Traditional Chinese Fiction
—The State of the Field

ROBERT E. HEGEL

An Introduction to the Field

The field of traditional Chinese fiction studies is as diverse in its approaches and findings as the body of material included in the term xiaoshuo, with which the modern field imprecisely corresponds. As a term for classifying writings in early China, xiaoshuo seemingly meant "other" works that did not fit into the major category of narrative, i.e., history. In the bibliographical section of Ban Gu's (c.e. 32-92) Han shu, the Yiwen zhi, titles identified as xiaoshuo apparently were miscellaneous writings of no uniform characteristics or content. In the Han shu bibliography, xiaoshuo were classified under the zhi or "miscellaneous philosophers" section of the zhi, the durable four-fold bibliographic division of all writing originated in the third century and still in use. This Han shu designation reflected the assumption that xiaoshuo are or should be generally "discursive," even if they are of less significance than formal philosophical works. The clear discrimination between verifiable narrative works (hence historical) and fanciful (or fictitious) writings was a product of the Tang period; however, the assignment of fictional xiaoshuo to the same category as philosophy continued then as well. Like Aristotle, early Chinese bibliographers saw general truth, rather than the specific truth of history, as the operative criterion in fiction, despite the origins of many fictional narrative conventions in historiography (see K. J. DeWoskin, "Six Dynasties Chih-kuan," esp. p. 46). Twentieth-century scholarly attempts to see the term as synonymous with the modern concept of fiction are frustrated by its original lack of specificity and the fact that patently fictitious (from the modern rationalist perspective) elements appear in all other forms of early

Robert E. Hegel is Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at Washington University in St. Louis. I am greatly indebted to Professors David Rolleston and Ellen Widmer for thoughtful suggestions for revisions after reading an earlier draft of this article; meticulous readings by two JAS referees have prompted me to revise still further. Of course, I alone am responsible for remaining errors in fact or in judgment. The List of References following the article contains full publication data; its entries—including titles not mentioned specifically in my discussion—are arranged in categories corresponding to the organization of the essay.

© 1994 by the Association for Asian Studies, Inc.
literature, both philosophical works (as parables or the flights of imaginative fancy in *Zhuang zi*) and history (in fabricated conversations and fantastic events). While it may be argued that a term like "narrative," with its coincident concern for story, discourse, and conventions (using distinctions drawn by Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990], pp. 9, 83, 117, etc.), would more adequately serve to describe the range of materials modern scholars might address, because the term *xiaoshuo* still delineates the field for its specialists, narratives in philosophy and history are usually disallowed, and there is no general agreement on criteria by which to identify its earliest examples (see Hou Zongyi, *Laohua xiaoshuo shi*, pp. 1–4, for a history of the term).

The scope of the field is further complicated by the tendency of late-Qing writers and editors to lump dramatic narratives along with fiction in the category of *xiaoshuo*; see, for example, the jottings collected in early resource compilations by Qian Jingfang (*Xiaoshuo zonghao*, 1912) and by Jiang Ruizao (*Xiaoshuo kaozheng*, 1919). Throughout the Ming and Qing, most plays of the lengthy *chuangqi* form were penned by literati on the basis of earlier writings, in particular the romantic tales of the Tang *chuangqi* *xiaoshuo* genre; many circulated widely as texts and were seldom performed in their entirety. By including these plays within the realm of *xiaoshuo*, turn-of-the-century scholars clearly meant the term to designate "written popular stories" regardless of divergence in literary form or genre within this category. However, more recently scholars have ignored this practice to concentrate on the fictional, rather than the dramatic, versions of shared story stuff. In effect, then, the field is delineated neither by the term *xiaoshuo* nor through any exclusive interest in purely fictional materials; it generally addresses writings in the broad arena suggested by the modern term "fiction" within the wider world of *xiaoshuo*. Imprecise as this is, the parameters of the field have not been the subject of anguish'd controversy.

The temporal range of this material being so vast (roughly from the third century to the nineteenth) and the material itself so voluminous, the field is subdivided into areas of specialization by language style of the writings (classical/literary vs. vernacular—although neither term is precise and most traditional fictional works in the vernacular include a variety of classical grammatical or lexical items), by conventional form, and by period of composition. The field of traditional Chinese fiction includes as its major divisions:

---

1. The latter includes a long narrative prosimeric version (*chugangshuo*) of the West Chamber in his purview, *Ding jieyuan Xiangju*, as well as *tenci* (dotted to the accompaniment of plucked string instruments) narratives, ballad tales in rhymed verse that became increasingly popular among women of lower Yangze cities during the Qing period. For introductions to these ballad narratives, see the entry on *tenci* (*tan-tzu*) by J. D. Schmidt in *Indiana Companion*, pp. 747–49; and relevant chapters in Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhangguo wenxue shi*, and Zhao Jingshen, *Qiji songlan*.

2. Y. W. Ma, for example, is content merely to identify examples of the categories of writings that all agree should be considered in this field in his survey essay "Fiction" in *Indiana Companion*, pp. 31–48. I see no need for further attempts to clarify the differences between the terms, but one should not mistake premodern uses of the term *xiaoshuo* as the equivalent of "fiction," much less as the even more specific "novel" that some use to translate it. The origins of "fiction" in China have been the subject of some debate, complicated by the tendency to accept Lu Xun’s early speculations as authoritative, even when they have been undermined by more recent scholarship and theoretical formulations. See Victor Mair, "The Narrative Revolution in Chinese Literature: Ontological Presuppositions?", Kenneth DeWoskin, "On Narrative Revolutions?"; and W. J. De Matthew, "The Illusion of Fiction," all in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 5 (1983).
the relatively short fantastic and supernatural tales of the Six Dynasties (220–
589) and Tang (618–906) periods known as *zhiguai* ("records of anomalies")
and their later developments, including the brief anecdotes of Ming (1368–
1644) and Qing (1644–1911) in the category of fictional *biji* ("jottings"); itself
a problematic term; see Y. W. Ma in *Indiana Companion*, pp. 650–52),
(2) the generally longer romantic tales of love and adventure from the Tang and
Song (960–1279) periods termed *chuangyi* ("tales of the marvelous"),
(3) narratives in verse and prose found at Dunhuang generally dating from the
Tang, collectively—but again imprecisely—known as *bianwen* ("transformation
texts"),
(4) vernacular stories from Yuan (1279–1368) through Qing periods retrospec-
tively termed *huaben* ("story texts") or *ni huaben* ("imitation huaben"),
(5) lengthy Song and Yuan vernacular narratives, most of which are concerned
with historical periods or figures, called *pinghua* ("plainly told tales"),
(6) the long narratives known during the Qing as *zhangbi xiashuo* ("fiction in
chapters") or, more recently, *changpian xiashuo* ("full-length fiction" or simply
"novels"), produced during the Ming and Qing.

While it is defensible to identify these types of writings as sources for the
"canon" of traditional Chinese fiction—those works identified as of major significance
in twentieth-century histories and textbooks—there are other narrative forms that
I have not included in this list. Some scholars also see *gong'an* or crime-case fiction
as a separate field, although this classification has been used to designate works
according to content; such works appear in both classical and vernacular languages
and in several forms. Collections of *gong'an* from late Ming and early Qing periods
contain formally similar examples of short crime and detective fiction (see Huang
Yanbo, *Zhongguo gong'an xiashuo shi*). The discovery in 1967 of vernacular narrative
texts in the tomb of a wealthy Ming woman also brought the term *cihua* into the
scholarly limelight. Almost all of these illustrated texts are short to medium-length
narratives in alternating prose and verse. The entire corpus was photoreprinted in
a discursively lavish edition entitled *Ming Chenghua chaoshang cihua congkan* (see
1981; Gail Oman King has translated the longest of these tales in *The Story of Hua
Guang in Suo*). Because of the term *cihua* ("narrative with doggerel verse") in several of
their titles, these texts have been linked with the much later *Da Tang Qianwang
cihsia*, a novel-like extended narrative in which verse figures more prominently than
in novels; the latter has been termed the earliest extant *gaci* or drumsong. Given
the dominant position of prose in all other works considered traditional fiction, this
Chenghua-period material is more relevant to the field of oral and performing literature.
Other, similar, forms of narrative for oral performance include *kaojuan* ("precious
scrolls," generally religious in content) and *tansui*, these popular forms have thus far
received only scant scholarly scrutiny. It is the last of the six major subfields enumerated
above, the novel, that has received the most intense and fruitful scholarly attention,
and it is to this area that I will devote most of this brief survey.

