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TOUGH GUYS, MATESHIP AND HONOUR:
ANOTHER CHINESE TRADITION

W. J. F. Jenner

“For a mate I’ll take a knife in the ribs.” “For a friend I’ll take a knife in the ribs and not even notice the pain.” Such boasts are common enough among the young members of street gangs in China’s cities according to worried officials. They are one of the current manifestations of a Chinese cultural tradition going back many centuries, a tradition that has been neglected but that is still a very powerful set of values.

Let us begin to explore them by going back to around 1920 in Changchun, a rough and tough Manchurian frontier town in a bandit region where executions were no rarity. The condemned man would be paraded through the streets on the back of a cart. A white board inscribed in black with his name and his offence was thrust between his back and his arms that were tied behind it. His name would be marked with the fatal red tick.

The tougher criminals would stand on the cart. When they passed a draper’s they demanded a length of red cloth to drape over themselves, which they called “wearing the crimson cross.” On passing a pub they’d ask for a drink. Some even sang folk songs or bangzi opera. Others foamed at the mouth, yelling and cursing … some even asked the crowds following them to watch the fun:

“I’ve got what it takes to be a real baoban, haven’t I?”

“You’re a real baoban!” the spectators would yell back enthusiastically, and this would be followed with a roar of laughter.¹

The soldiers permitted the condemned men their requests and their chance to go out in style. Such a final performance would, of course, never be permitted today, when the victims are often displayed silent, humiliated, and head bowed in a stadium or on a truck before the bullet in the back of the head. They are not allowed to shout or joke with the crowd. A wire noose

round the neck held by one of the guards is said to be a very effective way of ensuring compliance. The new mode of execution approved in 1997, the lethal injection, means that the victim need never be seen in public before dying.

Why do today's executioners go to such trouble to deny the victims their last swagger? And why did it matter to the young men on their carts in Changchun that they be considered a *haohan*, a tough guy, a real man? What people choose to say, or what kind of performance they try to put on, when they know that they have only a few minutes in which to live has to be something that really matters to them. And the chances are that they speak not only for their unfortunate selves, but also for many others.

I shall argue that the notion of being a *haohan* or tough guy has been one of central importance to the value systems of most Chinese men and boys in the last thousand years, and that there are living values directly derived from *haohan* ones. My untestable guess is that far more boys would have wanted to be thought a *haohan* than regarded as a good Confucian scholar. If we underestimate the appeal of the *haohan* image and its influence on what people did, our understanding of Chinese pasts will be damaged. Although the concept of being a *haohan* is now an archaic one, awareness of contemporary values descended from *haohan* ones, especially the elusive concept of *yiqi* or honour, is essential to reading much that happens on the streets of today's China.

Before going on to look at these questionable notions of honour and heroism as seen by those who admire them and those who fear and despise them it is good to have this chance to salute and thank the real heroes and heroines whose generosity made this occasion possible. After all, when you drink from a well, the Chinese proverb reminds us, you should not forget the people who dug it. We owe the lectures of which this is the 54th not to this or any other university, but to the Chinese community of Australia, which endowed them by public subscription. When this series was begun in 1932 it took tenacity and sustained, everyday courage to be Chinese and to be living in this country. I hope that the founders of these lectures would have approved of a subject that touches on such less exalted aspects of Chinese cultures as criminals, hooligans and knives in the ribs.

In looking at such a topic we are going beyond the traditional concerns of Western Sinology, which has generally tended to share the concerns and values of the dominant groups in China who have expressed them endlessly in writing over the last three thousand years. This applies to Confucian traditions, to the sacred texts of Maoism and to the writings of both the apologists and the critics of today's order. Those who study China on paper tend to share the reverence for the written character that is basic to Chinese high culture and to fall into the assumption that books speak for the whole of the societies in which they are produced. Anthropologists and others who take a less text-based approach have not been sufficiently heeded by their colleagues.
I will not subject myself as a Westerner to a ban on questioning the values of Chinese cultures for fear of being labelled Europe-centred, but will discuss one or two aspects of what a recent Chinese writer has called liumang shì 流氓史, "the hooligan history of China," or "the history of Chinese yobbery." It is not that there is anything so especially awful about Chinese hooliganism, but rather that those of us who make a living out of Chinese studies do not generally talk much about it except when looking over the shoulders of Chinese officials ancient or modern or of writers adopting official values. In the case of Chen Baoliang's 陈宝良 new history of the subject, the tone is one of almost unrelieved disapproval from beginning to end, as is that of nearly all of the sources on which he draws. Yet the very appearance of the book, coming as it does from the Chinese Social Sciences Publishing House in a new “Vagabond Culture Series," is a sign of the times. The crumbling of an established order makes the disreputable and disruptive appear at the same time frightening and fascinating. Again, there is nothing especially Chinese about this: for centuries revelations about the lives of the supposed criminal classes have been a staple of the European publishing industry, titillating the respectable reading public with purported inside information on the alarming otherness of those who live outside the rules of polite society.

This exploration of what is seen as alien and threatening by almost all those who write about it presents difficulties that do not arise when looking at the values by which various Chinese ruling groups have marked themselves off from their subjects through the ages. The educated tend to write disparagingly about unrespectable value systems when they are not ignoring them completely. One way in which these inferior, "subaltern" values and those who hold them are put down is by the choice of language.

Today's admirers of the kinds of courage that the authorities regard as anti-social are liable to be labelled by them as liumang. Liumang, a word conventionally rendered 'hooligan' in English, is in its present usage a fairly recent one of Shanghai origin. Its root meanings go back to wanderers and absconders, rogues and vagabonds who do not stay put or know their place. From the surviving fragments of the Qin code and other legal texts of the third century BC it is clear that even then vagabonds were regarded by the authorities as dangerous threats to the state's control of its subjects.

"Hooligans" are not docile. The term liumang was taken up a few years ago as a way of referring to oneself, as by some young writers and artists who prided themselves on not being respectable. Before then it was strictly a term of disapproval. For almost everyone, including most of those officially classified as liumang, it is still, I would guess, a bad thing to be called—hence its value to youngsters who want to be outrageous.

In recent legal thinking mobility was longer a necessary condition of "hooliganism," though not knowing one's place in the established order surely was. Section 160 of the 1979 Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, the article that was the most authoritative definition of what the Chinese state meant by hooliganism, reads:
An excellent introduction to contemporary Chinese legal thought and practice on hooliganism is a volume edited by Wang Yunsheng and others for the Supreme People's Procuratorate in the *Xingshi fanzui anti congshu* [Model criminal cases series] entitled *Liumang zu* [The crime of hooliganism] (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiancha Chubanshe, 1990; reprint ed., 1991). This practical handbook for prosecutors includes a number of authoritative directives on how the rather vague language of Section 160 is to be interpreted when handling cases; an overall exposition of the offence; and 254 model cases. These are chosen to illustrate the distinguishing features of various types of hooligan offences, to show how to draw the boundaries between actions that fall within the Chinese category of crime and those that are merely illegal, and to give guidance on distinguishing between actions that should properly be dealt with as hooliganism and those other criminal offences.

In September 1983 the maximum penalty for some hooligan offences was raised to death.8 “Hooliganism” as a criminal category is absent from the 1997 Criminal Law of the PRC, though nearly all the component offences are still covered by the new code that replaced the 1979 one.

It could be argued that the crime of hooliganism in the 1979 Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China was essentially a borrowing from the clauses in Soviet codes about “hooliganism” (*khuliganstvo*). Article 206 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic that was in force when the Chinese law was drawn up appears at first sight to be very similar to the provisions of the Chinese Section 160. It defines “hooliganism” as “intentional actions violating public order in a coarse manner and expressing a clear disrespect toward society,” and “malicious hooliganism” as “the same actions distinguished by exceptional cynicism or special impudence,” especially when directed against the authorities or their vigilantes.9 According to Feldbrugge, “the most typical case of hooliganism seems to be offensive behaviour in public by drunks; according to all available statistics drunkenness occurs in more than 90 per cent of all cases of hooliganism.”10

Clearly the type of offence covered by the Soviet Russian definition would be included within the scope of Section 160 of the Chinese law. Accounts of hooligan offences in China sometimes tell us that the offenders were drunk at the time, though my impression is that this occurs in considerably fewer than nine cases out of ten. The Chinese concept seems to include rather more than the drunken loutishness against which the Russian article was mainly used. Public drunkenness is, after all, much less apparent on the streets of China’s cities than it is on those of Russia.

Section 160 was a curious bundling of offences, and like much other Chinese legislation is worded so as to permit the authorities plenty of flexibility in interpreting it. “Other hooligan activity,” for example, included a range of sexual offences other than those covered under legislation against rape, prostitution and interfering with the marriages of others. Some would be punishable outside China, including various forms of indecent assault from the appalling to the trivial. Others are victimless crimes, including a wide range of sexual activities between consenting adults. This was not a dead letter. Many people were punished through either criminal or administrative procedures under the ‘other hooligan activity’ heading for such offences as having too many sexual partners even though no question of rape or prostitution had arisen or for showing supposedly pornographic videos. In everyday language *shua liumang* 耍流氓 “hooliganing around,” usually refers to sexual behaviour.
It may seem odd at first sight that the same article of the code should cover street brawls and private behaviour in the bedroom. Perhaps, though, there is a connection. What all the activities covered by Section 160 have in common is challenging or disrupting the social order. This section appears to inherit a principle of dynastic law. Although the Qing code did not, I believe, use the term liumang, it did include measures specifically aimed at guanggun 光棍 “bare sticks,” a term with very similar meaning. And, curiously enough, guanggun are singled out for especially harsh treatment in both chapter 26 of the code, which deals with fights and brawls, and chapter 33, covering sexual offences.

