

# Janus-faced Popularization in 20th-century Chinese Fiction: A Critical Quandary<sup>1</sup>

*Philip F.C. Williams*

## ABSTRACT

"Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Literature" and other pejorative terms coined by May Fourth iconoclasts have tended to obscure the major differences between works of 20th-century Chinese popular fiction. Along with switching to less dismissive terms such as *tongsu xiaoshuo*, critics can underline the dynamism of this body of writings by linking its close connection to serial publication in newspaper literary supplements [*fukan*]. The diversity of popular fiction may be illustrated by categorizing works along a spectrum of possibilities in four quadrants, from an idealistic tenor at one end of the horizontal spectrum to a cynical tone at the other, and from a strongly traditional Chinese aesthetic structure at one end of the vertical spectrum to a Western or other foreign aesthetic structure at the other.

This paper argues that the combination of idealism and a traditional aesthetic has tended to be the strongest current of this century's popular fiction, and is common among writers as far apart in time and sensibility as Zhang Henshui and Jin Yong. However, the detective fiction of Sun Liaohong and many others is strongly Western in its aesthetic while tending towards idealism in tone, except among a relatively small contingent of hard-boiled crime novelists. Eileen Chang's domestic novels about embittered wives are quite traditional aesthetically and yet strongly ironic or even cynical in tone. In contrast, contemporary popular fiction by writers such as Wang Chen-ho often leans strongly toward the poles of both Western aesthetics and cynicism in tone.

**KEY WORDS**

*tongsu xiaoshuo*

*“yuanyang hudie pai”*

academic postisms

elite-popular hybrid

spectrum modeling

regionalist framework

hybridization

detective fiction

knight-errant fiction

talent-meets-beauty fiction

modern *kitsch*

temporal model

cross-generic classification

polar opposites



## Introduction

Genre-based classifications of 20th-century Chinese fiction by scholars like David Der-wei Wang 王德威 (1998) and Yan Jiayan 嚴家炎 (1989) have extended the field's understanding of conventions and innovations in technique and thought within several types of fiction.<sup>2</sup> Yet outside of temporal models (e.g., “modernism”) and regionalist frameworks, relatively little systematic research has been done on cross-generic classification and “mapping” of this fiction's narrative features, especially with regard to *tongsu xiaoshuo* 通俗小說 [popular fiction].<sup>3</sup> One effective way of getting a handle on the genuine diversity of 20th-century Chinese *tongsu xiaoshuo* is to examine a limited set of its salient characteristics in such a way as to avoid artificially rigid or air-tight classification, and instead allow for grey areas between polar opposites within a literary attribute.<sup>4</sup> Structuralist approaches found in Susan Lanser's *The Narrative Act* (1981) and Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980) make very effective use of spectrum modeling—especially if compared to a poststructuralist like Derrida, whose crude absolutist notions about linguistics rule out conceptual grey areas, thereby ignoring basic advances in the philosophy of language going all the way back to Wittgenstein.<sup>5</sup>

This paper situates selected novels and stories along two perpendicular spectra, each of which ranges between two polar opposites: namely a strongly Chinese aesthetic structure at one end of the horizontal axis, and a Western or other foreign aesthetic structure at the other end; perpendicular to this is a vertical spectrum with a lofty or idealistic tenor at one end and a mocking or cynical tone at the other

end (see Figure One). Each work of fiction will fall into one of the four resulting quadrants, though borderline cases will occur when a work is situated in the grey area at the middle of one spectrum of possibilities (such as a type of selective omniscience that is halfway between total omniscience and no omniscience). Discussion of specific novels and stories within each of the four quadrants will highlight the extensive variety of style and tone that 20th-century popular fiction has offered to Chinese readers.

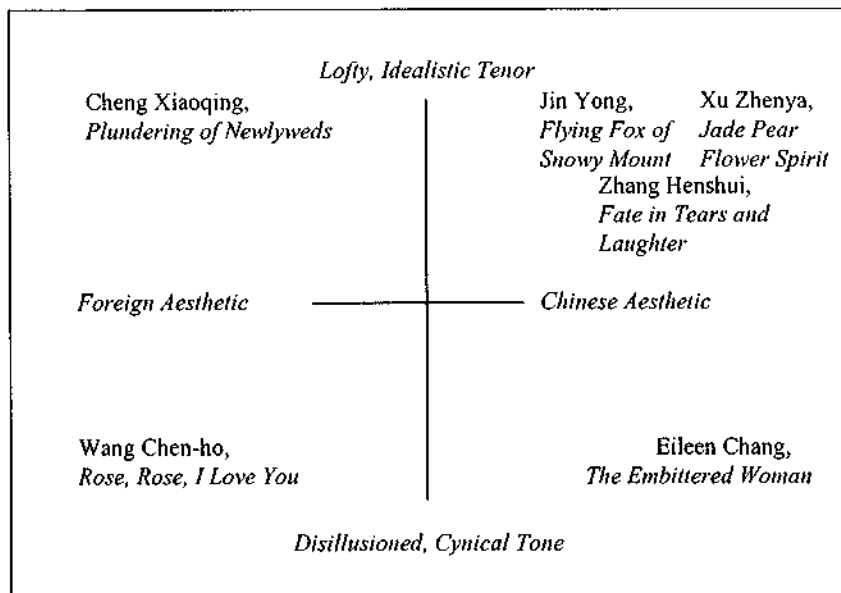


Figure 1

### Hybrids Between Elite and Popular Fiction

Advocates and skeptics of *fin-de-siècle* academic postisms such as postmodernism often seem to agree about very little, and may appear to talk past each another more often than with one another in genuine dialogue.<sup>6</sup> Yet at least among specialists in Chinese literature, both advocates and skeptics could likely agree upon the need to better integrate popular fiction into the study of modern Chinese fiction. Advo-

cates of postmodernism typically oppose a clear separation between “high” or elite literature and “low” or popular literature,<sup>7</sup> while skeptics of “pomo” like Bonnie S. McDougall (1984) have argued that most writers within the May Fourth tradition garnered too narrow a readership to have ever really been a dominant or mainstream force on China’s literary scene, as broadly conceived.<sup>8</sup>

Some scholars of Chinese fiction have proposed the category of “middlebrow” fiction as an intermediate grouping between the polar opposites of elite versus popular.<sup>9</sup> After all, many bestselling novels and stories that traffic in melodrama and other trademarks of popular writing are quite well-wrought and polished narratives of intrinsic literary interest.<sup>10</sup> The problem with adding a third category in between elite and popular fiction is that the new term simply points to the reality of hybridization without providing a conceptual model of how elite fiction may interact or overlap with its popular counterpart.

Logicians may offer a better model of hybridization by way of the Venn diagram (see Figure Two); in this illustrative model, a large circle representing popular fiction overlaps to a limited extent with a smaller circle representing serious fiction addressed to the intellectual elite.<sup>11</sup> In the overlapping area that falls within the boundary of both

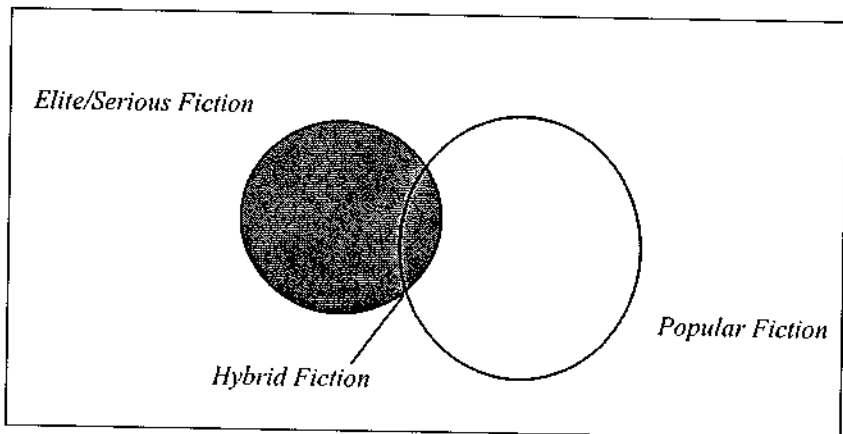


Figure 2

circles may be found those hybrid or “middlebrow” works that originally appeared in ordinary newspaper *fukan* 副刊 [literary entertainment pages] or other mass-circulation outlets, and yet are polished and substantial enough to be worthy of serious analysis and careful rereading by the intelligentsia.

Such hybrid serialized works include many within the standard canon of serious modern fiction, such as Liu E’s 劉鶚 (1857-1908) *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記 [Travels of Lao Can, 1904], Lu Xun’s 魯迅 (1881-1936) *Ah Q zheng zhuan* 阿Q正傳 [The Real Story of Ah Q, 1921-22] and Lao She’s 老舍 (1899-1966) *Si shi tong tang* 四世同堂 [Four Generations Under One Roof, 1944-45].<sup>12</sup> The connection of such canonic works with mass-circulation newspaper outlets and their popular readerships would be better acknowledged and taken into account if a relatively objective term like *tongsu xiaoshuo* 通俗小說 were substituted for the pejorative catch-all epithet *yuanyang hudie pai xiaoshuo* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派小說 [Fiction of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School]. If literary historians and critics do not dispense with this vague and value-laden term altogether, they should at least use it with more precision to refer specifically to traditional-style *caizi jiaren* 才子佳人 [talent meets beauty] novels (or *aiqing xiaoshuo* 愛情小說) like Xu Zhenya’s 徐枕亞 (1889-1937) *Yu li hun* 玉梨魂 [Jade Pear Flower Spirit, 1912]. There is no good reason to keep replicating the terminological blunders and ideological biases of the anti-popular May Fourth critics, who used *yuanyang hudie pai xiaoshuo* as a sweeping epithet of dismissal for rival turf on the literary scene. As the last elderly representatives of the May Fourth generation have passed from the literary scene, the value-drenched term of *yuanyang hudie pai xiaoshuo* has increasingly given way to the plain scholarly appellation of *tongsu xiaoshuo*; the latter term will almost completely replace its outdated predecessor as long as scholars of Chinese popular fiction in the 21st century are serious about terminological precision in this case. Otherwise, readers of such popular genres as *wuxia xiaoshuo* 武俠小說 [knight-errant fiction], *zhentan xiaoshuo* 偵探小說 [detective fiction], and burlesques (sometimes termed *xiaohua xiaoshuo* 笑話小說) will continue to be puzzled about why these are all classified under flowery

terms about young couples in love.<sup>13</sup>

### Idealism and Traditional Chinese Aesthetic

The combination of lofty, idealized passions and a traditional Chinese aesthetic pervades a large bulk of two leading genres of popular fiction, *wuxia xiaoshuo* and *aiqing xiaoshuo*. Admittedly, many translations of foreign knight-errantry novels and novels featuring young lovers have impacted Chinese popular culture since the late Qing; both *The Adventures of Zorro* and *Lady of the Camellias* [*Cha hua nü* 茶花女] have been great Chinese hits in their respective genres. Nevertheless, these are primarily home-grown popular genres, unlike the modern detective whodunit novel (Kinkley 1998). In fact, the fictional origins of these genres go back at least to the mid-Tang *chuanqi* 傳奇 classical tales of Du Guangting's 杜光庭 "Qiu ran ke zhuan" 虬髯客傳 [The Curly-Bearded Gallant] for the *wuxia xiaoshuo*, and Yuan Zhen's 元稹 "Yingying zhuan" 鶯鶯傳 [The Story of Yingying] for the *aiqing xiaoshuo* (Wang Pijiang 1979:178-84, 135-50).<sup>14</sup>

The most famous and well-received *aiqing xiaoshuo* since the late Qing have often ennobled the sufferings of passionate but virtuous young protagonists who encounter one obstacle after another in search of an ideal union of "talent meeting beauty" [*caizi jiaren*]. One such novel in classical Chinese is Xu Zhenya's (1889-1937) *Jade Pear Flower Spirit* [*Yü li hun*, 1912], which unfolds a kind of ill-fated love triangle that has fascinated so many novelists of bittersweet sentimentality and their giant readership.

A talented but frustrated tutor named He Mengxia 何夢霞 falls in love with his pupil's mother, the beautiful and kindly widow poetess Lady Pear Flower [Linian] 梨娘. She responds sympathetically but very obliquely to his entreaties, for the two seldom meet face to face. Similar to the famous young lovers Zhang 張生 and Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯 of Yuan Zhen's "Story of Ying-ying" and Wang Shifu's 王實甫 *The Western Chamber* [*Xi xiang ji* 西廂記], He Mengxia and Lady Pear Flower communicate mainly through letters and poems in an ornately parallelistic classical idiom. Lady Pear Flower would like to

marry He Mengxia, but feels that she cannot break her vow of chastity to her late husband, so instead arranges for her sister-in-law to marry him, over the initial objections of both He Mengxia and the sister-in-law.

Doom begins to engulf the central characters as Lady Pear Flower realizes that He Mengxia will remain frustrated as long as she is alive and yet unable to fully requite his love for her. Lady Pear Flower thereupon decides to do away with herself, and does so gradually by refusing all food and medicine. The sister-in-law subsequently becomes very ill after finding out about Lady Pear Flower's ultimate sacrifice, and dies in turn. Anguished upon his discovery of these two women's deaths, He Mengxia departs to join the revolutionary army. He dies heroically in combat at Wuhan, a decisive conflict in the revolutionary army's defeat of the Qing armed forces in 1911.

While this novel's flower-burying scene is but one of its many echoes of *Hong lou meng* 紅樓夢 [*A Dream of Red Mansions*] and its traditional love-triangle quandary, Xu's heavy use of interior monologue to reveal complex character psychology sets this novel apart from its pre-modern counterparts. All in all, *Jade Pear Flower Spirit* appealed to the reader who wanted to explore escalating tensions between individual yearning and traditional pieties, yet not discard those pieties or the literary conventions for articulating them.