The serious analysis of traditional Chinese fictional works began relatively recently.
Detailed and penetrating studies of the vernacular novel can ultimately be traced
to the work of a handful of seventeenth-century critics of the novel (about which,
more below); otherwise, until the present century scholarly attention to all forms
and periods of *xiashuo* was generally confined to random and typically brief comments.
By contrast, Chinese classical verse and prose were traditionally considered to have
greater literary sophistication and to deserve greater scholarly attention; fiction and its narrative predecessors, by their very name, *xiaoshuo* ('lesser discourses'), seemed unlikely to merit scrutiny for their art. The rapid decline of Qing society and political institutions late in the nineteenth century brought vernacular fiction, to varying degrees conventionally engaged with political and social causes, into the intellectual fray through works of outspoken satire and commentary on questions of modernization. Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and his generation advocated renewing China's intellectual and moral vigor by creating a new, progressive literature. He had in mind a parallel to the realistic fiction that originated in the emerging European nations, but traditional fiction provided the structural model that he and his readers were more familiar with and, to a certain extent, that he copied for new political messages. It was only the next generation of scholars, led by such central figures as Lu Xun (1881–1936) and Hu Shi (1891–1962), who came to recognize the social, political, and ultimately the artistic significance of these non-canonical writings of the *xiaoshuo* category. Yet, for obvious reasons, May Fourth-era and subsequent generations of Chinese scholars through the Cultural Revolution period generally allowed current political concerns to dominate their scholarship and to inform their interpretations. The search for the art of traditional Chinese narratives has shaped the field only very recently, as scholarship and politics have become less inextricably intertwined in China and, as a consequence, elsewhere.

The earliest systematic surveys and analytical studies were produced by a handful of scholarly pioneers in the early decades of the present century. In China the historical and textual studies of Lu Xun, Hu Shi, and Zheng Zhenduo (1898–1958, like Lu Xun and Hu Shi, a creative writer himself), of Tan Zhengbi, Sun Kaidi, and a few others laid the groundwork; it was scholars in Japan, in Europe, and in the United States who carried the field forward during the years when it was politically inexpedient to engage in objective or creative scholarship in China. Especially through the work of scholars outside China, the field of traditional fiction criticism is now taking its place in the international study of literature; Chinese fiction is becoming recognized for its artistic merit by comparatists and students of world literature; in recent decades specialists in all countries are focusing with increasing sophistication on the literary art of these fictional pieces. Likewise, the last twenty years have witnessed unprecedented attempts to catalog, reprint, and provide research materials for all of the major—and many of the minor—narrative works of China's imperial past. Consequently, the field has enjoyed a virtual explosion of scholarly activity during these decades. On the basis of these recent developments, the field of traditional Chinese fiction stands ready to assume ever greater importance in Chinese literary and cultural studies.

Textual Studies, Bibliographies, and Reference Books

Research materials recently made available have opened broad new vistas for the development of the field; scholars everywhere may now have access to materials and information previously available only to a few. When Lu Xun wrote his pioneering *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction) in the early 1920s, he had at his disposal far less than the complete corpus of classical Chinese fiction. Lu Xun relied heavily on *leishu* collections from which he gleaned examples of early
narratives in the classical language. His volumes *Tang Song chuanqi ji* (1927) and *Gu xiaoshuo gouhua* (begun in 1912, published only in 1938) respectively compile Tang Song *chuanqi* and Six Dynasties *zhiguai*; both are still useful today. Yet *bianwen* and *pinghua* were only being rediscovered at that time—and their historical significance had not become apparent. Nonetheless, even though Lu Xun addressed a great number of vernacular stories and novels, there were many more to which he did not have access. Thus, his *Brief History*, while still thought-provoking, is far from sufficient as an introduction to the field now, seventy years later (see John C. Y. Wang, 1985). Except for its critical insights, his survey was displaced by Tan Zhengbi’s widely influential *Zhongguo xiaoshuo jida* (1935); this work incorporated evaluations of then newly reprinted *bianwen* and *pinghua*. Like Lu Xun, Tan traced the origins of fiction rather unconvincingly from the myths of ancient China (on the basis of their imaginative qualities), through the parables of pre-Qin philosophers, and to the earliest *xiaoshuo* of the Han before assessing in detail the categories of writings mentioned above. While later histories of traditional fiction generally follow the model set by these two works, they have become more inclusive as newly discovered or previously overlooked material has been made available to scholars. Likewise, each tended to accept without serious reconsideration the assertions of the pioneers concerning the historical factors in the development of forms and on the artistic merit of individual works of fiction.

Sun Kaidi’s bibliography *Zhongguo tonggu xiaoshuo shumu* (1933, rev. ed., 1958) was a pathbreaking survey of the corpus of fiction in the vernacular language. Still of use today, it catalogued the books he saw and read about in a number of private and public Chinese and Japanese collections. (Sun’s more detailed notes from his brief 1931 tour of Tokyo and Dalian libraries were published, in revised form, in his *Riben Dongjing xuanjuan Zhongguo xiaoshuo shumu*; many of the editions he describes had been lost in China.) During decades of war, very few of these novels and stories were reprinted in China, with the result that, through the 1970s, researchers had to plan on traveling, like Sun Kaidi, to view any significant variety of texts. The years between 1949 and 1966 did witness tremendous growth in library holdings of traditional Chinese fiction as private collections came to be acquired by research libraries throughout the country. Yet for the most part cumulative catalogs became common only after the political liberalization of the late 1970s; reference books that exhaust even one subdivision of the field are very recent phenomena. Furthermore, until the 1980s most mainland Chinese libraries were closed to outsiders and, during certain periods, to China’s own scholars as well.

However, during the years 1949 to 1976 a small amount of traditional fiction did see print. A few of the classic works appeared in Shanghai and Beijing, either in photoreprint or in modern punctuated editions ranging in format from cheap *puji dawen* ("popular reading materials," sometimes called "workers’ and peasants’ editions") to expensive string-bound reproductions in limited quantities for libraries and collectors. *Guji malu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980) catalogs all mainland imprints of pre-May Fourth books produced during those years, both photoreprints of woodblock and manuscript editions and newly typeset editions. Over forty pages are required to list the numerous works of traditional fiction, some of which were altered considerably from their sources to purify them ideologically for modern reading audiences. These editions formed the basic collections of most Chinese libraries around the world until after the death of Mao.

Ironically, the 1975 campaign to criticize Shenbu zhuan for its theme of “capitulation” to imperial authority quite inadvertently opened the floodgates for
reprints of classic fiction. A variety of Shuihu editions were made available for that reason after decades of neglect; soon afterward Mao died, and seemingly every 1949 to 1966 edition of traditional fiction reappeared, along with a far greater number of works available for the first time in modern editions. These new imprints, despite the distortions occasionally imposed by arbitrarily deleting "crude" or "offensive" sections, facilitated a far broader understanding of the breadth and quality of the works in this field. Both historical surveys and studies of individual titles as a result have taken on new degrees of complexity.

China's reopening to the world after the death of Mao Zedong also revitalized literary scholarship. The development of bibliographic studies combined with these reprinting efforts to change the face of the field considerably. During the late 1950s Sun Kaud had written his bibliographies; in 1958 Liu Xiuye published notes on editions to be found in Paris in her Guadian xiaoshuo xiqu tongkao. But after 1966 even bibliographical scholarship generally ceased to be published, and the field was left in the hands of scholars outside China. In 1967 Liu Tsun-yan of Australian National University published his Chinese Popular Fiction in Two London Libraries, bringing a number of rare editions into the scholarly purview. Taiwan publishers began to reprint Ming and Qing woodblock editions of classical novels in the 1970s: the National Central Library published a short series entitled Lidai tongzhi xiaoshuo in 1971 (including Yangjia su yanyi and Dong Xi Jin yanyi), and Tianyi chubanshe released a larger series entitled Hanchao Zhongguo tongzhi xiaoshuo tongkao in the middle of the decade. Likewise, in the 1960s Li Tian-yi of Ohio State University arranged for the photoreprinting of rare editions of Feng Menglong's Sanxian collection of huabu stories along with a typeset edition of Ling Mengchou's Pai'an jingzi collection preserved in Japan. In the United States, first James Crump (in the 1950s) and later Andrew Plaks (in the 1970s-80s) oversaw the microfilming of rare editions in a variety of collections outside China; some of these films have been reproduced for other libraries and apparently have formed the bases for reprintings. The Robert H. van Gulik collection of fiction from the Sinological Institute, Leiden, is also available on microfiche (Part 1, "Polk Novels" edited by John T. Ma [Zug, Switzerland: IDC, 1988]).