The sexual offences that made one liable to be dealt with under the "guanggun regulation" (guanggun li 光棍例) in the eyes of Qing law are particularly unpleasant ones. (It appears that this regulation called for culprits to be sentenced to immediate decapitation when convicted.) Such is the implication of the discussion of the case of one Wu Qiyuan in 1819 reported in the collection of precedents to guide officials in handling criminal cases, the Xing an builan (Compendium of criminal cases). See juan 52, p.5a, of the undated reprint by the Tushu Jicheng Ju of the edition of the Daoguang period (1821–50).

11 I have not yet found a text of the "guanggun regulation" to which my attention was drawn on pp.273ff. and 318 of Chen Baoliang’s book, but from references to it in juan [chapters] 26 and 33 of the Qing code (see reference to Da Qing liili in n.13), it evidently required especially severe punishment for the offences it covered.

12 Such is the implication of the discussion of the case of one Wu Qiyuan in 1819 reported in the collection of precedents to guide officials in handling criminal cases, the Xing an builan (Compendium of criminal cases). See juan 52, p.5a, of the undated reprint by the Tushu Jicheng Ju of the edition of the Daoguang period (1821–50).

13 Da Qing liili, copy of the edition approved for publication in Qianlong 55 (1790) and held in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, juan 26, p.3a.

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It seems most unlikely that anyone went to the beheading ground shouting “In twenty years' time I'll be another scholar.”

We cannot ask any of those condemned long ago what they meant when they talked about being a *haohan*. Our questions in any case, would probably have been thought too stupid to be worth answering. Everybody knew what a *haohan* was. The term has long been so familiar to readers of Chinese vernacular fiction that one hardly notices it. It is one of those words whose meaning is so obvious within the culture from which it springs that nobody bothers to define it.

If it catches the eye of foreign readers it may be because of the difficulty of finding an equivalent in our own languages. No dictionary I have ever consulted has come up with something that both fits and sounds right. In English we can try tough guy, good bloke, hero, real man, even “a gallant, a stout-hearted plucky fellow” of Lin Yutang as lexicographer, but no version quite works. As so often happens when a word resists translation, the difficulty is instructive.

Sinology has not ignored the term when looking at printed fiction from before the twentieth century. Both C. T. Hsia and the late and much missed Robert Ruhlmann have written illuminating pages on the *haohan* concept in the *Shui hu7.Jcl'J.f* (Water Margin) story cycles of the Ming dynasty that deserve to be called seminal. Despite these treatments the concept has yet to be pinned down. Although the meaning of *haohan* tends to wriggle away whenever you think you have it, the effort is worth making. Without some idea of what *haohan* values were, our understanding of late traditional Chinese cultures will be deficient, and we will miss some essential background information on today's China.

The word does not appear to go back before the Tang dynasty in the meaning that is now familiar. Some have looked at an earlier notion of a man of supposedly honourable violence, the *xia*侠, *youxia*游侠, or *xiake*侠客, the so-called knight-errant. As with the English term knight-errant and its equivalent in other European languages, these words have had little meaning outside the world of fantasy for many hundreds of years. Within the worlds of the imagination they have been more powerful, especially as China has had no Cervantes to hold the myths of chivalry up to appropriate mockery. Indeed, in recent decades they have been given a new lease of life in the endless flow of violence-packed “have at thee, varlet” costume fiction and film produced in Hong Kong for male adolescents of all ages. There is no reason to regard this sort of invention as having any firm basis in real life, though its influence on real life has been, as we shall see, considerable.

If we want to find pre-Tang antecedents of *haohan* values a better place to look would be in the chapter of the universal history *Shi ji* 史记 (Records of the Historian) that deals with political assassins. There are some striking similarities between classic *haohan* big gestures made at high cost to oneself without hope of material gain and those attributed to those legendary killers of Warring States and Qin times.
A good example of *haohan* behaviour before the word had been created is the story of Nie Zheng, who fled from avenging enemies to Linzi, the capital of the state of Qi. After he had committed a murder, Nie was working as a dog butcher in the market when a high official from another state, Yan Zhongzi, needing a hitman to kill a political enemy, travelled from Puyang to offer Nie a large sum of money with which to buy comforts for his aged mother and expressed admiration for Nie’s sense of honour (*yi*). Though Nie declined the money on the grounds that he could provide for his own mother himself, he was after her death still sufficiently moved to offer his services as a killer to the fine gentleman who had gone to such lengths to show respect to a mere butcher. That Yan Zhongzi’s enemy was the chief minister in the state of Han and surrounded by many armed guards did not matter. Nor did it matter that neither Nie nor any member of his family stood to benefit from his sacrifice. Nie carried out a murder that was bound to be suicidal, killing a number of the guards before meeting his own inevitable death. As he died he cut off his own face and put out his own eyes to make himself unrecognisable and thus save his sister from being punished. His efforts were in vain. She too understood the demands of honour: she travelled to Han to identify her brother’s self-mutilated body, proclaim his glory and die on the spot of grief. Nie Zheng’s gratuitous and suicidal violence on behalf of a stranger for the sake of honour is pure *haohan* behaviour. His sister too knew how to die by the same code.

It is not only that the word *haohan* is hard to translate. It corresponds or refers to no recognisable social group, no profession or trade. One could not make a living as a *haohan* as one might as a bandit, a soldier or a policeman. But a bandit, soldier or policeman might be called, and would almost certainly want to be called, a *haohan*. You could not properly even claim to be one yourself unless on the way to the execution ground—and even then it was better to have others acclaim you as a *haohan*.

We have to pursue and identify not a social group but a set of values. What those values are or were is something of which almost any adolescent or adult Chinese male in the five hundred years up to the middle of this century would, I believe, have had some notion, however fuzzy. It was precisely because everyone knew what made a *haohan* that the word did not need to be defined. I also believe that these undefined notions held by nearly all Chinese men and boys would have been broadly consistent with each other. If challenged to support the assertion that the word *haohan* was so well understood that it did not need definition I would fall back on significant negative evidence: in some twenty years of looking out for it I have never come across even a paragraph-length outline in any Chinese text of all that it meant to be a *haohan*. There are countless sayings and other allusions that refer very briefly to some aspect of what a *haohan* is or is not. They all appear to assume that their audience already has a reasonably clear idea of what it takes to be a *haohan*.

By contrast, officially approved moralities, and even some unorthodox
Forty years after its first printing, R. G. Irwin’s *The evolution of a Chinese novel: Shui-hu-chuan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953) remains a very useful guide to the labyrinthine problems of the various early texts and editions of the *Shui hu*.

The edition of the *Shui hu quan zhuan* (henceforward abbreviated to *SHQZ*) in which the count was done was the published by the Zhonghua Shuju (Beijing and Shanghai, 1962 reprint of 1961 edition). *Shui hu quan zhuan* is regarded by Irwin as containing in chapters 1–82 and 111–20 the original late fourteenth-century work of Shi Nai’an and Luo Guanzhong. It is notable that the remaining twenty-eight chapters (83–110) contain only ten uses of *haohan* and one of *hao nanzi*. Indeed, in chapters 86–110 *haohan* is found only three times, with the solitary *hao nanzi* to bring the total up to four. This evidence appears to confirm Irwin’s judgement that chapters 83–110 are later additions to the *Shui hu* story. (See Irwin, *Evolution of a Chinese novel*, pp.48–9, 75ff., and 114–15.)

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ones, are set out in countless treatises that generally assume that the reader needs to be told how to be a filial son, virtuous wife, good Buddhist, true Communist, or adherent of one of the many popular religions of recent centuries. But what about another value system too deeply rooted to need tracts to propagate it, one that despite its mass appeal over many centuries has been treated as marginal?

*Haohan* notions were learned not from the textbook and the schoolroom, to which only the more privileged had access, but from talk. From talk about action, I would imagine, much more than from action itself. From stories, ballads and conversation you could learn what constituted *haohan* behaviour. Books would have played only a minor role.

For us, however, books are almost all we have to go on. One group of books above all is invaluable: the *Shuihu* story cycle that is in its best-known parts a saga of rebellion, violence and banditry that was published in several different related versions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The books are extremely useful as indicators of popular values not because they themselves reached enormous readerships in Ming and Qing times—they were luxuries too expensive for a mass market—but because their authors edited, modified, recorded and fixed into definitive form a tradition about ‘heroic’ violence that had been passed on by word of mouth in dramas and in other performances ever since the events early in the twelfth century from which the stories grew. And once the definitive book versions of *Shui hu zhuan* were available they became the set basis of later performance and invention that in turn reached a much wider audience than the books’ readings right through to television adaptations in our own time.

So although there is something inappropriate in using a written text to draw out *haohan* values, it is the best way we have of attempting it. The first 75 chapters of the various versions of the novel are the most useful source of notions about *haohan* behaviour as they are mostly taken up with stories of how the individual heroes (if that is the right word for them) each found themselves forced by circumstances to climb the hill of Liangshan, protected as it was by its surrounding waters, to join the outlaws who were in the course of events to be led by Song Jiang. It is also from the earlier chapters that most of the best known stories and incidents about *Shui hu* heroes come. They have thus been the most influential part of the novel in defining and propagating *haohan* values.

The term is certainly used often enough in the novel. At a rough count the word occurs 369 times in the 120-chapter version of the novel now known as *Shui bu quan zhuan*. The number rises to 383 if the variant form *bao nanzi* is included. It is most frequently used in chapters 11–50, with 260 occurrences (271 including *haonanzi*): this third of the novel contains over two-thirds of the usage of these key terms.