The inauguration of the Vernacular Literature Movement [*Baihua wenxue yundong* 白話文學運動, 1917] and the subsequent May Fourth New Culture Movement had a wide-ranging influence on fiction written by and for the elite intelligentsia, but in the popular realm of best-selling fiction achieved little more than hastening both the vernacularization of popular fiction and the importation of foreign popular literature and film. Later generations of popular novelists wrote in the vernacular instead of Xu Zhenya's classical idiom, but continued to draw heavily upon his preferred formulas like the bittersweet "talent meeting beauty" and the self-sacrificing heroic spirit of knight-errantry represented by He Mengxia's impetuous eleventh-hour leap into the thick of armed revolutionary struggle.

Zhang Henshui 張恨水 (1895-1967) succeeded in writing one of

the three or four most popular novels of the century, *Fate in Tears and Laughter* 啼笑因緣 (1929-30), precisely by means of his deft melding together of the *wuxia xiaoshuo* and *aiqing xiaoshuo* genres. In a plot full of twists and turns, an educated young man in Beiping named Fan Jiashu 樊家樹 gets ensnared in a love triangle with the humble but beautiful ballad singer Shen Fengxi 沈鳳喜 and the wealthy and gorgeous society girl He Lina 何麗娜. Fengxi's unscrupulous uncle sells her into concubinage with a sadistic general, whose harshness toward her drives her insane. Fan's two knight-errant friends, a father-and-daughter martial arts duo, settle accounts with the wicked general and also free Fan from kidnappers, enabling him to reunite with He Lina in the comic finale. The couple's joy is tinged with their grief in mourning the knight-errant father and daughter, who have just died in one of China's many internecine battles in the first half of the 20th century.

*Fate in Tears and Laughter* contains some references to 1920s Hollywood films familiar to the novel's Shanghai-based readership. Nevertheless, Zhang's novel resembles most other novels in the *wuxia xiaoshuo* and *aiqing xiaoshuo* in drawing largely on indigenous literary patterns. For instance, Zhang admits having directly modeled his dashing young female knight-errant upon the young heroine Thirteenth Younger Sister [Shisan Mei 十三妹] in Wen Kang's 文康 (fl. 1821-50) *A Story of Heroes and Lovers* [*Ernü yingxiong zhuan* 兒女英雄傳, 1872].

The most successful *wuxia xiaoshuo* novelists such as Jin Yong 金庸 (pseudonym for Louis Cha, born 1924) have usually taken a lesson from Zhang Henshui in drawing heavily upon the love interest of the *aiqing xiaoshuo*. In Jin Yong's 1959 novel *Xue shan fei hu* 雪山飛狐 [The Flying Fox of the Snowy Mountain], the gallant young hero Hu Fei's 胡斐 [Fox Hu] climactic fight with the martial arts master Miao Renfeng 苗人鳳 [Phoenix Miao] is preceded by a tender scene in which Miao's fetching daughter Ruolan 若蘭 joins the young man in a warm embrace (Jin 358-59).<sup>15</sup> Though many of this novel's fight scenes are too fast-paced to allow much time for reflection, the more leisurely interludes between the scenes of high adventure do allow for nuanced emotional expression characteristic of the better *aiqing*

*xiaoshuo*. The vendetta motif that writers like Zhang Henshui utilized so skillfully for its dramatic value also makes Fox Hu's final quandary all the more poignant; he would like to deal a mortal blow to Phoenix Miao for having earlier killed his own father, Hu Yidao 胡一刀 [Gully Hu], but he knows this would totally shatter his dream of marrying Ruolan, who is a traditional filial daughter.

### Idealism and Western Aesthetic

The Republican Era whodunit detective fiction [*zhentan xiaoshuo*] of Cheng Xiaoqing 程小青 (1893-1977) pays homage to the ideals of justice that animate so many knight-errants in the *wuxia xiaoshuo*, even if in a more cerebral and far less physical manner. Like Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Cheng Xiaoqing's master sleuth Huo Sang 霍桑 is no bounty hunter: he takes on unsolved criminal cases out of a combination of his thirst for justice and his fascination with piecing together intricate clues that would baffle an ordinary police detective.<sup>16</sup> Similar to Conan Doyle's Dr. Watson, Bao Lang 包朗 serves as Huo Sang's devoted but rather unimaginative companion and narrator—a more accessible and less cerebrally awesome figure to the ordinary reader, who might be put off or even intimidated by an unrelieved focus upon the lone master sleuth. The real-world messiness of unsolved criminal cases does not enter the picture, for in this idealized realm the Chinese Holmes, Huo Sang, invariably cracks the cases that cause ordinary detectives to scratch their heads in puzzlement.

