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Issued by Graduate School, HKBU
The Magician of Reason, the Plaything of Enlightenment:
Grotesque Fantasy and Tabloid Speculative Fiction, 1900-
1911

MARLING Thomas Oliver

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor:
Prof. Cindy Yik-yi Chu (Hong Kong Baptist University)

April 2017
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures in accordance with the University's Committee on the Use of Human & Animal Subjects in Teaching and Research (HASC). I have attempted to identify all the risks related to this research that may arise in conducting this research, obtained the relevant ethical and/or safety approval (where applicable), and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

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Date: April 2017
Just so, who claims Truth, Truth abandons. History is hir’d, or coerc’d, only in Interests that ever prove base. She is too innocent, to be left within the reach of anyone in Power - who need but touch her, and all her Credit is in the instant vanish’d, as if it had never been. She needs rather to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists, and counterfeitors, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev’ry Radius.

Thomas Pynchon, *Mason and Dixon.*
ABSTRACT

The final decade of the Qing Dynasty, 1901-1911, witnessed a proliferation of works of fiction that incorporated, to a large extent for the first time, themes and images relating to material and technological progress. These “science fantasies” of global and interplanetary peregrination and travel across epochal time have typically been situated along various degrees of confederacy with the values and ideology of modernising China at large. This study however addresses the complex and oft-obfuscated relationship between much of this speculative fiction and the late-Qing tabloid press, which is more closely associated with the satirical, grotesque, narcotic and libidinal. By investigating the subverting and distorting of nominally positivist images like imagined futures, space travel and utopia, the dissertation explicates the possibility for these works of fiction to express a cynical and critical subjectivity toward the ideology of “modern China” that was taking shape at this time.

The study incorporates new perspectives on oft-encountered novels, like Wu Jianren’s New Story of the Stone, alongside more marginal texts, like the popular sequels to the classics authored by Lu Shi’e, and several unattributed pseudonymous works of short experimental fiction. Through close analysis of these texts, I argue that the arena of “tabloid speculative fiction” was thematically united at the level of their “grotesque fantasies,” in which the images of fantasy and the values of modernity were subverted by sexuality, lassitude and boredom. In highlighting this critical grotesquery, the study stresses the internal discontinuities that undergird the superficial homogeneity often attributed to late-Qing speculative fiction.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the tireless support of my supervisor, Prof. Cindy Yik-yi Chu. She has always proven to have great faith in me, even when I’m sure it wasn’t deserved, and her wise and practical interrogations have always proven to be apposite. The History Department at Hong Kong Baptist University has been an inspiring place to work, and I thank all of my fellow students for sharing their work with me and pushing me to do better. I would like to thank Prof. Clara Wing-chung Ho for being so accessible, warm and supportive of all of us, even though I am sure that she was busier than I could imagine. My special thanks also to Renee Chan.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A culture’s sense of fun is largely opaque to the historical gaze because the loafers and moral deviants that author it are the first to be lost from the records – be it that they never tried that hard to leave themselves there, or that they are recorded only under the guise of their assumptive social and psycho-pathologies. For much of its history, Chinese fiction has however retained a soft spot for the lazy, morally-defunct and easily-distracted. For every hero-laden variation on the *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, c. 14th century AD), there has been a recurrent counterpoint situated in the adolescent (or merely adolescent in nature) for whom the futon is forever slightly too comfortable to lift themselves from. In comparison to the fetishisation of productivity and vigour under both the May Fourth era and Chinese communism, this trope came to be viewed retrospectively as reactionary and offensively bourgeois. Only decades prior to this however, pointless pleasure-seeking had taken on a renewed vitality. Facing the nascent hegemony of what Habermas calls the “infinite progress of knowledge [and] … infinite advance towards social and moral betterment,” it was to some extent more relevant than ever.

The title of this study is taken from a scene in *The New Three Kingdoms* (Xin sanguo 新三國, 1909) by Lu Shi’e 陸士谔 (1876-1944), in which the Han-Dynasty physician Hua Tuo 华佗 is dispatched into the city to recruit Zuo Ci 左慈, an expert in hypnotism, for a pioneering modern hospital. Sent to find a medical expert, Hua Tuo instead finds

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1 Examples include Du Shengqing in *Rulin Waishi* 儒林外史 (The Scholars, c. 1750), Ximen Qing in *Jin Pingmei* 金瓶梅 (The Golden Lotus, c. 1610) and Jia Baoyu in *Honglou Meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber, 1791).


3 The desire to recruit Zuo Ci for a hospital brings to mind what is, for this study, Foucault’s deeply informative characterisation of medicine (metonymic for a wider array of modern disciplinary practices and discourses) as a practice which “[takes] its place in that borderline, but for modern man paramount, area where certain organic, unruffled, sensory happiness communicates by right with the order of a nation, the vigour of its armies, the fertility of its
a performance of “magical-magnetism,” and rather than discovering a young, upstanding and (likely) foreign-educated “new citizen” ready to forward the cause of the modernising nation, Zuo Ci is a street entertainer:

He saw that at the west end of the street lay a storefront, it was surrounded by a throng of people and from inside came a great and irrepressible eruption of music and clapping gongs. Heading over to take a look, he saw that there was a signboard above [the entrance], on which was written “an establishment of technology.” Red curtains were draped across the frontage, and on these were a horizontal section of black satin, upon which was embroidered in gold lettering, “The Magician of Reason, The Plaything of Enlightenment” ... At this point Zuo Ci still had not appeared, and a couple of people from Eastern Wu were riding a bicycle around the stage in rapid circles while simultaneously jumping, dancing and performing all kinds of acrobatics, their monkey-like bodies were so unbelievably nimble and lithe that the audience was already whipped up into a fervour of applause and shouts. Shortly thereafter was the sound of a gong, and the crowd began to comment, “Zuo Ci is coming on stage.” When he first caught sight of Zuo Ci, his whole body was covered in white clothing, and in his hand he carried a short pole. Heading out into the arena, he turned toward the audience and gave a series of short bows, before saying, “Zuo Ci has a little trick he would like to perform for his esteemed audience.” He hoisted the short pole aloft and said, “when I strike [the ground] with this pole, it will cause two tables to appear from the ground.” Having said this, he struck to his left with the pole, and a small round table suddenly appeared on the stage. He then struck to his right, and an identical table appeared again. Zuo Ci said, “I will now cause two magnetic cylinders to appear.” He rapped the pole on the table once, and a white magnetic cylinder appeared. He did the same again on his right and another appeared as before. He picked up the cylinder on the left and lifted it up, and the cylinder on the right also began to levitate, as if another person were there lifting it. If the left one were further raised, the right one followed it. If it were lowered, the right one would also lower. If the left one fell to the ground, the right one would follow. If the left one were turned upside down, the right one would also turn upside down. The audience rose together in applause.4

See page 4 for more text.

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4 XSG, p. 240-1
Neither the sensory and embodied experiences of music and acrobatics, nor the itinerant performance and the joy of an audience in witnessing it were entirely uncommon images in late-Qing fiction. Neither was the “establishment of technology,” the respected scientist, or the doctor. This scene is remarkable not in their respective presence but their co-presence, and its rebuttal to the era’s strident bifurcation of fiction itself into the “reformed” (pedagogic, mimetic) and the “unreformed” (mocking, grotesque).\(^5\) Lu Shi’e offers a modernity no less intriguing for being spotted with the mould of the urge to indulge sensory and libidinal fun.\(^6\)

The phrase embroidered into Zuo Ci’s curtains, “The Magician of Reason, the Plaything of Enlightenment” (lixue zhi moshu, wenming zhi wanju 理学之魔术，文明之玩具), is a self-conscious distilling of the dialectical energies of the scene, reminiscent of

\(^5\) Zuo Ci seems to be a deliberate reference to the eighteenth-century scientist-as-magician, Franz Mesmer (1734-1815), who himself illuminated the complexities obscured behind the surface of modernity. This was not the only instance in which facets of mesmeric practices made their way into the era’s fiction, although this is the most comprehensive rendering. Other such instances include Wu Jianren’s third or fourth-hand translation of an unidentified Victorian novel, Dianshu qitan 电术奇谈 (Strange Talk of the Electrical Arts, 1903), which touches upon electrohypnosis at various junctures. Zeng Pu’s Niehai hua 濡海花 (Flower in a Sea of Evil, 1904) features a hypnotist met by the protagonists on a ship bound for Europe. Thanks to Prof. Paola Zamperini for suggesting some of these (personal correspondence, 11/5/2016). See also: Shaoling Ma, “‘A Tale of New Mr. Braggadocio’: Narrative Subjectivity and Brain Electricity in Late Qing Science Fiction,” Science Fiction Studies, 40:1, (2013), pp. 55–72.

M. M. Bakhtin’s theory that in Renaissance fiction the grotesque and playful images of the carnival were a means to refuse dominant and established models of thought about life (i.e. the “carnivalisation” of literature).7 Echoing Bakhtin, Larry Riggs identifies in the analogous imagery of the eighteenth-century playwright and actor, Molière (1622-1673), recognisably “postmodern” insights into “the ruling assumptions of modernity.”8 David Wang has attributed to late-Qing fiction a Bakhtinian capacity for “grotesque realism,” grounded in the “fantastic power of the clown.”9 Inspired by the self-consciousness clowning of Zuo Ci, this study will consider whether late-Qing grotesquery harboured an analogous capacity to that identified by Riggs and Bakhtin, for a ludic refusal of the era’s “modernity” (wenming 文明) project.10

This study will however turn to fictional imagery that is both “grotesque” and also evocative of its (only vaguely delineated) counterpart in the “fantastic.” The “ambiguous moral consequences” and “new non-linear order” that identify the late-Qing grotesque are equally present in the era’s technological and developmental fantasies, yet they are

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10 The translation of wenming as “modernity” here is in need to clarification. Wenming first arrived in China as part a transliteration of Meiji Japan’s modernising slogan “bunmei kaika” (wenming kaihua , itself taken from Chinese antiquity), which translates, generally speaking, as “civilising and opening up.” Over time wenming became the more commonly used of the two halves of the phrase, although its association with the Meiji restoration remained, particularly for reformist figures. Taking this into account, I argue that “modernity/enlightenment” a more valid and representative translation of the spirit of its usage in many instances that the more literal “civilisation” or “civility.” As with Leo Ou-fan Lee and Xiaobing Tang, I disagree with the argument that wenming does not correspond with the sense of continuum-breaking epochal shift that “modernity” or “enlightenment” embodies in western culture, as Jones has argued; Andrew F. Jones, Developmental Fairy Tales: Evolutionary Thinking and Modern Chinese Culture, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 18. However, I do recognise that it is not always appropriate as a translation, and so will use “civility” when appropriate. See Sato Shinichi, Jindai Zhongguo de zhiyi fenzi yu wenming, Liu Yuebing (trans.), Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2006. Leo Ou-fan Lee, “The Cultural Construction of Modernity in Urban Shanghai: Some Preliminary Explorations,” in Wen-hsin Yeh (ed.), Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 31-61.
typically afforded little of the same capacity for the subversive fun, inversive satire and distortive depravity. In this dissertation it will be argued that “speculative fiction” was comically intertwining the positivism and idealism of fantasy with the caustic depravity of the grotesque. Be it in sexless self-immortalising technocratic post-humans, libidinal bandits and their all-night sex gardens, or a utopian spacecraft of boredom, late-Qing fiction offers an assemblage of “grotesque fantasy” images, whose interrogation of the ideology of modernity was as perceptive as it was comical.

1. Tabloid speculative fiction

Instances of “grotesque fantasy” appear in a number of texts that will, in this study, be collectively termed “tabloid speculative fiction.” This terminology serves two related purposes. Firstly, it consciously avoids using the term “science fiction” (or “sf,” “sci-fi” etc.), which would be inappropriate and even misleading in the context of the period in question. Secondly, it acknowledges the complexity of their identity as texts, stressing that the incorporation of fantastical topoi did not negate their materialistic grounding as commercial works of the “tabloid” class of debauched, satirical and cynical authors (the “xiaobao wenren 小报文人”) in the late-Qing.

Mechanised printing technology, the breakdown of traditional career paths into and through officialdom and the rise of capitalism created the conditions for a proliferation of commercial fiction at the turn of the century. Between 1898 and 1911 a greater number of novels were published than in the previous 250 years combined, an outgrowth which impelled the exploration of new motifs and themes, both domestic in origin and appropriated from an increasing number of western novels in translation.

Wang, Fin-de-Siècle Splendor, p. 242.

1,145 to 834 according to Chen Pingyuan 陈平原; Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo de qidian: qingmo minchu xiaoshuo yanjiu 中国现代小说的起点：清末民初小说研究, Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 77. Wu Jianren was for instance drawing images from western science fiction and detective fiction, while remaining grounded in aspects of melodrama, shenmo xiaoshuo 神魔小说 (gods and demons fiction), and courtesan fiction. In publishing his own 1908 short story “Guangxu wannian 光绪万年” (“10,000 years of the Guangxu”) in Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说 (AllStory Monthly), he categorised it as either “a humorous satire of idealistic science
This presents a challenge to researchers, and Starr has noted that in the study of late-Qing courtesan fiction, generic demarcation has often taken precedence over actual analysis of texts. This is equally valid for the nebulous archetypes that in the late-Qing (pace David Wang’s argument that they were not entirely “new”) have frequently come to be grouped as genres like “science fiction” (or “science fantasy”). The setting of the boundaries of “science fiction” in the late-Qing has been an involved process, one that often obfuscates the intrinsic, and fascinating, thematic and generic ambiguity of the texts in question.

The earliest translation of the term “science fiction” (first used in English in 1851), literally as kexue xiaoshuo 科学小说 (“science fiction” or “science novels”), was made by Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), in an introduction to the genre that served as preface to his 1903 translation of Jules Verne’s De la Terre a la Lune (1865, under the title Yuejie lüxing 月界旅行 [Travels to the Moon]). The arrival of science fiction as a concept and of its emblematic works in translation over the following few years however precipitated few parables,” or “a satirical and humorous idealistic science fantasy” (lixiang kexue yuyan fengci huixie xiaoshuo 理想科学寓言讽刺诙谐小说), indicative of this cross-pollination. See also Jing Tsu’s discussion of Nüwa shi 女娲石 (Stone of the Goddess Nüwa, 1904) as a feminist, nihilist, and science-fiction novel; “Female Assassins, Civilization and Technology in Late Qing Literature and Culture,” in Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong and Richard J. Smith (eds.), Different Worlds of Discourse: Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China, London: Brill Press, 2008, pp. 167-196.

14 Any assertion of a “new genre” struggles to reconcile itself with the notion that genre best be understood as a dynamic diachronic process in which “variation and correction determine the scope, whereas alteration and reproduction determine the borders of a genre-structure;” Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, Timothy Bahti (trans.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. 23.
15 See for instance, Nathaniel Kenneth Isaacsain, “Colonial Modernities and Chinese Science Fiction,” PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2011. Chapter 2 will discuss the blending of social satire, urban adventure with ultramodern technological imagery in Wu Jianren’s New Story of the Stone, which has confounded the “sf” expectations of readers as much as it has satisfied them. As was the case for one contributor to the WCSFA (Kehuan xingyun wang 科幻星云网) website, who begs Wu Jianren to, “hurry up and replace the old with the new!” (dada kuai gengxin ya 大大快更新呀); http://www.wcsfa.com/topic_article.php?id=2461 (last accessed: 23/5/16).
approximations by Chinese authors, and Lu Xun did not include *kexue xiaoshuo* among the genres surveyed in his later history of recent Chinese fiction, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, 1930). There were few novels that immediately identified themselves as science fiction in the late-Qing, and certainly no dedicated science fiction authors in the mode of Verne. Instead, motifs like exploration by spacecraft and submarine (“driving iron by means of steam” *quite shiqi* 驱铁使气, as Lu Xun put it), were more often incorporated into existing genres like the travel diary, adventure novel, and even the romance.

The term *kexue xiaoshuo* was more prevalent in the articles of professional literary theorists like Lin Shu 林纾 (1852-1924), or Yin Bansheng 寅半生 (1865-?), and often less in terms of a considered reflection on common themes and topoi than in the pre-emptive ascribing of the prospective genre to existing ideological positions on the nature of fiction. Take Yu Mingzhen 俞明震 (1860-1918) for instance, a close associate of reformers like Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) and Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) who championed *kexue xiaoshuo* as a potential addition to the “*jishu pai*” 记述派 (recording school), to which the “*mimetic*” traditions like historical and military fiction

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17 Ibid., p. 164. In the inaugural issue of *Xiaoshuo lin* 小说林 (Forest of Fiction), Xu Nianci 徐念慈 (1875-1908) echoed this characterisation of western science fiction, stating that “circumnavigating the moon, the end of the world, travel to the core of the earth and beneath the ground, progress unceasing, these are all the ideals of *kexue* [xiaoshuo]" (*yueqiu zhi huanyou, shijie zhi mori, dixin didi zhi youxing, jie ben kexue zhi lixiang*); Xu Nianci 徐念慈, “*Xiaoshuo lin yuanqi* 小说林缘起," *Xiaoshuo lin* 小说林, 1, 1907; cited in Yu Runqi 于润琦, “Woguo qingmo minchu de duanpian xiaoshuo 我国清末民初的短篇小说," in Yu Runqi 于润琦 (ed.), *Qingmo minchu xiaoshuo shuxi: kexue juan 清末民初小说书系: 科学卷*, Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi, 1997, pp. 13-14. Xu Nianci was the author of one of the few late-Qing novels which seems to be attempting a Chinese variation on Verne-ian “science fiction.” *Xin faluo xiansheng tan* 新法螺先生谭 (The tales of new Mr. Blowhard, 1905) is a meandering story of global and intergalactic peregrination enacted by modern technology.

18 Yin Bansheng authored a regular column discussing plot, character and themes in new literature in the journal *Youxi shijie* 游戏世界, it was called “*Xiaoshuo xianping* 小说闲平” and ran between 1906 and 1907. See Zhu Yongxiang 朱永香, “*Lun Yin Bansheng ji qi Xiaoshuo xianping* 论寅半生及其小说闲评,” *Huadong Shifan Daxue xuebao (哲学社会科学版)* 华东师范大学学报 (哲学社会科学版), 2015:4, pp. 149-152.
and the era’s “New Fiction” school belonged. This was in contrast to the “miaoxie pai” (descriptive school), which at this point was synonymous with the perniciously unmimetic fantasy and grotesquery of tabloid fiction.

Using a term like “science fiction” erroneously implies that kexue xiaoshuo was a true domestic genre in the late-Qing. Furthermore, it emphasises the construction of genre through congruities of image and content, overlooking other registers of identification like Andrew Plaks’ continuum between history and fiction. Contrary to the expectations imparted by “(turn of the century) science fiction,” i.e. the technological “novum” of spaceships and submarines, in the late-Qing the prevalent motif is that of a fluidity and disintegration of temporality. Consider for instance the existential introduction to Li Boyuan’s Tracks of the Snowgoose (Haitian hongxueji 海天鸿雪记, 1899), in which the experience of modern life is described as akin to arrival in a fragile new temporality:

[I] was born to this world with only a past and a future, but not a present. Floating free and unfettered, I unexpectedly arrived in this place and came upon this reality. Had I not come upon here, the spectre of the past would go by unseen, not to mention the future. Amidst all the colourful sights of the present day world, this is one of the greatest, but one hundred years hence who can know what it will turn into? Really, all the people and the strange sights of the present day, this insubstantial soap bubble held up to the light, are like the cicada who doesn’t know the passing

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21 David Wang’s inclusion of works like Dangkou Zhi 蒲寇志 (Quell the Bandits, 1853) by Yu Wanchun 俞萬春 into a genre which he defines as “science fantasy” is a valuable attempt to undermine the hegemony of Verne-ian imagery of space and sea travel, technology and adventure; David Der-wei Wang, Fin de Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848-1911, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 125-137.

22 Li Boyuan’s authorship of this novel is suspected but contested, as Ah Ying has considered in some detail. Ah Ying 阿英, “Haitian hongxue ji 海天鸿雪记,” in Wei Shaochang 魏紡昌 (ed.), Li Boyuan yanjiu ziliao 李伯元研究资料, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980, pp. 234-258.
of the seasons, or the swallow nesting on a military tent.\textsuperscript{23}

Li’s unexpected arrival in a new world after floating free and unfettered suggests intergalactic peregrination, yet it is not the culmination of an estranging journey \textit{outward} through space and time via technology, but that of a journey \textit{inward} into modernity and its collapsing of temporalities. The late-Qing \textit{kairos} is experienced as a paradoxical exaggeration of both the synchronic and the diachronic, the passage of time is externalised, and yet, unlike for the cicada or the swallow for whom it passes by unseen, it is not unrecognised.

This invitation to imagine time as warped into non-linearity by the considerable energies of modernity was, for the late-Qing reader, not an entirely unfamiliar one. Each of the instances of grotesque fantasy in this study is to some extent implicated into this sense of atemporality and temporal multiplicity, akin to what Shawn Smith calls, “the torturing of time... in narrative, to conform to a damaged perception of the world.”\textsuperscript{24}

While titles like \textit{The Future of New China} (\textit{Xin Zhongguo weilai ji} 新中国未来记, 1902), \textit{A History of the Future of Education} (\textit{Weilai jiaoyu shi} 未来教育史, 1905), and \textit{A Short History of China’s Development} (\textit{Zhongguo jinhua xiaoshi} 中国进化小史, 1906), imply that the future was collapsing into the present, others, like \textit{New China} (\textit{Xin Zhongguo} 新中国, 1910), \textit{New Shanghai} (\textit{Xin Shanghai} 新上海, 1910) \textit{New Hankou} (\textit{Xin Hankou} 新汉口, 1909), and \textit{New Suzhou} (\textit{Xin Suzhou} 新苏州, 1910) suggest that alterity was becoming


indistinguishable from familiarity. Further indicative of this were fanxìn xiǎoshuō (翻新小说, “crossing-over-into-the-new novels”), anachronistic sequels in which there was no narrative link with the hypotext, but rather a fantastical and often unexplained transporting of familiar characters through time and space into the present day, or the “new.”

As both scientist and mystagogue, intellectual and common street entertainer, Zuo Ci alludes to the ambiguous social status of the late-Qing tabloid author. Tabloid writers have often been viewed through the prism of the opprobrium directed towards them by the official classes. This discourse saw tabloid fiction as synonymous with its most emblematic creations, the fiction of “revealing” or “exposé” (jiēlù 揭露 or bāoluò 暴露), and of “depravity” (xiàxìe xiǎoshuō 狭邪小說), as Lu Xun termed them. By comically exaggerating the hypocrisies, idiocies and self-serving fantasies of elite society, exposé fiction was viewed as having a negative influence on the reading population, undermining their faith in the institutions of authority. Later, Lu Xun would equate the

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25 Even non-fiction writing on Shanghai at the close of the century was “fundamentally magical and illusory... where ‘natural’ orders are confused or reversed,” Alexander Des Forges, “Street talk and alley stories: Tangled narratives of Shanghai from ‘Lives of Shanghai Flowers’ (1892) to ‘Midnight’ (1933),” PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1998, p. 53.


27 This use of the term “jiēlù” ran counter to other uses in the late-Qing, which were more to do with objectivity and critical analysis, as new tools of medical observation, like the X-ray and radiograph promised to “jiēlù” the previously hidden, and clarify the previously obscure.
exposé with gossip-mongering, and Ah Ying would describe it as a fictional form based in “slander” (guihua 鬼话). Depravity fiction, which typically depicted the oft-degraded relationships between courtesans and customers in the pleasure districts of Shanghai, was no less palatable to the official or reformist classes, or to the subsequent generation of fiction cognoscenti in China.

In addition to undermining the generic and formal diversity of tabloid writing, the direct equation of tabloid fiction with these two genres has led to a preeminent assumption that tabloid fiction was predisposed to realism rather than fantasy. Reinforcing this, research from Mainland China has tended to typify tabloid fiction as something of a style rather than an ethos, namely, that of the “realism school” (xieshi pai 写实派). Running counter to this the work of David Wang, who has found in late-Qing exposé fiction not realism, but grotesque exaggeration and distortion, a characterisation which is perceptive and yet often overlooked.

Other recent works have endeavoured to uncover the internal complexities of the tabloid fiction arena, and to identify value systems and moral contiguities that dissemble the equation of commercial (gaofei 稿费) writing with the disaffected voyeur manufacturing slander. This research has benefitted from a more involved and sympathetic consideration of the tabloid press in general, and the tabloid press and tabloid fiction have been shown to be sharing an assertiveness and unabashed muckraking quality, as well as a common textual and metatextual intersection with the urban entertainment industries.

Juan Wang has argued that tabloid fiction be read as the product of a nascent class in the late-Qing, that of the “tabloid literati,” who were deliberately subverting and bowdlerising the dominant discourse of “political and intellectual proscriptions” during

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29 Ah Ying 阿英, Wanqing wenyi baokan shulüe 晚清文艺报刊述略, Shanghai: Shanghai Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1958, pp. 49-89.
30 Wang, Fin de Siècle Splendor, pp. 200-227
the late-Qing. Wang draws out a dynamic whereby as tabloid writers sought out conflict with the era’s reformist figures they thereby reflexively formed themselves as a class which shared certain perspectives on the contemporary culture:

The [tabloid] community differed notably from the intellectual elites in its views on politics, ethics, and ethnicity. It opposed conservatives, reformers and revolutionaries, along with political and intellectual proscriptions from China’s future. It deliberately cultivated a consciousness of “Us” as the politically and socially powerless, versus “Them” as the powerful and privileged. This tabloid populism gained persuasiveness and appeal precisely because community members saw themselves as outsiders and underdogs, taking on the mighty political and intellectual “insiders.” They created a subversive culture of doubt, distrust and defiance that empowered the literate public. The culture reflected public opinion and sentiment; it is one of the first outgrowths of China’s media-driven “mass culture.”

Wang’s “tabloid” publications span both the entertainment newspapers like Youxi bao 游戏报 (Entertainment, 1897-1910), and fiction journals like Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说 (All-Story Monthly, 1906-1908) and Xiuxiang xiaoshuo 绣像小说 (Illustrated Fiction, 1903-1906). By drawing fiction journals into the same community as the entertainment newspapers (reinforced by “bridge” figures like Li Boyuan 李伯元 and Wu Jianren), he offers a vital counter-narrative to their frequent equation with establishment values. (As in Shu-ying Tsau’s strange statement that, “fiction magazines all had common views on purpose and content... [and] a well formulated purpose for publishing, namely to use fiction to educate the masses, foster a new morality, and criticize society so as to change it for the better”).

Wang’s tendency to assert a formal distinction between the tabloid and the non-tabloid world is however problematic, symptomatic of an over-willingness to equate the “tabloid ethos” with the “tabloid publication.” I find that the former was more identifiable than the latter at this time, and the use of “tabloid” in this study largely

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denotes this ethos rather than the “tabloid-ness” of specific publications. This has the benefit of allowing the incorporation of an author like Lu Shi’e, who expressed the values of the “tabloid literati” but who goes unmentioned in his study, because he did not publish within the boundaries of Wang’s “tabloid press.”

As with Catherine Yeh (who at times argues that the tabloid literati were feeding on “rancor”), Juan Wang characterises the coagulative disaffection of tabloid writers at this time as individualistic in animus. While viewing the tabloid community as inherently critical toward the individuals and social classes that were leading the charge for modernity in China, he is less willing to consider a parallel critique directed toward the ideology of modernity itself, the ethical postulates and scientific assertions that impelled their desired reform of Chinese society. It should not be overlooked that the grand figures of Chinese literary history, whom these tabloid writers idealised, used playful writing to express “a creative subjectivity quite distinct from the creativity spurred by personal frustration and anger,” as Ying Wang puts it. The first task of this dissertation will be to build a more three-dimensional picture of the tabloid ethos, in which attacks on a reformers are situated as part of this “creative subjectivity” of critical reflection on the ideology of late-Qing modernity.

While Wang focuses on tabloid fiction as coextensive with a class of individuals,

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33 Wang himself admits that this was a time in which “the distinction between serious reform and entertainment periodicals became blurred... [a] distinction [which] sharpened again after 1910” (p. 9). The second characterisation is more accurate. Formally, the tabloid press was indistinguishable from newspapers like Nanfang bao 南方报 or Xinwen bao 新闻报. Furthermore, the vernacular and reportorial style of tabloid fiction was appropriated by pioneers of reformist “New Fiction,” while replacing its supernatural, romantic and sexual content with more pedagogical tropes. Nonetheless, “tabloid” publications at this time did evince a consistent ethos and a collective sense of (self-)exclusion from the dominant intellectual culture (which both Wang and I see as being reformism and enlightenment modernity), and which were defined by none of the same social conservatism as the 1920s tabloids in China; see Kang Wenqing, Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900-1950, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009, chpt. 4.


Yeh has situated tabloid fiction within its wider ecosystem, the Shanghai leisure and entertainment industries. She notes that in tabloid-inflected courtesan novels of the final decades of the nineteenth century, there emerged “the notion of Shanghai as a ‘big playground.’”36 This was reinforced by the rise of tabloid publications like Li Boyuan’s Entertainment, which focused on news and gossip emanating from the entertainment life of the city (as well as serialising fiction, giving a start to many tabloid authors, including Wu Jianren). Entertainment publishing and the early serialised fiction it carried were engaged in a range of “symbiotic and symbolic” relationships with the wider milieu of urban leisure and entertainment in Shanghai.37

Alexander Des Forges argues that tabloid writing (both fiction and non-fiction) was a “double commodity,” selling itself and a stylised, almost overdetermined image of Shanghai as a “glittering world” (shijie fanhua 世界繁华), albeit one that also retained a capacity to convey new and modern dangers. The city’s infamous sexual and narcotic culture played a central role in this, and Des Forges argues that opium was an instance just a textual reference, but that the nocturnal motifs and preponderance of dream imagery and logic in tabloid novels are a reflection of a complex extra-textual relationship to the drug.38 He also sees tabloid fiction as indivisible from its foundations

37 Ibid., p. 5. Most symbolic among these being a publication like Shijie fanhua bao 世界繁华报 (World Vanity Fair, 1902–10), which was conceived of as advertising for the infamous entertainment complex “Da shijie 大世界,” probably the most emblematic single star in the “universe of fun” in Shanghai. Shanghai chunqiu 上海春秋 (Shanghai Annals, 1921) by Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 (1875-1973) for instance depicted its principal characters both in their working lives in a factory on the outskirts of the city and in visits to the Da shijie, as well as to traditional theatres and to new-style theatrical houses; Qiu Peicheng, Miaohui jindai Shanghaishi de yizhong fangfa: “Xiaoshuo yuebao” (1910-1920) yu Qingmo Minchu Shanghai dushi wenhua yanjiu 说明书: “小说月报” (1910-1920) 与清末民初上海都市文化研究, Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2011, p. 147. Qiu Peicheng also notes that tabloid fiction at this time evinced a deep interest in “leisure, [and] pleasure” (xiaoxian, yule 休闲, 娱乐).
in commerciality and industrial mass production, and shaped by the rise of serialisation, which changed the relationships of authors and readers alike to fiction.

Few of these studies of tabloid fiction reflect on fiction that was not of the “expose” and “depravity” genres however. This despite the fact that the tabloid press was also instrumental in the importing of commercially successful western genres like detective fiction and science fiction into China. Lu Xun’s translation/adaptation of *De la Terre a la Lune* mentioned earlier was for instance published in the commercial fiction journal *Xinyue Xiaoshuo* 新月小说 (*New Fiction Monthly*).³⁹ His introduction to western science fiction clearly courts a Chinese tabloid readership, stressing lucrative themes like emotion and passion (qing 情) and implicitly un-western conceptual dualisms like “separation and reunion, pain and joy” (lihe beihuan 离合悲欢).⁴⁰ Even more conspicuously he suggests that the genre could be a source of humour and social commentary, and that it could be “interspersed within mockery and accusation” (jian za ji tan 间杂讥弹), not a quality Verne was often credited with, but an ineluctable feature of tabloid fiction.⁴¹

This study will argue that Lu Xun’s intersecting of western science fiction and Chinese tabloid ideals, though it was ungainly and even fallacious in application to Jules Verne, proved informative for a generation of authors experimenting with the fantastical images and motifs of western science fiction. Tabloid speculative fiction is “interspersed with mockery and accusation” which represented a nascent subjectivity toward the ideals of modernity, and derived from a wider entanglement with fun, commerciality, sexuality and boredom.⁴² Within this, the traditional tabloid figure of the scumbag and the

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³⁹ In the same year, 1903, Lu Xun’s translation of *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers: Tour du monde sous-marin* (1870, under the title *Didi Lüxing* 地底旅行) was serialised in the Tokyo-based journal *Zhejiang chao* 浙江潮.

⁴⁰ In this he contrasts Yu Mingzhen’s later comments on the incompatibility of feeling and science writing.


⁴² This approach contrasts with Juan Wang’s assertion that entertainment news and “political
wastrel takes on a newfound agency. Be it the dandy Xue Pan, gurning and disrespectful audiences or sex-peddling bandits, the scoundrel becomes emblematic of tabloid speculative fiction’s capacity to enunciate a salient critique of modernity without relinquishing an entanglement with fun.

Tabloid speculative fiction should not be taken as a self-contained “genre” in the late-Qing, but it does afford a framework by which to draw thematic connections between previously unconnected texts, and to approach the field of tabloid fiction studies from outside of the exposé and depravity genres. While more traditional tabloid genres trafficked in an exaggerated familiarity, tabloid speculative fiction offered a grotesque distortion of fantasy that was no less cynical and critically disposed toward the enlightenment-led culture and ideologies of the late-Qing. These grotesque fantasies fostered a critical discourse on modernity that encapsulated a capacity for “tabloid-ness” and for “speculative-ness.” In chapter 2 for instance the traditional tabloid images of Shanghai foreign concessions’ embodied panorama of excrement, sweat, and sex is implicated into the speculative fantasy of the “Realm of Modernity.” In chapter 3 the ludic and rowdy audiences of the red-light district’s theatres and teahouses are employed as a counterpoint to utopian fantasies of a China led by authoritative public speakers. In chapter 4 the intrinsic libidinalism and commercialism of the tabloid press perverts the authority of the rational economic actor. Finally, chapter 5 turns to boredom, and its refusal of the sublimation of modern life as inherently exciting.

2. Shengse gouma 声色狗马

The texts discussed in this study variously enunciate that the promised mockery” were essentially separate and “jostled for space;” Merry Laughter, p. 7. Yeh’s supple and imaginative interpretation of the tabloid press-organised “flower elections” as both “selling” the city’s courtesans and wider leisure industry and as subverting the Imperial Examination system and early forays into constitutional democracy is an example of how the two could co-exist; Shanghai Love, pp. 227-230. Hong Yu 洪煬 also argues that the tabloid “critique from the periphery” and a sense of fun and leisure were feeding off of one another; Hong Yu 洪煬, Jindai Shanghai xiaobao yu shimin wenhua yanjiu, 1897-1937 近代上海小报与市民文化研究, 1897-1937, Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2007, p. 353.
civilizational achievements of modernity came at an (oft-suppressed) cost in terms of a curtailing of individual freedoms, problematising of modes of expression and, most simply perhaps, a debasement and denial of fun. Fun and play are however terms of such self-evident subjectivity and cultural specificity that merely to employ them without contextualisation is to assume an unreasonable degree of semantic stability and cross-cultural equivalency. These terms will, within the confines of this study, be understood therefore not as an essentialist commentary on their intrinsic significance across cultures and epochs, but signifying of the relatively specific confines of a male literati notion of fun based in libidinal desire/release, narcotic indulgence, gambling and even being rowdy in the middle of a performance.

In this study the grotesque exaggeration of this sexualised and debased conceptualisation of fun and play will be forwarded as a deliberate and satirical counterpoint to the enlightenment-led and temperance-based social reformist ideology of the late-Qing. Appropriately, libidinal fun was viewed by this modernising discourse as itself grotesque, and as irretrievably external to an enlightened Chinese nation and citizenry. The “enlightenment of the lower-class” in the late-Qing, as Li Xiaoti 李孝悌 has dubbed it, only went so low as to attract and reform the potential “new citizen” and not his counterpart in the “sick man of Asia.”

The grotesque qualities of transgressive pleasure - or less pretentiously “dumb fun” - are best encapsulated in the four-character idiom “shengse gouma 声色狗马” (or shengse quanma 声色犬马). The Hanyu chengyu bianxi cidian 汉语成语辨析词典 (Dictionary of Set Expressions in Chinese, 1997) defines shengse gouma as “indicating a happy life in shameless and dissolute pleasures” (zhizhuangyinwu de xiangle shenghuo 指荒淫无耻的享乐生活), with the shengse 声色 portion referring to “music, dancing and feminine charms” (gewu he nüse 歌舞和女色) and the gouma 狗马 portion to “animals that

provide entertainment” (gōng yúle de dòngwù 供娱乐的动物). In this both aspects of the expression invoke the liberating grotesquery of the carnival.

Shengse gouma raises various associations between bodies, senses and sensuousness. The characters sheng 声 and se 色 advert to the sensory and sexual components of fun, hinging on the semantically-grounded link between colour and sex (also expressed in a phrase like “red lanterns and green wine” dēnghóng jiùlú 灯红酒绿). On a more abstract level, gou 狗 and ma 马 also have associations with smell and touch. They also raise the ambiguous status of fun and sexuality with regards to the nature-culture antinomy, reminding the reader of the presence of the animal within the cultural. This implication of libidinal desire as animalistic contrasts the more effete and psychologically-tortured renderings of physical love common in Chinese literati writing (especially the “scholar and beauty” or cāizi jiären 才子佳人 tradition).

While invoking the “four vices” (jìusè cǎiqì 酒色财气), shengse gouma depicts these same activities as enjoyed shamelessly, rather than shamefully. While one could be “driven into” (duōluò 载落) vice, it was more likely that they would more willingly “submerge” themselves (chēn ní 沉溺) into the shengse gouma life. This submersion also

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44 Ni Baoyuan 倪宝元 and Yao Pengci 姚鹏慈, Hányǔ chéngyu biănxi cidian 汉语成语辨析词典, Beijing: Commercial Press, 1997, p. 469. Emphasis added. The Imperial dog of China was of course the Pekingese, a breed whose illustrious heredity, for anyone who has actually been around one, doesn’t really mitigate its inherently comic qualities.

45 Se 色 alone alerts us to the association between the sensual and the sensory found in the more bodily experiences of bawdy sexuality (in comparison to the aestheticized romantic love), as in a phrases like “sēsēmí 色色迷迷” (horny), “nánse 男色” (erotic male attraction), “sējīng 色精” (sex maniac) and “sēláng 色狼” (lecher or pervert). Chen Sihe 陈思和 has for instance used the phrase as a means by which to discuss colour-coding in the fiction of Mo Yan 莫言 (himself a highly sexualized author); Chen Sihe 陈思和, “Shengse quanma, jie you jingjie – Mo Yan xiaoshuo yìshù sān tǐ” in Chen Sihe, Bizoulongshè 笔走龙蛇, Taipei: Yeqiāng chūbānshè, 1997, pp. 318-325. It also speaks to the longterm Chinese literati association of nature not so much with sexuality-qua-fertility, but with sexuality “for its own sake” or for the sake of fun. Paolo Santangelo raises the interesting example of Tu Long 屠隆 (1542-1605), who exclaimed that the beauty of nature made him think immediately of going to brothels; Paolo Santangelo, “Appendix: Additional Data Concerning Bodily Sensations and Emotions in Pre-modern Chinese Literature,” in Santangelo (ed.), From Skin to Heart: Perceptions of Bodily Sensations and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Culture, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006, p. 293.
evokes the capacity for shengse gouma to colonise the self at the expense of everything else, as in Bai Juyi’s 白居易 poetic couplet, which proudly announced, “I am ignorant of everything, save for shengse gouma” (shengsegouma wai, qiyu yiwuwei 声色狗马外，其余一无知).46

This “sinking” into shengse gouma would likely take place in the shengse changsuo 声色场所, a common term for the “red-light district.”47 Through the association with the pleasure district we also arrive at the more capacious resonance of shengse gouma, which in addition to its literal connotations, also implies the theatrics, gambling, drugs and the disregard for social niceties of the red-light district at large. In this, it is worth bearing in mind Hirosue Tamotsu’s drawing of a parallel between the “red-light district” and the carnival, characterising the infamous Meiji Edo pleasure districts as a “permanent carnival,” a contingent inversion of the rules of society itself (similar to Erving Goffman’s supra-rational “action spaces”).48

Emblematised in Feng Menglong’s 冯梦龙 (1574-1645) cataloguing of the Ming Dynasty erotic, Chinese literati consistently imbued “dumb fun” with a degree of romance. The protagonist “Langzi 浪子,” in the late-Ming erotic novel, Langshi qiguan 浪史奇观 (A History of Debauchery, c.1600), for instance ensonces himself so deeply in shengse gouma that he becomes a kind of sexual immortal.49 In the nineteenth century however, shengse gouma and the shengse changsuo increasingly became a medium through
which to re-invigorate and re-interpret this sublime escape from terrestrial concerns. McMahon notes for instance that Hong Shanqing 洪善卿, the brothel-owner in Han Bangqing’s 韩邦庆 Haishanghua liezhuang 海上花列传 (The Lives of Shanghai Flowers, 1892), had disengaged the “quintessential acts of supposed decadence such as smoking opium and consorting with prostitutes” from the sentimental nostalgia and reactionary traditionalism of the “scholar and beauty” relationship.\(^{50}\)

In the case of the massively-popular erotic novel The Nine-Tailed Turtle (Jiuweigui 九尾龟, 1906-1910) by Zhang Chunfan 张春帆 (1872-1923), a transvaluation of shengse gouma is also underway, one which draws on this notion of alterity and inverted reality made possible by the grotesquely sexual and decadent. For the minor character Qiu Bai 邱八 the descent into shengse gouma is depicted as a path to a kind of streetwise wisdom, a corollary to the conceptual trajectory of this study as a whole:

> With nobody to keep an eye on him, he gradually fell into loose morals, and naturally he came upon some friends who shared his interest in the carefree life, and they used all manner of flattery and bootlicking to lure him into the world of shengse gouma. Qiu Bai was a smart kid at heart, but he had the temperament of a pampered Playboy, and once he managed to get his hands on some funds, he and this group of friends went to Shanghai in order to indulge themselves and throw some money around. In the brothels he acted like the world’s biggest moron and in the gambling dens he was unparalleled in having more money than sense. He sought out the company of high-class, middle-class and low-class prostitutes, dallied in courtesan houses both Cantonese and foreign [owned], visited every single pai gow den, even indulging at stalls laid out within the City-God Temple. He went everywhere trying to experience everything, and to taste every flavour on offer. After less than two years, he’d wasted four-tenths of his family’s massive wealth. However, despite having squandered a hundred thousand gold pieces, he’d also grown to be very wise, and now, no matter what situation, you couldn’t put one over on him.\(^{51}\)

无奈无人管束，渐渐的自放荡身心，就自然而然有那一班帮闲绰趣的朋友，援臀放屁的把声色狗马来引动他。邱八虽然质地聪明，却是

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\(^{50}\) Keith McMahon, "Fleecing the Male Customer in Shanghai Brothels of the 1890s," Late Imperial China 23.2 (December 2002), p. 26. See also Keith McMahon, Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

\(^{51}\) Zhang Chunfan 张春帆, Jiuweigui 九尾龟, Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2000, p. 88, chpt. 22.
The acquisition of wisdom that “Qiu Bai’s Progress” culminates in is not incidental to the waywardness that precedes it. In resituating the libidinal decadence of Ming-era erotica into a turn of the twentieth century setting, the Nine-Tailed Turtle brings dumb fun into contrast with not just traditional ethics, but the newfound values of modernity (not unlike Entertainment’s claims to speak to “brothel careerdom,” or qinglou faji 青楼发迹). Qiu Bai not only disregards sexual temperance, he also wasters money by his profligacy, spitting in the eye not only of Confucian morality but also the modern idol of the homo oeconomicus (see chapter 4), imparting on the reader the sense that he has not so much lost his moral compass, as pawned it. As Bennett notes, “one of the stock-types of the erotic-memoir genre of Victorian pornography” is similarly, “that of the narrator-hero who embarks on a career of libertinism with a fortune as large as his libido.”

The implication of the sexual into wider regimes of exchange reminds us that the dissolute life depicted in The Lives of Shanghai Flowers and The Nine-Tailed Turtle is critically intersected with the libidinal-as-economy.

In deliberately implying that the fiscally and sexually profligate young man manages to acquire “wisdom,” Qiu Bai’s descent into shengse gouma, like that of langzi in A History of Debauchery, resembles that of a Daoist or Buddhist spiritual journey. Not unlike the homosexual adventures of Du Shengqing in Rulin waishi 儒林外史 (The Scholars, 1750), Qiu Bai has acquired something of the classical notion of “self-understanding” (zhiji 知己 or zhiyin 知音), which Martin W. Huang, appropriately in

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this case, equates with a sense of personal “style.” In this, the episode subverts the era’s pervasive injunctions toward self-cultivation, by reflecting on the paradoxical capacity for “self-cultivation through personal dissolution” (the irony being that personal dissolution was the only aspect of late-Qing culture that reformism did not attempt to make pedagogical).

These kinds of parables are metonymic for the ongoing transformation and transvaluation of fiction-writing itself, as a once respectable literati hobby began to embrace the selling of “pleasure.” David Wang notes that Shanghai fiction (or hai派 fiction), “treated [literature] like a plaything... flamboyant and changeable with dilettantism and frivolity as its trademarks.” When an Imperial Edict ordered the closing of all newspaper offices in 1900, the emergent class of newspapermen was described as “consisting mostly of literate scum with no sense of shame” (士文巴劣，俗人乌礼) In New Flowers in the Mirror (discussed in greater detail in chapter 5), the story begins with the Taoist gibbon of the original (who also acts as a form of literary agent in Flowers in the Mirror) searching Shanghai for a willing author. Rebuffed by “men of aspiration” (志士), who disdain the classic fiction he represents, he enlists the services of Xiaoran yusheng, who is willing to write anything for a price “an man utterly and completely without shame” (不甘无记者).

Officials and reformist intellectuals also made the association between tabloid fiction and the subversive possibility of “huiyin huidao 海淫诲盗” (the stirring up of base passions). One contributor to the Liang Qichao-edited newspaper Qingyi bao 清议报 criticised “marketplace rascals” (市无赖) for producing works filled with

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54 Wang, Fin de Siècle Splendor, pp. 99-100.
56 XJHY, p. 388.
lewd words. In, “On the relationship between fiction and the governing of the masses” (Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi 论小说与群治之关系, 1902), Liang Qichao himself censured the fiction of “frivolous scholars and marketplace merchants” (huashi fangjia 华士坊贾), for inciting the “sinking into shengse” (chenni shengse 沉溺声色) and even for engendering the grotesquely gustatory dreams of the Water Margin’s outlaws, for “big bowls of wine, [and] big slices of meat” (dawanjiu, dakuairou 大碗酒, 大块肉). Read against C.T. Hsia’s perceptive commentary that the principle symbols of the Water Margin are the endless road on which the Liangshan Band travels and the intermittent respite of the inn where this meat and wine was served, Liang was perhaps not only decrying overindulgence, but also the wider societal undercurrent of a desire to take respite from the endless road of progress, that tabloid fiction tapped into.

The association of a moral decline in fiction with its newfound commerciality was a common refrain of officials and reformist intellectuals, but this should not be dismissed out of hand as elitism. McMahon identifies that in the even most debauched, erotic and voyeuristic Ming Dynasty-era fiction, a morality of “containment” (a kind of managed temperance) was expressed both thematically and formally. Moral completeness was reinforced by the structural completeness of the text (i.e. a cyclical or parabolic trajectory of the story, and a numerologically-significant number of chapters), as novels tended to formally express the traditional metaphysics of transgression and

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57 The author’s pseudonym was Hengnan jiehuoxian 衡南劫火仙; cited in Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo de qidian: Qingmo minchu xiaoshuo yanjiu 中国现代小说的起点: 清末民初小说研究, Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 105.
return, and give and take.\textsuperscript{61}

In the late-Qing, new commercial publication formats were placing constraints on space, novels were crammed into newspaper columns and cut up into serialised portions, while the market response could lead to abrupt cessation of some stories and perpetual inducements to continuation for others.\textsuperscript{62} This impinged on the possibility for formal symmetry and structural completeness, which had a causal impact on the rigidity by which the Confucian moral underpinnings of the novel were conveyed into the commercial era (see the comparison between \textit{Flowers in the Mirror} and \textit{New Flowers in the Mirror} in chapter 5).

These conditions also impelled a renewed interest in shorter fictional forms, that drew less on this tradition of novelistic moral completeness and more on the quasi-fictional traditions of Pu Songling (1640-1715) and Feng Menglong. “The Great Reform” (\textit{Da gaige 大改革}, 1906) by Wu Jianren is such a modern variation on this quasi-anecdotal short fiction, one which similarly obviates the traditional moral trajectory and the “comeuppance” that a Ming-era novel might have incorporated. The protagonist (again with the name “\textit{Langzi 浪子}”) of “The Great Reform,” when implored to make a modern man out of himself, continues smoking opium but begins calling it a “health tonic,” deposits his money in a local “bank” (a gambling den), and, expected to “settle down,” starts living in a brothel to which he affixes his family name.\textsuperscript{63} The story ends after this brief comic caricature is completed, \textit{Langzi}’s “comeuppance” unformulated, and perhaps by extension unwarranted. This formal irresolution and gaping moral ambiguity was recapitulated in the increasing prevalence of “unfinished” novels in the late-Qing, be it for commercial reasons, or, as in the case of \textit{Journey to Utopia}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Wu Jianren, \textit{Da gaige 大改革 (The Great Reform)}, \textit{Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说}, 2, (1906).
\end{itemize}
discussed in chapter 5, a certain degree of self-termination.

In “The Great Reform,” virtue and vice are no longer contrasted but collapsed, and in his refusal of the normative morality of the era’s reformers, Langzi’s self-defining vice of laziness and self-indulgence becomes a perverse metier (again a form of “self-understanding”). Wu Jianren was not alone in exploring the collapsing of vice and virtue, or approval and disgust. Chapters 4 and 5 will consider how Lu Shi’e and Xiaoran yusheng also subverted traditional moral causality. The ironic celebration of the profitable scumbag in the New Water Margin is a continuation and intensification of the central moral ambiguity of “The Great Reform,” while Xiaoran yusheng's short fiction too dissolves the traditional duality of approval and opprobrium into an undifferentiated moral greyness that elicits only ennui and tedium.