Truly large-scale reprint series appeared only in the 1980s, frequently as the result of international scholarly cooperation. They include Minghua Qinghao xiaoshuo, published by Chunfeng weiyi in Shenyang, a rich selection of modern typeset editions from the collection of caizi jiaoren ("scholar and beauty") and other popular fiction in the Dalian Library, the massive congshu of novels Ming Qingshan xiaoshuo congkan in ten collections published by the Guodian xiaoshuo yanjiu zhongxin, headed by Hu Wenchuan at Zhengzhi University in Taipei, the equally voluminous Guben xiaoshuo congkan, edited by Liu Shide (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) and others, in 205 volumes published by Zhonghua shuju in Beijing in 1987–1991, and Guben xiaoshuo zheng published by Shanghai Guji chubanshe in 1990–1992 and containing 530 works of traditional Chinese fiction. These latter series concentrate on the more interesting rare editions, and there is some overlap among them. (Unfortunately many of the Taipei series were reprinted using faint microfilms, with the result that certain volumes are barely legible; the PRC series is generally more easy to read, matching the standards of quality set in their reprints of the 1950s.) As a truly exciting consequence of these efforts, scholars at all major and many minor Chinese libraries around the world can now have access to a far broader range of works and editions than was ever before available in any one collection.
Likewise, the major works have appeared (or reappeared) recently in excellent variiorum and other editions with scholarly apparatus. The most loving attention has been showered on Honglou meng, of course, widely considered to be the single most important work of Chinese fiction. To name a few important releases, the jiassa manuscript edition in Hu Shi's possession had been photoreprinted in Taiwan in 1961 and 1962 and reissued in 1973; the same edition was printed in Shanghai in 1962 and 1985. The jimao edition was photoreprinted in Shanghai in 1981; a rare annotated manuscript in the Leningrad Library was reprinted in Beijing in 1986. The 120-chapter manuscript issued in limited edition in 1963 (Qianlong zhaohan baixianbi Honglou meng gao) has reappeared in greater numbers, and Yu Pingbo's variiorum edition (Honglou meng baoshui jiasha) has been reissued. Wang Bohang's (1884–1944) extensive interlinear commentaries were published by Jiangsu Guji in 1985; Chen Qinghao's Xinbian Shitou ji Zhiyan zhai pingyan jijiao, a compilation of the annotations from a variety of the "Zhiyan zhai" editions, appeared in Taibei in 1979, followed by Peng Qyong, comp., Zhiyan zhai chongping Shitou ji huijiao in five volumes and Honglou meng sanjiaping ban in two volumes.

While most of the major collections of huanben short fiction have appeared in modern versions from PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong publishers, reprints of early editions are relatively uncommon. Recent publications include 1990 Shanghai Guji reprints of Ming editions of Gu jin xiaoshuo, Jingbi tongyan, and Xingbi kengyan from collections in Tokyo and Nagoya and the Ming-period Shangyouzang editions of Paitan jingqi and Erke Paitan jingqi held in the Hiroshima University and Naikaku bunko collections. Here again, international scholarly cooperation has benefited scholars everywhere.


Perhaps even more remarkable than these wonderfully rich reprint series is a surprisingly complete bibliography published in draft form by the young Japanese scholar Ōsuka Hideraka in 1984; Ōsuka's goal was to record as many extant editions of Ming and Qing novels, stories, and story collections as possible. His revised version was formally published in 1987; entitled Zōhō Chūgoku tōzoku shōsetsu shomoku, it avoids completely the more murky textual histories of the six major "classics" but lists all editions for other novels and collections of stories that he either inspected himself or found references to in the numerous bibliographies, library catalogs, and reference books that he consulted. While inevitably omissions and minor errors can be found in such an ambitious undertaking, Ōsuka's bibliography is a truly invaluable checklist for extant editions; it is possible using this one source to gain not only the basic information about a title but also some sense of its relative historical importance (by comparing the information he provides about the number of printings it enjoyed, the names of the publishers, and other data).

Numerous textual studies have been devoted to single works. In the West, Patrick Hanan's study of the various versions of the novel Jin Ping Mei ('The Text
of the Chin Ping Mei") was a landmark, as was Glen Dudbridge's careful survey of the early versions of Xiyou ji stories (The Hui-yu Chi). More recently, Anne E. McLaren (1985) has shed new light on the complex origins of the Sanguo zhi yanji; her forthcoming Oral and Written Narratives in Ming China: The Chaotsables of the Fifteenth Century traces the evolution of Sanguo and other tales shared with the novel. Equally noteworthy are Liu Hui, Jin Ping Mei chengshu yu banben yanjiu, Hu Wenbin, comp., Jin Ping Mei shulu, Ma Tiji, comp., Shuihu shulu, and Hu Wenbin's extremely useful Honglou meng shulu.

Important as it is, Ōtsuka's bibliography of fiction gives only the barest of information concerning editions. Other reference books provide more details. Foremost among those devoted to Ming-Qing vernacular novels and stories is the massive Zhongguo songui xiaoshuo zongmu tiyan compiled by Ouyang Jian and his colleagues of the Ming-Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu zhongxin at the Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences. Entries provide alternate titles, publication histories, locations of rare editions, synopses, references to other texts sharing the same subject matter, and general comments; they vary in completeness, having been compiled by a variety of hands. Even so, when used in conjunction with Ōtsuka's bibliography this volume provides information of an unprecedented range and usefulness. Still more broadly useful through their coverage of both vernacular and classical language materials are Tan Zhengbi's Guwen xijian xiaoshuo banben (with Tan Xun) and Sun Kaich's Xeqi xiaoshuo shulu jieciti. Both are the product of years of careful research and are essential tools for the field, although their entries are far briefer than those in the Ouyang Jian volume.

Several works of smaller scope are also important for the study of huaben short stories. Poon Ming-sun's Sanyan Erpai tiyan provides a uniform set of synopses of all two hundred late-Ming short stories in the collections edited by Feng Menglong (1574–1646) and Ling Mengchu (1580–1644). In this, Poon's volume complements the service provided by André Levy and others in their multi-volumed Inventaire analytique et critique de contes chinois en langue vulgaire (Paris, 1978–) and of Ogawa Yoichi, Sangen Nihaku honji rouko shu (Tokyo, 1981).

Extraneous guides to and bibliographies of other of China's traditional fictional forms and genres are less useful. Cheng Yizhong's Gu xiaoshuo jianmu, for example, gives only the barest essentials about where a title was mentioned in an old bibliography and whether it is to be found in any extant laishu. Yuan Xingpei and Hou Zhongyi, compilers of Zhongguo wenyan xiaoshuo shumu, like Cheng, have to skirt the problems presented by the vagueness of the term xiaoshuo. While full catalogs or bibliographies of works in the other areas within traditional fiction are yet to be compiled, Victor H. Mair has provided much-needed clarification about fiction from the diverse Dunhuang corpus in his Tang Transformation Texts and his "Tay Students and the Making of Written Vernacular Narrative: An Inventory of Tun-huang Manuscripts."

Reference Materials

The recent publication of large quantities of reference materials facilitates more thorough grounding in the social and cultural contexts of the literary texts as well as their textual histories. During the early years of the Chinese Republic, several reference works appeared that served for decades as quick introductions to a range of information concerning writings in the xiaoshuo category (including dramatic and
some prosimetric narratives): compilations by Jiang Ruizao and Qian Jingfang both drew upon late-Qing comments from a variety of sources. During the 1920s and 1930s Lu Xun and Kong Lingjiing made more extensive collections of these comments; their Xiaoshuo jiawen chao (1926) and Zhongguo xiaoshuo shiliao (1935) were standard references for half a century. But with the revival of scholarship during the late 1970s there began to appear in China reference books that provide information and materials not generally available previously.

Available now are numerous compilations of prefaces, annotations, biographical data, and critical comments from premodern readers about Ming and Qing fiction that are considerably broader in scope than their predecessors. Building on the model of Honglou meng juan (1963), these yanjiu ziliao ('reference materials') volumes are now available for all of the major novels: Sanguo zhi yanyi (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), Shuibu zhuan (Outlaws of the Marsh), Xiyou ji (Journey to the West), Jin Ping Mei (Plum in the Golden Vase), Honglou meng (Story of the Stone), and Rulian wazhi (The Scholars). There are also volumes on Qilu dang (The Lamp at the Crossroads), Niehai hua (Flower in a Sea of Sin), Lao Can yanyi (The Travels of Lao Can) and its author Liu E, and collections of materials on a variety of titles such as Ming Qing xiaoshuo ziliao xuanbian and Ming Qing zhangbhi xiaoshuo yanjiu ziliao. A useful tool for the study of short stories is Tan Zhengbi's Sanyan liangdai ziliao; compiled in the 1960s, the book had to wait for the Cultural Revolution to subside before it could see print. Here Tan assembles all parallel stories and probable sources for the two hundred late-Ming okuden. Hou Zhongyi also compiled Zhongguo wenyan xiashuo cankao ziliao for the narratives in classical language. (However, except for the useful bibliography of secondary materials that concludes the volume, most of the material here is readily available elsewhere, especially the prefaces and the Siku quanshu tiyao bibliographic notes.)

