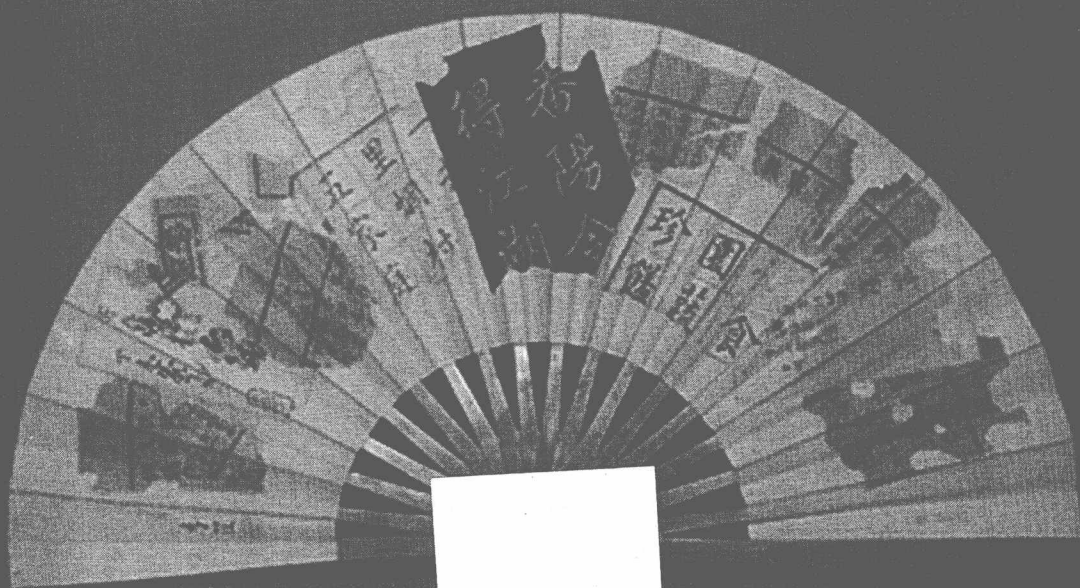


*Writing and
Materiality
in China*



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Preface

Many of these papers were first presented at a three-day symposium held on December 12–14, 1997, to mark the retirement of Professor Patrick Hanan from Harvard University. Hosted by the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, the symposium brought together Professor Hanan's students, colleagues, friends, and family from around the world.

Unlike more generic conference volumes, this one is not a simple selection of papers presented at a particular event. From the outset, a number of talks coalesced around a set of thematic clusters relating to publishing, readership, illustration, and the media. In the years since the symposium, editors Lydia Liu and Judith Zeitlin have subsumed these themes under the larger rubric of writing and materiality and solicited other essays to fill out the volume. Their efforts have helped us contributors to see our work in a different light and have challenged us to expand our perspectives on texts and images in China. Contributions from outside Hanan's immediate circle of students, too, have created new resonances and expanded the volume's thematic range. In considering writing and materiality, the authors in this volume take their cues from such fields as anthropology, art history, and history of the book, where traditional literary studies are decentered, and the focus moves away from the author and his or her work. In such fields, publishing, perishability, illustration, and visibility interact with the written text in ways that could not have been imagined twenty, or even ten, years ago.

This volume would not exist were it not for Patrick Hanan's long devotion to the study of Chinese fiction and his faculty for inspiring a similar devotion in his students. Even more, the diverse contents of this volume

reflect his ability to encourage others to pursue their own, varied research interests. His distinctiveness as a teacher, mentor, and colleague are his generosity of spirit and his gift for seeing the implications of others' work and commenting constructively on them. His major literary studies on the vernacular novel and short fiction, with their insights into language, form, and historical context, are foundational to the efforts of anyone coming after him in the field. Among these, *The Chinese Short Story*, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, *The Invention of Li Yu*, and the articles on Jin Ping Mei, *Pingyao zhuan*, the classical tale, court case fiction, and Lu Xun come most readily to mind. They are models of the scholarly accuracy, felicity of expression, and discernment to which we all aspire. We are further inspired by his activities as a translator. Writers as diverse in time and mood as Li Yu, Wu Jianren, and Chen Diexian have obtained a new life in English, thanks to his precise yet lively prose.

One of the most tantalizing aspects of Professor Hanan's work has been his excavation of the anonymous writer, variously known as "X" or "Lang-xian," from the fiction of the first half of the seventeenth century. It seems fitting that one of the contributors to this volume himself prefers to remain anonymous, a rare incidence of opaqueness in our information age. Remarkably, more than any other essay in the volume, Anonymous's work lives up to the high standards set by Professor Hanan, in terms of both scholarly quality and writing style. Moreover, in showing how a newspaper contest became a catalyst for the "new" novel in China, this piece exemplifies the volume's focus on extra-authorial issues and the power of the press. For these two reasons, the editors have chosen to include it, despite their misgivings about any confusion to which it might lead.

Most recently, