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CHINESE CLASSICS

# Outlaws of the Marsh

BY SHI NAI'AN AND LUO GUANZHONG

VOLUME I



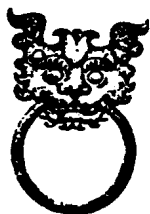
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Volume II

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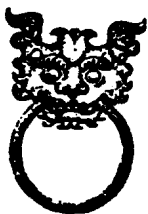


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# OUTLAWS OF THE MARSH

Volume IV

SHI NAI'AN  
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OUTLAWS  
OF THE MARSH

## INTRODUCTION

Chinese authors in olden times generally took the glorification of the deeds of emperors and kings as their themes. In contrast, the protagonists of the novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* are for the most part low-born members of a stalwart band of heroes forced by some injustice or another to seek refuge in the mountain fastness of Liangshan. The choice of subject matter and the thrust of the novel have a somewhat subversive tinge to them.

*Outlaws of the Marsh* recounts the doings of the 108 heroes, led by Song Jiang, of Mount Liangshan. This Song Jiang was in fact a historical figure, who led a peasant revolt in the area of what are now the provinces of Shandong, Hebei, Henan and Jiangsu in the closing years of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). Accounts of some of his exploits are found in such historical records as *The History of the Song Dynasty* and *The Full-Length Chronicles As a Sequel to History As a Mirror*, including the Liangshan uprising, the attack on the magistrate's headquarters, the acceptance of amnesty and the expedition against Fang La. Although Song Jiang has left few traces in the history books, we can imagine from these few references how seriously the uprising which he led disturbed the imperial court.

Following the destruction of the Northern Song Dynasty



by the Jin army as it advanced southward, the remnants of Song Jiang's forces, who had been incorporated into the Song army, continued to resist Jin in the north. There are many references to this in historical documents. For instance, in the *Random Notes of the Year Kuixin*, which was written in the transition period between the Song and Yuan dynasties, there is a section titled "In Praise of Song Jiang and His 36 Men", which lauds their deeds of resistance to the Jin invaders. It mentions by name many of Song Jiang's companions, including Zhang Heng, Yan Qing, Lu Junyi, Hua Rong, Wu Yong, Dai Zong, Sun Li and Yang Xiong. Some of the Liangshan heroes were active in the Taihang Mountains, which were a base for anti-Jin resistance. References to the "Taihang Patriotic and Righteous Society" can be found in various ancient records. In addition, it is said that the remains of a shrine to Song Jiang dating from the Northern Song and Jin period are located on Motian Ridge (northeast to present-day Shijiu Village, Taitou District, Yangcheng County, Shanxi Province) in the Taihang Mountains. The shrine is supposed to have housed clay images of Song Jiang and his 36 comrades, testifying to some definite connection between them and the "Taihang Patriotic and Righteous Society." In the *Romance of the Revival of the Great Song Dynasty*, published in the Jiajing reign period (1522-1567) of the Ming Dynasty, there is an episode concerning a victory for the anti-Jin forces led by Guan Sheng in the Jinan region of what is now northern Shandong Province. This is further evidence, from folk tales, that Song Jiang and his band were part of the resistance to the Jin regime.

However, this aspect of the heroes' resistance to a usurping dynasty was downplayed and finally ignored altogether in writings referring to them which appeared in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), which was likewise a regime set up by invaders, and so the subject would have been taboo; there is no trace of it in the *Tales of the Xuanhe Period*, published in Yuan times. Besides, the connection between the outlaws and the anti-Jin resistance in the Taihang Mountains may be tenuous, for there are many mistaken geographical references to the Taihang Mountains in the novel. For instance, Yellow Clay Ridge, where the birthday convoy was tricked, is stated clearly in one edition of the novel to have been in the Taihang Mountains. But another edition has the birthday convoy travelling from Beijing to Kaifeng; in which case there would have been no reason for a detour via the Taihang Mountains. It seems that the authors were careless in trying to tie in the Taihang Mountains episodes with those that took place in the vicinity of Liangshan, as the two places are very far apart.

Song Jiang and his merry men figure in 24 Yuan Dynasty *zaju*, a form of poetic drama. Of these, only the titles of 18 are known to us, the scripts having been lost. But the fact that Black Whirlwind occurs in 13 titles indicates that Li Kui was a particularly popular character. In the six surviving *zaju* scripts, Song Jiang and his band operate out of Liangshan to punish wicked officials and restore justice to the common people. There is no element of resistance to the Jin regime; nor are there any stories of the people revolting against official oppression; in the Yuan

*zaju*, Song Jiang and his men are in reality transformed into playing the role that honest officials play in other contexts. In the *zaju* which appeared in the early Ming Dynasty, the plots continue those of the *zaju* of the previous dynasty, but with the addition of emphasis on "abandoning the reactionary side and crossing over to the enlightened side." There was also the conviction that some day the Ming emperor would come and drive out the barbarians, grant the outlaws amnesty and recognize their heroic deeds. This was obviously propaganda supporting the establishment of the new dynasty.