*Haohan* is sometimes used by the narrator but much more often by the characters speaking of or to each other. Other rather grander terms, *jisbi* (gentlemen of honour) and *baojie* (hero, written with a different
character for bao) are occasionally used by characters who prefer more formal language.

As the leading characters enter the story, the ones who go on to become the 36 principal leaders and 72 minor leaders of the rebellion, they nearly always have to establish their baoban credentials. Whether at any given time they are on the same or opposite sides of the law, are enemies or allies, are known to each other or are total strangers, the bond that unites them once

Figure 1
Chapter three: “Controller Lu beats up the Boss of West of the Passes”

Lu Da, a military officer and a true haohan, uses his fists to sort out Zheng the Butcher, a prosperous shopkeeper who has used his wealth to mistreat a young woman. Three blows are enough to kill Zheng.

Lu Da’s actions are gratuitous, in that he owed the young woman nothing and had no sexual interest in her. He is simply punishing Zheng for being a nasty piece of work. For Lu the price of this haohan gesture is high: he has to leave the town of Weizhou as a fugitive from justice.
they recognise each other as *baohan* can be stronger than any other. To be accepted as a *baohan* by someone else you regard as one can be sufficient grounds for a change of side, or for putting your own family in grave danger from the authorities.

The qualities that the *baohan* in *Shui hu* recognise in each other are essentially two. One is skill in fighting or in the martial arts, or in some closely related field, such as military command. The other is a sense of honour, to use the nearest equivalent I can find to *yi* or *yiqi* as the words are used in *Shui hu* and later. This is not the place to look into the earlier history of the word *yi*, which, like words for moral values in other languages, has carried many different meanings.\(^{21}\) For practical purposes it is easiest to treat the *Shui hu* words for a sense of honour, *yi* and *yiqi*, without reference to their earlier history.

A recurring scene in the first fifty or sixty chapters of the story has two men fight twenty, thirty or more rounds with various weapons in single combat. Sometimes one wins and treats the other so well that the loser recognises the victor as a *baohan* or man of *yiqi* honour and goes over to the winner’s side. At other times the fight drags on inconclusively till a third party who can vouch for the *baohan* status of both combatants and has enough *baohan* credibility himself urges the two to desist and make common cause, whereupon they all become good friends linked by honour and ready to stand together against the world. Some of the protagonists are or have been professionals in the martial arts, generally in the army. Others are amateurs who cultivate these lethal social skills in their spare time. In almost all cases personal prowess in fighting is an essential qualification for being accepted as a *baohan*.

It is not, however, enough. The other quality, *yi* or *yiqi*, honour, is harder to define but well worth pursuing. This is not only in order to understand the values celebrated in *Shui hu* but also because this concept is one that in a modified form is still alive and ferociously kicking among today’s disaffected urban youngsters. It is central to mediaeval and modern gang culture. C. T. Hsia in his *Shui hu* essay rendered the term ‘friendship’ and cites examples of how a *baohan* will go to any lengths to get a friend out of trouble or avenge him.\(^{22}\) But friendship is not all that *yiqi* means. It can also tell you how to treat a complete stranger.

This is well illustrated in the second chapter of the novel. When one of a trio of minor bandits is captured in an attack on a village his two comrades present themselves on their knees and in tears at his captor’s manor-house, saying that as they have sworn to emulate the *yiqi* honour of the three great heroes of the Three Kingdoms stories\(^{23}\) and live or die together they hope the captor will hand them over together to the authorities and claim his reward. Their captor, the squireen ShiJin 史进 cannot resist this psychological attack. As he puts it to himself: “What a sense of honour. If I turn them in and claim a reward all the *baohan* in the world will jeer at me for being no hero.” Whereupon he insists on returning their comrade to them, all four acknowledge

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\(^{21}\) We can in passing note the use of *yi* in the story of the assassin Nie Zheng referred to above, where the word seems to be used in just the same sense as *yiqi* in *Shui hu* and later texts, and very differently from the ways in which a follower of Confucius would have understood the word.


\(^{23}\) The influence of *San guo* [Three Kingdoms] styles of honour and heroism on the *baohan* value system is a subject worth further investigation. My impression is that while there would be agreement on the importance of honour, *San guo* heroes are not as addicted to the gratuitous act as *Shui hu* ones.
each other as *baoban* and share a few drinks. As the bandit chiefs tell each other, Shi Jin did it all for the sake of *yiqi.*

It was hardly friendship: till a moment before they had been bitter enemies. Shi Jin was so moved by his enemies’ reckless gesture that he made a reckless gesture for the sake of honour himself, putting himself on the slippery slope from respectability to outlawry and rebellion. It is this, the willingness to make the big self-sacrifice that no normal obligation requires of you, that is the essence of *yiqi.* This gratuitousness of sacrifice had been well exemplified by the self-defacing assassin Nie Zheng in antiquity.

Shi Jin was also horrified by the prospect of being thought to be a man who cared more for wealth than for honour. *Yiqi* excludes covetousness in *Shui bu.* If a man of honour was a brigand he could of course rob and steal, but he could not keep the booty for himself. The gesture that a *Shui bu* *baoban* makes for the sake of *yiqi* can be extremely expensive, costing his life, his family, his job, his property, his respectability. It means abandoning everything, giving and not counting the cost. Hence the need to be indifferent to wealth, so often mentioned in the book as a *baoban* characteristic.

Dependence on honour and indifference to wealth is mentioned so often in the rebellious chapters of the book that the expression becomes a cliché. Not getting these priorities right could be fatal for a would-be *baoban.* Wang Lun 王伦, the original chieftain of the bandit stockade on Liangshan, comes close to failing the test when he shows reluctance to take a recognised *baoban,* Lin Chong 林冲, into the band. Wang shows a poor sense of honour by being jealous of someone with superior martial skills—Lin is a former military arms instructor—and by hesitating to act on the recommendation that Lin brings with him from a patron of *baoban* to whom Wang Lun is under a debt of honour. To make things worse, Wang tries to buy Lin Chong off by giving him fifty ounces of silver as travelling expenses, and when that does not work he subjects Lin to a humiliatingly basic entrance exam, requiring him to bring back the head of a traveller.

When five more real *baoban* come into the stockade a little later, Wang is unwilling to let them stay either. His attempts to buy them off too are more than Lin Chong can bear. He lays into Wang for being a wretched Confucian who has failed the official exams and is too jealous to keep heroes, then kills him. As Lin explains after lopping the head off the corpse, he did it all for the sake of honour. To prove the point he insists that one of the newly arrived *baoban,* Chao Gai 標蓋, a man of honour who is indifferent to wealth and is better known and wiser than he is, should become the new chieftain, and modestly accepts only the fourth-ranking position for himself. In the process he has established beyond doubt his own *baoban* status, being the opposite of Wang Lun, who was a pasty-faced scholar incompetent in the martial arts, short on honour, and caring too much about money. Wang Lun lacked the true *baoban*’s willingness to make the big, reckless gesture without counting the cost. The highest expression of the idealised *yiqi* of the *Shui bu* tradition is to give one’s all for the sake of honour of family, property,
social status, life itself or without pausing to think about the consequences.

This kind of honour is often closely linked with extreme violence. The violence that is all-pervasive in *Shui hu* is recounted with a graphic and detached vividness of language that is all the more disturbing for the fact that it is only repulsive when you make yourself think about it.\footnote{The best discussion of *Shui hu* violence is in Hsia, *The classic Chinese novel*, esp. pp.94–106.} It can be read without a sense of sadistic indulgence. The terrible thing is that it is simple childish fun. Li Kui 李逵, the good-hearted country lad who every now and then erupts into a mass murder of innocent bystanders with his pair of axes, is observed going about his berserk slaughters as if they were no more real than bloodbaths in comic books or pre-Peckinpah westerns. Violence is not gut-wrenching for the reader, though plenty of fictional guts are spilled. Even the occasional protracted killing of a special enemy is somehow painless. Indeed, the most painful moment in the whole book is the excruciating agony suffered by a tigress when Li Kui thrusts a dagger right up her back passage.\footnote{SHQZ 43, p.543.}

There is not even much exaltation in the butchery, either by narrator or by the *haohan* in the story. (Here one cannot help noting a contrast with the way writers of latter-day Chinese “have at thee, varlet” fiction sometimes draw attention to the pain inflicted by their extremely violent protagonists.)

Though the violence is sometimes “justified” by the demands of vengeance—something of great importance to the *baohan*—or by the dangerous circumstances in which they find themselves, a lot of it is simply for its own sake. Vengeance might explain the killing of an enemy, but it cannot justify the slaughter of whole households, or the destruction of entire villages and everyone in them, or the repeated occasions when mere onlookers are despatched wholesale, casually, simply because the *haohan* are in the mood to carry on bloodletting after the necessary murders of a particular occasion have been carried out.

Some of the killing is required by the demands of *yiqi* or honour, by longstanding obligations to a friend, or by an instant, self-imposed obligation to a stranger who appeals to one’s *baohan* instincts. Some of the slaughter is quite terrifyingly free of compulsion, either external or internal. The *baohan* do not need to be ordered to do it. It is not required by the demands of *yiqi*. Nor do they appear to be driven by inner demons. No great cause is at stake: the last things the novel can be plausibly said to be concerned with are peasant revolt, social banditry, the creation of some new order or the restoration of an old one. An occasional set of killings may be for some intended gain for the group, as with the raid on the Zhu Family Manor 祝家庄 that was expected to yield enough grain to feed Song Jiang’s forces for years. More often, the *baohan* seem to go out of their way to put themselves in positions that commit them to unending violence, or else they simply do it because that, we come to understand, is their nature. Li Kui can no more help the occasional chopping up of a few dozen harmless strangers with whom he has no quarrel but who just happen to be around when the mood is on him than a cat can help killing fledglings.