3. Positioning the study

Play in this study is understood not as self-indulgence, at least not only as self-indulgence, but also means of mediating and bridging the ever-widening gap that modernity intercedes between itself and pleasure. I am not the first to suggest this in the context of modernising Chinese culture. In looking at the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” (yuanyang hudie 鸳鸯蝴蝶) school, Yingjin Zhang has noted an unexpected critical energy toward modernity in this seemingly, even self-determinedly, ephemeral school of “leisure” writing. In Xu Zhuodai 徐卓呆 (1881-1958), he describes a capacity to evoke “playful alteration” (or play for alteration), as “a space of witness outside history where writers frequently deploy play as an indispensable tactic of the everyday, mischievously refuse or refute the tropes of revolution and progress, and unabashedly indulge in the pleasures of writing, reading, rewriting, and re-envisioning alternatives through the tactic of alteration.” Zhang sees this as “a minor tradition in modern Chinese culture” traversing the Butterfly school through to Eileen Chang in the 1940s.

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which "point[s] to values that are outside of the mentality of power."\(^{65}\) Considering that the "Butterfly" fiction of the 1910s grew directly out of the tabloid fiction of the post-Boxer decade (and figures like Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 and Lu Shi'e traverse the two) it is no great leap to draw the parameters of Zhang's periodization back one decade.\(^{66}\)

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While the late-Qing is increasingly being forwarded as a period of literary diversity and creativity comparable to that of the May Fourth, there remains an insufficient accounting of the breadth and diversity of literary works. This is particularly true of marginal tropes and motifs like those of speculative fiction or detective fiction, which, when accounted for, are often rendered as incidental and homogenous. Exemplary of this is that, to-date, there remains no English-language monographs dedicated to the

\(^{65}\) Ibid., p. 364. Emphasis added.  
\(^{66}\) Meng Yue’s study of Jiangnan culture (Suzhou, Yangzhou and Shanghai) has also uncovered a compelling genealogy which equates "unproductive festivity" with the "urban history of noncapital[ism] (if not nonmodern[ity]);" Meng Yue, Shanghai and the Edges of Empires, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Both Yingjin Zhang and Meng Yue tend not to consider sexuality as it relates to play. Meng Yue chooses the concept of fanhua 繁华 as the topos of her discussion of “festivity,” describing it as “hanging out, singing, and theater-going” (p. 67), excluding sexuality. For Meng Yue, sexuality and transgression connote yin 淫, which while dynamically tied to fanhua, is also “liminal,” an indication of the Rubicon at which fanhua descends into the “exceeding of natural boundaries” and “spinning out of control” (p. 79). This is a delineation which Meng Yue derives from the pronouncements and denouncements of local officials and the Qing court during this period. While certainly valid from this perspective, I think it would be valuable to recognise that popular culture was less prone to externalising sexuality from fun. This perspective might complicate statements like, “the festive culture of the Fourth avenue in Shanghai can best be seen as unruly and chaotic, rather than erotic and decadent” (p. 100), which appears to re-iterate the repressions of the dominant culture somewhat uncritically (see the discussion at outset of chapter 2). With this in mind, while Meng Yue raises Henri Lefebvre’s work on festival in interesting ways with relation to fanhua (p. 65), this externalising of sexuality is, to me, incompatible with his thinking. For Lefebvre, sexuality and the body was the only antidote to alienation, and the beach with its free-play of sexuality was the only genuinely liberating leisure activity remaining in modernity. With this in mind, while I think that Meng Yue and I are referring to similar conceptual arenas of transgressive and deliberately non-rational (or non-capitalist as Meng Yue stresses) fun, I think that shengse gouma is more reflective of a Lefebvrian reading than fanhua.
subject of “kexue xiaoshuo,” “kehuan xiaoshuo 科幻小说,” “science fiction,” “science fantasy” or “speculative fiction” (or, for that matter, detective fiction).

Two overarching issues are worth establishing at the outset of this overview. Firstly, the study of late-Qing “science fiction” has been overwhelmingly preoccupied with unearthing a nostalgic conceptualisation of the future but has been less preoccupied with the manner in which these images were subverted or questioned as desirable or efficacious. Secondly, the question of humour, irony or playfulness has not been sufficiently considered (and in some cases actively dismissed).

David Wang contributed a great deal to the awareness in the west of what he calls “science fantasy” in the late-Qing, when he included the field as part of his wider mapping of the era’s “incipient modernities.”

Wang’s reading of “science fantasy” in Fin de Siecle Splendor finds the field to be surprisingly conservative however. While viewing the era’s courtesan novels, like their subjects, as inherently “wayward,” and exposé fiction as subversively “grotesque,” he views science fantasy as comparatively straight-laced, featuring little of the same capacity for the subversion of conventions, or for parodical exaggeration. Instead he views science fantasy as linked by a common nostalgia – “not so much a discovery of a new temporal horizon as a wishful revival of the ancient dreams of China” - barely subtended within a “poetics of technology” (of the kind that Heroldova also catalogues). It is understandable to interpret novels in which the delirious possibilities of modernity are

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67 Wang, Fin de Siecle Splendor. Wang’s belief that these modernities were indigenous in origin and retrospectively marginalised by the New Culture Movement’s high-tide of western modernism is an important one for this dissertation. Sexual and self-indulgent fun and play was also latterly deemed atavistic by the May Fourth culture police, and its role as a source of subjectivity toward modernity has languished. His conceptualising of a modernism grounded in the ironic exaggeration and manipulation of pre-existing genre tropes rather than their refusal is one that will be reinforced at various junctures in this study, and I generally agree with his sense that the late-Qing was “differently modern” in comparison to the May Fourth in this regard.

68 Ibid., p. 302.

filtered through the interpretive faculties of classical figures from a literary past as a form of nostalgia, even repression. Nonetheless, this blunts the countercultural edge of the field, as does the focus on technology over time.\textsuperscript{20}

Wu Yan 吴岩 and Lü Yingzhong 吕应钟 do take up the question of kehuan xiaoshuo 科幻小说 as an expression of the values of enlightenment modernity, arguing that the late-Qing was a period of “functionalism” (shiyong zhuyi 实用主义), whereby authors facilitated the rise of scientism in China.\textsuperscript{71} While this is valuable in its critical re-interpretation of late-Qing speculative fiction as more than simply the work of “fannish” science enthusiasts, Wu and Lü overlook several texts which run counter to their homogenising of the field as a collective agent of ideology. Jones too sees late-Qing literature as a relatively empty vessel manipulated by the overwhelming transformative energy of evolutionary and developmental concepts, without much in the way of opportunity to be a “witness against” them.\textsuperscript{72}

Finally, Yan Jianfu’s 颜健富 recent study touches on several of the novels in this study, and his discussion of temporality and the cultural construction of the body makes it a natural corollary to this dissertation.\textsuperscript{73} As with Isaacson, Yan sees speculative fiction of the late-Qing as preoccupied with the “semi-colonial” experience of China. I take no issue with this approach, although my own reading of the same texts has often found the engagement with these issues to be a little cursory. I make the case that the censure of sham reform and social climbing through westernisation which characterised tabloid fiction took issue less with foreign imperialism as with the agents of “self-colonisation,”

\textsuperscript{70} Wang’s approach is also susceptible to the criticism forwarded by Des Forges against the C. T. Hsia school in general, that “modernity” in their appreciation is little more than a fetishist substitute for discussion of “aesthetic value.”\textsuperscript{70} Such an aesthetic approach leads Wang to overlook the materiality of modernity these texts, their wresting with new regimes of technology, time and urban infrastructure.

\textsuperscript{71} Wu Yan 吴岩 and Lü Yingzhong 吕应钟, Kehuan wenxue rumen 科幻文学入门, Fuzhou: Fuzhou shaonian ertong chubanshe, 2006, p. 228.

\textsuperscript{72} Jones, Developmental Fairy Tales.

\textsuperscript{73} Yan Jianfu 颜健富, Cong “shenti” dao “shijie”: Wanqing xiaoshuo de xin gainian ditu 从‘身体’到‘世界’晚清小说的新概念地图, Taipei: Guoli Taiwan Daxue chubanshe, 2014.
like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao.\textsuperscript{74}

In each of the above studies, late-Qing speculative fiction is ascribed a confederacy with the reformation and modernising of China, be it literally as a conduit for the underlying ideology (Jones, Wu and Lü), or merely in terms of a conspicuous refusal of the wider tendency in the era’s fiction to mock and satirise these reforms and their cheerleaders (David Wang, Yan Jianfu and Jing Tsu). This characterisation is ultimately intertwined with a tendency to interpret speculative fiction as intrinsically not humorous, and thereby incapable of comic inversions and grotesque exaggeration.\textsuperscript{75} This study will outline a different interpretation, in which the incorporation of humour, sexuality and grotesqueness was an epistemology by which to also critique the reforming of modern China, and the ideology that underlay this (see the next section).

4. The reform ideology in the late-Qing

The final decades of the Qing were a period of increasingly doctrinaire rationalism, empiricism and instrumentalism, derived in large part by the internalising of a broad canon of “Western learning” (\textit{x\'ixue} 西学), and thanks to the parallel efforts of Protestant missionaries and Chinese reformers (\textit{weixin shiren} 维新士人, or, less charitably, \textit{weixin zhishi} 维新志士).\textsuperscript{76} This canon of Western thought was of two camps.

\textsuperscript{74} In this sense, in this very limited context, I diverge from Li Zehou’s argument that foreign subjugation of the nation took prominence over the “enlightenment” in the minds of Chinese intellectuals; Li Zehou 李泽厚, “Qimeng yu ji wang de shuangzhong bianzou 启蒙与救亡的双重变奏,” in Li Zehou (ed.) Zhongguo xiandai xiangshu shi lun 中国现代思想史论, Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1987, pp. 25-41.

\textsuperscript{75} Isaacson briefly raises \textit{New Story of the Stone} as potentially satirical, but quickly dismisses this; Isaacson, “Colonial Modernities,” chpt. 4. So too Jing Tsu’s study of \textit{Nüwa Shi} notes the novel’s many farcical representations of modern scientism and a culture of intellectual slavishness, but ultimately dwells little on their significance as comic images; Jing Tsu, “Female Assassins.” Christopher Rea’s work is the exception to this statement, as he looks at both Wu Jianren’s \textit{New Story of the Stone} and Liang Qichao’s \textit{The Future of New China}, with a focus on both of their comic aspects; Christopher Rea, \textit{The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China}, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015, pp. 44-50.

\textsuperscript{76} The pathways that brought these theories to China are themselves a complex subject, and certainly challenge any simplistic sense that these discourses were imported wholesale and with minimal interpretation. See Lydia Liu, \textit{Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and
The first was political theory and philosophy, including German idealism, Russian nihilism and anarchism, metaphysics, and political/legal thought (Bluntschili, Hobbes). Alongside (and at times consanguineous with) this was the seventeenth and eighteenth-century canon of enlightenment reason and logic, such as Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776, first published in Chinese in 1901); Francis Bacon’s *The New Organon* (1620, first published 1877); John Stuart Mill’s *A System of Logic* (1843, first translated 1902-1905), as well as various concepts from Descartes, Kepler and Newton. The new canon of enlightenment knowledge transformed practices in economics;
historiography; the compiling of encyclopaedia and technical manuals; education; time-keeping and calendars; public health and hygiene; and urban administration and planning.

Reformers like Liang Qichao, Yan Fu (1854-1921) and Kang Youwei were closely identified with enlightenment modernity, arrogating themselves as “enlightened

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85 Zhang Zhidong 张之洞, “Xuewu gangyao 学务纲要,” in Shu Xincheng 舒新城, Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ziliao 中國近代教育史料, vol. 1, Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1961, pp. 197-203. See also Timothy B. Weston’s study of the ten-year attempt to found an Imperial University where enlightenment fields of learning could be taught, “The Founding of the Imperial University and the Emergence of Chinese Modernity,” in Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow (eds.), Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 99-123.

86 Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Time and Modernity in 20th-Century China: Some Preliminary Explorations,” Tamkang Review 30:4 (2000), pp. 67-92. Kun Qian argues that modernity rhetoric conceptually rendered time between two poles, “transcendent, continuous moral time” and “discontinuous, amoral time.” Within this paradigm, practices associated with intersubjectivity and discontinuous experience of time – both of which are applicable to the experience of fun and play which will be forward in this dissertation – were problematised as a source of “backwardness;” Kun Qian, Imperial Time-Order: Literature, Intellectual History, and China’s Road to Empire, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016, pp. 57-58.


88 Stapleton, discusses reforms to the city as a tool in the path to “increasing the economic productivity of city residents,” while these newly productive urbanites were moulded into “disciplined subjects;” Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. Tsin considers how the urban management of the city of Canton (Guangzhou) imagined the city in terms of a “discrete entity, with clear boundaries and its own social and economic regularities, which could be uncovered with ‘scientific’ knowledge;” Michael T. W. Tsin, “Canton Remapped,” in Joseph Esherick (ed.), Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001, p. 29. Emphasis added. Again the sociological theories of Yan Fu and Tan Sitong among others played a central role in the emergence of an urbanist project that viewed the city as necessarily “amenable to systematic manipulation and intervention” and “amenable to the flow of capital and commodities;” Michael T. W. Tsin, Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 30 and p. 52.
trustees” of, or “publicists” for, Western scientific knowledge. Indeed, Liang declared rationalist figures like Bacon and Descartes to be “the mothers of modern history” (jinshi zhì mǔ 近史之母).

Evolutionary paradigms, both Darwinian and Bergsonian, played central roles in the inducing of a new consciousness of time and in the interrogating of metaphysics. In Yan Fu’s translation and re-interpretation of Thomas Huxley’s (1825-1895) Evolution and Ethics (Tianyan lun 天演论, 1896-1898) he declared metaphysics to be subservient to the laws of physics. Herbert Spencer’s applications of evolutionary concepts to social theory proved influential in the formation of new theories of racial and biological determinism. The Chinese civilization became one stretched out along an axis of universal time and historical progress, as in Liang Qichao’s three stages in the evolution

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89 Jones, Developmental Fairy Tales, p. 21.
94 Shen Guowei, “Science in Translation: Yan Fu’s Role,” in Jing Tsu (ed.), Science and Technology, p. 102. By some estimates there were more than thirty editions of the translation published in just the first decade after its authorship; Hsing-yi Kao, “Yan Fu: Modern China’s Key Transitional Figure,” PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012.
of human civilisation: the barbaric, the semi-civilised, and the “modern” (wenming 文明).

Leo Lee’s assertion that such statements revealed a new conceptualisation of time “forming a progressive continuum into a glorious future” is well-trodden ground, but what is often less well established is his subsequent but no less valid assertion that this was a “derivative discourse... [with] positivistic and inherently monological tendencies embedded in its faith in human reason and progress.”

There was a greater investment in an epistemology of empiricism (shizheng shuyi 实证主义), objectivism, and the “demonstrability and reproducibility of knowledge.” Intellectuals of the Kang-Liang school in particular invested a great deal of energy in vitiating the boundaries between the traditionally objective and subjective arenas of thought, and between the empirical and the social. Iwo Amelung makes note of “mechanisation of late Qing discourse” in the application of “thermal force” and “attracting force” by Tan Sitong, Kang Youwei, Tang Caichang and Liu Zhenlin; a tendency that was mocked by their conservative critics. Kang Youwei advocated for a “common truth of mankind” (renlei gongli 人类公理), and as Young-tsu Wong puts it,

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100 Benjamin Schwartz raised the irony that Huxley’s Evolution and Ethics which they championed was a rebuttal to the dissolving of conceptual boundaries between biological and social applications of evolution in the works of Herbert Spencer among others; In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. 100-105.

he “took universal truth for granted.” Such “universal principal(s)” of science and history have been described by Viren Murthy as “mimic[ing] the rationalising tendency of the state... [and] resem[b]ling Lukacs’ description of modern rationalism as the equation ‘of formal, mathematical and rational knowledge with knowledge in general...’”

Yan Fu was the most prominent advocate of universal principles (qiongli 穷理) and their explication through “observation and experimentation” (guancha yanyan 观察演验). His translation of sociology texts equated sociology with the scientific method, and studies of mathematics and logic. The objective truths of the new science of anatomy greatly influenced changing conceptualisations and attempted regulations of gender, the body and of sexuality. This objectivity was bolstered by the new technologies of seeing and recording the physical world (photography, radiography, lenses and even X-ray), and their increasing connection to a discourse of societal and cultural pathology and dis-hygiene.


106 Matthew H. Sommer has demonstrated that the increasingly objective nature of gender moved the regulation of sexuality and sexual morality away from the family and into the realm of legal system where terms like “chastity” and “rape” were also forced to take on an objective quality; Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. See also Heinrich, The Afterlife of Images; Fran Martin and Ari Larissa Heinrich (eds.), Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006.

There was also a growing tendency toward stabilising antinomies, such as modern present-benighted past, masculine-feminine, psyche-soma, and enlightened-barbaric. These antinomies were raised up as more than objective heuristics, but as Leo Lee puts it, they “became polarized as contrasting values.” Liang Qichao suggested that there was “civilised freedom and barbaric freedom” (wenming de ziyou yu yeman de ziyou 文明的自由与野蛮的自由). Future editor of Shibao 时報 and Kang Youwei-disciple Mai Menghua 麦孟华 (1875-1915) postulated that post-Boxer China was situated at a crossroads between “barbaric anti-foreignism” (yeman paiwai 野蛮排外), embodied in the Boxer Uprising, and “modern anti-foreignism” (wenming paiwai 文明排外), which amounted to the westernising of Chinese society.

The scientific axioms and logical postulates formed the basis for a social-reformist vision of a “new China” and a “new citizen” whose robustness, virility (if not sexuality) and masculinity (again, somewhat desexed however) signified “an enthusiastic attitude to embrace... a better future.” China would be more rational and quasipolymathic; less superstitious and more individualistic, which was “nothing less than a complete transformation of the Chinese mentality.” Fiction (as well as theatre and music) became an inevitable focus for this reform of the citizen mentality, and while

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108 “The discourse of tradition and modernity became implicitly gendered, with the past coded as feminine and the future as masculine;” Hu Ying, “Naming the First ‘New Woman,’” in Karl and Zarrow (eds.), Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period, p. 186.
110 Liang Qichao, “Lun ziyou 论自由,” Xinmin congbao 新民丛报, 7 and 8, (1902).
114 Liang Qichao was a fan of yayue 雅乐 (court music), the form of musical expression in Chinese antiquity that was by far and away the most beholden to aristocratic power (songs often advocated for stable government and enjoined the populace to greater self-cultivation). In the
the annals of Ming and early-Qing Dynasty fiction in particular were increasingly dismissed as decadent and immoral, a counterpoint was raised in “New Fiction” which emphasised modern themes like social change, didacticism, positivity and moral rectitude and modern techniques like realism.\textsuperscript{115}

Although popular culture (like novels) is increasingly viewed as playing an important role in disseminating this ideology,\textsuperscript{116} it has not been afforded a capacity for critiquing, mediating or re-interpreting it.\textsuperscript{117} In looking away from high-intellectual discussions and into the world of middlebrow tabloid culture this study conjectures a critique of modernity that was conceptually and materially extrinsic to the culture of modernity in the late-Qing.\textsuperscript{118}

In this period of increasingly objectivist and Manichean thinking, “tabloid” writers were forever thinking in terms of the dialectic, and playing the mediator. Des Forges notes that Shanghai novels from this period “weave a sense of ‘betweenness’ into

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\textsuperscript{116} Jones, Developmental Fairy Tales.
\textsuperscript{117} Judge’s excellent Print and Politics notwithstanding, although it does not alight on fiction.
\textsuperscript{118} Wang Hui 汪晖 has contended that the internalising of enlightenment discourses like those discussed above was, on the part of late-Qing intellectuals, more dialectical than is immediately apparent. He notes that Liang Qichao, Yan Fu and Kang Youwei employed Chinese tradition (Song Dynasty-era Confucianism) to critique and re-interpret that which they were simultaneously introducing; Wang Hui, Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi 现代中国思想的兴起, Vols. 1-4, Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004. In contrast to its origins with Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976), Wang Hui he this dialectical capacity to express “anti-modern modernity” (fanxiandai de xiandaixing 反现代的现代性) entirely intrinsic to a class of high-intellectual discourse in China, and even intrinsic to individuals - like Liang, Kang and Yan - themselves. This intellectual and class insularity implies that a paradox whereby the reformists emerge as the only people intellectually qualified to critique their own imported concepts, systems and terminology. I believe that greater attention paid to the “middle strata of knowledge dissemination” - i.e. the Shanghai publishing industry that eventually delivered “scientism at large” at the turn of the century” as Elman and Jing Tsu put it, offers a less elite-driven path to a similar “anti-modern modernness;” Benjamin A. Elman and Jing Tsu, “Introduction,” in Elman and Tsu (eds.) Science and Technology, p. 9. See also Xiong Yuezhi, “‘Gezhi huibian’ yu xixue chuanbo ‘格致汇编’与西学传播,” Shanghai yanjiu luncong 上海研究论丛, 1989:1, pp. 65-66.
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the structure of a text,” and that “brokers” and “brokerage” between factions were an ascendant trope. Yeh argues that they were “cultural middlemen” between “the market and culture, between entertainment businesses and the newspaper.” Judge has argued that writers (and journalists) occupied a “middle realm” between reformist formulations and their readership, both transmitting the “culture of reform” and subverting it where they saw fit. David Wang has argued that late-Qing fiction was critically mediating between domestic traditions and newly-emergent topoi and forms.

Lü Wencui notes that haipei 海派 fiction bore two faces, the resplendent wonder of the city, and a desire to “convey... the philosophy of its existence” (cuisheng... shengcun zhexue 催生... 生存哲学). Tabloid literati at this time referred to one another as embodying a tendency toward “joyful laughter and angry curses.” Wu Jianren’s eulogy for his friend Li Boyuan 李伯元 (1867-1906) revealed that what he valued was Li’s capacity to negotiate the relationship between the two.

5. Chapter summary

Chapter 2, “Serious minds and playful bodies in New Story of the Stone,” considers how Wu Jianren’s New Story of the Stone constructs the Shanghai leisure arena as necessitating a form of “embodied subjectivity.” In contrast to this, the fantasised “Realm of Modernity” depicted in the second half of the novel enunciates a very different version of the relationship between bodies and subjectivity. New Story of the

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122 Joan Judge, Print and Politics: Shibao and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
Stone ironically embodies the enlightenment desire to transcend the physical and sensory and locate selfhood entirely in the mind. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the consanguinity between serialised and tabloid fiction and the modern experience of the body.

Chapter 3, “Orality, authority and the playful audience,” looks at representations of audiences to oratory. Many reformist works of speculative fiction presented the audience as symbolic of a national reformed-ness in their imagined futures. Taking representations of two instances of oratory and audience in Liang Qichao’s *The Future of New China* as the spine of the chapter, discussion considers various instances in which tabloid fiction mocked this fantasy of enlightened audience-ness, reminding the reader of the pleasures of its negation in unruly and prosecutorial audience fun. These perspectives alight on the modern culture of oratory as an ersatz practice in large part because it negated the conditions of its own critique by enforcing a culture of etiquette on the audience. Tabloid fiction raises up the counter-example of the forum, in which the role of audience and speaker flowed contingently between members of the collective as an example of a fun, and critically engaged, culture of oratory. The chapter ends with a discussion of how representations of audience-ness reflect on the conceptualisation of the reading audience in the late-Qing.

Chapter 4, “The Carnival of Capitalism in The New Water Margin” turns to the ideology of early capitalism, and the notion of the rational actor. Lu Shi’e, was one of the most critical voices in the late-Qing on capitalist society, and *The New Water Margin* is a farcical exploration of the unreason of capitalist reason, and subsequently of how capitalism could function as a perverse aegis for the *shengse gouma* world in modernity. By transporting the *Water Margin’s* Liangshan band into modernity, it asks the reader to consider where capitalism ends and banditry begins.

In addition to being intimately wrapped up with the industries of sex and fun, tabloid fiction was intertwined with boredom and its commercialisation, and in chapter 5, “It’s Raining Men: Xiaoran yusheng and the self-consciousness of boredom” – we turn to tabloid speculative fiction and the possibilities of the mundane, quotidian and the
boring fantasy. Again this chapter contravenes the traditional confederacy between science fiction and the celebration of modernity, finding in the fiction of Xiaoran yusheng a caustic energy directed toward the equation of modernity with excitement and dynamism. Turning a critical eye to the tabloid press’ dubious conflation of the resistance to boredom with the resistance to power, Xiaoran yusheng depicts characters who have imbibed this ideology of a life plagued by the possibility for boredom, finding that in doing so they have lost the capacity to react through anything but their own capacity for boredom.

The epilogue offers the opportunity to continue a discussion of the high-culture critique of modernity and the relative absence of a low-culture counterpart, as well as addressing the absence of women.
CHAPTER TWO

Serious minds and playful bodies in *New Story of the Stone*

For the advocates of “urban modernisation” (*chengshi xiandaihua* 城市现代化) at the close of the Qing Dynasty, the Shanghai foreign concessions (either known as the *zujie* 租界, or colloquially as *shili yangchang* 十里洋场 or just *yangchang*) were held up as an image of a “modern” urban space. As Stapleton notes, for New Policies-era urban reformers, “the wenming that they saw and admired in Shanghai’s International Settlement... was an orderly and productive urban community.”^1^ In 1895, R. S. Gundry espoused the educational effects of the International Settlement on the Chinese mind, thanks to “handsome houses and well-kept streets lighted by the electric light or by gas... machinery, water-works, telegraphs, telephones, steamers, public gardens...”^2^

The International Settlement was a paradox however. To what extent it was an archetype of “orderly and productive” modernity at the turn of the century, it was just as much home to an avant-garde concentration of tabloid publishing, fashion, narcotics, sex and self-indulgence. Modernisers praised the 102 miles of roads (36 miles of which were macadamised), even though many of them were lined with courtesan houses, brothels, theatres and opium dens.^3^ The French Concession had been home to the city’s most celebrated opium den since the first decade of the Guangxu era.^4^ Archetypal of this was Si Ma Road (*Sima lu* 四马路), running through the heart of the International Settlement, which (as Wu Jianren, a resident of the

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^1^ Stapleton, *Civilising Chengdu*, p. 70.


concessions himself, noted)⁵ was home to music halls (shuchang 书场), brothels, theatres and gambling dens.⁶ Le Zheng 乐正 too finds it to be defined by the availability of shengse gouma:

Along the less than three kilometre stretch of Si Ma Road (today Fuzhou Road), the distinctive features of Shanghai life – the squandering of money, fashion, and dissolute behaviour – were found in their greatest concentration and saturation.⁷

The International Settlement was the setting for some of the most infamously sexualised novels of the late-Qing, such as The Lives of Shanghai Flowers and The Nine-tailed Turtle, making Si Ma Road synonymous with the Shanghai pleasure industries. Both Zou Tao’s 邹韬 Haishang deng shihu 海上灯市录 (Shanghai Entertainment Guide, 1885)⁸ and The Lives of Shanghai Flowers presented Shanghai as materially modern thanks to electric lighting, clean streets and effective administration, while also offering an involved introduction to every aspect of available indulgence.⁹ Neither explicitly recognised nor offered an explanation for this duality. The Lives of Shanghai Flowers for instance makes no bones about juxtaposing the material modernity of the

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⁵ Wu’s nonfiction article, “A table of the relics of the concessions” (Yangchang chenji yi lanbiao 洋场陈迹一览表), lists a total of 30 places of interest for visitors to the International Settlement, including seven tea or alcohol establishments, six theatres, one courtesan house (jiaoju 叫局), and one cock-fighting venue (douji chang 斗鸡场). Other destinations include the first Shengbao 申报 offices, and the infamous Si Ma Road literati hangout, Yangliu loutai 杨柳楼台 (The Willow-tree Pavilion); Hai Feng 海风 (ed.), Wu Jianren quanjji 吴趼人全集, vol. 7, pp. 275-318.

⁶ For a genealogy of Si Ma Road across the twentieth century see Hu Genxi 胡根喜, Lao Shanghai: Si Ma lu 老上海: 四马路, Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2001.


⁸ Otherwise known as Chunjiang dengshi lu 春江灯市录, or Haishang huatianjiu di chuan 海上花天酒地传.

concessions with the availability of underage “Wild-Chicken” (yeji 野鸡) prostitutes (at the infamous Huayu lou 华雨楼, again on Si Ma Road).  

Lü Wencui 呂文翠 has noticed a similar irreconcilability spanning three novels - The Lives of Shanghai Flowers, Haishang chen tianying 海上尘天影 (Images of High and Low in Shanghai, 1894), and Haishang fanhua meng 海上繁花梦 (Dreams of Shanghai Splendor, 1898) - which each take the “modernised environs” (xiandaihua huanjing 现代化环境) of the International Settlement as backdrop, and make the lives of the area’s prostitutes the spine of their narratives. Through these novels Lü makes the case that Shanghai was a “space of interaction and dialogue” (hudongduihua zhi kongjian 互动对话之空间) - between alienation and materialisation (yihua 异化/wuhua 物化), and power and sexuality (xingbie 性别/quanli 权力).  

Shanghai’s palimpsests of material modernity and libidinal self-indulgence raise another relevant dyad in the intellectual life of China at the turn of the twentieth century - the bifurcation of the rational mind and visual faculties from the body and the lower-order somatic senses (smell, taste, and touch). The disassociating of mind from body has been intrinsic to enlightenment thought since René Descartes (1596-1650). As a codified duality, it was becoming commonplace by the late-Qing, as “Chinese schoolboys and girls were taught, from 1905 onwards, the essentialist distinction between psyche and soma, thereby redefining Chinese experiences within a Western biomedical epistemology.” While sight (and to some extent hearing) tends to construct perception as objective, taste, touch and smell raise not only a critical awareness of the body, but of the body as a source of “embodied subjectivity” and as participatory in the perceiving of the world, rather than as a machine or container for the perceiving mind. For Marcuse, these lower order “receptive” (rather than productive) faculties of the body, “remain strongly

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11 Ibid., p. 67 and p. 79.
committed to the pleasure principle." This is relevant to the irreconcilable conceptualisations of Shanghai in late-Qing society. Modernisers viewed the concessions from a quantitative and cartographic perspective - rectilinear streets, networks of water, electricity and sewerage, rational arrangement of housing, and so on. Conversely, the Shanghai tabloid press and entertainment industry constructed a sensory city (Yeh describes it as a city of "feeling"), oriented around the pleasurable indulging of smell, taste and touch.

The economic conditions of late-Qing Shanghai reinforce this interpretation. Hanchao Lu has pointed out that Shanghai became “China’s first modern real estate market” over the course of the late nineteenth century, beginning with the International Settlement. The rise of property capitalism induces a division between the property as use-value commodity (as in its capacity to provide shelter or pleasure), and an exchange value commodity through its accumulating of value and affecting of the value of the commodities within its sphere of influence. Again the body and the mind can be superimposed on this duality, for as Suvin puts it (paraphrasing Marx), “[a] commodity has... two types of value: its intrinsic sensual qualities issue in the use-value, while production for the market issues in quantitative exchange value.”

This chapter continues this discussion through an analysis of the body-mind as a motif in Wu Jianren’s Xin shítou ji 新石头记 (New Story of the Stone, 1905/1908). New Story of the Stone is a fanxín xiaoshuo-style sequel to Cao Xueqin’s

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16 Marx argued that the rise of surplus value abstracted commodities from their experiential, sensory qualities, creating “sensory” and “super-sensory” commodities; Frédéric Vandenberghe, *A Philosophical History of German Sociology*, London, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 59.
18 New Story of the Stone has, in recent years, been revived as one of the more analysed texts of Wu Jianren’s oeuvre. See David Wang, *Fin-deSiècle Splendor*, pp. 271-275; Dun Wang, “The Late Qing’s Other Utopias: China’s Science-Fictional Imagination, 1900-1910,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 34:2, (September 2008), pp. 37-61; Isaacson, “Colonial Modernities,” pp. 145-179; Huters, *Bringing the World Home*, pp. 151-172; Fei-yíng
曹雪芹 (c. 1715- c.1763) 18th century classic, *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 红楼梦, also known as *Story of the Stone*). It takes several of the characters from *Red Chamber* and resituates them in a contemporary China of the early 20th century. Following these “present day” chapters, focus shifts once again, to an ambiguously utopian form of alterity referred to as the “Realm of Modernity.” Through the juxtaposition of these two environments, and of the differing status of the body between them, *New Story* captures the split subjectivity of the self and of Shanghai itself at the turn of the century, pulled between opposing poles of modern mindfulness and sensory, transgressive, fun.

1. Wu Jianren, reflections on a career in reflection

The central motif of *New Story of the Stone* is parallelism (reflections, dialogue and dualism), which extends beyond *New Story* and into Wu Jianren’s wider body of fictional work. His prose style alone was a tacit deconstruction of the “modern” author, juxtaposing a modernist sophistication with formal experimentation (especially in the realm of narratology, as in his many short stories), and a personal preoccupation with arcane idioms, folk stories, ghost stories, and religious imagery. Indicative of the latter was a sequel to Pu Songling’s collection of the ghostly and grotesque, *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊斋志异 (Strange Tales from the Makedo Studio, c. 1679), entitled *Fan liaozhai 反聊斋* (Return to the Makedo Studio, 1904-5), which is rarely


19 Milena Doleželová-Velingerová makes a similar point, that Wu Jianren and Li Boyuan have often “been characterised as “mere entertaining raconteurs whose merit is restricted to social criticism,” “Typology of Plot Structures in Late Qing Novels,” in Doleželová-Velingerová (ed.) *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century,* p. 39. See also the chapter “Wu Jianren and the Narrator,” in Hanan, *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,* pp. 162-181.
included among his works.20 Return to the Make-do Studio was published under the pseudonym “Zhaoyaojing 照妖鏡” (the demon-reflecting mirror) – a moniker which aptly encapsulates his interest in both folk imagery and reflective motifs (the classical Chinese concept of “cross-reflection” or “correlation” – zhaojing 照应), even suggesting his role as “shedding light” (the homophone zhaojing 照映) on, and thereby driving out, the hobgoblins lurking in modern society, as the Demon-reflecting mirror did.

After taking over editorial responsibilities for New Fiction in 1903 (after issue 8),21 Wu immediately began serialising a historiographical diptych - Tongshi 痛史 (A History of Pain, 1903-1906) and Xin xiaoshi 新笑史 (A New History of Laughter, 1903-1906) – that ran side-by-side for three years. A History of Pain was one of the most violent novels of the era, featuring “numerous scenes of massacre and violence.”22 A New History of Laughter however was a compendium of light-hearted and profane jokes which he had accumulated.23

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20 Fan liaozhai was published in issues 12-16 of Xin Xiaoshuo 新小说 (New Fiction), and Wen Qingxin 温庆新 makes a compelling case that it was written by Wu Jianren and that he was using the liaozhai 聊斋 style to oppose the mainstream of anti-superstition sentiment in reformist thought at the time; Wen Qingxin 温庆新, “Xin xiaoshuo 新小说 ‘Fan liaozhai’ 作品的意味,” Huazhong xueshu 中学学术, 2014:1, pp. 35-45.

21 This is often stated although I have failed to find any conclusive proof. Nonetheless the anecdotal evidence is compelling. From issue 8 of New Fiction onward, at least five (and possibly six if we include Fan liaozhai) Wu Jianren works were serialised concurrently in Xin Xiaoshuo. These were A History of Pain, A History of Laughter, Strange Scenes Witnessed over the Past Twenty Years, Strange Talk of the Electric Arts, Viper Circle (his translation of an unknown detective novel with Zhou Guisheng 周桂声), and Fan liaozhai.

22 Michael Berry, A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 26. History was a recurring theme of Wu’s work. In All-Story Monthly, the regular column “Shuo xiaoshuo 说小说” (Talking Fiction) featured a contribution by Wenpi 文璧, on the unfinished novel Henshi 恨史 (A History of Hate, 1907), which was itself published under the name Baopi 报骈 (there is some elaborate masquerade going on in All-Story Monthly, behind which probably various pseudonyms of Wu Jianren). Wenpi states that the novel is an important one because, “hate too has a history” (hen eryou si 恨而有史); Yueye xiaoshuo 月夜小说, 6, p. 228. Indeed, Wu described himself as a disciple of the unofficial histories (yeshi 野史), that also saw themselves as complicating of the linearity of official history; Wu Jianren, “Xu 序” (Preface [to Sensational Biographies of Shanghai’s Four Diamond Cutter Courtesans]), in Hai Feng 海风 (ed.), Wu Jianren quanj 舒天人全集, vol. 6, p. 378.

Among the most complex issues which he approached via reflection was the centuries-long literati wrangling over the nature of emotion and passion (qing 情), by exploring its reflective interplay with “insanity” (chi 痴).24 The contemporary culture of reformism was also approached in a similar fashion. In an All Story Monthly article entitled “Lunkan Yueyue xiaoshuo de yichu 论看月月小说的益处” (“On the Benefits of All Story Monthly”), the author (Baopi 报批 or “Journal Addict” – almost certainly Wu Jianren himself) praises the journal’s willingness to neither unilaterally slander nor absolutely praise the reformist movement. He recommends two of the journal’s serialised novels - Xin fengshenzhuan 新封神传 (New Investiture of the Gods, 1908) and Shanghai youcan lu 上海游骖录 (Travels in Shanghai, 1908) - as indicative of this, because they “truly could be considered a reflection of the two sides of an image [that of reformism] in a mirror” (zheng suande zhaoyingzi de liangmian hao jingzi 真算得照影子的两面好镜子).25

As the tabloid fiction author who most consistently incorporated and maintained a discourse with China’s literary antiquity, this reflective tendency was a conscious continuation of the mirrored foundations of novelistic structure in China. This is particularly true of the traditional 100-chapter novel, which was often split down the middle and incorporated reflective images across a central “hinge” (i.e. chapters 25 and 75 would have thematic links),26 a format which Wu Jianren employed in his (likely) first novel, Haishang mingji sida jing’gang qishu 海上名妓四大金刚奇书 (Sensational Biographies of Shanghai’s Four Diamond Cutter Courtesans, 1899), which shifts from unilateral sympathy for its courtesan-subjects to equally unilateral

24 As in Dianshu qitan 电术奇谈 (Strange Tales of the Electric Arts, 1903-1905), Qingbian 情变 (Passion Transformed, 1910) and Henhai 银海 (Sea of Regret, 1906). See Cai Wanhua 蔡宛华, “Chuantong guannian yu xifang xinchao zhi jiao peng” 传同观念与西方新潮之交碰 - 从‘情变’ 看吴趼人对舶来情爱观的批判,” Wenzhu lunheng 文学论衡, 21, (October 2012), no pagination, available at http://huayuqiao.org/LLM/LLM-21/LLM2102.htm (last accessed: 19/4/2016). Similarly, the two pairs of lovers, Chen Bohe and Dihua, and Chen Zhongai and Juanjuan in Sea of Regret were a medium by which to explore both qing/chi, and the possible fates of the Chinese nation as it faced imperialist aggression.


satire and ridicule after chapter 50. Sensational Biographies was a reflection on the quintessentially modern issue of “celebrity courtesans,” and their incommensurate nature as figures of both opprobrium and admiration, yet achieved this through a very traditional technique like the 100 chapter reflexive novel.  

Second only to Sensational Biographies, this convention finds its most consistent expression in New Story of the Stone, a structural diptych of the classical (i.e. Ming-Qing Dynasty) sort, even beginning with a brief mythological prelude and ending with an allegorical conclusion, and within which contains many minor reflections and parallels expressing the classical Chinese aesthetic dialectics like zheng 正 / qi 奇, dong 动/ jing 静, and mi 密/ shu 疏. The choice of Dream of the Red Chamber as hypotext takes on a deepened significance with this in mind, as it was the classical Chinese novel which most consistently and explicitly wrestled with dualism. As Yee puts it, “the persistent recurrence of pairing of characters and episodes points to a conscious narrative procedure” in Red Chamber.  

The setting, plot and extraneous characters of the first half of New Story of the Stone are completely replaced at the outset of the second half, and but for the continued presence of the protagonist Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉, the only relationship between the two is one of reflection. This too is reminiscent of Red Chamber, where it is akin to Baoyu’s status as the mediating presence between the hermetic masculine and feminine worlds of the Rong and Ning households, as well as between the “earthly realm” (sanshi 凡界) and the “supernatural realm” (xianshi 仙界), a duality that is also implicated into the contrast between Shanghai and the Realm of

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27 Doleželová-Velingerová doesn’t make any mention of diptychs among the principal plot types of the late-Qing (such as “string-like” and “cyclical” plots), but it applies to at least two of Wu Jianren’s novels; Doleželová-Velingerová, “Typology of Plot Structures.”


30 Returning to Wu Jianren and history, the non-teleological relationship between the two halves of New Story of the Stone reflects David Wang’s notion that certain works in the late-Qing can be read as contradicting what he calls the “myth of linear temporality” that implicitly runs through the literary history of this period; Wang, Fin de Siècle Splendor, p. 22.
Modernity. It should also be noted that this duality between the two halves extends to the novel’s publication. The first 22 chapters were serialised in column-length fragments in a tabloid newspaper, Nanfang bao 南方报. (As Shanghai’s first bilingual tabloid, Nanfang bao was marketed to the “middling” class of compradors in Shanghai, of which the character of Xue Pan is a member). This serialisation took place between 1905-1906, ending at the point of transition between the novel’s two largely unrelated halves. It was only in 1908 that the remaining 18 chapters (along with the initial 22 chapters) were published, this time on quality stock with lithographed images under the title Huitu xinshitouji 绘图新石头记 (The Illustrated New Story of the Stone).

Yee, Epstein and Plaks have each pointed to a tendency in classical Chinese fiction to approach representational objects obliquely, via a reflexive give and take across boundaries (particularly the central “mirror” in works like Flowers in the

32 Nanfang bao was one of five Shanghai newspapers that included an announcement and brief article on the publication of the first issue of AllStory Monthly in 1906. It praises the publication and Wu Jianren personally, despite the fact that he ostensibly was yet to take over as editor until the fourth issue. See the collection of such articles collated in the second issue of Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说, “Ping lin 评林,” Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说, 2, p. 224.
33 For further information on the comprador as a new class in late-Qing society, see Qiu Peicheng, Miaohui jindai Shanghai, p. 286 and Wen-hsin Yeh, Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, pp. 13-15. Between 1842 and 1894 the comprador class as a whole (amounting to tens of thousands of individuals) had accumulated private assets of approximately 530 million taels of silver. Businesses catering to these new classes, in particular bilingual schools for “mercantile families,” were on the rise; Yeh, Shanghai Splendor, pp. 14-15.
34 The time difference between the two halves is reflected in the changing nature of the vocabulary. While “science” is referred to as gezhi 格致 at various junctures in the first 22 chapters, in the latter half this is replaced with the more modern kexue 科学. Several scholars have identified the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century as the time when this transition took place. See Wang Hui, “The Fate of ‘Mr. Science’ in China: The Concept of Science and Its Application in Modern Chinese Thought,” positions, 3:1, (1995), pp. 4-10; Wang Yangrong 王扬宗, ‘Cong ‘gezhi’ dao ‘kexue’ 从‘格致’到‘科学’,” Lishi daguanyuan 历史大观园, 10, (1994), pp. 56-7.
35 The Illustrated New Story of the Stone was published by Gailiang xiaoshuo she 改良小说社. Hanan incorrectly states in that “the first eleven chapters were published in a journal, after which no more text appeared until the whole book came out three years later;” Patrick Hanan, Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Essays by Patrick Hanan, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 173. Lu Xun mistakenly attributes the serialisation of the novel’s first half to the Li Boyuan-founded and edited, Zhinan bao 指南报 (The Guide); Lu Xun 鲁迅, Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe 中国小说史略, Tianjin: Baithua wenyi chubanshe, 2002, p. 222.
The remainder of this chapter will consider the validity of this precept in the late-Qing, considering the various ways in which bodies are precipitated across the central reflective juncture of *New Story of the Stone*. By considering how the status of bodies is constructed at the terminus of play and science, and through pleasures and prohibitions, we are afforded a hermeneutic by which to identify the palpable ambiguity with which Wu Jianren invests “The Realm of Modernity” (*wenming jingjie 文明境界*), his most extended reflection of the “modernity project” in the late-Qing.

2. Bodies, orifices and senses in the first half of *New Story of the Stone*.

The flying cars, modern warfare devices and futuristic health regimes of the Realm of Modernity have secured the novel a preeminent status as one of the earliest examples of a recognisably western form of “science fiction” or “utopian” writing in China.\(^{36}\) This has often caused readers to severely adumbrate the initial 22 chapters, in which these elements are not present.\(^{37}\) The novel’s central motif of bodies and senses is however established in these chapters’ grotesque panorama of urban life. The subsequent absence of this sensorium in the Realm of Modernity impinges on its superficially utopian qualities, implying that behind its material progress, efficiency and reason, lies diminished senses, muted pleasures and pathologised bodies.

For Baoyu, this diminished sensorium is however a fortuitous release from a sensory surfeit that overpowers him after awaking in the year 1901 with his

\(^{36}\) There have been a number of characterisations of *New Story of the Stone* as a utopia, all of which are predicated on an overwhelming focus on the novel’s latter half. See Fengying Ming, “Baoyu in Wonderland;” Dun Wang “The Late Qing’s Other Utopias;” David Wang, *Fin-des-Siècle Splendor*; Paola Iovene, *Tales of Futures Past Anticipation and the Ends of Literature in Contemporary China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014, p. 32; Chen Wexin and Wang Dongzhou, “Xinshitou ji.”

\(^{37}\) Dun Wang, in a summary that sounds like the account of an undiscovered continent, mentions only that in these chapters, Baoyu “encounters a race of humans that is degenerating along with their society;” “The Late Qing’s Other Utopias,” p. 41. The motif of a degenerating and isolated society was not uncommon at this time, but it isn’t appropriate to *New Story of the Stone*. See for instance Lu Sheng 米生, *Chiren shuo mengji 旅人说梦记* (*Dreams of an Idiot*, 1904) and Xiaoran Yusheng, *Xin jinghui yuan 新镜花缘* (*New Flowers in the Mirror*, 1908). Jones describes contemporary Shanghai simply as “venal and chaotic;” Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, p. 31.
manservant Bei Ming 烧茗。Arriving in Shanghai, Baoyu quickly finds that he dislikes the city, as well as his elder cousin Xue Pan 薛蟠, who has been living there for two years. In Xue Pan and Baoyu, Wu Jianren establishes the first of many yin-yang dualities – in this case between the openness, expression and even aggression (he is introduced beating a servant) of Xue Pan and coldness and passivity of Baoyu. This is further overlaid with the dualities of modern Shanghai life, between temperance and indulgence, and between mind and body. Baoyu, expressing the mindful subjectivity toward the city discussed at the outset of this chapter, praises Shanghai’s industry and urban infrastructure (like the electric street light) while repressing his awareness of its embodied “shengse gouna” aspects. Xue Pan on the other hand immerses both himself and an uncooperative Baoyu in the brothels, opium dens and restaurants of the city.

In contrast to its anachronistic second half, this immersion in debauchery belongs to the common archetype from this period of Shanghai adventure writing. This field, which traversed fiction, guidebooks, and general tabloid writing, was intended to afford an emergent national readership the opportunity to vicariously experience the thrilling fun and sexualty of Shanghai life.

Wu Jianren’s close association with this style of writing reinforces this reading. The initial advertisements (chushou guanggao 出售广告) for Sensational

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38 In Dream of the Red Chamber Xue Pan is a relatively marginal character, although he is among the most masculine and dominant of Jia Baoyu’s peers.
39 Yee has pointed out that Baoyu is a deliberately effeminate character in Red Chamber, “Counterpoise in Honglou meng,” pp. 631-4. This dualism between cousins is reminiscent of that between the cousins Du Shengqing and Du Shaoqing in The Scholars.
40 XSTJ(A), p. 66.
41 The Shanghai publishing industry actively constructed and propagated an image of the city as a place of leisure and fun in a manner which was of benefit to the nationwide marketing of the city’s publications as preeminent leisure fare at the turn of the century. As Des Forges puts it, “we may understand the Shanghai texts and images produced and distributed across China in the Guangxu era as a sort of double commodity, which sells as itself but also refers back to the general commodified experience ‘life in Shanghai,’ and encourages the consumer to travel to Shanghai;” Des Forges, “Street Talk,” p. 48, p. 62.
42 Wu Jianren was a tabloid mainstay, the editor of no less than four tabloid newspapers: Caifeng bao (采风报, 1898-?), Xiaoxian bao (消闲报, 1897-?), Qixin bao (奇新报, 1901-?), and Yiyan bao (寓言报, 1902-?). In his eulogy for Li Boyuan he praised Entertainment as, “cutting a new path for our nation’s newspapers, behind which many incompetent imitators followed” (wei weiguo baojie bi yibie cai, zhongqi er xiaopinzhe 为我国报界辟一别裁, 瞻起而效颦者); Wu Woyao, “Li Boyuan zhuan,” p. 10. For more on Wu as a tabloid figure see Xie
Biographies promised that “the reader will feel as if they themselves are really there” (ling yuehe nushen yu gezhong 令阅者如身入个中), the “there” in this case being the city’s many courtesan houses. Wu also wrote a full-length biography of the courtesan who most represented Shanghai’s entertainment and fashion culture, Hu Baoyu, as well as separately writing shorter profiles of many other courtesans which reveal that he was himself a frequenter of courtesan houses. He also authored Shanghai sanshi nian yanji 上海三十年艳迹 (An Amorous Tour of Shanghai’s Last 30 Years, 1906), one of the many salacious guides to Shanghai culture that emerged at this time. Beginning with its name - a play on the common term for courtesans at this time, yanji 艳妓 - An Amorous Tour of Shanghai’s Last 30 Years embodies the “libidinal role-play” of visitor and experienced guide inherent to this field of publishing. It featured courtesan profiles and anecdotes about the missteps and adventures of visitors to Shanghai, imputing Wu himself in the same role as Xue Pan, as a chaperone whose experience is only matched by his moral dubiousness.

