

CHINA KNOWLEDGE SERIES

A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
CHINESE FICTION

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Publisher's Note

A Brief History of Chinese Fiction grew out of the lecture notes Lu Hsun used when teaching a course on Chinese fiction at Peking University between 1920 and 1924. In January 1923 a first volume was printed and in June 1924 a second volume. In September 1925 these were reprinted as one book. In 1930 the author made certain changes, but all subsequent editions have remained the same.

"The Historical Development of Chinese Fiction" in the Appendix served as notes for a series of lectures Lu Hsun gave at a Sian summer school in July 1924. The preface to the Japanese edition appeared first in the edition published in 1935 by the Sairosha Press, Tokyo, Japan.

This translation has been made from the *Complete Works of Lu Hsun* published by the People's Literature Publishing House: *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* and "The Historical Development of Chinese Fiction" can be found in Volume 8, while the preface to the Japanese edition comes from the second series of *Essays of Chieh-chieh-ting* in Volume 6.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

Nearly ten years have passed since I began to lecture on the history of Chinese fiction, and this brief outline was first printed seven years ago. Since then much research has been done in this field and new discoveries have cleared up certain points which were obscure. For example, the discovery by Professor Shionoya Akushi of the mutilated Yuan dynasty edition of *Illustrated Vernacular Tales* and Feng Meng-lung's three collections of popular stories, as well as his researches on these, are of major significance in the history of Chinese fiction; and the contention of some Chinese scholars that there should be separate histories for the fiction of different periods is a sound one. All this means that my brief outline should now be outdated; but since no new histories have yet been written, there are still readers for these notes. For a new edition, this book should by rights be revised, but since I started moving from place to place I have given up literary studies, and have nothing but a vague recollection of what I wrote in the past. So I simply made a few changes in Chapters 14, 15 and 21, keeping the other chapters unchanged as I have no new theories regarding them. Since great vessels take years to produce, this earthenware pot of mine still serves some purpose; but though this fact has prolonged the life of my book, I am disheartened by this dearth of new writing.

In a melancholy mood I have gone through these proofs, hoping that better scholars will soon produce a more authoritative book.

Lu Hsun

Night of November 25, 1930

PREFACE

There has never been a history of Chinese fiction, if we except the accounts in the histories of Chinese literature written by foreigners. Recently certain summaries have appeared in Chinese works too, but the space devoted to fiction is usually less than one-tenth of the whole. Hence we still lack a detailed account of the development of Chinese fiction.

Though this book is concerned entirely with fiction, it is nothing but a rough outline. I wrote it because three years ago, happening to give some lectures on this subject and fearing that my defects as a speaker might make it hard for my hearers to understand, I jotted down this outline and had it duplicated for my students. Then, in order not to give the copyist too much trouble, I compressed it by using the classical language, omitting certain examples but keeping the main outline which I have been using ever since.

These notes are finally being printed because they have been duplicated so many times and given those in charge so much trouble that printing appears to be more economical.

During the preparation of this copy for the press, four or five friends have lent me reference books or helped me with proofreading; indeed, for the last three years

they have proved consistently helpful. I would like to thank them here.

Lu Hsun

Night of October 7, 1923, Peking

CONTENTS

Preface to the New Edition

Preface

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1. The Historians' Accounts and Evaluations of Fiction | 1 |
| 2. Myths and Legends | 10 |
| 3. Works of Fiction Mentioned in the <i>Han Dynasty History</i> | 23 |
| 4. Fiction Attributed to Han Dynasty Writers | 29 |
| 5. Tales of the Supernatural in the Six Dynasties | 45 |
| 6. Tales of the Supernatural in the Six Dynasties (<i>Continued</i>) | 61 |
| 7. <i>Social Talk</i> and Other Works | 71 |
| 8. The Tang Dynasty Prose Romances | 85 |
| 9. The Tang Dynasty Prose Romances (<i>Continued</i>) | 100 |
| 10. Collections of Tang Dynasty Tales | 113 |
| 11. Supernatural Tales and Prose Romances in the Sung Dynasty | 123 |
| 12. Story-Tellers' Prompt-Books of the Sung Dynasty | 139 |
| 13. Imitations of Prompt-Books in the Sung and Yuan Dynasties | 152 |
| 14. Historical Romances of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties | 163 |
| 15. Historical Romances of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (<i>Continued</i>) | 180 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 16. Ming Dynasty Novels About Gods and Devils | 198 |
| 17. Ming Dynasty Novels About Gods and Devils (<i>Continued</i>) | 209 |
| 18. Ming Dynasty Novels About Gods and Devils (<i>Continued</i>) | 220 |
| 19. Novels of Manners in the Ming Dynasty | 232 |
| 20. Novels of Manners in the Ming Dynasty (<i>Continued</i>) | 245 |
| 21. Ming Dynasty Imitations of Sung Stories in the Vernacular | 256 |
| 22. Imitations of Classical Tales in the Ching Dynasty | 269 |
| 23. Novels of Social Satire in the Ching Dynasty | 288 |
| 24. Novels of Manners in the Ching Dynasty | 298 |
| 25. Novels of Erudition in the Ching Dynasty | 317 |
| 26. Novels About Prostitution in the Ching Dynasty | 337 |
| 27. Novels of Adventure and Detection in the Ching Dynasty | 355 |
| 28. Novels of Exposure at the End of the Ching Dynasty | 372 |
| Postscript | 389 |
| Appendices: | |
| The Historical Development of Chinese Fiction | 393 |
| Preface to the Japanese Edition | 444 |
| Index | 447 |

1. THE HISTORIANS' ACCOUNTS AND EVALUATIONS OF FICTION

Hsiao-shuo,¹ the name for fiction, was first used by Chuang Tzu² who spoke of "winning honour and renown by means of *hsiao-shuo*." All he meant by this expression, as a matter of fact, was chit-chat of no great consequence. So here the term has a different connotation from that acquired later. Huan Tan³ said: "The writers of *hsiao-shuo* string together odd sayings and parables to make short tales which contain matters of use for daily life." This seems closer to our understanding of fiction. But Yao's⁴ questioning of Confucius in *Chuang Tzu* and the account in *Huai Nan Tzu*⁵ of how the giant Kung Kung made the earth quake were considered as "worthless *hsiao-shuo*." In these cases the term meant legends and fables having no basis in historical fact and counter to the Confucian tradition. Later there were many theories which we need not go into here; but we may as well see what the historians had to say about

¹ Literally "small-talk."

² A philosopher of the Warring States Period who lived in the fourth or third century B.C.

³ A scholar of the first century A.D.

⁴ A legendary sage king believed to have lived about 2000 B.C. He and Confucius lived centuries apart.

⁵ A philosophical work by the protégés of Prince Liu An who lived during the second and first century B.C.

hsiao-shuo, since literary criticism has always been one function of Chinese historians.

In the Chin dynasty books were burned in order to keep the people ignorant. When the Han dynasty was established, records were collected and copyists hired by the state, while the emperors Cheng Ti and Ai Ti ordered Liu Hsiang and his son Liu Hsin¹ to edit the books in the imperial library; and Liu Hsin, having made a summary, presented his *Seven Summaries*. This work is lost now, but Pan Ku's *Han Dynasty History* preserved its main contents in the section on literature. The third part of this gives a brief account of the works of non-Confucian philosophers up to that time and ten schools are recorded, of which Pan Ku says: "Nine are worth reading," but works of *hsiao-shuo* were excluded; however he appended the names of these fifteen works in the end.

1. *The Sayings of Yi Yin* in twenty-seven *chuan*² or books
2. *The Sayings of Yu Tzu* in nineteen books
3. *Records of Chou* in seventy-six books
4. *Ching Shih Tzu* in fifty-seven books
5. *Shih Kuang* in six books
6. *Wu Cheng Tzu* in eleven books
7. *Sung Tzu* in eighteen books
8. *Tien Yi* in three books
9. *The Sayings of the Yellow Emperor* in forty books
10. *Notes on the Sacrifice to Heaven and Earth* in eighteen books
11. *Adviser Jao's Writings* in twenty-five books

¹ Han dynasty scholars in the latter part of the first century B.C.

² *Chuan*; literally "rolls." A physical unit of textual division in old Chinese works.

