



The Origin and Development of Chinese Fiction

CHANGYU SHI

Translated by

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PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

The Origin and Development of Chinese Fiction is a book that discusses the origin, development and evolution of the *xiaoshuo* genre. The first edition was published in 1994. It was included in the “Harvard-Yenching Academic Series” by the SDX Joint Publishing Company. As it was republished, revisions were made to the book. In addition to correcting typos and errors, Chapter 6 “The Chapter-Division *Xiaoshuo*” has been supplemented and adjusted in the three places.

The chapter-division *xiaoshuo* is a historical phenomenon whereby subjects were created, developed and accumulated into a book. There are no exceptions in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin* and *Pilgrimage to the West*. It was not until *Jin Ping Mei* that *xiaoshuo* became independent of ready-made subjects, drawing, refining and switching plot materials for real life instead. But the accumulation of subjects into a book does not equal to collective authorship. They are two completely different concepts. Although *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin* and *Pilgrimage to the West* use long-term accumulated subjects, they are by no means editing and processing old subjects. They are individual creations perfused with the writer’s sentiment. Accumulating subjects into a book indicates that the creation of chapter-division *xiaoshuo* has gone through a significant developmental stage. To make the above viewpoints clearer, partial adjustments were made in the discussion during the revision.

As for when the episodes on the way west met with the calamities in the 100-chapter *Pilgrimage to the West*, the old version followed the common saying, based on the summary text of the episodes of *Pilgrimage to the West* in the *Baktongsa-Enhae* occurred at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and in the early Ming Dynasty. I amended this conclusion, since the evidence for it still needs to be examined. It was generally believed that *Baktongsa-Enhae* was written at the end of the Goryeo Dynasty, the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the early Ming Dynasty in China. This is not the case. The *Bakthonasa*, the earliest text of *Baktongsa-Enhae*, is a document of the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties. The *Baktongsa-Enhae* is the second revised text of *Bakthonasa*. It was revised during the reign of Emperor Hyeonjong of Korea, that is, in the Kangxi reign (1661–1722) of the Qing Dynasty. There are three hundred years between the two texts. Since the original text of *Bakthonasa* has not been found, it is not known what specific modifications were made in the *Baktongsa-Enhae*. Fortunately, as a companion work of *Bakthonasa*, *Nogeoldae*, written in the late Goryeo Dynasty as the conversational Chinese textbook, is still extant. Comparing *Nogeoldae-Enhae* with *Nogeoldae*, it becomes obvious how much difference there is between the two. As a conversational Chinese textbook, it must stick to real life and the oral vocabulary that changes with social life. In the period of the Kangxi reign, the *Pilgrimage to the West* was popular, so it was likely that *Baktongsa-Enhae* drew on the *Pilgrimage to the West*.

The stories of the scholar and the beauty are the products of the classical Chinese novella and the vernacular chapter-division *xiaoshuo*. They have their common features in narrative, language and length, so they are listed separately from the *xiaoshuo* genre, where many changes were made.

The book has been revised, but errors are still unavoidable. I hope that further corrections will be made.

Finally, I would like to thank SDX Joint Publishing Company for their support, without which this book would not be revised and republished.

Beijing, China
March 2014

Changyu Shi

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TRANSLATORS' NOTE

In this book, Chinese names and place names are in general spelling according to the Chinese System known as *Pinyin*. It should be noted that in Chinese the family name comes first, and the given name second. We also found it difficult to render some important culture-loaded terms into English, and so they were rendered in an approximation of their literal meaning, with *Pinyin* in place of Chinese characters in the brackets for the terms. As for the titles of some works, which are merely a few key Chinese characters having a specific meaning, we just put them into *Pinyin*.

Frequently Encountered Chinese Terms:

chi a unit of measurement, translated as “foot”.

li was usually about one-third of an English mile and now has a standardized length of a half-kilometer.

liang translated as “tael”, equals one-sixteenth of a *jin*.

jin was equal to 1 1/3 pounds or 604.79 grams. Traditionally, it was divided into 16 liang. In modern China, the *jin* is a metric unit equal to exactly 500 grams (1.1023 pounds) and divided into 10 liang.

zi translated as “courtesy name”, the name by which an educated person was addressed by people of his or her own generation and probably the one used more often than the person’s official name.

Among the reference works we have consulted are:

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CHRONOLOGY OF CHINESE DYNASTIES

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Xia | ca.2070–ca. 1600 BCE |
| Shang (Yin) | ca.1600–ca.1046 BCE |
| Zhou | ca.1046–ca.256 BCE |
| Western Zhou | ca.1027–771 BCE |
| Eastern Zhou | 770–256 BCE |
| Spring and Autumn | 770–476 BCE |
| Warring States | 475–221 BCE |
| Qin | 221–207 BCE |
| Han | 206 BCE–220 CE |
| Western Han | 206 BCE–8 CE |
| Xin | 9–25 |
| Eastern Han | 25–220 |
| Three Kingdoms | 220–280 |
| Wei | 220–265 |
| Shu | 221–263 |
| Wu | 222–280 |
| Six Dynasties (Wu, Eastern Jin, Former Song, Southern Qi, Southern Liang, and Southern Chen) | 222–589 |
| Jin | 265–420 |
| Western Jin | 265–316 |
| Eastern Jin | 317–420 |
| Southern and Northern Dynasties | 420–589 |
| Southern Dynasties | |
| Former Song | 420–479 |
| Southern Qi | 479–502 |
| Southern Liang | 502–557 |