43 Cited in Wei Shaochang 魏绍昌, “Guanyu ’Haishang mingji sida jin’gang qishu’ de liang zu ziliao 关于‘海上名妓四大金刚奇书’的两组资料,” in Hai Feng 海风 (ed.), Wu Jianren quanji 吴趼人全集, vol. 10, p. 332. The same advertisement played on the duality of se 色, promising a compilation of tales that were “yousheng youse 有声有色,” ibid., p. 331. Whether or not Sensational Biographies is actually a Wu Jianren novel has been the source of some debate. I defer to the summary offered by Huang Jinzhu 黄锦珠; “Lun Wu Jianren xiaoishuo zhong de nxing guan 论吴趼人小说中的女性观” in Hu Xiaozhen 胡晓真 (ed.), Shibian yu weixin, p. 518, fnnt. 6.
44 Under the pseudonym “Lao Shanghai” (老上海).
45 Xia Xiaohong has read the courtesan profiles as an ironic puncturing of Liang Qichao’s profiles of famous industrialists; “Wu Jianren yu Liang Qichao.” This is certainly interesting, but overly minimises Wu’s authentic interest in, and sympathy for, the courtesans of the city. He personally penned several wanlian 挽联 (elegiac couplets) of condolence and remorse on the occasion of many courtesans’ deaths. The magazine Banyue 半月 (Semi-Monthly), recorded three of these for posterity. Of Chen Lijuan 沈丽娟 for instance, Wu Jianren lamented that she “unburdened me of new anxieties and old enmities” (xinhou jishen weikong 新愁旧恨为孔), Wei Shaochang 魏绍昌, “Guanyu ’Haishang mingji sida jin’gang qishu’,” p. 331.
Bearing this in mind, Xue Pan’s debauched tour of Shanghai is not a reflection of his own dissolution so much as the engrained social expectations placed upon visitors like Baoyu. As Yeh notes, this typically included “visiting courtesan houses,” “going to the theatre,” “dining at a Western-style restaurant,” “drinking and eating at leisure in Shanghai’s famous teahouses,” “smoking at an opium den,” and “[viewing] the town’s exotic features.” Baoyu and Xue Pan not only follow this itinerary, but also play out the standard interaction of the experienced and shameless “old hand,” who guides the neophyte explorer of the city through his descent into personal abasement and (hopefully) back out again. Baoyu is a naïve figure with regards to the city’s entertainment culture, and as his host, Xue Pan attempts to deliver the archetypal Shanghai experience by variously convincing, entreating and physically dragging him into the city.

Many of the early episodes conform to the archetype of Shanghai as a place of fleshy and dangerous pleasures. Xue Pan states that “Shanghai isn’t like other places, we’ve got racing, walking in the park, seeing a show, whoring, and actually there’s no fifth thing on that list” (chu que paomache, guang huayuan, tingxi, guang wozi, meiyou diwu jianshi 除却跑马车，逛花园，听戏，逛窑子，没有第五件事). He immediately takes Baoyu to Sima Road to “wander around the strip of amusements, teahouses, smoking parlours” (yidai youwan, chalou, yanguan ye shangqu guangguang 带游玩，茶楼、烟馆也上去逛逛). They also visit several restaurants, an opium

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47 Yeh, Shanghai Love, pp. 255-258.
48 In one restaurant, Baoyu drifts off and finds himself “listening to the conversation about business dealings and the gossip about courtesans, as he sat there in silence he understood only half of it” (ting taliangge tanxie dinghuo de hua, you tanxie piaojie shang de xinwen. Baoyu banding banbudong, zhihi moran bu zuo yiyu 听他两个谈些定货的话，又谈些嫖界上的新闻。宝玉半懂半不懂的，只是默然不作一语); XSTJ, p. 46. At one point he asks the more experienced Xue Pan to explain the origins of the “Four Diamond Cutters” (sida jingang 四大金刚) moniker for the city’s most prominent courtesans, again making Xue Pan the voice of Wu Jianren, who himself wrote a guide to the “Four Diamond Cutters” for tourists; XSTJ, p. 48.
49 There are also attempts to “sell” the city as an entertainment destination. Bai Yaolian notes to Baoyu, “Shanghai is more lively than any other place around” (Shanghai bi biechu dou renao 上海比别处都热闹); XSTJ, p. 47.
50 XSTJ, p. 39.
51 XSTJ, p. 47.
den (where Baoyu gets a contact high), the Zhang Gardens (张园) and the Yu Gardens (愚园). After cajoling Baoyu into “going out drinking” late one night, Xue Pan explains that the night is particularly special because the results of the famous “flower elections organised by Entertainment” (“Youxibao” chu de huaxuan “游戏报”出的花选) have recently been published, noting with excitement that the winning courtesans “are going to want to celebrate until the break of dawn” (yao naodao tianliang ne 要闹到天亮呢). When Baoyu expresses his typical surprise at the idea, Xue Pan replies only that Shanghai is a “city without night,” which was a motif of the brochures for Shanghai that were being produced at the time. Baoyu is also indoctrinated into certain ritualised behaviours of Shanghai’s shengse gouma world. At the outset of chapter 7, during a visit to a courtesan house (jiaoju 叫局), Xue Pan introduces Baoyu to the act of “jiao tiaozı”叫条子 (making requests for the company of courtesans). Baoyu however chooses to spend his time discussing the racial regulation of captains for shipping carriers operating out of Shanghai.

52 For more on opium smoking in late-Qing fiction see McMahon, The Fall of the God of Money, chpt. 4.
53 When Xue takes Baoyu to the Zhang Gardens to eat with a pair of courtesans it embarrasses him greatly, but any reader of courtesan novels or the local entertainment press would have been well aware of the social status attached to being seen eating with courtesans at the Zhang Gardens’ teahouse; Yeh, Shanghai Love, p. 22.
54 XSTJ, p. 51. The elections were held in 1897, 1898 and 1900, so by the (occasionally confused) time period depicted in the novel this should be the final such election.
The novel plays with its readership’s expectations vis-à-vis these conventions via Baoyu’s unique status as not just a country bumpkin but also an eighteenth-century aristocrat and aesthete, whose idealised “sublime passions” clash with the libidinal and the sensory world of Shanghai. Particular fun is had with the propensity toward Red Chamber-derived names amongst the courtesan population of Shanghai. Baoyu, after lusting after Lin Daiyu for much of Red Mansions, is dropped into a world of innumerable sexually-available Daiyus, a grotesque inversion of reality which leaves him completely overwhelmed.\(^\text{59}\)

As with the better fanxin xiaoshuo (we will consider this more in chapters 4 and 5), the comedic alienation of Baoyu gives way to a more involved thematic as the novel progresses. This is the motif of bodies and senses, upon which the dualism between Baoyu and Xue Pan is once again overlaid. Senses are directly tied to the recreational spaces of the city, as are somatic experiences, as in the satisfying moment

\(^{57}\) XSTJ, p. 45.
\(^{58}\) XSTJ, p. 53.
\(^{59}\) Yeh discusses the contemporary fashion for courtesans to appropriate names from Dream of the Red Chamber; Shanghai Love, chpt. 3.
of “stretching out the waistline” (shenle shenyao 伸了伸腰), to use one of the novel’s many bodily metaphors. Sensory stimulation is the essentially only logic by which Xue Pan determines the itinerary of his tour, and the desire for women, alcohol and food is paramount and often nocturnal in its emergence, ensuring that forays often last until four or five in the morning (much to Baoyu’s distaste). Everyday life, and the wider psychogeography of the city, is oriented around the fulfilment of the body as sensory organ, and the city’s restaurants, bars and brothels constantly necessitate discussion, digression, and travel, as when Xue Pan becomes so violently and immediately hungry that his “legs go weak” (tuile nuanle 腿子软了), and he forces an emergency detour to a restaurant.

Baoyu is constantly being entreated to smell, taste, touch and listen to the city. At one point the reprehensible Bai Yaolian pulls out two cigars and he and Xue Pan proceed to blow malodourous smoke around. In chapter 9 he is cajoled into trying a series of western alcoholic drinks, including beer (pijiu 皮酒), brandy (bolandi 拨兰地), and champagne (xiangbing 香饼). Baoyu is depicted as being acutely estranged by the sensory experiences of urban life. His review of a Yangzhou-style restaurant is revealing in this regard, suffused with a disgust that is both exaggerated and multi-sensory:

Baoyu spat repeatedly, and said to Xue Pan, “That place, what a great idea to go there and their food. Such filth, its worse than a dog kennel, only a dog kennel couldn’t smell so bad! The smell of coal and oil smoke is everywhere, and the taste of deep frying; the tables, chairs and benches, there’s not one place that isn’t covered in oil, I couldn’t even bear to sit down. Watching you eat and drink, I felt terrible for you.”

While David Wang had previously compared Baoyu to Candide because of their shared naiveté, it is worth noting that this naiveté does not prevent him from being intensely opinionated.
We are here briefly allowed a portal into the acute synaesthesia through which Baoyu perceives his surroundings, a world of oleaginous surfaces, nauseating smells, and threatening, even predatory, sensations. (This synaesthesia reoccurs when he tries the various alcohols, as he describes the taste of one as, “like tiny knives being driven into my throat,” xiang na xiaodaozi wang sangzi chuo de yiban 象拿小刀子往嗓子里戳的一般).\(^{(64)}\) Fear and repression of the sensory causes Baoyu to experience Shanghai as overburdened with these qualities, to the point of being threatening and violent. His subsequent retreat into his lodge room is a paranoiac reaction symptomatic of someone suffering from acute mysophobia. Filth and uncleanness are in many ways the most acutely negative expression of the bodily senses, the sensation of being dirty existing at the intersection of smell, touch and even taste. Xue Pan’s interest in the libidinal is the counterpoint to this, as the embodiment of these senses’ cumulative capacity to elicit pleasure.

Baoyu’s hyper-awareness of dirt and filth is a recurrent motif (and a reference to his status in Red Chamber).\(^{(65)}\) In a later scene he cruelly embarrasses a waiter, accusing him of having touched his glass with unwashed hands.\(^{(66)}\) It is raised again during a visit to the Jiangnan Arsenal, where Baoyu and Xue Pan observe various aspects of the industrial production process:

All of the workers inside were dishevelled and dirty, their faces covered in a layer of yellow dust... Xue Pan said, “you’re afraid of dirt, how is it that you can look at all this filth and somehow be only enthralled?” Baoyu replied, “Look at how they became filthy, this is the filth of necessity. In order to make a living they are beaten into this appearance, their willingness to look this way is their meal-ticket.”\(^{(67)}\)

里面做工的人，都是蓬头垢面的，脸上铺着一层黄尘... 薛蟠道：“你是怕脏的，怎么见了这些脏劲儿，倒看出神了？” 宝玉道：“看怎么能脏法，这个是不得已之脏。他们为了做活，闹成这个样儿，他们又肯这个样去自食其力。

\(^{(64)}\) XSTJ(A), p. 65.
\(^{(65)}\) In Red Chamber Baoyu complains about the dirtiness of the Ning household and Nannie Li describes him as “always on about how dirty other people are;” Yee, “Counterpoise,” p. 635.
\(^{(66)}\) XSTJ(A), p. 63.
\(^{(67)}\) XSTJ(A), p. 78.
This comment speaks to the necessary bifurcation of modern thought with regard to the senses. Whilst the enlightenment was envisaged as a victory for the realm of the mind, its entanglement with early-capitalism necessitated a repressing of the corporeality and filth of the factory floor. Modern life has been characterised by an ever greater disjuncture and obfuscation between the conditions of production (experienced by the proletariat, the body of society) and the conditions of consumption (experienced by the bourgeois, the mind of society). In this case, the factory is necessarily hot, rank and unclean, but it is not filthy in the same manner as the restaurant, in large part because it neither violates Baoyu’s own sensorium nor his sense of social order. As Schuelting notes, “matter is conceived as dirt when it disturbs order and threatens to pollute what a social group [the middle class] considers clean and pure.”68 In his rationalisation of this Baoyu is the parodic epitome of a “champagne socialist” (albeit one who apparently dislikes champagne).

From a physical and class remove, he is able to romanticise the experience of being dirty the “filth of necessity,” but when his waiter touches his glass or his lunch is too greasy he experiences this as a dangerous violation of the given order and thus a moral offence and a threat.

Entwined with the sensory is the world of excreta and orifices. One anecdote involving a character named Wang Wei’er 王威儿 encapsulates Wu Jianren’s authorial approach to the city, his fascination with viewing it through fresh eyes, and his ability to exist in a narrative space between the transcendental and the banal (in this case public urination):

Sure enough, Shanghai was flourishing and diverse, and without realising it he became bewildered by the sights that were all around him. Managing to block out the tumult for a moment, he chose a direction and set off. Not long had passed however before he realised that he urgently needed to piss, and so he found a spot in the street to do so. At that moment a patrolling policeman appeared, but having already begun to act and now unable to stem the flow, he was helpless. When the policeman seized him, Wang Wei’er

shouted and struggled: “Why did you collar me? Spit it out!” The policeman simply struck him on the mouth.⁶⁹

果然，上海的繁华与众不同，不觉看得他目眩神迷，左顾右盼。也不问东西南北，只拣热闹的地方走去。忽然觉着内急，就解了小衣，当路小便。一个巡捕上前喝阻，无奈他已尿了出来，收止不住。那妄捕抓了他便走，王威儿乱嚷道：“你抓我作什么？有话好说呀？” 说着，还要挣扎。妄捕举起手，拍的就是一个嘴巴。

Wang Wei’er is eventually rescued from his predicament by Xue Pan, who pays his fine, puts him up in a lodge and gives him money and new clothes. This is the first scene in which we see Xue Pan through the eyes of anyone but Baoyu, and he is practically unrecognisable when compared to his constant denigration as a loser and naïve idiot. Xue Pan is the only member of the audience to this scene who is willing to intervene with the police officer, bravely preventing a further beating for Wang Wei’er.⁷⁰ As with the Yangzhou restaurant, Baoyu’s way of seeing the world begins to come into focus as quasi-hallucinogenic by contrast.

The incident brings into question the often reflexive denigration of Xue Pan as a character on the part of secondary literature (which we will come to later). It also speaks to the destabilising effect of sensory experience on modernity’s subject-object duality. In his concept of the “emancipation of the senses,” Marx describes how the “senses and attributes have become human, subjectively as well as objectively... the eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object...”⁷¹

This speaks to a similar sense in Bakhtin’s work, whereby the indulged senses and exposed orifices of the grotesque body are the basis for a “carnival self” which is able to exceed its monadic isolation via a corporeal connection to the world around itself. For Baoyu, his sensory emancipation in Shanghai induces an unpleasant entanglement with the world around him, he experiences the desired objective world as not only surprisingly subjective but also threatening. Xue Pan’s interaction with

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⁶⁹ XSTJ, p.104.
⁷⁰ Ironically, he is the only person who does not conform to Liang Qichao’s characterisation of China as a nation of “spectators” (pangguan zhe 旁观者), to be discussed in the following chapter.
Wang Wei'er is however one in which his sensory engagement with the world is akin to a compassionate anti-individualism. Wang Wei'er (who, considering that he has no extra clothes, has been travelling for some time and has just finished urinating against a wall is probably pretty ripe) is just another facet of the sensory experience of the city which is embraced, unquestioningly, by Xue Pan.

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Baoyu is the only character who spans the two halves of the novel, and as such he is typically identified as the sole protagonist of New Story of the Stone. During the first 22 chapters this is formally inaccurate. On several occasions we follow either Xue Pan or Baoyu independently of one another, and the restricted third person perspective of the novel does not make the reader privy to the internal thoughts of one privileged character. This throws the novel off the axis of a monological central protagonist and into the realm of the dialogism, offering the opportunity to interpret the interplay between the Baoyu and his Mephistophelean other as itself an interrogation of the dualities of modern life itself.

In the complementarity that undergirds their superficial contrast, Baoyu and Xue Pan are a literary version of the “odd-couple” relationship endemic to “cross-talk” (xiangsheng 相聲) humour. In one illustrative incident, Xue Pan returns from a night of heavy drinking and interrupts Baoyu’s intensive study by listening to an Edison phonograph in his room. Baoyu knocks on Xue Pan’s door, gets no reply, stews, returns to the door, bangs on it again, and is greeted by an insouciant Xue Pan who asks, simply, “aren’t you sleeping?” The greater significance of a scene like this lies however not in their comic status as poorly-matched roommates, but as a reflection upon the split subjectivity of the modern mind. The innocence, violence and sexual energy of Xue Pan are indicative of a nascent conceptualisation of the

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72 Xue Pan for instance is the sole protagonist of chapters 12-14, which take place in Beijing. His experiences as a “wannabe” Boxer can be read as another aspect of his embodiment of “fete” and non-rational being in the city. He spends more than a month “fooling around with magical incantations” with Wang Wei’er before chickening out on the Uprising itself and escaping the remaining Boxer leadership who want revenge; XSTJ, pp. 113-119.
unruly and irrepressible unconscious. Baoyu’s rejection of libidinal and sensory experience and his excessive absorption in the rational satisfaction of the mind ensures the return, like any repressed element in the Freudian-Lacanian discipline, of the unconscious, in this case through the spectre of Xue Pan, his gluttonous, impious and recalcitrant id (made alter ego).

Another such aspect of their relationship is that Baoyu and Xue Pan make recourse to opposing methods of achieving subjectivity. Xue Pan is an example of embodied subjectivity, he finds meaning through recourse to somatic experience, entering the city senses-first, smelling, touching and tasting the world around him. While Xue Pan is forever entreating Baoyu to leave his room and experience (through his body) Shanghai, Baoyu conversely entreats Xue Pan to change and improve himself through mental pursuits - to “self-fashion” himself as a modern man, largely by expanding his mind and repressing his base desires.

Baoyu is a model of this modern subjectivity, retreating from Shanghai into reading and empirical knowledge, methodically and unblinkingly working his way through back issues of - and these are surely not unintentional selections - reformist newspapers like Qingyi bao 清议报, Shiwu bao 时务报 and Zhixin bao 知新报.73

73 In Ming-Qing fictional works, including Dream of the Red Chamber, a character's taste in poetry was a means by which the reader was afforded a window into their taste and interiority. In the context of turn of the century Shanghai this has been replaced, fittingly, with a given character’s taste in mass media publications. Qingyi bao 清议报, a tri-monthly paper edited by Liang Qichao, was, along with its successor Xinmin congbao 新民丛报, the principal press vector through which the western enlightenment-led intellectual agenda of the late-Qing reformers entered China. It featured translations of Bacon, Spencer, John Stuart Mill and Bluntschili. If this scene is set in 1901 as the novel states Baoyu likely would have been able to read Liang’s relatively infamous editorial “Zhongguo jiruo suyuan lun 中国极弱溯源论” (“On the Sources of China’s Weakness”), one of the most prominent modernising documents in the late-Qing, which attacks various aspects of Chinese tradition and mentality. Shiwu bao 时务报 (also edited by Liang Qichao) and Zhixin bao 知新报 were also press organs for the reformist ideology. See Seungjo Yoon, “Literati-Journalists of the Chinese Progress (Shiwu bao) in Discord, 1896-1898” in Karl and Zarrow (eds.), Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period, 2005, pp. 48-76. For more on anti-traditional sentiments in Qingyi bao see Jin Chongji 金冲及, “Qingyi bao 清议报,” in Xinhai gening shi qi kan jieshao 辛亥革命时期期刊介绍, vol. 1, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1982, pp. 1-30. It is vital to recognize the gulf that separated the tabloid press from newspapers like Qingyi bao and Zhixin bao. The choice of a term like qingyi 清议 is indicative of the differing class associations and outlooks of the tabloid and reformist newspapers. Mary BACKUS Rankin’s genealogy of qingyi (“pure discussion”) finds it in the late-Qing to refer “specifically to the opinion of men in the lower and middle grades of the metropolitan bureaucracy,” “Public Opinion” and Political Power:
Following this he naturally becomes interested in the new scientific and manufacturing knowledge celebrated in these newspapers, eventually purchasing a crate of translated works on "gezhi 格致" (science and technology) from the Jiangnan Arsenal.

Baoyu’s internalisation of, and total submission to, the authority of these modern, reformists texts is parodic in its immediacy and totality. His investment comes at the expense of the awareness of his own body, as Xue Pan and Bei Ming both make note of the fact that he has stopped eating and sleeping. He also refuses the folk knowledge of his own era entirely. In a symbolic scene, he opens a case full of assorted books and blindly “tears through” (chai 拆) and discards layers of lay wisdom-like the Back-Pushing Diagrams (Tuibei tu 推背图) and the Baked Cake Ballad (Shaobing ge 烧饼歌, a particularly pertinent reference, as a form of food-based spiritualism) in order to reach an anthology of Liang Qichao’s Qingyi bao.74 Xue Pan

74 XSTJ, p. 58. There is an irony to the notion that the overarching concept of the novel is Baoyu’s search for China’s utopian future, and yet he ignores the Back-Pushing Diagrams and Baked Cake Ballad, which themselves were systems of futurological prognostication and which, in the case of the Back-Pushing Diagrams (which were developed by the Tang Dynasty astronomer-mathematician Li Chunfeng 李淳风), predicted a utopian future for China. For more on the frequent association of the Baked Cake Ballad and Back-Pushing Diagrams with a particular focus on the the respective mystical qualities see Lin Yixie 林宜学, Zhongguo yeyan zhi mi: Tuibei tu’yu Shaobing ge’de toushi 中国预言之谜:推背图与烧饼歌的透视, Hong Kong: lantian shuwu, 1977. See also Chen Xuelin 陈学霖 and Wang Jianchuan 王见川, “Taiwan liuchuan de Liu Bochen ‘liujie biwen’ tansu 台湾流传的刘伯謐‘救劫碑文’ 探溯,” Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao 中国文化研究所学报, 47, (2007), pp. 165-190. Lianyan Ge has raised some interesting connections between the Back-Pushing Diagrams and Red Chamber; “Albums in the Land of Illusion: Visualizing Baoyu’s Visualization,” Southeast Review of Asian Studies, 34, (2012), pp. 51-2
on the other hand reads *Entertainment*, another indication of where Wu Jianren’s true sympathies may lie.\(^{75}\)

While Huters and Jones recognise aspects of the mind-body duality in *New Story of the Stone*, both demonstrate how pervasive the privileging of the mind over the body can be. Huters praises Baoyu’s retreat into “intense reading” as a means to understand the modern world which has been foisted upon him, and dismisses Xue Pan as “oafish” and “gross,” because he “can do nothing more than simply respond to the immediate sensory stimuli of the madding crowd and plunge in headfirst.”\(^{76}\) Jones states that the first half is one in which, “Bao-yu assiduously studies the new world and China’s place within it, and gamely dedicates himself to the task of becoming a would-be reformer,” while Xue Pan does not warrant mention.\(^{77}\)

In this section I have argued that Xue Pan’s excessive somatic and libidinal investment can only be understood as a counterpart to Baoyu’s excessive mentality. Both are comic caricatures, in much the same fashion that Shanghai itself was a caricature of itself in the tabloid press, and indeed this initial dyad between Baoyu and Xue Pan is later re-inscribed in the duality between two pastiche landscapes of late-Qing Shanghai and the Realm of Modernity. Wang Liyan 王立言 describes the first half as one in which the denizens of Shanghai (i.e. Xue Pan) are mocked for being “shameless citizens” (*wu chi guoren* 无耻国人),\(^{78}\) but neither Shanghai nor Xue Pan are really shameless, or all that mocked, and within a line-drawing of shamefulness (bars, brothels and crowds) is painted moments of communality, mutuality and endearing foolishness. In this, *New Story* brings to mind Marshall...

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\(^{75}\) In addition to his tabloid reading habits, fashion plays a key role in identifying Xue Pan as a libertine and an embodied figure. At one point he lounges around the boarding house “a robe of grey squirrel-hair, which he had left unfastened” (*hui shupaozi, haimei kou niuzi* 灰鼠袍子，还没扣钮子), reminding us also of his general louche sexuality (incidentally reminding the reader of a similar quality expressed in the Persian dressing gown worn by Ivan Goncharov’s eternal layabout, Oblomov); XSTJ, p. 58.

\(^{76}\) Huters, *Bringing the World Home*, pp. 159-61.

\(^{77}\) Jones, *Developmental Fairy Tales*, p. 31.

\(^{78}\) XSTJ(A), p. 2.
Berman’s description of Walter Benjamin, that “he cannot resist one more look down the boulevard or under the arcade; he wants to be saved, but not yet.”

3. Libidinal repression, pathologies and specimen bodies in The Realm of Modernity

The Realm of Modernity has typically been read as an unblushingly earnest vision of the utopian possibilities of technological advancement and “enlightened autocracy” (wenming zhuanzhi 文明专制) – in effect, a vernacular counterpart to Kang Youwei’s Great Commonality (Datong Shu 大同书, c.1911/1935).

Properly situating it with regard to the themes of the first half of New Story of the Stone impinges on its apparently utopian qualities however. This begins with the subjection, dissection and analysis of the formerly pleasure-seeking body. David Lyon notes that this is a quintessentially modern desire, for “[i]f the pre-modern concern was [with] how a body should live... [then] modernity is dominated by the question of how a body is known.” In the Realm of Modernity, the body is pathologised and mechanised, while the libidinal energies toward play and self-indulgence are made profane. Humankind’s relationship to the body is mediated through medical technology, which has engendered the possibility of controlling and eliminating physical needs entirely.

Baoyu’s entry into the Realm of Modernity begins with his imprisonment in Hankou two chapters earlier, having been accused of slander. His experiences in prison can read as the ultimate incitement to his pre-existing paranoia about sensory experience and filth. The prison is depicted as near-medieval, a gaol, and in the sight-

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depriving total darkness (heian bubì 黑暗不比) of a fetid cell filled with numerous bodies, he is forced to feel and smell his way around, alighting at one point upon opium smokers lying next to a bucket full of faeces. This hallucinogenic ordeal only comes to an end when two unidentified figures attempt to murder him by suffocation with several large bags of rice - another instance in which the gustatory is experienced as exaggerated mortal threat.

Baoyu apparently manages to escape this fate, but his fortuitous and unexplained discovery of the Realm of Modernity in the immediate aftermath of the incident raises the possibility that this is a delusion brought on by the psychological trauma of his imprisonment (there are a number of subtle allusions to imprisonment throughout), or even by death. Various members of the Frankfurt School trace the rise of Cartesian dualistic subjectivity “back to an inability to accept finitude and death and a compensatory demand for an unconditional control of nature and human nature.” Baoyu’s fantasy is conceivably that of man who never escapes the prison or his own mind, and the desire to control (and thereby escape) the conditions of his imprisonment and attempted assassination permeate the Realm. This is expressed particularly in the assault upon the body’s claims to agency over the mind, especially in bodily death and its capacity to engender mental death. The delusionary vision of a world in which the body is being made progressively more and more redundant is a morose (and mordant) refraction of a mind experiencing somatic death in the final stages of suffocation, and the desire to transcend all bodily functions reads as a desire to eliminate the possibility of experiencing the pain of death itself.

82 During one of Baoyu’s adventures 40 scientific assistants say (ostensibly at once): “the weather is very strange today, I’m afraid we’re really going to see frost in June” (jintian tianqi qiguai, zhípà zhèn yáo xìa liúyuè xuéle 今天天气奇怪，只怕真要下六月雪了); XSTJ, p. 257. This is a bizarre statement to make considering they are in the South Pole, and can be read as a veiled allusion to the Warring States-period mystic Zou Yan’s own wretched imprisonment, which led to frost occurring in June.
84 As Maeda Ai notes trenchantly, “if utopian literature is the product of an intense vision to materialize human happiness within a closed and organized space, it perhaps maintains, at the deepest level, an analogical relationship to the mechanism of power that is the prison;” Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity, James A. Fuji trans., Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, p. 21.
The Realm of Modernity’s possible status as Baoyu’s personal fantasy also alludes to the “Illusory Realm of the Great Void” (taixu huanjing 太虚幻境) which is visited in fantasies by Baoyu in Red Chamber. Both are signified by a stone gate with an inscription, and are inversions of the real world. While “no mortal is allowed to tread” in the Illusory Realm, entry to the Realm of Modernity is also predicated on certain demonstrations of being untainted by the material world. Furthermore, the Realm of Modernity is a deepening of the theme of mind/body dualism and over-rationalisation which Shanghai revealed to be inherent to Baoyu’s way of seeing the world. In this it is reminiscent of the fundamental premise of the land of illusion, which, as Pu Songling puts it in Liaozhai zhiyi, “is born of the individual” (huanjing youren ersheng 幻境由人而生). That is, as its name suggests, the land of illusion is viewed and experienced differently be each person, a projection of their inner selfhood.

True to this idea, Baoyu’s repression of the body and privileging of the eyes and mind is the central ethos of the Ream of Modernity, and the basis for its “biopolitical” control over the body politic. Brennan’s assertion that the subject’s dislocation from the physical world results in a “hallucinatory” regime of fantasised control over nature is of recurring relevance here. The term wenming is partially grounded in images of light and perspicacity, and in the “Realm of Wenming” ocular and visual technologies and the capacity for unfettered surveillance are implicated into this subjugation of the body as subjective organ. In addition to, even as a result of, this, the Realm privileges observational and experimental truths that are delivered via visual-scientific regimes of speculums, X-rays and telescopes.

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85 The comment comes in a summary of the tale “Hua bi” (画壁) in Liaozhai zhiyi, which Pu Songling summarises as indicative of the notion that “if a person has a wastrel’s character they will give rise to an obscene land of illusion; if they have an obscene character they will give rise to an frightful land of illusion” (yige ren ruguo you le yindang zhi xin, jiu hui chansheng weixie de huanjing; ruguo you le weixie zhi xin, jiu hui chansheng kongbu de huanjing 一个人如果有了淫荡之心，就会产生猥亵的幻境；如果有了猥亵的之心，就会产生恐怖的幻境); Pu Songling 蒲松龄, Liaozhai zhiyi 聊斋志异, vol. 1, Shanghai: Shanghai guidian chubanshe, 2012, p. 7.
This is made apparent almost immediately upon Baoyu’s arrival, when he learns that entry to the Realm is predicated on the submission of the body and soul to an invasive medical surveillance regime. The medical interventions begin with the request that he sterilise his barbaric digestive tract - only the first of many indications that natural bodily processes have been problematised in the future. This is also an oblique reference to the Realm’s status as a modern Realm of the Immortals; as noted in the inner chapters of Ge Hong’s 葛洪 collection of Daoist wisdom on achieving immortality, Baopu  抱朴子 (c. 317), the complete cleaning of the intestines is one of several “methods for achieving immortality” (xianfa  仙法).

The surveillance escalates with a visit to the “character examination room” (yanxingzhi fang 验性质房), located in a form of moral quarantine centre, which confirms Baoyu’s own assessment of himself, that he is a naturally wenming person. It is explained that the nature of each person is determined by recourse to a special chemically-enhanced lens, which can see through the body to the material of the human soul. The explanation of the lens leads Baoyu to ask, “isn’t human nature

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88 Lao Shaonian introduces him to the Realm by stating simply that everyone is welcome, if “they can comply with the regulations of civility” (zunshou wenming guizhi 遵守文明規制); XSTJ, p. 175. This introduction offers one interpretation of why the Ream of Modernity is a “realm” - bringing to mind Confucius’ statement that “[when] entering a realm [one should] ask about prohibitions, [when] entering a country ask about customs” (rujing wenjin, ruqiao wenmin 入境問禁, 入國問俗) in the Liji 礼记 (Book of Rites).
89 Baoyu’s physical and moral sterilization is reiterated in the satirical novel Mapi shijie 马屁世界 (Ass-Kissing World, 1911), where incoming students to a specialised academy are required to thoroughly clean their body as a form of “self-cultivation” (xiuhen 修身); Shui Shi 睡狮, Mapi shijie 马屁世界, in Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi 中国近代小说大系, vol. 9, Nanchang: BAIHUAZHOU WENYI CHUBANSHU, 1991, p. 600.
90 Ge Hong 葛洪, Baopu 抱朴子, Shanghai: Shanghai gudian chubanshe, 1990, p. 10. Issue 10 of AllStory Monthly (1907) features a quote from Baopu following a short story by Wu Jianren entitled “Renjing xueshe gui ku zhuan 人镜学社鬼哭传.”
91 XSTJ, p. 175.
92 Both Rea, “A History of Laughter,” p. 7, and Laikwan Pang, The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007, pp. 6-8, raise differing instances in which the penetrating lens was employed in tabloid publications for comedic purposes in the years around 1907, when this first appeared in print. The “substance of the soul,” which the lens looks for, appears to be a more or less explicit reference to the material nature of ren 仁 (benevolence) in the epistemology of Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong. In fact, much of the structure and ideology of the world appears to be either a direct or indirect reference to reformist ideology. Huters for instance points out that the Realm of Modernity...
immaterial, how can it be measured?” (xingzhi shi wuxing zhiwu, ruhe keyi ceyan? 性质是无形之物，如何可以测验?) To which Lao Shaonian replies, “with the rise of science, there is now no matter nor substance that cannot be tested and measured!” (kexue changing zhou, heshihewu buke ceyan 科学昌明之后，何事何物不可测验).93 This statement - a parodic manifesto of enlightenment modernity - pervades the experience of life in the Realm of Modernity, where nothing can escape the analytical gaze of a scientifically-enhanced technocracy, in this case, poetically, not the least of which is the human soul.

This initial examination is the first indication of a pathologising and ascetic regulation of the human body, and an alienating of the human from the biological rhythms of life.94 The need for defecation has been eliminated via a combination of the colonic cleansing Baoyu experiences and a diet of nutritionally-enhanced water. The seasonal and crop cycles have been overcome by recourse to artificial habitats in which any climate can be maintained year-round. The process of ageing has been defeated, and in the final chapter Lao Shaonian reveals that he is 140 years old (despite looking only 40), and kept alive by a cocktail of drugs.95

While Shanghai overwhelmed with smells, textures and tastes, the sensory experience of the Realm of Modernity is curiously two-dimensional. Tea has no colour, alcohol has no alcoholic effect, and vehicles and guns make no noise.96 Food has no texture or shape, rather consisting of nutrient-rich water that “does not leave a mark on the digestive tract” and preserves the organs from contamination with

is “an eclectic mix of elements of Confucian theories of communal unity combined with an idiosyncratic borrowing from social Darwinism,” but doesn’t recognise that this is a concise encapsulation of Kang Youwei’s own epistemology; Bringing the World Home, p. 168.


94 This brings to mind the cleansing and strengthening of the body as a pre-requisite of the creation of the “new citizen” in late-Qing reformist ideology. See Andrew Morris, “‘To Make the Four Hundred Million Move’: The Late Qing Dynasty Origins of Modern Chinese Sport and Physical Culture,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 42:4, (October 2000), pp. 876–906. As Ping Zhu argues, “Liang Qichao, conceived the new people of the Chinese nation following the colonial model of masculinity and virility in his thesis ‘On the New People’ (Xinmin shuo, 1902).” Gender and Subjectivities in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Culture, New York: Palgrave, 2015, p. 77. Hu Ying sees the discourse surrounding cainü 末女 as relating to a sense among reform intellectuals of the emasculation of “national fiber;” “Naming the First ‘New Woman,’” p. 186.

95 XSTJ, p. 315.

96 XSTJ, pp. 262-3.
impurities.⁹⁷ (In one illustrative incident Baoyu orders “apples” from a menu, which leads to him being delivered a cup of colourless water, which upon closer inspection is revealed to smell faintly of apples).⁹⁸ Devices that are expected to have immediate sensory qualities reveal themselves to be invisible to all but the rational mind and eyes. The testing of a new cannon at the outset of chapter 38 reveals it to be both incredibly powerful and “without sound or smell, there was nothing to report its presence, and nothing to see [when it fired]” (queshi wushengwachoude, ji wusuowen, you wusuojian 却是无声无臭的，既无所闻，又无所见).⁹⁹

The most important figure in the new bodily regime of the future is the figure of Dongfang De 东方德, principal medical technologist of the new world. As the novel draws to a close Baoyu is afforded the opportunity to speak with him in person, and the discussion reveals a great deal about the nature of somatic life in the Realm of Modernity:

Dongfang De replied, “When it comes to medical innovation, powdered intelligence can at this time be considered a complete success. Therefore, at this juncture I intend on researching two new practices that will test the limits of my abilities, but it’s not yet clear if they will prove to be viable... [Firstly,] I think that the greatest misfortune in life is death itself, and yet not one of us can escape it. So I intend on researching a way of defeating death. [Secondly,] mankind’s greatest encumbrance is food, no matter what kind of vital matters we are engaged in, if we go hungry they can’t succeed. Eating is a great waste of time, every time we pause to eat we waste a quarter of an hour. Even if one only pauses to eat twice a day, over the course of a year the accumulated time spent simply on the work of eating is more than ninety hours, how many matters has this retarded! Therefore, I also want to research a method by which to end the need to eat” [...] Lao Shaonian asked, “If we are able to engineer the end of death, won’t this lead to a population crisis? Dongfang De replied, “It’s likely that after we find a means by which to end death, there will have to be no more children. If you doubt this, just go and look at ancient accounts of the immortals, is there any record of them having

⁹⁷ XTSJ, pp. 184-186, 193; This is reminiscent of certain 18th century theories of diet and behaviour forwarded by the likes of Dr George Cheyne, who as Anita Guerrini has argued, epitomised the dialectical nature of enlightenment, in a manner not unfamiliar to that of Franz Mesmer; Obesity and Depression in the Enlightenment: The Life and Times of George Cheyne, Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.
⁹⁸ XTSJ, p. 185.
⁹⁹ XTSJ, p. 302; In this the Realm of Modernity is an ironic counterpoint to Lu Xun’s comments a few decades later that modern China would be “noisy China” (yousheng Zhongguo 有声中国), and not “silent China” (wusheng Zhongguo 无声中国).
children? Although the ancient peoples never thought things through to this extent, you can nonetheless see that this is a natural ideal.”

东方德道：“医学新发明的，祇有制造聪明散，已经告成。此刻我要研究两个法子，但不知做得到做不到，祇可以尽了我的才力做去。倘使我毕生研究不出来，只可以待后起的了。” ... “我想人生最不幸的事，然而人人都逃不了一死。打算研究出一个不死之法来。人生最受累的是食，无论何等大事，非吃饱了不能辨。这吃饭又最耽搁时候，每吃一顿饭，总要一刻时侯。一天祗算吃两顿，一年积算起来，单是吃饭的工夫，就占了九十个时辰，要耽搁了多少事？所以又打算研究一个不食之法。” ... 老少年道：“只管不死，不要有人满之患么？” 东方德道：“只怕能得着了不死之法之后，便不生子了。不信，你但看古来所有讲仙讲道的书，何尝载有仙道生子的？古人虽未必想得到这一层，然而也可见得是个天然理想。”

In proffering sex (and its co-agitators, eating and reproducing) as a sacrifice at the altar of eternal life, Dongfang De speaks here to the narcissistic victory of the drive toward self-preservation over the libidinal. While the body is pathologised and problematised as a source of disease and distraction, the mind is enhanced through recourse to “powdered intelligence” (zhìzào congming 散制造聪明). This transcending of the body and its capacity for death through elixirs and powders suggests that the modern scientific regime of the Realm of Modernity is little divorced from the innumerable alchemical paths to Daoist immortality that littered Chinese antiquity.

As a demigod and benign monarch, Dongfang Wenming is the central figure of the Realm of Enlightenment. Nonetheless, it is Dongfang De and his brother Dongfang Fa’s military and medical technologies that define the parameters of Baoyu’s experience of modernity, which juxtaposes an intensely

\[\text{XTSJ}, \text{pp. 312-313.}\]

\[\text{As Mencius’s comment, “shi se xing ye 食色性也” (“appetite and lust are only natural”), implies, they are natural bedfellows as much as natural desires.}\]

\[\text{Baoyu points out that this sounds Buddhist in its sensibility, but is told that Dongfang De has no interest in individual release from desire and suffering, only a collective, population-level intervention (of the kind made possible by medical technology).}\]

\[\text{The most complete collection of such alchemical means to immortality being Ge Hong’s Baopuzi mentioned earlier, in which the ingesting of elixirs of edible gold and jade, among other methods, is said to lead to immortality and transcendence. See also Fabrizio Pregadio, Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.}\]
pathologising society with a military superpower. This combination of military and medical incursions into the world recalls Foucault, Virilio and Lefebvre’s separate assertions that in modernity foreign imperialism and aggression is mirrored by a covert colonisation of the body and society at the hands of capital and medical regimes, which is often disguised as therapeutic in animus. This kind of notion is made apparent when Dongfang Fa shows Baoyu a military device which is designed for delivering medical “powdered intelligence” into the atmosphere. Considering a later discussion in which it is stated that the powder is useless on the “lesser races,” this must be for use on the population of China.104

The status of bodies in the Realm of Modernity reflect the culmination of a number of turn of the century scientific discourses. The authority and power of the mind and visual faculties was reinforced in the late-Qing by the discourse of anatomy, and the X-ray and radiograph, which offered a rationality by which the body was revealed to be a machine-like assemblage of systems. One scene in which the body’s minimal differentiation from a machine is most critically brought to light is Baoyu’s “interaction” with an automaton in the form of a boy, soon after he enters the Realm. Lao Shaonian explains that it is a form of phonograph and clock, which is able to accurately simulate the human voice. This is thanks to it having an exact replica of human physiognomy of the lungs and voice box (of the kind made possible by Hobson’s Treatise on Anatomy, which was a popular scientific text at the time). Such an assertion is indicative of the modern sense that bodies are modular and mechanical, and furthermore that the organic and inorganic boundary can be superseded at will.105 It also reminds the reader that, in the Realm of Modernity, being guided by the body is akin to indulging the needs of a clock rather than simply using it to tell the time.

104 XSTJ, p. 313. This is reminiscent of Guan Yun’s 1905 argument that civilised countries only become more civilised and barbaric countries can only become more barbaric. Guan Yun 观云 (pseud.), “Pingdengshuo yu Zhongguo jiu lunli zhi chongtu 平等说与中国旧伦理冲突,” in Zhang Dan 张枏 and Wang Renzhi 王忍之 (eds.), Xinhai geming qian shinian qian shilun xuanji 辛亥革命前十年前时论选集, vol. 2, Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1963, pp. 21-28.

105 Descartes believed that there was no difference between animals and automata for instance.
In chapter 36 the discussion between Baoyu and Lao Shaonian turns briefly to the question of shengse guoma (referred to here as “vice”, yinfeng 淫风), and its existence in the Realm of Modernity. When asked about theatre, Lao Shaonian confides that not only is there no theatre, the character for “actor” (ling 伶) has been removed from the lexicon. His explanation takes the form of a tortured exclamation - “who would be willing to cover themselves in makeup like this!” (shei kenhouzhe lianpi qu ban zhege 谁肯厚着脸皮去扮这个) - that speaks to the concern over the body’s capacity to engender a subjective fluidity through disguise and transformation. When Baoyu asks about the continued existence of prostitution and courtesanry, Lao Shaonian becomes even further agitated, and states once again that the dictionaries in the Realm don’t even have the characters (chang 娼, ji 妓, piao 娼) related to such activity. Clearly flustered, he goes on to offer a long and unprompted diatribe on the debased sexual practices of a “certain other country that considers itself civilised” (yige ziming wenming de guo 一个自命文明的国). Lao Shaonian proceeds to loosely describe a harem, where:

twenty or thirty women enter, wearing not even a stitch, bare, naked, and proceed to writhe around on the ground embracing one another and contorting themselves into innumerable strange and ugly shapes [i.e. the “beast with the many backs”].

This apparently all goes on while customers watch these contortions through special spy-holes. Lao Shaonian’s juxtaposition of the impotent male voyeur (all eyes and mind) with the naked and unavoidably embodied women is a bizarre break in the façade of civility, a moment of almost clichéd release from libidinal repression.

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106 XTSJ, p. 290.
107 Ibid.
clothed in the guise of puritan disapproval. The need to include three different variations on their nakedness (visibugua 一丝不挂, chishen 赤身, luoti 裸体) is for instance striking in its unveiling of the metonymy between the depiction of voyeurism and the voyeuristic urges underlying the telling of the story. In final moment of dark humour, the subsequent shocked interjection of Gao Yutian (practically the only female character in the entire novel) reminds us that Lao Shaonian has let loose this tale of male repressive sexual objectification in front of a young woman.

The systemic libidinal repression of the Realm of Modernity necessitates that there eventually be a return of the repressed, and Lao Shaonian’s outburst is a telling moment in which his evident desire to participate in the harem struggles with his own societally-induced sexual asceticism. In doing so he also raises the subconscious presence of voyeurism in the minds of the population of the Realm, and the indeterminacy between the “degraded” voyeurs hiding behind their peepholes and the Realm of Modernity’s own panopticon of medical surveillance, which itself extended down to the level of the skin, and beyond.108 In his critical confusion of voyeurism (the “soft gaze”) and surveillance (the “hard gaze”), and juxtaposition of sexual repression and ocularcentrism, Lao Shaonian is an archetype of the modern subject.

Much like Baoyu’s denial of all physical experience in the first half of the novel, the intensity with which all libidinal energy is repressed in the Realm of Modernity ensures that its inevitable release or indulgence is ludicrous in its hypocrisy. The same can be said for the attempt to eliminate all superstition (there are no temples or churches in the Realm),109 which resurfaces when Dongfang De begins to compare himself to the immortals.110 This secular religiosity is picked up on by Baoyu, who notes puckishly that his whole programme of eliminating death sounds vaguely Buddhist.

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108 Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 15-16.
109 XSTJ, p. 225
110 The death of all superstition fits strangely with Wu Jianren’s defence of such superstition in many contexts as we discussed above. One such example being the extended introduction to Qingbian 情变 (Passion Transformed, 1910).
The Realm of Modernity is suggestive of the notion that perceptions of the body and mind are a cultural construct rather than an objective truth or biological given. John Hay, in looking at depictions of the body in *The Golden Lotus* has argued that bodies are “never a whole object” in 17th century fiction.\(^{111}\) This is a characterisation which also has some validity in the case of *New Story of the Stone*, albeit for different reasons. In the Realm of Modernity, the body does not have an a priori claim to existence, but is brought into being at the intersection of various disciplinary, medical and surveillance practices. The guts only exist to be sterilised and the reproductive organs to be quieted. Only the eyes and the brain appear to have an objective reality, and rather than being medically repressed they are augmented through various technological interventions. This augmentation of the mind can itself bring aspects of the body into contingent being, as in the case of the nose and its privileged access to the brain. It is repeated by both Dongfang De and Dongfang Fa 东方法 that “powdered intelligence” is ingested through the nose, because “the nostrils are directly connected to the brain” (*biqiao tongnao* 鼻窍通脑),\(^{112}\) transforming them from redundancy in the useless act of smelling, to crucial centrality in the promise of access to the brain-pan.\(^{113}\) The comparatively neglected mouth only promises access to the equally redundant digestive tract.

Baoyu’s eventual meeting with Dongfang Wenming doesn’t come until the very end of the novel. During their conversation, the autocrat notes that “when we set eyes on another person, what we wish most is to be able to tell true from false” (*na yanjing kanren, zuixiao bianbie zhenjia* 拿眼睛看人，最要辨别真假).\(^{114}\) On one level of referentialism to the hypotext this foreshadows the immanent revelation that this is in fact Zhen Baoyu 真宝玉, Jia Baoyu’s twin brother from *Dream of the Red Chamber*. On another level it inculcates the reader into an awareness of *New Story of

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112 XSTJ, p. 274. This is repeated again on p. 313.
113 The role of the brain as subject of medical intervention on behalf of invasive medical regimes is mirrored in *Nuwa shi* 女娲石, where, as Jing Tsu puts it, “the infusion of new knowledge takes on a specific form of transmission, targeting the brain as an appropriate site of surgical remedy;” “Female assassins,” p. 180.
114 XSTJ, p. 311.
the Stone’s continuation of the central critical motif of Red Chamber, the dialectics of truth and falsity.¹¹⁵ The reoccurrence of this motif in Red Chamber reflects obliquely on New Story’s own concerns with body and mind. The most infamous scene in which it is raised brings that involving “The Precious Mirror of Love” (fengyue baojian 风月宝鉴), which Jia Rui 贾瑞 is instructed not to consult the front of, but which he does anyway, ending up dead in a semen-filled bed. Jia Rui’s fate is borne of his inability to distinguish between his true object of lust, Wang Xifeng 王熙凤, and her false representation in the mirror, with only his eyes as guide (mirrors presenting a world reduced only to the visual sense). Less commonly cited is a later and more quotidian scene that offers a counterpoint to ocularcentrism in the critical faculties of the entire sensorium:

We hobnob with wood all day long; when tired, we sleep on wooden pillows; when exhausted we rest on wooden stools; and in the time of famine we even eat the bark of trees. Seeing it day by day; hearing it day by day; and talking about it day by day – that’s why I can tell apart good wood from bad and genuine from false.¹¹⁶

The body’s role here in inducing a truth that is discretionary, subjective and phronetic stands in contrast to the search for absolute and empirical truths and denigration of the body which animates the scientific regime of the Realm of Modernity (raising the awareness that the Realm’s true endeavour is not distinguishing truth from falsity so much as acceptable truth from unacceptable truth). The Realm of Modernity is constructed on the ideological foundations to which Baoyu was inculcated after his arrival, there is nothing which cannot be known, no truth which cannot be disentangled from falsehood with the proper application of ocular and scientific techniques. The irony being however that Jia Baoyu, emblematic of the rational

¹¹⁵ Most famously, the inscription on the stone archway that leads to the Realm of the Immortals, recounted in chapter 5 of Red Chamber reads, “truth becomes fiction when the fiction’s true; real becomes not real when the unreal’s real;” Ying Wang, “The Supernatural as the Author’s Sphere: Jinghua Yuan’s Reprise of the Rhetorical Strategies of Honglou Meng,” p. 134.

mind, is unable to recognise his own twin brother in Dongfang Wenming/Zhen Baoyu, so denuded is he in his relationship to his intuitive senses.

The above commentary from *Red Chamber* recalls those on embodied truth from the Zhuangzi 庄子, such as that Wheelwright Pian, whose ability was “something you sense in your hand and feel with your heart,” or that of Butcher Ding, whose skill in his vocation was so consummate as to be without thought.

The dualism between objective and subjective truth embodied in these parables is reiterated in another scene from *New Story*, and one which also appropriates Zhuangtian imagery. In chapter 25, Lao Shaonian reveals that one of the principal uses of the flying car is for “sky hunting fun” (*kongzhong da liewan* 空中打猎顽). This revelation prompts Baoyu to ask, reasonably, that if the nature of food has changed so much, what is the point in still hunting? To this, Lao Shaonian reiterates the association of hunting with fun, stating that, “It doesn’t have to be for the purposes of eating, sky hunting is nothing more than a bit of fun” (*hebi yiding yao chi, women da kongzhonglie, buguo shi wanyi er ba le* 何必一定要吃，我们打空中猎，不过是玩意儿罢了), adding that the quarry is in fact not food but scientific specimens.\(^{117}\) This is the only direct reference to leisure and fun in the Realm, and one which is conspicuously intertwined with empirical knowledge and the domination and cataloguing of bodies.\(^{118}\)

The following chapters depict Baoyu and Lao Shaonian leaving the urban sprawl of the Realm of Modernity, and engaging in a series of Jules Verne-esque sea and sky-based hunting trips around the world (Africa, the sea floor, the South Pole). Again the sensory aspect of exploration that was so central to the construction of Shanghai is negated. Physical movement has been replaced with the vicarious movement of the “hunting craft” (*lieche* 猎车) and the later submarine. The crew

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\(^{117}\) XSTJ, p. 199.

\(^{118}\) Ibid.

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almost never leaves these vehicles, and they recall Barthes’ comments that the spaceship and submarine in Verne-inspired fiction function as an allegory for the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. The sense that world exists at an objectal level, separated by the impenetrability of the egoistic subject is palpable in instances where the various creatures are captured and killed, shot with guns and “rays” from afar and principally viewed through the one-way glass walls of the crafts, as well as through a series of different lenses that emphasise not only distance and two-dimensionality, but also the inherent commerce of sight and its analogousness to the commerce of hunting (the goal isn’t so much fun as status it is revealed).  

