

A Historical Taxonomy of Talking Birds
in Chinese Literature

Wilt L. Idema

Published by the Harvard University Asia Center
Distributed by Harvard University Press
Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London 2025

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Chinese Dynasties</i>	xi
Introduction	I
1 Captured Birds and Frustrated Talent: From Earliest Times to the Early Third Century	6
Selected Texts	16
Mi Heng, "Rhapsody on the Parrot"	16
Cao Zhi, "Rhapsody on the Parrot"	21
2 Exotic Cockatoos and Foreign Tales: Third to Sixth Centuries	22
Selected Texts	37
Buddhist Parrot Tales	37
"The Grateful Parrot"	37
"The Parrot That Escaped by Fasting"	38
"The Parrot That Feigned Death"	39
"The Parrot King and the Buddha"	40
"The Two Parrots and the Monkey"	42
"The Parrot Chosen as King"	44
"The Filial Parrot"	46
"The Preaching Parrot"	47

3	At the Palace and in the Boudoir; at the Bordello and in Religion: Seventh to Tenth Centuries	50
	Selected Texts	75
	Wang Wei, "Rhapsody on the White Parrot"	75
	Anonymous, "Dayao's Crested Mynah"	77
	Niu Sengru, "Liu Guishun"	84
4	Abiding Loyalty and Filial Piety: Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries	90
	Selected Text	115
	Anonymous, <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i>	115
5	Parrots as Desire, as Allegory, and as Prop: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries	147
	Selected Text	181
	Anonymous, <i>The Precious Scroll of the Parrot</i>	181
6	Treasure and Go-Between, Entertainer and Statesman: Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century	230
	Epilogue	255
	<i>Appendix: Bird Call Poems and Bird Voice Poems</i>	259
	<i>Bibliography</i>	263
	<i>Index</i>	283

Illustrations

Figures

- | | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 2.1 | Line drawing of parrots painted on bricks of the third century from Foyemiaowan, Dunhuang | 24 |
| 4.1 | Title page of <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 114 |
| 4.2 | The parrot father goes picking fruits, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 117 |
| 4.3 | "I will go to the Southern Garden to find out," from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 118 |
| 4.4 | The little parrot returns to the nest, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 121 |
| 4.5 | The hunters notice the little parrot, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 123 |
| 4.6 | The two hunters take the little parrot to the market, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 127 |
| 4.7 | The little parrot recites poems, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 132 |
| 4.8 | The prefect of Longzhou presents the little parrot to the emperor, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 135 |
| 4.9 | The emperor has the two hunters beheaded, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 138 |
| 4.10 | The emperor releases the little parrot, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 140 |
| 4.11 | The little parrot joins the bodhisattva Guanyin, from <i>The Tale of the Parrot's Filial Piety</i> | 144 |
| 5.1 | Lin Daiyu and her parrot, from <i>Dream of the Red Chamber</i> | 159 |

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 5.2 | “Abao Calling the Parrot Down,” from <i>Xiangzhu Liaozhai zhiyi tuyong</i> | 164 |
| 5.3 | <i>The White Parrot</i> , from <i>The Precious Scroll of the Parrot</i> | 180 |

Plates

Following page 146

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | A jade carving of a parrot from the grave of Fu Hao |
| 2 | Parrots painted on bricks of the third century from Foyemiaowan, Dunhuang |
| 3 | A fragment from Yan Liben’s painting <i>Tribute Bearers</i> |
| 4 | <i>A Five-Colored Parakeet on a Blossoming Apricot Tree</i> by Emperor Huizong |
| 5 | <i>White Cockatoo</i> by Chen Shu |
| 6 | <i>Fighting Mynah Birds</i> by Emperor Huizong |
| 7 | <i>The Parrot</i> , from <i>Sancai tubui</i> |
| 8 | Woman and parrot, color print from Suzhou of the eighteenth century |
| 9 | Parrot, color print from Suzhou of the eighteenth century |
| 10 | Three women amusing themselves, color print from Suzhou of the eighteenth century |
| 11 | Guanyin in black and white, New Year’s print of the Qing dynasty from Yangliuqing near Tianjin |
| 12 | Complete picture of Guanyin, New Year’s print of the Qing dynasty from Yangliuqing near Tianjin |