

READING EAST ASIAN WRITING

THE LIMITS OF LITERARY THEORY

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CHAPTER 8

WHAT THE MESSENGER OF SOULS HAS TO SAY: NEW HISTORICISM AND THE POETICS OF CHINESE CULTURE

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This project attempts a new reading of traditional Chinese fiction, taking into consideration the indigenous characteristics of Chinese *xiaoshuo* texts and the Chinese concept of fiction.¹ It critically evaluates the scope of applying concepts offered by the new historicism, an approach developed by English Renaissance specialists, to the Chinese context. This study illustrates a new approach to Chinese fiction by using the example of the seventeenth-century novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* (A Tale of Marriage Destinies That Will Bring Society to Its Senses; hereafter: *Yinyuan zhuan*, or *YYZ*)² which previously has been read mainly as a comic story on the theme of a Chinese virago. Analysis focuses on the dynamics of the text, tracing the flow of social energy and the permeability of boundaries between the literary and non-literary discourses. This approach enables us to identify and analyse the voices and perceptions of the world in seventeenth-century Chinese discourse. It contributes to an interdisciplinary enquiry into fiction and its cultural context, which will be of interest to both the modern literary critic and the historian of late imperial China.

PORTRAIT OF A VIRAGO

Viragos abound in Chinese literature but stories about shrewish wives and henpecked husbands reach a climax in the *xiaoshuo* writings of the late Ming (1368–1644)/early Qing (1644–1911) era (Wu 1995). The *Yinyuan zhuan* is the first novel to focus on a wife's tyranny over her husband, and Xue Sujie, the main female protagonist, appears as one of the most violent and obnoxious viragos in Chinese literature (Wu 1986:142ff; 1995:110ff, 197). When Sujie batters her husband Di Xichen, for example, the narrative voice comments:

Sujie charged at Di Xichen and gave him a clip round the ear – who would have thought that such a beautiful girl had hands like wood?

She beat him until one side of his face became as red as the buttocks of a monkey, swelling so much that it looked like steamed loaves of bread. Di Xichen got extremely upset and took up the whip she had used to beat her chambermaid to use it on her. Before he managed to hit her, however, Sujie got hold of it and threw him down on to the floor, held down his head with her thighs and let the whiplashes rain down on him. Di Xichen yelled out for his mother and father, 'Help! Help!' (YYZ, 48:702)

Sujie, moreover, tortures Di Xichen with shoe needles and pliers (52:751-4, 59:855), makes him kneel throughout the night locked into the privy and ties him down there on a bench (60:867-8). She imprisons and starves him (63:902-3), bites a chunk out of his arm (73:1043), deals him six hundred blows with a club (95:1359-60) and pours hot charcoal down his collar (97:1385-6).

These scenes have both amused and astounded literary critics in the East and the West, who have marvelled at Sujie's antics. Unlike the viragos in other Chinese stories, Sujie does not even repent her misdeeds in hell. The depiction of the virago in *Yinyuan zhuan* makes full use of irony and satire, painting a grotesque picture of social dysfunction and the inversion of social hierarchies – but what interest does it hold for the twentieth-century reader and how do we interpret it?

Sujie has inspired some modern critics to write monographs about the phenomenon of the virago in Chinese literature (Wu 1995). In her study of the Chinese virago as a literary theme, Yenna Wu concludes that the shrewish wife is both a social phenomenon and a literary type (1988:63). Critics have struggled to spell out the author's intention in writing this work on the theme of the shrew and on retribution as marital destiny – this is what the title promises but the problem remains that principle and action do not match up properly (Wu 1986). The literary critics Wimsatt and Beardsley have warned about the pitfalls of intentional fallacy: 'the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art' (Wimsatt and Beardsley [1954] 1995:90). Whatever the author's intention, and whether he succeeded in fulfilling it or not, the voices from the text may well have an altogether different story to tell.

This leads us to some more intriguing questions: How did the characters of Sujie and Di Xichen come to be conceived? What were the elements in the society of the time that led to the creation of such characters? What can the novel tell us about life at the time in which it emerged? What story do the voices in the text have to tell? Since critics have almost exclusively focused on the theme of the virago and the analysis of rhetorical figures

within the text, very little has been done to answer these questions.³ They demand an approach that enables us to fill the gaps in our understanding of the story in its cultural context.

THE NOVEL *XINGSHI YINYUAN ZHUAN*

The *Yinyuan zhuan* is a chapter-linked novel (*zhanghui xiaoshuo*) in an idiom approaching the vernacular. It appears as a comic novel, brimming with irony and satire and with a delight in the grotesque. One of the longest traditional novels ever written, the one hundred chapter-long narrative is a milestone in the history of the *xiaoshuo* between the sixteenth-century *Jin Ping Mei* (The Plum in the Golden Vase) and the eighteenth-century *Hongloumeng* (Dream of the Red Chamber; Story of the Stone). The action takes place mainly in Shandong province and is set in the fifteenth century, but detail and rhetoric rather refer to the time of its composition in the seventeenth century around the end of the Ming dynasty (Berg 1999; Wu 1999).

As the present title of the book, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, and an earlier title, *E yinyuan* (Horrific Marriage Destinies) announce, the principle of *yuan*, 'destiny' or 'affinity' in Buddhist terminology, governs a network of relationships in human society. *Yuan* functions mainly in the specific usage of *yinyuan*, the affinity that brings men and women together. It works in both its positive sense as the source of love and marriage and its negative sense as predestined enmity and a bond of tragedy. The principle of *yuan* divides the plot into two parts, i.e. two sets of marriage destinies, but paradoxically it also links them. The first major protagonist kills with his arrow a fox demon on a hunt in Chapter 1. They are later reincarnated as the protagonist Di Xichen and his shrewish wife Xue Sujie to play out the tale of revenge for the fox's slaughter. Finally, in Chapter 100, Sujie shoots back the arrow at Di Xichen, fatally wounding him.

The novel, however, depicts not only the couple and their families but more than a dozen major protagonists, several hundred minor characters and masses of anonymous inhabitants of the fictional world. Apart from the marital partners, we encounter characters in the other Confucian ethical relationships such as rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, older and younger brothers and friends. We also see much more in sharp detail: doctors, patients, teachers, students, merchants and patrons of scholarship. We enter into the world of women, meeting not only shrewish but also virtuous ones and a multitude of mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, maids, cooks and servants. In sum, a panoramic grand view of society unfolds before us and explodes the thematic framework of marriage destinies.

The author has so far remained anonymous and we know only his pen-name Xi Zhou Sheng, Scholar of the Western Zhou.⁴ The text suggests that he was familiar with life in Shandong province and the capital Beijing in the 1630s and 1640s. The novel must have been composed sometime between 1628 and 1681 and it remains unclear whether it is a product of the Ming or the Qing dynasty. Its voices and visions, however, appear to be steeped in the late Ming world and reveal no explicit references to the dynastic change or the Qing reign. Internal evidence suggests that the current timeframe in the narrative corresponds to the last two decades of the Ming dynasty, from the late 1620s to the early 1640s, an era of political breakdown and social turmoil that also witnessed a burst of creative energy in literature and the arts.