(continued)

(continued)

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Southern Chen | 557–589 |
| Northern Dynasties | |
| Northern Wei | 386–534 |
| Eastern Wei | 534–550 |
| W-ei | 535–556 |
| Northern Qi | 550–577 |
| Northern Zhou | 557–581 |
| Sui | 5– |
| Tang | 618–907 |
| Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms | 907–979 |
| Five Dynasties | |
| Later Liang | 907–923 |
| Later Tang | 923–936 |
| Later Jin | 936–946 |
| Later Han | 947–950 |
| Later Zhou | 951–960 |
| Ten Kingdoms | 907–979 |
| Liao (Khitan) | 907–1125 |
| Song | 960–1129 |
| Northern Song | 960–1127 |
| Southern Song | 1127–1279 |
| Xixia (Tangut) | 1038–1227 |
| Jin (Jurchen) | 1115–1234 |
| Yuan (Mongol) | 1271–1368 |
| Ming | 1368–1644 |
| Qing (Manchu) | 1644–1911 |

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Xiaoshuo and Elements of Its Literary Style

1.1 THE CONCEPT OF *XIAOSHUO*: DIFFERENT VIEWS BETWEEN WRITERS OF *XIAOSHUO* AND TRADITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHERS

Chinese narrative literature has a time-honored tradition. As early as the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), there were *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu*) and *Intrigues of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce*) in the documentary style as well as *Zuo Commentary* (*Zuozhuan*), which is so ingenious in its recording of events and depictions of people. In the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE–24 CE), the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*), written by Sima Qian (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE), is the epitome of historiographic literature. Many of its chapters can be read as *xiaoshuo* (fiction) if we put its historical implications aside. Chinese *xiaoshuo* had its roots in historiographic literature, but the latter was so highly developed that the former had to live for a fairly long period of time in its shadow, and therefore developed slowly. It was like a poor toddler, stumbling through time in the grip of historiographic literature. Given this history, it is understandable that theorists and scholars often looked at Chinese *xiaoshuo* with contempt. However, traditional bibliographers take Chinese *xiaoshuo* as a by-way and think that it deserves to be placed in the garden of literature, since it has some scant value for historical data even though it is a minor genre. In other words, traditional bibliographers have consistently regarded Chinese *xiaoshuo* as a minor appendage to historiography.

The first known use of the term *xiaoshuo* was made in the *Zhuangzi*:

If one polishes *xiaoshuo* to fish for fame and reputation, one will be far from obtaining *dada* (great wisdom).¹

This means that if a person seeks honor and renown by means of small talk on trivial matters, he or she will be far from enlightenment and wisdom. “Xiaoshuo” here is used as a phrase, not specifically referring to a genre. It was Huan Tan (ca. 23 BCE–56 CE) and Ban Gu (32–92) of the Eastern Han Dynasty who used it as a concept for genre. Huan Tan said:

Those in the tradition of *xiaoshuo* collect fragmentary and petty utterances and draw on parables and fables at hand to make small books, which contain guidance on how to discipline oneself and manage one’s family affairs.²

He followed Zhuang Zi’s recommendation and called small books that “collect fragmentary and petty utterances and draw on parables and fables at hand” *xiaoshuo*. Ban Gu provided accounts of “*xiaoshuo*’s tradition” in the “Treatise on Arts and Letters” (*Yiwen zhi*) in his *History of the Han* (*Hanshu*), but none of the fifteen works he listed under *xiaoshuo* are extant. As Ban Gu said:

The *xiaoshuo* style was probably created by those junior officials (*paiguan*) whose duty was to collect town gossip and street talk. Confucius said, “Even *xiaodao* (by-ways) are sure to have something worth looking at, but if going too far one could become bogged down.” Gentlemen do not undertake this themselves, but neither do they dismiss such talk altogether. They have the sayings and chats of the ordinary people collected and kept, as some of them may prove useful. Even in the opinions of wood cutters and utterances of mad men, one may find something still worth jotting down.

The “xiaoshuo”, as understood by Ban Gu, consisted mostly of street-talk and alley-conversation collected by junior officers who, as the

¹ From the External Objects 外物 of Miscellaneous Chapters 杂篇. In *Zhuangzi*.

² From notes of General Li in the Army in Jiang Yan’s Miscellaneous Poems 江淹杂体诗. In *The Anthology* 文选, Chap. 31.

textual research by Yu Jiayi (1883–1955) shows, were “scholars” responsible for collecting popular talks and conveying them to emperors. It can be inferred that those lost fifteen works listed under the heading of *xiaoshuo* were “probably attributed to famous men of early times, or ancient records. The first category bore some resemblance to early philosophical writings, except that they were inferior, while the second resembled historical records, only less reliable”.³ The reason that they were recorded and kept was that they contained guidance on how to discipline oneself and manage one’s family affairs. Ban Gu’s definition of *xiaoshuo* has become a classic concept in traditional Chinese bibliography. From the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, when Ji Yun (1724–1805) compiled *The General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasures* (*Siku quanshu zongmu*), despite the development of the times, the style and pattern of literature underwent tremendous changes. However, traditional Chinese bibliography adhered to Ban Gu’s definition. “Xiaoshuo” was included in the category of philosophical writings or in historical records. No matter where it was positioned, “xiaoshuo” would not contain anything fictional or the writers’ imagination in the narration. From a modern perspective, those who tell the truth are historians while those who tell lies are writers of *xiaoshuo*. The concept of “xiaoshuo” in traditional Chinese bibliography is completely different from the one in prose narrative. There were fictional elements in many tales of real men and the supernatural in the Han, Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties. Traditional bibliologists acknowledge that these are “xiaoshuo” and are true to their own principles. They argue that, despite the legendary and anecdotal nature of folktales, these tales are consistent with the nature of “xiaoshuo” so long as they are truthfully recorded as they originally were, and that the recorder/writer has not subjectively added a little varnish that is purely imaginary or exaggerated. Moreover, in the ancient society, due to the limited perception of people, many natural and social phenomena could not be explained, so it was not strange for them to resort to destiny and ghosts. The *Record of the Search of Spirits* (*Soushen ji*) narrates many tales of the supernatural (*zhiguai*). Although modern people know that they are fallacious at first glance, the author Gan Bao himself believed that they were true. He said that