What distinguishes the 1920s and 1930s *zhentan xiaoshuo* of writers like Cheng Xiaoqing from the *wuxia xiaoshuo* is chiefly the former's very close adherence to Western models like Conan Doyle.<sup>17</sup> China's Judge Bao 包公 detective fiction and drama have an ancient pedigree that predates its Western counterpart by a number of centuries. However, the reader of traditional Chinese detective fiction knows the identity of the culprit early on, and thus lacks the opportunity to join the wise sleuth in personally piecing together the clues that will crack the case and nail the culprit, as is the case in the Western whodunit. Instead, the reader of a Judge Bao story is supposed to be a fairly passive on-

looker while the great magistrate himself does the work of pondering the evidence and testimony. Cheng Xiaoqing's and Sun Liaohong's 孫了紅 (1897-1958) rejection of this passive role for the reader impelled them to adopt the Western model of the whodunit in a wholesale fashion; just as Cheng's Huo Sang is modeled closely after Sherlock Holmes, Sun Liaohong's master sleuth Lu Ping 魯平 is but a slightly Sinified version of Arsène Lupin, the French writer Maurice Leblanc's "debonair cat-burglar and confidence man turned detective" (Kinkley 563).

Three other factors helped push Cheng Xiaoqing in the direction of choosing a Western aesthetic for his detective fiction. He rejected the supernatural trappings found in so many traditional Chinese detective narratives as incompatible with the logical frame of mind and scientific approach required in detective work of the 20th century. Moreover, thanks to the labors of translators of foreign fiction since the late Qing, Cheng Xiaoqing was able to read a large amount of this fiction from an early age. He also learned English well enough to translate a great deal of Western detective fiction into English as a young man—and it was not such a great leap to move from translating such fiction to writing fresh Chinese adaptations of Western detective fiction.

### Mockery and Disillusionment Along with Chinese Aesthetic

If the enraptured or pining young lovers of *aiqing xiaoshuo* were actually to settle down together for a long duration and experience the everyday tensions of urban life and the growing web of family obligations, they might discover that the surface harmony of many a family covers up deep divisions below. Eileen Chang 張愛玲 (1920-1995) herself grew up in a dysfunctional Shanghai family headed by a father who once forcibly confined her in her locked bedroom for months on end. Chang excels in portrayals of women who find themselves trapped in grim family situations they would have preferred to avoid, but decide to make the best of them through measures that often stir up in-

tense disapproval from those above them in the family hierarchy. Chang describes her often embittered heroine's domestic surroundings in practically claustrophobic detail, as if the heroine has merely exchanged her youthful domestic enclosure within a well-to-do but depressing walled family compound for a self-imprisonment of her own design during widowhood.

The triangular love entanglements, the focus upon a tension-ridden world of mainly women and servants within a wealthy family compound, and a mood of general decline and dispiritedness evokes the atmosphere of more gloomy chapters of Cao Xueqin's *Hong lou meng*, a novel that Chang knew almost by heart. In spite of Chang's familiarity with Hollywood films, Broadway plays, and major Euro-American novelists (Lee, *Shanghai* 98, 276-79), her continued preoccupation with women caught within the decline of a prominent extended family gives much of her *oeuvre* an unmistakably Chinese flavor and aesthetic.

With regard to setting and general scenario, Chang's 1966 novel *Yuan nü* 怨女 [*The Embittered Woman*] is a reworking of Chang's famous 1943 novella *Jin suo ji* 金鎖記 [*The Golden Cangue*]. The older brother of an shopkeeping orphan close to twenty practically forces the attractive orphan to marry into a wealthy Shanghai extended family. In that family, the orphan endures an extremely frustrating life with her blind, crippled husband and condescending female in-laws and servants. After both her husband and the grand matriarch (her mother-in-law) die, the family property is divided and she sets up another unhappy household with her children, their spouses, and various servants. However, *Yuan nü* features a milder and less vindictive protagonist, Chai Yindi 柴銀娣, in place of the decidedly "extreme" heroine of "Cangue," Cao Qiqiao 曹七巧 (Chang, "My Writing" 438).

Compared with "The Golden Cangue," *Yuan nü* delves much more deeply into both the heroine's life before her marriage and her subsequent existence within the wealthy extended family. *Yuan nü* also provides a more detailed examination of the heroine's dangerous and unfulfilling romantic flirtation with her philandering younger brother-in-law.