In analysing the *Yinyuan zhuan*, the first task is to investigate the characteristics of this text. With its fierce scrutiny of provincial society, the *Yinyuan zhuan* appears as a novel of manners and has been called a 'novel of social realism' (Wu 1991:55), but the issue of realism has proven a major dilemma for literary critics. Andrew Plaks, for example, observes:

Although in much of the book we get the sense of a thoroughgoing realism that is almost cinematographic in detail . . . this mimetic treatment gives way to various levels of unreality or distortion at many key points. (Plaks 1985:564)

Critics have been battling with the generic classifications of the novel. Labels for the novel range from 'photographic realism', not mimetic but rather a 'stylization of reality', to 'a conventional Buddhist tale of moral retribution' that fails 'to achieve realistic integrity' (Ch'en Shouyi 1961:573; Wu 1986:170; Hsia 1968:204-5). The guidelines to the *Yinyuan zhuan* refer to the paradox of fiction and realism in the text:

First, Chao Yuan, Di Zongyu, Miss Tong and Miss Xue in this tale are not the real names for I do not wish to let the facts expose the people.

Second, for all the people with flawless moral conduct I use their real names . . . (YYZ, 3:1537)

According to this claim the fictional and the historical coexist within the narrative as complementary parts rather than opposites. The narrative even becomes explicit in erasing the borders of history and fiction, reality and illusion by means of paradox when announcing: 'Virtue becomes vice, fiction becomes truth' (9:127). Puns on *zhen* (real) and *jia* (false) in the text (10:146) anticipate the eighteenth-century novel *Hongloumeng*, which

develops this paradox further and declares as the reader enters into the realm of the novel:

Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true,
Real becomes not-real when the unreal's real.
(*Hongloumeng* 1957:1:5; Cao Xueqin 1973:55)

In the *Yinyuan zhuan* the key notion *yuan* (destiny) itself takes part in the paradoxical play on reality and illusion, appearing as *jiayuan*, a false form of destiny (YYZ, 80:1134). Eventually *yuan* does turn out to play an ambiguous role as the denouement does not match up with the principles and promises involved in karmic retribution and marriage destinies.

The identification of the voice of the narrator in the *Yinyuan zhuan* also plays an important part in the analysis of the narrative play on fiction and history. According to the literary critics Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal, the text consists of several agents that reflect perceived reality by speaking and seeing: the speakers/narrators and the perceivers/focalizers (Genette 1980:189-91; Bal 1988:119-20).⁵ The terms *narrator* and *focalizer* refer to a linguistic function and not a person, an 'it', a linguistic subject or agent and not a 'he' or 'she', a male or female person.⁶ This also illustrates their difference to the biographical author or the implied author (Booth 1983:151; Bal 1988:120).⁷ Narrator(s) and focalizer(s) can appear as either identical or different agents. In addition the text reflects another layer of voices and visions: those of the fictional characters/actors who also perform by speaking and perceiving.

The voice of the narrator in the *Yinyuan zhuan* frequently interferes in the action as an omniscient agent. It also intrudes into the story announcing its presence as a visible 'I' (*wo*). The 'I' in the story is but one version of the narrator, one of the several different possibilities of its manifestation. The narrative voice represents human follies and vices in carnivalesque imagery with warning and apocalyptic overtones. In deploring the current state of affairs and advertising a revival of Confucian norms and values, the narrator reveals itself as a Confucian conservative. But it also appears in many other guises – telling and commenting while shifting its tone of voice and parading once as a moralist, then as a preacher, teacher, satirist, humorist and caricaturist. It assumes the voices of an epic poet, scribe, reporter and commentator, and even eye-witness. Addressing both fictional characters and the implied reader directly, it functions as a mediator between the actors and the narratee. The narrative voice also stresses the topicality of events in the story. By referring to 'nowadays' (*jin*), it fabricates the illusion of topical references linking the world in the story to

the contemporary present time of narrating in the seventeenth century (e.g. YYZ, 20:304).⁸

In the *Yinyuan zhuan*, then, fiction and history both divide and converge: the good characters retain their 'real' names and the bad characters assume pseudonyms. Some events masquerade as 'real' and others as unreal. The narrator claims to have personally witnessed certain scenes in the story while grotesque and carnivalesque imagery introduces a layer of hyper-realism. Ultimately both reality and illusion exist in written discourse solely in the perception of the narrator and actors. Fiction and history interweave in the textual orchestration of voices and visions, true to the *xiaoshuo* tradition of rhetoric.

READING THE *XIAOSHUO*: HISTORY AND FICTION FROM THE CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

As we set out to analyse the voices in the *Yinyuan zhuan*, let us first consider how Chinese readers would have read and understood the rhetoric of the *xiaoshuo*. In modern Chinese the term *xiaoshuo* generally translates into English as 'novel' or 'fiction' but the Chinese novel borrows a term with ancient roots that had little to do with creative fiction. The concept of *xiaoshuo* originally stems from historiography.

The term *xiaoshuo* was first used in the *Zhuangzi* (Book of Zhuangzi; attr. to Zhuang Zhou, 369–286 BC).⁹ It also occurs in the *Xunzi* (Book of Xunzi; attr. to Xun Qing, c. 300–230 BC); the character *xiao* meaning 'minor or petty' and *shuo* denoting 'political advice or persuasion' (*Xunzi yinde*, 85/22/70). *Xiaoshuo* thus occurs in the meaning of small talk, chit-chat, petty talk or minor persuasions and both the *Zhuangzi* and *Xunzi* refer to the adornment or embellishment of such political advice (Wilhelm 1972:252).

The earliest definition of *xiaoshuo* as a literary genre occurs in Huan Tan's (43 BC–AC 28) *Xinlun* (New Treatise) which was written in c. 2 AD:¹⁰

The *xiaoshuo* writers collect fragments and minor sayings and select parables they have heard to make short books. The *xiaoshuo* contain words that have a certain value for controlling oneself and regulating one's household. (*Wenxuan*, 31:6a)

The modern scholar Victor Mair reminds us of the difference between fiction and *xiaoshuo*:

Where the Chinese term etymologically implies a kind of gossip or anecdote, the English word indicates something made up or created

by an author or writer. 'Xiaoshuo' imports something, not of particularly great moment, that is presumed actually to have happened For this reason, many recorders of *xiaoshuo* are at great pains to tell us exactly from whom, when, where, and in what circumstances they heard their stories. (Mair 1983:21–2; transcription adapted by the author)

Mair here emphasizes the Chinese claim for historicity in writing *xiaoshuo* and points to the underlying difference in conception from the English term, placing *xiaoshuo* in the realm of historical discourse.

The grand historian of the Latter Han dynasty (25–220), Ban Gu (32–92), included an entry for *xiaoshuo* in the bibliography of the first dynastic history, the *Yiwenzhi* (Bibliographic Treatise) in the *Hanshu* (History of the [Former] Han Dynasty) which is based on the bibliographic catalogue *Qilüe* (Seven Epitomes) by Liu Xin (50 BC–AD 23) (*Hanshu*, 30:1744–5). Ban Gu categorizes the school of *xiaoshuo* writers under philosophy and defines it in the following way:

The trend of the *xiaoshuo jia* emerged from the Board of Petty Officials. It was created by those who picked up the gossip of the streets and the sayings of the alleys and repeated what they had heard wherever they went. (Translation adapted from Wilhelm 1972:251–2)

Although Ban Gu traces the genre of *xiaoshuo* to minor – i.e. not quite properly Confucian – persuasions and popular lore, the modern scholar Hellmut Wilhelm conjectures that it must have contained expository writings with political intent as in the *Zhuangzi* and *Xunzi*, rather than popular lore. His analysis of the early *xiaoshuo* from the Zhou dynasty (trad. 1122/hist. c. 1050–221 BC) reveals that these texts came from the persuasion and from the (legendary) episode and must have concerned fictionalized history or historical legend (Wilhelm 1972:252–63).