Using the hunting craft the team undertakes to hunt apocryphal zooalia from Chinese antiquity – including the sea-loach (haiqyuy 海鳅鱼) from the Shuijing 水经 (The Classic of the Water), and mer-people (yuren 渔人) recounted in the Shanhai jing 山海经 (The Classic of Mountains and Seas). These episodes might initially be dismissed as little more than adventure novel chicanery but for being protracted and shockingly callous in their violence (such as when the crew inadvertently kills dozens of “ice minks” and chooses to make coats from them). In this, the novel again draws a sanguinary contrast between modernity and antiquity, recalling the mytho-zoological impetus of The Classic of Mountains and Seas but, in contrast to its passive descriptive cataloguing, in the Realm the demand of science is for the acquisition of specimens, and the absolute and empirical truths that they confer.

In one protracted episode, the crew encounter a massive bird which attacks their ship and then flies away. What ensues is a two-day chase across the globe, ending in the deserts of Africa, during which time the bird is repeatedly shot without being killed, before it eventually succumbs to a poison-coated (named “buren 不仁” poison) bullet. The adventure ends with the corpse being brought to a scientific

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119 Including “distance lenses” (yuanjing 远镜, otherwise known as “thousand-mile lenses” (qianlijing 千里镜), “penetrating-water lenses” (toushuijing 透水镜), “penetrating-metal lenses” (touqinjing 透金镜), “astronomical lenses” (tianwenjing 天文镜), “clarifying lenses” (zhumingjing 助明镜) and super-powered microscopes.

120 Jones has discussed the ice minks in some detail; Developmental Fairy Tales, p. 60.
research facility, where it is revealed to be a member of the same species as the massive “Peng” bird that opens the first of the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*.

[Lao Shaonian] said, “although I captured this, I still don’t know what type of bird it is.” Duo Jianshi replied, “This is the Peng that Master Zhuang talked about. It’s a transformed Kun fish. If you don’t believe me, just look at its talons, they still have scales. In this ornithology institute, we are lacking this [specimen].”

又道：“虽然猎了来，却还不知他叫什么鸟。”多见士道：“这就是庄子说的鹏了。不信，但见脚爪上，还带着鳞甲呢。我这里飞禽部里，就少了这个。”

The continued existence of this mythical creature in the Realm of Modernity is initially a case for raised eyebrows, as is the oblique reference to Master Zhuang’s anti-rationalist, anti-authoritarian epistemology. (“There must first be a True Man before there can be true knowledge” seems for instance to contradict much of what the Realm of Modernity stands for.) As Geling Shang puts it, “Zhuangzi could have been the first Chinese ‘deconstructionist’ in terms of his challenge to metaphysics, language, logic, morality, self, and anything authoritarian and hierarchically categorical.”

The slow and bloody nature of this death reveals the Peng to be not only mortal but also undeniably corporeal, and the moment in which Baoyu and the crew incite it to bleed results in a redoubled effort to kill it. However, the irony of the episode crystallises not around the Peng’s death so much as its subsequent transformation into a specimen, and its internment in a facility for the study of total knowledge. The Peng is described as being treated with “medicinal liquid” (yaoshui

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121 It is clear at various junctures that Wu interprets the *Zhuangzi* as referring to a species of some kind when it makes reference to the Peng and the Kun.

122 XST], p. 219.


126 Baoyu’s experiences in the Realm of Modernity reveal a prescient rendering of first world tertiary cities under neoliberalism. While labour and industry have been outsourced to the
and propped up in an “Institute of Aviary Zoology” (*Feiqin yuan* 飛禽院) where it is subjected to the weighing and measuring of its various body parts.\(^{127}\) Institutes of preservation (like museums of natural history)\(^ {128}\) function to further the modern dualism of self and other, and that the Peng - the archetypal image of a non-western philosophy of critical indeterminacy between the two - is depicted as being permanently preserved in one is one of the archetypal “grotesque fantasy” images of the era. The fate of the Peng again appears as a violent culmination of Lao Shaonian’s early words of explanation to Baoyu - that this is a world where all knowledge is absolute, and nothing is not understandable, a commitment apparently written in blood.

Again the body here is constructed at the intersection of military technology and the various desires for classification and objective knowledge. The Peng’s status as “specimen” reminds the reader that all bodies are specimens in the Realm of Modernity. For Baoyu and his crew, the ontological “unknowableness” of the Peng is not to be meditated upon, it only implies its need to be captured and catalogued, and its evasion of this only heightens the modern desire for possession and mastery, ending inevitably in its death. As Horkheimer notes of modern reason, “all things in nature become identical with the phenomena that that they present when submitted to the practices of our laboratories,”\(^ {129}\) in this case, the Peng is killed only so that it can be weighed and measured, after which it is essentially redundant, a casual brutality that speaks to what Lefebvre would note about modernity in general, that it is “tinged with nihilism.”\(^ {130}\)

The Peng is ontologically representative of “wandering in absolute freedom” (*xiaoyao you* 遊逸遊), and it is symbolic that this absolute freedom is here curtailed by the power of technology and the desire for equally absolute knowledge of the developing world, the Realm is constituted entirely of institutes of higher learning and research, massive conference centres and the military-industrial complex.

\(^{127}\) XSTJ, p. 224.

\(^{128}\) Jones compares the Institute to the British Museum, and the hunting and taxonomy which brings us there makes this reading seem valid; *Developmental Fairy Tales*, p. 32.


world. The two cannot co-exist. Consider Zhuangzi’s musings on the nature of the Peng at the outset of the Inner Chapters:

“Is the sky really so azure? Or is this just a limitlessness accorded by distance? When [the Peng] looks down, it must be the same.”

The Peng’s irreconcilable perspectival distance from the people on the ground is the first rift in the holistic nature of reality, the genesis of Zhuangzi’s epistemology. It’s massiveness and strength reveal the fallacy of the absolute subject capable of collapsing the universal and the particular. As Yearley puts it, “no fully objective way exists to decide which of the conflicting perspectives is correct because any decision is bound to reflect a perspective.” That Baoyu is able to merely fly up to the Peng and kill it speaks to modernity’s predisposition toward disenchantment and monologism. Technological development, in the form of submersible and the flying car, allows modern culture to transgress the philosophical dualities and boundaries of antiquity.

The hunting of apocraphilia functions as a furthering of the “debunking” of traditional belief systems in the Realm of Modernity. Among these, only Confucianism is considered valid, and Daoism in particular comes under scrutiny. At the end of chapter 28 for instance, Lao Shaonian states that China only ever had one true teacher, Confucius. He goes on to describe the Daoist spiritual leader

131 Chapter 2 of the Inner Chapters of Zhuangzi, Qiwu lun 齐物论 (“Seeing all things as equal”) is a refining of this point.
133 The western equivalent might be if Verne had employed Captain Nemo and the nautilus to go spelunking in Plato’s cave, or to explore another parable of Master Zhuang, attaching electrodes to him and his butterfly friend to find out conclusively who was dreaming whom.
134 Just to twist the knife further we learn the Institute of Aviary Zoology holds a prized collection of “first editions” of Confucius’ works. This seems to me to be a reference to the realising of Kang Youwei’s goal to make Confucianism the state religion of China. There is a broad undercurrent of anti-Confucian sentiment in Wu Jianren’s writing, particularly his admiration for figures like Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797). This will be discussed in greater detail in the epilogue.
Zhang Daoling 张道陵 as a “magician” (fangshu jia 方术家). This kind of statement, and the violent murder of the Peng, is particularly remarkable considering Wu Jianren’s own relationship to Master Zhuang. His chosen name, Jianren 跤人 (“the calloused one”), was a reflection of his desire to show the determination in Master Zhuang’s anecdote, that “during the stages of the hundred days, the soles of my feet became quite callous, but I did not dare to stop and rest” (baishê chòngjiàn èr bugàn xi 百舍重趼而不敢息, which contains the same jian 跤 character).

This wasn’t the only fictional work from this period to depict the hunting of the Peng for the purposes of scientific cataloguing. In Nüwa shi 女娲石 (Stone of the Goddess Nüwa, 1904), (a novel with a number of interesting connections to New Story of the Stone), the protagonist Jin Yaose demonstrates her dedication to science by attempting to kill the Peng. Coming across the massive creature while flying on an “electric horse” she reasons that attacking it will be worthwhile because, “on the one hand, I can observe the efficacy of this gun, and on the other, if I shoot down this bird, I will be doing a service to the zoological researchers of my country” (yilai kankan zhe shouqiang de shili, erlai jixia zheniao, keweिल wo wuxia bowuxuejia yizhu 一来看看这手枪的实力，二来击下这鸟，可为我国博物学家一助). Again scientific regimes of knowledge acquisition and military technology are the symbolic agents of rationalist disenchantment through unchecked violence. Here however, the Peng retaliates, chasing Jin Yaose down and forcing her out of sky and into a cave where she crashes and passes out. Wu Jianren sounds no such optimistic note for the traditions of China in modernity.

4. Conclusions

135 XSTJ(A), p. 223.
137 Beginning with both novel’s references to Nüwa. Nüwa Shi also features non-food elixirs that prevent organ damage; Jing Tsu, “Female assassins,” p. 183.
138 Haitian duxiaozhi 海天独啸志, Nüwa shi 女娲石, in Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi 中国近代小说大系, vol. 25, Nanchang: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe, 1991, p. 492. Emphasis added. The niao/diao duality also raises the possibility of this as a scene in which there is the killing of an oversized penis.
We began this chapter talking about the irreconcilable dualities of the Shanghai concessions at the turn of the century, between rectilinear jewel of a modern and “mindful” China, and a post-morality Gomorrah of embodied and commercial self-expenditure. The discussion followed considered how this duality was interpreted by Wu Jianren via an exaggerated splitting of the two into respective grotesque versions of the themselves.

It goes without saying that New Story of the Stone should be probably considered one of the richest and most thematically and aesthetically complex novels of the late-Qing, and at the very least among Wu Jianren’s finest novels. It is a critique of modernity's desire for absolute and observational truths expressed via a prose style that traffics, appropriately, in ambiguity, reflexivity and obscurantism.

New Story of the Stone suggests an awareness that modernity is, despite its secular and scientistic grounding, a crisis of spiritual and theological foundations. Dongfang De’s comparing of the people of the Realm of Modernity to immortals conforms to a strain of ascensionist utopian imagery which eclipses the transcendental realm of thought only to then reconstruct an ersatz transcendence out of the conditions of immanence. The Peng incident reinforces this, a violent act of retribution against the memory of a cosmological order which complicates the new religion of cognitive mastery upon which this transcendence is built.

In this, the Realm of Modernity is an example of the case that certain theorists have made for the consanguinity between modernity and Gnosticism. As Eric Voeglin puts it, “the murder of God is the very essence of the Gnostic recreation of the order of being.”139 The body too stands at the centre of a gnostic worldview, which juxtaposes its divine imagery with the “prison of flesh,” which ties the self inescapably to the non-transcendental.140 As Žižek puts it, in “dualist-Gnostic beliefs... sexuality and the entire bodily domain of generation/corruption are perceived as a hated prison, to be overcome by the scientific construction of a new,

ethereal, and desexualised immortal body.”141 This strikes an obvious chord with New Story of the Stone, in which the attacks on the body, amounting to a form of secular sacrifice, reveal modernity to be a series of quasi-religious dogmas and catechisms. In the end of death, birth, suffering and pleasure, Wu Jianren envisages the ultimate culmination of enlightenment modernity not as a form of utopia, but rather as a form of secular heaven. Appropriately to this, the Realm of Modernity is not presented as the future of Chinese society, but rather a hidden domain, and one which is denied to the un-wenming majority (who, it is noted, can “only wait for death,” zhiyou dai qi zisi 只有待其自死).142

It is in Wu Jianren’s most readily-dismissed work that he makes his most explicit and personal recanting of this precept of modernity. In “Haiwo hunling ji 还我魂灵记” (“The Restoring of my Mind,” 1905), written as advertising for a local businessman’s brain tonic, he turns to the central question of this chapter, the relationship between the body and the mind. (NB - hunling 魂灵 is typically translated as “soul,” although in its use of hun 魂 rather than po 鬼, it refers to a form of soul which is little distinguishable from the mind; furthermore, considering that this was an advertising for a brain tonic I have chosen to translate hunling as “mind” rather than “soul” in this context).143 In it, he states unequivocally that the mind is bound to the physical, and the “corporeal body” (quqiao 躯壳, rather than the scientific body or shenti 身体) as it relates to the spirit cannot be transcended:

If the mind lives on and the body perishes, one may live on in spite of death, if the body lives and the mind dies, one may still live but be as good as dead. This, at least, is what I believe, although some will probably disagree. There are many theories on the nature of the mind... I find them all implausible... because all of them suggest that [the mind] is something separate, beyond my corporeal self. I possess a body and a mind, and my “selfhood” unites the two, one

142 XSTJ, p. 176.
143 See Kong Yingda 孔颖达 (574-648), who stated that “[hun] implies that a man’s mind and comprehension improve and gradually he is able to grasp [some things];” Zhuo Xinping, “Theories of Religion in Contemporary China,” in Lü Daji and Gong Xuezeng (eds.), Marxism and Religion, Leiden: Brill, 2014, p. 68. Luo Hui summarises the duality succinctly as follows: “Classical texts, such as Liji 禮記, Yijing 易經, Zuozhuan 左傳, and Huainanzi 淮南子, suggest that a person is born with a hun 魂 (mental soul) and a po 鬼 (bodily soul);” Luo Hui “The Ghost of Liaozhai: Pu Songling’s Ghostlore and Its History of Reception,” PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2009, p. 33.
cannot exist without the other.\textsuperscript{144}

Written at almost the same time as he began writing \textit{New Story of the Stone}, the subsumed thematic of the novel takes on a new explicitness in this article. Relating specifically to the precepts of the Realm of Modernity, Wu goes on to argue for instance that death cannot be transcended, and the mind cannot be subjected to observation.

What is particularly interesting is that immediately after what reads as a very personal account of his interpretation of the mind-body dualism, the article uses all of this as an entry point for the schilling of a brain tonic.\textsuperscript{145} This reflects something intrinsic to tabloid authors in the late-Qing, who were not so much caught between art and commerce, as openly embracing of their collaborative potential.

Des Forges argues that regular serialisation enforced a distinctive aesthetic of “simultaneity, fragmentation and excess” in serialised tabloid fiction.\textsuperscript{146} This same troika is also a reflection of the benighted experience of the body at the turn of the century. The body’s dispersal across roles as both sensory organ and container for the monadic mind is for instance a form of inescapable simultaneity (i.e. dualism). As we have already discussed, anatomical discourses and practices rendered the body as lacking in transcendental qualities, it was instead \textit{modular}, and \textit{fragmented}. Des


\textsuperscript{145} Wu recounts how ten years of overwork had left him exhausted, before his friend and business magnate Huang Chujū 黄楚玖 recommends his own brain tonic, which miraculously restores his mind to him. The choice to promote this product was evidently not well-looked upon at the time. Zhou Guisheng’s 周桂笙 eulogy for Wu Jianren, published in 1914, spends an inordinate amount of time defending him for the article, stating that he spent the 500 pieces of gold he was paid on his ailing mother; Zhou Guisheng 周桂笙, “Tongbei huiyi lu 同辈回忆录,” in Wei Shaochang (ed.) \textit{Wu Jianren yanjū zíliao}, p. 17. Another article of Wu’s, “Shipin xiaoshi 食品小识” (“A short guide to food items,” 1905) was paid for by a local manufacturer of edible birds’ nests; Hai Feng 海风 (ed.), \textit{Wu Jianren quànjí}, vol. 10, pp. 319-321.

\textsuperscript{146} Des Forges, “Building Shanghai,” pp. 781-810.
Forges refers to the quasi-medical sense that serialised texts necessarily “cut up” and subsequently “sutured” together storylines, and a sense that this devalued them as works of art (much as dissection of the body was itself a transgression in Chinese culture). The regular cycle of production raises the body’s growing subordination to mechanical rhythms, and yet the daily nature of serialisation and the regular diurnal rhythm of consumption and pulping of the newspaper itself can be understood as an allegory for the cycle of consumption and defecation of the human body. Des Forges’ perceptive comment that readers of serialised fiction were caught between desires for completion and inexhaustible continuation has obvious wider sexual allegories, and the relative cheapness and disposable nature of the daily newspaper (in comparison to the lithograph novel) reflects the moral “cheapness” and disposable nature of the libidinal economy.

In this sense, bodies were unconsciously imbricated into commercial fiction at this time. New Story is an ideal case study in this regard, as it is transposed from tabloid newspaper serialisation to lithographed book at the mid-point, so too the somatic and libidinal energies also dissipate. As Des Forges notes,

The introduction of instalment publication was not a mere cause, with predictable effects that make intuitive sense, but, rather, an occasion for a fundamental rethinking of novel writing, and aesthetic challenge that demanded specifically aesthetic responses, and an opportunity for formal concerns to affect their social context.147

While the lithographed book promised an escape from the imposition of the serialised form over the purity of the textual experience, so too the Realm of Modernity depicts a world in which the body’s uncouth agency over this mind has been all-but eliminated. It would be possible to read this as an example of technological causality, but I, like Des Forges argues in the aggregate, see it as an aesthetic response to changing materialities which is “not so much mechanistic as it is dialectic.”

147 Ibid., p. 805.
CHAPTER THREE

Oratory, authority and the playful audience

How am I to know when the sleeping tiger of our great nation will awake, when the “sick man” will recover? And so I take ink and paper as my stage, and act out the living drama of land and sea.1

吾不知大陆睡狮其梦境何日觉，举世病夫厥竟何日瘳也？吾于是借楮墨为舞台，演瀛寰之活剧。

“The stage” (wutai 舞台) took on both a greater prominence and polysemy in late-Qing society. The circulation of the “new stage” (xin wutai 新舞台), the “twentieth-century stage” (ershi shiji wutai 二十世纪舞台), “the new-style stage” (xinshi wutai 新式舞台), the “great stage” (da wutai 大舞台) and the “great stage of modernity” (wenming da wutai 文明大舞台), all invoked the western association of the stage with public self-fashioning and reproduction.2 The great stage of this era was the newly-globalised world itself, upon which the political elite desired to be an actor through what Karl has called the “staging” of the China itself in the twentieth century.3 But while the nation was staging itself internationally, reformers were also

2 The dawutai 大舞台 and xinwutai 新舞台 concepts also infiltrated fiction at this time. Representative works include, Baopi 报朴, Xinwutai hongueji 新舞台鸿经, (Tracks of the Snowgoose on the New Stage, 1907), discussed later in this chapter; Wu Xiaolu 吴小鲁 (Xiao Lu 嘎庐 or Chen Xiaolu 陈啸庐), Zhongwai sanbainian dawutai 中外三百年大舞台 (Three Hundred Years of the Great Stage of Foreign Relations [also published under the name Dawutai 大舞台], 1906); Shi Changyu 石昌渝 (ed.), Zhongguo gudai xiaohuo zongmu 中国古代小说总目, vol. 2, Taiyuan: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004, p. 532. In Xinfengshen zhuang 新封神传 (The New Investiture of the Gods, 1906) by Da Lu 大陆, the character of Zhu Bajie 猪八戒 from Journey to the West, now a modern westernised intellectual and pig-about-town, repeatedly refers to Shanghai as the “dawutai.”
3 Rebecca E. Karl, Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, Duke University Press, 2002. The most representative source in terms of the increasing consanguinity between national and theatrical reform was the short-lived periodical Ersi shiji da wutai 二十世纪大舞台 (The Great Twentieth Century Stage, 1904). This was China’s first newspaper dedicated to theatrical news and information, the publication of extracts from new plays and novels, it acted as a bridge between the arenas of rationalist and scientific national reform and the theatre. The first issue vowed to “reform negative habits, open people’s minds, advocate for nationalism and call for nationalist thought”
enacting a parallel transformation of national stagecraft, tying the nation’s performance stages to its taking of the "world stage." The centrality of the stage as both metaphysical object of desire and practical object of reform can be attributed in part to the increasing awareness of it as a parallel arena of self-presentation and re-invention, alongside the page, for a generation of public intellectuals like Liang Qichao and Cai Yuanpei (both of whom were prominent public speakers and advocates of theatre reform).

Public oratory (yanshuo 演说), “in the sense of an official or other figure addressing an indoor or outdoor crowd, was exceedingly rare” throughout Chinese antiquity and up until the turn of the century. This changed rapidly in the final decade of the Qing Dynasty however, in particular amongst exiled figures in Japan

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4 The history of stage reform from this period, alighting on such central figures as Wang Xiaoyi 汪笑侬, Pan Yueqiao 潘月樵, and the "Xia Brothers" Xia Yuexian 夏月仙 and Xia Yuerun 夏月润, is well covered in Fang Ping 方平 Wanqing Shanghai de gonggong lingju (1895-1911) 午清上海的公共領域(1895-1911), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2007, p. 274.

One of the earliest proponents of theatre reform was Ou Quijia 欧渠甲 (pseud. Wu Yasheng 无涯生), whose article "Guanxi ji 观戏记," was admired by Liang Qichao and republished in Qingyi bao 清艺报 (issue 25) in 1902. Both advocated for a form of theatre that aroused nationalist sentiments and avoided lewd and lascivious matters. See Xia Xiaohong 夏晓虹, "Liang Qichao qulun yu juzuo," pp. 15-17. For other voices in theatre reform see the series of articles published in Jingzhong ribao 警钟日报 between May 30 and June 1 1904, entitled “Yanxi gailang zhi jihua 演戏改良之计画.” Zhong Xinzi's 钟欣志 study of the first performances of Uncle Tom’s Cabin in China is an interesting look at the idealised new theatre in action; "Wanqing 'Shijie juchang' de lilun yu shijian yiyi xiaoartshuo 'Hienu nutianlu' de gaibian yanchu weili 晚清 ‘世界剧场’的理论与实践-以小说 ‘黑奴吁天录’ 的改编演出为例," Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊, 74 (2011), pp. 83-131.

like Liang, as well as Wang Jingwei 汪精卫 and the anti-monarchical anarchist Qiu Jin 秋瑾, who each used public speaking as a medium.

Fig. 2.1. Depiction of a yanshuo event in Tuhua ribao

Fig. 2.2. Cartoon in Tuha Ribao

The above two images from the Shanghai periodical Tuhua ribao 图画日报 (Illustrated Daily, 1909-1910) demonstrate that public speaking was viewed as more than a neutral instrument, but harboured preeminent associations with modernity and rationalism. The text in Fig. 2.1. states that, “the oratorical meetings of the westerners are the easiest way to open minds and instil modernity” (xiren yanshuo zhi ju zuiyi kaitong zhishi, guanshu wenming 西人演说之举最易开通知识, 灌输文明). Comments like this echoed Liang Qichao’s own earlier characterisation of public speaking (alongside schools and newspapers) as one of the three principal methods in the pursuit of “wenming puji 文明普及” (“universal modernity”). The image depicts a public speaking event that features an audience which is not only

intersex, but also attentive and ordered, focused entirely on the speaker (and no longer a “sheet of loose sand”). The second image, in Fig. 2.2, - an allegorical cartoon from the “General store of new knowledge” (新知识之杂货店 - depicts the “public speaker” (演说家) as symbolically preying on the high-ranking officials of the Qing court. The subtext again is one of modernity in the guise of public speaking preying on social atavism. Both images reflect on a central tendency in modern thought, to, as McLuhan famously put it, believe that “the medium is the message.”

The emergence of the stage and the enlightened orator as the pre-eminent metaphors for nationalist modernity at the turn of the century raises the inevitable question of who was watching and how they were acting. In this chapter we will consider the theme of “oratory and audience” as it traverses several works of speculative fiction, both tabloid and “reformist” in orientation. In considering the continuities and discontinuities between these two agendas, and between storytelling and modern oratorical contexts, we will come to see that “演说” could range from the institutionalised historical lecture to the comparatively turbulent confines of the public forum. The fictional representation of lectures and public fora offer an insight into diverging cultures of audience-ness which variously celebrated or derogated (and in both cases exaggerated) the rich tradition of unruliness and fun among audience members in Chinese performance culture.

This chapter will examine Liang Qichao’s Xin Zhongguo weilai ji 新中国未来记 (The Future of New China, 1902), from the perspective of the depictions of

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8 Chen Pingyuan’s overview of the history of public speaking from the late Qing to May Fourth is essential reading on this topic. Yet while demonstrating that public speaking was closely implicated in the larger reformist culture of societal renewal in the late-Qing, Chen offers little in the way of a counter-narrative which questioned this positivity, or any discussion of audiences; Chen Pingyuan 陈平原. “Yousheng de Zhongguo: ‘yanshuo’ yu jindai Zhongguo wenzhang biange 有声的中国: ‘演说’ 与近代中国文章变革,” in Wang Fansen 王汎森 et al. (eds.), Zhongguo jindai sixiang shi de zhanxing shidai 中国近代思想史的转型时代, Taipei: Lianjin chuban, 2007, pp. 383-428. See also Chen Pingyuan, “Yanshuo xianchang’dé fuyuan yu chanshi: ‘xian dai xue che yanshuo xianchang’ zongxu ‘演说现场’的复原于阐释：‘现代学者演说现场’丛书总序,” Xian dai Zhongguo 现代中国, 7, (2006), pp 192-196, and the special collection edited by Chen in the same edition, including work on the public speaking of Liang Qichao, Cai Yuanpei and Zhang Taiyan.
Oratory and audience which bookended it. While it opens with an almost self-parodic scene in which author and novel are clothed in authority toward the reader via the installation of the narrator as the unassailable authority figure of the modern lecturer, it closes with a denigration of the contemporary culture of public fora, bemoaning in particular the unruly audience. Over the antecedent decade, various works of tabloid speculative fiction responded to both aspects of this, mockingly uncovering the charlatans hiding behind Liang’s enlightened public speaker, while celebrating the grotesque inversion of authority on the part of the unruly and prosecutorial audience which he denigrated. In this they also drew on the changes that were taking place in urban societies like Shanghai, where the reformist diminution of the urban traditions of democratic “small stage” culture and the rise of new and modern mega-theatres were impinging on the common people’s access to the stage, and their relationship to it from the audience.

1. Audiences in transition

The audience to performance throughout Chinese antiquity was viewing and interacting within itself as much as with the performance itself. Goldman has extended this into the late-Qing, characterising the city playhouse, and the audience itself, as “a public space for the expression of sentiment and the locus for interaction and negotiation among peoples of different social backgrounds.”

Audiences were not passive but active, and performance was not only an opportunity to be entertained but also to entertain oneself.

In Chinese culture, the practice of public oratory was largely equated with the performative, blurring the boundaries between oratory and theatre as the two are constructed in the western imaginary. “Storytelling” refers to a constellation of narrative performative acts - pingshu 评书 or pinghua 评花 which narrativises with

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vocal range, humour and simple musical arrangements (on the *pipa* 琵琶 or drums), *tanci* 弹词 (a more musical version), “big drum” storytelling (dagu 大鼓), “clapper operas” (bangziqiang 梆子腔), and various forms of improvised and recited poetry. Storytelling was a prominent part of the entertainment culture of urban life in the Qing Dynasty, and the boundaries between practices (theatre, opera, *zaju* 杂剧, chuanqi zaju 传奇杂剧, *tanci*, and *pingshu/pinghua*) and settings (storytelling halls, theatres, teahouses) were fluid.

The storytelling hall, teahouse and the playhouse were each spaces in which the minimal spatial and conceptual delineation between performer and audience undermined the idealised subject/object dichotomy of modern oratory. In late-Qing Shanghai, new spaces like the *shuyu* 书寓 and *nü shuchang* 女书场 emerged, as something of a combination of the courtesan house and storytelling hall.¹⁰ One account of an incident in one of these *nü shuchang* is worth recounting for its capacity to illustrate the more traditional interaction of orator and audience (and audience and audience) at this time:

There was once a holder of the Imperial *juren* degree, who passed by Shanghai and found himself tasting the night-life [of the city] for the first time. He was adamant that the term “*shuyu*” was completely ridiculous, and let flow an unending stream of mockery [on the matter]. To this, the *nü xiansheng* [“Lady Master”] of the *shuyu* replied angrily: “Because the likes of us cannot cite one line of literature but call ourselves a *shuyu*, you launch into brazenly nitpicking without respite. One might equally ask why we don’t ludicrously call your place of schooling - which hasn’t even the *Rapid Records of the Successive Dynasties of the Outline Mirror* or even one book of the Hundred Schools or the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics* - an academy of Classical Learning? Why don’t you look at yourself, you might find that your sarcastic lips have been misdirected. Give it a rest sir! When the young man heard this, his words came to a sudden stop and he checked himself, before retreating shame-faced. Just as he was leaving the *shuyu*, he heard someone shout loudly, “Please Master, start your storytelling.”"¹¹

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¹⁰ Certain accounts noted there was little that could be called the “[spoken] literary word (*shuci* 书词),” as courtesan-performers preferred clapper operas and singing in accompaniment to *erhuang* melodies; Chen Wuwo, *Lao Shanghai*, p. 48. For depictions of *nü shuchang* in Shanghai in the 1890s, see http://chuansong.me/n/1699062, (last accessed: 8/7/2016).

The heckler is evidently not an unexpected incident, and the performer seems sufficiently well-versed in their management as to dispatch them mid-performance. Furthermore, the audience finds as much entertainment in itself as in the actions taking place on stage, and a wry comment directed toward, or emanating from, off-stage could become the momentary locus of the performance. In fact, the anecdote seems to have been worthy of recounting not because of the bromidic interruption, but thanks to the piercing qualities of the “putdowns” emanating from both stage and audience. The shengse goura experience of the theatre, teahouse and storytelling hall was grounded in this chaotic interaction between the stage and audience, and among the audience itself.

Wu Chenyu 吴琛瑜 has described in detail the culture of audience “feedback” (fankui 反馈) in storytelling (pingtan 评弹 in the local dialect) halls in nearby Suzhou around the same time. As in the above example, a culture of demonstrative dissatisfaction or “nitpicking” (bancuotou 扳错头 in the Wu dialect) was prevalent. Audience members were participatory, and speakers generally “deferred to the audience on all matters” (jiajian shi nenggou buxixiaowen 件件事能够不耻下问). This critical culture was so engrained as to have become a ritualised part of the entire performance. Ritualised acts of feedback included “luocao” (啰嘈), which was the shouting out of disagreement, and “performing divination” (chouqian 抽签), or walking out of the performance. Other audience practices were more supportive, such as that of “luoyu” (落雨) in which the sound

of applause approval was likened to that of rain (applause was permitted at any
time during the performance and at one’s own whim it could be supportive or
sarcastic).\textsuperscript{13} It was even the case that, for young performers, the older members of
the audience could take on the role of the teacher, guiding their artistic maturation
in real time as they were on stage.\textsuperscript{14}

Such an account demonstrates that the audience’s \textit{dialogic} (tanshuo 谈说)
capacity to negotiate meaning exceeded the semantic (cross-interpretation or
“conquering the textual inertia and transforming it”),\textsuperscript{15} and entered into the
physical and rhetorical (interruptions and outbursts). These physical and rhetorical
interjections, although often playful in nature, afforded the audience a capacity for
collective critical engagement and with the capacity to direct and influence a given
performance. In this manner, storytelling culture acutely reflected Gadamer’s
aesthetic hermeneutics of performance, where the “spectator is ‘being-there-present’
(in participation, involvement, unity) rather than ‘being-attentive-to-the-thing’ (in
difference, distance, alienation).”\textsuperscript{16} Gadamer compares this mode of audience
involvement to the playing of a game, and that to have fun is to be critical, and to
be critical is to have fun, jibes closely with the traditional experience of audience-
ness in Chinese culture.

Despite these examples to the contrary, the traditional relationship between
stage and audience was undergoing considerable change during the final years of
the Qing. Goldstein and Fang Ping both note that in theatrical contexts the
traditionally “permeable” relationship between stage and audience was curtailed,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{13} Wu Zhongxi 吳宗鍚, \textit{Pingtan wenhua cidian 评弹文化词典}, Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian
\item \textsuperscript{14} Wu Chenyu, \textit{Suzhou pingtan}, p. 143.
\item \textsuperscript{15} John Miles Foley, \textit{The Singer of Tales in Performance}, Bloomington: Indiana University
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ben Faber, “Ethical Hermeneutics and the Theater: Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice,” in
Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James K. A. Smith, and Bruce Ellis Benson (eds.), \textit{Hermeneutics at the
\end{itemize}
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and the culture of holding conversations, moving about the room, eating, drinking
and generally carousing was replaced with one of dignified attention.\textsuperscript{17}

In the emergent arena of political oratory there was a newfound tension
between performer and audience, as “elites often had reason to try to limit
uncertainty, and citizens often had cause to try to expand the repertoire of response
beyond polite applause.”\textsuperscript{18} The practice of distributing procedural rules to the
audience before oratorical meetings implied a concern for imposing some form of
etiquette on unruly audiences.\textsuperscript{19}

Nonetheless the audience was perhaps the most illustrative context in
which playfulness and the ideology of modernity were intersecting. Take the
account of a Tokyo-based meeting of overseas Chinese reformers whose descent
into chaos is reported (with no small amount of glee) by Zhang Taiyan in 1907:

On October 17\textsuperscript{th}, the members of the Political News Society had a meeting
at the Jin Hui Auditorium and planned to implement a constitution. The
head of the Society was Zhang Zhiyou and he supported Liang Qichao.
Qichao came and there were 200 members and 2000 non-members who
attended the meeting... From the revolutionary party, Zhang Ji, Jin Gang
and Tao Chengzhang all attended. Liang Qichao ascended the podium
with body-guards to his right... Liang Qichao spoke about the National
Assembly and such matters; moreover, he said: “[At present]\textsuperscript{20} the palace
has issued an edict proclaiming that it would immediately establish a
constitution. You should all delight in this.” Before he could finish his
speech, Zhang Ji cursed him in Japanese saying “Bakayaro!” He stood up
and then yelled “hit him.” About four hundred people ran towards the

\textsuperscript{17} See: Fang Ping, \textit{Wanqing Shanghai}, chpt. 4. Joshua Goldstein, "From Teahouse to
Playhouse: Theaters as Social Texts in Early-twentieth-century China," \textit{The Journal of Asian
\textsuperscript{18} Strand, “Citizens in the Audience and at the Podium,” p. 46.
\textsuperscript{19} A \textit{North China Herald} account of a 1903 meeting to condemn Russian imperialism notes
that one of the first steps in the meeting was that, “a set of rules, translated from the
English [Robert’s Rules of Order?], for the governance of public speakers and meetings
were... distributed to the audience,” Esherick and Wasserstrom, “Acting Out Democracy:
Political Theater in Modern China” p. 852.
\textsuperscript{20} Murthy translates this as “today” but it seems certain that Liang is referring to the
September 1, 1906 Imperial Edict, “Yubei fangxing lixian 预备仿行立宪,” Tang Zhijun
汤志钧 (ed.), Zhang Taiyan zhenglun xuanji 章太炎政论选集, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju,
1977, p. 375.
podium. Liang escaped down the stairs. Some people threw slippers, one of which hit Liang in the face."21

Liang Qichao was prescient perhaps, when a few years earlier in 1900, he had described the “great stage” of global competition as one “peered down upon by a gallery of ten thousand ghosts, and eyed covetously by a hundred tigers” (wangui huankan, baihu danshi 万鬼环瞰，白虎耽视), equating audiences with the monstrous and the predatory.22 (In the very first words of the same article he declared that, “In all the world, there is no person more disgusting, lamentable and pernicious than the spectator” tianxia zuï keyan kezeng kebi zhiren, mo guoyu pangguanzhe 天下最可厌可憎可鄙之人，莫过于旁观者).23

Though reformers saw oratory as being able to affect the habits of the lower classes, the enlightening happening through the “oral enlightenment” (koutou qimeng 口头启蒙) was unilateral.24 In Cai Yuanpei’s 蔡元培 (1868-1940) utopian novella Xinnian meng 新年梦 (New Year’s Dream, 1904), the perverting of the “inferior classes” (xiadeng shehui 下等社会) is derived from their own “[access to] so many novels, opera shows, public speaking pulpits and theatres” (xueduo xiaoshuo, changben, yanshuo tan, xiyuan 许多小说，唱本，演说坛，戏院).25 This statement makes an interesting contrast to Cai’s own engagement with both theatre reform and public speaking.26 He personally participated in a number of oratorical events

23 Ibid., p. 444.
26 He was also a prominent translator of lectures on philosophy, such as of a series of lectures by Enryō Inoue (serialised in Yanlaihong congzhao 雁来红丛报 in 1906) and that of a German lecturer named Keppler (published in Xinmin congzhao 新敏丛报 in 1903). Cai’s translation of Inoue was published under the title “Yaoguaixue jiangyi lu 妖怪学讲义录” and is reprinted in, Gao Pingshu 高平叔 (ed.), Cai Yuanpei quanjì 蔡元培全集, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 384-389. For more on his translation of Keppler, see
that took place at public pulpits.\(^{27}\) He spoke at a forum organized by Tang Caichang in 1900 and a forum of soujourners and intellectuals in 1903, both of which were held in Shanghai’s Zhang Gardens (Zhang Yuan), home to Shanghai’s greatest concentration of public pulpits.\(^{28}\)

Baopi 报批 (Wu Jianren) turned his critical attention away from the audience, recognising (correctly) that the “new stage” functioned as a medium by which it was possible to produce an image for consumption, sarcastically imploring his readers:

Since we have leapt on the “new stage,” you must now act as dynamic citizens of a grand nation, and on no account like absurd little swindlers.\(^{29}\)

既然跳到这新舞台上來, 须要做轰轰烈烈的大国民, 切莫做荒荒唐唐的小骗子。

This idealised and ultimately false reproduction was predicated on the modern culture of audience and of “following the lead” (suisheng fuhe 随声附和). Bemoaning the decline of a critical and dialogic quality to audiences, he noted that in modern lecture halls and playhouses (i.e. “new stages”), no matter how poor the performance, no matter what the content of the speech was, audiences were

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\(^{28}\) Zhang Taiyan 因此 recalled that Cai Yuanpei was a participant in a 1900 meeting in his memoirs; Wo zai liushi sui yi qian 我在六十岁以前, Ma Yichu 马夷初 (ed.), Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1983, p. 20. The latter meeting was held in response to Wang Zhichun’s (the Governor of Guangxi) use of the French army to quell a local uprising, and Cai was among a number of speakers including Ma Junwu 马君武 and Wu Jingheng 吴敬恒.

\(^{29}\) Baopi 报批, “Lunkan yueyue xiaoshuo de yichu 论看月月小说的益处,” Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说, 13, p. 4.
politely approving.30 Faced with this, performers could peddle any nonsense, even, he implies, the reformist fallacy that idealised China as a nation of dynamic citizens and not of absurd little swindlers.

In a prefiguring of the argument of this chapter, Wu directly associated this audience culture with reformism in general, and even New Fiction specifically (he makes reference to Liang’s “On the relationship” essay). For Wu, New Fiction and modern lecturing were aspects of a common reformist project to “accrue personal benefit at the expense of the people” (guimou yiji zi li suru bugu qunzhè 谗谋一己之私利而不顾其群者) by arrogating for itself a “vanguard” role (zongzhi fuhe zhi 宗旨而附和之).31 Wu again explicitly states that a pre-requisite of this was the creation of a credulous modern audience and reading public (the “followers” of the vanguard), who – to return to Strand’s comment – could only participate through “polite applause.” These comments speak to the wider argument of this study, that commercial fiction authors transcended a superficial critique or satire of reformers for ad hominem reasons, and instead were looking toward a systemic critique of the ideology reformism and modernity.

In this chapter it will be argued that the representation of oratory and audience was another context in which tabloid speculative fiction was challenging the ideology of modernity by making recourse to an appreciation for, and

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30 Wu Woyao (Wu Jianren), “Yueyue xiaoshuo’ xu ‘月月小说’序,” in Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, Xiao Xiaohong 夏晓虹 (eds.),Ershishiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao (1897-1916) 二十世纪中国小说理论资料 (1897年-1916年), vol. 1, Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 1989, p. 169. We also critiqued Liang’s fiction ideology for producing novels that were at least “bizarre and fragmentary” (guadian zhi li zhi zhuang 怪诞支离之著作) when not merely intellectually slavish and tiresome. For more one this see Xia Xiaohong’s short article on Wu Jianren’s wider antipathy for Liang; Xia Xiaohong 夏晓虹, “Wu Jianren yu Liang Qichao guanxi gouchen 吴研人与梁启超关系钩沉,” Anhui shifan daxue xuebao 安徽师范大学学报, 30:6, (2002), pp. 636-40. Wu Jianren’s comments are indicative of how the ideological positioning of authors at this time is too often a direct by-product of their surface affiliations, and reducible to increasingly overdetermined terminology, and this is often true of the term “New Fiction.” Chen Pingyuan for instance lists three “new fiction writers” as Liang Qichao, Wu Jianren, and Lin Shu 林纾; Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi moshi de zhuantian 中国小说叙事模式的转变, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003, pp. 30-31. Wu spent the final half-decade of his life directly and indirectly mocking Liang and derogating the New Fiction project in general.

31 Ibid.
entanglement with, an autochthonous culture of ludic expression and shengse gouma. Part of the playful and transgressive shengse gouma world of the entertainment district was this participatory and critical experience of audience-ness, and the wider sensation of being part of a dynamic and expressive crowd. Homan’s observation, that “play best describes the nature not only of artistic creation, but also of artistic reception,” is particularly appropriate in the context of entertainment culture in the late-Qing. The playfulness of the audience was a means by which to disrupt to the authority of the medium, and reveal the ambiguity of the message. For the tabloid author, there were clear parallels between performing in front of a critical audience and writing for a commercial market. They were conditioned to recognise that silencing the audience was symbolic of a wider shifting the balance of power in discourse from periphery to centre.

2. Mediating modernity

The Future of New China was Liang Qichao’s only original novel. It was serialised in the initial issues (1-3) of his own journal, Xin Xiaoshuo 新小说 (New Fiction), before a final chapter was published almost a year later, in issue 7. The novel was curtailed after just these five initial chapters of what promised to be a longer novel, and only the first of a trilogy. It was a self-professed failure in artistic, commercial and political terms. Despite this, the text employs some inventive

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33 He translated parts of Shiba Shirō’s (1852-1922) political novel Kajin no Kigû (1885-1897) and other Japanese translations of western fiction.

34 The total commercial failure of the novel is particularly striking considering Liang Qichao’s prominence at the time. Xinmin congzhao 新民丛报 for instance enjoyed a circulation of nearly 10,000 in 1903. Had it not been for this commercial failure Liang had intended The Future of New China to be the first of a trilogy of novels. Each of the novels was to deal with different versions of the future; Wang, Fin de siècle Splendor, p. 313. In addition to the positive depiction in The Future of New China, one future would depict a China which fails to change (The Future of Old China) and another would envisage an island utopia (New Peach Blossom Spring).
literary techniques. Among these is its narratological framing through the device of the historical lecture (jiangyi 讲义).

The Future of New China begins in media res sixty years in the future, with the busy preparations for a public lecture entitled “The History of China over the Past Sixty Years” to be held in honour of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the constitutional Chinese nation. The lecture is to be delivered by the most prominent historian of the period, the venerable 76-year-old “Dr Confucius-the-awakener-of-the-people, PhD” (Kong Juemin 孔觉民博士). The morning of the first of the lectures is described as a scene of tense excitement, as the ticket holders for the event have reached almost twenty thousand. Following this we are taken inside of the auditorium:

By 12.30pm on the first of February, the audience had already assembled in the lecture hall... at 1pm sharp there appeared [Dr Confucius] wearing a ceremonial robe, hanging in front of his chest were the medals conferred upon him by the people of the nation, and the medals that all of the nations of the world had conferred upon him for his study of constitutional law, and even further medals that the educational societies had presented him. With august and majestic bearing, tender and sincere expression he slowly approached the rostrum. The entire audience simultaneously arose to show their respect, welcoming applause letting loose like an intractable torrent. When the audience returned to their seats, silence descended upon the hall.

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35 The novel contains poetry in translation (the translation of Byron’s “the Giaour” in chapter 4 was of a very high quality), excerpts from news reports, and a chapter conducted entirely in dialogue.
36 In this filtering of the future through the constraints of the conference The Future of New China borrows considerably from the 1870s and 1880s traditions in Japanese political fiction. These include Suehiro Tetchō’s Chronicle of 1890 (1886) and, particularly influential in the case of the National Congress setting discussed here, his later Before and After the Opening of the National Congress (1890). See Xia Xiaohong 夏晓虹, in Wanqing shehui yu wenhua 晚清社会与文化, Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001; section entitled, “Liang Qichao yu Riben mingshi xiaoshuo 梁启超与日本明治小说,” p. 29.
37 XZWLJ, p. 89. The event is already here blurring the boundaries between pedagogy and entertainment, and leaning toward the latter precipitously. The notion of historiography as performative is also reflected in Liang’s pioneering of the “historical play.” See Xiaomei Chen, Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002, p. 93. Although a small point, the reference to advance ticketing here was also quite pioneering, and something that wouldn’t happen in Shanghai for another decade at least; Goldstein “From Teahouse to Playhouse,” p. 774.
38 XZWLJ, p. 90.
What follows is Dr Confucius’ narrating of the novel itself, which takes place not in this idealised future but entirely in a present-day China of the late-Qing. This framing is a self-conscious aestheticisation of oratory as new mode of authoritative medium, and of Liang’s “new historiography” (xin xishu 新史学) program itself, which legitimated an enlightenment political and cultural agenda by making it into an objective phase of universal historical development. 39 The title’s temporal contortions of future and past come into focus here, and it is the lecture’s authority as modern and objective medium through which the novel’s modulation (and eventually collapsing) of past, present and future is made possible. In this, the lecture is an instance of the modern ideology of presenting the medium as the message. In fact, it acutely reflects McLuhan’s sense that the medium organises “one’s position in and relation to time and space… [it is] the historical a priori of the organization of perception itself.” 40

In this role as narrator and historian of the present day Dr Confucius is a deliberate divergence from the “implied oral storyteller” that had permeated Chinese fiction up until this point. 41 A short promotional article accompanying

39 For more on Liang’s New Historiography see Xiaobing Tang, Global Space, chpt. 2.
41 Through recourse to certain standardised phrases and motifs, typically known as the “storyteller’s manner” (shuoshu 说书体), the narrator in literature of the huaben 话本 tradition (as most vernacular fiction was) is generally understood to represent the voice of a physical person, namely a pinghua or pingshi storyteller. See Hu Shiyi, Huaiben xiaoshuo gaihen 话本小说概论, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980; Yang Yi 杨义, Zhongguo gedian xiaoshuo shilun 中国古典小说史论, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004; Wilt Idema, Chinese Vernacular Fiction: The Formative Period, Leiden: Brill, 1974. Meng Zhaolian 孟昭连, “Zuozhe, xishu, xushuren: Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo fushi zhuyi yanjiu 作者，叙述者，说书人：中国古代小说叙事之演近,” Ming Qing xiaoshuo 明清小说研究, 4, pp. 137-52. Vibeke Bordahl, “Storytelling, Stock Phrases and Genre Conventions: The Case of Wu Song Fights the Tiger,” in Vibeke Bordahl, Fei Li
The Future of New China in the first issue of New Fiction, implies a critical collapsing of subjective and objective and of fantasy and reality through Dr Confucius and his lecture:

The entire novel is written in the form of a historical treatise, and based on the lecture of a single man. From its outset, this grand lecture explains the origins of the means by which the reform and independence of China was made possible, and every word in it equips the intellectuals of today with the tools of social critique.42

本书全部以史体传出之，而皆由一人所讲演。这场大表演，开宗明义，讲中国何以能维新自立之原因，语语足为今日志士所砥。

David Wang has stated that reformist intellectuals like Liang and Yan Fu were attempting to “narrate the modern nation,”43 but The Future of New China is not attempting to “narrate” (which implies a subjective recounting) the modern nation so much as “lecture” it, to speak about the as yet undetermined present with the objectivity of historical fact.

Liang Qichao’s lecturer is a representation of, and medium for, his own ideology. The choice to swaddle him in majestic medals and robes, make explicit note of his august bearing and social status, and of course to give him the absurd name of Dr Confucius, collectively reflect a desire to clothe him and this ideology in authority. This is reinforced by the conspicuous deference and respectful etiquette of the modern audience. That the reader is implicated into a position as one member of an audience of tens of thousands is, when compared to the imagined tent or teahouse context attributed to the traditional imagined oral storyteller, reflective of a desire for narratorial authority of the kind that Wu Jianren criticised.

Intended to represent a symbolic break with the narrative traditions of magic and heroism endemic to the storytelling tradition, Dr Confucius’ status on the continuum from storyteller to lecturer is nonetheless more ambiguous than


42 Cited in Xia Xiaohong, Wanqing shehui yu wenhua, p. 79.

43 Wang, Fin de siècle Splendor, p. 126.
might be imagined. His narrativising, not to mention his interjections, framings and interpretations, raises the extent to which the desired elevation of storytelling to a science, by transforming the medium from (cyclical) “story” to (teleological) “history,” is threatened by his very existence as a link to an atavistic cultural past. His presence alone threatens to regress history back to the story, and the objective inevitability of the constitutional nation back to a propagandist ideal. The novel’s relationship to storytelling is variously tortured in this manner. Liang bemoaned the traditional historiographical focus on the individual in lieu of the collective or societal. Yet his archetypal modern historian tells the history of the preceding six decades through two individuals (who frequently descend into extended dialogue).44

Liang’s lecturer is a negation of a negation, and he is as unstable as the storyteller which he replaces. In fact, without reference to the idealised deference of the audience and the massive auditorium space (which reoccur throughout this initial chapter), Dr Confucius would be indistinguishable from a storyteller. The novel’s extensive establishing of the deferential and respectful modern audience takes on a renewed significance therefore in this tacit negotiating of the filiation between subjective narration and authoritative dictation. The audience is a “passive actor,” playing a central role in legitimating Liang’s re-situating and re-clothing of the storyteller, through their uncritical consumption of the performance of history they alone invest it with any “modern” authority.

Yet, in the manner of the emperor’s new clothes, the subversive extrapolation of this is that “the emperor” becomes dependent upon his own subjects for his existence. While outwardly presenting the audience as subordinate to the performance, their status as “audience to history” re-invests them with remarkable authority, epitomising the ontological necessity of reforming audience-ness in the late-Qing, as their order (and only their order) imbued the medium with authority, and thereby the message. History as linear time was based on a

44In this Liang wrests with the balancing of historiographical and narrative requirements, and (his long-standing struggle) between “populist romanticism and elitist rationalism;” Xiaobing Tang, Global Space, p. 81.
sublimation of synchronic experience to diachronic rationalisations of that same experience. The ordered audience is a microcosm of this, as the synchronic relations of the teahouse were replaced with the central authority of the stage and podium, attentiveness to which was a reflection upon the ordered continuity of history itself. A slip in a façade the audience’s civility would not only ruin the performance but bring into question the reformers’ historiographical self-justification, a conclusion that the commercial fiction writers considered in this chapter seem to have implicitly understood.