While working behind the counter at her elder brother Bingfa's 炳發 sesame-oil shop, the gorgeous orphan Yindi must regularly fend off unwanted advances from uncouth and aggressive lechers. Realizing that she will have to get married before long, Yindi attempts to attract the attention of the presentable but shy bachelor Young Liu 小劉, who works at the pharmacy across the street. Yindi's grandmother in the countryside tries to make arrangements for Yindi to get acquainted with Young Liu there, but Bingfa callously delays their New Year's trip to the countryside so many days that Young Liu has already returned to his job in Shanghai by the time Bingfa's family and Yindi arrive at her grandmother's rural home.

Yindi expresses her strong disapproval of Bingfa's negotiations with matchmakers and servants from the wealthy Yao 姚 family, especially after she learns that the original plan is to make her the concubine of a blind man. However, Bingfa and his wife largely turn a deaf ear to Yindi as they go on negotiating with the Yaos. They seem to believe that by helping upgrade Yindi's future position from concubine to wife, they have done their duty by Yindi, and have nothing to regret or apologize for. Most importantly, from Bingfa's perspective, the Yaos finally agree to waive the traditional bride-price, which the financially strapped Bingfa had long felt was unaffordable.

After Yindi has settled down in the Yao mansion for some years and given birth to a baby boy, she manages to set up an amorous encounter with her willing but fearful brother-in-law in a dark corner of a temple. The passionate couple get little further than groping and heavy petting before the brother-in-law breaks off in terror that the couple's risqué behavior might be exposed and lead to an ugly family scandal. Both of them avoid each other's company for years thereafter. Yindi even makes a failed suicide attempt owing to her intense marital frustration and persistent fear that rumors of the illicit tryst would eventually spread and lead to her disinheritance and utter ruin.

In contrast with Qiqiao, who cruelly browbeats her daughter-in-law and craftily intimidates her daughter's suitor into breaking their engagement, Yindi is high-handed but moderate in exerting her matriarchal authority over her son and his wife and concubine—provided

that the latter women stay in her son's good graces. Although Yindi is fading in and out of an opium stupor by the end of the novel, her episodes of dementia seem considerably less severe and destructive toward herself and her family if compared to Qiqiao's in *Jin suo ji*. However, both work's mocking portrayal of the crass motives and emotional callousness of so many of the principal characters creates an overpowering disillusionment with life in an extended family compound—at least within the setting of Shanghai during the early Republican period.

### Mockery and Disillusionment Along with a Western Aesthetic

*Meigui, meigui, wo ai ni* 玫瑰·玫瑰·我愛你 [Rose, Rose, I Love You] is a rollicking serialized burlesque novel originally published in 1984 by Wang Chen-ho 王禎和 (1940-1990), a talented Taiwanese fiction writer noted for his naturalistic dialogue and sardonic narrative tone. The novel's cultural and linguistic background is rich in puns and malapropisms emerging from the clash of the most prominent languages spoken in 1960s Taiwan—Taiwanese, Mandarin (often Hakka-accented), Japanese, and English. However, Wang Chen-ho was much more than a dialect-conscious local colorist. Wang's delight in word play across several languages is reminiscent of James Joyce, having grown out of his careful study of Western languages and literatures at National Taiwan University and as an auto-didact.

Wang Chen-ho satirizes the widespread yearning for *kitsch* that almost inevitably accompanies an uncritical embrace of alluring modernity, with its material abundance.<sup>18</sup> Narrowly circumscribed along almost Aristotelian lines in terms of time and place, the novel's action takes place during just a few days in the late 1960s within the east-coast provincial seaport of Hualien, where the author grew up. Word has just reached the local townsfolk that a few hundred American soldiers are about to get a break from combat duty in Vietnam for a few days of "rest and recreation" in Hualien. Since this seaport has never hosted so many cash-laden foreigners of bacchanalian bent, local movers and

shakers must hurry to erect a new quasi-modern tavern, and give the local “bar-girl” prostitutes a crash course in conversational English and other accoutrements of international *savoir faire*. Much raucous humor arises from the spectacle of the local Christian church as the setting for this course in up-to-date “world-class” prostitution—along with the overweight and unctuous male teacher Dong Siwen’s 董斯文 chronic flatulence, which punctuates his orations with gaseous affronts to the noses and ears of his captive audience.

Burlesque of the sort that fills this novel usually trafficks in rough-hewn caricature rather than subtle characterization, even where major protagonists enter the picture. Wang Chen-ho makes especially skillful use of broad-brush caricature in the novel’s many crowd scenes, such as a large audience’s multi-faceted reaction to a political candidate named Qian 錢 who strips naked onstage as a show of daring. Wang adds a large dose of engaging word play to a hilarious classroom scene in which an increasingly flustered Teacher Dong simply declares victory after his ineffectual English language drills leave his prostitute “trainees” more tongue-tied and puzzled than ever.