³ Lu Xun. The Historian’s Accounts and Evaluations of *Xiaoshuo*. In Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, trans. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2009, 3.

he compiled *Record of the Search of Spirits* to prove “the existence of supernatural beings”.

Liu Zhiji (661–721), the famous historian of the Tang Dynasty, had a typical view of *xiaoshuo*. As a historian with profound knowledge and rigorous scholarship, he followed Ban Gu’s idea. However, he held more specific and strict standards for *xiaoshuo*. First, he admitted that *xiaoshuo* “formed a school of its own and could go side by side with official histories”.⁴ The reason that *xiaoshuo* forms a school of its own is that it has a long history and can be expected to have a prosperous future. He believed that *xiaoshuo* came from conversations along walkways, people’s mouths, street-talk, rumors and hearsay, a mixture of what was true with what was not. It is difficult to compare it with the five commentaries (i.e., *Zou Commentary*, *Jia Commentary*, *Gongyang Commentary*, *Guliang Commentary* and *Zuo Commentary*) and the three bibliographical treatises (i.e., *Records of the Historian*, *History of the Han* and *History of the Later Han*). It can only serve as additional references and complementary to the official history. From the standpoint of a historian, Liu Zhiji was very harsh in criticizing the tales of real men and the supernatural in the Han, Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties. He subdivided *xiaoshuo* into ten groups, (1) unofficial notes, (2) minor records, (3) anecdotes, (4) notes on trivial matters, (5) local chronicles, (6) family histories, (7) anecdotal biographies, (8) miscellaneous records, (9) local conventions and customs, and (10) chronicles of the imperial city. Well-known tales of real men (*zhiren*) such as *Collection of Tales (Yulin)* by Pei Rongqi (date unknown, in Eastern Jin Dynasty) and *A New Account of Tales of the World (Shishuo Xinyu)* by Liu Yiqing (403–444) are listed in the category of notes on trivial matters. Famous tales about the supernatural such as Gan Bao’s *Record of the Search of Spirits* and Liu Yiqing’s *Records of Darkness and Light (Youming Lu)* were listed in the miscellaneous records. Liu Zhiji said, “Miscellaneous works of the Jin Dynasty, such as *Collection of Tales (Yulin)*, *A New Account of Tales of the World (Shishuo xinyu)*, *Records of Darkness and Light (Youming lu)* and the *Record of the Search of Spirits (Soushen ji)* do not belong to the same group. Included in them are either witty dialogues or accounts of strange beings like spirits and ghosts. Their contents are unrefined and vulgar so that Yang Xiong (53 BCE–18 CE, a scholar in the Han Dynasty) would

⁴ Li Zhiji. Miscellaneous Accounts 杂述. In *Comprehensive Study of Historical Writings* 史通. Chap. 10.

not waste his time on them. They talk about the chaotic and supernatural which Confucius would not bother to speak of.”⁵ There were more negative comments in it. Nevertheless, he said that *xiaoshuo* “gives accounts of small talks that are merely strung together”, and that “some writings are profane, and many words are not classical”, hence making them worth little in comparison with the five commentaries and three bibliographical treatises. However, they do contain some historical facts that are not recorded in the official histories. Therefore, they cannot be discarded altogether. As he argued, “A wise monarch chooses to accept utterances of the common people, and poets do not abandon rustic styles. Therefore, people who engage in learning are erudite and knowledgeable. If we do not read alternative writings other than the Confucian classics and do not study rare books other than the official histories, only concentrating on the rites of the Zhou and Confucianism and the historical books such as Sima Qian’s *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*) and Ban Gu’s *Book of the Han* (*Hanshu*), how can we achieve the purpose of learning?”⁶ Liu Zhiji lived at a time that predated the period when *Chuanqi* tales boomed in the Tang Dynasty, so it was impossible for him to make any comments on the *Chuanqi* tales. However, *Chuanqi* tales started to develop in his time. *An Account of the Ancient Mirror* (*Gujing ji*) by Wang Du (date unknown, in the late Sui and early Tang dynasties), *The Fairies’ Cavern* (*Youxian ku*) by Zhang Zhuo (660–740) and anonymously *A Supplement to Jiang Zong’s Biography of the White Ape* (*Bu jiangzong baiyuan zhuan*), etc., survived. We do not know whether Liu Zhiji himself had read them, but it was a fact that he did not refer to them. If he had read them but did not make any comment, they were not worthy of his comments. If he neglected to read them, it was a sign of his contempt. From his standpoint as a historian, it is a big question whether *An Account of the Ancient Mirror* and the like are eligible to be classified as “xiaoshuo”.