While *Outlaws of the Marsh* is a collection of stories from folk legends and dramas of the Song and Yuan dynasties, it also in essence bears the mark of the creativity of the individual author. Whether it is the overall structure of the novel or the plot, or the characterization or artistic use of language, it attains a real of artistry never before reached in the Song Jiang stories. What *Outlaws of the Marsh* is all about is not a group of murderous and plundering wilderness outlaws, as Yuan Dynasty records describe them; nor is it about a band of avengers extirpating evil and restoring order, as depicted in the Yuan *zaju*. It is in fact a lively and acute critique of the people's revolt against official oppression in the social and political conditions of feudalism.

When did *Outlaws of the Marsh* first appear in book form, and who wrote it? These questions are still matters of debate among scholars. So far, the consensus is that *Outlaws of the Marsh* is a product of the period which saw the closing of the Yuan and opening of the Ming dynasties,

and that the author was Shi Nai'an. This is based on the fact that the earliest reference to the novel says that it was written by Luo Guanzhong and Shi Nai'an. *The Hundred Rivers Bibliographical Notes* by Gao Ru says, in the author's preface to the 1541 (19th year of the Jiajing reign period of the Ming Dynasty) edition: "*The Patriotic and Righteous Outlaws of the Marsh* is in one hundred chapters. Originally written by Shi Nai'an of Qiantang, and arranged by Luo Guanzhong." And a bibliography compiled by Lang Ying has the following entry: "Both the novels known as *The Three Kingdoms* and *Song Jiang* cite the editor as Luo Guanzhong of Hangzhou. Therefore, the author must have been someone else. Moreover, the author of the *Song Jiang* is named as Shi Nai'an of Qiantang."

Further evidence of the identity of Luo Guanzhong is found in the *Sequel to the Record of Ghosts* by Jia Zhongming of the early Ming Dynasty: "Luo Guanzhong, a native of Taiyuan, styled 'Wanderer of the Lakes and Seas.' He was solitary by nature, a writer of ballads and in esoteric language, which are original and fresh. A close friend of mine despite the difference in our ages, we lost news of each other for some years because of the upheavals of the times until 1364, when we met each other for the last time. Since then more than 60 years had passed, and I had never heard of him again."

From the above documents, we can put the year of Luo Guanzhong's birth at around 1323. So he was about 50 years old when the Yuan Dynasty fell. That means the authors of the *Outlaws of the Marsh*, Luo Guanzhong and Shi Nai'an, lived in the period which saw the end of the

Yuan and the beginning of the Ming. These records name Shi Nai'an as the author of the material in the novel, and Luo Guanzhong as the editor or compiler. Some of the editions of the novel which appeared in the Ming Dynasty bear the names of both men as the authors, some one or the other, and some bear the name of no author. The 70-chapter edition of the novel by Jin Shengtan of the late Ming Dynasty gives Shi Nai'an as the sole author, and thereafter Luo Guanzhong's name gradually disappears, leaving only that of Shi Nai'an.

The accounts by Gao Ru and Lang Ying are reliable. However, three problems remain. The first is the fact that ancient writers often used pen names and aliases. Zhou Lianggong, who lived in the early part of the Qing Dynasty, expressed his doubt about the authorship of *Outlaws of the Marsh* thus: "As it is doubtful that any writer in those days would have dared to put his real name to such a work, I do not know upon what grounds we can attribute *Outlaws of the Marsh* to Shi Nai'an." Therefore, we need more solid evidence for the authorship. The second problem is that, supposing Luo Guanzhong and Shi Nai'an are the real names of the authors of the work, and that Luo Guanzhong is the person named Luo Guanzhong mentioned in the *Sequel to the Record of Ghosts* as a writer of *zaju* plays, ballads and esoteric language, why is there no mention of *The Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh* or *The Sorcerer's Revolt* and *Its Suppression by the Three Suis*, full-length novels also attributed to Luo Guanzhong and which had a far greater impact than his *zaju*? Besides, it was not uncommon for people to bear identical names in

olden times. The third problem is that the earliest documents that mention the book of *Outlaws of the Marsh* all date from the Jiajing reign period, and the earliest extant version of the book was published during the Jiajing reign period. This version is titled *The Loyal and Righteous Outlaws of the Marsh*, and only two pages — pages 17 and 36 of Volume 10 — of the book are still extant. All other versions of the book date from the Wanli reign period (1573-1620) or later. So, to say that *Outlaws of the Marsh* first appeared in book form in the late Yuan or early Ming dynasty, we have no definitive edition to examine. Therefore, the argument that “*Outlaws of the Marsh* was written by Shi Nai'an of the period from the end of the Yuan Dynasty to the beginning of the Ming Dynasty” is still questionable and further research is needed before we can draw such a conclusion.