During the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties (220–581), *xiaoshuo* referred mainly to works of history and philosophy but never the *belles-lettres* (*wen*) (Cheng Yizhong 1987:44). The author of the first book-length study in Chinese literary criticism, Liu Xie (c. 465–520), classified literary writings including philosophy and history in his *Wenxin diaolong* (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons) but did not recognize *xiaoshuo* as literature (Lu 1994:46–7).¹¹ Literary critics followed his example until the twentieth century.

The titles of traditional *xiaoshuo* texts include elements remindful of their historical association, such as *zhi* (record), *ji* (account) and *zhuan* (transmitted tale). Gan Bao's (fl. 320) preface to his early fourth-century

collection of *zhiguai xiaoshuo* ('records of the strange', or 'writings recording abnormalities') entitled *Soushen ji* (In Search of the Supernatural) regards the texts as statements on historiography, defends the importance of committing historical information to writing and insists on their claim to truthfulness (*Jinshu*, 82:2151). The style of terse, documentary prose and the biographical structure in the *Soushen ji* are reminiscent of historiographical works. It also contains materials from the dynastic histories, from their commentaries and from ethnographic descriptions.

In his autobiography in the *Baopuzi* (He Who Embraces Simplicity) the Daoist philosopher Ge Hong (c. 280–340), who also wrote *zhiguai xiaoshuo*, establishes their relation to historiography:

I moreover composed a book on people who are not normally mentioned in books, which resulted in the *Shenxian zhuan* in 10 scrolls (*juan*), and I did the same for people who did not enter officialdom which resulted in the *Yinyu zhuan*, also in 10 scrolls. (*Baopuzi*, 203)

In his use of the term, *xiaoshuo* refers to an unofficial version of historiography.

Since Xun Xu (d. 289) and Li Chong (early fourth century), the dynastic histories list books under four categories: classics (*jing*), historical records (*shi*), philosophical writings (*zi*) and miscellaneous works (*ji*) (Drège 1991:109). The works classified as *xiaoshuo* all appear under philosophical writings (Lu Hsun 1982:3; Cheng Yizhong 1987:44–5; Lu 1994:49).¹² This categorization remained influential throughout the centuries – the eighteenth-century *Siku quanshu* (Complete Library of Four Branches of Books) collection still retained *xiaoshuo* in the same section and even twentieth-century scholars and bibliographers have tended to follow this classification, listing classical *xiaoshuo* under philosophical writings and vernacular *xiaoshuo* under miscellaneous works (Cheng Yizhong 1987:44; Dudbridge 1995:39).¹³

The only extant items from the *xiaoshuo* listed in the *Suishu* (History of the Sui Dynasty) are the *Yan Danzi* (Prince Dan of Yan), a historical narrative, and *Shishuo xinyu* (New Account of Tales of the World), which also contains anecdotes from historical sources and appears as a kind of *yeshi*, unofficial history. Stories about ghosts, spirits and the supernatural world from the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties by contrast did not count as *xiaoshuo*, but would appear under *zazhuan* (miscellaneous traditions) in the history section (*shi*) in the *Jiu Tangshu* (Old History of the Tang Dynasty), under *zazhuan ji* (records of miscellaneous traditions) in the *Xin Tangshu* (New History of the Tang Dynasty), or under *zhuan ji* (records

of traditions) in other works (Cheng Yizhong 1987:44). The early Tang dynasty (618–907) historians and bibliographers apparently found no reason to distinguish between *xiaoshuo* and historical records (Lu 1994:49, 130).

In 710 the historian Liu Zhiji (661–721) critically surveyed all aspects of historical scholarship in his work *Shitong* (Anatomy of Histories or Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Historiography) and established standards of critical procedure for historians.¹⁴ The Chinese historian considered history to be a mirror of human affairs; its pattern of success or failure served a didactic function. The historian regarded his task as the 'faithful recording of events' (*shilu*) and was fascinated with the narration of events (*xushi*) (Lu 1994:130). Liu Zhiji praised the skilful narration of events in imperial historiography and criticized *xiaoshuo* texts from the historian's point of view. He regarded *xiaoshuo* texts (including *zazhuan*, *zaji* [miscellaneous records] and *dili* [geography] writings such as *Shishuo xinyu* and *Soushen ji*) as a branch of historiography, assessed them for veracity and reliability and concluded they were 'flawed works of history' (Pulleyblank 1961:135–66).¹⁵ Tang scholars since Liu Zhiji thus began to view the *xiaoshuo* from the philosophy category and the *zazhuan* from the history category as one kind (Cheng Yizhong 1987:45f.).¹⁶

In the High Tang period the poet and painter Gu Kuang (d. c. 806) sketched in his preface to the *Guangyi ji* (Great Book of Marvels), a collection of tales by his contemporary and friend, the scholar-official Dai Fu, the state of the field of what later came to be known as *zhiguai xiaoshuo* (*Wenyuan yinghua*, 737:5b–7a).¹⁷ He listed the names of 'men who recorded strange things' (*zhiguai zhi shi*) from the Han (206 BC–AD 220) to the Tang dynasty as belonging to one tradition, although he did not refer to their works as *xiaoshuo*. The imperial bibliographies (*Suishu*, *Jiu Tangshu*) classify the texts in Gu Kuang's list under 'miscellaneous traditions' (*zazhuan*), 'geography' (*dili*), 'miscellaneous histories' (*zashi*), 'miscellaneous schools of thought' (*zajia*), 'Daoism', 'standard histories', 'histories of usurping dynasties', and 'commonplaces' (*xiaoshuo jia*) (Dudbridge 1995:18–45). Gu Kuang's list gives insight into the way Tang readers and writers would have read and understood these tales: historical records, geographical writings and supernatural stories all form part of the same discourse charting the mental map of their world.

In the late Tang period, Gao Yanxiu regarded 'unofficial history writings' (*yeshi*) and 'miscellaneous records' (*zaji*) as *xiaoshuo*, thus identifying *xiaoshuo* as history rather than philosophy. Duan Chengshi (c. 803–63) was the first to call the *zhiguai* tales *xiaoshuo* (Cheng Yizhong 1987:46).

All these documents illustrate the lack of clear-cut boundaries between history and fiction in the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern dynasties and

Tang periods. The *xiaoshuo* texts retain the tradition of recording 'street gossip' as their source, and may have included oral narratives, family held records and other documents of regional sayings and customs (Cheng Yizhong 1987:50; Campany 1996:179; Nienhauser 1999:188).

MISLEADING TERMINOLOGY: *ZHIGUAI* AND *CHUANQI*

Ever since the publication of Lu Xun's (1881–1936) *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction) modern scholars have distinguished between prose narratives from the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties under the label of *zhiguai* and Tang tales under the generic label of *chuanqi*, regarding the former as proto-fiction and the latter as the beginning of consciously creative fiction (DeWoskin 1977:51; Adkins 1980; Kao 1985:21ff.). Recent scholarship has shown, however, that this conception is erroneous and represents but a twentieth-century generic classification (Dudbridge 1999). The term *zhiguai*¹⁸ has been used as a generic term only in modern times and it refers not just to texts from the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties but to an unbroken tradition of 'recording the strange' (*zhiguai*), running from antiquity through the Tang dynasty right to the present day (Li Jianguo 1984:11; Dudbridge 1995:18).¹⁹

Similarly, the term *chuanqi* originally appeared as the title of a tale collection by the Tang writer Pei Xing (825–80) and was used in the Song dynasty (980–1279) by Chen Shidao (c. 1068–94) to describe writings in the style of Pei Xing. Although in the Ming era Hu Yinglin (1551–1602) used the term to refer to Tang dynasty tales (Cheng Yizhong 1987:49–50),²⁰ it was not adopted in a generic way until Lu Xun's criticism appeared in the twentieth century and it was not used for classification in catalogues. As far as Tang readers were concerned, no distinction existed between *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* and both referred to a 'literature of record' among historical documents (Dudbridge 1995; Campany 1996; Nienhauser 1999). Most recently, the sinologist Glen Dudbridge (1999) has argued that the traditional and modern scholars' instinct and urge to categorize these narratives have often made culturally sensitive interpretation impossible. The dominant genre of narrative in imperial China remained history writing and the poetics of narrative continued as a theory of historiography until the Ming/Qing era. Attitudes towards the reading of *xiaoshuo* began to change with the emergence of the long vernacular *xiaoshuo* in the late Ming era. Writers and critics began to emphasize that *xiaoshuo* narratives were self-consciously non-historical and creative works that required their own

poetics rather than being judged as defective history or quasi-history (Lu 1994:134).²¹

The Ming/Qing discourse on the nature of *xiaoshuo* texts develops ideas first formulated in the Song period. Guanyuan Naideweng (fl. 1235) attempted to classify genres of storytelling (including *shuohua*, *huaben* and *xiaoshuo*) in his *Ducheng jisheng* (A Record of the Splendours of the Capital City) and discussed the nature of *xiaoshuo* as a mixture of *xu* (imaginary) and *shi* (real) and also *zhen* (true) and *jia* (false) (*Ducheng jisheng*, 82). The self-conscious mixing of reality and illusion became a common topos in the writing of the long vernacular *xiaoshuo* of the Ming/Qing era. The late Ming critic Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624) commented on the style of *xiaoshuo* writings in his *Wuzazu* (Five Miscellanies) as follows:

Fiction (*xiaoshuo*) and dramatic compositions should contain a mixture of the fictive (*xu*) and the real (*shi*). Then they become writings that capture the essence of literary games. One should try to construct feelings and scenes as perfectly as possible but not ask whether they really exist or not. (*Wuzazu*, 1287)

In the early seventeenth century the champion of popular literature, Feng Menglong (1574–1646), also discussed the dialectic of principle (*li*) and events (*shi*), and the mixing of true (*zhen*) and fictive (*yan*) in *xiaoshuo* writing. In his preface to the anthology *Jingshi tongyan* (Words to Warn the World) he states that events in fiction do not have to be completely real or completely fictive: 'The protagonists may not have done the things, and the things may not belong to the protagonists' (Xu, ZXX, 97). In Feng's view, the truthfulness of a story does not depend on whether the depicted events are historically verifiable; what matters is the principle and its containing some universal truth.

The delight in punning and playing with the notions of reality and illusion marks most of the great vernacular Ming/Qing novels and culminates in the self-reflexivity of the *Hongloumeng*, which emphasizes its fictionality while both the narrator and the commentator, Zhiyan zhai (Red Inkstone), insist on the truthfulness of the story (Yu 1988). As we have seen, the *Yinyuan zhuan*, too, celebrates this very paradox.

THE HISTORIAN AS A MESSENGER OF SOULS

In exploring how the literary text communicates to us from the past and how the fictional artefact relates to historical 'reality', we need an approach that allows us to take into account the Chinese discourse on the nature of *xiaoshuo* texts and their cultural idiosyncrasies. The reality of seventeenth-century China that we can know today exists only as a narrated or perceived reality in the voices of various observers and in the reconstructed images from surviving sources. Each textual source represents a construct in itself and communicates its particular perception of the past. Literary texts clearly mark their representations of the world as images of artistic perception. The novel after all represents a literary construct that conveys its own particular perception of the world. It does not mirror 'historical reality'; rather it presents a version of perceived reality. Our interest in the *Yinyuan zhuan* focuses on this very issue: how written discourse communicates perceived reality and historical experience.

Recent literary criticism abandons the distinction of historical and literary sources in textual analysis. Twentieth-century literary theory rests on the assumption that all texts can equally be decoded and deconstructed. Bakhtin, for example, postulates the intrinsic relation between fiction and history:

The boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between literature and non-literature and so forth are not laid up in heaven. Every specific situation is historical. And the growth of literature is not merely development and change within the fixed boundaries of any given definition; the boundaries themselves are constantly changing. (cited in Gearhart 1984:i)

Suzanne Gearhart describes in her literary-historical approach to the French Enlightenment period the boundary separating history and fiction as 'open' (5-8). She points out that the study of the relationship of history and fiction is one of the most important critical tasks. Structuralist critics such as Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov discard the older distinction between historical 'evidence' and fictional 'narrative' that Gallie and Collingwood proposed (Gallie 1964). Barthes has questioned the traditional opposition between history and fiction, maintaining that history is essentially a form of narrative (Barthes 1970; Gearhart 1984:204). Barthes argues that fictional discourse has an arbitrary relationship to historical reality but historical narratives are also arbitrary in this sense. Todorov regards both history and fiction as types of narrative. For Todorov neither history nor fiction exists outside of language. Both constitute forms

of discourse. He argues that *l'histoire* (in the meaning of both history and story) is always a convention: 'It does not exist at the level of events themselves.' It is 'an abstraction because it is always perceived and narrated by someone. It does not exist "in itself"' (Todorov 1966:127; Belsey 1985:ix). In sum, fictional and non-fictional sources may differ in their style and rhetoric but both constitute forms of written discourse conveying particular perceptions.

The concept of perception is of crucial importance to our analysis. How does a text perceive the world? How can it communicate perceived reality? How does it represent historical experience? How does it relate to its context? The French cultural historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie has compared the role of the modern historian to that of Arnaud Gélis, the messenger of souls in the mediaeval village of Montaillou whose task is to make the dead speak and to communicate between the living and the dead (Le Roy Ladurie 1982:601). His historical approach has inspired analytical approaches to both Western and Chinese literary narratives.

The Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt tackles the problem of perception in textual analysis in terms of voices. Drawing on the image of the historian as a messenger of souls, he embarks on his study of literary texts from the English Renaissance period and their historical contexts with the 'desire to speak with the dead' (Greenblatt 1988:1). He cautions that this involves not one single voice of the other but many voices including one's own: the voices within the literary text, those from its contexts, and finally the critic's own voice that poses questions to the text and searches for answers (20). The concept of the multi-voiced or polyphonic novel in literary criticism is already familiar from the Russian critic Bakhtin (1984:5-46), but here the dialogue of voices refers to the work of literary criticism that looks at literature as historical records of the past. Greenblatt has referred to his style of analysis as new historicism, but he has come to prefer the term 'cultural poetics' to emphasize his concern with the integration of aesthetic and social discourse (Greenblatt 1990:147).