Since the Emperor Dezong (reigned 779–805) of the Tang Dynasty, *Chuanqi* tales have sprung up, and there were a great number of well-known writers who established a genre with great vitality and social influence. Although the writers of *Chuanqi* tales pretended to stress that the story in their work had taken place at a certain time and a certain

⁵ Liu Zhiji. The Collection and Identification of Historical Writings 采撰. In *Comprehensive Study of Historical Writings*, Chap. 5.

⁶ Liu Zhiji. Miscellaneous Accounts 杂述. In *Comprehensive Study of Historical Writings* 史通. Chap. 10.

place, or that they had heard it from a particular person at a particular time, intending to emphasize that it was by no means fictional, it was not hard for one to identify the imaginary and fictional elements contained therein. Regardless of the writer's thoughts and motives, the *Chuangqi* tales of the Tang Dynasty failed to meet the historian's principle of "factual record". Its emergence indicates that *xiaoshuo* written in prose narrative broke away from the historical record and acquired the essence and nature of pure literature.

Meanwhile, the popular literature of the Song and Yuan dynasties arose, and the "folk art of storytelling" spread throughout big cities from the north to the south. Oral literature developed into written literature, and *Huaben xiaoshuo* appeared on the literary stage. Marked by *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Water Margin*, the vernacular stories reached maturity and flourished during the Wanli reign (1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty. Hu Yinglin (1551–1602), a literary critic of the Ming Dynasty who was born nine hundred years after Liu Zhiji, still adhered to the concept of traditional bibliography for the 900-year history of "xiaoshuo" and was rather conservative and outdated in his classification of *xiaoshuo*. He said, "*xiaoshuo* are like the books of Pre-Qin scholars. The principles contained therein are as explained in Confucian classics and annotations. The recorded events are much like history and biography."⁷ *Xiaoshuo* was still included in the category of philosophical writings or historical records. Compared with Liu Zhiji, Hu Yinglin introduced a new concept. First, he expanded the coverage of the concept of "xiaoshuo" and divided it into six subtypes: records of the supernatural (*zhiguai*), *chuanqi*, miscellaneous records (*zalu*) assorted remarks (*congfan*), evidential research (*bianding*) and moral admonitions (*zhengui*). Second, he included the *Chuangqi* tales that debuted during the Tang Dynasty in the category of "xiaoshuo". In fact, the three types, i.e., assorted remarks, evidential research and moral admonitions, are non-narrative items, and it is improper to include them in the category of "xiaoshuo". It is a small concession to include *The Story of Yingying* (*Cui Yingying*) and *The Tale of Huo Xiaoyu* in the category of "xiaoshuo". He probably thought that such works were factual records rather than fabricated illusions. He denounced works like *The Story of Liu Yi* as "absurd narratives and men of letters should despise them". Thus, his criterion

⁷ Hu Yinglin. Introduction to Nine Streams 九流绪论. In *Brush Notes from the Shaoshi Mountain Retreat* 少室山房笔丛.

still revolved around the question of whether *xiaoshuo* were based on facts or were intentionally fabricated. Those which are closer to being factual are *xiaoshuo* and those which are closer to fabrication are not, and even if they are classified as such, they are still not worth reading. He also excluded the popular full-length *xiaoshuo*, short stories and novella in classical Chinese. He referred to *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Water Margin* as “the romance”; “In this world there are street-talk and alley-conversation, which are so-called romances included in legendary shows”.⁸

Ji Yun (1724–1805) in the Qing Dynasty developed a thorough understanding of the concept of *xiaoshuo* when he was in charge of editing *The General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasures* (*Siku quanshu zongmu*). He adhered to the traditional view and classified *xiaoshuo* into three subtypes: (1) miscellaneous accounts, (2) records of marvels and (3) anecdotes. The fundamental principle was to be truthful, excluding vulgar and extravagant writings, which simply confuse people. Thus, the *Chuanqi* tales of the Tang Dynasty were cast out of *xiaoshuo*. The *xiaoshuo* in the catalogue of preserved titles (*cunmu*) of the philosophical writings in *The General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasures* includes *Unofficial Biography of Feiyan* (*Feiyan waizhuan*), *Anecdotes of the Daye Reign* (*Daye shiyi ji*), *Tales of Seas and Mountains* (*Haishan ji*), *The Story of the Labyrinth* (*Milou ji*), *The Opening of the Canal* (*Kaibe ji*) and other *Chuanqi* tales in the Five Dynasties and Song Dynasty, but they did not conform to the style of *xiaoshuo*. In his judgment, *Unofficial Biography of Feiyan* was attributed to later writers. “Despite the intimate relation she had with Feiyan as the latter’s close maid, Fan Ni had no possibility to witness the obscene scenes between curtains in the boudoir, and even if she did by chance know about these things about Feiyan and the man in the bed, there would be no point for her to relate it to Fan Tongde in detail. Therefore, it is certain that there are hypocrites and braggarts in it”. *Anecdotes of the Daye Reign* was, in his viewpoint, a “totally groundless vulgar creation”. As for the *Tales of Seas and Mountains*, *The Story of the Labyrinth* and *The Opening of the Canal*, he deemed them as “the vulgarest ones among the vulgar

⁸ Ibid. in Zhuangyue weitan 庄岳委谈.

that contain nothing that is of moral significance”.⁹ What Ji Yun found hard to tolerate was fiction purely based on imagination and fabrication. With the concept of traditional *xiaoshuo*, he criticized *Strange Tales from Liaozhai* (*Liaozhai zhiyi*) as follows:

Strange Tales from Liaozhai is exceedingly popular. It is the work of a talented man, but it is not one that a serious scholar would write. Many ancient works from the Han dynasty down to the Tang dynasty have been lost. Of those remaining there are two types: *xiaoshuo* such as the *Garden of Marvels* (*Yiyuan*) by Liu Jingshu (ca. 390–ca.468) and *A Sequel to Records of Search for Spirits* by Tao Qian (ca. 365–427), and biographies such as *Unofficial Biography of Feiyan* and *Encounter with a Fairy* (also *The Story of Yingying*). Because the *Extensive Records from the Taiping Reign* (*Taiping guangji*) contains different forms of *xiaoshuo*, it could include both types, but it is incredible to find two literary forms in one work. *Xiaoshuo*, which is different from drama that may be altered or adapted while being performed on stage, is to be written as record of what has been seen and heard ... Now Pu Songling gives a vivid picture of the smallest details down to amorous gestures and the secret whispers between lovers. It would be unreasonable to assume that the writer experienced these things himself; but if he was describing what happened to others, how would he have known so much? This would be hard to explain.

Ji Yun questioned how it would be possible for the writer to know the smallest details and amorous gestures between the characters in the work. If these characters were real, would they share their private things with the writer? It would not be possible for the writer to know their secrets, so the euphemistic and delicate descriptions were obviously fabricated by the writer through imagination. Ji Yun believed that *Unofficial Biography of Feiyan* and *Encounter with a Fairy* (*Huizhen ji*) contained the imagination of the writer, so they were the *Chuangqi* tales rather than *xiaoshuo*. *Strange Tales from Liaozhai* belonged to the “*xiaoshuo*” genre, but it used the method of *Chuangqi*. Ji Yun dismissed it as being neither fish nor fowl, mainly because it had the essence of *Chuangqi* that was disguised under the coat of *xiaoshuo*.

From the perspective of literature, the concept of *xiaoshuo* in traditional bibliography can be criticized for being conservative and completely

⁹ *Xiaoshuojia* in the catalogue of preserved titles of Philosophical Writings in *The General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasures*. Chap. 143.

disregarding the historical facts of literary development. However, from another viewpoint, it has to be admitted that it has its own factual basis. As a genre independent from historical and philosophical writings, *xiaoshuo* has been in existence for a long time. The tales of real men and the supernatural in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties are not *xiaoshuo* in the sense of literature. They are just its embryonic forms, which should be included in the category of historical records or philosophical writings. Since the Tang Dynasty, one of its forms has been transformed into *Chuanqi* tales, opening the first page in the history of literary fiction. However, “*xiaoshuo*” of historical records or philosophical writings have not disappeared. Since the Tang and Song dynasties, many works have been produced. As stated in *The Complete Library of the Four Treasures*, “Since the Tang and Song dynasties there have been many works of this sort. Though many of them are idle gossip or foolish superstition, intermingled with them are quite a few useful pieces of knowledge, research and moral teaching. Ban Gu said that writers of *xiaoshuo* were successors of the petty officials who collected information. A comment in the *History of the Han* said that the task of these officials was to help the ruler to understand folk customs and morals. Evidently, this was the ancient system for assembling miscellaneous information. Hence these works should not be discarded as merely useless or spurious.”¹⁰ After the Tang Dynasty, two sorts of tales began developing in parallel. Some works shared features of the two while some collections included tales of two different natures. For example, many tales like the *Strange Tales from Liaozhai* are *xiaoshuo* in the sense of literature, but there are quite a few works that fall into the “*xiaoshuo*” category of traditional bibliography. In view of this parallel and entangled situation, it would be unreasonable of us to label the traditional bibliographers as being over-conservative in their adherence to their traditional definition of “*xiaoshuo*” and their insistence on drawing a clear line between *xiaoshuo* and fabricated tales that have no grounds in real life. There is surely something worthy in what they believed to be true.

It is essential that we do not confuse the issue. The dividing line between the “*xiaoshuo*” of traditional bibliography and “*xiaoshuo*” as a

¹⁰ *Xiaoshuojia* under the category of Philosophical Writings in *The General Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasures*, Chap. 140. Lu Xun. This translation is revised from Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, trans. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2009, 6.

prose narrative in literature is whether it is a factual record or a fiction. A writing would be regarded as *xiaoshuo* in traditional bibliography if it is a true depiction of the real life (at least the writer thinks so), and as *xiaoshuo* in prose narrative if it is fictional. Although the latter concept came into being relatively later, it would be wrong to claim that it did not emerge until the “May Fourth” New Literary Movement or the Modern Literary Reform Movement. As early as in the Wei and Jin dynasties, “clown *xiaoshuo*” was already in use. The addition of the modifying “clown” before the word “*xiaoshuo*” was to distinguish it from the so-called *xiaoshuo* of factual record. Pei Songzhi (372–451) quoted a passage from *A Brief Account of the Wei Dynasty* (*Weilue*) when he annotated the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*:

Cao Cao, the first emperor of the Wei Dynasty (220–266), sent Handan Chun to visit Cao Zhi. Zhi was very happy to see him and arranged for him to take a seat. He did not start to talk with him at once. It was hot at that time and so Zhi asked his servant to fetch water and took a bath. Then putting some scented powder on his face, bareheaded and with naked feet he did the dance of the Hu people (Wuzhuiduan), played with sword, and read the clown *xiaoshuo* with a few thousand words. After that, he said to Handan Chun, “Mr. Handan, what do you think of the story?” After he put on his headscarf and readjusted his clothes, he talked to Handan Chun about the creation of the earth and the differences between things.