With this in mind it is also worth considering Liang’s wider futurological imagery. Two events are taking place simultaneously. Nanjing is hosting the “World Peace Conference” (万国太平会议), where world leaders are coming together to sign a new peace accord. Simultaneously an international exposition (da bolanhui 大博览会) is being held in Shanghai. Once again oratory and modernity come together to shift focus from the synchronic to the diachronic as the disparate regions of Shanghai are finally united by centralised authority of the exposition as world-historical event. Liang notes, that the “daily speaking events brought together Jiangbei, Wusong, and Chongming District to make Shanghai into one massive exposition site” (rizi kai jianglunhui, jing ba moda yige Shanghai, liang Jiangbei, Wusongkou, lian Chongming xian, dou bianzuo bolanhuichang le 日日开讲论会，竟把偌大一个上海，连江北，连吴淞口，连崇明县，都变作博览会场了). In this description not only does the audience and urban population have to turn itself to face the “stage” as symbolic embodiment of the future, but the physical spaces of the city are also expected to. In this manner the built environment of the city itself takes on the properties of audience-ness, homogenised and ordered even as it is made peripheral.

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45 XZWLJ, p. 19.
The collapsing of medium and message is grotesquely re-iterated in the 1906 assassination-fantasy, 46 On Assassination (Cike tan 刺客谈, 1906), written by an author with the suggestive moniker of “The Waste of New China” (Xin Zhongguo zhi feiwu 新中国之废物), in which a lecturer and a storyteller reflect separately on the central motif of heroic political assassination.

The first story begins when the protagonist, studying abroad in Europe, alights upon the lecture, which is advertised as a discussion of “one of the lost ancient societies of the east.” Much like in The Future of New China, the lecturer, Mi Ke 密克, is buttressed by the symbols of authority, among which the respectful silence of the amassed audience:

I saw that the audience was already almost filling the room. (Eyebrow commentary: “what an illustrious meeting”). I showed my ticket and went to sit down. All around me the audience was twittering on about Mi Ke’s lectures and how wonderful they were. After about five minutes of this, with even more people having somehow joined the audience, I suddenly heard the striking of a clock, and then a middle-aged gentleman took the podium. The attendant began to ring a bell, and the entire hall immediately fell completely silent. 47

只见里面坐的人，差不多挤满了一屋子。（眉批：好盛会）。我交了票子，随即坐下。但听的堂内的人，都在那里唧唧喳喳的说这密克的演说，如何佳妙。不到五分钟时候，来的人较前愈多，忽听的大自鸣钟打了一下，只见一个中年英人，走上演台。会中执事，摇铃宣布，登时满堂寂静，阒然无声。

This scene can’t help but bring to mind Dr Confucius, yet Mi Ke’s historical lecture is even stranger in its collapsing of fiction into fact and past into present. Conflating the Boxer Uprising and a more recent incident in Guangxi, it recounts an event in the history of this unnamed ancient society, in which a bandit uprising threatens the comfortable life of a dissolute Earl, causing him to sell off vital mining concessions to foreign powers in order to secure their support in quelling

46 On Assassination takes place in alterity. China is never mentioned (although it is alluded to), only the “Old Country” (Lao daguo 老大国).
47 CKT, p. 28.
the uprising. Only his timely assassination prevents the treaty from being passed, allowing the nation to recover.

It doesn’t take much insight to recognise that a story in which machine guns are purchased through international trade is unlikely to have been “acquired from a trader of ancient books” (cong yige mai jiushu de ren shouchong 从一个卖旧书的人手中), and it is revealed to be little more than shallow allegory tinged with casual salaciousness and hidden behind an obscurantist façade of historicism. Yet despite his inexpert and fumbling attempts at manipulation, the bourgeois culture of audience etiquette comes to Mi Ke’s rescue by ensuring that his deception is met with a polite and uncritical applause untroubled by the patently false narrative. The audience’s credulity is an instance of the degraded modern performance culture which Wu Jianren bemoaned, in which the traditional judiciary role of the audience becomes sublimated to the homogenising primacy of etiquette. (On the other hand it is possible to read the protagonist’s confusion as indicative of the fact that he is the only person who has failed to grasp that this is oratory-as-entertainment, in which the facts are secondary to the narrative; to some extent both are true.)

In spite of winning the audience’s approval, Mi Ke is the embodiment of the degraded culture of literati and “men of aspiration” (zhishi 志士) which the protagonists explains were what caused him to leave the old country for Europe. “Men of aspiration” was a common derogatory term for reformists like Liang Qichao, and the protagonist characterises them as cowardly aesthetes, whose words “are nothing more than fantasies“ (buguo shuo ta shi menghua 偶然听了他们的议论，不过说他是梦话). Considering this explicit attack on the sophistry of the contemporary reformist culture, the figure of Mi Ke can by extension be read as a satirical interrogation Dr Confucius and the culture of enlightened public speaking in general. On Assassination mocks the pretence by which the medium of the lecture transforms subjectivity into objectivity and fantasy into reality by taking it to its

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48 CKT, p. 29.
49 CKT, p. 27.
50 CKT, p. 28. Emphasis added.
exaggerated and yet logical conclusion in the ideology that Mi Ke is pedalling as fact.

This reading is further reinforced in the subsequent chapters of the novel, which recount the life of a would-be Chinese assassin named Fan Pu’an (“Paragon of Simple Contentment”). In contrast to Mi Ke, the second narrator, Meng Chongjun has no audience or podium, and his is a narrative that mirrors its subject in its lack of adornment or pretension. Although Meng isn’t explicitly a storyteller, he embodies the physical sacrifice of the storyteller when, in the final sentence of the novel, we are told that “[he] had spoken until he was completely exhausted” (jiangde jingpi lijuan 讲得精疲力倦). While Mi Ke performed to a packed house and rapturous applause Meng exhausts himself for an audience of one (the protagonist). Yet although he lacks the implicit authority of the audience and hall, his message proves more insightful. While Mi Ke aimed for a transcendental form of scientific historicism, the analytical tools of the storytelling hall - in this case the universal figure of the filial hero and its expression in the form of Fan Pu’an actually reveal a greater historical truth about (what the author believes to be) the heroic actions of the assassin.

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51 His assassination attempt is on the life of an official who is planning to sell of ownership of the “Aolin” (奥林) railway line to foreign interests (in this Fan Pu’an is the unnamed assassin from Mi Ke’s lecture made manifest.)

52 Expressions of exhaustion are typical to the ending of a storytelling performance.

53 Fan is a literary chimera between the modern figure of the self-sacrificing young man who “answer[s] the call of his times and change[s] the course of history;” Xiaobing Tang, Global Space, p. 83, and the filial, righteous struggle against venal officialdom of the knight-errant (youxia 游侠) archetype of the storytelling hall. His discovery of nihilism is an example of the novel’s juxtaposition of traditional and alien. In his sadness over his father’s death Fan begins reading the books of the Russian Nihilist Party, “all the while thinking of his father’s dying words to him” (you xiangqi ta fuqin linzhong suo shuodehua 又想起他父亲临终所说的话); CTK, p. 43. The eyebrow commentary to this reads, “If Pu’an forgot his father’s dying words, we couldn’t call him a filial son” (Pu’an nei wangque le ta fuqin de yizhu, jiu bu meng cheng ta xiaozi le 朴安若忘了他父亲的遗嘱, 就不能称他孝子了). For a discussion of filial desire and knight-errantry see: C. T. Hsia, The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968, pp. 86-87.

54 As Tan Duxian 谭达先 notes, “The principal goal in the creation of pingshu is to represent the hopes and dreams of the people and to stimulate social and historical progress through the image of the heroic figure;” Zhongguo pingshu (pinghu) yanjiu 中国评书(评话)研究, Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1982, p. 66.
In *The Future of New China* and *On Assassination*, the Transcendental Audience (like the Transcendental Subject) is a “living reference to and function of the master discourse.” Just as with Baoyu’s refusal of the body in *New Story of the Stone*, in modernity the truth faculties that exist outside of the individualist mind are undermined. Without recourse to the critical faculties of the collective, the modern self is paradoxically alone even as it is part of an audience, and thereby asked to sign off on increasingly ideological sophistries.

For tabloid fiction authors, the moral act was to return to the culture of critical and uncouth audience, as in Wu Jianren’s short story, *Qingzhu lixian* 庆祝立宪 (*Hooray for Constitutionalism*, 1906). Published in the first issue of *All-Story Monthly*, alongside his article condemning new fiction and the modern culture of audience-ness, the story features a similar set-up to *The Future of New China*, placing the reader in the position of audience member at a future conference praising the constitutional near-past. In *Hooray for Constitutionalism* however, the benumbed atmosphere is shattered by an uncultured man who interrupts the enlightened speeches, berating the speakers for being fabulists and counterfeiters. This wasn’t the only instance in which Wu seemed to be directly taking issue with Liang Qichao’s characterisation of oratory and audience, as we will come to see. Considering it in concert with his article condemning New Fiction, this direct and uncompromising short story reflects not only a desire to burst the hermetic seal of self-congratulation surrounding reformist culture in the late-Qing, but also to elaborate on the power of the critical audience.

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In *The Future of New China*, the space of the hall itself - holding 20,000 audience members - is a supplement to the authority of Dr Confucius’ narration. In Cai Yuanpei’s *New Year’s Dream*, the thousands of stages found in the late-Qing city are similarly depicted as having coalesced into a singular, central and monolithic

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auditorium. The fantasy on the part of reformers for massive auditoria reflects a hegemonic desire to institute one form of expression and reception above all others. In this, these fantasised auditoria would pre-empt the prevalence of western-style theatre spaces like the Xia brothers’ “New Stage” (completed in 1908) and its subsequent facsimiles not only in style, but also in subtended social agenda. Goldstein has noted that new theatres represented a form of spatial discipline, which by lighting the stage, assigning seating and assuring that every seat faced the performers, attempted to impose a culture of etiquette on the unruly Chinese audience. In doing so, he states, the “cordonning off” of representation and reality (or, more essentially, of subject and object) became the principal “disciplining logic” of theatre reform.\(^{56}\)

These “new stages” were self-consciously new and modern spaces for the performance of new and modern dramas (juben 剧本). In many of the plays most closely associated with reformist intellectuals, theatre and propagandist oratory began to become indistinguishable from one another. These were often called “lectures in costume” (huazhuang yanjiang 化妆演讲), which, as many at the time noted, were little more than thinly veiled “enlightenment rhetoric” (qimeng huayu 启蒙话语) and “political ideology” (zhengzhi lixiang 政治理想).\(^{57}\) Among the hundreds of new plays from this period, Liang Qichao’s Wuling chun 武陵春 (Wuling Spring) was among those that expressed the tendency to lecture in costume.\(^{58}\) As Fang Chang’an 方长安 recounts, this practice was relatively institutionalised:

\(^{56}\) Goldstein, “From the Teahouse to the Playhouse,” p. 754. Yoshino Sugawara has noted a similar tendency toward spatial and regulatory disciplining of audiences in the context of early cinema, looking in particular at the performance context of the YMCA in the early Republic; Jinyuan Qingnai 莘原庆乃 [Yoshino Sugawara], “Zouxiang ‘weiza’ de bi’an: jiankang yule zhi diyanying de dansheng yu Shanghai Jidujia Qingnianhui 走向‘银杂’的彼岸：‘健康娱乐’之电影的诞生与上海基督教青年会,” Chuanbo yu shehui xuekan 传播与社会科学, 29, (2014), pp. 151-175.

\(^{57}\) Fang Chang’an 方长安, Zhongguo jinxiandai wenxue zhuanxing yu Riben wenxue guanxi 中国近现代文学转型与日本文学关系, Taipei: Xiwei zixun keiji gufen, 2012, p 54.

Within the play, those roles that disregarded the natural flow of the plot in order to deliver extended lectures were called “old man of the opining school,” “leading man of the opining school,” and so on. In Ren Tianzhi’s [任天知] *Gold and Blood*, the three main characters - the leading man Diao Mei, the leading woman Dan Mei, and the child Xiao Mei - were all dedicated to opining. They didn’t pay even the scantest attention to a theatrical atmosphere, and instead spoke extemporaneously, particularly on the topic of patriotic self-sacrifice.59

剧中那些不顾叙事流程的自然，顺畅，作长篇演说的角色，被称为“言论派老生”，“言论派小生”，“言论派正生”等。如“黄金赤血”的三个主角是言论正生调梅，言论正旦梅妻和言论小生小梅，他们不拘泥于剧性作即兴演说，言说中心为劝募爱国捐。

In a similar confirmation of its prevalence, one contemporary of the period wryly compared two of the leading figures in the new-style theatre movement by stating that, “Ma Xiangbo orates in order to produce theatre, [but] Pan Yueqiao produces theatre so that he can orate” (Ma Xiangbo yanshuo yi zuoxi, Pan Yueqiao zuoxi yi yanshuo 马相伯演说以做戏，潘月樵做戏以演说).60

While theatre became more oratorical, Esherick and Wasserstrom have stressed that modern public speaking was becoming inherently theatrical in its metaphors, techniques and settings.61 In the later years of the decade, after the completion of the New Stage, tabloid fiction began to reflect satirically on the dissolving of oratory into the aesthetics and settings of theatre. Just as Mi Ke’s falseness was compounded in his positioning at the centre of modern auditoria, the authority and modernity of “New Stage”-style theatres was revealed to a façade behind which sham-artists could pedal absurd messages. Similarly, new theatrical forms were deemed to be merely naked propaganda with a veneer of entertainment. In each case the critical role of the audience is supplanted. As stages get larger and more centralised the audience both materially expands and yet is also

59 Ibid.
60 Fang Ping, *Wangqin Shanghai*, p. 282.
61 “Alongside foreign models for oratory and rallies, activists in the new politics also borrowed metaphors and techniques from Chinese theater... Meetings began with a kaimushi, a curtain-raising. Speechmaking was a kind of performance: yansheng, or yanshuo,” Esherick and Wasserstrom, “Acting Out Democracy: Political Theater in Modern China,” p. 852
diminished in terms of its active participation in the act of performance. The
fantasised audience is polite, ordered, quiet and attentive and sufficiently massive
as to engender anonymity and homogeneity.

The 1911 satirical novel Mapi shijie 马屁世界 (Ass-kissing world) takes place
in the “Institute of Ass-kissing” (Mapi yanjiu suo 马屁研究所), an elitist private
academy where bourgeois scions (they all wear make-up and cologne) learn to get
ahead. Indicative of the modern-ness and status of the academy, its central
auditorium is described as being “exactly like the New Stage in every way” (zhi he Xin
wutai xueyuan liyi yang 直和新舞台戏曲院里头一样), and it is only with “rows
999 and 1000 eventually seated” that the professor arrives.62 The august nature of
the evidently massive structure, filled with fine embroidery and mosaics, and the
audience’s reinforcement of this in martial salutes and bowing is made immediately
laughable however when his presentation gets underway. The professor’s oratory is
revealed to be a farcical treatise on improving one’s “ass-kissing” (mapi 马屁,
literally “patting the horse’s rump”) through an involved discussion on the
physiognomy, psychology and antiquaria of actual horses.

In the 1910 minor-key satire New China by Lu Shi’e, the protagonist (Lu
himself, a drunken compulsive gambler and author in the novel), having been
transported into the future, comes across a massive 140,000-seat auditorium on the
site of the old Shanghai racecourse. He is told that there are no longer any small
theatres, just this single stadium, which, in a moment of comedic self-
aggrandisement, is named the New Shanghai Theatre (Xin Shanghai wutai 新上海
舞台), after his own 1909 novel, New Shanghai (Xin Shanghai 新上海).63 In addition
to the suggestive name, the interior of the massive auditorium is modelled on the
New Stage, it features a similar round stage and five stories of terraced seating. The
“performance” which is taking place is one of a ten-part series of dramatic
reconstructions of modern history, beginning with the Wuxu 戊戌 reforms and

62 Shui Shi 睡狮, Mapi shijie 马屁世界, in Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi 中国近代小说大
63 Lu Shi’e 陆士谔, Xin Zhongguo 新中国, in Huang Lin 黄霖 (ed.), Shibo menghua sanhualu
世博梦幻三部曲, Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zongxin, 2009, p. 310.
ending with the creation of a modern constitutional democracy. The extent to which this can be called “performance” is limited however, as the live performers have been replaced with form of “cinema” (dianguang yingxi 电光影戏, literally “electric shadowplay”). This early rendering of a cinema (which was growing in popularity in the late-Qing),\(^\text{64}\) is in itself an interesting deepening of the audience-abnegrating function of the New Stage, removing entirely the (already remote) possibility of influencing or interrupting the performance.\(^\text{65}\) As Ebrahimian notes, cinema, “functions purely by itself, and for itself, with a stage that can stand on its own autonomously and behave precisely, automatically, systematically, and mechanically.”\(^\text{66}\)

Xiaoran Yusheng’s Journey to Utopia (to be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5) takes place on a form of utopian cruise ship (which reveals itself to be a reformist satire). The final chapter is entirely taken up with the protagonist’s visit to an on-board entertainment complex that is dominated by two structures, a theatre called the “Small World” (xiaojie 小世界) and identical structure which advertises itself as a lecture hall. The majority of the chapter is taken up by an involved recounting of one of the performances at the theatre. Echoing Liang’s own collapsing of past and present and fact and fiction, the performance states that rather than a play it is simply performing history itself, that of the “oldest autocratic nation on earth.” In a satirical rendering of the “lectures in costume,” the performance begins with a long political treatise on the evilness of the autocratic nation and the slavishness of its servants, mitigated only by the heroic individuals struggling to reform it. Having completed this extended oratory (punctuated by the regimented chanting of “Hateful! Hateful! Hateful!” by the audience, their own act of involvement), the performance descends into a series of silent allegorical tableaux criticising Imperial China, complete with court officials


\(^{65}\) In this it pre-empts some of the trends raised by Sugawara’s study of the early Republican period; “Zouxiang ’weiza’ de bi’an,” see fn. 58 above.

transforming into grotesque barn animals. In this bizarre juxtaposition the
performance manages to be both avant-garde and insipid, and the chapter closes
with the protagonist (generally a deferential figure in the text) admitting that
although the play will continue the next day, “honestly, the style of today’s
performance was so terrible, how could I think about coming back?” (jintian suoyan
de zhezhong zhuangtai, shizai shi keyan dehen, nali kande xiaqu 今日所演的这种状
tate，实在是可厌的很，哪里看得下去).67

3. Speaking to, and as, the meatloaf

A new term appeared in the Chinese lexicon around 1903, that of
“qunzhong 群众” (“the crowd”).68 If the respectful audience was a tacit reflection of
the authority of the new pedagogical/propagandist mediums and messages of the
late-Qing, the crowd was inevitably viewed by contemporary intellectuals with
distrust - as a group of “modern barbarians,” and “a particular mode of being in
which individuals thought and behaved differently.”69 Kang Youwei embodied this
when he noted that:

When thousands of people are gathered in a crowd, they bounce around
without purpose... this can’t be considered publicness, this kind of
publicness is just a big fight, and such things deprave men’s thoughts.70

兆人万众旁徨奔走...所取未既必公，即公亦出大争，坏人心术。

67 WYJ, p. 86.
68 Tie Xiao, “In the Name of the Masses: Conceptualizations and Representations of the
Crowd in Early Twentieth-Century China,” PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago 2011,
pp. 24. One lacuna in Tie Xiao’s work is the relationship between crowd and audience.
How the audience intersected with the parallel phenomenon of the crowd deserves more
attention than this chapter can give.
69 Tie Xiao, “In the Name of the Masses,” p. 2. Considering the emergence of the term in
1903, Vogelsang has noted the oddness of the reformist distaste for the crowd considering
Liang, Kang and Yan Fu’s interest in qun 群 (grouping), suggesting that, “perhaps
qunzhong was a disillusioned conceptual successor of qun;” Kai Vogelsang, “Chinese
The crowd’s contravention of the kind of individualist-rationalist epistemology that characterised the late-Qing reform culture is central to this kind of judgement. To return to the conclusions of the previous chapter, the derogation of the crowd was grounded in its association with the sublimating of the individualistic and rational mind as interpretative organ to the intuitive-interpretative capacity of the body, or in this case bodies as a collective, and the directives of the unconscious impulse. The crowd was an instance of the permeability of the ostensibly monadic self, an intersubjective membrane through which messages, urges and desires were able to pass through and between. As such, the crowd was often characterised as lacking rational cognition, its members “controlled by crazy, floating suggestions,” in the words of Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白.71

Tao Baopi 陶报庇 (again likely a Wu Jianren pseudonym) encapsulated the sense that being part of a crowd could engender a supersession of monadic individuality. In the unfinished novel Xinwutai hongxueji 新舞台鸿雪记 (Tracks of the Snowgoose on the New Stage, 1907),72 the narrator (a boy still at school, as yet unaware that this is to be feared perhaps) describes a scene in which, standing at the centre of a massive crowd, he finds himself (pleasurably) “encircled within a big meatloaf” (weichengle yi ge da roujuan 围成了一个大肉圈儿).73 In comparing the members of the crowd to ground meat, the “big meatloaf” is an image which - in contrast to its derogation by reformist epistemologies - playfully raises the non-rational and playful aspects of the loss of self that can occur in the crowd. In this section we will consider representations of oratory as they relate to the phenomenon of the crowd, and in turn its capacity to represent either Kang Youwei’s “depraved public” or Tao Baopi’s ludic “big meatloaf.”

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71 Tie Xiao, “In the Name of the Masses,” p. 11.
72 Originally published in Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说, 5, (1907).
In the late-Qing, crowds and oratory most frequently came together in the context of the “public forum” (gongkai jihui 公开集会). The differentiation between forums and rallies, and even to some extent lectures, seems to have been more interpretative that semantically codified. In contrast to the lecture, the forum was as an event in which audience members became speakers, and vice versa, and Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之 states that the fora held in the Zhang Gardens were defined by a culture of “publicness, openness and participation” (gongkaixing, kaifangxing yu canyuxing 公开性，开放性于参与性). Furthermore, forums were also more spatially ad hoc than lectures, often taking place in parks and teahouses. They differentiated themselves from “[scholarly] societies” (xuehui 学会) and “public speaking societies” (xuanjianghui 宣讲会), in that they required no membership and were open (barring in some cases a fee) to all members of the public. The forums depicted in this chapter reflect this, and they are little differentiated from a crowd.

Xiong Yuezhi estimates that at least 39 forums/rallies were held in Shanghai’s Zhang Gardens between 1897 and 1913. These were organised by a wide spectrum of figures, from Sun Yat-sen and Zhang Taiyan to Wu Jianren. Although attendance figures are not always reliable, indications are that they proved to be very popular, in some cases as many as 10,000 people are reported to have attended, and they frequently garnered more than one thousand attendees.

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24 Perhaps only jiangyi 讲义 seems to have referred specifically to a public forum, jihui 集会 was more ambiguous, but this is conjecture.

25 There were often also pre-arranged speakers, such as Huang Zongyang 黄宗仰, Wang Kangnian 汪康年 and Bi Jinquin 薛锦琴 who spoke at Wu Jianren’s forum in 1901; Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, “Wanqing Shanghai siyuan yu gongyong yu gonggong huodong kongjian de tuozhan 晚清上海私园公用与公共活动空间的拓展,” Xueshu yuekan 学术月刊, 1998:8, p. 77.


27 Xiong derives this from looking at reports on these events in Shenbao 申报, Zhongwai Ribao 中外日报 and Shibao 时报; Xiong Yuezhi, “Wanqing Shanghai siyuan,” pp. 73-81.
One of the two resistance-to-Russia fora (ju’e jihui 拒俄集会) held in 1901 was organised by Wu Jianren (and Sun Baoxuan 孙宝瑄) and attracted approximately 1000 people.\(^78\)

In this section we will consider how the forum is described as a context for oratory in comparison to the historical lecture in late-Qing fiction. Once again, a particular focus will be placed on the question of the audience and audience involvement.\(^79\) Tabloid authors like Wu Jianren and Li Boyuan celebrated the forum for this capacity to reflect the simultaneously fun and critical qualities of “speaking to, and as, the meatloaf.” For both Liang and Wu, the forum is characterised by an atmosphere in which the delineation between oratory and entertainment and speaker and audience is lifted, although they interpret this differently. For Li Boyuan, the forum critically collapses the modern distancing of oratory from its own conditions for critique, as the audience reclaims its role as a critical participant.

The protagonists of Chapters 2-5 of The Future of New China are Huang Keqiang 黄克强 and Li Qubing 李去病, two overseas students who are inspired to return to their homeland and commit themselves to reforming the nation via their expertise in Western political and scientific theory.\(^80\) In existing studies of The Future of New

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\(^78\) It was held on March 24 1901; Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, “Zhang Yuan: Wanqing Shanghai yige gonggong kongjian yanjiu 张园晚会上海一个公共空间研究,” Dang’an yu shixue 档案与史学, 1996:6, pp. 31-42.

\(^79\) Forums are reasonably well represented in the fiction from this period, although it is only The Future of New China which features instances of both a lecture and a forum. New Story of the Stone features both a lecture and a forum, although the lecture by a local official in Hankou takes place in a private academy and Baoyu is required to wear a disguise of sorts to enter, so it isn’t really “public.”

\(^80\) The excellent readings by Xiaobing Tang and Xia Xiaohong situate the novel in terms of intellectual trends in political philosophy and in the contemporary struggles between exile revolutionary groups in Japan, respectively. Xia Xiaohong, Wanqing shehui yu wenhua, pp. 75-87. Xiaobing Tang’s reading of the two protagonists as representatives of German liberalism and French republicanism, respectively, is compellingly argued; Xiaobing Tang,
China, little attention has been paid to the fifth and final published chapter, which is undoubtedly secondary to the centrepiece third chapter, in which the two engage in a protracted political dialogue (a narrative take on the “lectures in costume” in which the external diegesis to their mimetic exposition is removed). The fifth chapter was a black sheep by comparison, after a four issue hiatus it was published in issue 7 (September 6, 1903) of New Fiction, which was to be the final issue before Liang handed over control of the journal to Wu Jianren, apparently disenfranchised by its poor commercial performance.

These commercial circumstances colour the final chapter, which recounts Li and Huang’s visit to a version of Shanghai, which much like Jia Baoyu’s interpretation of it in New Story of the Stone, is a den of iniquity, and a “massive furnace” (大炉子 da lúzi) from which no honest man can escape. The Future of New China begins on a metaphorical soap-box (and behind a literal podium), and ends in the alleys of Shanghai, lost in the petty scams and self-aggrandisements that Liang sees as endemic to the city’s literate urbanites as a class (one scene for instance depicts the selling off mining concessions to foreigners for personal gain over tea). Their depiction as fickle, amoral and thankless dilettantes can’t help but feel like an expression of personal dissatisfaction with a readership that failed to embrace the novel’s idealism and experimentation, although ironically the chapter is far more “tabloid-like” than the earlier chapters, conspicuously less idealistic and formally experimental, and far more cynical.

The narrative centrepiece of the chapter is a public forum organised by the “Popular Will Society” (民意公会 minyì gōnghuì) and being held at the Zhang Gardens. The forum is described as just one a number of meetings being held

Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 136. Both however tend to focus largely on the central chapters of the novel in which the artifice of fictionality most conclusively breaks down, leaving us with little more than a political manifesto.

81 XZWLI, p. 71.

82 The fictional forum seems to be a conflation of the “Forum on China” (Zhongguo yihui 中国议会) organised by Tang Caichang 唐才常 in the Zhang Gardens on July 26, 1900 and the forums held to oppose the signing of treaties with Russia the following year. See Sang Bing 桑兵, Gengziqinwáng yǔ wànqíng zhēngzhèng 庚子勤王与晚清政局, Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004, chpt. 3, which deals with the topic of the “Forum on China.” In
every day there by the “new parties” (xindang 新党). While the bringing together of diverse parties and ideologies for a free and open forum might offer a representation of the Gardens as nascent “public sphere” (as postulated by both Xiong Yuezhi and Fang Ping), this does not materialise in Liang’s account. The forum is instead depicted as an example of the superficiality of urban public life and the incommensurability of fun and political engagement.

The contrast between the lecture and the forum in The Future of New China begins with the nature of the space itself. The main hall of the “foreign-style building” (the famous Zhang Gardens “arcadia”) is arranged in an ad hoc fashion, with two large tables, on top of which was balanced a smaller table. Li and Huang are dismissive of the humble arrangement, a form of podium fetishism that brings to mind the comically decadent podium in Ass-Kissing World, which is elaborately embroidered and bejewelled. As the room fills with people the congruity with the storytelling hall is reinforced, as “the room quickly began to fill with a dense miasma of smoke, and the clour aud hubub of many people” (nongde manceng li doushi yanqi yinyun, resheng caoza 弄得满层里都是烟气氤氲，人声嘈杂). Reminiscent of the extent to which audience-ness was a social environment in the storytelling hall, Li and Huang become drawn into people-watching, commenting on various sartorial anomalies amongst their fellow audience members. The

the novel the first rally is followed by a second several days later that the protagonists can’t attend, while the first meeting of the Forum on China was followed by a second three days later in Shanghai’s Yu gardens.

83 XZWLJ, p. 73.
84 XZWLJ, p. 74.
85 The foreign-style clothing of the “petty urbanites” (xiao shimin 小市民) encountered in this chapter is a consistent point of distraction. The first is a young returning student from Japan, whose shoulder-length hair, “foreign style” leather shoes and socks, and Japanese-manufactured straw hat immediately identify him as an urbanite. A disreputable young student assisting in the selling off of mining concessions is depicted as wearing a western-style suit with gold jewelry and glasses, and white silk scarf. His official accomplices are described as wearing (among many other items) an “foreign-made floral satin jiapao” (shihua moqing waiguo moben duan de jiapao 时髦花売外国摹本缎的夹袍) and pince-nez (meiyou bing de yanjing 没有柄儿的眼镜); XZWLJ, p. 75. Each of them seems to fit neatly into the archetype that Paola Zamperini terms, “modern-man-wanna-bes,” used by “late Qing writers to depict the tensions, the predicaments, the changes, that the Chinese race had to face in fashioning its own modernities;” “Clothes that Matter: Fashioning Modernity in Late Qing Novels,” Fashion Theory, 5:2, (2001), p. 207. Of these tensions,
comparison with the storytelling hall is supplemented in the actions of the audience/crowd once the oratory gets underway:

In fact, they ended up right in the middle of these people, and while those seated close to them were quiet and refrained from speaking out, on the other hand those seated further away were constantly whispering and chatting amongst themselves, making an unreasonable racket. Fortunately, Zheng Baicai had a powerful and imposing speaking voice, and when he raised his voice these people would briefly hush. Despite this they really didn’t pick up on much and their clapping was especially meaningless, in fact they seemed to clap almost at random. These people sitting at the back were entirely preoccupied with their own conversations, and were completely unaware of the speeches. When they heard the people at the front applaud, they would start chaotically clapping as if their life depended on it, this chaos continued until it seems that after every sentence there was this clapping, or even before a sentence was finished the clapping would start up, truly it was the sound of the cries of wild animals, and of the earth rending open.86

却是座中这些人，那坐得近的，倒还肃静无哗；那坐得远一点儿的，却都是交头接耳，唧唧哝哝，把那声浪搅得稀乱。幸亏这郑白才声音十分雄壮，要不然大喝两句，这些人静了一晌，虽然如此，却还有一桩事不得了，他们那拍掌是很有价值的，随便就拍起来。那坐得远的人，只顾谈天，并没听讲。他听见面的人拍掌，便跟着拼命的乱拍，闹到后来，差不多讲一句，便拍一句，甚至一句还未讲完也拍起来，真个是虎啸龙吟，山崩地裂。

The “crowd” here conspicuously fails to embody the values of an “audience.” They do not fall into the kind of reverential silence depicted earlier in the novel, but maintain their own discourse with the performance, and with one another. Returning to the previous chapter, there is a general recalcitrance on Li and Huang’s part toward the corporeality of public expression in the forum. Their preoccupation with the dress sense of the urbanites, the physicality with which listeners and speakers at the rally represent themselves and their opinions, the ludic

clothing as costume, as public mask, is central here – and in this chapter the physical space of the Zhang Gardens themselves are depicted as wearing many costumes, that of the sombre meeting place and then later of the frivolous playground.

86 XZGWL, p. 74. The initial complaint about clapping is repeated, as it is again noted that “nobody could hear the speakers over the unceasing sound of palms slapping” (ye meiyou ren ting ta, zhishi pai zhang zhi sheng zong bu duan de) 也没有人听他，只是拍掌之声总不断的); ibid., p. 75.
nature of self-expression in the form of clapping, the manner in which the oral culture of the forum blurs the lines between physical performance and speech, and between audience and speaker, share a common anxiety with physicality as medium of expression and interpretation - something that as Goldstein has pointed out, all-seated theatres attempted to gradually wean audiences away from.87

The manner in which the forum is depicted is anomalous within the wider tendencies of The Future of New China. That we don’t hear anything from the speakers directly is a decision which is out of character in a novel that often “lectured in costume.” Instead the forum scene is overwhelmingly preoccupied not with the the experience of being in a crowd, whose cacophony and lack of order makes any direct relationship between speaker and individual impossible. Li and Huang’s cautious disapproval of the forum itself (and its feckless organisers) is greatly exceeded by the far more pressing issue of the etiquette of their fellow audience members. The crowd emerges as the nexus of anxieties about urban society in general, as the false and passing transcendence of the crowd (metonymic for other urban distractions) impede the individual’s relationship with higher entities like the nation (the scene in which a speech presenting information about the recent occupation of Manchuria is rendered inaudible by the chaos of the crowd is particularly symbolic of this).

This is reinforced when the two return the following day to find that the Zhang Gardens are even busier than during the Forum on the Popular Will. A flower festival is taking place (an event held annually at the Gardens), and the realisation that a flower festival is more popular than a nationalist rally offers an opportunity to reflect on another pernicious quality of urban life and of the crowd’s unscrupulousness:

Almost everyone who attended the anti-Russian rally was here again. Yesterday they had been flushed with anger discussing the soldiers facing life and death on the battlefield, but today they were spilling their guts with joy, chatting, singing and dancing in the beautiful surroundings, they seemed truly at ease, carefree and elegant with no recollection of the temporary passions which had overtaken them. The two men looked on

87 Goldstein, “From the Teahouse to the Playhouse,” p. 754.
full of doubt and surprise... Dear reader, how could Li and Huang, half worried about their family, half concerned for their nation, accept this scene of noise and chaos?  

The issue at stake seems not to be that the flower festival is more popular than the nationalist rally, but that the same people have attended both events. That the fashionable young urbanites that populate the city are able to attend to national extinction one day and enjoy “gut spilling” pleasures the next is only a variation on their capacity to be both engaged with a speaker and their fellow audience members simultaneously. Huang and Li are shocked that the crowd continues to have interests and desires outside of its intrinsic validation of the master discourse of the lecture itself. While this paradoxically monomanical form of togetherness was the basis for Liang’s idealised notion of collectivity (qun群), the real-life crowd is able to turn away from the stage as much as toward it.

The choice of the Zhang Gardens as setting was in this regard both unavoidable and also pointedly representative. As Xiong Yuezhi notes, “the city’s history of public spaces undivided along lines of class, race, type or district begins with the Zhang Gardens.”  


Unlike the auditorium, the Zhang Gardens were a public space without a centre - in which leisure, political engagement and commerce would take place simultaneously.

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88 XZGWLJ, p. 78.
91 Although undoubtedly a public space in any practical sense, the Zhang Gardens were privately owned and operated, having been sold to local merchant Zhang Shuhe 张叔和 (after whom they were named) in 1882. Xiong Yuezhi gives the “heyday” of the gardens as 1893-1909, and among the possible diversions available were the gardens themselves, tea houses, restaurants, a library, a theatre, a public hall, a photographic studio, exhibition
While Liang bemoans that the Zhang Gardens were a space in which the modern culture of oratory was perverted by its intersection with the fun and the libidinal, in chapter 17 of *New Story of the Stone* we are afforded a celebration of the same idea. The chapter, entitled, “Two public speeches in the Wei Chun Gardens [Zhang Gardens]” (*Wei Chun Yuan liang fan yanshuo* 味莼园两番演说) depicts Baoyu’s visit to a public forum on the signing of a secret treaty between China and Russia.  

As with *The Future of New China*, this is being held in the Zhang Gardens’ Arcadia building, and many of the details, such as the arrangement of tables as a podium and the centrality of the Russian question, are practically identical in both novels. Yet the novel’s interpretation of the scene is clearly quite different. In one instance the audience faces off against a speaker whose voice booms above the din, but rather than quieting, “the undercurrent of noise simply got louder as well” (*dixia chao de shengyin ye genzhe ta dale* 底下吵的声音也跟着他大了). Echoing the sentiments of Li and Huang, one audience member stands up and shouts:

There is important business to be discussed today, this isn’t a casual get-together! May I suggest that you quiet down a little and cease this barbarous activity in a place of civility.

今日在这里是议事，不是谈笑！奉劝你们静点，不要在这个文明会场上，做出那野蛮举动出来。

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halls, a stadium, playgrounds, “all in one public place.” The gardens were also an informal commercial space for the selling of goods, and a popular site for prostitution; Xiong Yuezhi, “Wanqing Shanghai siyuan,” pp. 73-81. See also Hong Yu, *Jindai Shanghai*, p. 222.

92 This was likely reference to a treaty signed on November 9 1900, relating to control of the northern port city of Dalian.

93 In this case – it is less clear with Liang’s version – this is almost certainly a reference to the March 1901 forum held there which Wu himself played a part in organising. Considering Wu’s ongoing editorial involvement with *New Fiction* it is certain that he would have read Liang’s description of the forum in issue 7, and although it was published just over two years later, Wu’s version of the same event certainly raises the possibility that he is responding to Liang’s version of events. For more on this forum see Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, pp. 249-250.

94 XSTJ, p. 138.

95 Ibid. Emphasis added.
The attempt to invoke the Gardens as a “place of civility” is however symbolically trampled underfoot by the crowd, and the forum feels very much a part of the “big meatloaf,” rather than inimical to it.

Reinforcing Baoyu’s status as a caricature of reformism, his response to this is to complain about the cacophony and inability to hear, prompting Wu Jianren (in one of the few uses of the “kanguan 看官” form in New Story) to contradict his own character, interjecting on behalf of not just the forum, but the entire social space of the Zhang Gardens:

This time there was even more people, and the noise was even more cacophonous, it was unbearable and made everything unclear. After this person was done speaking, more took his place.

My esteemed reader, you must understand that the Zhang Gardens are a place of fête, people are free to come and go, and so there are inevitably many curious peekers, as well as the comings and goings of pimps and prostitutes, some people even thought it was a sermon spreading the word of Jesus Christ. With the sounds of laughter, talking and general tumult, how could one ever expect to hear clearly?76

可奈今番人多，声音嘈杂，听不清楚。这个人说过之后，来的人更多了。

看官，须知这张园是宴游之地，人人可来，所以有许多治游浪子于及马夫，妓女，都跑了进来，有些人还当是讲耶稣呢。笑言杂沓，那里还听得出来？

Wu here is speaking not only on behalf of the speakers but on behalf of the entire scene, and his desire that the very nature of the event be understood as ludic and deliberately chaotic seems to speak directly to those, like Liang Qichao, who could only interpret it as pernicious. Fittingly, the scene ends with a fifteen-year-old girl pulling herself onto a table and delivering a rousing nationalist oratory which, “upon hearing the crowd applauded in unison, before returning to its tumult with

76 XSTJ, p. 137.
renewed energy” (zhongren tingle yiqi paishou, yihou renshe gengjia caozha 众人听了一齐拍手,以后人声更加嘈杂). 97

The representation of the forum in New Story of the Stone seems to be in contrast to another forum scene in chapter 20 of Wenming xiaoshi 文明小史 (Modern Times, 1903-1905), by Wu Jianren’s close friend Li Boyuan. This relatively famous scene appears to depict the contemporary forum not as sublime chaos, but indistinguishable from the lecture in its capacity to act as a façade behind which lurks the all manner of self-service and avarice. Crucially however the audience proves to be the differentiating factor, breaking the bonds of enforced etiquette and both revealing and prosecuting the sham.

The episode begins when the three principal brothers, Jia Ziyou, Jia Pingquan, Jia Geming (“Fake Freedom,” “Fake Democracy” and “Fake Revolution”),98 are invited to attend a “comrades’ oratory meeting” (Tongshi yanshuo dahui 同志演说大会) held at Shanghai’s Xu Gardens.99 This is organised by an unscrupulous acquaintance of theirs, Wei Bangxian 魏榜贤 (“Wei the hack”). The forum is nothing more than a get-rich-quick scheme which plays of the ease with which nationalist rhetoric could attract a paying crowd. Central to which seems to be Wei’s expectation that the audience will do all of the work for him, and it is only when nobody is willing to come forward and speak that he himself is forced on stage. His seemingly-improvised speech is initially a success (it is virile and demonstrative while lacking in any actual content, an ideal example of reformist oratory), yet as it reaches its crescendo, Wei misplaces the final page of the script that he has evidently been reading from verbatim. As he stumbles, the audience becomes an actor:

All did was grope all over his body, struck completely dumb. The crowd waited impatiently, a confusion of urging and prompting, before they began clapping in unison. Thinking that this “applause” was really meant to mock him, he

97 The common thread through each of them is commonality and diversity (zata 杂沓), be it positive or negative, as the foundational material of urban life - which notably disappears in the second half of New Story of the Stone.
98 Wang, Fin de siècle Splendor, p. 221.
became even more anxious, he flushed and veins began popping out under the pressure. Still unable to find what he was looking for, he clutched the table with both arms, cleared his throat twice, and began again to speak, “gentlemen, gentlemen!” But when he finished with this, he had no more... his anxiety was such that he couldn’t say another word.100

While the forum itself is little more than a money-swindling scheme, Li Boyuan undercuts the unilateral criticism of the “exposé” with a brief celebration of the critical and participatory audience.101 While they react enthusiastically for as long as Wei is able to maintain his “performance,” when he loses the script (literally), the audience as critical participant immediately intervenes, causing him to retreat, embarrassed, from the stage.

In their willingness to play the credulous audience up until the point that it is no longer entertaining, the audience reveals itself to be as cynical as the speakers about the true nature of the forum. It knows that it has paid its entrance fee to enjoy a performance, and in a manner common to expose fiction, everyone involved is revealed to be distancing themselves from investment in reality. Again a moment of playful and transgressive fun is able to pierce the shroud of modernity’s own perilous self-constructs, acting as both fun and as a “truth act.” While Dr Confucius and Mi Ke adverted to an incontrovertible truth for which they were the conduit, at the forum truths were as yet unformed, negotiable and contingent. While in the context of the lecture the audience’s role in the medium-message duality was on the side of reinforcing the authority of the medium, in the forum the audience engages with the message, even when that takes the form of ignoring and mocking it. Considering the wider context of pseudo-modern sham orators depicted in commercial fiction, Wei Bangxian’s crucial mistake was perhaps to

100 Ibid., p. 105. Emphasis added.
101 Juan Wang, Merry Laughter, p. 145, and David Strand, Unfinished Republic, p. 69, both mention this episode, but neither references the audience reaction.
organise a forum and not a lecture, where one could be “a hack” and still be politely applauded.

4. Conclusion

Bodies, audiences and settings have an exaggerated relevance in tabloid writing. Tabloid fiction was a refraction of the conditions of the forum and storytelling hall, where the author exposed themselves to the crowd without adornment, and risked their mockery from behind a makeshift podium. Doleželová-Velingerová notes that that “the styles of Li Baojia [Boyuan] and Wu Woyao [Jianren] in general show a remarkable affinity with that of Chinese story-telling.” These authors grasped the fundamental fun of the holistic experience of audience interaction in the storytelling hall, which in its chaos and confusion is a microcosm of how they viewed the world, pugilistic, sarcastic and riotous. Commercial authors were in many ways spiritual audience members themselves, marginal to modernity, they nonetheless spoke out, often in sarcastic and profane ways, challenging the artificial authority of the centre.

In this chapter we have been witness to a late-Qing society still coming to grips with public speaking as an ambiguously playful and modern context, and with the social rules that would be imposed upon participants and observers as a result of their undesirable agency over the rhetoric of modernity. While lectures and forums were both oratorical events, they couldn’t have been understood more differently by contemporary observers. In tabloid fiction, forums are depicted as retaining a close relationship to the tradition of storytelling, particularly in the sense of which the subject/object nature of modern performance was dissembled, and the audience took on a critical role. For these same authors, the lecture and its spatial adornments imposed a tacit passivity upon the audience which pre-empted and diminish the conditions of its own critique. This was perceptive, for as Liang Qichao conflated medium and message, audience passivity became metonymic for approval of his social and political reformism. As they did with all modern

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intellectual archetypes at this time, commercial authors found catharsis in revealing these modern lecturers, whether they were in costume or not, to be frauds. These were more complex than mere acts of “exposé” however, they implicitly grasped the postmodern proposition that “modern” agendas employ the modern as a means to naturalise their own power and authority.

In chapter 1 we considered the means by which “the task of rationalism” and modernity was to “confine men within the limits of their own individuality,” by denying the truth faculties of the body.\(^{103}\) In this chapter the rational modern man is enjoined to strip himself of the intersubjective truth faculties of the collective, of the “wisdom of the crowd” and of the “crowd self” as sentient, judiciary, being. Reformers, like the enlightenment crowd theorist Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931), asserted that the crowd-self was irrational, “a barbarian – that is, a \textit{creature acting by instinct}.”\(^{104}\) As with the latent barbarity of sexuality and self-indulgence, audience unruliness could not be co-opted by the reformist culture as pedagogical or socially palliative in some fashion. In this sense, both in its externality to reformist culture and in its relationship to instinct and preconscious energies, the irrepressible crowd and the sexual and self-indulgent body were united by the same potential for cathartic refusal of modernity.

That the readership was more than extrinsic arbiter but intrinsic participant in the creative process was always at the surface of the commercial author’s consciousness.\(^{105}\) The novel form originated in the dialogic practice of storytelling and was later enconced in a commercial context which adumbrated this quality of audience involvement. Lianyan Ge’s comments from instance can be applied to commercial fiction almost verbatim:


\(^{105}\) Part of the reason novels were left unfinished was essentially dialogic, the audience could demand more, they were actively involved in the producing of the novel. There must have been a great deal of affinity between popular authors and storytellers in their mutual willingness to face the possibility of a very public failure.
One of the hallmarks of oral storytelling is the immediate partnership between the teller and the audience. No teller can afford to lose his or her listeners, without whom the narrative activity would cease. No audience would just listen passively all the time: They would laugh, they would cry, and they would applaud... The story told is inevitably the outcome of such a negotiation between the audience and the storyteller, which goes on coevally with the development of the narrative itself. The teller is, therefore, never the sole creator of the story, and the audience is not only the addressee but, significantly, a coauthor in the story making.106

Despite this, few studies have explicitly argued that novels from this period were critically involved in a creative dynamic with their own readership, or were expressing an aesthetics of dialogue. (Mittler has considered this question, but only in the context of late-Qing newspaper readerships).107

The implicit and explicit audiences within a text reflect its implied readership, “texts invariably contain clues as to how they are to be interpreted: audiences are evoked, or, often enough, represented in the text.”108 The mimetic representation of involved audiences in tabloid fiction was reflective of the reader’s expected involvement in “knitting” the meaning of the text together, just as the audience was in storytelling contexts. This was particularly true of the exposé-style which was the foundation of tabloid fiction, in which the grotesques of modern life were typically thinly sketched and immediately discarded with, functioning only as cues prompting the readership to embellish with their own experiences. One of the reasons that fanxin xiaoshuo and commercial fiction went hand-in-hand was that both were essentially dialogic in this manner, with fanxin xiaoshuo demanding that the readership negotiate a complex and largely implicit dialogue between the text and its hypotext.

The “budding Ciceros” of modern life like Liang Qichao and Cai Yuanpei harboured deep uncertainty about the role of the audience in the act of oratory


and the wider forum. Speaking to one’s peers was far different than speaking to an unmediated public. Nonetheless, the fictional audiences that bookend The Future of New China speak as much to anxieties about “involved readerships” as “involved audiences.” Liang described the New Fiction agenda as a leveraging of fiction’s power to “immerse” (浸) its readers, to enjoin them to “assimilate themselves with the content” (而与之俱化者也). This is an ambiguous statement. Does Liang conceptualise the moment of assimilation between the text and reader as one between subject and object, or co-subject? Is the reader “engrossed” and “immersed” in the sense of being rendered immobile or as being internalised within the text as an active agent? (i.e. where does its meaning lie between Georges Poulet’s belief in the submission of the reader’s subjectivity to that of the text and Wolfgang Iser’s notion of reader as co-author?) The immobile audience to Dr Confucius’ lecture (as well as Liang’s dozens of didactic interjections) indicate a sense of immersion only in the latter sense.

In the context of fiction in the late-Qing there was no authorial pedestal akin the one imagined for Dr Confucius. The nature of fiction at this time was inherently unconducive to his central image, texts were meant to shared, sources of bawdy gossip and fun anecdotes, they were horizontally and fragmentally disseminated, not related back to a central and canonical authority. The audience for Liang’s novel effectively refused to sit quietly for his lectures, they got up and walked out, metaphorically speaking, expressing their dissatisfaction through the tepid commercial response to New Fiction with The Future of New China among its vanguard novels.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Carnival of Capitalism in The New Water Margin

This study opened with a scene from The New Three Kingdoms by Lu Shí’e, which was presented as illustrative of tabloid fiction’s dialectical intertwining of playfulness and modern-ness. The previous two chapters elaborated on facets of this image. Chapter 2 looked at a variation on Zuo Ci’s interplay of embodiedness and mindfulness, while chapter 3 considered the ludic collectivity of the crowd and the street performance, and its challenge to the modern privileging of oratorical individualism. Returning to that scene, a final detail is worthy of recounting. Although Hua Tuo is shocked to find a street performer, he nonetheless still wants to employ him, he’s just not sure he can offer him enough money to convince him to leave his performing. Whether Zuo Ci is charlatan or scientist, fantasist or renaissance man is ultimately irrelevant, capitalist modernity mitigates his myriad ambiguities, asking only if he is profitable.