Like the big gestures required by *yiqi*, which in their purest form are not
the product of any normal social or moral obligations or intended to bring oneself any material benefit, the killing is very often gratuitous. And because the extreme violence is shown as cheerfully attractive, with scarcely a thought being given by the novel’s narrator or its characters to the suffering caused, the direct and indirect influence of this classic *baohan* text has been both great and appalling.

One aspect of *baohan* values in *Shui hu* that should be mentioned even in this brief treatment is the attitude to women and sex. The two are linked as the story is told from a man’s, or perhaps a boy’s, point of view. Women who demand or use sex are bad, and wives are sometimes shown as being more trouble than they are worth. Sexually active men are also shown in a bad light. A real *baohan* does not need sex. Here *baohan* values are not those of machismo, or of the modern *liumang* hooligan culture in a wider sense. This can be seen clearly in the story of Song Jiang, who is destined to become the leader of the Liangshan bandits, and his sexually demanding young bride. The leading *baohan* of *Shui hu*, Song is persuaded to take to wife a seventeen-year-old whore from the capital, sleeps with her for the first few nights, but gradually stops bothering: “Song Jiang was a *baohan* whose only love was practising the spear and quarterstaff, so sex was not very important to him.” Because she has sexual appetites and takes a lover she is wholly evil, so that Song Jiang is “forced” to kill her.29

Another episode in a later chapter shows a *baohan* using his wits to deal with the sexual advances of a woman. For the sake of the Liangshan band, Yan Qing has to call on the famous courtesan Li Shishi, who is also the emperor’s mistress, in the capital to seek her help in arranging the terms for the rebels to switch to the government side. This means he has to be friendly to her—but not too friendly, as he is a *baohan*. She starts trying to flirt with him because that, we are told, is her nature: “Yan Qing, being no fool, couldn’t help noticing. But as he had the spirit of a *baohan* and was afraid of ruining things for his elder brother he dared not let himself be led on.” They play the flute then sing for each other, which is acceptable by the *baohan* code, but then she asks to see his tattoos. He protests that he cannot strip for her. She insists till Yan Qing finally bares an arm. Horror of horrors, she touches him. He covers his arm at once then thinks of a brilliant solution to a dilemma that he cannot solve in the usual *baohan* way by killing her. He asks her age, finds out that she is two years older than him, and kowtows to her as his elder sister. That puts paid to her evil desires. This episode shows that “his heart was like iron or stone: he truly was a *bao nan zi*.”30

If sexual women are evil and sexual men are evil, or at any rate weak and ridiculous, women who fight like men can be fully accepted as members of the band, though on terms that are a little less than equal. None of the 36 top leaders are women and only three of the 72 lesser leaders are.

Sun Erniang, a big, muscular woman, enters the story as one of those terrible innkeepers who drug their customers then chop them up to make mincemeat fillings for steamed buns. One customer is the *baohan* Wu

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29 *SHQZ* 20–1, pp.240–56.
30 *SHQZ* 81, pp.1005-8.
Figure 2
Chapter forty-eight: “One Zhang of Blue captures Wang the Short Tiger," and "Song Gongming attacks the Zhu family manor for the second time"

Two images of a fighting lady who proves her right to be one of the 108 Liangshan heroes by her prowess in battle as one of the officer class. Hu Sanniang makes her entry into the story (above left) by fighting against the Liangshan forces when they attack her home village, capturing Wang Ying. She lifts him out of his saddle after beating him in single combat. As he is the most lecherous of the Liangshan heroes there is an aptness that she has him on his back and helpless while a henchman holds him by the hair. In the second illustration (above right) she meets with an honourable defeat when faced with Lin Chong (wielding his spear) and the double axeman Li Kui while Song Jiang watches from the upper left. Shortly after this Lin Chong seizes her. Following her capture she is inducted into the rebel army just as many other hard-fighting enemy officers have been.

Song 武松. When he notices a telltale short and curly hair in his bun he does not drink the drugged wine, but only shams unconsciousness. She strips down to her underclothes for the messy work of cutting him up, only to have Wu Song spring up and start wrestling with her. He wins the fight and ends up lying on top of her, both of them half naked. She pleads with him as a haoban to spare her. Her husband comes in, apparently sees nothing to make him jealous in the sight of his wife lying on the floor with another man, and explains to each of them who the other is. All is now well. She goes on to become the first woman among the bandit leaders.31

She is later joined by Big Sister Gu 顾大嫂, an even beefier innkeeper who shows what a good sort
she is by smuggling knives into a gaol and later contributing to the butchery at the Zhu Family Manor by slaughtering all the women in the household. Big Sister Gu is a very rough customer much given to violence who has, we are told, never held needle and thread in her life. The other leading woman, Hu Sanniang, belongs to the squirearchy. When the Liangshanpo rebels raid the Zhu Family Manor, she fights brilliantly against them until her capture. Though she has apparently switched sides, this does not save her from being awarded as a bride to Wang Ying, the most lecherous of the Liangshanpo haohan and her inferior in martial skills—she has previously captured him in single combat. And this comes only just after her first husband has been killed, along with almost everyone else in both her father's and husband's households, by the Liangshanpo haohan. But seeing how strong Song Jiang's yiqi honour is, she accepts that there is no getting out of it. 

Another sign that women's status among the haohan is inferior is that there is no feminine equivalent to the strictly masculine term haohan. A woman can be almost a haohan, but not quite. The highest honour for a woman in this boys' imaginary world is to be accepted as an honorary man.

The haohan imagery in Shuihu is, I suggest, pure fiction, an escapist world for most readers and for most of those who have down the centuries seen or heard performances based on it. Perhaps that is where a lot of the appeal of the Shui hu haohan tradition lies. People living in the real world could not afford the grand reckless gesture with which the Shui hu haohan cast off family obligations, forgot about the need to make a living and stopped worrying about the
consequences of their actions. Nor could real people indulge in cathartic slaughter—which no doubt is why they were happy to daydream themselves into having the bloody freedom of *Shui bu*’s imaginary heroes, chopping their enemies and even the ever-present urban crowds into mincemeat.

There has, after all, been plenty of propaganda down the centuries telling people to know their place and stay in it. Few cultures can beat China’s in the complexity of their terminology of kinship and in the carefully graded reciprocal obligations one is taught to take on towards those who stand in different places in the kinship structure. From the Confucian texts that were the basis of the education for the upper classes to most of the popular religions whose cheaply printed homilies were circulating while the *Shui bu* story cycle developed from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, people were taught to accept their place in the family and the wider social order. The *Cabbage Root Talks* (*Cai gen tan*)，a manual of worldly wisdom roughly contemporary with the earliest surviving versions of *Shui bu* that has had a resurgence in popularity in recent years, teaches caution, modesty, self-denial, harmony, calculation, staying out of the spotlight, avoiding anger and almost everything that is in contrast with the recklessness of the *Shui bu* haohan. The advice on how to handle oneself in life in almost every text from the *Book of Changes* to propaganda of the Deng era hardly ever includes encouragement to stand against society. Some books of advice would counsel withdrawal in some circumstances, but not resistance. Others in recent decades would have urged alignment with some social forces against others. But none would advise you to behave like a *Shui bu* haohan. It is, I think, precisely this contrast between the pressures to accept the constraints of everyday life and the terrible freedom of the *Shui bu* haohan that enables us to make sense of the book’s orgies of violence. They would otherwise be meaningless.

The imaginary escape from the careful calculations of ordinary life can also be seen in a secondary characteristic of the *Shui bu* heroes: their consumption of huge amounts of meat and alcohol. Another mark of casting off the normal restraints of respectability is visible and corporeal: the tattooing with which six of the 108 *Shui bu* toughs distinguish themselves from the docile mass of the population.34

If *Shui bu* is the classic repository of haohan myths, the term was around long before then. An unusually colloquial piece of reported speech in the earlier of the Histories of the Tang (lifted, with the whole story of which it formed part, from a collection of anecdotes compiled at the beginning of the ninth century about leading personalities in Tang public life) has the woman emperor Wu Zetian 吳則天 saying to her minister Di Renjie 狄仁杰 about the sort of man she has in mind for a particular post, “We need a haohan for the job. Is there one?” She was referring to a senior political appointment, and it does seem that a man with a touch of the thug about him was just what Wu needed. Di asks whether she wants a man with conventional pen-pushing competence. Or does she find scholarly gentlemen revolting? Is she looking

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34 On tattooing in *Shui bu*, see He Xin, *Shui bu yanjiu* [*Shui bu* studies], rev. ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1985), pp. 278–9. The six tattooed leaders are listed on p.272. Earlier accounts of bad lads covered in tattoos can be found in chapter 264 of the Song collection *Tai ping guang ji* (pp. 2062–3 of the Beijing Zhonghua Shuju edition of 1961 and later reprints).
for someone with the breadth of talent needed to make a success of the world's affairs? On being told that this is indeed what she wants, Di recommends a man in his seventies. Wu Zetian pays no attention to this advice, but we are not told whether or not this was because he was rather old for being a haohan, whatever the word meant in the seventh century. There is a clear sign that it may have carried some at least of its later associations in the implied contrast between haohan and weedy Confucian scholars.35

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There are other signs that what in later eras we could confidently label baoban values were about in the Tang period. A memorial by Cui Rong 催融 written in 703 refers to:

rich merchants and big traders and the evil youth of great clans. They take death lightly and yì (honour) seriously, form gangs and gather in crowds. For a quiet sob they draw their bows; at an angry look they wield their swords.\(^{36}\)

By the Southern Song period the word haohan has undoubtedly acquired something like its Shui bu meaning. Indeed, a thirteenth-century collection of anecdotes includes a list of the names and nicknames of thirty-six heroes led by Song Jiang with sixteen characters of comment on each man. This is clearly derived from an early version of the story cycle that was to grow into the various printed versions of Shui bu we now have. One of the thirty-six, Zhang Heng 张横, is described as a baoban.\(^{37}\)

The lively and sometimes rough language of the dialogue recorded in the texts of Yuan zaju 杂剧 song-and-talk dramas on Shui bu themes and characters includes quite frequent use of baoban and its synonym bao nanzi.\(^{38}\) A runaway wife who has plotted with her boyfriend to put her husband into the death cell and now finds that the heroic psychopath, the Black Whirlwind Li Kui, has a knife to her throat makes a desperate appeal to him: “Haohan, spare my life.” Li Kui is indeed a baoban: he kills her and cuts off her head.\(^{39}\) In another Yuan play on a Shui bu theme, the innkeeper Wang Lin, a good character, says to two men who are pretending to be Song Jiang and his lieutenant Lu Zhishen, “The chiefs on your hill are all baoban who carry out the Way on behalf of Heaven.”\(^{40}\) It thus seems very likely that the baoban value system we know from Shui bu novels was formed by the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

To return to baoban values since they were given their definitive mythic form in Shui bu, the question that presents itself next is the relationship between the imagined figure of the baoban and people living in the everyday world. Here proverbs turn out to offer some clues. In recent times the word baoban has been used in many a proverb. Some but not all of them are consistent with Shui bu values:

A baoban takes responsibility for what he does.
When a baoban's teeth are knocked out he swallows them with the blood.
If you want to be a baoban be ready to be exterminated.

One proverb comes up more than once in Shui bu itself:

It takes the clever to value the clever, it takes a baoban to know a baoban.

Others, however, suggest a more worldly-wise approach.

A baoban won't marry a living man's wife.
A baoban lives on his tongue.
A baoban doesn't walk straight into disaster.

Another smashes the Shui bu notion that caring about money is incompatible with being a true baoban:

If you've got money you're a baoban.\(^{41}\)
This sequence of proverbs is a bridge from the fantasy of *Shui hu* to the real world, where in normal times the orgies of pointless slaughter and destruction it celebrates are not really on offer. The word *haohan* could thus sometimes be used without all the implications of reckless ferocity it has at its worst. Thus, in the nineteenth-century novel-length sequence of stories in prose and verse about the judicial official Liu Yong that was written around the year 1800, his assistant Chen Dayong, an army man, is described as a *haohan* so often that it becomes almost a stock epithet. Though Chen is a tough guy he is not a *Shui hu* type: he accepts his place in respectable society and does not indulge in violence for its own sake.42

We find in a book of anecdotes about the city of Yangzhou around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the story of the Nanjing woman Cao Sanniang, the amply endowed "Fleshly Vajrapani," who went in for bodybuilding. A young officer cadet who prided himself on his fast punch was sitting opposite her on a couch when he said, "I'd like to hit you." "If you're a *haohan*, go ahead," she replied, and when he reached out for her breasts one blow from her hand was enough to send him tumbling on the floor.43

We can also find examples of *haohan* being used in a rather loose way as a term of approval. In his set of comments on historical figures, Li Zhi 李贽 (1527–1602) refers to a number of them as *haohan* in ways that show he has in mind qualities that are not quite the same as those of *Shui hu* heroes. Li seems to be using the word to praise people of courage and determination rather than expert fighters.44 It is evident that for Li Zhi the essential *haohan* quality is not incompatible with being an official or a scholar.

I have argued that the world of *Shui hu* is

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41 These and other similar proverbs are to be found in many collections, among them Arthur H. Smith, Proverbs and common sayings from the Chinese (1914; reprint ed., New York: Dover, 1965), pp. 18, 74, 292, 293, 348; Wang Yungang, Su yu dian [Dictionary of slang] (Taipei, 1976), p. 155; and Joseph van Oost, Dictions et proverbes des Chinois habitant la Mongolie Sud-ouest (Zi-ka-wei, Shanghai: Imprimerie de l’Orphelinat de Tou-sé-wé, 1918), pp. 173, 175, 283, 331, 340. I owe the van Oost references to a 1978 letter from Dr Craig Clunas.


44 Among those who attract the title are Shang Yang 商鞅 and Shen Buhai 申不害, the bold and ruthless political reformers of the fourth century BC; Gong Sheng 龚胜 and other Han officials who refused to hold office under the usurper Wang Mang 王莽; Li Gu 李固, who studied diligently at the Eastern Han imperial university and did not let his fellow students realise how well-connected he was; and Li Shimin 李世民, the founder of the Tang dynasty. Li Zhi, Shigangpingyao [Summary evaluations of the outline of history] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), pp. 57, 235–6, 297 and 465.
A collection of stories that is rich in baohan references is Anhui Sheng Fuyang Zhanqu Wenxue Yishu Gongzuozhe Lianhehui [The Association of Literature and Art Workers of Fuyang Prefecture, Anhui Province], ed., Nianjun gushi [Collecting stories of the Nian army] (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1962). Although this volume has evidently been heavily edited, it is unlikely that baohan references would have been put in. Many folk poems on the Nian can be found in Nianjun geyao [Nian folksongs], edited by Li Dongshan and others (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1960). Baohan references can be found on pp. 41, 54 (twice) and 123.

On popular traditions about Song Jingshi’s rebellion gathered in the early 1950s, see Chen Baichen, ed., Song Jingshi lishi diaocha ji [Investigations into the history of Song Jingshi] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1957).

A collection of folk traditions about the Boxers that includes a number of references to them as baohan are yiben tibetangushi [Stories about Boxers], ed. Hebeisheng Minjian Wenxue Yanjiuhui [The Association of Literature and Art Workers of Fuyang Prefecture, Anhui Province], ed. (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1960). Among the pages on which the word is used are Boxes are 26, 70, 93ff. and 166.

In 146 pages of the collection Taiping tianyigeyao [Folksongs about the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom], ed. Taiping Tianshu Lishi Bowuguan (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1962), the word baohan is not found once. This striking regional difference in the use of the word baohan between texts collected, edited and published from similar political motives at about the same seems to eliminate the possibility that baohan references have been slipped into some of them but not others for reasons connected with the politics of the 1950s and 1960s.

Hebei Wenshi Ziliao Bianjibu, ed., Jindai zhongguo tufei shilu [Records of bandits in recent China], 3 vols (Beijing: Quanzhong Chubanshe, 1992), abbreviated to JZTS below, is a rich collection of stories that appear to be more reliable as evidence of attitudes than as accounts of what actually happened. It includes a number of references to values and actions of the Shuibu baohan type in the northern half of China.

Wang Tianzong 王天�� of west Henan, who died in 1920, is given a glowing write-up in Zhang Fang, “Zhongzhou da xia Wang Tianzong” [Wang Tianzong, the great knight of the central region], JZTS, vol. 3, pp. 223–39. Wang is said to have compared his being driven into banditry with the way the Liangshan baohan were all forced into rebellion, and appealed to people’s sense of yiqi when calling on them to join him (p. 225). “Although he did not fly the banner ‘Carry out the Way on behalf of Heaven; Kill the rich and aid the poor’ … in reality he did try to win praise as a baohan of the greenwood tree who behaved like a knight (xia) and relied on honour, which is why he was known at the time as the ‘great knight of the Central Region’” (p. 228).

Two stories in the collection tell of Communist officials appealing to baohan values when trying to win Manchurian bandits over during the 1940s. In one reminiscence Zhang Ruilin tells us about working out his approach to one band: “From what I had learned already I knew that bandits who roam around the rivers and lakes value honour among mates (gemei yiqi 哥门儿义气) on which more
fictionalised predecessors in *Shui hu*, the large literature on banditry that has been published in China in the last two or three years does not lack references to those bandits who did have a sense of *yi qi*. A 1992 three-volume collection of anecdotes about bandits in the first half of the twentieth century includes references to 'good' bandits who go in for *baoban* behaviour.\(^5\) Cai Shaoqing's history of banditry in Republican China tells of one Manchurian who showed his *yi qi* by first killing his own uncle for raping a village girl, then giving him a slap-up funeral. Another bandit did such good deeds as rescuing the victims kidnapped by other bands. If that was conventional morality, his response to a request for help from another band he had not met before when it was out of ammunition after a defeat could have come straight from the pages of *Shui hu*. He gave them ammunition and escorted them along their way, taking heavy casualties in the process. This was pure *yi qi*.\(^5\)

It was not, however, normal bandit behaviour.