Certain compilations limit their scope to particular types of research materials. Particularly noteworthy are Zhongguo Vidai xiaoshuo xuba xuanzhu and Ming Qing xiashuo suha xuan, collections of prefaces and colophons from virtually all extant editions. Ming and Qing critical commentaries, particularly of the interlinear variety, have been reprinted for Shuibu, Sanguo zhi yanyi, Jin Ping Mei, Rulian wazhi, and Honglou meng with ever greater completeness (see the discussion of critical editions above). While many of the volumes devoted to the same material overlap considerably in content, they provide ready access to clues, culled from a great variety of sources, as to how these works were produced, circulated, and read in late imperial China. A pioneering work on official attempts to limit or to suppress traditional works of fiction is Wang Liqi's Yuan Ming Qing suandai jianhu xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao (1957, rev. ed., 1981), followed by the even more extensive Zhongguo jianhu daguan (1990).

An interesting recent development in critical scholarship are the literary, or "connoisseur's," dictionaries (cidian or jianzhang cidian) devoted to one or more works of fiction. They provide explanations for terms, titles, customs, and brief "biographies" of characters in the texts. To date two have been produced for Shuibu, one for Sanguo, four for Jin Ping Mei, and four for Honglou meng, one of which was edited by the veteran scholar Zhou Ruchang. In addition, there are the broader Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo liu da mingzhu jianzhang cidian edited by Huo Songlin (1988), Gudian xiaoshuo jianzhang cidian, and Guan Yongyi's Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo jianzhang cidian (both 1989). A historical series, Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo cidian, began with a volume on pre-Qin to Five Dynasties works edited by Hou Zhongyi; a general work is Zhongguo xiaoshuo cidian edited by Qin Kangzong (1990).
Critical Studies

Recent analyses of traditional fiction—both conventional biographical and bibliographical studies and those that utilize Western critical theory and methodology—have surpassed all previous efforts in the field in quantity and in significance as meaningful interpretations of literary art. This is nowhere more true than in studies of Ming and Qing vernacular narratives.

The volume of Chinese language critical studies since the Cultural Revolution has been staggering; it is not possible for any one person to read everything of note throughout the field. One can glimpse the richness of this production through the extremely helpful bibliography of criticism of traditional Chinese fiction compiled by David Rolston at the end of his How to Read the Chinese Novel (1990). Other useful printed bibliographies include the Bibliography of Chinese and Foreign Studies on Literature of the Six Dynasties published by the Center for Chinese Studies in Taipei (Rev. ed., 1992), Honglou meng zaixiu yanjiu lunzhu xiazhi, 1982-1987 (1988), and Zhongguo gudian xiaoibiao lanwen mu, 1912-1980 compiled by Poon Ming-sun; for more recent PRC scholarship, as well as a complete record of reprinted fictional texts, see Guodian xiaoibiao xiju shuji 1949-1985 edited by Zhu Yixuan, Xiao Zeyun, and Liu Jianhai. In addition, one must regularly consult the serial references, especially the Zhongguo gudai, jindai wenxue yanjiu and Honglou meng yanjiu volumes in the series of reprinted scholarly articles and bibliographies produced by Zhongguo Renmin daxue shubao ziliao zhongxin in addition to other, more general, Sinological and literary bibliographies and journals.

It has been gratifying to see numerous new scholarly periodicals devoted in whole or in part to the study of Chinese fiction. In China, there are Ming Qing xiaoibiao yanjiu (Jiangsu sheng shenhui kexueyuan, 1985–) and Ming Qing xiaoibiao lunzong (ShenYang: Chunfeng wenyi, 1984–) in addition to a number on more narrowly defined topics—including several on Honglou meng (The earliest was Honglou meng yanjiu zhuanlan [Hong Kong, 1967–]; others are Honglou meng yanjiu zike [Shanghai, 1978–], Honglou meng xuexian [Tianjin, 1979–], and Honglou meng lunzong [Shanghai, 1979–]); in North America, Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews (CLEAR, Bloomington, Madison, and St. Louis, 1979–) regularly devotes space to studies of fiction, as do Ming Studies (Minneapolis, etc., 1975–), Late Imperial China (since 1980 the successor to Ch'ing-shih wen-hsii, established 1965), and other general, chronologically delineated, journals. Especially in its early issues, CLEAR frequently published instructive surveys of scholarship by country of origin and for particular masterpieces.

The one text that has enjoyed more scholarly attention than any other is the great mid-Qing novel Honglou meng (generally, though inaccurately, termed Dream of the Red Chamber in English; its alternative title, Shitou ji, is the basis for David Hawkes's felicitous translation, Story of the Stone, about which, see below); it is the focus of a subfield of its own, Hongxue ("Red-ology")—a term originated around 1875 (Wu Shih-chang, On the Red Chamber Dream, p. 4; for a history of this subfield, see Hao Jiilan, Hongxue shi gao). In many ways, studies throughout the field parallel those devoted to this one text. The earliest school of Hongxue scholarship, the suoyin pai or "Allegorists," in Lucien Miller's apt term (Mask of Fiction, p. 6), perceived references to historical persons and events in the novel as keys to its interpretation. This approach had its basis in the tradition of making veiled pronouncements on one's contemporaries in the work of many earlier writers—social and political
commentary are conventional elements in most traditional fictional forms, after all. Nineteenth century "allegorists" read Hong Lou meng as a lament for the fallen Ming, among other possibilities; one prominent figure in the school later was president of Beijing University during the 'teens, Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940). Despite the scorn generally heaped on this school by May Fourth scholars (see Miller, _Marks of Fiction_, pp. 6–12), such studies have unraveled the complex references to his contemporaries with which Wu Jingzi (1701–1754) packed his Rulin waishi (ca. 1750, published 1803) and other works of satirical fiction that became increasingly numerous during the late-Qing period. See, for example, He Zehan's _Rulin waishi renwu benshi kaolun_ (1957) and research materials on characters in Li Hanqiu's 1984 compilation, _Rulin waishi yanjiu ziliao_.

By searching primarily for predetermined relationships between the contents of a work of fiction and the immediate social, political, and economic context in which it was produced, many twentieth-century critics of Chinese fiction have followed the lead of the suoyin pai, even though their rationale was considered revolutionary at the time. Nationalistic May Fourth scholars and their mainland successors after 1949 interpreted vernacular literature as the written record of popular oral materials because these texts utilized the colloquial instead of the official language of the Confucian elite; some scholars maintain this position even today despite increasing evidence that links many of these texts to literati writers (about which, more below). In particular, this school of interpretation ascribed the supposedly democratic or revolutionary traditions of China's masses to the vernacular fiction of a variety of forms and periods; indeed, this interpretive strategy was the only rationale for critical scrutiny during periods of exaggerated political orthodoxy in China (see, for example, Jerome B. Grieder, "The Communist Critique of Hong-lou Meng," _China Quarterly_ 10 [1956]: 142–68). I link this approach with that of the suoyin pai because their proponents tended to perceive only what they wished to find. While such interpretations might be based firmly on clues given in the texts, it comes as no surprise that deliberately biased scholarship, regardless of the approach or the agenda, has sometimes produced distorted or even unsupportable general interpretations of fictional works. Consequently such studies have for the most part been utilized skeptically by scholars outside China; this tendency has recently disappeared from most Chinese scholarship as well.

A second critical approach within Hongxue is the kaozheng pai or the school of textual criticism and historical research. Beginning in 1922 with the appearance of Hu Shi's pioneering study of the autobiographical elements in the novel "Hong lou meng kaozheng," through succeeding decades this school reached such a high stage of development that the artistry of the work came to be secondary in importance to the extrinsic factors of its production. Some have even termed the school "Caoyue," or "the study of [the novelist] Cao [Xueqin]."