There are thirty-eight books in *A Brief Account of the Wei Dynasty*, the original text of which was lost. The writer Yu Huan was from the capital city (Changan) and occupied a post as a Director (Langzhong). Pei Songzhi was born during the Northern and Southern dynasties. There would be no question of the authenticity of the words quoted from *A Brief Account of the Wei Dynasty*. Even if there were problems, it indicated that there existed the concept of “clown *xiaoshuo*” at that time. From this context, we know that “clown *xiaoshuo*” is a kind of art, which generally belongs to the scope of “variety shows” (*baixi*), characterized with playful teasing. It is one of the early forms of “storytelling” art. There were “folk tales” and “tales of urban life” in the Tang Dynasty. The *History of Law System of the Tang Dynasty* (*Tanghui yao*) in the fourth book states that “in the tenth year of Yuan He (815) ...Wei Shou was recalled to the readership. He was fond of a humorous drama and good at folk tales.” Duan Chengshi (803–863) says in the fourth chapter of the sequel to *A Miscellany from Youyang* (*Youyang zazu*), “At

the end of Tai He period (827–835), I went to a place of entertainment watching miscellaneous shows on my brother's birthday, and there was a storyteller who mispronounced the word Bianque." Its nature was like that of "clown *xiaoshuo*" and was probably developed from "clown *xiaoshuo*". The two characters "xiao shuo" cannot be separated from the three concepts of "clown *xiaoshuo*", "folk tales" and "tales of urban life". They associated the "xiaoshuo" with games and entertainment, making the original meaning of "xiaoshuo" change, which cannot be ignored. As a concept different from traditional bibliography, the "xiaoshuo" first appeared in the category of "storytelling" in the Song and Yuan dynasties, according to existing historical data. Nai Deweng (date unknown) in the Southern Song Dynasty wrote the *Notes of the Chief Sights in the Capital* (*Ducheng jisheng*) to record the "storytelling" in his dynasty. There were four groups of "storytelling": "xiaoshuo", "accounts of battles and war", "Buddhist legends" and "historical tales". "Xiaoshuo" was called "Yinzi-er that is stories of romantic love, tales of the supernatural, historical legends, accounts of law-courts and detection, of sword-fights, contests with clubs or of the vicissitudes of fortune". "Xiaoshuo" was a category of "storytelling" classified as such since it was not yet written literature. In the Ming Dynasty, the status of "xiaoshuo" on the hierarchy rose from the class of "species" to the class of "genus", covering "accounts of battles and war", "Buddhist legends" and "historical tales". It transformed from oral literature into written literature and carried the connotation of *xiaoshuo* as a prose narrative in literature.

The Sixty Stories (also *Qingping shantang huaben*) compiled by Hong Pian during the Jiajing reign (1522–1566) in the Ming Dynasty is the first anthology of stories that we have known so far. This anthology collected the "Buddhist legends" such as "Liannü Attains Buddhahood on the Way to her Wedding", and the "historical tales" like "The Story of the Han General Li Guang", the "Sharp-tongued Li Cuilian" with its style of telling, singing, rhyme and prose, and "Blue Bridge" (*Lanqiao ji*) in the classical Chinese *Chuanqi* tales, etc. Hong Pian referred to the above works as "xiaoshuo". The so-called *xiaoshuo* here is a prose narrative developed from previous *Chuanqi* tales and folk "storytelling". Its subsets were originally named *Rainy Window Collection* (*Yuchuang ji*), *Leaning on a Pillow Collection* (*Qizhen ji*), *Ever-burning Lamp Collection* (*Changdeng ji*), *Suibang Collection*, *Relieving Boredom Collection* (*Jiemen ji*) and *Awakening Dream Collection* (*Xingmeng ji*). It was obvious that they were printed to provide entertainment not for the emperors to understand

folk customs and morals or to correct the deficiencies in official history. *The Sixty Stories* was published in the 20th–30th year of the Jiajing Reign. In the same period, Lang Ying (1487–1566) said in the twenty-second chapter of *Seven Revised Types of Drafts* (*Qixiu leigao*), “When *xiaoshuo* started in the Renzong reign (1022–1063), the country was peaceful and prosperous, and strange and outlandish things were needed for everyday entertainment”. The *xiaoshuo* that Lang Ying referred to was for people to read for fun, which corresponded to what Hong Pian said.

Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624), a contemporary of Hu Yingli, had a fully developed concept of “*xiaoshuo*” in narrative literature. As he argued:

Written as a way of writing, as a form of entertainment, *xiaoshuo* and variety shows must be a medley of facts and fiction. If the plot is fully developed and heart-touching, there is no need to ask whether it is actual or supposed. Throughout history, there are many tales such as *The Western Capital Miscellany* (*Xijing zaji*), *Unofficial Biography of Feiyan*, *Anecdotes of the Tianbao Reign* (*Tianbao yishi*), biographies such as *Curl Beard* (*Qiuran*), *Red Threads* (*Hongxian*), *Yin Niang*, *The White Ape* (*Baiyuan*), etc., and miscellaneous dramas such as *The Story of the Lute* (*Pipa ji*), *The Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji*), *The Tale of the Hairpin* (*Jinchai ji*), etc. Did these events really happen? At that moment when *xiaoshuo* touched on something queer or grotesque, it would be recognized by people as being nonhistorical. In the new dramas such as *Silk Wash* (*Huansha*), *Green Sweater* (*Qingshan*), *Wet Nurse* (*Yiru*), *Orphan* (*Gu'er*), etc., everything contained in them must conform to official history. If the time was not accurate, or the family name was different, the dramatist hesitated to use them in his writing. If this was the case, it would be enough for one to read historical biographies. Why would there be a need to write drama?¹¹