The three-volume collection of bandit stories includes some tales about women bandits who appear to be in the female line of the *baoban* tradition. A woman “Boss of Seven Provinces,” Gaiqisheng 盖七省, on the northern grasslands surrounded herself with twenty beautiful female bodyguards.\(^5\)

One woman was so remarkable that a variety of contradictory stories about her circulated. Widow Zhang 长寡妇 of western Henan specialized in kidnapping unmarried girls and looking after them with such concern for propriety that they were still marriageable after they were ransomed. After a long criminal career in which she more than once sent thousands of her men off to join government armies she was eventually captured and executed in Luoyang in 1933, going to her death calm, smiling and boasting of her achievements. Although she could not make the claim that in twenty years she would be another *baoban* she does, according to one version, say, “I'm fifty-three now, and in another fifty-three years I'll be as stout and tall again as I am now.” She was strong on honour and, when captured, quoted the saying, “A *baoban* takes responsibility for what he's done,” and admitted her crimes.\(^5\)

Another woman, Zhang Shuzhen 张淑珍 or Suzhen 素贞, moved between banditry and prostitution in the Changchun region and died in proper Changchun style in 1925 at the age of twenty-four. To those who saw her being driven on a cart to her execution she was as elegant and beautiful as an aristocratic lady on the stage. As she passed a draper's shop she demanded the traditional length of red satin to drape over herself; and on being given a bowl of liquor she had asked for she drained it at a draught. Although she too could not make the promise to be reborn as a *baoban* she did shout just before she was shot, “I'm not afraid of dying.”\(^5\)

Arthur H. Smith has some wonderful pages on ‘bullies’ in his 1899 *Village Life in China* that catch the essentials of a nineteenth-century version of a kind of archetypal *liumang* or *guanggun*. They also give a most valuable picture of what happened when the fantasies of *Shui hu* were brought down to rustic earth. They thus provide a link between the imaginary world of fictional *baoban* and bored teenagers in today's China. After dividing /below) above all else. At this vital moment … I proposed swearing blood brotherhood as a way of gaining a firm foothold among them.” He goes on to appeal to them by calling them men who care about *yi qi* and becoming sworn brother number six. See p.305 of this *Shenru feichao gaibian* 'Zhuangjiaren feidui' [Going deep into the bandit lair to reorganise the farmers' bandit gang], *JZTS*, vol.1, pp.300–14.

An even more *Shui hu* story is told about a remarkable woman Communist Party county secretary, Li Ran 李然 (also called Shen Yang 沈洋), who needs to obtain some information that has fallen into the hands of a bandit chief known as Nine-headed Bird 壬头鸟. With only a single bodyguard she ensures that she and he will be captured and taken to the bandit chief. Her response to his threat to kill them is to say, “If you bump us off like that you're no *baoban*.” She challenges him to a shooting match and wins. Whereupon ‘Nine-headed Bird thoroughly admires this 'baoban' and invites her into his hut to meet his mother. They then swear brotherhood and sisterhood.” Cao Baoming, “Dongbeituifei” [Bandits in the northeast], *JZTS*, vol.1, pp.1–76.

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\(^5\) Cai Shaoqing, *Minguo shiqi de tujei* [Bandits in the Republican era] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1993), pp.97, 102. Some of these acts of *yi qi*, as they are described, were earlier to be found on pp.26–7 of Cao Baoming's article cited in the previous note.

\(^5\) Guo Fu, “Bashan tuifei” [Bandits of the high plains], *JZTS*, vol.2, p.84.

\(^5\) Miao Peimeng, “Qing mo Min chu de Luoning lulin renwu” [Greenwood personalities in Luoning in the late Qing and early Republic], *JZTS*, vol.3, pp.213–14; Wang Shoumei, “Chiming Yuxi de Zhang Guafu” [Widow Zhang who was famous throughout west Henan], ibid., pp.245–53. This latter version makes her into a somewhat improper wager of class struggle.

villagers into the laoshi (well-behaved) and the not-laoshi, Smith goes on to deal with the latter:

In his simplest form, a Chinese bully is a man of more or less violent temper and strong passions, who is resolved never to “eat loss,” and under all circumstances to give as good (or as bad) as he gets … In order to secure the reputation of being not “lao-shih” a shrewd villager will sometimes adopt the expedient, not unknown to other lands, of wearing his clothes in a loose and rowdy fashion, talking in a boisterous tone, and resenting contradiction … . His cap is worn studiously awry; his outer garment, instead of being decorously fastened, is left purposely unloosed; his abundant hair is braided in a loose cue apparently as thick as his arm, the plaiting beginning several inches away from the head; the end of the cue is generally coiled about his neck or over his head (a gross breach of Chinese etiquette), as if to show that he thirsts for a fight. His outer leggings are not improbably so tied as to display a lining which is more expensive than the outside; and his shoes are invariably worn down at the heel, perhaps to make an ostentatious display of a silk embroidered heel to the cotton stocking—a touch of splendor adopted to strike awe into the rustic beholder … . He will succeed in diffusing the impression that he is a dangerous man to interfere with, and will in consequence be left severely alone.  

Though the actual clothes and hairstyles change with fashion, the same messages have been put across down to our own times. You dress differently to mark yourself off from the docile.

The village bully of a century ago was also a thug:

One of the qualifications which is very convenient for the village bully, though not absolutely indispensable, is physical strength … . A high degree of skill in wrestling, and the ability, as alleged, to deliver such a blow with the fist as shall knock out a brick from a wall a foot thick, are in many circumstances valuable accomplishments.

Had Smith better remembered Shui bu and other traditions about violent women he might not have been so surprised at the “female bully”:

Her traits are, mutatis mutandis, the same as those of the individuals already mentioned, but her mere existence is so great a departure from our ordinary conceptions of Chinese social life, that it needs a word of explanation. She is simply an evolution of her surroundings. Skill in speech, physical violence in act, and an executive talent are her endowments, and her usefulness to the perennially hungry “wolves and tigers” of the yamen is such that she is called their draught-horse to draw victims.

This rather squalid reality is a long way from the fictional world of the Shui bu heroes and heroines. Were the violence in Shui bu for real it would be far more damaging than the generally petty thuggery of the village bully-boys and bully-girls. Seen through Smith’s eyes these village troublemakers are not the larger than life baoban and their female equivalents. Nor are they legendary and heroic bandits of the Robin Hood type. They are small-time gang members, nasty enough if they take against you, but hardly likely to indulge in either the
multiple slaughter or the grand gestures of self-sacrifice so common in the pages of the novel. Nor would we expect the rustic petty criminals to be as indifferent to sex and money as were the invented characters.

It would be a mistake to see only the differences between fiction and the behaviour of living people while missing the ways in which fictional creations can influence real action. Though we have to assume that many aspects of the *baohan* ethic as portrayed in *Shui bu* have rarely been put into practice there are enough similarities between the values of fiction such as *Shui bu* and other more recent celebrations of gratuitous violence and honour, on the one hand, and those put into practice by some groups in society, on the other, to make the subject worth looking into further. Concepts of *yiqi* are still a powerful enough influence on some to be identified as one of the principal causes of youth crime. The word *baohan*, like all that it stands for both in myth and in practice, remained a dangerous one to be handled very carefully until recent decades.

As a party that was once the organiser of violent rebellion and at the same time depended on a strictly enforced discipline to gain and hold power, the Communists have always been acutely sensitive to the threat of disruption and anarchy implicit in *baohan* values. Someone obeying the demands of *yiqi* cannot be depended on to observe the principles of absolute obedience and loyalty to the organisation on which party power was based. That is why they have been so aware of the appeal and the dangers of *baohan* values, *jiangbu yiqi* 江湖义气, the “yiqi of the rivers and lakes,” as well as of their living descendant, “mates’ honour,” or *gemenr yiqi* 哥们儿义气. What follow are only a few brief remarks on a subject that is worth a much more extended treatment.

In official Communist literature it is unusual (though not unknown) to find *baohan* being used by them to describe their own people, especially before 1949. The word since then has almost always been a taboo one in referring to people on their side. To fill the gap they gave the word *yingxiong* 英雄 (hero), once used almost as a synonym for *baohan*, a distinct and different meaning, to express heroic qualities approved of by the Party organisation.

In the crude but vigorous novel about Communist-led peasant militia fighting the Japanese and their collaborators, *Lüliang yingxiong zhuàn*呂梁英雄传 (Heroes of the Lüliang Mountains), these two words are very carefully distinguished. Only bad characters or people on the wrong side talk about *baohan*. The villainous landlord known as Hualingba (Boss of Birch Ridge) says, on hearing of the anti-Japanese militia’s plan to cut some woods down to prevent the Japanese from getting the timber to use as railway sleepers, that they are “playing *baohan* in the King of Hell’s palace” and that he is going to get every one of them. The only other use of *baohan* in the novel is in a conversation between two militiamen in the Japanese puppet forces. By contrast, the word *yingxiong* is used quite often by and about the Communist-led militia.
Chapter twenty-seven: “The mother demon sells human flesh in Mengzhou Circuit” and “Commandant Wu meets Zhang Qing at Shizi Slope”

In the first illustration to this chapter (this page) the demonic innkeeper Sun Erniang, using no feminine tricks, assures Wu Song that the filling in his steamed bun is beef, not the human flesh it actually is.

In the second (facing page) Wu Song, having pretended to drink drugged liquor, has sprung to life when the mother demon tried to butcher him, rolling on the ground half-naked with her as he wrestles her to submission. Once her husband Zhang Qing (to the right) explains who they both are all misunderstandings are ended, and Sun Erniang’s honorary haohan status is established.

Later in this episode Wu Song shows what a fine haohan he is by insisting that the two guards who are escorting him to gaol and have really been drugged should be spared despite Zhang Qing’s kind offer to kill them so that he can escape.

There is a *kuaihan* 快板 ballad treatment of the encounter in prison between the Communist Wang Ruofei 王若飞 and a bandit chief called Zhang 张 who has been sent into the captured revolutionary’s cell by the gaolers in order to break him. In the struggle of will and wits between the two of them much is made of the contrast between the values of a disciplined revolutionary and those of an individualistic and self-proclaimed *baohan*. The bandit is hairy-chested, fiery-tempered, tough, proud, wild—a hard case.
If he does not like what anybody says, he will hit them, pull out a knife or gun, then kill them.

He made himself head of the self-proclaimed heroes; Among the *baoban* he was king.