12. *Adviser An Cheng's Writings* in one book
 13. *Shou's Account of the Chou Dynasty* in seven books
 14. *Yu Chu's Chou Dynasty Tales* in 943 books
 15. *Miscellaneous Writings* in 139 books
- In all, this totals 1,380 books.

The *hsiao-shuo* writers succeeded those officers of the Chou dynasty whose task it was to collect the gossip of the streets. Confucius said: "Even by-ways are worth exploring. But if we go too far we may be bogged down." Gentlemen do not undertake this themselves, but neither do they dismiss such talk altogether. They have the sayings of the common people collected and kept, as some of them may prove useful. This was at least the opinion of country rustics.

By the Liang dynasty (505-556) *Ching Shih Tzu* alone of these fifteen works was left, and this book was lost too by the Sui dynasty. Judging by Pan Ku's comments, however, most of these titles were later works attributed to some ancient men, or anecdotes about ancient history. The first category bore some resemblance to early philosophic writings except that they were inferior, while the second resembled historical records, only they were less reliable.

During the first half of the seventh century the official *Sui Dynasty History* was compiled by Changsun Wu-chi and other Tang dynasty scholars. The bibliographical section was written by Wei Cheng, who based it on the record by Hsun Hsu of the Tsin dynasty, dividing books into four categories:

1. Confucian classics
2. Historical records

3. Philosophical writings

4. Miscellaneous works

Hsiao-shuo are included under philosophical writings. All the works in this section except the *Story of Prince Tan of Yen* date from the Tsin dynasty and include records of sayings as well as descriptions of various arts and games; while the definition of *hsiao-shuo* is based on that in the *Han Dynasty History*:

Hsiao-shuo were the talk of the streets. Thus the *Tso Chuan*¹ quotes chair-bearers' chants while the *Book of Songs*² praises the ruler who consulted rustics. In days of old when a sage was on the throne, the official historians wrote records, blind minstrels made songs, artisans recited admonitions, ministers gave advice, gentlemen discoursed and the common people gossiped. Clappers sounded in early spring as a search was made for folk songs, while officers on tours of inspections understood local customs from the popular songs; and if mistakes had been made these were rectified. All the talk of the streets and highways was recorded. Officers at court took charge of local records and prohibitions, while the officers in charge of civil affairs reported local sayings and customs. Thus Confucius said: "Even by-ways are worth exploring. But if we go too far we may be bogged down. . . ."

In the first half of the tenth century, Liu Hsu and others drew up the bibliographical section of the *Tang Dynasty History* based on the *Record of Books Ancient*

¹A commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* by Tsochiu Ming, who was roughly contemporary with Confucius.

²A collection of songs compiled in the Chou dynasty.

and *Modern* by Wu Ching¹ and others, shortening it by cutting out the preface and notes. So we find no comments on books in the official Tang history. The *hsiao-shuo* listed here differ little from those enumerated in the *Sui Dynasty History*; but works no longer extant are omitted, while Chang Hua's² *Records of Strange Things*, formerly classified as miscellaneous writings, is added.

In the middle of the eleventh century, Tseng Kung-liang and other Sung dynasty scholars were ordered to edit the *New Tang Dynasty History*, and Ouyang Hsiu wrote the bibliographical section. His list of *hsiao-shuo* includes many additional works from the third to the sixth century: fifteen accounts of ghosts and fairies in 115 books from Chang Hua's *Tales of Marvels* and Tai Tso's *Discerning the Marvels* down to Wu Chun's *More Tales of Chi Hsieh*; as well as nine works in seventy books on divine retribution from Wang Yen-hsiu's *Tales of Divine Retribution* to Hou Pai's *Stories Exemplifying Marvels*. These works had previously been included in the section on historical works together with the biographies of local elders, hermits, filial sons, loyal officers and famous women. But from this time onwards these accounts of the supernatural were considered as fiction and ceased to be classed as history. Other works of the Tang dynasty added to the list of *hsiao-shuo* were moral admonitions like Li Shu's *Advice to My Son*, compendiums of knowledge like Liu Hsiao-sun's *Origin of Things*, Li Fu's *Corrections of Mistakes* or Lu Yu's *Book of Tea*. Thus this category became more diversified. When the *Sung Dynasty History* was compiled

¹A Tang dynasty scholar of the eighth century.