Kaozheng-style scholarship has been the most productive in China itself with noteworthy accomplishments elsewhere. The increasingly careful and reliable textual histories mentioned above are one manifestation; the innumerable studies of intertextual relations between individual works of fiction and between writings of different literary forms have dramatically enhanced our understanding of how Chinese fiction developed. Among significant Western-language contributions in this area, Patrick Hanan's study, "Sources of the Chin Ping Mei" (1963), was one of the earliest. David Roy and several of his former students have also addressed this novel: Katherine Carlinz has focused on the relationship between Jin Ping Mei and a variety of earlier works of dramatic literature; Indira Seryendra has analyzed the sources for its poetry.
Similarly noteworthy development has occurred in biographical studies. Descriptions and evaluations of the lives and works of fiction writers now abound, although not all are of equal relevance. Timothy C. Wong and Frederick Brandauer in the United States produced biographies of Wu Jingzi and Dong Yue, respectively; PRC conferences and volumes of essays have focused on known writers and critics, including the buaahan story editor Feng Menglong (Lu Shulun, Feng Menglong yanjiu) and Zhang Zhupo (1670–1698), the first to write an extensive commentary for the novel Jin Ping Mei few facts were known about the important critic Zhang Zhupo until 1985 when a number of materials discovered quite by accident in Zhang’s hometown of Xuzhou came to be published; see Rolston 1990, pp. 196–201). Even the problematic Shi Na’er, to whom the “original version” of the novel Shuihu zhuan has been ascribed, has become the object of numerous essays (many compiled by the Literary Research Institute of the Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences in 1984). Among the new specialized Chinese periodicals is one devoted to the study of this author, Na’er xiaohan (Dafeng xian, Jiangsu, 1985—), despite the efforts of scholars such as Liu Shide of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to debunk the alleged ties between the novel and material evidence concerning scholars surnamed Shi (see Liu’s and other essays in Shi Na’er yanjiu, 1884). Patrick Hanan’s The Invention of Li Yu traces the creative life of the peripatetic but eccentric dramatist and fiction writer Li Yu (1610–80). Liu Tsun-yen’s studies of two writers, Luo Guanzhong and Wu Cheng’en, to whom the major novels Sanguo zhi yanyi and Xian TU have been attributed, have also been widely influential. Narrow biographical research has reached such a stage that even the skull of Wu Cheng’en has reportedly been discovered, scrutinized, and used as the basis for a portrait sculpture of the novelist (see Zhang Jianjun, “Wu Cheng’en xiongxiang de jingxue fuyuan,” Ming Qing xiaohua yanjiu 1 [1985], 183–87, with a photograph inside the back cover of that issue). Carefully reasoned broader biographical studies have paid close attention to the authentic intellectual and social context of old China’s authors of fiction, with the result that critical biographies such as Wu Jingzi pingzhuo by Chen Meiling provide excellent background materials for the study of the works themselves even when literary criticism is not the primary goal of the researcher. Patient and highly detailed recreations of the lives and times of Li Yu and the later xiaohan author Pu Songling by Chang Chun-shu and Shelley Hsüeh-lun Chang also have considerable usefulness for literary study.

Using, for the most part, a combination of these conventional approaches, scholars from a variety of countries have produced important general studies. Among the broader works are Fang Zhengyan, Ming Qing xiaohua yanjiu, Luo Liqun, Zhongguo wuxia xiaohua shi, the collection Caizi jiaoyan xiazhuo shilun, the survey essays “The Military Romance” by C. T. Hsia, Y. W. Ma’s “The Chinese Historical Novel,” and Patrick Hanan’s “The Early Chinese Short Story”; all of these explore important genres of traditional Chinese fiction and make insightful generalizations that illuminate these areas. Among the Europeans, Jaroslav Prüšek’s painstaking investigations began in the 1930s; some of them, now superseded, were pioneering efforts to combine historical study with critical analysis. These essays have been compiled to form his Chinese History and Literature (1970). Wilt L. Idema’s studies in Chinese Vernacular Fiction: The Formative Period are definitive statements on vernacular literature in general, on the short story, and on the long pinghua. Likewise, a productive middle generation of scholars in China including Ouyang Jian in Nanjing at the Jiangsu Shehui kejue yuan, Sun Xin and others in Shanghai, especially at the Literary Research Institute of Shanghai Shifan daxue, Liu Shide at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in
Beijing, and several Taiwan scholars (among them Wei Ziyun on Jin Ping Mei) have produced a truly remarkable quantity of useful scholarly writing on traditional fiction; it is their work that appears so frequently in the burgeoning bibliographies of the field.

A second area of particularly fruitful research in recent decades has been traditional fiction commentaries and literary aesthetics. Major collections of analytical studies include Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo lilan yanjiu, Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo yishu de xikan by Hu Bangwei and Wu Hong, Ye Lang's Zhongguo xiaoshuo meixue, Fang Zhengyao's Zhongguo xiaoshuo pipeng shilve, and Ming Qing xiaoshuo lilan pipeng shi by Wang Xianpei and Zhou Weimin. Pioneering biographical studies such as John C. Y. Wang's Chin Sheng-t'an drew Western readers' attention to the major seventeenth-century commentators, but the major work in this area is the monumental How to Read the Chinese Novel. This compilation, edited by David L. Rolston, contains insightful exploratory essays by Rolston and Andrew H. Plaks on the sources, development, forms, and terminology of traditional fiction criticism followed by precise and carefully annotated translations (by John C. Y. Wang, David Roy, Shuen-fu Lin, Anthony C. Yu, and Plaks) either of an extensive daifa ('how to read') essay or a set of prefatory and chapter commentaries written during the late Ming and Qing for the six best-known novels. These essays, and the numerous interlinear and marginal comments compiled in the yanjiu ziliao volumes and reprints of commentary editions mentioned previously, constitute an invaluable source for authentic readings from the same cultural tradition—sometimes even the same literary circles—as the authors themselves.

A third major approach to the study of traditional fiction, the application of the tools of Western literary criticism, has gained most headway in the West through the model set by C. T. Hsia in his influential The Classic Chinese Novel (1968). Although in his analyses he generally utilized the approach of New Criticism, focusing on texts rather than their contexts, Hsia made judicious use of textual histories and biographical studies while squaring off against all simplistic readings. By observing the multifaceted artistry of these literary novels with the seriousness previously reserved for fictional works written in European languages, Hsia's book sparked a new direction in Western-language scholarship on Chinese narratives. In fact, this tendency parallels to a degree the intense critical scrutiny in the fiction pingdean commentary tradition that matured during the seventeenth century, a legacy that has come to be properly evaluated by modern students only in the last two decades, especially in the works listed above.

Given the great diversity and contentiousness within current European and North American literary theory and criticism, there has been a wide range of experimentation in applying narrowly Western approaches in analyses of Chinese fiction. Several schools of Western-style criticism are discernible. One relatively small group of scholars uses Chinese fiction in its engagement with the Western philosophical debates on literary theory and criticism in general (I refer to Chang Han-liang and John Deeney in Taiwan and others, such as Andrew Plaks—in certain of his writings—and Jing Wang, in North America). A second considerably larger group combines Chinese and Western critical approaches. Its scholarship has been fostered, on the one hand, by the close reading of literary texts akin to both European and North American critical practice and the intense (but sometimes subjective) scrutiny of Ming-Qing pingdean commentators in China. On the other hand, the increased

awareness and sophistication of interpretation of cultural context in Chinese-language scholarship has meshed with the new emphasis on historical and cultural factors in American Sinology to produce well-documented interpretations that take full advantage of renewed biographical and bibliographical studies and the critical analysis of intellectual, artistic, and religious currents surrounding individual literary works. (‘Deconstruction’ of texts, with its essentially solipsistic bent, has rarely been applied to the study of traditional Chinese fiction.)

With C. T. Hsia leading this second category (in his later studies of Jinsha yuan and other novels) one must include the senior scholars Hou Chien at National Taiwan University, David Roy at Chicago, the late Robert Ruhlmann, and André Lévy in Paris. Patrick Hanan’s The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition (1973) was a pioneering effort to utilize stylistic analysis to group huanren stories of Yuan and Ming periods that exhibit similar characteristics. Hanan was careful to accommodate evidence from more conventional analysis, with the result that his classification scheme is extremely useful in general despite the reservations some have concerning specific details.

Likewise, essential work has been produced more recently by a number of Western scholars: Katherine Carlitz (on Jin Ping Mei), Kenneth DeWoskin (on zhiguai fiction), Milena Dolezelová-Velingerová (who, with her students at Toronto and other Canadian colleagues, has produced excellent studies of late-Qing fiction), Victor Mair (whose work has redefined huanren studies), and Ellen Widmer and Robert Hegel (both of whom have demonstrated the engagement of seventeenth-century novelists with the political concerns of their day). Significant contributions have come from the hands of a younger generation of scholars as well: Keith McMahon, Wai-ye Li, David Rolston, Indira Satyendra, Yenna Wu, Angelina Yee (all students of Ming-Qing novels), Alan Barr and Judith Zeitlin (specialists in Qing classical language fiction)—among others. Although none of these scholars uses Western literary critical approaches exclusively, through their work Western methods have brought great vitality and exciting new insights to the field.