Xie Zhaozhe (1567–1624) offered a response to the traditional concepts. The development of Chinese historical literature and the prominent position of Confucian classics as well as the feudal discrimination against popular literature, coupled with the fact that *xiaoshuo* itself flattered historical biography, brought about a traditional view that a completely fabricated *xiaoshuo* is not a good one and a good *xiaoshuo* must contain real people and real things. Although Hu Yinglin appreciated *The Story of Liu Yi*, which says “The narrative account is so detailed, and Fan Ye (398–445) and Li Yanshou (fl. 618–676) are unable to achieve

¹¹ Xie Zhaozhe. *The Fivefold Miscellany* 五杂俎. Chap. 15.

it”, he disagreed with fabricated *xiaoshuo* and denounced it as being “absurd and incredible”.¹² Many people speculated as to whom or what *Jin Ping Mei* and *A Dream of Red Mansions* alluded. Their views were dominated by this traditional concept. Xie Zhaozhe made it clear that *xiaoshuo*, like dramas (*xiqu*), were made up, which drew a clear distinction between *xiaoshuo* and historical biographies. This was an enlightened argument at that time. What is written in *xiaoshuo* is not without authenticity. The authenticity does not depend on the fact that the person or events depicted cannot be proved to have been like that. It is only mandatory that the character and plot development conform to the logic of life. As Xie Zhaozhe said, “*Xiaoshuo* and other vulgar stories are rarely recorded in official history. Although they are full of fantasy, they do contain some golden sayings.”¹³ Therefore, the truth of *xiaoshuo* is not the truth of facts but the truth of art. In this regard, Feng Menglong (1574–1646), Ling Mengchu (1580–1642) and Li Yu (1610–1680) all made in-depth discussion after Xie Zhaozhe. It goes beyond the scope of this chapter and will be discussed further in the following chapters. In short, Xie Zhaozhe’s concept of *xiaoshuo* is close to the actual writing in narrative literature. His concept can be regarded as valid for *xiaoshuo* writers.

Xibudiaoshi, a scholar in the early Qing Dynasty, stated in the *Preface to the Sequel of Jin Ping Mei*:

Xiaoshuo originated in the Tang and Song dynasties and was popular in the Yuan Dynasty, having different genres. It was probably love that made country folk pass it down with the classics and historical records. Love is attached to the text, regardless of its rhetoric and slang. *Jin Ping Mei*’s original version is a romance book. Love will flow when it comes, and it is easy to fail the check and be unrestrained. People could see its appearance but couldn’t know what is hidden; let it go but don’t know where it ends; like to boast but don’t know what it thrusts. Moth oil drowns and poisonous wine kills. Yuan Shigong was the first to narrate. But it was difficult for the writer to narrate the obscure. There are myriad *xiaoshuo* works in this world, but only three are called masterpieces, i.e., *The Water Margin*, *Pilgrimage to the West* and *Jin Ping Mei*. Why is it like this?

¹² Hu Yinglin. The Second Unitary Supplement 二酉綴遺. In *Brush Notes from the Shaoshi Mountain Retreat*.

¹³ Xie Zhaozhe. *The Fivefold Miscellany*. Chap. 15.

The *Pilgrimage to the West* illuminates the great enlightenment of Buddha through stories about fighting with devils; and *The Water Margin* warns against chivalry while advocating righteousness in bandits; and *Jin Ping Mei* punishes adultery and shows off eroticism.

This preface was written in the seventeenth year of the Shunzhi reign (1660). Several points regarding the concept of “xiaoshuo” are quite clear. First, “xiaoshuo” originated in the Tang and Song dynasties. Second, the value of “xiaoshuo” does not depend on whether it is faithfully recorded or not, but on whether it has emotional validity. The reason why it can be passed down along with classics and historical records is that it expresses or reveals people’s true feelings. Third, one of the social functions of “xiaoshuo” is moral persuasion and punishment. Fourth, *The Water Margin*, *Pilgrimage to the West* and *Jin Ping Mei* are representatives of “xiaoshuo”. Here, “xiaoshuo” refers to the fiction of prose narrative. What is the difference between the concept of “xiaoshuo” explained by *Xihudiaooshi* more than 300 years ago and that of today’s *xiaoshuo*?