The new historicism merits a closer look as it offers some useful concepts in our search for an approach to the Chinese *xiaoshuo* that remains sensitive to indigenous concepts such as the perceived historicity of texts. The term was coined by Roy Harvey Pearce in his book *Historicism Once More* (1969). In 1973, Hayden White's book *Metahistory* had a powerful impact on historians by pointing out their unconscious reliance on rhetorical figures (White 1973). In the 1980s and 1990s, Renaissance scholars in America, notably Stephen Greenblatt, made the term fashionable when they embarked on a new historical and cultural approach to Shakespeare and his world.

The new historicists appear as a loose group of modern scholars including both historians and literary critics who share a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history (Montrose 1986:8; Veenser 1994). The new historicism tries to turn away from the formal, de-contextualized analysis that has dominated criticism in the 1980s and 1990s (Greenblatt 1990:163). While the old historicists (e.g. Leopold von Ranke) attempt to reconstruct history *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* (as it actually happened), claiming to avoid all value judgements in their account of the past, the new historicism challenges the reading of fiction as an unproblematic documentary source from which one can easily build a picture of societies of the past (169).²² New historicism instead pays attention to rhetoric as a ground for the contestation and negotiation of power relations and acknowledges the modern critic's engagement and partiality.

The new historicists reject any notion of history as an imitation of events in the world or a reflection of external reality and propose to treat both literature and history as forms of discourse. They acknowledge their debt to recent developments in literary, anthropological and social theory, in particular post-structuralism, but insist that the new historicism can be situated as a practice but is 'no doctrine at all' and that it remains 'unresolved and disingenuous about its relation to literary theory'.²³ (146-7).

Independently from European Renaissance scholarship, Dudbridge has applied a similar approach to the study of traditional Chinese literature. He uses Le Roy Ladurie's concept of the historian as the messenger of souls in tracing the sequence of voices in his analysis of Tang dynasty tales and their historical context (Dudbridge 1995:1-17). Although Dudbridge does not use the term 'new historicism', his analysis similarly reacts against the old historicism that would regard anecdotal literature as a simple and straightforward testimony of past practices in the analysis of customs and beliefs. Instead, like the new historicists, he takes an interest in historical particularity, reading the tales as a literature of record, not of fantasy or creative fiction (16; cf. Greenblatt 1990:164).

In his analysis of the Chinese poetics of narrative, Sheldon Lu has also attempted to solve the 'dilemma of balancing respect for the historical character of literary texts and the desire to appropriate cross-cultural and transhistorical methodologies' by pointing to the new historicist's 'other sense of history' that understands history as a story or narrative and allows for the coexistence of multiple, competing and conflicting histories (Lu 1994:160-1).

It may be worth our while, then, to outline and critically evaluate some of the key assumptions shared by the new historicists that appear most relevant to our inquiry into the Chinese *xiaoshuo* and examine how useful

these concepts would prove in an approach to Chinese texts.²⁴ Let us consider here three main assumptions.

(1) *Literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably*

New historicists assume that both literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably, that both constitute forms of cultural discourse and require analysis that takes them into consideration simultaneously (Veenser 1994:16-17; Greenblatt 1990:170ff.). This appears as the most important and relevant concept to our inquiry into Chinese fiction as it provides a critical approach that remains sensitive to the Chinese conception of *xiaoshuo* texts and their perceived historicity. The new historicism abandons the distinction between a literary text and its cultural or historical backdrop and demands an investigation into the margins as well as the centre. This approach can provide us with an analytical tool for seeing both literary and non-literary texts in context and reconstructing resonance and significance within a cross-generic discourse (Greenblatt 1990:169).

One problem here lies in the stress on cultural significance at the expense of the role of aesthetics in textual analysis. The portrayal of the virago in the *Yinyuan zhuan* thrives on satire, irony, hyperbole and the grotesque. In order to analyse the text for its potential of yielding glimpses of perceived reality, we cannot afford to ignore its rhetoric. In dealing with the Chinese *xiaoshuo*, therefore, we face a dual task: on the one hand, we need to analyse the rhetoric and aesthetics of the text and, on the other, we shall use the aesthetics as a tool to reconstruct the perceptions in the voices that speak through the textual traces of the past.

(2) *All works of art are embedded in a network of negotiation and exchange*

The new historicism assumes that all works of art are embedded in a network of negotiations and exchange that accompanies the production of a text. In Greenblatt's definition, art 'does not simply exist in all cultures; it is made up along with other products, practices, [and] discourses of a given culture.' In his use of the word, 'made up' means 'inherited, transmitted, altered, modified, [and] reproduced far more than it means invented' and he claims that 'as a rule, there is very little pure invention in culture' (1988:13). The work of art appears as a product of collective negotiation and exchange between a creator and the institutions or practices of society and involves currencies such as money and prestige and, as returns, pleasure and interest (1988:12; 1990:158). The new historicism is interested in reconstructing the historical circumstances of the production and consumption of texts and regards the context not as a fixed background, but rather as a dynamic network of social forces (1990:170). Greenblatt uses the term 'resonance' to refer to the dynamics of such forces in culture (161-83).

A focus on resonance could provide important insights into cultural practices in the Chinese context, too, as a detailed knowledge about the creation of a text and the motives of creation would help safeguard against the pitfalls of intentional fallacy and illuminate the position of the text in relation to power, authority and the contestations or manipulations involved in its creation. The problem with the *Yinyuan zhuan*, however, as with so many other *xiaoshuo* texts, is that it remains difficult to analyse the historical circumstances of artistic production, since this requires exact knowledge about the authorship and dating of a text. In the case of the *Yinyuan zhuan*, we know next to nothing about the author and we face the additional difficulty of not even being able to determine whether the text is a product of the Ming or the Qing period.

Despite this problem, the concept of cultural embeddedness remains useful in the Chinese context insofar as it seeks to explore how other cultural structures resonate within imaginative literature (164–9). Artistic imagination appears as bound up with a collective, social energy (1988:12). Greenblatt defines this *energia* as a term from rhetoric (rather than physics), denoting the power of language to cause 'a stir to the mind' (6). Social energy circulates through anything produced by society, including dreams, desire, anxiety and experience (19). Although this concept has been formulated for the analysis of Renaissance culture in Europe, it may be applied to the Chinese context, too, as it can help us identify and define aspects of the culture out of which the *xiaoshuo* texts have emerged, even if we cannot recover the historical circumstances of the original production and consumption of those texts. Most recently, in his study of Tang dynasty tales, Dudbridge (1999:169–70) has also stressed the need to explore echo and resonance between texts in the analysis of *xiaoshuo* narratives – rather than questions of generic category which remain problematic. He also speaks of the 'energies in the surrounding intellectual culture' involved in the creation and reading of texts (154, 156).

Chinese writers themselves have acknowledged and pointed to the phenomenon that the concept of social energy describes. The late Ming scholar Feng Menglong, for example, maintained that *xiaoshuo* narratives have always existed side by side with other genres. Although society has attributed only marginal value to *xiaoshuo* stories, their power to affect and transform the readers exceeds that of the Confucian classics. The Great Understanding or the Way, as Sheldon Lu paraphrases Feng, 'becomes accessible to us when we have truly recognised not only the relativity of each and every little narrative (*xiaoshuo*) but also the value and worth inherent in each narrative's partial truth and local knowledge' (Lu 1994:168). Tracing the flow of social energy will show the permeability of

boundaries between the literary and non-literary discourse and help to identify the voices and perceptions from the past.