Andrew Plaks has probably contributed more than any other North American scholar toward revolutionizing Chinese fictional studies in European languages (although much of his work has appeared in Chinese as well). His writings include theoretical essays based on comparative analysis of Chinese and European fiction and detailed studies of specific masterworks utilizing certain Western approaches and a great array of materials from and about Chinese cultural history. His conclusions have been courageously innovative while his analyses are painstakingly supported by reference to corroborating contemporary evidence. Plaks’s first book, Archetype and Allegory in Dream of the Red Chamber (1976), explored the implicit parallels between Hongluo meng and elements of the intellectual and artistic traditions of its time. His seminal essay, “Full-length Hsiao-shuo and the Western Novel” (1978), traced the parallels in development that made the novel at both ends of the Eurasian landmass become an increasingly effective vehicle for self-expression. Later, Plaks’s concern turned to structural elements in other major novels, codified in his Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel (1987). Here Plaks demonstrates how Ming and Qing novelists self-consciously balanced scenes, characters, and other structural elements, many of which reflect ironically against earlier fiction and literature in other forms. Plaks’s writings are required reading for any serious student in the field (other essays on narrative structure include those by Hegel, Shuen-fu Lin, and Angelina Yee, among others).
An important critical realization in recent decades is the intellectual and artistic range within traditional Chinese fiction. Although officially denigrated as frivolous both to write and to read, fiction—both in classical and "vernacular" prose styles—was not simply an entertainment form for the marginally literate. Fiction was also an important part of literati culture. In fact, the most artistically complex works are demonstrably literati fiction written by and for the educated elite (see C. T. Hsia's seminal "Scholar-Novelist" and other essays in Plaks's Chinese Narrative). This—now—relatively obvious assertion flew in the face of the previously dominant politically motivated scholarship mentioned above that considered all fiction popular and therefore directly reflective of the creative imagination of China's "masses." Once the role of the literati in the creation of the texts of vernacular fiction gained widespread acceptance in the field (while not denying the popularity of some of the subject matter of these texts), then numerous scholars, many of them relatively young, began to comb traditional fiction for sophisticated art. Particularly outstanding developments have been achieved in examining the artistic significance of intertextual and contemporary references, the imaginative use of rhetoric, and the prevalence of narrative irony and parody. Examples include Phillip S. Y. Sun, *Jin Ping Mei de yi shu*, Katherine Carlitz, *The Rhetoric of Chin p'ing mei*, Haun Saussy, "Reading and Folly in Dream of the Red Chamber," Martin Huang, "Dehistoricization and Intertextualization: The Anxiety of Precedents in the Evolution of the Traditional Chinese Novel," and Deborah L. Porter, "Setting the Tone: Aesthetic Implications of Linguistic Patterns in the Opening Section of Shui-hu chuan," but more such noteworthy studies are appearing regularly in a variety of periodicals and from university presses. Several of these writers, along with Lu Xiaopeng, "The Fictional Discourse of P'ien-wen," build upon or respond to another of Andrew Plaks's pathbreaking essays, "Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative" (1977).

Realizing that novels and vernacular stories—like the classical tales—came from the hands of present, past, or potential Confucian scholars and bureaucrats, a few scholars have analyzed discourses and power relations within works of fiction, specifically the ways in which political or social legitimacy are questioned or authenticated by texts. I trace political engagement through several works in *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*; Ellen Widmer's *Margins of Utopia* explores the relationship between art and Ming loyalty in *Shuihu zhoubuan*; Paul Ropp discusses social criticism in the eighteenth-century novel *Rulin waishi* in his *Dissent in Early Modern China*; Patrick Hanan takes up the engagement of seventeenth-century short stories in "The Fiction of Moral Duty," Chinese fictional texts, like those of other times and places, often gained social legitimacy/respectability to the extent that they appeared to subvert the heretical actions and ideas they narrated; recent criticism has begun to unravel the ideological complexities of these writings. From this sort of perspective, convincing new general interpretations become possible: the many fictional writings on bandits and rebels can more reasonably be seen as exercises in accommodating the power structures in Confucian society rather than as representations of social disobedience or of ideological rebellion in themselves. Pursuing these leads further will undoubtedly reveal that containing heretical ideas or antisocial actions in narratives should be appreciated as more or less self-conscious attempts to gain social legitimacy for fiction by subverting—even silencing—already socially marginal groups such as women and rebels. (For the former, see Keith McMahon's *Causality and Containment.*) A successful analysis from a feminist critical perspective is Louise Edwards's "Gender Imperatives in Honglou meng: Baoyu's Bisexuality" (1990). Feminist perspectives have begun to revolutionize the way we read much of traditional Chinese
fiction by drawing critical attention to the analogies between the subservient position of marginalized male writers in social power structures and the position of women vis-à-vis men in general, the next few years should see an increasing number of perceptive new publications in this realm.

Moreover, many scholars, both Chinese (from the seventeenth-century critic Jin Shengtan onward) and Western, have revealed that certain Ming and Qing intellectuals took the writing—and reading—of fiction as a kind of literary game, often involving the application of hermeneutic skills learned in Confucian scholarship. This tendency is a product of China’s traditions of reading poetry and classic texts closely and making references to or quoting from these earlier works in their own writings. Consequently, students of the later works of fiction, of Ming and Qing literati novels in particular, must seek everywhere for reflections of earlier texts. Often these references are ironic: it is commonly accepted among scholars of Western fiction that to a certain degree each novel subverts its predecessors, a suggestion we should follow in this field as well. Surely parodies of more formal writing, of the act of writing, of specific texts, or the conception of texts, and particularly of other popular literary works are to be seen in virtually all examples of literati fiction, from the Ming if not earlier, to the point of parodies of parodies. Only when scholars in this field regularly confront the possibility of literary play and the engagement of China’s fiction writers in their literary traditions—as well as their political and social contexts—will these fictional works finally receive the complicated readings many of them deserve.

While in these last few paragraphs I have addressed only the “masterworks” of vernacular fiction, attention should be drawn to studies of works beyond the “canon.” Despite the fact that fictional texts as such—although not necessarily the story material in them—are generally traceable to the hands of men well trained in the literati tradition, the relationship between written and oral or “popular” material is inevitably complicated. However, preliminary surveys have found only subtle differences between the values implied in literati fiction and verifiably more popular works sharing the same subject matter. The process of converting oral material into a text which was then circulated among old China’s relatively small fully (or professionally) literate population conferred a new and higher cultural status on the material and generally affected the amount of ideologically uncharged narrative (see my experimental “Distinguishing Levels of Audiences”; a more sophisticated reading of these differences by Y. H. Zhao is his essay in Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature). Likewise, material that originally derived from writings seemingly was preferred over more purely oral material, the consequence of its purer textual lineage even as popular literature. This explains the greater respect accorded Sanguo zhi yanyi compared to Shihua while provoking other questions concerning the process of “canon” formation, especially in Ming-Qing fiction.

In this brief introduction to trends within scholarship on traditional Chinese fiction I have certainly not mentioned all of the many books and essays that have illuminated the field. During the past two decades, significant critical work has appeared—both in Chinese and in other languages—that addresses all major texts. Yet a large number of fictional works have either been studied only relatively superficially or not at all. In part, this situation was the consequence of the paucity of primary materials, a lack now alleviated through the opening of libraries in China and the reproduction of an ever-growing number of literary texts. However, until the entire corpus has been thoroughly surveyed, there can be no genuine sense of just what literary riches are to be found in traditional Chinese fiction—or even a
thorough understanding of its conventions—and its specialists are bound to repeat the oversights and generalizations typical of pioneering works like Lu Xun’s history. Recent comparative studies are beginning to clarify Chinese literary and cultural traditions by contrast with parallel phenomena in Western countries. Thus, even if we are approaching complete access to the primary materials in Chinese fiction, our critical studies are still far from exhausting their artistic and cultural significance. Clearly no one approach to scholarly activity has a monopoly on the field; the internationalization of research is enriching the criticism of scholars everywhere. With present tools and materials, the field can only move forward rapidly as it becomes increasingly well grounded historically and sophisticated in its critical methodology.

Translations

A new generation of translations into European languages will allow the canonical works of traditional fiction to be appreciated more broadly. The great novels, those C. T. Hsia aptly termed the “classics,” long ago were translated into English and other languages. Among the most widely read were C. H. Brewitt-Taylor’s Romance of the Three Kingdoms (1925), J. H. Jackson’s Water Margin (1937) and even Pearl Buck’s awkward All Men Are Brothers (1933—the latter two both versions of Shuihu zhuan), Clement Egerton’s rendition into English—and Latin for certain relatively graphic descriptions—of Jin Ping Mei (The Golden Lotus, 1939), Arthur Waley’s truncated and distorted version of Xiyou ji, entitled Monkey (1944), C. C. Wang’s graceful but considerably shortened Dream of the Red Chamber (1958), and the workmanlike version of Ruyin wuxiaishi by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, entitled The Scholars (1957). Honglou meng and a number of other, lesser, works found their way into German through the work of Franz Kuhn, and some, in turn, were retranslated to English (The Prater Mat of Flash), from Rou putuaan, and Florence and Isabel McHugh’s version of Honglou meng, Dream of the Red Chamber, among others.

