Toward the end of The Three Knights and the Five Gallants (San xia wu yi 三俠五義), one of the more popular martial arts novels published in the nineteenth century, two young heroes put on an elaborate act of cross-dressing.² Hoping to infiltrate the stronghold of a rebellious outlaw, the two, Black Demon Fox Zhi hua (Heiyaohu Zhi Hua 黑妖狐智化) and the knight Ding Zhao Hui 丁兆蕙, disguise themselves as lowly Hubei fishermen. When the two heroes reach the gate of the stronghold, the guards at the gate become suspicious and threaten to shoot, at which point Zhi Hua answers not in his own voice, but instead affects a strong Hubei fisherman’s accent, saying,

Hold your fire! Waddaya (what are you) shootin’ for? Uz (us)’re comin’ on invite. Us two brothers ’ave bo’ath (both) come with fish for the lord. Officials don’t beat those carrying gifts, do they? So waddaya shootin’ for?

Zhū dālā ba, nǐ fāng mā (ma) jiān xià, nán (an) men chén qìwàng de, ān dāngjiā de dìxióng dòu (dou) lái le, tè tè gei nǐ jiā dà wáng sòng yù lái le. Guānr hái bu dá sòng lì de ne, nǐ yǒu fāng jiān zuò mā ne?

住搭拉嘍，你放麻(嗎)箭吓，難(俺)們陳起望的，俺當家的弟兄斗(都)來了，特特給你家大王送魚來了。官兒還不打送禮的呢，你又放箭做嘛呢？³

¹ I would like to thank Haun Saussy as well as the anonymous reader for Brill for their thoughtful comments.

² Between 1879 and 1900, the novel was republished at least thirteen times, under three different titles. Originally published as The Tale of Loyalty and Righteousness (Zhonglie xiayi zhuan) in 1879, it was renamed The Three Knights and the Five Gallants in 1883, only to be renamed yet again, after a careful headcount of the actual knights, as The Seven Knights and the Five Gallants (Qi xia wu yi) in 1889. For the sake of consistency, I refer to the novel solely by the 1883 title, The Three Knights, the most widely accepted title in the Chinese mainland. For a general preface to this novel, see Susan Blader’s introduction in Shi, Tales of Magistrate Bao, i–xlvi.

³ The translation of a particular Chinese dialect into English is difficult and is made even more so by the novel’s inconsistent use of paratextual techniques. Susan Blader’s translation avoids these problems by eliding the novel’s use of dialect. See Shi, Tales
Fooled by Zhi Hua’s stellar performance of their native dialect, the two guards take the heroes to be two of their own and grant them access to the stronghold.

In the scene from *The Three Knights* quoted above, two aspects draw our attention. The first is the great lengths to which the printed text goes to impress upon the reader the sounds of dialect speech. As Illustration 1, from the first printed edition of *The Three Knights*, shows, the novel registers the sound of dialect speech by printing certain words twice, one character to register the sound of the character’s accent and once to offer the reader the appropriate meaning as well as sound. For instance, before the character 俺 (pronounced an), a personal pronoun meaning “we” (itself a word already “vulgar” in tone), the text prints 難 (pronounced nan). “Both” is printed first as 斗 (dou, third tone), only then as 都 (dou, first tone). The final particle 麻 is similarly printed twice, first with the second tone 麻, and next with the toneless 嗎. The result of the paratextual device of double printing is a remarkable sonic feat: even though faced with the silent pages of a text, the reader can imagine the sounds of Hubei dialect.

The second striking aspect of this scene is the highly self-conscious way in which it captures the sound of dialect speech. After all, the scene quoted above does not simply depict a Hubei fisherman speaking his own dialect, but rather a clever martial arts hero pretending to speak in a Hubei accent. The great attention to the acoustic details of dialect speech thus does not strictly follow the logic of mimesis, that is, the literal transcription of dialect speech onto the page in an attempt to represent reality. Indeed, upon closer scrutiny the dialect

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of *Magistrate Bao*, 113–48. Since this essay is a work of scholarly inquiry, rather than a work of literary translation, I have created a set of conventions that may not always capture the spirit of dialect for an English speaker, but do give the reader a better sense of how accent is used in the original language. First, I follow the original text’s inconsistent practice in terms of the word order of dialect accent and standard character. Second, even though the original text does not always offset the second character, I have consistently placed the translation of that character in parentheses and italics. Third, I mark dialect accent by “miswriting” words in the translation. Fourth, words that are very colloquial, but not marked in the text as having a distinct accent, I have translated in a conspicuously “vulgar” manner, but I have not misspelled such words. Even though there exist slight differences between the original 1879 Juzhen tang edition and the later (1996) Zhonghua shuju edition, I will usually refer to the more easily accessible Zhonghua shuju edition, unless the differences are significant. In this case, the modern reprint (using modern punctuation to set off the dialect accent more clearly) mistakenly adds an accent in the first phrase. See, Shi Yukun, *Zhonglie xia’yi zhuan*, chapter 111, 6a; Shi Yukun, *San xia wu yi*, 2: 644.