(3) Any critique is subjective and influenced by cultural contexts

The new historicism moreover holds that any critique or analysis of a text is inherently subjective and any reading is influenced by the cultural contexts both of the text and the critic. This self-consciousness about the critic's voice and position derives from concepts developed by Jacques Derrida and the theory of deconstruction (Veese 1994:12, 31 n. 25), and manifests itself in the sense of ambivalence and embarrassment apparent in the self-confessions of new historicist critics, leading Greenblatt to conclude that 'there can be no single method, no overall picture, no exhaustive and definitive cultural poetics' (Greenblatt 1988:19). In diametrical opposition to the old historicism, the new historicism challenges the notion that any objective analysis or reconstruction of history is possible and instead proposes approaching textual traces from the past with a spirit of wonder (1990:170). This position ultimately negates the possibility of making any claims to accessing history through critical discourse.

For the present purpose, too, it remains important to stress that any form of analysis is bound to be subjective and to acknowledge the presence of the critic's voice in selecting and organizing his or her material. Instead of the concept of wonder, it may be more suitable in the present project to place more emphasis on the spirit of exploration in the historical inquiry into literary texts that seeks to recreate the perceptions from the past and their versions of historical experience.

PERCEPTIONS AND VOICES

In the present approach, then, some of the concepts offered by cultural historians and new historicist critics may be fruitfully adapted to the analysis of Chinese texts. In the role of messenger of souls, the historian can tackle the concept of perception in textual analysis by identifying the voices that communicate from the past and by reconstructing their meaning in critical comparison with contextual – both literary and non-literary – sources. This analysis gives access to voices rarely heard in other more conventional sources, for Chinese orthodox historiography, as laid down in the government records, represents the official version of history. Official sources leave us with a version of history that projects self-images in accordance with the current state ideology or the tendentious bias of their authors. Fictional accounts, too, represent versions of perceived history. But they speak out where other sources remain silent, focusing on people,

actions or situations that have not merited the attention of other records. Providing insight into the realm of thoughts and emotions, they give access to both the bright and the dark aspects of life, the obverse and reverse sides of historical events. They deal with vernacular culture as opposed to the officially recognized culture and the imperially ordained version of history.²⁵

As a historian of the popular imagination, of the hopes, fears and aspirations in a society from the past, the critic accesses imaginative literature not primarily for its aesthetic value, but to retrace how other cultural structures resonate within it. In placing the text within the context, we look for the dynamics of the text rather than the structural or formal aspects, and try to trace how social energy circulates within it. It should have become sufficiently clear that this approach does not regard literature as a reflection of society or a looking-glass in which we can see history, but instead attempts to analyse the voices and perceptions of a lost culture.

The image of the messenger of souls who tries to make the dead speak appears as a powerful metaphor for the modern historian who acknowledges his or her own voice and engaged partiality. Some of the new historicist concepts appear particularly useful in the context of analysing Chinese fiction as they allow for an approach to *xiaoshuo* texts that pays attention to indigenous ideas. The analysis of the cultural discourse can open a new window on the social life and informal aspects of traditional Chinese society that rarely become accessible through other sources.

THE MEN AROUND THE VIRAGO

Let us return to our main protagonists Sujie and Di Xichen. To shed new light on the theme of the virago, we shall try to approach it from a different angle by looking at the men around her: above all her husband, but also her father and her father-in-law.

The narrative traces Di Xichen on his way up the social ladder. His parents were originally farmers. Having become an inn-keeper and ranking now among the richest men in town, the father tries his best to educate his only son according to literati standards in order to pave his way into the scholar elite. Di Xichen, however, appears as an incapable student with an inclination for mischief. All attempts at making him acquire a standard Confucian education fail. Despite his lack of literary accomplishment Di Xichen starts climbing the ladder of success via the regular route, that is the examination system. Di Xichen manages to pass the preliminary examinations by virtue of cheating with a little help from his friends and classmates. Later in life he opens a pawnshop (YYZ, 75:1072, 77:1092). For

a Confucian scholar, giving up book-learning and going into business would traditionally indicate social decline.

In the late Ming period, however, a new phenomenon took shape as the population increased while chances dwindled for aspiring scholars to succeed in the higher examinations: many literati 'gave up book-learning and went into business' (*qiru jugu, qushi congshang*).²⁶ Their careers began to turn conventional ideas about social hierarchies topsy-turvy (Yu Yingshi 1987:104–21). Chinese tradition defines social hierarchies in terms of the four classes: the scholar-officials come at the top, followed by the farmers, then the artisans and, at the bottom of the social scale, the merchants.²⁷ However, in the sixteenth century the writer and scholar-official Wang Daokun (1525–93), a descendant of salt merchants from Huizhou, claimed that 'the good merchant is no worse than the learned Confucian' (*Taihan ji*, 55:1a).²⁸ The poet and literatus Li Mengyang (1473–1529) compared the good merchant to the good scholar (*Kongtong xiansheng ji*, 44:4a).²⁹ The words of the essayist, teacher and official Gui Youguang (1507–71) echo his perceptions of change in the world: 'In the past the four orders pursued different professions but nowadays scholars frequently mix and mingle with farmers and merchants' (*Zhenchuan xianshengji*, 13:319).³⁰ The voice of the writer and thinker He Xinyin (1517–79) reflects how the concept of the four orders and their hierarchy became obsolete: 'Merchants are superior to farmers and artisans, scholars are superior to merchants and sages are superior to scholars' (*He Xinyin ji*, 3:53).³¹

Similar voices came from late Ming fiction. Ling Mengchu's (1580–1644) *Erke Pai'an jingqi*, for example, declares: 'In Huizhou, as custom has it, business comes first, scholarship second' (*Erke Pai'an jingqi*, 37:680). These trends in society also resonate in the rhetoric of the *Yinyuan zhuan*. The narrative voice does not deride Di Xichen for his change of career as he gives up book-learning and goes into business; on the contrary, the adult Di Xichen as a merchant is on his way to good morality, happiness and salvation, and he eventually succeeds in educating his sons to become Confucian scholars. Although Di Xichen has never counted as a real scholar, having succeeded only by virtue of his father's wealth and corruption in the system, other examples in the novel such as that of Sujie's father Professor Xue and her father-in-law Mr Di show how successful scholars too become merchants while rising in social status and how successful merchants patronize scholarship while displaying perfect morality in Confucian terms.

Professor Xue gives up a career in teaching and sets up his own business with a textile shop in Shandong. The fact that he has taken up trade does not interfere with his affirming the Confucian value system and there is little

satire in the portrayal of this character or derision in the tone of the narrating voice.³²

In the Song dynasty Confucians still insisted that even a rich merchant could not measure himself with a scholar, as the writings of the scholar-official and historian Ouyang Xiu (1007–72) testify (*Ouyang wenzhong gong wenji*, 63:15b).³³ Attitudes towards merchants began to change during the latter half of the Ming reign. The philosopher Wang Yangming (Wang Shouren, 1472–1529) spread the concept that 'the four orders have different professions but follow the same Way. Their devotion to it is one and the same' (*Wang Wencheng gong quanshu*, 25:363). Believing that any man in the street could become a sage, Wang Yangming proclaimed: 'Even doing business all day long does not prevent you from becoming a sage or a worthy' (*Chuanxi lu shiyi*, 14:398). Representatives of the Taizhou School of Thought, the radical wing of the Wang Yangming School, such as Wang Gen (1483–1541) and Wang Dong' (1503–81) further disseminated these concepts (*Mingru xue'an*, 32:709–17, 732–44).³⁴

The seventeenth-century scholar-official Wu Weiye (1609–72) observed that many contemporary merchants, notably those who had 'given up book-learning', were Confucians and followers of Wang Yangming (*Meicun jia canggao*, 50:1a–2a). Wang Yangming's teachings could justify their change of career. On the other hand, as the influx of silver from abroad led to an unprecedented economic boom in China, his ideas responded to new trends in late Ming society (Atwell 1982:68–90). Wang Yangming praised the scholar-turned-merchant Fang Lin for adopting Confucian morality and values in the world of business (*Wang Wencheng gong quanshu*, 25:363). In the *Yinyuan zhuan* Professor Xue's business flourishes while he remains a 'good man' (*haoren*) (YYZ, 25:364, 25:375, 29:433). The morality of Professor Xue in the end sanctions his actions. He remains sincere and upright, never discarding the ethos of his Confucian background. In depicting Professor Xue, the narrating voice abandons all traditional Confucian prejudices against the new elite of scholar-cum-merchants.

At the same time as scholars became merchants, wealthy merchants began to identify with literati culture and their circles in turn produced many scholars (Fujii Hiroshi 1953/54; Fu Yiling 1956:49–91; Zhang Haipeng and Tang Lixing 1984). Sujie's father-in-law, the illiterate innkeeper Mr Di, also becomes a patron of scholarship, using his wealth to sponsor Confucian studies. Moreover, by marrying his son Di Xichen to Sujie, he links his family with that of a Confucian scholar.

The joining of the Di and Xue families conjures up all the nightmares of mixed society that might have plagued Confucianists. The marriage of Di Xichen and Sujie runs counter to the concept of the superiority of scholars and inferiority of merchants within the hierarchy of the four orders. In this

light Di Xichen, the boy from a peasant and merchant background, and Sujie, the daughter and sister of educated men and scholars, form a grotesque *mésalliance*. Furthermore, Di Xichen's social inferiority clashes with the traditional concept of male superiority within the marital hierarchy.³⁵

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The narrating voice blames marital destiny and karmic retribution for the failure of Sujie's and Di Xichen's marriage. But as this explanation remains fraught with ambiguities, the reader's attention shifts to the protagonists' own words and actions. They dramatize the conflicts arising when individuals from different social backgrounds begin to mix and intermarry. In Di Xichen and Sujie we see the first generation of scholars and merchants under one roof. They fail to adapt to each other. The professor's daughter proves incapable of respecting the innkeeper's son and pseudo-scholar. The union of the merchant and scholar families results in tragedy as Sujie wreaks havoc with Di Xichen and both his and her relatives. As she announces when her family proposes Di Xichen as her husband, she is taking revenge for having been forced into the marriage (YYZ, 25:375–6). Her rage eventually kills both her father and father-in-law and she fatally wounds her husband.

The lives of Sujie and the men around her end in social breakdown and physical destruction but the narrating voice affirms new phenomena in society and reveals the influence of new trends in late Ming thought. The discrepancy between narrating voice and narrative events creates a cacophony that dominates the novel. We can read the drama of the marriage between the merchant and scholar families as a literary expression of the undercurrent of conflict that ensued in late imperial China when different groups in society started to mix and mingle.

In this light the story of Sujie transcends the rhetoric of comedy and satire and gives access to popular perceptions of historical experience.³⁶ The use of an approach that is historically oriented while at the same time critical of old historicist values appears in the present case more useful than an ahistorical and formalist approach because it allows for cultural resonance, taking into account the Chinese reading of *xiaoshuo* texts and the tradition of their perceived historicity. It shows how social energy circulates in the text and throughout the contemporary discourse and demonstrates the embeddedness of texts in the culture out of which they emerged. It sheds light on the nature of *xiaoshuo* texts presenting voices that differ from the official version of history as imperial historiographers presented it.

The limitations of this approach perhaps lie in a lack of emphasis on the artistic qualities of the text. It analyses the rhetoric in view of social, cultural and political implications rather than for its aesthetic value. Yenna Wu, for example, has analysed the aesthetics of the *Yinyuan zhuan*, in particular the modes of repetition in the text but her study concludes that 'the meaning of the novel seems ambivalent at best' and goes back to searching for the narrator's 'true intent' (Wu 1986:277). It seems an undertaking well worth our while to try to avoid the pitfalls of intentional fallacy and direct our energies instead to rethinking the poetics of the Chinese *xiaoshuo*.

NOTES

- 1 The author would like to thank Glen Dudbridge for valuable comments.
- 2 Full title: *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*.
- 3 Similar questions have been raised in an approach to late Ming literature by Allan Barr. See Barr 1997.
- 4 This has been interpreted as a nostalgic reference to the Golden Age of the Western Zhou dynasty (traditionally 1122 BC, historically ca. 1050–770 BC) as a Confucian utopia (cf. Wu 1986:40).
- 5 Genette distinguishes between narration and focalization (also: point of view, points of perception, narrative perspective) (Genette 1980:189–91). Bal introduces the concept of the focalizer next to the narrator to distinguish between 'those who see' and 'those who speak' (Bal 1988:119–20).
- 6 While Scholes defines the narrator like a *histor* as a 'man of authority' (Scholes and Kellogg 1979:266), Bal (1988:118–21) points out that the narrator is not a storyteller but an 'it'.
- 7 On the concept of the implied author, see Booth 1983 (151). Bal defines the term as the 'result of investigation of the meaning of the text, and not the source of that meaning' (Bal 1988:120).
- 8 There are numerous other references; Chapters 23 to 29 depict the most important contrast of 'then' and 'now'.
- 9 In the phrase: 'If you parade your little theories [*xiaoshuo*] to fish for fame, you will be far from the Great Paradigm' (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 26:925).
- 10 On *Xinlun*, see also Pokora 1975.
- 11 Liu Xie mentions *xiaoshuo* only once in passing (Lu 1994:46–7).
- 12 Wei Zheng's (580–643) definition of *xiaoshuo* in the *Suishu* is based on the *Hanshu*: 'Xiaoshuo were the talk of the street... all the talk of the street and the highways was recorded. Officers at court took charge of

local records and prohibitions, while the officers in charge of civil affairs reported local sayings and customs' (translated in Lu Hsun 1982:4).