Unavoidable as these renditions have been for classroom use, none has the degree of fidelity to the original expected of a serious scholarly translation; likewise, none has a sophisticated critical introduction. The only exception to this rule is Harold Shadick’s English version of the best of the late-Qing novels, Lao Can yangji by Liu E, The Travels of Lao Ti’an (1952); it has stood the test of time despite its exclusion of the later chapters, which Shadick judged to be of lesser artistic merit.

More recently a new generation of scholarly translations has transformed Western perceptions of the field. First was David Hawkes’s masterful recreation of the first eighty chapters of Honglou meng, entitled Story of the Stone; the final forty chapters were translated, differently but with equal immediacy, by John Minford (5 vols., 1973–86). Next came Anthony C. Yu’s annotated Journey to the West (from Xiyou ji, 4 vols., 1977–83) which provided far more detailed insights into the symbolic references in the text than any Chinese edition. This was followed by W. J. F. Jenner’s Journey to the West (3 vols., 1982–86) and André Lévy’s version, entitled La Pèlerinage vers l’Ouest (1991). Veteran Beijing translator Sidney Shapiro, despite admiringly choosing sections from two quite different editions, set a new standard for Shuihu translations with the lively style of his Outlaws of the Marsh (1961). André Lévy also has rendered Jin Ping Mei citous into French as Fleur en fuite d’or (2 vols.,
1985); the first volume of David Roy’s superb and heavily annotated English translation, The Plum in the Golden Vase appeared in 1993. Moss Roberts’s new and authoritative Sanguo zhi yanji translation has been published as The Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel (1992). For their part, the Yangs have reissued their version of Radin wai, The Scholar, in a new edition with all names transcribed in Hanyu pinyin rather than in the simplified Wade-Giles of the earlier version. However, a more thorough, annotated translation of this major eighteenth-century novel clearly is needed.

These classic novels have been joined by translations of a number of lesser works that contribute significantly to the general understanding of this field among nonspecialists and foreign readers. Gary Searman has presented Beiyu ji as an important religious text (The Journey to the North, 1987) with an extensive introduction; essayist and impresario Li Yu has been wonderfully served by Patrick Hanan’s lively rendition of Rou paiwan as The Carnal Prayer Mat, Tower of Myriad Mirrors, an English version of Xiyou ku, was published some years ago by Shuen-fu Lin and Larry Schulz; even the mythic struggles of Fengshen yanji are available as Creation of the Gods in two volumes (1992).

Ming and Qing short stories have been appearing in Western languages for 250 years (see Wang Lin, Zhongguo gudan xiaoshuo xiqu mingzhu zai Gumi), but few of the early translations were noteworthy for their accuracy. A fine exception was Cyril Birch’s lively Stories from a Ming Collection (1958); more typical were the many imprecise and often arbitrarily truncated translations by Yang Xiaoyi and Gladys Yang in The Courtesan’s Jewel Box (1957, revised edition with names in Hanyu pinyin, 1981). Here, too, the field has been invigorated by more readable versions. William Dobey has translated six of the Sanxian stories in his The Perfect Lady by Mistake and Other Stories by Feng Menglong (1976), John Scott presents enjoyable renditions in The Lachenus Academician and Other Tales by Master Ling Mengcha; Patrick Hanan and his collaborators provide similarly reliable versions of Li Yu’s short fiction in Silent Operas (Wenben xi, 1990); Hanan translates six Li Yu stories (from the collection Shier lan) in A Tower for the Summer Heat (1992). Other story translations appear in the anthologies discussed below.

Works of Chinese fiction in the classical language were initially known in the West only through very selective adaptations. Among the earliest was Herbert A. Giles’s Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio (1880), his selections from Liaozhai zhiyi. Unfortunately the greatness of that collection is still not fully available in English, although new annotated translations by Lu Yunzhong (Strange Tales of Liaozhai, 1988) and by Denis C. and Victor H. Mair (Strange Tales from Ma-ke-Do Studio, 1989) are a positive contribution toward that end. Poetry and Praise of the Ming and Qing (1986) introduces writings of a variety of forms, including some in the Liaozhai mold.

Yang Xiaoyi and Gladys Yang provided a great service through their translations of early fiction, The Man Who Sold a Ghost and The Dragon King’s Daughter (1958 and 1962), versions of zhiguai and chuanqi stories, respectively. However, neither collection has the necessary annotations, and except for a few pieces in the anthologies mentioned below, the only collection of reliable English versions is Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic, edited by Karl S. Y. Kao (1985). The major Six Dynasties compilation of anecdotes, both fictional and otherwise, concerning historical persons, Liu Yiqing’s Shihuo xinyu, is still wonderfully served by Richard B. Mauch’s heavily annotated Shi-huo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World

The narrative riches preserved in the Dunhuang caves came to be known in the European-language world first through Arthur Waley’s Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang (1960). Eugene Boyang’s faithful translation of one manuscript version of the Mulian tale appears in the Ma and Lau anthology listed below; Victor H. Mair painstakingly traces references to a variety of Buddhist and other texts in his renditions of four of these tales in Tun-huang Popular Narratives (1983). Translated pinghua appear in Liu Ts’iun-yen, Buddhist and Taoist Influences, and William O. Hennessey, Proclaiming Harmony; the latter is a highly readable version of Xuanbe yi, a thirteenth-century narrative concerning the fall of the Northern Song dynasty.

While a number of anthologies of Chinese fiction have appeared in English, only three are of special importance. Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations, edited by Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau (1978—with a companion volume having all the translated texts, Zhongguo chuantong duan pian xiaoshuo xuanyi, edited by Ma and Lau with Hu Wanchuan, 1979) includes renditions by numerous hands, but all are based on authoritative texts and are reasonably well annotated. H. C. Chang’s translations are especially felicitous in his Chinese Literature: Popular Fiction and Drama (1973), a collection of xiaoshuo stories and excerpts from longer narratives; Chang also includes thorough introductions and extremely useful notes. A sequel, Chang’s Chinese Literature: Tales of the Supernatural (1984) set a similarly high standard for scholarly translations; only a few others have approached it. These anthologies replace the earlier compilations by C. C. Wang, Traditional Chinese Tales (1944) and Wolfgang Bauer and Herbert Franke, The Golden Casket: Chinese Novellas of Two Millennia (translated from the German; 1964). Chinese Literature, the monthly-turnover literary journal in English from Beijing, continues to publish translations of traditional fiction as an adjunct to its standard fare of contemporary writings. The periodical has also introduced its own translation series in separate volumes, Panda Books. However, few of these unannotated versions of traditional literature are precise enough to use in the English-speaking classroom, and fewer still meet scholarly standards. On the other hand, Renditions, a semi-annual journal produced by the Research Centre for Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, has presented a broad variety of generally praiseworthy English translations of traditional literature, including fiction. Some of its special issues have appeared as separate volumes of considerable usefulness, I refer in particular to the late-Qing materials in Chinese Middlebrow Fiction from the Qing and Early Republican Era, edited by Liu Ts’iun-yen (1984).

One final note on translations: an unusual Japanese series presents parallel texts in Chinese and Japanese and includes many of the original illustrations for Ming novels: Taiyaku Chingoku rekishi shōsetsu zenbun (1983—).

In summary, one can only conclude that the field is far stronger now than ever before, with general access to primary material through more open libraries, more useful references and guides, and important reprint series of hard-to-find editions of all major and most minor works of the period—despite bowdlerization or selective omission on occasion. Recent secondary studies are pathbreaking in the area of biography and bibliographical work; critical analyses have proliferated, reaching new insights through attention both to details of fictional texts and to the contexts in which they appeared. Simultaneously, contemporary literary theory and critical methodology from Western literature are increasingly contributing to older philological
and historical analytical approaches. Furthermore, new and more authoritative translations of classics have made the masterpieces available to readers of European languages—and to students not yet linguistically prepared to appreciate the subtleties of the originals. As a consequence of all these extremely significant accomplishments, traditional fiction, like classical Chinese poetry, is ready to be integrated into broad considerations of world literature, to be acknowledged by comparatists and appreciated appropriately. If, as I believe, the duty of any academic field includes widening its gates to the outside world while presenting increasingly detailed and complicated readings of its basic materials to its specialists and their students, then the study of traditional Chinese fiction has achieved truly remarkable advances in the last few decades and stands at the threshold of ever more significant development.

Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simplified Character</th>
<th>Traditional Character</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ban Gu</td>
<td>班固</td>
<td>bān gu</td>
<td>班固</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banjuan</td>
<td>班固</td>
<td>bān gu</td>
<td>班固</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beiyou jì</td>
<td>北遊記</td>
<td>běi yóu jì</td>
<td>北遊記</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biji</td>
<td>笔记</td>
<td>bǐ jì</td>
<td>笔记</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bianjuan</td>
<td>變文</td>
<td>bìng wén</td>
<td>變文</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cai Yuanpei</td>
<td>蔡元培</td>
<td>cài yuán bēi</td>
<td>蔡元培</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cai tian ren</td>
<td>才子佳人</td>
<td>cài zǐ jiā rén</td>
<td>才子佳人</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cao Xueqin</td>
<td>曹雪芹</td>
<td>cáo xuě qín</td>
<td>曹雪芹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caoxue</td>
<td>曹學</td>
<td>cáo xué</td>
<td>曹學</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changqian</td>
<td>長篇</td>
<td>cháng piān</td>
<td>長篇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chuangji</td>
<td>傳奇</td>
<td>chuán qí</td>
<td>傳奇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chibiao</td>
<td>修表</td>
<td>xiū biǎo</td>
<td>修表</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congshu</td>
<td>攝書</td>
<td>suǒ shū</td>
<td>攝書</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da Tang Qinhuang cihua</td>
<td>大唐秦皇</td>
<td>dà táng qín huáng chìhuá</td>
<td>大唐秦皇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong Xi fan yanyi</td>
<td>東西發宴義</td>
<td>dōng xī fā yàn yì</td>
<td>東西發宴義</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dufu</td>
<td>道法</td>
<td>dào fá</td>
<td>道法</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erke Pai'an jingqi</td>
<td>二刻拍案驚奇</td>
<td>èr kè pāi àn jīngqí</td>
<td>二刻拍案驚奇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng Menglong</td>
<td>憩夢龍</td>
<td>fēng mèng lóng</td>
<td>憩夢龍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fengshen yanyi</td>
<td>封神演義</td>
<td>fēng shén yàn yì</td>
<td>封神演義</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gong'an</td>
<td>公案</td>
<td>gōng àn</td>
<td>公案</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guci</td>
<td>鼓詞</td>
<td>gǔ cí</td>
<td>鼓詞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guji melu</td>
<td>古目錄</td>
<td>gǔ mù lu</td>
<td>古目錄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guji xiaoshuo</td>
<td>古今小說</td>
<td>gǔ jī xiǎo shuò</td>
<td>古今小說</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han shu, Yuwen zhi</td>
<td>漢書藝文志</td>
<td>hàn shū, yù wén zhì</td>
<td>漢書藝文志</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongshu</td>
<td>紅樓</td>
<td>hóng shū</td>
<td>紅樓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huaben</td>
<td>話本</td>
<td>huà běn</td>
<td>話本</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jingbi tongyan</td>
<td>警世通言</td>
<td>jǐng bì tōng yán</td>
<td>警世通言</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaozheng pai</td>
<td>考證派</td>
<td>kǎozhèng pài</td>
<td>考證派</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lei shu</td>
<td>雷書</td>
<td>lèi shū</td>
<td>雷書</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Yu</td>
<td>李漁</td>
<td>lǐ yú</td>
<td>李漁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liang Qichao</td>
<td>梁啓超</td>
<td>liáng qǐ chāo</td>
<td>梁啓超</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ling Mengchu</td>
<td>漯濤初</td>
<td>liáng méng chu</td>
<td>漯濤初</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Yiqing</td>
<td>劉義慶</td>
<td>liú yì qìng</td>
<td>劉義慶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luo Guanzhong</td>
<td>羅貫中</td>
<td>luó guàn zhōng</td>
<td>羅貫中</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming Qing xiaoshuo luncong</td>
<td>明清小說論丛</td>
<td>míng qīng xiǎoshuò lún cōng</td>
<td>明清小說論丛</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu</td>
<td>明清小說研究</td>
<td>míng qīng xiǎoshuò yán jiū</td>
<td>明清小說研究</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ni huaben</td>
<td>變話本</td>
<td>ní huà běn</td>
<td>變話本</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pai'an jingqi</td>
<td>拍案驚奇</td>
<td>pāi àn jīngqí</td>
<td>拍案驚奇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pingduan</td>
<td>平點</td>
<td>píng diǎn</td>
<td>平點</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pinghua</td>
<td>平話</td>
<td>píng huà</td>
<td>平話</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pu Songling</td>
<td>蒲松齡</td>
<td>pú sōng líng</td>
<td>蒲松齡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pu jiu dou</td>
<td>古籍 trovare</td>
<td>gǔ jiè zhǎn</td>
<td>古籍 trovare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rou putuan</td>
<td>肉蒲團</td>
<td>ròu pǔ tuán</td>
<td>肉蒲團</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi Naian</td>
<td>施耐庵</td>
<td>shī nài ān</td>
<td>施耐庵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shier lau</td>
<td>十二樓</td>
<td>shí èr lóu</td>
<td>十二樓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shihou xingyu</td>
<td>世說新語</td>
<td>shì huò xīnyǔ</td>
<td>世說新語</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiyou ji</td>
<td>石頭記</td>
<td>shí tóu jì</td>
<td>石頭記</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shihu</td>
<td>四部</td>
<td>sì bù</td>
<td>四部</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siku quanshu tiyao</td>
<td>四庫全書提要</td>
<td>sì kù quán shū tí yào</td>
<td>四庫全書提要</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suoyin pai</td>
<td>索隱派</td>
<td>suǒ yǐn pài</td>
<td>索隱派</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenci</td>
<td>彈詞</td>
<td>tán cí</td>
<td>役詞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu Chengen</td>
<td>吳承恩</td>
<td>wú chéng én</td>
<td>吳承恩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu Jingxiu</td>
<td>吳敬梓</td>
<td>wú jìng zǐ</td>
<td>吳敬梓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wu sheng xi</td>
<td>無雙戯</td>
<td>wú shuāng xi</td>
<td>無雙戯</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiaoshuo</td>
<td>小說</td>
<td>xiǎo shuò</td>
<td>小說</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xingyi hengyan</td>
<td>醒世恒言</td>
<td>xǐng yì héng yán</td>
<td>醒世恒言</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xijiu bu</td>
<td>西遊補</td>
<td>xī jiū bù</td>
<td>西遊補</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuanhe yishi</td>
<td>奮和寓事</td>
<td>fèn hé yù shì</td>
<td>奮和寓事</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangfuyanyi</td>
<td>楊府演義</td>
<td>yáng fǔ yuǎn yì</td>
<td>楊府演義</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Zhupo</td>
<td>張竹坡</td>
<td>zhāng zhú pō</td>
<td>張竹坡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhanghui</td>
<td>章回</td>
<td>zhāng huí</td>
<td>章回</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhuiguai</td>
<td>詩觀</td>
<td>zī guān</td>
<td>詩觀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuangzi</td>
<td>莊子</td>
<td>zhuāng zǐ</td>
<td>莊子</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xingdiao</td>
<td>興隆</td>
<td>xīng lóng</td>
<td>興隆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhouyi</td>
<td>諸宮野</td>
<td>zhū yě</td>
<td>諸宮野</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zi</td>
<td>子</td>
<td>zǐ</td>
<td>子</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of References

Noteworthy Editions and Collections


_Mingwa Qingchu xiaoshuo_ 明末清初小說 [Late-Ming and Early-Qing Fiction], 1983–. Shenyang: Chunfeng.

_Ming Qing shiben xiaoshuo congkan_ 明清善本小說叢刊 [A Collection of Rare Editions of Ming-Qing Fiction], 1983. Taipei: Tianyi.


_Yuanwen quanzhang pinghua wuzheng jiaozhu_ 元刊全相平話五種校注 [Five Illustrated pinghua Published During the Yuan, Annotated], ed. Zhong Yaohua 鄧兆華. 1989. Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe.


Textual and Bibliographic Studies


Reference Books and Research Materials


Ming Qing xiaoershu xuba xuan 明清小說序跋選 [Selected Prefaces and Postfaces for Ming-Qing Fiction], comp. Dalian Library, 1983. Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi.


Xiaoshuo ciyu huxi 小說名詞解釋 [Explanations of Terms Used in Fiction], Lu Dan an 魯端安. 1964. Beijing: Zhonghua.


Critical Studies


HOU ZHONGYI 侯忠義. 1989. *Han Wu Liuchao xiaoshuo shi 漢魏六朝小說史 [A History of Fiction During the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties Periods]*. Shenyang: Chunfeng.


JIANG RUIZAO 姜瑞藻. 1958. *Xiaoshuo zhiyian 小說技藝始 [Rambling Thoughts on Fiction]*. Shanghai: Gujia wenxue.


Sun Xun Sun Xun. 1986. Ming Qing xiao.shu lun.gao 明清小說論稿 [Draft Discussions of Ming-Qing Fiction]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji.


Translations


Buck, Pearl. 1933. All Men Are Brothers. New York: John Day.


———. ed. 1990. Silent Opera. Hong Kong: Research Centre for Translation, Chinese University of Hong Kong.


Previously Published

*JAS State-of-the-Field Articles on China*