Wang Chen-ho mockingly concludes his narrative with Dong Siwen’s ridiculous extended daydream about a perfectly choreographed dance and song routine by rose-laden bar girls on the pier at Hualien’s waterfront, beaming effusively as they welcome smiling American soldiers with lei flower wreaths. In keeping with a common Western aesthetic pattern in the 20th century, Wang Chen-ho leaves it to the reader to imagine the possible results of the action portrayed—in this case, the locals’ foolishly exhaustive preparations for the Americans’ arrival. The only hint Wang provides is during a brief foreshadowing of the American visitors’ horrified reactions to the stench of the new “up-to-date” bar’s rustic privy: each soldier who visits the privy frowns and mutters or exclaims in disgust; one battle-hardened officer is so revolted by the stench that he vomits outright.

## Conclusion

The combination of idealism and a traditional Chinese aesthetic

has tended to be the strongest current of this century's popular fiction, and is common among writers as far apart in time and sensibility as the talent-meets-beauty romance writer Xu Zhenya and the contemporary knight-errantry novelist Jin Yong. In contrast, the classic detective stories of Cheng Xiaoqing are strongly Western in their aesthetic while tending towards idealism in tone. The triangular amatory conflict and re-elaboration of old material in a novel like Eileen Chang's *Yuan nü* is quite traditional aesthetically, and yet pervasively mocking and disillusioned in tone. Finally, contemporary popular novels like Wang Chen-ho's *Meigui, meigui, wo ai ni* increasingly lean toward the poles of both Western aesthetics and irreverence and mockery in tone.

*Tongsu xiaoshuo* that originate in newspaper serialization or other mass-circulation outlets constitute a complex, Janus-faced body of work. This variegated and massive collection of fiction can no longer be shoehorned into a category as restricted in scope as "Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Fiction," a label that was originally seized upon in bad faith by dismissive May Fourth antagonists of popular writers. Scholars of Chinese popular fiction in the 21st century should reject this negative side of the May Fourth cultural inheritance and adopt a more precise set of terminology and research methods that are suited to the specific type of *tongsu xiaoshuo* being investigated.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Professors Robin Tsai, Lin Yaofu, and the other distinguished conveners of Tamkang University's Eighth Quadrennial International Conference on Comparative Literature (25-27 August 1999), where the original version of this article was first presented. I would also like to thank the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange and the University of California Pacific Rim Program for assistance with funding.

<sup>2</sup> David Wang slightly modifies three of Lu Xun's late-Qing fiction genres from the latter's 1924 *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 [A Brief History of Chinese Fiction], while adding a fourth genre of new coinage, "science fantasy" (252-312). See also John C.Y. Wang,

“Lu Xun as a Scholar of Traditional Chinese Literature,” in Leo Ou-fan Lee (Lu Xun 93-99). Yan Jiayan makes generic distinctions based on *liupai* 流派, groupings or schools of writers, such as “social analysts,” “late romantics,” and “neo-perceptionists” (8-10).

<sup>3</sup> Temporal frameworks would include the notoriously malleable and blurry terms of “modernism,” “postmodernism,” and the “modern.” Regional frameworks limit the scope of inquiry to a particular locale or set of locales in China; while such studies may be enlightening, they often favor local cultural history over literary analysis, and may neglect to place the local region within the larger context of China as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> An example of the “scaling” of a literary attribute across a spectrum of possibilities (or Edward O. Wilson’s “continuum”) would be narratorial omniscience (Wilson 204-05). On one end of the spectrum would be total omniscience, in which the narrator would enter and reveal the silent thoughts of every character. On the other end of the scale would be no omniscience at all in the narrator, who would merely relate what could be heard or observed in the literary setting.

<sup>5</sup> According to Jacques Derrida, it is “impossible or illegitimate” to formulate a philosophically coherent concept “outside this logic of all or nothing” (117). John Searle points out that Derrida’s dogged insistence that conceptual distinctions have to be absolute or all-or-nothing to be meaningful betrays his stunning ignorance of advances in the philosophy of language that go back as far as the early Wittgenstein (663-64). See Philip F. Williams (“A Humanist Critique” 391-92) for more discussion of this shortcoming of Derrida, and Yenna Wu (“Changing Trends” 278-80) for other problems with poststructuralist approaches to Chinese literary research.