- 13 On categories, see also McMullen 1988 (159–60). On the problem of classification, see also Dudbridge 2000 (53–79).
- 14 On the title of the *Shitong*, see Quirin 1987 (173) and Dudbridge 2000 (63). For the translation I am indebted to Glen Dudbridge, personal communication.
- 15 Liu Zhiji's son Liu Suceng also collected historical narratives from the Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties and the early Tang in an anthology entitled *Xiaoshuo* (Cheng Yizhong 1987:45).
- 16 The *Xin Tangshu* (*Yiwenzhi*) classifies some *zazhuan* ji as *xiaoshuo*; the *Siku quanshu* also classifies some *zashi* as *xiaoshuo* while leaving them under philosophy. Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801) established a *xiaoshuo* section in *Shikao shili*, continuing Liu Zhiji's tradition.
- 17 For an annotated critical translation and discussion of Gu Kuang's preface, see Dudbridge 1995 (18–45).
- 18 The term first appears in the *Zhuangzi* (*Zhuangzi jishi*, 1A:4).
- 19 Thematic and textual devices known from stories in the *zhiguai* tradition are apparent in the writings of contemporary writers such as Su Tong, Can Xue, Ge Fei, Yu Hua and even Wang Shuo (Wedell-Wedellsborg 1998).
- 20 On Hu Yinglin, see Nienhauser 1986 (439–441).
- 21 Sheldon Lu points out that writers began to celebrate verisimilitude – a resemblance to the real world or an internal psychological truthfulness – instead of historicity in the late imperial period and used new terms to describe the artistic quality of fictional writings such as 'realistic' (*bizhen*), 'exact picture' (*xiaoxiang*), 'exact image of the thing' (*xiaowu*), 'spiritual resemblance' (*chuanshen*), and 'picture-like' (*ruhua*) (Lu 1994:134).
- 22 While the old historicism adhered to the veneration of the past or tradition, the new historicism by contrast approaches its subject with a spirit of wonder and reacts against the canonization of certain texts and the celebration of literary authority, treating the power of certain authorities as suspicious.
- 23 Joel Fineman has, not without irony, drawn attention to the new historicism's 'programmatic refusal to specify a methodological program for itself – its characteristic air of reporting, haplessly, the discoveries it happened serendipitously to stumble upon in the undirected, idle rambles through the historical archives'. Louis Montrose states that the new historicists are 'actually quite heterogenous in their critical practices' while Catherine Gallagher calls

- the 'phenomenon' one of 'indeterminacy' and Veeseer admits that 'the New Historicism is a phrase without an adequate referent' (in Veeseer 1994:1).
- 24 The present study here draws on Veeseer's account of the new historicism that recognizes five key assumptions (Veeseer 1994).
- 25 On the concept of vernacular culture, see Dudbridge 1995 (63-4).
- 26 As in 'Jie'anfang gong mubiao', by Wang Shouren, in *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* (25:363).
- 27 Earliest reference in the book of *Guanzi* (c. third century BC). See *Guanzi jijiao* (8:138).
- 28 On Wang, see Goodrich and Fang 1976 (1427-1430) and Fujii Hiroshi 1953/54 (42-3 and 66-71).
- 29 On Li, see Goodrich and Fang 1976 (841-42).
- 30 On Gui, see Goodrich and Fang 1976 (759-61).
- 31 On He, see Goodrich and Fang 1976 (513-5) and Dimberg 1974.
- 32 The incident involving Professor Xue in *YYZ* (29:429-30) is rather a joke, yet again stressing the professor's kindness.
- 33 On Ouyang Xiu, see Franke 1976 (808-16).
- 34 On Wang Gen, see also Goodrich and Fang 1976 (1382-5) and de Bary 1970 (157).
- 35 Another scholar-merchant marriage is that of Xue Rubian and Di Qiaojie. Here the social hierarchy corresponds to the marital hierarchy - the husband comes from the scholarly background. Qiaojie's role as a virtuous wife compensates for any other potential conflict (*YYZ*, ch. 59).
- 36 On historical experience, see Brockmeier 1990 (41); Greenblatt 1990 (99).

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GLOSSARY

Ban Gu	班固
Baopuzi	抱朴子
bizhen	逼真
Chen Shidao	陳師道
chuanqi	傳奇
chuanshen	傳神
Dai Fu	戴孚
Di	狄
Di Qiaojie	狄巧姐
Di Xichen	狄希陳
dili	地理
Duan Chengshi	段成式
Ducheng jisheng	都城紀勝
E yinyuan	惡姻緣
Erke Paian jingqi	二刻拍案驚奇
Fang Lin	方麟
Feng Menglong	馮夢龍
Gan Bao	干寶
Gao Yanxiu	高彥休
Ge Hong	葛洪
Gu Kuang	顧況
Guangyi ji	廣異記
Guanyuan Naideweng	管園乃德翁
Guanzi	管子
Gui Youguang	歸有光
Han	漢
Hanshu	漢書
haoren	好人
He Xinyin	何心隱
Honglouloumeng	紅樓夢
Hu Yinglin	胡應麟
Huan Tan	桓譚
Huizhou	徽州
ji	記
ji	集

jia	假
jiayuan	假緣
jin	今
Jin	晉
Jin Ping Mei	金瓶梅
jing	經
Jingshi tongyan	警世通言
Jiu Tangshu	舊唐書
juan	卷
li	理
Li Chong	李充
Li Mengyang	李夢陽
Ling Mengchu	淩濛初
Liu Suceng	劉餗曾
Liu Xie	劉勰
Liu Xin	劉歆
Liu Zhiji	劉知幾
Lu Xun	魯迅
Ming	明
Ouyang Xiu	歐陽修
Pei Xing	裴鉞
qiru jiugu	棄儒就賈
Qilüe	七略
Qing	清
qushi congshang	去士從商
ruhua	入畫
Shandong	山東
Shenxian zhuan	神仙傳
shi	史
shi	事
shi	實
Shikao shili	史考釋例
shilu	實錄
Shishuo xinyu	世說新語
Shitong	史通
shuo	說
Siku quanshu	四庫全書

<i>Soushen ji</i>	搜神記
Song	宋
<i>Suishu</i>	隨書
Taizhou xuepai	泰州學派
Tang	唐
Wang Daokun	汪道昆
Wang Dong	王棟
Wang Gen	王艮
Wang Shouren	王守仁
Wang Yangming	王陽明
Wei	魏
Wei Zheng	魏徵
wen	文
<i>Wenxin diaolong</i>	文心雕龍
wo	我
Wu Weiye	吳偉業
<i>Wuzazu</i>	五雜俎
Xi Zhou	西周
Xi Zhou sheng	西周生
xiao	小
<i>xiaoshuo</i>	小說
<i>xiaowu</i>	肖物
<i>xiaoxiang</i>	肖像
Xie Zhaozhe	謝肇淛
<i>Xingshi yinyuan zhuan</i>	醒世姻緣傳
<i>Xinlun</i>	新論
xu	虛
Xue	薛
Xue Rubian	薛如卞
Xue Sujie	薛素姐
Xun Qing	荀卿
Xun Xu	荀勗
<i>Xunzi</i>	荀子
<i>xushi</i>	敘事
yan	贗
<i>Yan Danzi</i>	燕丹子
<i>yeshi</i>	野史

<i>Yiwenzhi</i>	藝文志
<i>Yinyu zhuan</i>	隱逸傳
<i>yinyuan</i>	姻緣
yuan	緣
<i>zaji</i>	雜記
<i>zajia</i>	雜家
<i>zashi</i>	雜史
<i>zazhuan</i>	雜傳
<i>zazhuan ji</i>	雜傳記
Zhang Xuecheng	章學誠
<i>zhanghui xiaoshuo</i>	章回小說
zhen	真
zhi	志
<i>zhiguai</i>	志怪
<i>zhiguai xiaoshuo</i>	志怪小說
<i>zhiguai zhi shi</i>	志怪之士
Zhiyan zhai	脂硯齋
<i>Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue</i>	中國小說史略
Zhou	周
<i>zhuan</i>	傳
<i>zhuan ji</i>	傳記
Zhuang Zhou	莊周
<i>Zhuangzi</i>	莊子
zi	子