About the life of Shi Nai'an, Ming Dynasty sources are unclear. Hu Yinglin, a Ming Dynasty scholar, says, “It is said that the surname (of the author of *Outlaws of the March*) was Shi, and he has been styled Nai'an. His given name is unknown.” In the foreword to Jin Shengtan's revised edition of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, there is a section in which Shi Nai'an supposedly discusses his life, attitudes and the conditions under which he created the novel. But as this foreword is a fabrication by Jin Shengtan, it is of no value for our purpose. Moreover, with the elevation in the 20th century of the status of studies in vernacular literature, legends and forgeries concerning Shi Nai'an have multiplied. The result is that we really know nothing about the man's life, and must await the findings of genuine tex-

tual research.

*Outlaws of the Marsh* was banned several times under the Ming and Qing dynasties, because it lauds acts of resistance to oppression and sings the praises of the "greenwood outlaws." Such activities, of course, were regarded by the feudal rulers as "banditry." Nevertheless, the novel never failed to circulate in editions with varied numbers of chapters and in language expanded or condensed, which explains its high degree of popularity over several centuries. But what is the real attraction of *Outlaws of the Marsh*? It is precisely its fiercely robust spirit of resistance to oppression, expressed in vivid images. When you read how Sagacious Lu batters down a local bully with his iron fist, or how Gao Qiu relentlessly drives Lin Chong into a corner, and how the latter fights back and escapes from the Mountain God's shrine you cannot help feeling an extraordinary sense of elation. Sagacious Lu and Lin Chong are but two of the 108 desperadoes who have sought refuge in Liangshan. The novel relates how a score of them fight back against tragic circumstances, and the injustices perpetrated against them by corrupt officials and evil gentry, until they are forced, one by one, to seek refuge on Liangshan. Viewed objectively, seeking shelter on this wild mountain is a reflection of class antagonism in those feudal days and clearly reveals the true circumstances in which the common people rose in revolt against oppression.

The place where the outlaws worshipped, held ceremonies and issued decrees was called the Hall of Loyalty. In front of the hall was a pair of pillars on which hung a scroll bearing the following couplet: "Be ardently righteous and

loyal always, never covet wealth or harm the people." Also outside the hall was a tree, upon which hung an apricot-yellow banner which read "Acting for Heaven in the Cause of Justice." Song Jiang and his armed band on Liangshan had "Loyalty and Righteousness" as their slogan. By "loyalty" they meant faithfulness to the Song emperor, and the "Heaven" in their slogan also meant the Song emperor. They took it as their mission to enforce justice on behalf of the emperor. On the occasion of the Double Ninth Festival, Song Jiang writes a ci poem in the Hall of Loyalty, which reads, "Only when the emperor condescends to grant us an amnesty will my heart be full." The objectives of the outlaws are to obtain an imperial amnesty, protect the people and the country, and perform noble exploits. However, among the band of 108 there were some men who had no desire for an imperial pardon, and advocated the overthrow of the Zhao family and the setting of their own clan on the throne. One of these was Li Kui, who proposed "destroying the Eastern Capital and seizing the throne." When he hears Song Jiang intoning his poem about hoping for an amnesty, Li Kui explodes in anger and kicks the banquet table over. Nevertheless, Song Jiang's opposition to corrupt and wicked officials, with no hostility toward the emperor himself, remained the central political stance of the outlaws — and indeed of the novel itself. This is witnessed by the fact that the earliest extant fragment of the novel bears the title *Loyal and Righteous Outlaws of the Marsh*. There is a tragic contradiction in the novel inasmuch as on the one hand the outlaws do not oppose the emperor, while on the other they are greenwood



exiles waging armed struggles against the forces of the government. The final tragedy is that the outlaws are pardoned and given a mission to campaign against the rival Liao Dynasty and the uprising led by Fang La, but at the end of their usefulness they are eliminated upon orders from the court.

The success of *Outlaws of the Marsh* as a novel lies in the fact that it describes the tortuous course of the adventures of the Liangshan outlaws in a uniquely true-to-life way. Lin Chong, once military instructor of the 800,000-strong Palace Guard, has a cosy little home, and all he wants is a quiet life. But this modest ambition is rudely shattered by nightmare-like reality, when the son of his superior Gao Qiu becomes enamored of his wife and resorts to all sorts of tricks to ensnare him and bring about his death. Lin Chong is finally driven by desperation to slay his enemy and flee to Liangshan. Song Jiang comes from a landowner's family. With some degree of education, he is an official in the local county magistrate's office. By nature he is sincere and respectful, and always ready to help others out of difficulties. He rescues Chao Gai from danger when the birthday convoy is ambushed. Later, he finds out that his treacherous mistress Yan Poxi is about to betray him, and kills her in a fit of anger. Because of this he was thrown into prison. Song Jiang strives to be a loyal subject and filial son, but cruel reality forces him, step by step, in the opposite direction. In the end, he too ends up, much against his will, taking refuge on Liangshan, and in fact occupying the highest seat in the Hall of Loyalty. Another man forced to find refuge on Liangshan is Sa-