This chapter will continue this theme of ludic profitability by returning to Lu Shí’e. Like Zuo Ci, Lu too was a medical professional who had chosen the alternative practice of administering profitable entertainment to the masses. He was one of the most prolific and commercially-successful authors of the late-Qing and early Republican period, completing at least 30 novels between 1906 and 1915, while continuing to publish into the 1930s. Though not identified as one of the late-Qing “tabloid literati” because his novels were not published in the tabloid press or in fiction journals, he is nonetheless a worthwhile point of reference in the

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1 The New Water Margin was one of seven novels published (all by the Gailiang xiaoshuo she 改良小说社) in 1909 alone. Five of the seven – Xin yesou puyan 新野叟曝言 (The New Humble Words of an Old Rustic), Yeshi xiyouji 也是西游记 (More Journeying to the West), Xin niehaihua 新孽海花 (New Flower in the Sea of Sin), The New Water Margin and The New Three Kingdoms - were fānxīn xiaoshuo, and Lu Shí’e would a prolific fānxīn xiaoshuo author throughout his career. (To be entirely accurate More Journeying to the West was serialised in 1909-10, and only collected into a novel by the Gailiang xiaoshuo she in 1910). For a complete list of all Lu Shí’e publications see Tian Ruohong, Lu Shí’e xiaoshuo kaolun, p. 389-398. For more on Lu Shí’e in general see the special edition of Mingqing xiaoshuo yanjiu 明清小说研究, 2001:1, pp. 52-107.
identification of a tabloid fiction ethos.

For one thing he expressed the archetypal tabloid writer’s disdain for the era’s pedagogical and moralist fiction. His novel New Shanghai depicts a bookseller who is selling off his copies of Japanese political novels and reformist tracts (including Kang Youwei’s non-fiction travel diaries, Shiyiguo youji 十一国游记), for pennies on the dollar. The seller explains that he sells them so cheaply because nobody wants to read them or for that matter can even understand them, and so the publishers are selling them to him at scrap paper prices. Not only did he mock and ultimately reject reformist bellwethers he also asserted the function of fiction within a wider economy of escapist leisure and libidinal desire, deprecatingly admitting that his novels were “ultimately for lubricating conversation over food and wine” (zhongwei chuyi zhi zhutan 终为茶余酒后之助谈). He also embraced a dialogic relationship to his readership, even operating a book-lending society (xiaoshuo shiyue she 小说贳阅社) from his own home, the address of which he advertised in his novels.

While he championed the satirical agency of fiction, Lu Shi’e saw this as a means to social betterment, and his novels do tend toward their own form of pedagogics. In Liulu caishen 六路财神 (The God of Wealth of the Six Roads, 1910), the character Xia Baxi 夏霸喜 organizes a fake business association which he uses to embezzle money. Lu intercedes to direct the reader not to the shamefulness of Xia Baxi himself, but toward the institutions of modernity that facilitate his scam by

2 For more on these diaries see Kang Youwei, Kang Youwei yigao: lieguo youji 康有为遗稿: 列国游记, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1995.
3 Lu Shi’e, Xin Shanghai, pp. 71-72. (Chapter 16).
4 Ibid., p. 2.
5 Xie Renmin 谢仁敏 states for instance that he had a “reader-centric” (duzhe zhongxin zheqi 读者中心主义) philosophy as an author; “Wanqing Lu Shi’e de xiaoshuo guanlian ji qi wenshi yi yi 晚清陆士谔的小说观念及其文史意义,” Guangxi shehui kexue 广西社会科学, 2013:05, pp. 140-143. The address can be found in chapter 9 of New Shanghai, it was in the International Settlement; Wang Xuejun, “Shiliu yu pinglun,” p. 53.
6 He stated for instance that, “while fantasies are best suited to satire, and reality is best suited to warnings, both have the same benefit to society” (yuyan ziyi fengshi, shishi ziyi jingren, you yiyu shehui shi yiyangde 寓言足以讽世，实事足以警人，有益于社会是一样的); Lu Shi’e, Zuijin shehui mimi shi 最近社会秘密史, Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 1996, p. 203. Despite this, his yuyan 寓言 novels, like New China, have largely been read as earnest rather than satirical
arrogating to themselves an unassailable modern-ness, and thereby honesty (as with the lecturer in the previous chapter). 7

Among these modern systems, capitalism was becoming precipitously more elaborate and speculative in nature after 1860. The founding of the Shanghai Stock Exchange in 1869 and the proliferation of private banks, foreign banks, join-stock companies, remittance firms (piaohao 票号), and native banks (qianzhuang 钱庄 or qianpu 钱铺) indicate a growing illusoriness to capital. Once again the Shanghai International Settlement was ground zero for this.

Studies of early capitalist societies often make note of the extent to which the logic of exchange is conflated with the ethics of exchange - embodied in the concept of “rational choice” and homo oeconomicus. 8 Although a generalisation, this has some validity in the late-Qing. In a 1910 article on stimulating the national economy, Liang Qichao stated for instance that in individual and family-run businesses, the owner-operators “bear complete responsibility” (jie fu wuxian zeren 皆负无限责任). 9 In contrast, in modern joint-stock companies, personal responsibility is amortized and replaced with the bureaucratic postulates of capitalism:

Other than exchanging money for stock, the stockholder has no responsibility: they are merely a mechanism of the company, it isn’t as if they assume the fiscal responsibilities of the company... outside of the company’s assets and liabilities, there really isn’t any other consideration. 10

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7 Lu states, “dear reader, the business association may seem on the surface to be the most modern system, but it is actually more barbaric than the barbarians” (kanguan, shang shehui shi zai biaomian shang kanqilai guoshi de zhidu, qishi bi yeman de hanyao yeman 看官，商社议事在表面上看起来果实机文明的制度，其实比野蛮的还要野蛮); Lu Shi’e, Liulu caishen 六路财神, Shanghai: Gailiang xiaoshuo she, 1910, p. 10. In the wedge (xiezi 六翼) to the same novel he stated that the central motif (chudian 出典) of the novel was dialectical – i.e. it was based in yin/yang; ibid., p. 1.


Liang here is invoking a version of the *homo oeconomicus* - whose only considerations are the efficient distribution of profit and loss. This subordination of the subjective arena of ethics to the objective and empirical was so pervasive that he even suggested that “the nation’s citizens are equivalent to stocks” (*gufen ze piyou quanti guomin ye* 股份则犹如全体国民也). 11 Incredibly, these comments on the infallibility of the joint-stock model were made on November 1910, just a few months after the Shanghai rubber stock market crisis (*xiangpi gupiao fengchao* 橡胶股票风潮) had decimated the native banks and the personal savings of thousands (beginning in July 1910), offering a traumatic demonstration of the consequences of the modern ethics of delineated responsibility. 12

Lu Shi’e consistently expressed a critical disposition toward the early capitalist economy and society, viewing it as a medium which cloaked the traditional vices of greed, self-delusion and ruthlessness in the guise of modern rational acting. Novels like *New Shanghai*, *God of Riches of the Six Roads*, *The New Water Margin*, and *Zuijin shehui mimi shi* 最近社会秘密史 (*The Secret History of Modern Society*, 1910), largely turn away from the world of benighted officialdom so familiar to tabloid fiction, 13 taking place instead in the parallel context of illusory wealth, status and social mobility, get-rich-quick schemes, and the rise of the speculator, or *caishen* 财

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11 In a revealing statement of reformism’s vanguard role for capitalism in China, Liang also noted that while the contemporary government and society of China were “incompatible with the spirit of the joint-stock company” (*yu gufen youxian gongsi zhi xingzhi zui buxiangrong zhe* 与股份有限公司之性质最不相容者), the reform of these things will eliminate this and allow for commercial and industrial growth; ibid., p. 181.

12 The rubber stock market crisis was caused by rampant speculation on the rubber market, leading to a bubble in a market in which many native banks overextended their investment, causing more than 40 to go bankrupt in 1910 alone. The crisis is among the many factors that contributed to the Xinhai Revolution one year later. For more see: Ji Zhaojin, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China’s Finance Capitalism*, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2003, pp. 92-3.

13 Although it should be noted that the arenas of officialdom and capitalism were increasingly intersecting at this time, a development which Li Boyuan’s *Guanchang xianxing ji* 觀chang 现形记 (*Observations on Officialdom*, 1901-1906) took as its central premise.
In chapters 18-20 of *The Secret History of Modern Society*, an extended episode surrounds the same rubber stock market crisis, encapsulating these themes. At the height of “rubber fever” the protagonist, Shen Ergong 萍公, starts a native bank and makes a deal to acquire a massive amount of stock in a foreign-owned rubber company. For a brief time, he (and other speculators like the “rubber king”) enjoys the status that this rapidly inflating stock portfolio brings him. At the outset of chapter 20 however, hearing that the stock price has fallen, he sells everything in order to “minimise his losses,” furthering the collapse and causing the bankruptcy of his bank and several others, as well as many other businesses tied to them in the modern networks of credit. Shen too thinks of himself in terms of the rational actor, and it is only when he sees a group of ragged factory workers made redundant by his hand that this moral distancing of himself begins to collapse.

*Xin shuihu 新水浒* (*The New Water Margin*) was published a year earlier than the rubber crisis, in 1909, at the height of stock and commodity speculation in Shanghai. It too reflects on the social costs of economic reason and illusory regimes of capital, but reminiscent of the total shift in attitude at the mid-point of Wu Jianren’s *Sensational Biographies*, the second half of *The New Water Margin* turns away from rote exposure, and comically celebrates the sagacity of a series of illegal, profane and libidinal businesses. While outwardly funny (particularly in its total disrespect for the heroes of the *Water Margin*), these episodes juxtapose the fallacious “modern” subjectivity of rational actors and economic institutions, with a more authentic

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14 On the same theme of speculative and illusory capital, among the many social vultures and oddities in *New Shanghai*, we are introduced to what is almost certainly China’s first fictionalised property developer. Lu even introduces the contemporary term for such a figure as a “real estate worm” (*dipi chong* 地皮虫); Lu Shi’e, *Xin Shanghai 新上海*, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997, p. 32.

15 In this, Shen Ergong anticipates the speculator-protagonist of Mao Dun’s *子夜* Ziye (Midnight, 1933).


17 *New Shanghai* is also something of a diptych, following two different protagonists in the first and second halves, something which Lu declares at the outset of chapter 30 of that novel much as he does in *The New Water Margin*. 
(although no less capitalist) selfhood, grounded in the playful, profane and expressive confines of the “carnival of capitalism” that was Shanghai's Shengse Changsuo.

1. Enlightening the bandits

Over the course of its existence, the *Water Margin* has proven to be both formally and conceptually ductile. Formally in its dispersal over numerous novels, operas, plays, storytelling and art (as well as later in cinema and video games), and in its innumerable variations, continuations and re-interpretations. Conceptually in large part due to the central figure of the “righteous bandit” (*zhongyi qiangdao* 忠义强盗), whose tenuous harmony between loyalty and vengeance invited diametrically opposed readings. While the Qing court had long viewed the story as essentially seditious (and more recently Liang Qichao had deemed it simply too sexy), others responded that it was a utopian vision of incipient socialism, equal rights, or even anarchism.

That it expressed a seditious or socialistic ethos, or that it was frequently subject to official restrictions as *huigin* 海淫, was little impediment to *The Water Margin*’s commercial appeal. Throughout the Qing Dynasty, the urban theatre, opera, printing and storytelling industries had sold versions of the story to a middle class urban audience, largely as sexy and violent escapism from the grind of bureaucratic life in the city. Between 1886 and 1898, at least four high-quality lithographic-printed and illustrated editions of *The Water Margin* were published in Shanghai by three different publication houses. The “sister-in-law” (*saozi 嫂子*) operas, derived from the *Water Margin* story-cycle, were extremely popular (and populist).

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21 Ah Ying 阿英, *Xiaoshuo santan* 小说三谈, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979, pp. 129-130.
interpretations that depicted cuckoldry, titillation and masculine revenge over an exploration of the complex morality of righteous banditry, or the transvaluation of rural values to an urban stage. As Liangyan Ge has deftly demonstrated, the urbanisation of the Water Margin even led to the gradual incorporation of more urban settings and jokes at the expense of the rural poor, in order to satisfy the tastes of urban consumers. In this cultural context, Ding Yi’s 1905 claim that The Water Margin was in fact a depiction of an incipient desire for enlightenment modernity (i.e. reformism and constitutional rights) is the ironic culmination of the increasingly appropriated status of the Liangshan band in modern urban society, on hand for the ventriloquizing purposes of any given agenda and endlessly malleable to its intended audience.

The depiction of the Liangshan band’s sudden inculcation into capitalist modernity in The New Water Margin is therefore simultaneously fantastical and also entirely not. The commercialised and deracinated second life of pre-modern and pre-capitalist folk traditions plays a central role in many of the fanxin xiaoshuo works of Lu Shi’e, reflecting on the very culture of folk commodification and aestheticisation that the fanxin xiaoshuo embodied. The New Three Kingdoms for instance features one of the more starkly modernist images of late-Qing fiction (and one that is indicative of how unfortunately overlooked Lu Shi’e is the search for “incipient modernities”.

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22 Goldman, Opera and the City, chpt. 6.
24 Liyan Ge, Out of The Margins, p. 156. That the central theme of the Water Margin, personal loyalty (yiqi 义气), increasingly assumed a financial significance for urbanites in the Ming, a transition which was then re-reflected in the production of the story for urban audiences, is a particularly profound point about the contextual nature of the central values of cultural products; pp. 160-161.
25 There is a tortured irony to Ding Yi’s praising of the unassimilable nature of the Liangshan band even as he openly attempts to assimilate them. He notes that they remained “uncaptured by the straight world” (yu guan Shuihu zhu hao, shang buju yu shisu 上不拘于世俗), and how this really brought to mind for him that they in fact expressed the beginnings of the contemporary dominant enlightenment cultural values of democracy and human rights; Ding Yi 定一, “Xiaoshuo conghua 小说丛话,” Xin xiaoshuo 新小说, 15, pp. 19-21.
at this time), in which having been transposed into modernity, the characters of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* join the deracinated folk economy, selling their own degraded image back to the public in a proto-department store of mass-produced knick-knacks:

... the building was whitewashed and a sign stating that it was a commodity exhibition centre was hung up. Sure enough all kinds of merchants sent over some goods and rented a space for their display. Among the most famous items on display was some surplus make-up used by Diao Chan and the halberd once used by Lü Bu, the saddle and reins of Guan Yu’s horse Red Hare, a new book written by Cao Mengde [Cao Cao] entitled *A New Book by Mengde*... [Also there were] Zhuge Liang’s inventions, the wooden ox and the gliding horse, and the peasant’s feather from Zhou Yu’s hat...²⁶

把这所房屋粉饰了一遍，悬挂起商品陈列所招牌来。果然就有各项商人，纷纷送货进来，祖屋陈列。内中最著名的陈列物品，如貂蝉用剩的脂粉，吕布遗下的方天戟，关羽赤兔马上的鞍缰，曹孟德新著的“孟德新书”... 诸葛亮发明的木牛流马，周瑜冠上插过的雉尾...

*The New Water Margin* explores a similar instance of estrangement through bourgeois commercialisation, although, in a reflection of the overarching duality of the two novels, while the characters in *The New Three Kingdoms* acquiesce and sell themselves, the bandits revolt against their objectification and commodification.²⁷

In chapter 22, Wu Yong 吴用 and Li Kui 李逵 attend another “New Stage” (*xin wutai* 新舞台), where a series of *Water Margin*-derived plays are being performed.²⁸

The New Stage is depicted as a thoroughly bourgeois institution (the audience arrives by sampan and motorcar), in which the Liangshan band’s adventures have been reduced to an entertainment commodity. When the performance begins, Li Kui immediately becomes irate with the urbanised reinterpretation of his adventures, which depict not heroism and adventure but the salacious cuckolding of his “brother” Lu Junyi 卢俊义. Although Li Kui is reminded by Wu Yong that he must

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²⁶ XSG, p. 198.
²⁷ In the history of sequels and additions to the *Water Margin*, Lu Shi’e is consistently overlooked or mentioned in passing. That *The New Water Margin* was written at a time of high fashion for sequels is indicated by the fact that a novel with the same name, by “Xileng Dongqing 西冷冬青,” was serialised just a year earlier (1907-1908).
²⁸ XSH, p. 152. The plays include, “Da Mingfu 大名府,” “Shangxue shougu 赏雪收孤,” and “Wu Yong maibu 吴用卖卜.” There is also “Junyi shangshan 俊义上山” - in which Lu Junyi 卢俊义 (Magnate Lu) is persuaded to join the Liangshan Band.
“wear the mask of modernity to some extent” (yexi zhuan sanfen wenming mianmu chulai 也须装三分文明面目出来), he ultimately refuses this, jumping on stage and beating the actor playing the adulterer Li Gu 李固 half to death. His outburst, a cathartic puncturing of an appropriated evening entertainment version of banditry with actual bandit violence, indirectly comments on the barbarism of a society willing to enjoy banditry as evening entertainment.30

These images encapsulate the maturity of Lu’s fanxin xiaoshuo works, which use the basic premise of dislocation between subject and epoch less to laugh at the estrangement of the now-anachronous premodern, but rather through which the dialectical nature of modernity reveals itself (the first of many comparisons with New Story of the Stone). As the contrast between the above two episodes indicates, The New Water Margin and The New Three Kingdoms are a working through of the duality between acceding to the demands for self-commodification and self-cultivation in modernity, and the possibility of cathartic refusal. The scene from The New Three Kingdoms presents the joining of capitalist modernity as a form of self-abasement, an erasure of the individual at the hands of commercialisation and mass reproduction. Li Kui’s irruption against his own co-option and commodification by bourgeois culture is microcosmic of the contrasting ethos of The New Water Margin, where the injunction to “wear the mask of modernity” is ignored in ever more absurd and exorcising ways.

29 XSH, p. 153. Li Kui’s act of unenlightened but righteous interruption and Wu Yong’s comparing of the stage to the modern world both echo some of the motifs considered in the previous chapter. 30 Li Kui’s interrupting of the performance is only a continuation of his tendency to do so in the Water Margin, particularly chapter 90, in which he attends a storytelling performance derived from the Three Kingdoms story-cycle, and in which as with The New Water Margin he shouts loudly at the performers, but does not disturb them. In this contrast between text and hypotext acts as a further contribution to the discussion of the modern nature of audience-ness from the previous chapter, as Li Kui finds that in the modern age the audience is no longer a privileged participant in the storytelling act and is instead expected to show bland decorum; Lianyan Ge, Out of the Margins, p. 153. Mei Chun interprets this act in the original Water Margin as indicative of his anxiety over losing theatrical centrality to a woman; The Novel and Theatrical Imagination in Early Modern China, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p. 101. It is interesting to note that our brief view of the proceedings on stage reflect Goldman’s conclusions about the nature of Water Margin performances in late-Qing Beijing, that stories of adultery were particularly popular; Goldman; Opera and the City, chpt. 6.
In *The New Water Margin*, the plot of the original *Water Margin* is played in reverse. Rather than following how law-abiding figures become outlaws, it follows the bandits as they disperse among the urban centres of China, each intending to make their way in the modern world as “enlightened” men of the age.\(^{11}\) As chapter titles like, “The White-faced Gentleman plans to open a women’s school, the Divine Mathematician founds a bank” (*Baimian Lang ni kai nüxiao, shensuanzi chouban yinhang* 白面郎拟开女校，神算字筹办银行, Chapter 8), and “The Nine-tailed Turtle cleverly sets up a private courtesan house, Ten Feet of Blue establishes a women’s club” (*Jiuweigui qiaoshe si changliao, Yizhangqing tekai nüzonghui* 九尾龟巧设私娼寮, 一丈青特开女总会, Chapter 12), imply, the plot is both episodic and follows a leitmotif of entrepreneurship.

In this manner, *The New Water Margin* stands in contrast to Yu Wanchun’s *Quell the Bandits* (1794-1849) sequel to *The Water Margin*, *Dangkou zhi* 藩寇志 (*Quell the Bandits*, 1853), in which the Liangshan band is killed off in an intensely ideological expression of incipient technological modernity experienced as crushing authoritarianism.\(^ {32}\) Contrary to the comfortingly modern narrative of *Quell the Bandits*, in which newly invented military technology is used to excise these premodern elements from society, in *The New Water Margin* these same elements have willingly laid down their arms and joined modernity, all in the hope of

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\(^{11}\) There is a considerable mimesis with the plot of the original *Water Margin*, which features a series of individual adventures (business enterprises), linked by messengers (the tabloid media) and eventually resulting in a final coming together of the bandits (chapters 22-24 of the *New Water Margin*), dozen of bandits convening for the opening of a night garden, followed by even more travelling to a martial arts contest, and finally in chapter 24 the entire band convenes again in Mount Liangshan to discuss and rank their various embezzlements. However, it is unclear where in the original story arc *The New Water Margin* picks up from (unlike say *Quell the Bandits*, which begins after chapter 70 of the original). A few passing references to the Liao Dynasty 辽朝 imply that the events may take place after the amnesty depicted in the longer 120-chapter version.

\(^{32}\) For more on *Quell the Bandits* see David Der-wei Wang, “How Modern was Early Modern Chinese Literature? On the Origins of ‘Jindai wenxue’,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 30, (December 2008), pp. 153-158.
becoming a caishen. This is a much more complex image, which comments on the inherent lack of sovereignty of the transgressive in the face of the armature of enlightenment values.

The reader’s expectations are subverted though, as the bandits prove not to be estranged in modern society. Their immediate acculturation to the codes and logics of capitalist modernity takes shape as less a commentary on the belated enlightenment of the Liangshan Band as the latent banditry of modern life. This is encapsulated in the phrase, repeated often by the Liangshan band, that they must “wear the face of modernity, and have the guts of a bandit” (wenming mianmu, qiangdao xinzang 文明面目，强盗心肠). The bandits come to find that this is the ethos of modern Chinese life in general, expressed in the irony that they are not hunted down as seditious bandits, but rewarded with status and wealth as entrepreneurs. Crucially, these bandit-bourgeoisie far exceed their previous bandit selves’ capacity for larceny and general disruption, precisely because they are now inside of the dominant culture. In this their entrepreneurial spirit and savvy are raised as the quintessence of both modern and bandit values.

2. What is the robbing of a bank?

The first business enterprise depicted in the novel is that in which Shi Qian and Jiang Jing found a private bank (Lu states that it is a yinhang 银行, and not a qianzhuang or piaohao) in the city of Xiongzhou 雄州. The bank is an immediate success, taking in over two hundred thousand silver taels in deposits and issuing the same in the form of private bank notes. This episode draws on the contemporary proliferation of private banks and bank notes in late-Qing Shanghai.

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33 The phrase is, much like that in the title of this dissertation, an eight-character study in the dialectical nature of modernity, the profane lurking within the newly sacred. It also brings together the conclusions from the previous two chapters, bringing to mind the belief of oral performers that the story comes from their guts, and speaking to the association of the head with the critical faculties of modernity, and the body (and guts) with those base truth practices (gut feelings).

34 This is a reference to Jiang Jing’s status in the Water Margin as the “divine mathematician” (shen suanzi 神算子) and former Imperial accountant.

35 XSH, p. 50.
and Beijing (a total of 17 private banks opened before 1911), encouraged by official sanctions and decrees after 1900.\(^{36}\) Banking was among the archetypally modern industries whose development was directly tied to that of the nation by Liang Qichao and other reformers throughout the decade.\(^{37}\) Yet as with the rubber stock market crash, the private bank episode offers an opportunity to explore the inherently unreasonable, even paralogical, qualities that continue to undergird the ostensibly modern nature of speculative capitalism - particularly the bank’s quasi-supernatural status as institution that takes in silver and hands back what Marx called “subjective illusion,” or value-signified.

While the new forms of capital are dubiously modern, Shi and Jiang bely the archetypally modern capacity to abnegate moral responsibility in the running of their bank to the pervasive injunction to act as \textit{homo oeconomicus}. This becomes clear as the rapid growth of the Loyal and Righteous Bank (\textit{Zhongyi yinhang} 忠义银行) leads to insolvency, and the two agree to “minimise their losses” by continuing to issue bank notes even as they have no capital to back them up. In this Lu once again seems to intuitively understand the kind of logical unreason that produces bubble economies and bank defaults, a new climate of economic rationality, in which figures like Shi and Jiang viewed themselves as “only instruments in a system” driven by the singular collapsing of self-preservation and “rational acting.” Stylistically, he reinforces their abnegation of responsibility by presenting the discussion in which they decide on this course of action as between two unnamed and faceless human instruments of the bank itself, reflecting on the distancing of selfhood from the implacable diktats of exchange reason.\(^{38}\)

A later discussion with Zheng Tianshou on the functioning of the bank is for instance notable in its absence of banditry’s tendency toward the “tall tale” (as in \textit{Wu Song} and the tiger) in favour of a dull and bureaucratic diminishing of personal involvement in favour of the natural maximising of profit and loss:

\(^{37}\) Liang stated that alongside railways, transportation in general and public welfare, “trustworthy banks” (\textit{xinyi ge yinhang} 信义各银行) would be the engine (\textit{qianche} 前车) of national economic growth; Liang Qichao, “Jinggao guozhong zhi tan shiyeh,” p. 180.
\(^{38}\) XSH, p. 51.
When we organised the bank, there was no need for any seed capital, all we needed was to be ratified by the Ministry of Commerce, rent a respectable looking establishment and print tens of thousands of notes and we were in business. These bank notes were the foundation, using them we opened up the path to success; once this path was open we had tens upon hundreds of thousands of silver coming in, and we had some security. Early on there wasn’t any major deposits, so it was necessary to take these notes and exchange them for silver, and through these piecemeal deposits we started to get by.

办银行，本不消得资本的，只要部里头批准了，租几间体面房屋，印他数十万纸的钞票就可开办了。把钞票作为先锋，教他去开路；路一开通，自有整万数千的银子存放进来，我就可以不怕了。那初开几天，没有巨款存放进来，兑换柜上有拿着钞票来兑换银子的，全靠那储蓄柜放下来的零星款子来敷衍呢。

Shi and Jiang's rational loss-minimising strategy nearly falls apart however when it runs up against a mob and their desire to not lose all of their savings. When a disgruntled employee spreads the word that the bank is defaulting the ensuing riot tramples police officers and has the makings of a violent outcome for Shi and Jiang.³⁹ As the tension in the streets builds, quick thinking on their part is able to resolve the situation:

All that could be heard was the roar of the crowd: “[let’s] tear down this bandits’ bank and release our spite.” The chorus of shouts and beating fists was becoming ear-splitting. While they shouted and screamed, they noticed the door of the bank suddenly open, and two people carried out a notice written on long red poster, and stuck it up on the outside of the bank. At once the crowd’s attention turned to the poster and what was written on it: “An important announcement from Xiongzhou Loyal and Righteous Bank: because of the success of this bank, we have been subjected to attacks by bandits, and due to insufficient cash on hand, we will be temporarily suspending business. All deposits and account transactions will be executed within the next five days, we will absolutely not turn our back on you, thank you for your patience.” The crowd said, “So that’s how it is, we will return to this in five days.” They then dispersed one after another.⁴⁰

³⁹ XSH, p. 52. Considering the novel was published in 1909, it seems likely that the collapse of Shi and Jing’s bank is illustrative of the number of small private banks which folded in 1908 after Shanghai’s foreign banks significantly reduced their loans to other banks due to market instability; Linsun Cheng, Banking in Modern China, p. 35.
⁴⁰ XSH, pp. 52-53.
Returning to the conclusions of the previous chapter, this scene is essentially tragicomic, coming at the expense of a modern crowd and their credulity in the face of institutional authority and illusory wealth-as-status. Despite being bandits, Shi and Jiang are able to steal indiscriminately with nothing more than the appearance of rationality that the bank as “institutional cultural capital” affords them. Reflecting back on the “mask of modernity,” which can be put on or taken off at will, all it takes is the gesture of enlightenment in the form of the implicit authority of bourgeois patterns and modes of speech (the “important announcement”) for it to be immediately re-erected.

The crowd’s quiescence demonstrates that the enlightened bandit is able to rob people much more effectively from one side of the bank counter than from the other. In this Lu pre-empts the capitalist gallows humour in Mack the Knife’s notorious rhetorical question from The Threepenny Opera, “what is the robbing of a bank compared to the founding of one?” Lu Shi’e takes the opportunity to reinforce this central premise later in discussion with Zheng Tianshou again:

Zheng Tianshou said, “I never would have thought that banking was all a big scam. Actually then, what you did was really a good deed.” Jiang Jing said, “I have no idea what you might mean by that.” Zheng Tianshou replied, “Is it that hard to understand? When your bank failed, everybody suffered a terrible loss, but afterwards they will naturally be more careful. And the next banks that open won’t be allowed to start out of thin air, they’ll have to bring real capital to the table, from now on if you want to issue a million notes you’ll need to have a million in capital [to back it up]. Once the banks reach this point they won’t be able to fail anymore, isn’t this the success of your collapse? Shiqian replied, “Since our Liangshan Band came down from the mountain, by and large we’ve actually been of benefit to society, we’ve been able to uncover these false façades of modernity, and those following behind us know not to follow our example.”

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42 XSH, pp. 64-5. Emphasis added.
This conversation is suffused with the substitution of ethical thought with the logic of exchange, and the absurd and tortured self-justifications of capitalist logic. Jiang Jing’s earlier dispassionate recounting of the bank’s illusory function and Zheng Tianshou’s judgement that the bank was a “righteous scam” are each intentionally an expression of both the absolute self-interest of bandit ethics and the selfsame absolute self-interest that subtends the logic of the rational actor. The consanguinity between these two strains of self-justificatory thought being that both purport to engender systemic reform through self-interest (the Liangshan band’s crusade against the system in the Water Margin was driven by self-interest and peppered with “collateral damage”).

Stephen X. Mead has argued in his reading of Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida that early modern England was increasingly torn between the stable social identities reflected in, and engendered by, the gold standard, and the increasing slippage of actual value to value signified, in the form of a debased pound. The bank incident’s demonstration of the absurdity of capitalist logic is necessarily the first episode in The New Water Margin, as not only an illustration of the regime of illusory capital, but also of the possibility of self-reproduction that this signified, and which instigated and lubricated the rise of the entrepreneur in the late-Qing. The bank collapse in many ways triggers the parallel dissolution of the identity of the

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43 The choice of name for the bank only reinforces this duality between capitalism and banditry.
45 Social mobility and self-transformation are reflected through faces in many of Lu’s fictional works. Faces are malleable and transformational, particularly thanks to the new commercial technologies of cosmetics, as in the outlandish promises made by an advertisement which he transcribes in chapter 21 of New Shanghai; Lu Shi’e, *Xin Shanghai* 新上海, p. 94.
bandits, and they increasingly move away from archetypal modern industries, and into the fluidity and amorphousness of entrepreneurship’s “dispersed, placeless market of negotiated identities.”

The silver lining to illusory capital, at least to the bandits, is that while wealth can be accrued and lost overnight, so too can identity and status be endlessly re-iterated. The dubiously modern status of the new class of entrepreneurs that emerged with the rise of speculative capitalism in the late-Qing is the subtext of the remainder of the novel. Rea notes that for the early entrepreneur in this period, “industry and market forces encouraged not only occupational specialization but also occupational crossover.” The New Water Margin postulates a deeper conviction about social fluidity, that the basic inside and outside of modernity - the civilised and the barbarians - are themselves undermined by the status fluidity of a high capitalist society.

3. Libidinal economies

Lu’s critical eye toward capitalism sets him aside from the mainstream of exposé fiction. Nonetheless, by uncovering social climbing through private banking and “new schools,” national industries like mining, railways and even, as in the case of Hua Rong 花荣 and Xie Bao 解宝, through officialdom, The New Water Margin is playing the “greatest hits” of the exposé canon. Lu himself seems to have been

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47 The ultimate representation of this is that at the end of the novel, the original ranking of the bandits (and division into the 36 Heavenly Spirits and 72 Earthly Fiends) from the Water Margin is re-iterated, this time based solely on how much money they managed to embezzle.
48 Christopher Rea, “Enter the Cultural Entrepreneur,” in Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland (eds.), The Business of Culture: Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900-60, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015, p.14.
49 At the close of Chapter 22, Xie Bao 解宝 arrives at the night garden (discussed later) bedecked in finery in the classic caricature of a venal and grasping official. His appearance prompts several of the other bandits to bemoan his transformation from a true haohan 好汉 into a hated official; XSH, p. 159.
50 Lu wrote many exposé works, including Longhua hui zhi guaixianzhuang 龙华会之怪现状 (A Strange Scene at the Longhua Society, 1911), The Secret History of Modern Society, and God of Riches of the Five Roads.
aware of this, and around the mid-point of the novel he admits that it has been “entirely absent of excitement” (hao meixie’er jingcai 豪没些儿精彩). However, a new direction also raises its head at this point, as he notes:

Thankfully outside of Jiangzhou there are many dissolute and flippant talents, who have set themselves up in all kinds of shady, self-interested and abased schemes. These are bound to loosen my wrist and moisten my tongue, and I will inevitably spill some ink getting this down on paper.

Although the tone of this comment is ambiguous, the remaining chapters of the novel clarify it in their sympathetic, even celebratory, account of these flippant characters and their new and absurd variations on, and additions to, the rich tapestry of commercialised shengse gouma in the modern world. For Lu Shi’e, these “shady businesses” are worth celebrating not only as rich material for the voyeuristic and gossip-mongering exposé author, but in their refusal of the dominant social reformist values of modern life. While the bankers and private educators embody the fallacies of a rapidly capitalising society, these silly takes on modern business express the sense that commercial success is not necessarily predicated on selling illusions.

This shift in the progress of the novel begins when the bandits begin to realise they are no match for the economic violence of the imperialist foreigners and the habituated liars and scammers (jiaxinren 假心人) of modern Chinese life. In chapter 15 for instance, An Daoquan 安道全 is elaborately scammed by a group of local toughs. As Zheng Tianshou 郑天寿 states rather explicitly in Chapter 13, “these people’s hearts are ten times more bandit-like that ours!” (zhexie rendexin, bi women zuo qiangdaode, haiyao hen qishibei 这些人的心，比我们做强盗的，还要狠起十倍!). Out bandit-ed by the non-bandits, the Liangshan band find their economic niche in the world to based not in their infamous capacity for ruthlessness, but their equally infamous capacity for libidinal shamelessness (sex and violence being the yin

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51 XSH, p. 90.
52 Ibid.
53 XSH, p. 71.
54 XSH, p. 80.
and yang of *The Water Margin*). Their business concerns become elaborately provocative, bringing to mind Lyotard’s own characterisation of the libidinal economy as a combination of economic commodification and radicalisation of the libido.\(^{55}\)

This begins in Chapter 12 when it is revealed that Wang Ying 王英 has become a male prostitute in the service of wealthy and lonely women. As Zhou Tong 周通 relates, “all day long he makes himself up like a butterfly and passes up and down the street [on the arms of these women]” (*zhengri jia daban de hua hudie xiangsi, zai malushang chuanlaichuanqu* 整日价打扮的花蝴蝶相似，在马路上穿来穿去).\(^{56}\) Just as the banking collapse introduced the wider pervasiveness of social fluidity, the prostitute has often functioned as the conceptual entry point for the libidinal economy:

Bataille’s prostitute in *L’Erotisme* (1957), like Marcuse’s in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), is a figure of glorious, gratuitous, unproductive expenditure, and hence a heroic figure of negation, of what Marcuse called ‘the Great Refusal’ of ‘the order of business’ and the bourgeois imperatives of parsimony, saving and investment. One-Dimensional Man’s prostitute is a marginal figure who challenges the instrumental rationality of advanced industrial society, apparently by cheating its rules of investment and return, its imperatives of alienated labour, time, and sexuality. For Marcuse, the prostitute’s ‘avoidance’ of ‘work’, her refusal to support herself with wage-slavery, renders her a heroic figure with the same ‘power of negation’ as the work of art has in a ‘two-dimensional culture’. Marcuse values precisely the ‘subversive force’ of prostitution that its critics traditionally feared, oddly implying that the prostitute is somehow living, or spending, her desire more authentically than are those whose sexuality and libido have been fully assimilated to bourgeois society.\(^{57}\)

The libidinal economy is the dialectical counterpart of the substitution of ethical reasoning to that of exchange, its profit-making is both within the values of modern society and subversive of them. Zheng Tianshou’s sympathetic response to Wang Ying’s prostituting is indicative of this, echoing Marcuse and Bataille in its refusal to

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\(^{56}\) XSH, p. 71.

\(^{57}\) Bennett, “Libidinal economy, prostitution and consumer culture,” pp. 104-5.
interpret the libidinal act as shameful and recognising its capacity for subversive profit. While Zhou Tong accuses Wang Ying of “bringing shame on the Liangshan name,” Zheng makes the case that prostitution is the modern embodiment of the bandit ethos by taking from the rich and redistributing among the poor. He notes that, “in fact, brothels, courtesan houses and gambling halls represent a great contribution to society in that they are all consumers of the wealth of the wealthy” (changliao, jiguan, duchang deng neng xiaohao furen qiancai zhe, junshi shehui zhi dagongchen 红楼，妓馆，赌场等能消耗富人钱财者，均是社会之大功臣).

Prostitution here is not shameful but expresses a “subversive force” its capacity to profit and undermine the traditional hierarchies of economic success simultaneously, to “cheat the rules of investment and return.”

In the same chapter Tao Zongwang 陶宗旺 is operating an off-the-books courtesan house, and Wang Ying’s wife, Hu Sanniang 卢三娘, is the proprietor of a business referred to as a “women’s club” (nüzonghui 女总会）- a place for gambling, gossip and libidinal fun, both explicit and only alluded to. 58

Zhou Tong said, “Clubs are meeting places for friends, the members of the club are subject to a special police dispensation that allows them to gamble and play mah-jong or wahua, everything goes, only pai gow isn’t allowed... When Hu Sanniang arrived here, she saw that these clubs were everywhere in Jiangzhou, but there was no equivalent women’s club, so she hit on this new idea to start a club just for women. After she finished setting it up, she invited the concubines of business magnates, and the famous courtesans of gentry and officials to come and gamble. Having received the invite these women were overjoyed, and they called their sisters and mothers in law, and told them to go, and the women’s club took off... At first it was just a few female members playing, but as the game got bigger, men also joined in, men and women crammed in together gambling all through the night, even some con-men managed to sneak in, I once heard they were actually invited under Hu Sanniang’s direction. Among those men, some were really here for the game while others only pretend to gamble but look mainly to flirt with the

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58 XSH, p. 72. This certainly isn’t the only late-Qing novel to expound on turn of the century metropolitan gambling culture. The Nine-tailed Turtle and Li Boyuan’s Guangchang xianxing ji 官场现形记 (Officialdom Unmasked, 1903-1906) both discuss gambling in some detail. See the forthcoming monograph from Paola Zamperini on gambling in Late-Qing fiction, Spellbound: The Maze of Gambling in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction. The idea of a women’s club however has no basis in reality as far as I can ascertain, Prof. Catherine Yeh, personal correspondence, 23/4/2016.
lady customers. The good thing is that money always came in either way, so the club management turns a blind eye.  

The “gender-bending” of traditional libidinal activity - male prostitutes and female gamblers and pimps - invests these businesses with a deliberate sense of absurdity. Yet as the above discussion indicates, it also speaks to the bandits’ role as more than simply willing participants in the libidinal economy but as “libidinal entrepreneurs,” finding market niches and exploiting them. In this they represent a form of “rational actor,” and no less so for being grounded in the industries of irrational and transgressive pleasure. In modernity’s weaving together of puritan self-cultivation and economic productivity it was essentially modern and morally upstanding to strike out from moral cesspit officialdom and pursue success in the untainted world of business, yet the bandits have become economically successful without repressing their drives to pleasure, sexuality and fun.

Such acts of entrepreneurship reflect on the indeterminate “modern-ness” of the pioneers of leisure industry in late-Qing society, bringing to mind the figure of Li Boyuan, whose sexual role-play, anti-establishment ethics and personal re-invention made him one of the most fascinating figures of the time. This comparison seems to be apparent to Lu Shi’e as well, and in chapter 20 Wu Yong is depicted as inventing the modern tabloid newspaper - the Cry to Heaven Daily (Hutian ribao 呼天日报) - in much the same manner as Li Boyuan:

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59 XSH, p. 73.
60 The Liangshan band have become the kind of “cultural entrepreneurs” discussed in Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland (eds.), The Business of Culture: Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900-60, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015.
Wu Yong said, “Right not there are a lot of newspapers, but none dare to speak out. This is because they all have taken official money, causing their vitality to disappear and leaving their readers dissatisfied. Setting up right now, all we need is to stand out from the crowd, to not take any official payoffs, any outside money whatsoever, and to not shy away from the bigwigs [in our reporting]. We won’t fear the anger of the despotic, and won’t avoid toil and resentment... If we handle things this way we’ll strike fear into the hearts of the officials, and they’ll definitely try to find a way to buy us out, and we can double or triple our initial stake.61

吴用道：目下报馆虽多，敢言的报却一家没有，因都受了官款，奄奄然生气全无，阅看的人家也都不甚高兴；我此刻开办，只要立异标奇，不受官款，不受外款，不避权贵。不畏强御，不辞劳怨，这样一个办起来，不怕不发达…我这样大弄起来，官场中必定忌惮，那时必定设法买我们的报馆，我就可大大的赚他一注银子。

The irony of the newspaper image is not that it is a means for the bandits to domesticate themselves and join bourgeois society, but rather it functions as the modern pretext for, even a refinement of, the longstanding values of banditry. Again it is the commercial potential of dissolution and gossip with undergirds this however, and despite his initial idealism, Wu Yong dictates that local news will categorised in terms of, “[sex] extortion, swindling and blackmail, murder... and legal action” (yinguai, zhapian, shashang… cisong 淫拐、诈骗、杀伤... 词讼).62 Xiao Rang agrees, suggesting that the paper will help its readers recognise the sham institutions of modern banditry (like scams and strong-arm tactics), which obviously brings to mind Lu’s own fiction ethos.63

The equation of tabloid news with bandit values is furthered when Wu Yong realises that he can use of the newspaper to blackmail officialdom.64 While the

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61 XSH, p. 140.
62 Ibid. At certain junctures the extra-juridical qualities of the press are even turned against other bandits. Zheng Tianshou’s trial-by-media in chapter 11 after he is accused of improper relations with a student at his school being one example.
63 XSH, p. 143.
64 XSH, p. 140. The experiences of Wu Yong with the newspaper seem to be closely based on those of Wu Jianren’s editorship of Hankou ribao 汉口日报 in 1903. Wu’s editorial satire of local official Liang Dingfen 梁鼎芬 led to the newspaper being censored and eventually, Liang Dingfen was forced to buy the newspaper and return it to state control, spending a great deal of money in the process. The incident was the impetus for Wu’s shift away from newspapers and into authorship. The entire episode is covered by Wang Lixing 王立兴, in “Wu Jianren yu ‘Hankou ribao’: dui xin faxian de yizu Wu Jianren cailiao de tantao 吴趼人
economic success of the newspaper is driven by a willingness to delve into the sexual and irrational underbelly of modern life, doing so creates the conditions by which to critique - and even hold to ransom - the integrity of the enlightenment project itself (with obvious parallels in our premise regarding tabloid fiction in general). When Wu Yong goes ahead with his scheme, the local official whom he blackmails asks him what he will do after the paper is bought off. Wu Yong replies playfully that just because he sold one paper this doesn't prevent him from establishing another just like it. The individual tabloid can “quelled,” but the negation of the dominant culture can never be eradicated, only endlessly transformed.

The Liangshan band’s final contribution to the libidinal economy is the “night garden” (夜花园 ye huahuan) operated by the cannibal tavern owner, Zhang “the gardener” Qing 张青. Zhang Qing’s narrative arc is reflective of the capacity for endless self-reinvention in modernity. While he previously bribed his way into the Hanlin Academy, despite being completely illiterate (once again exchange value is confused with material value), his attempts to make it in the “straight world” of officialdom have evidently failed by this point. Zhang Qing has instead joined the libidinal economy. His innovative contribution is the night garden, which amounts to little more than a patch of cheap land on which he has erected grass pavilions and strung electric lamps. Once again its success is based in the mining of the

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65 XSH, p. 140.
66 One of the comedic motifs of the novel is the assigning of businesses to the various bandits which are ironically reflective of their status in the original Water Margin. The play on words with Zhang Qing draws on contemporary Shanghai culture and Zhang’s original status in the Water Margin in a satisfyingly gnomic way (the night garden is a light-hearted version of the Zhang Gardens, which shares the zhang 张 character with that in Zhang Qing’s name.) As Wu Yong says in Chapter 22, in the case of Zhang Qing, “the gardener has become the night gardener” (caiynanzi gaiwei yejuyanzi, zhichade gebazi 菜园子改为夜园子，只差得个巴字); XSH, p. 158.
67 XSH, p. 83. Mocking the corruption and stupidity of the Hanlin Academy seems to have been something of a pastime for commercial authors. One of Wu Jianren’s frequent agonists was the Hanlin Academy member and Governor-general of Zhili 直隶, Liang Dingfen 梁鼎芬. In Chapter 24 of Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang 二十年目睹之怪现状 (Strange Sights Witnessed over the Past Twenty Years, 1906-10) he depicted him being thrown out of the Hanlin Academy for stupidity. Liang Dingfen is also the subject of a number of jokes in A New History of Laughter.
68 XSH, p. 156-7.
commercial possibilities of shamelessness, as it is revealed that the garden is nothing more than a thinly-veiled place for illicit rendezvous between “loafers [and] sluts” (yinwa langzi 淫娃浪子).\(^6^9\) The garden promises not only sexual license but drunkenness, Zhang Qing’s advertisement for the garden in Cry to Heaven Daily states that, “[at the night garden] the finest food and drink will leave you with pleasure of double vision and double hearing” (xiyao zhi jingjie, fushi ting zhi yiqing 酒肴之精洁，复视听之怡情). Despite this reputation for sexual licence and drunkenness, or more likely because of it, the night garden is a huge success, and seemingly not only with “loafers and sluts,” but with the local bourgeoisie. Xiao Rang and Wu Yong’s eventual visit finds the arriving vehicles “queued nose to tail, extending [into the distance] in an unbroken line” (shouwei xiangxian, lianyan bujue 首尾相衔，连延不绝).

This is a playful exaggeration of the actual status of the Zhang Gardens in Shanghai society at this time, which was known for intentionally eliding the boundary between high-status activities and low-class pleasures.\(^7^0\) In chapter 3 we considered Wu Jianren’s celebration of the Gardens as a space in which the modern culture of oratory was perverted by its entanglement with pleasure and fun. Lu Shi’e is enacting a similar perversion of capitalism via recourse to the unreal and ludic environment of the Gardens.

Des Forges and Dorothy Ko have noted that the popularity of the Zhang Gardens was closely linked to a new form of publicness grounded in being seen via illumination and brightness.\(^7^1\) Once again the bandits perform a comic inversion of reality, creating the “Zhang Gardens after dark,” which only opens at 7pm and stays open all night (once again Shanghai is the city without night). In this, the night garden is not as a place of self-production but rather as an escape from a modern

\(^6^9\) XSH, p. 156.
\(^7^0\) The Gardens were for instance often noted for improper liaising between courtesans and men; see Yeh, Shanghai Love, p. 222.
culture of seeing and being seen, and into the sense-based and sensuous fun of the dark:

As Xiao Rang and Wu Yong passed beyond the reed canopies, they suddenly saw that on the lawns was a dark shape, writhing and swaying unceasingly. There were no electric lamps strung in this area, and they were straining to see under the starlight, but by the time Wu Yong was ready to strike a match the shape had already gotten up and taken the form of two people. Wong Yong was afraid that it was a demon materialising, and he hurriedly struck the match, only to reveal, a-ha!, it was only his brother bandit, Wang “Stumpy Tiger” Ying. The other person disappeared like a puff of smoke, but Wu Yong was able to catch a glimpse and ascertained that it was a woman.72

Wu Yong and Xiao Rang’s time in the night garden sees them proceed to skulk around in the dark, all the while striking matches in order to uncover “offences against public decency” (shangfengbaisu 伤风败俗).73 Their efforts are rendered moot however when all they seem to uncover are their fellow bandits in various states of sexual congress, and who, like Wang Ying 王英 and Zhou Tong 周通, seem neither ashamed nor chastened anyway. In fact, as soon as Wu Yong turns his back they’ve disappeared, “those two horny goats” (zheliangge sezhong’egui 这两个色中饿鬼), he notes ruefully.74

Being caught in flagrante at a casual sex garden offers an interesting re-interpretation of motif - forwarded by David Wang among others - of the “uncovering” of the bandit or barbarian in modernity, and its violent undertones. Lu explores the comic qualities to the uncovering of our collective barbaric nature, the mutual recognition of the pervert in us all. Upon discovering Wang Ying, Wu Yong initially thinks he’s found a “demon,” but once he strikes the match, all he’s

72 XSH, p. 158.
73 XSH, p. 159.
74 XSH, p. 160. This is actually a phrase first used in the original Water Margin.
really uncovered is the libidinal energies that have been “demonised” and driven from the seen to the obscene. True to the larger theme of the novel, the uncovering of the bandit in modernity is not a monstrous or terrifying event, but fun and exciting (as with Lao Shaonian in chapter 1, their attempts at exposing indecency barely mask a desire to see and participate). While Wu Yong discovers that upon shining a light on libidinal energies their demonic nature is lost, the local officials remain tied to the association of the obscene with the demonic. They state that Wu Yong’s commercialising of gossip and sex is “summoning demons to create havoc” (xingyaozuoguai 兴妖作怪).

The ultimate irony of these businesses is that their “shady” nature - and the commercial potential of this shadiness - becomes a perverse and unexpected pretence for entry into bourgeois life. Like Li Boyuan or Larry Flynt (1942-present), the bandits achieve wealth and a much-begrudged form of social standing by selling eros back to a population divorced from these energies by their own commodification. Wu Yong’s gossip rag gets him a meeting with (and payoff from) a local official. Similarly, Xie Bao, now an aristocratic official bedecked in finery and arriving in a carriage pulled by snow-white horses, deigns to come to Zhang Qing’s garden, where he is taunted and laughed at by a rowdy crowd of onlookers. This incident reminds the reader that Zhang Qing’s place of business in the Water Margin was an inn where he and his wife made buns from the flesh of wealthy travellers who stopped to rest there, while allowing the passing underclass of prostitutes, convicts and reprobates to rest and enjoy themselves unmolested. To reiterate the “big meatloaf” analogy, the night garden is also a business in which the monadic human is reduced to mixed meats, and, furthering the analogy with Zhang Qing’s meat buns, there is a class implication to this homogenising of humanity in the darkened corners of the night garden - as aristocrats and bourgeoisie flirt with the aforementioned loafers and sluts.

75 The episode in the night garden is an interesting contrast with the overt punishment of promiscuous women in the Water Margin. Here the bandits may throw around language like “slut,” but it is really they who are revealed to be promiscuous and shameless. Lu’s novels are all quite feminist. In New China Lu is mocked and prodded throughout by a strong woman (based on his wife).