While the bandit boasts of being a *baoban* who'll break before he'll bend and sets out his credentials as what Hobsbawm might call a social bandit who
kicks the rich to help the poor and fights injustice, Wang stresses correct thinking, urging Zhang to be the right sort of hero, a yingxiong 英雄汉. As Zhang starts to be won over he says to Wang, "You’re a yingxiong, I’m a baoban; you’re a man of honour, I’m tough." When Zhang is finally won over by the Communist’s arguments that only the party can bring about justice for all, he submits, admitting that he cannot compare himself with such real yingxiong heroes. Curiously enough, a prose memoir purporting to describe the actual episode on which the ballad was based does not use the word baoban once. 61 The ballad sets against Wang Ruofei’s party orthodoxy not so much alternative social practice as a rival myth. A rival myth that could influence social practice, even if it did not portray it.

The images of heroes created by Communist propaganda are of disciplined, modest people who even when sacrificing themselves for the cause do so without the flamboyance and the big gestures of the baoban. Consider the images of heroes from Dong Cunrui (who deliberately blew himself up with an enemy pillbox) to the ineffable Lei Feng 和他的 ilk. They are all calculatedly boring. There is nothing flash about them, no style, no panache. Instead of showing off their individuality they submit to the organisation and its discipline. For the swaggering self-assertion of the baoban style of talking they substitute the self-effacing language of the political study meeting. They have none of the glamour of the Shui hu 杀手 killers.

One of the reasons why the Communists succeeded in conquering China against enormous odds was their ability to impose their kind of revolutionary values on a culture that was much more used to other images of heroism and struggle. The tension can be seen in the best-known scenes of the novel Lin hai xue yuan 林海雪原 (Tracks in the Snowy Forest) and the Peking opera based on it, Zhiqu Weihushan 知取威虎山 (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy) that both tell the story of how during the civil war of the late 1940s a unit of the People’s Liberation Army brings about the destruction of a group of Nationalist troops in a Manchurian mountain stronghold. The Nationalists are shown as behaving just like bandits. At a crucial stage in the story, Yang Zirong 杨子荣, a PLA scout, has to disguise himself as a bandit in order to enter the lair and act like a bandit in order to convince the enemy that he belongs to their milieu while not letting readers or audience forget that he is not one of them. He does this almost impossible job so well that the bandits praise him as a baoban, while when his own commander receives a message from him, he calls Yang a yingxiong (hero). 62 The danger to Communist propaganda is that in such scenes the bandits will be too attractive: hence the complaint in the Beijing Evening News in 1964 that the bandit language of the novel was having a bad influence on children. 63 However hard Communist propagandists tried, sometimes they were unable to defeat the appeal of baoban values. Jiang Qing 江青 complained during the 1960s that in some films:

you don’t see the Party’s leadership, Party policies, the strength of political
work or the support of the masses. Instead they propagate individual heroism, heroes of the bush, baoban of the Greenwood tree, the yiqi of the rivers and lakes, and all that is low.\(^6\)

The Party’s fear of the big gesture so characteristic of baoban models of behaviour also explains its refusal to allow execution victims to go out in style.

Lacking in constructive features though the whole baoban value system always was both in fiction and in practice, it looks quite good when set against what those values have turned to in recent decades. The culture and language of the world of prisons and camps has made deep incursions into the dominant culture of bureaucrats and other more or less educated people who would once have marked themselves off as clearly as possible from the language and style of the criminal. In the first volume of his memoirs of prison life in the late 1950s and early 1960s the writer Cong Weixi 東維西 shows himself as horrified by the common criminals whom he was forced as a convicted rightist to live.\(^5\) The criminals he describes were not at all eager to imitate chishifenzi 吃屎分子 (shit-eaters), as they called zhishifenzi 知识分子 (intellectuals). They had their own sub-culture and attitude to the world, and even in the 1950s marked themselves off linguistically from respectable Communist Party society.

Among themselves they were not comrades, they were mates—gemenr 哥们儿. Gemenr and gemen 哥们 are mates who are outside (or posing as being outside) respectable morality. If you are accepted as one of the gemenr you have to be ready to earn it by breaking the rules. Being in gaol, or being an ex-con, clearly qualify, provided you are inside for the right sort of crime.

The term for “mate” is gemenr in the local Peking dialect today, where it originally also meant “brothers,” to be distinguished, according to some authorities, from gemen 哥们, only meaning “brothers.”\(^6\) In written texts representing Peking speech the usage of the two terms is often confused; and in texts both from there and from other parts of the northern half of China we sometimes find that the character er (elided into the r in the middle of gemen and at the end of gemenr) is dropped in writing the word, so that it is written gemen and we do not know whether or where er sound would occur when the word was spoken.\(^6\) It can also happen that gemen is written where in standard Peking we would expect gemenr.\(^6\) Occasionally one comes across a female equivalent of gemenrin jiemenr 姐们儿, a word that seems to be a recent invention and to carry the same affection of disreputability. The linguistic inequality that denied women and girls an equivalent to baoban seems at last to have been put right.

I am no dialectologist, but my impression is that neither gemenr nor gemen is much used south of the Yangtse. Youth cultures in the south use other words in place of gemenr, but the general meaning is the same.\(^6\) The difficulty one has in grasping these nuances of language when trying to approach living popular cultures through printed sources is in itself an

\(^{64}\) “Jiang Qing tongzhi tan guanyu dianying wenti” [Comrade Jiang Qing talks about film problems] in the collection Jiang Qing tongzhi lun wenyi [Comrade Jiang Qing on art and literature] (no place of publication given, May 1968), p.83.

\(^{65}\) Cong Weixi, Zou xiang hunzhao [Into the fifth] (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsi, 1990).

\(^{66}\) Xi Shirong, Beijing tuyucidian [Dictionary of Peking argot] (Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe, 1990). The writer Wang Shuo 王朔 who shows a most acute awareness of current Peking language use, always writes gemen when it means mate. He evidently feels the word to be essentially singular; hence his use of the curious plural gemenmen 哥们儿门 on p.139 of the satirical novel Qian wan bie ba wo dang ren [Don’t treat me as human, whatever you do] (Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1993).

\(^{67}\) Omission of a spoken er when writing a word is of course common.

\(^{68}\) As, for example, on p.99 of Liu Binyan’s article “Ren yao zhi jian” [People or monsters?] in the September 1979 issue of Renmin wenxue. I am only moderately confident that I am following correct Peking usage in making the distinction between gemen and gemenr, and am glad to acknowledge the guidance I have been given by Geremie Barmé, whose perceptions of the eddies and flows of the living language of the young are so acute. What makes the distinction harder to detect in speech than on paper is that in the slurred articulation affected by those who like to be taken as real Pekingers the two words do not necessarily sound very different from each other.

\(^{69}\) Such is the impression gathered from reading a number of collections of reports on juvenile crime in different parts of China during the 1970s and 1980s. Gemenr and its variants occurs far more often in articles discussing youth attitudes in the north than in the south.

Having spared his escorts, Wu Song is taken to be imprisoned in Anping Stockade, where he is astonishingly well-treated by his gaoler, Shi En. After hints that a favour may be expected in return Wu Song is eager to demonstrate his almost superhuman strength. This he does by picking up the stone base for a temple’s paper flags. Although it weighs several hundred jin he tosses it effortlessly into the air. The picture is one of vigour and physicality that are unusual in Ming graphic art. Wu Song’s ample and muscular body exudes energy; even the hair in his armpits bristles with strength.

The re-emergence of modified but in some ways rather traditional values derived from *baoban* values since the 1970s has a lot to do with the Maoist rejection of much of the Chinese Communist Party’s own ethos in the chaotic years from 1966 onwards. After decades of indoctrination and propaganda about subjecting oneself to the discipline of the hierarchical organisation and the collective interest, nearly all restraints were thrown away. What had been almost taboo—“playing the ‘individual hero’”—was now acceptable. Accounts of fighting in the Cultural Revolution are full of incidents in which individuals go in for reckless heroism or brutality. Men fight bare-chested, take on bandit-style nicknames, glory in sacrifice and slaughter. When the time came for this kind of action to be discredited by official propaganda, *baoban* could be used to refer in a derogatory way to Maoist bully-boys.

Plenty of illustrations can be found in fiction and reminiscences describing fighting between factions during the most violent years of the Cultural Revolution. For a foreign account based on interviews that describes the fighting at Peking’s Qinghua University, see Hinton, *Hundred day war*. From Hinton’s evidence it is clear that the style of some of the student combatants on the campus was heavily influenced by *Shui hu* and Qing-era models of how a tough guy ought to act in order to win respect, such as fighting bare-chested and going in for acts of reckless daring. I have already cited in an earlier footnote a piece of tough-guy verse that was used in Qinghua at the time.

A description published in 1979 of the Shanghai militia when, under the control of Jiang Qing’s associates, they were used in 1976 to repress demonstrations in favour of Zhou Enlai refers to them as *baobanmen*. This plural form of *baoban* is somehow contemptuous. Yang Kuang-man and Guo Baochen, “Mingyun” [Fate], in *Dandai*, 1979.2, p.19.
Once the countless local civil wars were over and the revolution had been revealed as the fraud it was, all sorts of value systems rushed into the ideological vacuum left by the implosion of Maoism. Among them were those of gemenr yiqi and its equivalents in many local cultures. ‘Honour among mates’ is one way we could translate the term, which belongs to today’s world and is distinguished from the more traditional jiangbu yiqi, or “honour of the rivers and lakes,” the value system of many bandits, soldiers and others up till the middle of the twentieth century. If precision is possible in such matters we might distinguish between the fictional baohan values of Shui hu that have been continued in wuxia (martial knights) fiction and related films in our own time and the sense of honour that may or may not have been felt by some bandits, soldiers and the like in recent times. There is quite a lot of overlap. Gemenr yiqi belongs to the present and to cities; jiangbu yiqi to the recent past and, to a large extent, to the countryside.

