ping Mei*,” *Modern China* 10 (1984): 400.

49 Zhu Yuhang, “Zaofan jiuyao chi niurou,” 15.

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