76 XSH, p. 145.

77 XSH, p. 159.
The bandits expose the unstable antinomy erected between the free market and the libidinal. Both the Cry to Heaven Daily and the night garden sell the possibility of being homo ludens in a world that demands the unending rationalism of homo oeconomicus. In doing so they also undermine the blood oath made between puritanism and capitalism, that making money in modernity won’t be fun (at a level other than the nakedly fetishistic at least), and that to do so is a form of “cheating.” In this sense The New Water Margin is a natural corollary to New Story of the Stone. Both novels juxtapose aspects of modernity with the shengse gouma life of Shanghai, finding the basis of an alternative subjectivity in the libidinal and fun. For Wu this was a rediscovery of the body in the brothel and the winery, but in The New Water Margin it is a discovery that the brothel and the winery are - in the perverse egalitarianism of capitalism - just as valid businesses as banks or schools.

4. Commentary and the “grifted reader”

Accompanying the change in tone around the mid-point of the novel is a greater investment in bringing the rationality of its own diegesis into question through playful interjections via the interlineal commentaries (jiapi 夹批, or pingdian 评点). There are only five such commentaries prior to chapter 13, after which however they range between ten and twenty per chapter. The majority of the commentaries mimic the pattern of emphatic praise that Jin Shengtan 金圣叹 (1610?-1661) popularized in his commentaries to the canonical “Guanhuatang 贯华堂” edition of the Water Margin, in many cases employing the same phrases verbatim. Several of the comments emulate Jin’s praising of the author for sublimating his own voice in order to embody the inner nature of their characters.

78 Jin Shengtan willingly re-wrote and curtailed and added to the original text even as he praised and defended it throughout by rationalising and adverting to the “genuine” aesthetic value of a folk tradition like the Water Margin through Confucian hermeneutics. These commentaries were so revolutionary that they became the basis for a formal aesthetics of commentary that informed subsequent commentaries to The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and The Golden Lotus; See Rolston, Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary. This mimicry in The New Water Margin doesn’t however approach that in Chen Chen’s 陈忱 (1615-1670) Water Margin sequel, Shuihu houzhuan 水浒后传 (A Sequel to the Water Margin, 1664); See Ellen Widmer, The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, chpt. 5.
One commentary, for instance, notes that Lu Shi’e effectively captured the voice of a tortured figure like Lin Chong, or similarly for correctly mimicking the literati mannerisms of Wu Yong.79

The putative author that Jin Shengtan constructed was, in the words of Rolston, “an all-powerful creator in control of all aspects of the [writing] process.”80

Chen Chen’s 陳忱 (1615-1670) commentaries in Shuihu houzhuan 水浒后传 (A Sequel to the Water Margin, 1664) followed this model, and further shifted focus from, “what one thinks of intuitively as the characters’ world and onto the author-reader relationship,”81 where the author had authority over the reader’s sense of orientation in narrative time and space by providing “compasses” in the form of allusions, predictions and general exegesis. This, coupled with the tendency to “emphasize the uncertainty of the real world” beyond the text, implicates the author into a position of considerable authority over the reader’s interpretation in both novels.82 In both works, the tripartite reader-author-commentator relationship was understood largely as one of synthesis, leading to a canonical exegesis of the text “as it was to be read.”

The dialogic nature of these commentaries was one enacted between two scholars, while this axis of dialogism only served to strengthen the monological axis of meaning as it traversed between text and reader.

While many of The New Water Margin’s commentaries outwardly accord with the Jin Shengtan model, they deviate considerably from this resultant sense of textual authority and rationality, revealing instead an extra-textual realm of deliberate indeterminacy and confusion.83 Rather than interrupting the primary diegesis to reflect upon the correctness of this diegesis, the commentaries briefly let slip that behind the novel’s ontological horizons lays a more ambiguous reality, in which the

79 The comment about Lin Chong can be found on XSH, p. 114; and about Wu Yong on XSH, p. 129. This kind of involved referentialism accords with recent conclusions of the some of the studies of fanxin xiaoshuo, that have recognised the contributions to the genre to be more than opportunist-led pulp fiction, but rather expected a great deal of knowledge of their hypotexts on behalf of the reader.
81 Widmer, The Margins of Utopia, p. 123.
82 Ibid., p. 130.
83 That May Fourth figures like Lu Xun and Hu Shi openly denounced the use of commentaries again raises the sense the late-Qing tended more toward playing with conventions rather than denouncing them.
author is not authority figure, but exactly the kind of entertainment-industry bandit that populates the world of the novel.

In this, *The New Water Margin* continues its basic project at an extra-diegetic level, embodying the putative instruments of reason in order to reveal that beneath them there is, for instance, nothing more than a very shabby and haphazard “production” of the novel including missed marks and missing “cast members.”

Wu Yong replied, (in fact, nobody knew if Wu Yong was supposed to reply or not. After Lin Chong had twice asked for advice, eventually ‘Wu Yong replied’ was added, and Wu Yong hit his mark.)

吴用道：（求即应，不是吴用；求不应，亦不是吴用。于林冲二次求教之后，接写“吴用道”三字写，吴用身分，恰到好处。）

The ambiguity between the novel as object of print and as stage production here is intriguing. Print has always created the illusion of mastery on the part of the reader over the text, as well as inviting the assumption of singular and objective meaning. Riggs argues that, “by banishing the slippages, ambiguities and openness to change characterizing oral and scribal productions and theatrical performances, print seems to promise unity and consistency to its reader.” By deconstructing the boundaries between text and performance, and re-introducing the slippages and maladroit moments of the stage, Lu Shi’e denies the modern reader the authority they desire, leaving them adrift without the textual compass at hand.

As the novel progresses the reader is distanced ever further from their position of assumptive mastery via the manipulation and the denial of knowledge on the part of the commentaries. In many cases the interjections deliberately reflect the mannerisms of the ingratiating hucksters, confidence men and flim-flam artists that populate the novel. That these are turned toward the act of writing the novel itself reflexively places the reader in the position of the “mark” being conned by the act of reading itself. The sense of being conned is reinforced when, at one juncture, the exegete lets slip a murky personal history in which they were under investigation.

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84 XSH, p. 114.
by the police. This is a possible reference to Lu’s own personal relationship to dubious legality, in which he was “involved in a lawsuit” (shesong 涉讼) for breach of the intellectual property rights to Niehahua 夔海花 (Flower in the Sea of Sin, 1905-1907, 1916) by Zeng Pu 曾朴 (1872-1935). The exact timing of these legal difficulties is unclear, but in the same story the exegete seems to make a veiled reference to the incident by accusing Lu of plagiarizing from their own experiences for The New Water Margin.

This dubious status of the exegete and the references to Lu’s own problems with the law raise the possibility that the writer and commenter are working together to “grift” us into an interpretation (rather than gifting us one). Indeed, even by the generous standards of Jin Shengtan’s exaggerated praise for the Water Margin, some of the instances of congratulation in The New Water Margin feel comically unwarranted. One commentary praises the phrase “Wu Yong replied with a smile,” noting, vapidly, that the “smile” is an excellent detail as it really captures Wu’s personality.

This façade of mutual respect between exegete and author eventually slips however, revealing deep wells of self and mutual-loathing which again reflect the comic qualities of cross-talk. In chapter 15 for instance, after a particularly repetitive description of the world as a pianzi shijie 骗子世界 (world of scammers), the exegete comments that:

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86 XSH, p. 88. In the only reissue of the novel since its initial publication the “wedge” to the novel is not included, and it is only here that the identity of the exegete is revealed to be that of Lu’s own wife, Li Youqin 李友琴. An original copy of the Gailiang xiaoshuo she-edition of The New Water Margin can be found at the Yunnan Provincial Library, which holds a number of Lu’s original works.

87 The initial 20 chapters of Flower in the Sea of Sin were first published in 1905, followed by a further five chapters in 1907, after which it remained unfinished for several decades after this (Zeng Pu eventually completed a final 20 chapters in 1925. Lu’s Xin niehahua 新夥花 (New Flower in the Sea of Sin) was first published in 1909, although it was immediately under legal scrutiny and was not widely released. See the postscript by Xiao Shi in the 1989 reprint of which actually combines two of Lu’s sequels to the same novel; Lu Shi’e, Xin niehahua 新夥花, Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian, 1909, p. 263.

88 XSH, p. 88

89 Such a clever play on words!

90 XSH, p. 129.
At another point the exegete deflects responsibility for a nonsensical idea, pointing blame at the author and admitting that, “look, I know this isn’t accurate, if it was accurate how could it have ended up in The New Water Margin?” (wo zhidao buque, ruguo quele, ruhe paodao “Xin shuihu” zhonglai 我知其不确，如果确了，如何跑到“新水浒”中来?).

While the bandits revealed the city to be a place in which the irrational continued to exist behind the veneer of rationality, Lu’s narratorial malapropisms similarly undermine the apparent and desired authority of the novel itself, the historiographical authority of all written text over oral cultures, and the rationalist self-construction of the literate reader themselves. That in this the reader is morally implicated into a new form of self-awareness brings to mind that this was also the goal of New Fiction, albeit through more hectoring means. In this manner The New Water Margin is indicative of the sense that Lu remained an author who believed in the society-transforming power of fiction, but explored less explicitly pedagogical routes to this.

5. Conclusion

In the past few decades the focus of western academia has shifted from, “reformers and their imagined literatures to the actual works printed and consumed.” The absence in this discussion of Lu Shi’e, who was largely published outside of the most prominent journals and newspapers, reminds us that this focus has placed more on popular publications than on popular authors. This has

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91 XSH, p. 92.
92 XSH, p. 144.
94 Even at a time when “the author” as concept was crystallising for the first time.
obfuscated some intriguing parallels that reach across the divide between serialised and non-serialised authors. Lu Shi’e for instance emerges as a natural corollary to his more celebrated contemporary Wu Jianren. Both were drawn to the complexity of modern urban life, and to “raising the undercurrent of modernity” (yang wenming zhi anchao 扬文明之暗潮), as a short article praising New Story of the Stone in AllStory Monthly (likely written by Wu himself) put it. Lu and Wu both explore the undercurrent of modernity that exists in the societal “other” - a strain of social flotsam, arcane beliefs, “strange happenings” (guai xianzhuang 怪现状), and shengse gouma – which harboured a crucial dissembling energy toward the rationalism and objectivism of modern life. Of special importance to both was the “unproductive” - the smut peddlers, gigolos and gamblers (just as Wu rejoined to a gallows chorus of pimps, peepers and oddball Christians).

Des Forges has also previously noted a motif surrounding “the business of cultural entrepreneurship” in late-Qing fiction. That he begins with a discussion of New Shanghai is fitting, since Lu Shi’e was constantly interrogating the role of cultural production within not only a society but an economy. The “libidinal

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95 Baopi 报骈, “Xin shitou ji 新石头记,” Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说, 6. They shared a relationship to the Gailiang xiaoshuo she.

96 A Strange Scene at the Longhua Temple for instance uses the same phrase (guai xianzhuang 怪现状) that Wu Jianren does in Strange Scenes Witnessed. In this they were a slightly more modern version of the writers considered in Li Yanping 刘燕萍, Guaidan yu fengci: Mingqing tongpu xiaoshuo quanshi 怪诞与讽刺: 明清通俗小说诠释, Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2003. Wu Jianren also wrote about bandits, in a 1906 article entitled “Yi dao ji 义盗记” (“The Righteous Bandit”). In it, he recounts a story told to him by an official investigator about a righteous and honourable bandit in modern day Shandong, who refused to betray his brethren in return for a stay of execution. The bandit’s last words before his execution are, simply, “does the world see me as an animal?” (gong youyi gouzhi mu wo 供犹以狗彘目我耶). Once again showing surprising sympathy for the outcast, Wu asks the reader at the end of the story how, rather than an animal, we could see this figure as anything other than “the embodiment of the hero of the greenwood [i.e. Robin Hood]” (lülin haoke, tian rang jian qiyou youren hu 绿林豪客, 天壤间其犹有人乎). Wu Jianren, “Yi dao ji 义盗记,” Yueyue xiaoshuo 月月小说, 3, (1906).

97 Des Forges argues that the depiction of a buffoonish newspaperman in New Shanghai implies a fracturing of the commercial publishing class along the boundary between the “newspaperman” and the “professional writer” at the turn of the century. Figures like Wu Jianren and Li Boyuan who were both professional writers and newspapermen seem to refute this assertion. For me this may be an overinvestment in the significance of a single scene in a novel that in many ways is “farcical” rather than “satirical” - tending to poke fun at everyone and everything with a good-natured, if grotesque, eye. For a considered look at the relevance
entrepreneurship” of the Liangshan band raises Lu’s own willingness to embrace his dual status as a creative and an entrepreneurial figure - neither entirely wenren 文人 nor shangren 商人. While it would be easy, prima facie, to read the equation of the entrepreneur with the bandit as a derogation of a new and unassimilated social class (much as with that of the comprador in New Story of the Stone), Lu Shi’e makes a passionate defence of the bandit, and by extension the cultural entrepreneur, as heroically unmodern figures who were just as likely to profit from the dissolution as from the regeneration of Chinese society.

Ma Youyuan 马幼垣 has argued that The Water Margin bandits can be delineated into a larger group of haohan 好汉 and a smaller group of haose 好色, literally “the good perverts.”98 Lu picks up on exactly this idea in his libidinal entrepreneurs, who are not only perverts, but good perverts in their refreshing counterpoint to the expectations of rational and sexless productivity in modernity (just as the haose in the Water Margin were a counterpoint to its martial and violent themes).

Many of the turn of the century critical re-appraisals of the Water Margin argued that it was not profane but instead was socialist or reformist. Lu Shi’e presents a compelling interpretation which neither mitigates the inherently risqué nature of the original, nor condemns it (he does it exaggerate it as in the “sister-in-law” operas, albeit for differing purposes). Contrary to Tang Zhesheng’s 汤哲声 characterisation of the bandits in The New Water Margin (as well as the characters in The New Three Kingdoms and The New Humble Words of an Old Rustic) as “exceptionally intelligent and perspicacious statesmen” (zhili chaoqun, gaozhan yuanzhu de zhengzhijia 智力超群，高瞻远瞩的政治家),99 the Liangshan band are intentionally not this modern archetype. The haose that populate the second half of the novel have however found, of such terms, and their interrelation in Chinese society see Christopher Rea, The Age of Irreverence, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015.


in the “shengse gouma-economy,” the possibility of a critical subjectivity toward modernity through sex and play. Their success is both the embodiment of the unleashed individualism of modernity, and also a permanent monument to the premodern desires for irrational and unhygienic pleasure lurking in the populace.
CHAPTER FIVE

It’s Raining Men: Xiaoran yusheng and the self-consciousness of boredom

“To do a thing in order to bore people is something I never imagined! And that’s too bad, because it’s a beautiful idea.”

Marcel Duchamp

The late-Qing tabloid press was a facet of what Alexander Des Forges has termed the “rise of leisure time as a social practice” in the late-Qing. Following on from this, we can imagine that the emergence of a sense of “leisure time” would also have provoked an awareness of that to which “leisure” (xiaoxian 消闲) addressed itself and from which it received its legitimation – the possibility of being subject to boredom. In the nascent tabloid press, leisure was not so much a state or an act, but an analgesic, as in the explicitly medicinal undertones to Entertainment’s claim that it “relieved worries, eliminated boredom, revived from sleep and dispelled burdens” (qianchou, paimen, xingshi, chufan 遗愁、排闷、醒睡、除烦), and that it was “not only a means to nurse the spirit’s recuperation, and also aid in dispelling boredom and eliminating worries” (suifei tiaoshe jingli zhi fang, yaoyi kewei qianmenpaichou zhizhu 虽非调摄精力之方，要亦可为遣闷排愁之助也). In instances like this, the leisure press was appropriating, largely verbatim, the medicinal angst-abnegating effects often attributed to opium, even as, after 1899, it began to denounce the drug a pernicious scourge on the nation. More than half a century later Adorno and

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1 Des Forges, “Street talk,” p. iii.
2 “Shi Xiaoxian bao mingming zhi yi 释消闲报命名之义” (“Explaining the meaning of Entertainment”), Xiaoxian bao 消闲报, issue 2; cited in Ah Ying, Wanqing wenyi baokan shulüe, p. 66.
3 One article from 1908 described mahjong as “raising the spirits like opium, and eliminating boredom and low-spirits to a much greater degree than alcohol” (提神既有效如鸦片,排愁遣闷远过酒浆); “Wang guo nuxi 亡国奴戏” (“The game of national destruction”), Da gong bao 大公报, 6th August 1908. For more on the leisure press’ attacks on opium use see Juan Wang, Merry Laughter, p. 44. Men had confusing relationship with drugs – it is both a component of a traditional term for anesthetic (menxiang 闷香 – a kind of chloroform-like substance used by bandits and robbers), and was also dispelled by opium, another anesthetic. McMahon has considered a similar irreconcilable quality to opium, in
Horkheimer would also find the pleasure industry to be a “quack's spiel,” for whom “fun is a medicinal bath... [that it] never fails to prescribe.”

Although nominally a part of the leisure industry, tabloid fiction offers little insight into the exigencies of a state of mind from which its customers putatively sought refuge. Textual references to boredom were glossed and the “downtime” from which it might have sprung into recognition was artificially invigorated. Departing from the conditioned denial of boredom however is the fiction of the pseudonymous author Xiaoran yusheng 萧然郁生. Xin jinghua yuan 新镜花缘 (New Flowers in the Mirror, 1907-8), and Wutuobang youji 乌托邦游记 (Journey to Utopia, 1906) each endeavour to depict the “self-consciousness” of boredom in the late-Qing, the duality of a self who was subject to boredom and of a world which harboured the capacity to bore. By emphasising the mimetic register over the diegetic, Xiaoran yusheng conveys the existential experience of boredom while also paying homage to the hypotext of his sequel, Jingshuo yuan 镜花缘 (Flowers in the Mirror, 1828) by Li Ruzhen 李汝珍 (c. 1763-1830), which also juxtaposed diegesis and fictionality with mimetic enclosure in depicting the quasi-synonymous mental state of men 闷.

In addition to depicting boredom, New Flowers in the Mirror and Journey to Utopia are themselves “self-conscious of boredom,” recognising and manipulating the antinomy between the leisure commodity and the boredom of its consumer. Chinese fiction has long made recourse to the intersecting of “the oneiric, the

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4 This elision of boredom can even extend to the secondary literature. Denise Gimpel’s study of the late-Qing fiction journal Xiaoshuo Yuehao 小说月报 (The short-story magazine) concludes that it, “did not provide light reading for bored urbanites in search of cheap thrills and mental distraction in their leisure hours,” but rather was a bastion of “modernity” ideals; Lost Voices of Modernity: A Chinese Popular Fiction Magazine in Context, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001, p. 229. This contrasts considerably with Qiu Peicheng’s reading of the same publication, which sees it as responding to a readership which was “bored” with modernity and reformisms; Qiu Peicheng 裘培成, Miao Hui jindai Shanghai dushi de yizhong fangfa: “Xiaoshuo Yuehao” (1910-1920) yu Qingmo Minchuo Shanghai dushi wenhua yanjiu 描绘近代上海都市的一种方法: “小说月报”(1910-1920)与清末民初上海都市文化研究, Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2011, p. 147.

6 The two novels were both serialised in issues 1-2 (Journey to Utopia) and 9-23 (New Flowers in the Mirror) of Yueyue Xiaoshuo 月月小说 (All-Story Monthly).

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religious, the supernatural, and the fantastic” with “the social, the quotidian, the mundane, and the political.” Xiaoran yusheng reinterprets the significance of this duality between fantasy and mundanity, turning away from the “untranscendental” and its satirical profaning of the universal order, and toward the grotesquely boring and its rejection of the inherent dynamism of modern life. In this, his fiction turns the critical and countercultural energies of tabloid fiction back on the modern leisure industry of which it is a part, deliberately adverting to fiction’s manufacture of excitement and boredom.

By arguing that these texts are “boring fantasies,” this final chapter looks at another arena in which a critical perspective on the idealism of speculative fiction motifs is being fostered through the cynicism of tabloid-ness. In the previous chapters this was grounded in tabloid fiction’s associations with commercialism, bodies and audience involvement, in this chapter we will consider its necessary entanglement with boredom.

1. Mimesis, interiors and men in *Flowers in the Mirror*

As in the examples above, in the late-Qing tabloid press, men 门 frequently signified boredom, or the absence of entertainment or eventfulness. The appropriation of men for these purposes was something of an ahistorical contraction placed on the term’s complex philology. Hall and Ames note that “the Chinese have traditionally affirmed... the copresence of a plurality of significances with which a term might easily resonate.” This is especially apt in the case of men, which encapsulates both material depression, stultification and tedium and the situation of these sensations in relation to the metaphysical tradition of dynamic interpenetration of control and release, stillness and dynamism, wandering and settling (implicated into both yin-yang and the qian 乾 - kun 坤 hexagrams of the I Ching). As such, the various facets of men encapsulate what is, in English,

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apportioned across the fuzzy duality between boredom and ennui, with the former “a response to the immediate” and the latter “a judgement of the universe,” as Meyer Spacks puts it.⁹

This metaphysical valence was buttressed by a stable ideography – reaching back at least as far as the *Huangdi Sijing* (Four Texts of the Yellow Emperor, c. 290 BCE), and into Qin-Dynasty seal script – in which the character constitutes itself as a dialectic between the “heart-mind” (xin 心) and its necessary (en)closure (men 门).¹⁰

![Fig. 3 – Seal-script character for men 闷](image)

David Lloyd has argued that the interiority of emotional life is intimately linked with property and the homestead. The bounding of personal space reflects the necessity of establishing a “boundedness and closure or enclosure” of emotional life.¹¹ In its structural images of doors and walls, *men* too reflects a confederacy between

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¹⁰ In this self-negation, *men* is a subset of the wider metaphysical principles of *yin* and *yang*, which themselves suggest interiority and exteriority, with *yang* suggesting the sunlight and warmth of exteriors, and *yin* a darkness and coldness of interiors (like the *yin*-space of the inner chambers). The association of *men* with the duality of stillness and dynamism was medical as well as metaphysical, it is symptomatic of insufficient circulation of heart energy when referenced in the *Huangdi neiijing* 黄帝内经; see Wang Hongtu 王洪圖 (ed.), *Huangdi neiijing yanjiu dacheng* 黄帝内经研究大成, vol. 1, Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997, pg. 493.

emotional and domestic boundaries, equating the excessive *interiority* characteristic of depression and stultification with the physical *interiorising* of the self.\(^\text{12}\)

If “boredom” is a form of alienation, then it is worth bearing in mind Jean Hyppolite’s insight that alienation is founded in images of outside-ness.\(^\text{13}\) Men is conversely evocative of inside-ness, which is appropriate to its denotation of the phenomenology of excessive self-reflection and interiority. This is expressed in many of the most emblematic works of Chinese narrative art. The sprawling yet domestically-contained narratives of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (*The Story of the Western Wing*) and *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (*The Peony Pavilion*) rely for instance on the boundedness of the homestead as a physical counterpart to the myriad repressions characteristic of adolescent and female life.\(^\text{14}\)

Ideographically, *men* evokes a visual similarity to *gui* 鬧, the boudoir or the “inner chambers,” an association reinforced by the poetry of the women who were confined to these spaces. The late-Ming poet Bo Shaojun 薄少君 (c.1626) juxtaposed the listlessness and lethargy (*yong* 動) characteristic of boredom and depression with images of confinement and even claustrophilia (pleasure in enclosure) in this passage:

> A single stone blocks the door – too listless to open and close it,
> Filled by sorrow you often borrowed wine to fill the holes.\(^\text{15}\)

In exploring the structural implications of *men*, Bo Shaojun was following in the footsteps of Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084 - c.1155), whose lyrics and poetry elevated

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\(^{\text{14}}\) Keith McMahon has identified in Ming Dynasty fiction a dialectical interplay between “consolidation and self-composure” and “engagement and interaction on the other,” in which physical enclosure between and behind walls and gates (“which are omnipresent props” at that time) plays a central figurative role; McMahon, *Causality and Containment*, p. 29. See for instance the proverb which he finds repeatedly employed, “it’s between the stay at home than go out and roam;” ibid., p. 28.

“the pensive, bored woman confined by the walls [not to mention the blinds, curtains and draperies] of her boudoir” to an archetype.\textsuperscript{16} The following verse for instance can be read in terms of the phenomenology of Bachelard’s “poetic instant”\textsuperscript{17} - in which a moment of “reverie” gives image to and thereby consciousness to the simultaneity of the previously chronological and antithetical - in this case, between the central dialectical tension of men between boundedness and liberation:

I study poetry but useless are my startling lines  
A vast wind blows, the giant phoenix will soon take flight  
Oh wind, do not slacken!  
Blow my little boat all the way to the Immortals’ Isles.\textsuperscript{18}

The imagined transformation of the encapsulating and stultifying interior space of the bed-chamber into a “little boat” on a journey to the pastoral exteriors of China’s spiritual hinterlands (literally the “three peaks and five sacred mountains, sanshan wuyue 三星五岳) is indicative of this collapsing into simultaneity. The boudoir adrift on the ocean itself is a compelling image, one which encapsulates the escape from enclosure and also, once again, the possibility for claustrophilia.\textsuperscript{19}

These images (boats, the immortal hinterlands) and central themes (feminine boredom, confinement and claustrophilia) are recapitulated in Flowers in the Mirror (hereafter Flowers). While Flowers is a novel defined in the popular imagination by maritime journeys to immortal lands that deliver amusement and adventure to

\textsuperscript{17} Gaston Bachelard, “Poetic Instant and Metaphysical Instant,” in Intuition of the Instant, Eileen Rizo-Patron (trans.), Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013, pp. 6-64.
\textsuperscript{19} This juxtaposition offers a vivid reflection on what Phillips deems the paradox of boredom - wishing to have something to wish for. The “land of the immortals” can be understood as a proxy for the “transformational object” that the bored person seeks but whose identity can never be known before it is discovered; Adam Phillips, On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 75-77. That this substitute transformational object is not an object but a journey accords with Christopher Bollas’ sense that most transformational objects are “sought for their function as a signifier of the process of the transformation of being,” cited in ibid., p. 76.
characters and readers alike, as for Li Qingzhao, there is a necessary minor-key and secular counterpoint to this in diligence, cloistering and (excessive and implicitly feminine) self-reflection. At the close of the first half of the Flowers, the protagonist Tang Ao’s adventuring away from home has afforded him a Taoist immortality that can be read as a spiritually-infused exculpation from domestic concerns and responsibilities. His aspirations for a career in officialdom thwarted, he pulls the timeless parental shenanigan of heaping his unrequited aspirations onto his children. While searching for her father in the spiritual and mythical hinterlands, his daughter Tang Xiaoshan receives from him a communique that instructs her to cease her wandering, return to the mortal world and pass the Imperial female examination through diligence and reclusion.

This tension between masculine opening to the world and feminine closing is expressed in its overarching symbolic motif, that of flowers (as women) and their own cycles of opening and closing. It is further reinforced by motifs of structural enclosure. The first half of Flowers is characterised by exteriors (the open sea, islands and mountains), public life, exteriority (unexpected encounters and discoveries), masculine camaraderie and high-spirits. The second half, depicting Tang Xiaoshan and several dozen other girls’ attempt to pass the examination, counterpoises this with interiors (acts of reclusion and cloistering), interiority (self-obsession, neuroses and implicitly feminine emotions like men) and private lives. This shift from exteriors to interiors is most tangibly symbolised in Tang Xiaoshan’s name, which, at the transition between the two halves of the novel, changes from the exterior and spiritual imagery of “Little Peak” (Xiaoshan 小山) to the interior and secular “Servant of the Inner Chambers/Boudoir” (Tang Guichen 唐闺臣), a name given to her in the same communique (from Tang Ao) that instructs her to cease adventuring.

20 Ying Wang has noted that “all major narrative events in Jinghua yuan involve a search for amusement,” a characterisation which I struggle to agree with just as much as his comments on New Flowers and Journey cited later in this chapter; “The Supernatural as the Author’s Sphere,” p. 137.

21 Lin Tai-yi translates this as his “freed… from the coils of mortal strife;” Li Ju-chen, Flowers in the Mirror, Lin Tai-yi (trans.), London: Arena: 1965, p. 145. This “mortal strife” is the term fanchen 凡尘 in the original which also implies something of mundanity.
In conjunction with this shift in the novel’s horizons is a transition from the highly fantastic (i.e. fictionalised) and diegesis-heavy adventures of the first half, to the greater mimetic engagement with reality in the latter half, accompanying which the novel’s narrative progress and the fictional passage of time itself slow (becoming more, “longwinded and tedious” according to Yuming Luo), and dialogue and psychic interiority come to the foreground. Having begun very much in the adventuresome and mythopoetic mode of *Journey to the West*, *Flowers* concludes in the psychic entanglements, perceptive ambiguity and claustrophobic enclosure of its more contemporary counterpart, *Red Chamber*.

Symbolic enclosure and narratological mimesis function in concert to create a complexly layered and evocative reproduction of the experience of men. This is most vividly true in chapters 64-66 of *Flowers*, in which narrative progress is arrested entirely in order for to allow for the mimetic reproduction of the experiences of two different groups of adolescent girls cloistered in confined, suffocating and emotionally-wrought spaces.

The first of these scenes depicts the cohabitation in the Bian household of 33 daughters of the Jiang, Dong, Lv, Meng, and Zhang families, whose respective patriarchs are mandarins in the Ministry of Rites (*Li Bu* 礼部). Having been denied the opportunity to take the Imperial Examinations for this reason, their metaphysical quiescence and depression is reflected in, and intensified by, their physical enclosure and containment within the household. Although their families suggest that they have been brought together in an attempt to raise their spirits in one another’s company, in all practicality they and their depression have been collectively shelved, placed out of sight and out of mind. Their conversation with one another reflects an awareness of this, laced as it is with images of confinement. Jiang Qiuhui 蒋秋辉 for instance suggests that missing out on the examination could be construed as a fortuitous opportunity to “store oneself (and one’s inadequacies) away” (*cangzhuo* 藏拙). They also describe their time together

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23 JHY, p. 430.
as a “stopover” (dange 耽搁), a term whose intimations are again of storage (ge 搁) and cupboards (ge 閣). This sequence (along with the later one in chapter 66) are highly mimetic, moving little in either time or space, a shift from progression to reflection which implies their own imagined ensconcement apart from the progress of their own lives.

Notably, their shared circumstances predictably serve only to prompt greater and intensified scrutiny and emotional investment, not less. This begins almost immediately after being brought together, as they engage in an extended and neurotically punctilious discussion in which they collective pick at the scab of their preclusion from participation. Their obsessive self-interrogation is structurally reinforced, rather than explore the gardens or go outside, they remain within the walls of a house that increasingly takes on the qualities on a pressure chamber. One of the girls, Meng Zizhi reflects on exactly this association of men with pressure and even suffocation, noting that they had been brought together to “relieve ourselves of men (lit: release the atmosphere of men)” (jiejie menqi 解解闷气) through fun, but that “when you all came face to face, all you can talk about are academic matters, this is just piling men on top of men!” (nímen jiānle miàn, zhīshuo zhexié kǒu shì xīn fēidào xuéhuà, qí bù mén shāng jiā mén me 你们见了面，只说这些口是心非道学话，岂不闷上加闷么!), in effect, increasing the pressure of men within the household.

Such a statement encapsulates the problems of associating men directly with boredom, for while fun releases men as it does boredom, it does not originate in a lack of interest, but an over-investment that implies suffocation rather than detachment.

Echoing other fictional depictions of men as related to confinement and

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24 Their conversation becomes quite mean-spirited, as when Lü Yaoming 吕尧蓂 accuses Meng Zizhi 孟紫芝 of “spewing hot air” (taoqi 嘘气), while Jiang Chunhui 蒋春辉 accuses one of the other girls of being “delusional” (huabing chongji 画饼充饥); JHY, p. 429.
25 One possible origin for the English term “boredom” is the French word “bourrer” (“to cram”).
26 JHY, p. 430.
27 Outside of the these chapters, the frequent descent into recursive and obsessive philology and word games (with one such game occupying an entire chapter) in the second half of the novel functions in a similar manner, as an extreme overinvestment in mimesis in order to imply a certain degree of claustrophobia.
intellectual and emotional over-investment, the girls eventually turn to a release in the mythical and spiritual orders of existence, in this case by engaging in a collective qiuqian 求签 divination session.\(^{28}\) The oracle that they receive states that, “To know one’s fate in life, [see] the former three-three and the latter three-three” (yu shi shengqian jun mingyun, qian sansan yu hou sansan 欲识生前君命运，前三三与后三三).\(^{29}\)

The immediate association is in the hexagrams of the I Ching, in which a former and latter san-san would form the second hexagram, kun 坤䷁, which symbolises both enclosure (“a sack tied up”)\(^{30}\) and more prominently, total yin/femininity in contrast to the total yang/masculinity of the first hexagram, qian 乾䷀. The oracle could therefore be read as “your fate in life is yin/femininity (and confinement).” The girls however overlook this, interpreting the oracle as referring to the significance of the number 33 in their lives (there are 33 girls in the house and, they infer, 33 days remaining until the examination which they still hope to participate in).

The oracle also speaks to the reader however, directing them within the text itself. As Maram Epstein has already pointed out, Flowers is a numerically byzantine novel, and one in which thematic mirroring occurs between numerically linked chapters.\(^{31}\) Following the oracle, the dual valence of men in angst and physical confinement recurs in chapters 33 (the former three-three) and 66 (the latter three-three), a pairing that also points to some further Imperial Examination-related numerological in-joking.\(^{32}\)

\(^{28}\) See footnote 19 in this chapter.
\(^{29}\) JHY, p. 431. This is the 63rd oracle of the Master Leiyu 雷雨师 oracles. The author here is also subtly alluding to his central theme of the duality between wandering and confinement. The Buddhist parable from which the divination is drawn depicts the wanderings of a monk who, coming upon another monk, is informed that the difference between any place and another is negligible.
\(^{32}\) Drawing divinations was a traditional pre-examination act during the Qing, and the “former three-three and the latter three-three” oracle had special significance for Examination candidates. Xu Ke’s 徐珂 Qingbai leichao 清稗类钞 recounts how – in the Qianlong era – a candidate named Feng Xiaoshan 鄧小山 was given the divination prior to the provincial examination (xiangshi 乡试) and achieved 3rd place, and ten years later he
Chapter 33 is also a mimetic break in the exterior-led and diegetic adventuring of the first half of the novel, depicting the imprisonment of the character Lin Zhiyang in the Land of Women. Lin’s imprisonment is the culmination of a descent into the ever deepening palimpsests of the interiors of the Imperial Palace of the Land of Women, “past several layers of gold doors... all with guards... [they] arrived at the inner hall” (chuango jiceng jinmen... chuchu you ren bashou... lai dao neidian 穿过几层金门... 处处有人把守... 来到内殿).\(^{33}\) Having been imprisoned as a prospective concubine for the “King” of the Land of Women, Lin is feminised through cosmetics, footbinding (a form of confinement), and also by his confinement to the inner chambers. Lin’s enclosure is an opportunity for him to reflect on the condition of women, and for the novel to presage the themes of its second half, as he turns to self-reflection and the novel shifts to a mimetic register that focuses on representing the experience of confinement. Lin even foreshadows this, noting that the feeling of illicitly removing his footbindings is akin to “a scholar who has managed to avoid taking the Imperial Examination” (ru xiucai mianle suikao yiban 如秀才免了岁考一般), which contrasts with the feelings of the young nü xiucai 女秀才 in chapter 64.\(^{34}\) This respite is another collapsing of the duality of physical confinement and release with its emotional counterpart, as it is described as not just a physical release for his feet but a freedom from inhibitions (zhiyi changkuai 这一畅快). When this release of

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achieved 9\(^{th}\) place (three times three) in the metropolitan examination. The pattern was repeated once again later in the Qianlong era for a candidate named Mao Yangwu 毛养梧, who after receiving the divination placed 33\(^{rd}\) in the provincial examination and later 33\(^{rd}\) in the metropolitan examination, before dying at the age of 33. One other candidate is recounted to have placed 66\(^{th}\) after the same divination. See the article entitled, “The oracles of Feng Xiaoshan and Mao Yangwu” (Feng Xiaoshan, Mao Yangwu qiuqian 芬小山，毛养梧求签) in the “Superstitions” (mixin 迷信) section of the Qingbai leichao; Xu Ke 徐珂, Qingbai leichao 清稗类钞, vol. 10, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986, p. 4667.

There are even further connections to the number 33 in the text, as in the stark commonalities between the plot of the novel and the 33\(^{rd}\) divination of the Lü 吕 clan - “Rising to the top of the Imperial Examination like the plum blossom is the queen of the flowers, born of good fortune and grace; ask where to spend one’s life, there is glory in being among the three-seven” (mei zhan huakui jidi wei, tiansheng fu lu lulu tong hui; wendao zhongshen hesuo jiu, sanqi zhi nei shi ronghua 梅占花魁及第巍，天生福禄禄同辉；问到终身何所就，三七之内是荣华); the significance of 37 in the narrative will be addressed later in this section.

\(^{33}\) JHY, p. 216.

\(^{34}\) JHY, p. 219.
his feet is discovered, Lin is beaten into submission, prompting a return to interior/exterior imagery when he laments that his “boundless (lit: oceans and lakes) of enthusiasm and aspiration” (huai haoqing 海海豪情), an exterior image, “have been replaced with a feeling as if his intestines had been cut short” (rouchang cunduan 柔肠寸断), an interior image.\(^{35}\)

Lin Zhiyang’s feminine confinement, neurosis and even his insomnia (the pain of his footbinding “leaving him unable to close his eyes every night,” meimei zhengye buneng heyan 每每整夜不能合眠)\(^{36}\) is reiterated in chapter 66, which takes place entirely within the crepuscular confines of a single locked room, recounting the sleepless night before the announcing the Examination results and the cloistering of the candidates in the “Feminine Literary Inn” (Hongwen guan 红文馆).\(^{37}\) The enclosure of the narrative within a locked room, which is shared by four girls (Qin Xiaochun 秦小春, Lin Wanru 林婉如 and the sisters Tian Xiuying 田秀英 and Tian Shunying 田舜英), offers a vivid and, again, mimetic reflection on the duality of psychic interiority and physical interiors and confinement. Again the cause of this is men, the depth of which is “bringing them to tears” (men hen yao ku le 闷很要哭了).\(^{38}\) Once again this denotes not detachment but an intensity of psychic interiority that finds expression in, among other symptoms, a quasi-hallucinogenic collapsing of pleasure and pain into an environment of “laughter within tears, and tears within laughter... indistinguishable from one another” (ku zhong dai xiao, xiaozhong dai ku... ku xiao bun fen de guangjing 哭中带笑，笑中带哭... 哭笑不分的光景).\(^{39}\)

The sleepless night spent in the room is characterised by a largely unstructured bricolage of snippets of conversation and images of psychic distress, resulting in an oneiric subjective fluidity. Within this heightened dream-like state the repeated references to the passage of time (via the practice in Beijing of marking out the five

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\(^{35}\) JHY, p. 220.
^{36}\) Ibid.
^{37}\) Chapters 33 and 66 also reiterate the same phrase, “no small matter” (feitong xiaoke 非同小可); JHY, pp. 219, 444.
^{38}\) JHY, p. 442.
^{39}\) As with the Bian household in chapter 64, this leads to fighting, as Qin Xiaochun describes Tian Xiuying as a “cruel hag” (kebo gui 刻薄鬼), and questions who would ever marry her; JHY, p. 442.
segments of the night watch via the use of the drum tower) paradoxically only serve to remind the reader of the extent to which without these markers it would seem as if time had completely come to a halt, trapped in the amber of men.

The intrusion of time from outside of this context is reiterated with the system of announcing the results in the early hours of the morning. The examination messenger (baozi 报子) arrives outside of the doors of the inn, and lets off a cannon, with each blast signifying a girl who passed the examination.\(^{40}\) Having been informed of this system in advance the girls decide to lock themselves into the inn for the night, only unlocking the door once the cannon has been let off 45 times (for the 45 participants residing there), an initial allusion to their subconscious pleasure in confinement. Even they recognise as possibly misguided however, once again returning to the associations between men and the sensation of suffocation:

Wanru opened the door of the room, and Xiaochun immediately told the servant girl to go and find Duo Jiugong. But unexpectedly the doors [of the Inn] were still locked, and they couldn’t leave. The sounds of another blast arrived, and the two girls filled the room with disorder. Xiaochun sent the servant girl to find the keys when suddenly another two blasts rang out... [Wanru said] ‘If I’d have known before how suffocating this would be, I wouldn’t have gone along with the idea [to lock the doors].’\(^{41}\)

When the final tally of blasts is counted, it totals just 37, resulting in a “collective nervous breakdown” (gege fakuang 个个发狂).\(^{42}\) The girls shiver to the extent that the chairs they are sitting on begin to sway back and forth, their “faces like gold leaf

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\(^{40}\) This again has a close relevance to the famous examination related divinations collected in the Qingbai leichao – namely, “After getting drunk today in the apricot garden, a series of noises announce those who passed the Imperial Examination [i.e. the zhuangyuan 状元]” (jinri taoyuan shenzui hou, shengsheng baodao zhuangyuan gui 今日杏园沈醉后，声声报道状元归) which was received by a figure named Xu Yishao 徐逸少; Xu Ke, Qingbai leichao, vol. 10, p. 4665.

\(^{41}\) JHY, p. 442-3.

\(^{42}\) JHY, p. 446.
and bodies paralysed” (mian ru jinzhì, hunshen tanruan 面如金纸，浑身瘫软).\textsuperscript{43} They speak in a form of pronounced stuttering.\textsuperscript{44} Unable to decide whether to open the door of the inn or wait for the remaining blasts, the slowly building leitmotif of emotional overinvestment and physical enclosure reaches its claustrophilic climax when Wanru 婉如 announces that the door will literally only be opened over her dead body:

Don't you dare open that door, I... I still need to think; If... if you open the door, say... say I didn't pass, I... I would die! To... to tell you the truth, only... only if you kill me will you be able to open it.\textsuperscript{45}

你不开门，俺俺还要有点想头；得待或开开，说说俺不中，俺俺就死 了！实实对你们说吧，除非把俺杀了，方准开哩。

The claustrophobia and pressure of the room here does not create the desire for escape but rather to eliminate the final possible means of escape, to symbolically brick up the doorway and create a total confinement. This fluidity between door (portal) and walls (barrier) is reminiscent of Cary Howie’s observation, that “for the claustrophilic reader and the claustrophilic text, the door may not be a way out so much as a place of identification, in which the riddle of embodiment, penetrability and contact is focused, narrowed, into a deepening and reinforcement of edges.”\textsuperscript{46}

The chaotic pressure of the scene is finally released with Lin Zhiyang returns from the Forbidden City having bribed his way into acquiring the final results (his masculine adventuring a counterpoint to feminine cloistering), highlighting the extent to which the preceding events were discrete to the overall progress of the novel. Tang Xiaoshan/Guichen is recorded on the final ranking of Examination participants only as “Tang Guichen,” reminding the reader of the extent to which the object of her diligence and cloistering was the ratification and enshrinement of her feminised and confined status.\textsuperscript{47} What ensues of Tang Guichen and the other

\textsuperscript{43} JHY, p. 444.
\textsuperscript{44} JHY, p. 446.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} “The examinations... [are] the primary public institution oriented toward the possible verification of the individual’s ’name;” Yung-Kung Kao, “Lyric Vision in Chinese Narrative:
successful candidates is symbolic however, for as Brandauer has noted, “none of the graduates are given external posts. Assignments for women are all within the palace.”

Men as it is depicted in Flowers is a valuable point of comparison for the aesthetics of boredom that will be discussed in the following two sections of this chapter. The contrast between the two halves of Flowers is more than that of exteriority and interiority, but also a shift from diegetic accounts of exploration to the mimetic representation of psychic interiority. By drawing on images of interiors, enclosure and cloistering, men is intimated upon as an excessive interiority. Men, lacks a causal object, nothing is there “to bore” the sufferer into it, rather it is a sensation akin to having deliberately sealed oneself into an airless room, an evocative image of the unending capacity for the human mind to torture itself.

2. Self-conscious boredom and the self-conscious bore in New Flowers in the Mirror

New Flowers in the Mirror is a curious sequel to Flowers, in that it is by-and-large a conscious refutation of its central themes. While it revivifies its principal characters, Xiaoran yusheng’s novel is considerably more cynical and pessimistic than Li Ruzhen’s original. In Flowers, the divergent registers of life – exploration and containment – are paths to a common transcendental destination, as both Tang Ao (via adventure) and Tang Xiaoshan/Guichen (via diligence) eventually achieve immortality on Little Penglai 小蓬莱. In New Flowers however these two registers are equally enervating. The opening two chapters recount the tragic fates of the (non-immortal) characters of Flowers after the close of that novel, whose righteous professionalism leads only to punishment, exile and even death. After establishing that the rewards of bounded diligence are a false promise, New Flowers turns to the hollowness of adventure. Once again setting out to sea in the mercantilist

peregrinations of the first half of *Flowers*, the object of the novel’s explorations is “Reformland” (*Weixin guo* 维新国), which is not estranging but rather a recursive return to the familiar in the form of a pat recapitulation of the era’s innumerable reformist satires.⁴⁹

Having thematically “hollowed out” the original, Xiaoran yusheng goes about refilling it with a modernist self-reflexivity that was itself a continuation and refinement of that which animated his earlier short story, *Journey to Utopia*. *Men* is interpolated into the text from the outset, and in the explicit iteration and reiteration of its significance as both subjective and as the antithesis of eventfulness, *New Flowers* draws a direct analogy with the leisure press’ use of the character to signify boredom. The subjection to men and the possibility of its erasure (*sanmen* 散闷), through which the characters clothe their motivations for embarking on the novel’s narrative, would have been immediately recognisable to the late-Qing reader of entertainment publications – like *All-Story Monthly* – as fundamentally analogous to their own putative reasons for buying and reading, or at least these motivations as they were introjected from the claims of the press itself.

Coming upon Lin Zhiyang and learning that he is planning to go back out to sea, Tang Xiaofeng 唐小峰 (the younger brother of Tang Xiaoshan), notes that a trip abroad would “dispel this boredom that I have (lit: in my bosom)” (*xiaoxiao xiongzhong de fanmen* 消消胸中的烦闷).⁵⁰ Entreating Lin Zhiyang to allow him to join, he notes that “joining Uncle’s boat on a trip on the ocean will relieve me of my boredom” (*fuzhuo jiufu de chuan dao haiyang* fuzhuo jiufu de chuan dao 帮着舅父的船到海洋消消烦闷)

⁴⁹ The people of Reformland dress in western style and drop the occasional western word -like “gudebai” 鹅得拜 - into conversation. Western material culture is predominant, and an upwardly mobile petit-bourgeoisie robotically and uncritically parrots scientistic ideals, such as “equality,” “freedom” and “the survival of the fittest;” XJHY, p. 407, 409. Foreign figures and institutions are fawned upon by an intellectual elite while the common people are denigrated and abused. This reaches its apogee in the words of a book-within-the-book, entitled *Reformland’s Destruct* (*Weixinguo miewang lun* 维新国灭亡论). The book alights upon the complex interdependence of ideological reform and material and capitalist-led development, noting that while Reformland may have shaken loose from the bounds of Imperial court power, all it has been replaced with is “financial rights, police rights, road rights and mining rights” (*zhengcai quan, jingwu quan, lu quan, kuang quan* 财政权，警务权，路权， 矿权); XJHY, p. 454.

⁵⁰ XJHY, p. 400.
and “if I stay at home, I definitely will be bored to sickness” (ruguo zai zhu zai jiazhong, dingyao mengibinglai le 如果再主在家中，定要闷起病来了). 51 Lin Zhiyang points out that the trip would take Tang Xiaofeng away from his aging mother, his last living relative, who would be forgiven in impeding his attempts to travel abroad considering that both her husband and her daughter were previously lost to ocean voyages taken with Lin. 52 Yet although Xiaofeng also has a pregnant wife at home, his mother too spends all night worrying that he will “be bored to sickness” at home, and admits to him that “adventuring around the world will at least rid you of this boredom you have (lit: in your bosom again), and real life experience is better than being trapped at home” (dao haiwai youli, keyi sansan xiongzhong menqi, bingke zengzhang shijie shang yueli, shengyu kun zai jiali 到海外游历，可以散散胸中闷气，并可增长世界上阅历，胜于困在家里). Another familiar character from the original, Duo Jiugong 多九公, also signs up for the voyage, admitting that having suffered from a serious illness, he too “has been feeling unusually bored at home” (zaijia juede fanmen yichang 在家觉得烦闷异常). 53

This precursory section reflects on the dubious motivations for reviving a classic like Flowers on the part of both the protagonists (Tang Xiaofeng, Lin Zhiyang, Duo Jiugong, Bian Bi 卞璧 and Yan Ya 颜崖), 54 and for the reader of fanxin xiaoshuo works like New Flowers, for whom the nation’s literary history was being cannibalised in the constant search for relief from boredom. When Tang Xiaoshan raises the possibility that they will be able to find Little Penglai and reunite with his lost father and sister, this is only as incidental (shundao 顺道) to the escape from a boredom to which he is subjected, prompting Lin Zhiyang to conclude matter-of-factly that, “you’re more interested in dispelling boredom [than in finding your lost relatives]” (kuangqie ni zheci daban weizhe jiemen 况且你这次大半为着解闷). 55 In this the characters and the reader are tied together from the outset of the novel, their direct and abstracted experiences united at the generative ontology of “men-sanmen,” a

51 XJHY, p. 401.
52 Ibid.
53 XJHY, p. 402.
54 Bian Bi is the son of Bian Bin 卞滨, and Yan Ya is the brother of Yan Zixiao 颜紫绡 from the original Flowers.
55 XJHY, p. 400.
precursor to the novel’s manipulation of its own status as a commodified opportunity for the latter. Every instance in which Reformland reveals itself to be boring presupposes the boredom of the reader, and every instance in which Reformland prevents their escape so too is the reader prevented from escaping the novel.