Gemenr values—gemenr yiqi—are closely related to, and directly descended from, baohan ones through the jiangbu yiqi of the bandit tradition. Indeed, some of the links between gemenr yiqi and jiangbu yiqi are so close that writers on youth crime sometimes refer to the one and sometimes to the other as a value system that holds youth gangs together. The connections between them seem to be primarily through the popular arts: fiction, films and television. It makes loyalty to your mates a higher priority than virtually any other obligation. For gemenr yiqi today’s tearaways will forget about the demands of the family and the state (including the Party) in order to stand by a mate in trouble, even if it means risking very serious trouble. For yiqi you must be ready to fight, to be beaten up, to be arrested, or even to die with a knife between your ribs. What you can never do is sell your mates out, inform on them or leave them in the lurch. Yiqi also requires the settling of scores.

Today’s gemenr yiqi, like the earlier sort, involves big gestures and no compromise with respectable society. But you are no longer expected to be casual about money—as long as you share it with your mates—or to be afraid of female sexuality. Young women can belong to the gangs held together by gemenr yiqi and will win respect if they sleep with several boys in the gang. Sex with outsiders is, however, disapproved of. Female gang members in Shanghai will pride themselves on finding girlfriends for the boys in the mob.

Honour among mates was identified as a powerful and dangerous concept in a 1977 short story by Liu Xinwu set in a class of Peking middle-school students. It sets two kinds of spiritual emptiness against each other: the shallow hypocrisy of late Maoist ideology as personified by the class monitor, and the liumang values held by a young, working-class gang member who admires gemen yiqi (so written) and is rejected by the correct-thinking students.

Another view of the revival of gemenr yiqi during the Cultural Revolution can be found in one of the less attractive autobiographical novels of recent years, Lao Gui’s Xuese huangbun 血色黄昏 (Bloody Dusk). This
This is the form normally used in the novel.

Examples of *baoban* being used in a consciously archaic way can be found on pp.3 and 4 of the edition published in Changsha by the Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe in 1993, for instance. Curiously, it is used on p.99 to refer to Bai Du, a very strong contemporary female character. As in much of Wang Shuo’s other fiction, *gemei* is used too frequently for its occurrences to be worth noting individually.

A general term for organised crime.

Signs of the death of the *haohan* can be found in other post-Mao fiction too. To take but one example, Wang Shuo’s grim and fantastical satire set in the corrupt Peking of the 1980s, *Qian wan bie ba wo dang ren* (Don’t Treat Me as Human, Whatever You Do), includes among its characters one Tang Guotao, the last of the Boxers, still implausibly vigorous over eighty years after the rising. This living fossil uses the word *haohan* quite often, especially when talking about his fellow Boxers. The other characters hardly ever do. *Gemei*, by contrast, is much more commonly said.

In the China that has followed the death of Mao and the end of revolutionary values and solidarity there has been a rebirth of gang culture in the cities. In the words of the Ministry of Public Security:

It is worth noting that in the last few years quite a few criminal gangs have appeared that are composed of middle-school students and strongly bear the coloration of feudal gangs and black society organisations. These youngsters imitate the actions of feudal gangs in knight-errant fiction, films and television. They kowtow, take blood oaths, swear brotherhood and sisterhood, place each other in order of precedence, print signs, make gang rules, fight, brawl, stir up trouble, insult women, lord it over shopping areas, act the local bully, and seriously affect social order.

In the 1980s this was seen as something new and alarming.

Before the ‘Cultural Revolution’ gang crime among the young was very rare—and gang crime for which *gemei yi qi* (honour among mates) was the spiritual prop was even rarer.
Gemen(r) yiqi—the value system which requires you to be ready to take a knife in the ribs for a mate—is the cement that holds gangs together. That is why its danger is so well appreciated by the Communist authorities, always jealous of loyalties and organisational structures not under their control. We know that it is regarded as a serious problem by the frequency with which it is referred to as a threat to the socialist order. It is common in writing on juvenile crime to find references to the continuing appeal of *gemen(r) yiqi* to teenage boys.

Figure 8
Chapter twenty-nine: “A drunken Wu Song fights Door God Jiang”

The favour Wu Song’s benefactor, Shi En, asks of Wu is to rid him of a newly-arrived rival in Happy Wood, a market some fifty li outside the eastern gate of Mengzhou. Shi En has been using his own martial arts prowess and eighty or ninety desperado prisoners to run a protection racket that raised 200-300 ounces of silver a month from the inns, gambling dens and prostitutes catering to business travellers in Happy Wood. The newcomer, Door God Jiang, a better fighter than Shi who can also call on the troops of the local garrison, has taken over Shi’s rackets.

Wu Song cannot resist the challenge to his prowess. After getting himself thoroughly plastered in all the pubs along the way he goes into Door God Jiang’s inn and behaves like a drunken lout, throwing Jiang’s new concubine into a vat of unfiltered wine (at the top of the picture) before going out to lay into Jiang with fist and foot. Jiang is rapidly subdued and forced to quit Happy Wood, leaving Shi running the rackets again.

It is characteristically haohan of Wu Song not to concern himself with the rights and wrongs of Shi En’s situation. A mate is in trouble: that is enough to send him into action. The gratuitous drunkenness is an extra touch. Once again, the graphic art is supremely physical.
Chapter forty-three: “A false Li Kui robs lone travellers on the road”

In this chapter the most lovable and most psychopathically violent of the Shui hu haohan, Li Kui, is on his way home to fetch his aged mother and bring her to the stockade on Liangshan. In a wood he is jumped on by an imposter, Li Cui, who disguises himself as Li Kui to make himself more terrifying to the travellers he robs. In this scene the real Li Kui has overpowered Li Cui, seized one of the axes the imposter has been using, and is about to kill him. The imposter is spared because he appeals to Li Kui’s better nature with another falsehood: that he is only robbing in order to support his old mother who would otherwise starve.

Figure 9

A 1980 survey of young offenders and a straight control group in Shen-yang 沈阳, each of nearly 500 members, found that 47.8 per cent of the young offenders approved of the notion that you should be willing to take a knife in the ribs for a friend (compared with 13.1 per cent of the straights); 48.3 per cent thought you should never betray a friend; and 28.3 per cent felt that to be the boss of your territory through violence was to be a haohan.
TOUGH GUYS, MATESHIP AND HONOUR: ANOTHER CHINESE TRADITION

(The word may be dying, but it is not quite dead yet.) The more friends they could get to help them in a fight, the more prestige they would have; and to help others in a fight was "being a real mate" (gemenryiqi哥们儿够意思), true friendship, and yiqi. "Being a real mate" also could mean passing on a girlfriend to a pal.

When a friend's in trouble you've got to help if you're asked. You can't stand aside, even if it's going to mean fighting or murder. In their world anyone who abandons a mate or doesn't give help when asked is disgraced for ever.

The writers stress how hard it is to break away from such a gang culture. Another youngster became a murderer at the age of seventeen when he knifed a stranger who had told a mate to shut up in a cinema. In that case the knife was in someone else's ribs.

A 1986 textbook on juvenile law, written at a time of official alarm about youth crime, draws our attention to the traditional element in such value systems. It identifies as one of the main subjective causes of juvenile lawbreaking that the young people “have come under feudal ideological influence. They care about honour among mates [gemen yiqi], and will take a knife in the ribs and sacrifice everything for a mate.”

The same author describes Peking gangs of boys of fourteen to sixteen holding initiation ceremonies in which they swear to share weal or woe, and hope to die on the same day. To him it is evident that "gemenyiqi of the feudal gang type is the highest belief of these gangs." All this is very clearly part of a tradition passed on, if not actually invented, by literature and other cultural media. Another writer refers to gemen yiqi as an ideological sub-culture strengthening undesirable and potentially criminal circles of friendship, identifying it with feudal “yiqi of the rivers and lakes” and calling it one of the spiritual props of gangs. Other references to gemen yiqi (in its variant spellings) as a “spiritual prop” occur in writing on youth crime.

The connections between the values of gemen yiqi and the world of prisons and labour camps remain strong. There is a report that when a formerly penitent young thug left labour camp his old mates dragged him back into crime by giving him banquets and setting off fireworks to congratulate him on the glory of having been inside.

* * * * *

We started this exploration with a rather stirring piece of street theatre as a prelude to an execution. Now, as we have seen, everything possible is done to ensure that the victim goes out without style. Even the right to a last, defiant letter to one's loved ones is denied by regulations that require the authorities to hold back anything that might be seen as challenging or subversive. However, even this can be counteracted by those reckless enough to defy the state.

In May 1982 a certain Xu was shot for murder, robbery and other offences. His family and over a dozen of his associates gave his ashes a very conspicu-
ous funeral procession through the centre of the city, then held the regular ceremonies for him at seven-day intervals at a local Buddhist temple. They even burned paper models of the officials and judges involved in handling his case carrying a sedan chair with a model of the dead man in it. A year later other ceremonies were held on the anniversary of the execution.\(^92\) This was not a safe gesture. When the law came down on his family and friends the only question was whether they should be charged with the serious offence of hooliganism or the even more serious one of counter-revolution. Eleven of them were convicted.

As it is with all the youngsters who will do anything for a mate, even take a knife in the ribs, this was pure \textit{yiqi}. For good or ill the tradition lives on.