<sup>6</sup> Compare, for example, two contrasting essays in the special issue on “Ideology and Theory in the Study of Modern Chinese Literature” in *Modern China* 19.1 (1993), which are introduced by Perry Link (4-12); on the skeptical side, see Michael S. Duke (41-70); for an advocate of assorted postisms, see Liu Kang (13-40). For an analysis of the views of Liu Zaifu and several other scholars involved in this debate, see Philip F. Williams (“The Rage” 43-53).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Liu Kang (20) lashes out at C.T. Hsia's *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917-1957* (553) for having supposedly underrated the literary significance of Yang Shuo's popular-style Communist novel, *A Thousand Miles of Lovely Land* (1953).

<sup>8</sup> McDougall argues that the "solemn self-consciousness" of so many engaged May Fourth novelists erected "a barrier between them and their potential audience: it is hard to think of even a reform-minded student reader of the 1920s being content with an unrelieved diet of May Fourth writing" (284).

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the closest Liu Ts'un-yan's introduction comes to succinctly defining the subject of the book he had edited, *Chinese Middle-brow Fiction* (1984), is "traditional-style urban fiction" (30).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, many other melodramatic bestsellers are lowbrow trash, at least from an aesthetic perspective—and are best studied, if at all, as sociological phenomena.

<sup>11</sup> The usefulness of Venn diagrams in working with categorical propositions and syllogisms has been demonstrated by Vernon and Nissen (13-31, 39-47).

<sup>12</sup> The standard twenty-chapter version of Liu E's novel first appeared in its entirety in the *Tianjin riri xinwen bao* 天津日日新聞報 [Tianjin Daily News] (1904). Lu Xun's famous long novella first came out in the Beijing *Chen bao* 晨報 [Morning Post] from December 1921 to February 1922. Lao She's long wartime novel initially appeared in the Chongqing *Saodang bao* 掃蕩報 from November 1944 through September 1945.

<sup>13</sup> My intent is not to criticize even the fair-minded scholars who have used the May Fourth term of *hudie yuanyang pai xiaoshuo* in the 20th century, such as Fan Boqun (1984), Perry Link (1981), and Wei Shaochang (1980). Instead, I am arguing that scholars of popular fiction in the 21st century should reduce the confused blurring of categories by jettisoning such a pejorative term in favor of *tongsu xiaoshuo*. Perry Link astutely notes that the May Fourth term was used by reformist literati to "lead an attack on *all* kinds of popular old-style fiction," but later turns around to say that he personally intends for the term "Butterfly fiction" to be "value-free" (7-8). While an occasional indi-

vidual critic may be able to drain the negative connotations of such a pejorative term from his own thoughts, the pejorative stigma remains in place for the large majority of critics and readers, who all too often hastily dismiss this fiction of mating butterflies and ducks as sentimental mush unworthy of attention. It is little wonder that the vast majority of Chinese popular writers since the 1920s have rejected the appellation of *hudie yuanyang pai* in favor of *jiu pai* 舊派 [old school] or some more specific grouping (Link, *Mandarin Ducks* 177).

<sup>14</sup> If literary narratives other than fiction proper are considered, the locus classicus for each genre would go back even further in time to at least the Han dynasty, with “Jing Ke zhuan” 荊軻傳 [The Story of Jing Ke] in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 *Shi ji* 史記 [Records of the Historian] for *wuxia xiaoshuo*, along with Han dynasty anecdotal accounts of Sima Xiangru’s 司馬相如 wooing of Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 for *aiqing xiaoshuo*. For an example of how Chung Ling 鍾玲, a contemporary fiction writer in Taiwan, shifted the mood quite far in the direction of disillusionment in her bold reworking of Yuan Zhen’s classic story, see Williams (“Nüxing” 257-71).

<sup>15</sup> Like so many other popular novels, *The Flying Fox of the Snowy Mountain* was serialized in a newspaper (the *Ming bao* 明報 in 1959) prior to its publication in book form. Having gone through over ten editions, this novel has also been made into a television series and a full-length movie. For an examination of the significance of serialization in literary journals in the publication of early modern Chinese novels, see Denise Gimpel, “A Neglected Medium: The Literary Journal and the Case of *The Short Story Magazine* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*), 1910-1914,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11.2 (1999) 53-106. Gimpel casts doubt on the scholarly utility of terms such as “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature” (96).

<sup>16</sup> For a representative Huo Sang story by Cheng Xiaoqing, see “Xin hun jie” 新婚劫 [Plundering of the Newlyweds, 1947] in Liu Yangti (311-69).

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey C. Kinkley makes a strong case for characterizing Cheng Xiaoqing’s close adherence to a Western literary model as a sort of genteel “deference” that one highly advanced civilization is capable

of expressing to another (1998).

<sup>18</sup> For a fascinating and in-depth study of the national and international contexts of Wang Chen-ho's satirical treatment of *kitsch* in Taiwan, see Kinkley (1992).

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