During the Kangxi reign in the Qing Dynasty, Liu Tingji in the second chapter of *Notes in the Garden (Zaiyuan zazhi)* made clearer the difference between the ancient and the modern concept of “xiaoshuo”. He said:

Although the name of *xiaoshuo* is the same, there is a big difference between its meanings in ancient and in modern time. Since the Han, Wei, Jin, Tang, Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties, there have been over a hundred different schools of *xiaoshuo*, all of which are characterized with elegance in writing. Some record the emperors and official systems, the affairs of state and palace, the celestial phenomena above and the geographical features below, including people and times, poultry, fish and flowers, frontier fortress and foreign countries, interpretation of spirits and ghosts, fairy monsters and occult, which are combined or divided, or detailed or omitted, or biographies, or journeys, or outlines, or anecdotes, or short chapters with a few words, or great length of writing, using much not recorded in official history. They are all named *xiaoshuo* in different dynasties. Reading them, one can find out the implicit information, check true or false, develop the beautiful diction, further the conversation and discussion of the times, improve their writing skills and learn narrative methods. As for the “four marvelous books”, they were based on the talk of the streets collected by petty officials and amounted to hundreds or dozens of

chapters taking one person and one thing as the main topic and involving various social relations. ... *Xiaoshuo* that came out these days such as *Two Gifted Maidens* (*Ping Shan Leng Yan*), *Awakening from the Love Dream* (*Qingmeng tuo*), *Love Match* (*Fengliu pei*), *The Oriole in the Spring Willow* (*Chun Liu Ying*) and *Two Fair Cousins* (*Yu Jiao Li*) portray beautiful girls and brilliant young scholars and praise genius and beauty. They are unofficial but do not go much against accepted social conventions or moral codes.

Liu Tingji named “xiaoshuo” in traditional Chinese bibliography as “dynastic xiaoshuo” that differs sharply from later *xiaoshuo* that are derived “from petty officials” and are represented by the “four marvelous books”. It clarified the fact that the word “xiaoshuo” contains two quite different styles. Liu Tingji’s understanding of “xiaoshuo” is roughly the same as how this concept is typically interpreted today. Those who claim that the concept of “xiaoshuo” came from the West are obviously ignorant of the historical development of the styles and theories of Chinese *xiaoshuo*.

There are two types of “xiaoshuo” in Chinese history. One is a short book attached to the historical tales, in essence based upon factual record. The second is a story for people to read for entertainment. It is related to the former but differs from it in that the latter cannot be separated from imagination and fabrication. Traditional bibliographers have been defending the purity of “xiaoshuo”. Their efforts are understandable, but in fact, it is a kind of deep-rooted prejudice for them to turn a blind eye to the narrative *xiaoshuo* and blame such writing for deviating from the traditional concept of “xiaoshuo”. Some scholars who work on “xiaoshuo” today also ignore the fact that two types of “xiaoshuo” coexisted in history. Since Liang Qichao (1873–1929) advocated the evolution in literature, *xiaoshuo* has developed and gradually become the pursuit of various genres in the field of literature. In the preface to this literary favorite, the former two types of *xiaoshuo* were included. It seems as if not doing so would not gain enough momentum for *xiaoshuo*.

There was only one type of “xiaoshuo” before the Tang Dynasty, and it is reasonable to regard it as the precursor of today’s *xiaoshuo*. Since the Tang Dynasty, the two kinds of *xiaoshuo* have developed in parallel so they cannot be confused. *The Bibliography of Classical Chinese Xiaoshuo* (Peking University Press, 1981) systematically organizes the bibliography of ancient *xiaoshuo* written in classical Chinese. It is the pioneering work

that counts but lacks the essential definition of the concept of classical Chinese *xiaoshuo*. Although the “general notices” of the book say that “this book aims at prudence and completeness, and all classical Chinese *xiaoshuo* that have been found are generally included”, however, it is still not sufficiently prudential and complete. If you follow the classic opinions of traditional Chinese bibliography rather than idiosyncratic ones, *New Tales under the Lamplight* (*Jiandeng xinhua*), *Supplementary Tales Under the Lamplight* (*Jiandeng yuhua*), *The Story of Mistress and Maid* (*Jiaohong ji*), *Collection of Deep and Wonderful Love* (*Zhongqing liji*), *Refined Collection of Romance* (*Huaichun yaji*), *Tales of Search for a Lamp* (*Mideng yinhua*), *Unofficial History of Yanshan* (*Yanshan waishi*), etc. are obviously fictional works and cannot be included. If this type of *xiaoshuo* can be included, it would surely be unreasonable to exclude the works such as *Liu Sheng Looking for Lotus* (*Liusheng milian ji*), *Refined Collection of Xunfang* (*Xunfang yaji*), *Three Wonders of the Flower Goddess* (*Huashen sanmiao zhuan*), *Serendipity* (*Tianyuan qiyu*), *The Empress and Her Gigolos* (*Ruyijun zhuan*) and *The Story of the Spoony Woman* (*Chipozi zhuan*).

The *xiaoshuo* discussed in this book are all in narrative prose, that is, the genre of *xiaoshuo* represented by the four marvelous books mentioned by Xihudiaooshi and Liu Tingji (1653–1716), which is different from the concept of traditional Chinese bibliography. Tales of real men and the supernatural in the pre-Tang Dynasty are only the early development forms of *xiaoshuo*. *Chuangzi* tales of the Tang Dynasty are the origin of the *xiaoshuo* genre. After the Tang Dynasty, those tales that follow Ban Gu’s *xiaoshuo* studies and focus on facts, including fragmentary utterances and short books with a focus on useful knowledge, research and moral teaching are not discussed in this book.

1.2 CLASSICAL CHINESE AND VERNACULAR CHINESE: SPLIT-FLOW AND CONFLUENCE

In terms of style, the ancient Chinese *xiaoshuo* can be divided into two types, i.e., classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese. Languages of all ethnic groups have their own history of development, and all have evolved from ancient languages to their respective modern descendants. However, writing *xiaoshuo* in ancient written languages has continued from ancient to modern times. Parallel to *xiaoshuo* written later in modern spoken