²A Tsin dynasty scholar. See Chapter 5.

in the Yuan dynasty the same tradition was followed, though the connotation of *hsiao-shuo* became even more all-embracing.

Hu Ying-lin¹ of the Ming dynasty, judging the *hsiao-shuo* genre too indefinite, subdivided *hsiao-shuo* as follows:

1. Records of marvels
2. Prose romances
3. Anecdotes
4. Miscellaneous notes
5. Researches
6. Moral admonitions

During the reign of Chien Lung (1736-1795) of the Ching dynasty, when a general survey was made of the catalogue of books in the Imperial Manuscript Library under the direction of Chi Yun,² *hsiao-shuo* were divided into three main groups. But Chi Yun's views were based on earlier records:

When we investigate the different types of *hsiao-shuo*, we find three groups: miscellaneous records, records of marvels, and anecdotes. Since the Tang and Sung dynasties there has been a great deal of literature of this sort. Though much of it is idle gossip or foolish superstition, intermingled with this are quite a number of useful pieces of knowledge, research and moral teaching. Pan Ku tells us that the *hsiao-shuo* writers were successors of the Chou dynasty officers who collected information, and a comment in the *Han Dynasty History* says that the task of these officers was to help the ruler to understand country ways and

¹A scholar of the early seventeenth century.

²See Chapter 22.

morals. Evidently this was the ancient system for assembling miscellaneous information; hence these works should not be thrust aside as useless or spurious. We have selected only the better examples which serve to broaden knowledge, rejecting vulgar and extravagant writings which simply confuse people.

He goes on to list three categories of *hsiao-shuo*:

1. Miscellaneous writings
The Western Capital Miscellany in six books
New Anecdotes of Social Talk in three books,
 etc. . . .
2. Records of Marvels
The Book of Mountains and Seas in eighteen books
The Travels of King Mu in six books
The Book of Supernatural Things in one book
Records of Spirits in twenty books
More Tales of Chi Hsieh in one book, etc. . . .
3. Anecdotes
Records of Strange Things in ten books
Accounts of Marvels in two books
The Yuyang Miscellany in twenty books
Sequel to the Yuyang Miscellany in ten books,
 etc. . . .

If we compare this with Hu Ying-lin's categories, we can see that there were actually two main groups: miscellaneous anecdotes and tales of marvels; but here those tales which are more complete are classified as records of marvels, the briefer and more miscellaneous are described as anecdotes. Prose romances are not included, neither are miscellaneous sayings, short studies and moral admonitions. From this time on, the *hsiao-shuo*

genre seems to be more clearly defined. Since this was the first time works like *The Book of Mountains and Seas* and *The Travels of King Mu* had been classed as *hsiao-shuo*, the following explanation was given: "Works like *The Travels of King Mu* were formerly classified as biographies. . . . But in fact those tales are sheer fantasy, not to be compared with the *Lost Records of Chou*. . . . If we count them as authentic history, the concept of history becomes confused and the rules of history are broken. We have therefore put them down as *hsiao-shuo*, which seems more logical. We hope readers will not condemn us for altering time-honoured categories in this way." Since then, historical legends have been classed under *hsiao-shuo* as tales of marvels, and the section on history contains no more legendary accounts.

The Sung dynasty story-tellers' scripts and the Yuan and Ming novels have always been popular with the common people and very numerous, but they were never listed in official histories. Only Wang Chi and Kao Ju of the Ming dynasty in their bibliographies, *Hsu Wen Hsien Tung Kao* (*Sequel to Studies in Ancient Bibliographies*) and *Pai Chuan Shu Chih* (*Hundred Rivers Bibliographical Notes*), mention the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the *Shui Hu Chuan*. Chien Tseng at the beginning of the Ching dynasty in his bibliography, *Yeh Shih Yuan Shu Mu*, mentions three popular romances including the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and sixteen Sung dynasty tales including *Mother Lamp-Wick*. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Shui Hu Chuan* were considered as proper writings because they were printed by the censorate of the Ming government in the sixteenth century, and that was why they were included