Images of confinement and escape begin immediately after arriving in Reformland, as Tang Xiaofeng and Yan Ya are arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned, suspected of being hated revolutionaries. After a last-second reprieve they are suddenly fawned on by the yamen head who previously wanted to execute them, and cajoled into attending various soporific ceremonial events in their honour. These events cover the final half of the novel and, as with Flowers, there is pronounced shift from diegetic exploration (across time) to the interpolation of the reader into the mimetic experience of these social gatherings. Starr has noted, in late-Qing courtesan novels, “the predominance of paragraphs, even whole chapters, that are scene rather than summary,”\(^{56}\) that is an apt summation of these dialogue-heavy and plot-light chapters, which evoke what H. C. Chang calls the “banquet pattern” of classical Chinese literature.\(^{57}\)

These episodes, by faithfully and mimetically depicting boredom (down to the level of forced small-talk and mutual daydreaming) rather than glossing it, are necessarily boring. They are also consciously boring, to such an extent that they manipulate the reader’s boredom. The use of the “maiguangzi” or “selling of the climax” (the “cliffhanger” at the end of each chapter intended to whet the reader’s appetite)\(^{58}\) is for instance used as a means to comically manipulate the desire for escape on the part of both the characters and the readers, by which they will finally achieve sanmen. At the close of chapter 9, torpor sets in at one meeting only for a sudden clamour from outside the room to promise means for cathartic escape in the


\(^{58}\) The “maiguangzi” was a tradition that serialized fiction incorporated from storytelling and chantefable traditions, in which public performers would continue stories the following day, and would therefore invent an intriguing or exciting junction between the two.
following chapter. At the outset of the chapter 10 however, the dramatic intruders are only envoys from an organisation of students, who immediately restoke the proceedings. Promised escape, the four protagonists find themselves dragged into an impromptu dinner which occupies the entire following chapter.

During these events the reader flits – again mimetically – between ongoing conversations, alighting briefly on an asinine and hyper-bureaucratic (i.e. the paper-pushing) exegesis on the centrality of paper in all aspects of civilised life, before moving on to an impenetrable and possibly moronic guessing game that none of the protagonists can understand and ending on one dignitary’s buttonholing of Lin Zhiyang on the topic of the possibility of a comet striking Earth. As Lin Zhiyang notes to himself at one point, “the formulas of their conversation are so rehearsed it seems as if they have been practicing day after day, it comes out unceasing, never faltering for a moment” (na yiqie yingchou de taowu, haosi pingri lianxi chunshu guan de, yan chu na liu, haowu miwu 那一切应酬的套语，好似平日练习纯熟惯的，言出如流，毫无谬误), a realisation that the reader has already coming to grips with having mimetically experienced the same stale small-talk.59

The protagonists experience the physical and mental strain of sustaining feigned interest in this surfeit of “agreeable if ineffectual” (wanzhan 婉转) conversation. Faced with one blathering interlocutor, Duo Jiugong “struggles to think of a response” (sousuo yihui 搜索一回),60 in another instance the four protagonists “simply took it in turns to force out some response, every topic invariably being about some pointless buying and selling anyway” (zhide lunliu zhe mianqiang yingchou, suo tande, wufei shi shangye shang na maikong maikong de qingxing 只得轮流着勉强应酬，所谈的，无非是商业上那卖空买空的情形).61 Particularly striking is their inability or unwillingness to sustain their attention on conversations

59 XJHY, p. 445. This comment highlights the extent to which New Flowers is consciously swimming in the same conceptual waters as the “novel of manners,” the central satirical conceit of which being that of rigid, even syllogistic, formulas of outward representation that bely an inward emptiness (although this is not to be confused with Lu Xun’s shiqing xiaoshuo 世情小说 designation, which is often also translated as “novel of manners” although is not relevant here).
60 XJHY, p. 463.
61 XJHY, p. 443. Forced smiles and forced conversation are repeated motifs, see XJHY, p. 429.
that the novel nonetheless reproduces for the reader completely. Lin Zhiyang chooses to ignore a conversation that the reader is subjected to in its mimetic entirety, only bothering to return his attention to it when it is almost over (buzai siliang... zailai lihui 不在思量... 再来理会). During one ongoing conversation the focus shifts briefly to Tang Xiaofeng, who is revealingly depicted as “looking like someone who had something on his mind” (si xiang xinsi yiban 似想心思一般), which obviously implies the opposite, that he has nothing on his mind.

The collective retreat into internal monologue or “thoughts to the self” (zicun 自忖) both reinforces the sense of boredom and forms a secondary mimesis, on the necessary sub-surface “repression” (nazhu 按住 or renzhu 忍住 at different junctures) engendered by boredom. In this struggle for interest and repression of boredom the reader is afforded a sense that the characters are becoming conscious of a possibility for boredom in a manner distinct from the characters’ relationship to their own men in Flowers. This is more explicitly alluded to when the narrator notes at once point that “they became aware that they were bored people” (zijue menren 自觉闷人).

In the onslaught of longstanding bureaucratic figures of mockery like the supercilious yamen head (who for instance is a figure of disgust in Flowers also),
gentry-merchants (shenshang 酉商), self-serving representatives of committees and parties, and various sub-facets of officialdom, these scenes are also grounded in the

62 XJHY, p. 443.
63 XJHY, p. 438.
64 See Tang Xiaofeng's internal monologuing on XJHY, p. 438-442.
65 XJHY, p. 448. This is perhaps a play on menren 闷人, a quasi-derogatory term for the hanger-on or disciple. For more on the growing centrality of “self-consciousness” in the phenomenological and existential discussions of this same period see Kirk A. Denton, The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 44.
66 See for instance chapter 34 of Flowers.
67 Wu Jianren also engaged in the mockery of overblown official events and their association with the new class of gentry-merchants in a story that was in fact published alongside New Flowers, in issue 10 of All-story monthly, it was titled “Renjing xueshe gui ku zhuan 人镜学社鬼哭传” (“The ghostly cries at the Renjing study society,” 1907). It seems appropriate to mention at this juncture that I suspect that Xiaoran yusheng was Wu Jianren, based on his only works appearing in Wu’s All-story journal, certain prose affectations, and ideological positions like the gentry-merchants and the modern derogation of the classics.
wider sociological foundations of tabloid fiction. Authority and its expression in pedantry, fawningness and officiousness, tended to elicit disgust and condemnation from characters and narrators of tabloid fiction, not boredom however. *New Flowers* depicts a flattening of affect, as disgust and condemnation elide into a boredom which is both gaping absence and distended goitre that eventually chokes the novel itself to death. In this is presages the twentieth century term for boredom, *wuliao 无聊*, which literally means “an absence of anything to rely on.”

Even the participants from Reformland seem bored. With the conclusion of one round of small talk, a group of the dignitaries is described as relieved, not out of any sense of closure, but because they are finally able to “return to applying all of their energy to thinking of other matters... like birthday presents and schemes for promotion and getting rich” (*rènjiù jūjīnghuíshèn, sisúbìshì... nàshénme shǒu lǐ yījī bīde shèngguān fācái zhīfǎ* 仍旧聚精会神, 思索别事... 那什么寿礼以及别的升官发财之法).* In another instance they are depicted as barely engaged:

The people at the Commerce Society wore a range of expressions: Some had a cigarette already in their mouth, and were thinking of a way [to smoke it]; some were holding theirs and puffing on them while knitting their brows in concentration; others were whispering or chatting in low tones; about what it wasn’t clear.*

That商会里的人也另有一副神情：有的衔着一支烟，在那里想法子；有的拿着纸吹，在那里皱眉；有的大家交头接耳，在那里喁喁私语；不知究竟为着甚事。

The series of ceremonial events ends with a final welcoming committee, whose elaborate pomp and circumstance recall Liang Qichao’s introduction to *The Future of New China* and its sending up in *Ass-Kissing World*. The protagonists are given an impromptu invitation to speak, but having been subjected to unending social Chinese boxes they find themselves so bored that the will to speak has left them:

Looking out on the scene before them, they felt as if their brains were swollen with boredom, what interest could they have left. Tang and Yan saw that these people couldn’t be reasoned with, *what’s more they were somebody else’s*
problem, nothing to do with them, and so in mutual forced modesty, each deferred to the other.\textsuperscript{70}

看了这副情形，已把孩子们都闷得涨了，还有什么兴致。唐，颜，
二人更[?]看得[?]这种人已不可理喻，且视为别家的事情，无于我
事，便互相推让，着实谦逊了一回。

Here the calculus of men as it is introjected by the leisure press is most explicitly expressed, in which one is filled with boredom in inverse proportion to their emptiness of interest and eventfulness. In this, their brains swelled with boredom are necessarily indistinguishable from those of a reader who has been subjected to the same mimetic experience. The speech is of course an invitation to a refusal of these circumstances, yet rather than mock or even identify the innumerable patent hypocrisies and absurdities of Reformland, they demur, boredom having robbed them of their capacity for action. All that remains the bored disassociation by which everything becomes someone else’s problem. This too seems to implicate the reader, who have themselves not revolted against the novel, even as it manipulates and even cautiously mocks them.

Having eventually escaped the unending ceremonies, the group turns to leaving Reformland entirely, a task which is once again constituted as an escape from boredom itself. The reader’s desire for escape is collapsed into the characters’, and just as they are preparing to raise anchor, the head of the Commerce Society again lurches into view, inviting Lin Zhiyang to a meeting on an “important matter.” Lin frets over the spectre of bureaucratic boredom that the man embodies - “I’m only afraid that they want [to talk about] their roads, mines, boats or electricity [again]” (you wei kong tamen keyao ta banshenme lu kuang lun dian zhexie shijian 又惟恐他们可要他办什么路矿轮电这些事件), a commentary which could just as easily be attributed to the reader. Lin promises to come ashore shortly, during which time “he hastily ordered the deckhands to raise anchor, lift the sails and get going right away” (bian lianmang jiao shuishou qile mao, cheqi fengpeng, dangji kaichuan 便连忙叫水手起了锚，扯起风篷，当即开船).\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} XJHY, p. 459. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{71} XJHY, p. 464.
New Flowers is encapsulated in the phrase, mentioned earlier, of “becoming conscious of being a bored person,” an awareness of the possibility of boredom and of its attribution to the self. The phrase “zijue menren” intimates another possible reading - “the self-conscious bore.” This would be Xiaoran yusheng himself, who is (and this is true of many authors of fanxin xiaoshuo) consciously, and even sadistically, dismissive of the reader’s desires to reacquaint themselves with the original. Xiaoshan doesn’t find his lost sister or father, or Bian Bi his sister, and the iconic images of Flowers - like “Two-facedland” and Little Penglai - are tantalisingly alluded to but unconsummated.\(^{72}\)

A final note to this metatexual boredom on the part of the reader can be found in Xiaoran yusheng’s closing refrain, “this manuscript is too long already and perhaps the reader is becoming disgusted” (ci shupian lu guochang, kong yuezhe shengyan 此书篇录过长，恐阅者生厌), which following the comical drawing out of the close of the novel, the thwarting of the promise of escape and wielding of the threat of continuation, reads less like false modesty and more as winking self-revelation.

3. Boredom as a negative impression of leisure in Journey to Utopia.

Just four chapters in length, Journey to Utopia (hereafter “Journey”) will be referred to here as a “short story” rather than an “unfinished novel,” because it is unlikely that it was ever intended to be a novel-length work; ranking instead among a gamut of experimental short fiction that All-Story Monthly carried alongside more traditional and longer-running serialised novels. Although the use of the word “utopia” (wutuobang 乌托邦, still uncommonly encountered at the time of publication)\(^{73}\) has informed its occasional categorisation as a utopian work of fiction, the story stubbornly refuses the depiction of any kind of utopia.\(^{74}\) Instead it sets

\(^{72}\) The arrival in Reformland follows an unexpected storm which blows them off course (echoing the storm which precipitated the discovery of Little Penglai in Flowers).

\(^{73}\) Yan Fu discusses the concept of wutuobang 乌托邦 in the eighth preamble (daoyan ba: wutuobang 导言八：乌托邦), in his adaptation of Evolution and Ethics by Thomas Henry Huxley, entitles Tianyan lun 天演论 (On Evolution, 1896-1898). The was, I believe, the first use of the transliteration.

\(^{74}\) Fei-ying Ming states that Trip to Utopia is be a “utopian novel;” “Baoyu in Wonderland,” p. 182. While Ying Wang describes New Flowers as, “a world where paradise is lost, dreams
about answering an unasked, patently absurd and frustratingly trivial question – what is the experience of being on a journey (a cruise ship even) to utopia?\(^75\)

_Journey_ is both a cynical commentary on the unsatisfying monotony and lame bureaucracy sublimated within the reification of the utopian among late-Qing reformist intellectuals, and, in methodically exploring the utopics of a non-utopia, a prefatory engagement with the authorial “games of boredom” that Xiaoran yusheng would play with his readers in _New Flowers_. Like its thematic counterpart, _Journey_ promises sanmen only to betray this, prefiguring this via an explicit collapsing of the motivations of the reader and those of the narrator/protagonist who admits to being in search of sanmen through fiction:

So if I'm not on the road, then I really will get bored to death, and no matter what events come up they only make me depressed. Only perusing fiction can go some way to relieving me of this boredom; if I didn’t have fiction, I’m afraid I would really die of boredom.\(^76\)

所以我没有了游，我就闲闲的生起病来，无论什么事情都扫了兴，只有几部小说书看看，还略可解闷；若没小说，恐怕就闷死了。

As with Tang Xiaofeng at the outset of _New Flowers_, the causality between men and its release is more than a little narcotic in nature. Interestingly the protagonist further implies that the true narcosis of adventure can be approximated in the novel, a comment which speaks to an increasing collapsing of experience with the representation of experience, something that Des Forges and Catherine Yeh have also identified in the late-Qing tabloid press (see the discussion of Wu Jianren in chapter 2). This is encapsulated in _Journey_’s inversion of the typical relationship between novel and adventure. While the novel is typically the consumption of

\(^{75}\) In fact, the novel even begins with a cynical aside on the intrinsic hypocrisy of the cult of “modernity” in the late-Qing, noting that to be exploited and deceived by others is “barbaric” while exploiting and deceiving others is, conversely, the epitome of “modernity,” _WYJ_, p. 75.

\(^{76}\) _WYJ_, p. 74.
adventure after the fact, in Journey the protagonist embarks on an adventure to find that which he has already read about in the novel of “the Englishman More” (and in Yan Fu’s Tianyan lun 天演论).77

This theme is immediately re-iterated when, during his search, the protagonist alights on a remote island (“Nowhere,” heyou xiang 何有乡) atop whose mountain he discovers a Buddhist temple. The elderly monk who lives directs him not to adventure, but to another representation of adventure, in the form of his own “travel diaries” of Utopia, which he wants published by AllStory Monthly. When the protagonist settles in to read the first manuscript the reader is delivered into a secondary narrative, although one which also fails to deliver on its utopian promise. The manuscript is a record of everyday life aboard a “skycraft” or “spacecraft” (féikōng tíng 飞空艇) that is en route through space (and time?) to (the planet of?) “Utopia.” The utopian destination is permanently deferred however, and instead the diaries describe a form of ersatz and simulated utopia provided within the confines of the spacecraft. This dubious non-consummation raises the inconclusive nature of the title, which can be understood both as “(record of) A Journey to Utopia” or “(record of) A Utopian Journey.” The second such interpretation imbuing the ship itself with the unsatisfying status of utopia-fulfilled.78

Evidently, the possibility that the protagonist will ever reach utopia is already lost, his access is now only through recourse to the second-hand experience of the

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77 See footnote 67 above on Yan Fu’s use of the term.
78 It is explained in the manuscript that a leisure industry has emerged around the providing of touristic travel to Utopia, and that Nowhere is a travel hub for these commercialised tours. The depiction of the utopian travel industry contrasts with what we have already been told by the “I”-protagonist however. His arrival in Nowhere found it to be an “uninhabited... and desolate island” (womei kanjian yige zhuren... yige huangdao 我没看见一个居人... 一个荒岛), not a bustling international or even interplanetary travel hub. This is, we learn, because the utopian economy has collapsed due to “the chaos of the time of great reforms” (da gaijie zhiji, guonei fenfen raoluan 大规模改革之际，国内纷纷扰乱). This is confirmed by the inverse progression of the three manuscripts given to the protagonist by the monk. The first volume is subtitled “The era of reform” (weixing shidai 维新时代), the second “The era of transition” (guodu shidai 过渡时代), and the final volume “The era of decay” (fubai shidai 腐败时代). This progression is an ironic inversion of the linear teleologies espoused by the likes of Kang and Liang Qichao, even employing the “era of transition” (guodu shidai 过渡时代) which Liang frequently used to describe the present day in China; See Xia Xiaohong, Jueshi yu chuanshi p. 69.
monk’s travel diaries. Again this marks a shift from diegesis to mimesis, as the monk’s diaries are a plotless pastoral exploration of the experience of life aboard the ship. Indicative of the sense that this is short experimental fiction, there are no other characters with whom the author speaks, and no events that impel the plot forward. Instead the monk/author languidly roams the ship making passing and often quite disinterested observations on everyday life.

In two particularly acute instances of this mimetic narration, the account arrests whatever narrative energy it has accrued to transcribe the ship’s regulations and those of the on-board library in full and exacting detail:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE SHIP</th>
<th>RULES FOR THE LIBRARY OF NOVELS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. THERE ARE EIGHT SUCH SPACESHIPS IN TOTAL, WITH A TOTAL TRAVEL TIME OF</td>
<td>1. THIS LIBRARY CONTAINS NOVELS FROM EVERY COUNTRY AND FROM BOTH THE PLANET AND FROM BEYOND THE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROX. FOUR WEEKS</td>
<td>PLANET, FOR THE DIVERSION OF THE PASSENGERS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PASSENGERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO BOARD ONLY AFTER THEY SUBMIT THEIR</td>
<td>2. THE NOVELS CONTAINED WITHIN THIS LIBRARY HAVE BEEN DIVIDED UP - ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUGGAGE TO INSPECTION BY THE CREW, DISPLAY THEIR NAME CARD AND UNDERGO A</td>
<td>CLASSES, TOPICS AND REPUTATION - WITH THE BEST BOOKS ON THE TOP SHELVES, THE NEXT CLASS OF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FULL MEDICAL TEST.</td>
<td>BOOKS ON THE LOWER SHELVES, AND SO ON ACCORDING TO THIS MODEL. ONLY THE “WORST” BOOKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PROVIDED ARE LOCATED BENEATH THE SHELVES, RANDOMLY AND IN DISORDERED HEAPS, IN ORDER TO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INDICATE THEIR WORTHLESS STATUS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ALL PASSENGERS MUST COMPLY WITH THE RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE SHIP,</td>
<td>3. THERE ARE SEVERAL HUNDRED COPIES OF EACH OF THE NOVELS CONTAINED WITHIN THIS LIBRARY, WITH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF THERE IS A RULE TO WHICH YOU CAN NOT COMPLY, INFORM A MEMBER OF THE</td>
<td>FEWER COPIES AVAILABLE AS THE CLASS ORDER IS DESCENDED. ONLY ONE COPY IS PROVIDED OF THOSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREW, OTHERWISE COMPLIANCE IS ASSUMED.</td>
<td>NOVELS PILED ON THE FLOOR, WHICH IS CONSIDERED SUFFICIENT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. MORNING MEALS ARE SET AT 7AM, LUNCH AT NOON, AND DINNER AT 7PM. ALL PASSENGERS MUST RECOGNISE THE HORN OF THE SHIP'S AUTOMATIC CLOCK, THOSE WHO ARRIVE LATE TO THE MEAL ROOM WILL BE UNABLE TO BE RECEIVE THEIR FOOD SUPPLY.

5. ALL PASSENGERS WILL WAKE AT 6AM, AND RETIRE AT MIDNIGHT. THERE MUST NOT BE ANY DEVIATION FROM COMPLIANCE IN THIS REGARD, IN ORDER TO PREVENT DISTURBING OTHER PASSENGERS.

7. A FULL RANGE OF FOODS ARE PROVIDED ON BOARD, ONLY THOSE ITEMS WHICH PREVENT THE MAINTENANCE OF HYGIENE HAVE NOT BEEN PROVIDED.

11. ON THE FOURTH FLOOR OF THE SHIP THERE ARE SEVERAL RECREATION ROOMS, IN WHICH THERE HAVE BEEN PROVIDED ALL KINDS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND PASTTIMES FROM AROUND THE WORLD; THE ROOM IS ONLY OPEN FROM 2PM...

13. ...EVERY DAY THE ON-BOARD NEWSPAPER "THE SPACESHIP TIMES" IS PUBLISHED, FEATURING ACCURATE AND DETAILED INFORMATION, THE MOST UP-TO-DATE EVENTS, AND ALL AS FAST AS POSSIBLE.

15. THE SHIP HAS SPECIFIC TIMES OF DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL, IF PASSENGERS HAVE SOME SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, OR ARE UNABLE TO

4. OF THOSE NOVELS OF THE HIGH AND MIDDLE-CLASS, IF READERS ARE UNABLE TO PART WITH THEIR COPY, THEY CAN INFORM THE INTENDANT IN CHARGE AND WILL BE ABLE TO BUY A COPY AT ITS ORIGINAL PRICE.

5. ALTHOUGH THE EXHASUTIVE COLLECTION IN THE LIBRARY IS CONSIDERED TO BE WITHOUT FAULT, IF A PASSENGER HAS AN UNWANTED COPY OF A NOVEL, OLD OR NEW, WHICH IS NOT CURRENTLY CONTAINED IN THE LIBRARY, THIS LIBRARY IS WILLING TO OFFER A GENEROUS PRICE FOR ITS ACQUISITION.

6. THE NOVELS CONTAINED WITHIN THIS LIBRARY ARE DIVIDED INTO THREE CLASSES: 1) NOVELS IN CHAPTER FORM; 2) SHORT STORIES WITH ROMANTIC AND LEGENDARY FIGURES; 3) READING NOTES. THE SHELVES ARE ALSO DIVIDED IN THIS FASHION.

7. THOSE PASSENGERS THAT DONATE PREVIOUSLY UNOWNED VOLUMES SHOULD BE SURE TO PROVIDE THEIR NAMES SO THAT THEY MIGHT BE RECOMMENDED FOR A CITATION.

8. ALL NEWLY PUBLISHED NOVELS, NO MATTER WHETHER FROM THIS PLANET OR OTHERS, WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THIS LIBRARY BY 2PM ON THE DAY OF THEIR PUBLICATION, HAVING BEEN ACQUIRED ACROSS SPACE BY ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION.
Table 1.

Excerpts from the rules and regulations of the spaceship in *Journey to Utopia*79

In these narratively redundant and bloated lists of minutiae Xiaoran Yusheng takes the ascendance of mimesis over diegesis to its most pronounced extent. The lists are not indicative of anything, they merely exist, and through this uneconomical recounting they economically inform the reader of the dual quotidian boredom of both the ship and the novel itself.80 As with *New Flowers*, boredom here has a sociological component in its direct entanglement with the actions of bureaucratic power, albeit a shift from the personalisation of this in bureaucrats (officials, yamen chiefs, envoys) into its representation in the depersonalised arena of rules. For the guests of the ship, leisure is a vaguely authoritarian and undeniably dull bureaucracy which reveals that utopia is less about frolicking without care as much as a rigidly programmatic provision of pleasure. Metatextually, for the reader promised the “sanmen” of a temporary escape from just these quotidian concerns and petty tribulations, Xiaoran yusheng here is surely playing another cruel joke on his readership.81

79 See Appendix 1 for the full transcription of the rules in the original language.
80 They can also read as a mocking reference to some of the less successful experiments in *The Future of New China*, such as the transcribing of the minutes of a meeting of the Constitutionalist Party (Xianzheng dang 宪政党), in their entirety (at least 3000 characters), in chapter 2 of that novel.
81 The visit to the on-board library in Chapter 3 is illustrative of Xiaoran yusheng’s ongoing attempt to provoke and alienate a readership. The library floor is littered with classical Chinese novels, having been deemed worthless (see Table 1., Column 2, Number 2), and there the author finds classical erotic and mystical novels like *Investiture of the Gods*, *Xinghua tian* 杏花天 (Days of Apricot Blossoms, the absurd and highly sexual story of a magically-endowed Daoist monk), and the *Liumei tu 六美图* (Six Beauties), *Qiimei tu 七美图* (Seven Beauties), and *Bamei tu 八美图* (Eight Beauties). The author approves of this institutionalised vandalism, noting that such works “arouse only the interest of the unenlightened people of the country of China” (yinhe na zhina guo li meiyou yishi de ren huanxi kan ta 引着那支那国 里没有意识的人欢喜看他). WY, p. 81. Xiaoran Yusheng’s own sympathetic engagement
Again the promise of revolt against this anodyne boredom is unfulfilled, and the monk proves frustratingly obsequious. Having read the first list of regulations he notes that, "even a ship from the most modern nation in world could not compare in terms of on-board regulations" (zheng de zhengcheng, zhenshi shijiesheng ji wenming de lunchuan, yeshi meiyou zheyang wanshan 这种轮船上的章程，真是世界上极文明的轮船，也是没有这样完善). Xiaoran Yusheng’s previous derogation of wenming as little more than a justification for autocracy resonates in the later comment that although the rules are wonderful and modern, he “dare not contravene them in the slightest” (bugan wei’ao yidian 不敢违拗一点). In a later furthering of this attitude, he notes that, “having finished looking over [the rules and regulations of the library], I truly felt as if my wishes had been fulfilled, there wasn’t a single condition or clause that didn’t accord with my own spirit” (wo kanbi yihou, zhenzheng shifen meiyidao zhengcheng buru wodexin 我看毕以后，真是十分如愿，没一条章程不和我的心). These responses bring us back to Adorno, for whom the escapism of the culture industry is not "as it is asserted, flight form a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thoughts of resistance. The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and negation."

To return to the depiction in chapter 2 of this study, the novel ends with a visit to a terrible performance. This final moment of revelation is that even the author himself, previously so enthusiastic, has begun to see through the façade by which the ship denies the possibility of boredom and into the necessary boredom

with classical Chinese fiction in New Flowers in the Mirror and All-Story Monthly’s furthering of this agenda with such works as The New Investiture of the Gods certainly implies that the reader was not expected to acquiesce to this judgement. Wu Jianren, as editor of All-Story was a passionate advocate of a Chinese literary tradition, and this can only be read as satirical. The authoritarian control over reading habits as a portal by which a control society is revealed is also raised in the final chapter of New Flowers. Tang Xiaofeng and Yan Yai go looking for a copy of Reformland’s Destruction (Weixin guo mieuang lun 维新国灭亡论), only to be told by a local bookseller (fearing they are undercover investigators looking to catch him in contravention of the book’s complete ban) that all copies of the book have been burnt for being “in opposition to the government officials” (fandui guanshi 反对官使); XJHY, p. 461.

82 WYJ, p. 80.
83 WYJ, p. 82. Emphasis added.
84 Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 144.
85 See pp. 111-2 of this study.
that this very denial entails. The chapter title is (in part) “attending a performance alone fills the soul with boredom,” (ɡuān ɡuān yù duì ɡuān xiōnɡhuái 观演剧独自闷胸怀).

As with New Flowers, Journey too ends on a moment of boredom that transcends the textual and implicates the reader themselves. Returning again to the themes of the “self-consciousness” of boredom, the monk “becomes conscious of how bored he is” (zijue fanmen 自觉烦闷) with the performance just as it comes to an end. In a sly elision of the boundaries between text and metatext, so too does the chapter also come begin to a conclusion at this juncture for the reader who is perhaps increasingly conscious of their own boredom with Journey. Furthering this interweaving of text and metatext, the author is tempted with the counterintuitive desire to return to the performance the next day via a formidable “selling of the climax”:

The “selling of the climax” at this Little World [Theatre] was really formidable, pulling my mind in two directions at once, and I began to doubt the very existence of my boredom and of my concerns. I thought that if the climax will come tomorrow, then it would be best to come back, but on the other hand, honestly, the style of today’s performance was so terrible, how could I think about coming back? I thought of a plan, and slowly began to leave. What happened next? The following installment will explain.86

This passage begins with an excursion into the power of the maiguanzi to make the monk forget his own disgust and boredom, before transitioning directly into an actual maiguanzi. In this satirical juxtaposition the novel explicitly implicates the reader into the position of the monk, aware of their own boredom, yet also manipulated into continuation. The monk’s decision to disinter himself from a cycle of perpetual boredom is therefore a coded invitation to a readership faced with Xiaoran yusheng’s own “detestable” novel. Yet although it ends with the phrase

86 WYJ, p. 86. Emphasis added.
“What happens next? The following installment will explain,” the next chapter of *Journey* would never to appear in print, and the novel comes to an end of a climax sold, but unfulfilled. This preamble implies something quite different to the typical reading of the novel as one which is “unfinished” in a sense that it could have continued. Bearing in mind the ending of *New Flowers* as well, it is clear that Xiaoran yusheng was playing with the boundaries of fiction itself, using the abrupt ending to make a point about his own disinterest in continuation.

*Journey* speaks to the connection between leisure and boredom by allowing them to implicate one another. The ship is a space of pure leisure, and whose denial of the possibility of boredom is analogous to that of commercial fiction. The analogy between the ship itself and the entertainment it provides is a compelling one. Both are thin and fragile entities holding off an overwhelming pressure that threatens to invade and suffocate them.

In counterpoising the quotidian with the dynamic and epic timescale of his hypotexts, Xiaoran yusheng makes a salient point about the irony of being on the cusp of a new era in national history, a transitory moment on an epic timescale and of finding in this same moment, a newfound capacity to be bored. In the depiction of modernity as a bleak monoculture of boredom his fiction is genuinely provocative (more than it is shocking or titillating in the manner of a great deal of tabloid fiction), impelling its readers to interrogate the metatextual manipulations of fiction itself, to both make the reader aware of their capacity for boredom and offer relief simultaneously. Starr has noted “the attention drawn to framing devices” in late-Qing courtesan fiction, which she suggests, “extend to the authors’ viewing reality itself as a construct.”

The use of the framing device of the “maiguanzi” in both *Journey* and *New Flowers* is emblematic of this, indicative of the commercial energies that were reinvigorating excitement in the novel form, they function in these novels as a means through which to reflect on artificiality. Prusek notes in Xiaoran yusheng’s contemporary, Liu E, that “the artificial barrier which exists between an

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87 Starr, *Red-light Novels*, p. 102, fnrt. 65.
88 The author of *Laocan youji* 老残游记 (*The Travels of Lao Can*, 1906).
author and a completely fictitious character... has disappeared.” Xiaoran yusheng takes this one step further, as he implicates himself as the dissatisfied consumer of his own work, the bored character of his own story and the disinterested mediator between both, the tripartite delineation between character, author and reader is collapsed.

4. Conclusion

Goodstein’s assertion that boredom is “an encounter with the limits of language” was particularly true in the case of late-Qing China, where historical terms like men 任命 and chou 憔 approached but never encapsulated a sensation that was entangled with modern materialities. The rise of mass production, urbanisation, and even artificial lighting in a city like Shanghai prompted the awareness that work could continue without respite and into perpetuity. The leisure press sold itself as the antithesis of this new regime of productivity, but was in many ways intrinsic to it – it was mass-produced, celebrated Shanghai as a “city-without-night,” and, by introjecting the possibility of boredom, reduced life to an endless cycle of work and the “other work” that is the perpetual struggle to not be bored.

In addition to being an encounter with the limits of language, in this chapter we have considered how boredom can also be an encounter with the limits of narratology. Xiaoran yusheng’s fiction is an opportunity to reflect on how a nascent subjective experience like boredom was being constituted in relation to both philological and narratological traditions. In appropriating the narrative transition from diegesis to mimesis employed in Flowers in the Mirror, New Flowers and Journey reflect on how men and boredom transcend their lexical tethering, most notably in a common phenomenological grounding in the perceived arresting of progress and suspension of time itself. The sense of being “on the clock” and of “clock-watching” (clocks too being a relatively new introduction to urban life at this time) is reflected in the endless plasticity of “boredom time” that a novel like Journey evinces in its

mimetic purgatory of time suspended, in which only ever prolongs the torment of boredom.

Despite these commonalities, for Xiaoran yusheng, boredom is defined - in contrast to men - by a blasé subjectivity, as a conspicuously detached response to what were traditionally objects of outrage in tabloid fiction - myopic reformists, supercilious officials and bureaucratic rules. Both texts depicts characters who have imbibed the ideology of tabloid press, a life plagued by the possibility for boredom, finding that in doing so they have lost the capacity to react to anything but in terms of their own capacity for boredom.

In this consideration of boredom’s introjection into established dynamics of power and resistance, these novels are reflecting critically on the influence of a leisure press (of which the author and All-Story Monthly were tacitly a part) which proffered the paradox that to consume them was both to be made both aware of the evils of modern society and oppression of the people, and also to be relieved of concerns and worries which were presumably implicated into this awareness. The collapsing of resistance into boredom was an inevitable consequence of reducing power and authority to little more than the impediment in the endless search for amusement, one which brings to mind Adorno and Horkheimer’s sanguinary warning that, “even when the public does — exceptionally — rebel against the pleasure industry, all it can muster is that feeble resistance which that very industry has inculcated in it.”

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90 Adorno and Horkheimer, Diatetic of Enlightenment, p. 145.
EPILOGUE

This dissertation has attempted to demonstrate that the critical and subversive energies endemic to tabloid fiction - previously identified by Juan Wang et al. - were not only directed toward officials and modernising figures in the late-Qing, or even the specifics of a modernising programme, but also toward the underlying ideology of modernity itself. Not only the desire for a more mindful nation, but the reflexive suspicion toward the body as subjective and interpretive organ. Not only the questioning of the values and influence of the nation’s literary and spiritual heritage, but a derogation of orality and the non-objective world in general. Not only the valorising of public speaking, but the reflexive devaluing of the critical faculties of the collective and the audience. Not only the faith in systems of capital accumulation and transformation, but their assumptive reason. The novels considered in this study both recognised this duality between surface and sub-surface, and offered complexly rendered examinations of it through fiction. In doing so they revealed themselves to be neither derivative nor conservative,¹ nor reflexively unmodern, but worthy of a place among the critics of turn of the century modernity, often been located within a more high-intellectual stratum in China.

Among these high-intellectual critiques of late-Qing modernity is Lu Xun’s early non-fiction writing under the influence of Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936).² “Po e’sheng lun 破惡声论” (Toward a refutation of malevolent voices, 1908) is for instance a valuable point of comparison for critique of modernity outlined in this study.³ Lu enunciates several of the same perspectives touched on in this study, including the blind faith in capitalism, objectivism and scientism, the rise of anti-spiritualism and the mockery of the mythical, and the hegemony of “men of aspiration” (zhishi 志士), who “conceal... desires for wealth and power” behind the

² It would be at least another decade before Lu Xun turned to fiction to express this dissatisfaction with modernity.
profession of enlightenment.⁴ Yet in his considered thought on the nature of qun 群 (grouping) and the tendency to nu 奴 (servility), his employing of historical “stages” and superficial references to geopolitics (Poland and India) and the spiritual cultures of the world (ancient Hebrewism), Lu also attempts to address to the modernity clique almost entirely in their own voice (and through their cognitive pathways). His tendency to sound like Liang Qichao even as he criticises him leaves the impression that modernity and its critique were two faces of the same high-intellectual culture, much as Wang Hui has also concluded.⁵

In contrast to this, the critique emanating from tabloid speculative fiction in the late-Qing was endemic its ontological antithesis to the modernity discourse. This was a critique grounded in a hermeneutics of “low-class” pleasures of rowdiness, sexuality and misbehaviour, the experience of shengse gouma. These authors’ capacity to break down the dissolute life into its constitutive counter-logics leads them to avoid a naïve nostalgia for premodern literati self-indulgence. The winds of modernity are not shuttered beyond the comfortingly anachronistic confines of the brothel. The teahouse and courtesan house were understood to engender an invaluable subjectivity by which to engage modernity, not escape it. The idealised modern Chinese citizen may have been able to quote Byron, but he was somehow critically diminished in his inability to properly carouse, interpret the world through the sensory or the libidinal, or effectively interrupt a performance.

Yeh makes the case that turn of the century Shanghai, in its simultaneity of old and new, western and eastern, was “the only city,” in which, “one could publicly stage one’s passage from a traditional to a modern lifestyle.”⁶ The authors considered in this study imply that this passage was bilateral, Shanghai’s cultural hybridity, richness of cultural expression and inherent sensuality also created the natural

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⁴ Ibid., p. 55.
conditions for an elaborate and persuasive critique of modernity, one which avoided the lurch into anti-intellectualism or nostalgia.

Lukács argues that no-one was better placed to make sense of capitalism than the commodified worker, and these authors’ shared status as tabloid writers informed their capacity to critically and comically embody the alienated, commodified and mechanised subjectivities inherent to modernity. The images of mechanised and industrialised bodies and minds in *New Story of the Stone* bring to mind how, in “The Restoring of my Mind,” he bemoaned that even in failing health, he must “work without rest” (*lao buke jie* 劳不可节). Lu Shi’e, who once went through the low-class ordeal of being sued for breach of intellectual property, perhaps naturally alighted on the sense that modern capitalist subjectivity was an (often judiciary-led) attempt to crush the bandit consciousness and then to police this divide rigorously. Not to mention that tabloid authors inevitably felt that the audience's critical role was inviolable, and that avoiding it was degraded.

Despite being grounded in the degraded realities of modern subjectivity, the possibility for transcendence is found in the aspects of life that can never be made mechanical, productive and pedagogical. While tabloid speculative fiction was inherently playful, that is not to say that they were ephemeral. It engaged not just with the troubling authoritarianism of ideation, but also its violence against the complexity and muddy utopics of the everyday life.

The earliest theorists of the power of literature to reform the Chinese mind misunderstood the significance of western science fiction authors, conflating them with an earlier generation of political writers and failing to recognise them as populist and market-driven purveyors of regurgitated early-capitalist bourgeois logics of time and space. By playing with these images tabloid authors were able to create images of grotesque alienation as a corollary to positivist notions of the linearity and inevitability of development.

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7 Wu Jianren, “Huanwo hunling ji,” p. 331.
8 As Pierre Macherey notes, Verne’s work was commissioned and received acclaim from the *Academie Francaise* largely by the efforts of the French bourgeoisie of the Third Republic; “Jules Verne: The Faulty Narrative,” in *A Theory of Literary Production*, Geoffrey Wall (trans.), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, pp. 159-248.
Ying Wang describes Xiaoran Yusheng’s *New Flowers in the Mirror* as “mix[ing] nostalgic sentiment with conservative, male-oriented criticism.”  

I have addressed how, taking this as representative of a more general critique of late-Qing tabloid writing, I disagree with the first two of these three judgements. The issue of gender however finds more purchase. The fun depicted in this study was very specifically that of a literati man, one which women facilitated but little participated in. One need only remember that bound feet were often called “playthings” (wanju 玩具) to recognize that a great deal of libidinal male play came with a silent female partner.

The presence of women as subjective actors in a critique of modernity is a question worthy of greater attention, since women were largely objectified by the nation-reforming rhetoric of the late-Qing. Perry Link and Xia Xiaohong for instance have argued that women’s journals were not actually for women (or written by them), but only about them as aestheticised objects of nationalistic and modernising discourses. The women’s agenda was not only male-led but also enlightenment-dominated, and unsurprisingly women became only another facet of the logics of modernity, impelled to educate themselves, pay greater attention to their hygiene, and “not burden the nation and be a cause of its continued backwardness.”

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11 Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith, “Introduction: Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and early Republican
Qichao’s praise for Madame Roland (1754-1793) for instance was for little more than her vicarious engagement with his personal bêtes noires of despotism and autocracy. Women like Xue Shaohui 薛绍徽 (1866-1911), who did manage to gain access to the women’s press in the late-Qing, were themselves avid espousers of such values, including “raging nationalism,” as Nanxiu Qian 萬幸茜 puts it. Literary women were, by their nature, archetypally “modern” - educated, westernising and so on - and so inherently “inside” of modernity. Zhang Li 張莉 for instance sees the assertive generation of female writers of the May Fourth period as grounded in the modern intellectual cultivation that they received in the late-Qing, tacitly acquiescing to the equation of feminine self-becoming with enlightenment values of ascetic self-cultivation.

The question of whether or not the tenets of a wider modernity agenda implicit in the “new woman” (xin nüxing 新女性 or xin funü 新妇女) discourse were undermined and adapted, when not simply refused, is ongoing. Recent studies of the women’s press have recognised the capacity to transcend an artificial suturing to the nation by male intellectuals, but less work has brought in the necessary association of nationalism with modernity. Several of the contributions to the recent collection, Different Worlds of Discourse, relating to women like Wu Zhiying 吳芝瑛 (1867-1936) and Lü Bicheng 呂碧城 (1883-1943) suggest that women’s cultural production enunciated versions of the modern woman that complicated, and ran counter to, the dominant “new woman” ideals of the time.

Recent work on courtesans has also uncovered avenues for the expression of woman-hood not tied to literary and hygienic cultivation. Many courtesans were
entrepreneurial, sexually assertive, financially independent, and often dominant of their male admirers, representing a modern femininity that was very different from the educated woman imagined by the “new woman” ideology (they were viewed as a form of cainü 才女, a model of womanhood which was openly rejected by reformers as effete and unproductive). They expressed a capacity, not unlike the writers in this study, for ludic refusal to self-cultivate and “act modern” (and they were admired by writers like Wu Jianren and Li Boyuan for this). Yet this refusal was not enacted on the page but in the arenas of fashion and the creation and cultivation of a public persona - to return to a recurrent point they expressed the modern sense of “style.”

Notably, they, like the tabloid writers of this study, also shared a common association with the spaces of play in the city, particularly with the Zhang Gardens. As Ellen Widmer has considered, even this figure was open to co-option for the consumption of a male audience, as in the novels and courtesan profiles of Zhan Kai 詹培 (c. 1860–c. 1910) women emerge as both the image of traditional female values of virtue and beauty in one context (the courtesan) and as modern assertive and adventurous women in another (the non-courtesan woman). Zhan Kai later, and somewhat inevitably, turned to the image of the self-cultivating and autodidact courtesan as idealised conflation of the two.

The female protagonist in tabloid speculative fiction and its relationship to a dominant culture of self-cultivating womanhood would be a productive avenue for future research. The depiction of courtesans as ambiguously modern women in fictional works is something that McMahon has previously considered. The female


19 McMahon, “Fleecing the male customer.”
assassin depicted in *Stone of the Goddess Nüwa* (discussed briefly in Chapter 2) is an interesting case of an assertive woman who struggles with her role in a modern society that juxtaposes her gendered liberation with her mental subjugation at the hands of a pathologising futuristic medical regime. As Jing Tsu puts it, “if [the author of *Stone of the Goddess Nüwa*] thought that science could have an important place in Liang [Qichao]’s vision for new fiction, he saw it not as a set of hypothetical theories but the very instrument for physically altering the mindset of modern female citizens.” The counter-reading of this is the author’s ironic reflection on modern womanhood, that like other aspects of modern subjectivity it was a necessary submission of the self to the scientific and the mechanical.

The final contribution of this study to be re-iterated is its highlighting of internal discontinuities within the apparently uniform generic arena of speculative or science fiction. Late-Qing speculative works spent the majority of the past century in anonymity. It was only in the late 1980s that mainland scholars began to catalogue and analyse their continuities and commonalities. This process has picked up steam over the past 15 years, leading, as we discussed in the introduction, to more assertive claims to “genre” and the attendant necessity of establishing common motifs and intentions among science fiction authors and works. This has become recursive, as not only secondary literature but also primary sources have begun to reinforce a priori notions of generic homogeneity. As Starr notes in the case of courtesan fiction:

> The need to consider the novels as individual texts has been made more pressing by the production patterns where, following critical and editorial promotion of serial similarity, the format of modern reprints has predisposed readers to particular expectations of the text.

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22 Starr, *Red-Light Novels*, p. 27.
In the case of speculative fiction, emblematic texts like *New Story of the Stone* and *The Future of New China* have found a second life (and a second readership) in anthologies like *Xin Zhongguo shengshi yuyan* 新中国盛世预言 (*Predictions of a Flourishing World and New China*, 2010) and *Shibo menghuan sabuqu* 世博梦幻三部曲 (*A Trilogy of World Expo Fantasies*, 2010). These have recovered this genre’s principal examples from comparative obscurity, while inciting the reader to internalise their continuities. As their titles suggest, they also play a considerable role in framing the reader’s expectations. Late-Qing speculative fiction has become a uniform yearning national strength and prosperity through technological progress and sociological and biological tinkering.

In this dissertation I have attempted to consider the fissures within the false linearity ascribed to a “genre” whose pre-conceived rules and motifs were non-existent. The identities of the authors of speculative fiction were first and foremost class-based, and their disposal toward power, authority and vanguard cultural programs for the masses could be widely divergent. Reprint collections which place Liang Qichao and Wu Jianren side-by-side threaten to impose a dangerously uncomplicated linearity and coherence between the work of two figures who seemed at times to actively dislike one another and their ethos for the self and the nation. In more specific cases they also undermine the complexity of the relationship between textuality and content, reinforcing preconceptions that novels existed as singular and a priori before being released as a contiguous whole onto the market. In the case of *New Story of the Stone*, discussed in chapter 2, the novel’s serialisation and its impinging on the textual world of the novel have been critically overlooked in many interpretations. As we discussed in chapter 3, the commercial failure of the journal for which *The Future of New China* was emblematic begins to impinge on the text itself as it progresses, a development which is difficult to identity in the context of a reprint.

The appreciation of late-Qing speculative fiction is also enriched by the unexpected diachronic hybridity with the non-modern. Many outwardly modern texts were indebted to storytelling, erotic and lay-knowledge, and folk figures and ideals. There are references to works like Days of Apricot Blossoms, and The Back-Pushing Diagrams which neither denigrate nor attempt to extirpate. This hybridity between modern and premodern and the modern self and “other” might be forwarded as a basic aspect of Wu Jianren’s ontology as both author and as editor. As he put it in the preface to All-Story Monthly, “this society is a collection of writers who are willing to speak to the strange, and write the fantastic; we the weirdos and oddities, adorned with beautiful words, will pay attention to and improve society” (benshe ji yuguai zhi jia, wenxie huaguan; guaiqi zhi ke, yuchuan mingzhu, yi zhu zhi yu gailiang shehui 本社集语怪之家，文写华管；怀奇之客，语穿明珠，亦注意与改良社会). The use of the phrase “zi bu yu guai 子不语怪” raises the presence of the early-Qing intellectual Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797), whose own collections of the libidinal, supernatural and violent were viewed as an deliberately non-rational antidote to a stifling cultural agenda of Confucian orthodoxy which refused to “speak to” (buyu 语) such matters. Late-Qing modernity had self-evident Confucian elements, and Wu Jianren identified himself closely with such counter-cultural figures of a Chinese past, using them to highlight how late-Qing modernisers deliberately repressed the strange and the discomforting much as Confucius did.

Of course the most critical hybridity was with the space and culture of the red-light district. Hirosue Tamotsu, describing the pleasure district of old Edo described how “the everyday world” and the pleasure district as “site of the ‘non-everyday’,” were “continuous with one another... a non-everyday place that existed

25 As opposed to Confucius who said that he would “not speak to the strange” (zi bu yu guai 子不语怪).
26 See Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, Censored by Confucius: Ghost Stories by Yuan Mei, Armonk, M. E. Sharpe, 1996.
27 In Chapter 32 of Wu Jianren’s Strange Events Witnessed over the Past Twenty Years, it is revealed that eldest son of one character is named “Admires Mei” (yinci dade jiao ta yangmu Yuan Mei 因此大的叫他仰慕袁枚); Wu Jianren, Ershinian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang 二十年目睹之怪现状, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997, p. 164.
in an everyday way.” He goes on to note that it was particular to the early modern era that “these places were real places.”28 Each of the chapters of this study has found commercial authors interrogating the complexities of a transitional period in which the pleasure district was increasingly looking like it would no longer be “really there.” Wu Jianren envisaged an ascendant asceticism looming on the horizon, and Xiaoran Yusheng reflected on the subsumption of pleasure to the avoidance of boredom. Lu Shi’e however offers an interesting counterpoint, that while the pleasure district itself was on the wane, libidinal energies, gossip and generally unmodern societal energies were, thanks to the rise of a capitalist ethics, becoming perversely permissible in their remarkable capacity for profit.

28 Cited in Ai Maeda, Text and the City, p. 76. Emphasis added.
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## APPENDIX 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>飞空艇上的章程</th>
<th>阅小说书室章程</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 飞空艇共有八号，来往各处，约四礼拜可以往返。</td>
<td>1. 本书室凡地球内及地球外无论何国所有各小说尽行预备，以为各客人消遣。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 乘坐飞空艇各客人，必须经主人投检行李，及给牌验病三事，然后可以乘坐。</td>
<td>2. 本书室所备各小说，皆分等级，命意及作为好者，藏书简最上层，次等藏次层，一切均仿此列，惟最坏的置书简以下，任意乱堆，以示贱贱。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 乘坐飞空艇各客人，必须严守此章程，如有未便当告知主人，否则作为默许。</td>
<td>3. 本书室所有上等小说，每部各备数百份，以下依等及递减，至书简下者，只备一份，以示完全。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 飞空艇搭客当中自鸣钟为准，如迟到膳室者，不能别行添补。</td>
<td>4. 本书室所有上等中等各小说，如阅者不忍释手，亦可向小说书室干事人说明，照原价向购。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 飞空艇搭客定于六点钟起，十二点钟卧，不得参差，妨碍同船搭客。</td>
<td>5. 本书室所藏各处各种小说，自问亦已完备，如客人另有新旧小说，为本书室所不备者，本书室愿重价购之。</td>
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<td>6. 飞空艇个舱俱有电铃，可以呼仆，又有水月电灯，德律风管，及无线电报管，火炉，风扇等。</td>
<td>6. 本书室所藏各小说，内分三部。甲，章回，乙，传奇，丙，札记。书简亦分三等藏置。</td>
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7. 飞空艇各项食物俱备，惟有碍卫生等物，概行不备。

8. 飞空艇分四层楼，最上层设立藏书楼一所，凡世界上各国的古书，无不藏置。

9. 飞空艇于第二层楼设阅报所一间，凡世界上各种逐日新闻纸及月报旬报等无不齐备，又设小说书室室一所，凡世界上所有各种小说俱有。

10. 飞空艇于第三层楼设博物馆三间，内分动物，植物，矿物三类，凡世界上所稀有者俱备。

11. 飞空艇于第四层楼设俱乐部数间，内分世界上各种音乐及各种嗜好品，惟此室每人只二点钟可住，又设化学试验所一间，欲研究者可以任意试验。

12. 飞空艇每日下午一点至四点钟，在各层楼内俱设讲习会，内分格物，哲理两大部，细目极多，临时再分单。

13. 飞空艇在世界上各处，通通无线电报，故飞空艇每日出“飞空艇报”一纸，信息极确，事件极详，又极速。
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<td>14. 飞空艇内设制造厂一所，搭客欲学习制造者，约五点钟即自能制造一种物件。</td>
<td>飞空艇开行停止，俱有一定时刻，如搭客有特别事件，不得照所定时刻，须告知主人，由主人承认。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CURRICULUM VITAE

Academic qualifications of the thesis author, Mr. MARLING Thomas Oliver:

• Received the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in History from University of Newcastle upon Tyne (UK), June 2008.

• Received the degree of Master of Arts in Chinese Philosophy from Xiamen University (PRC), June 2010.

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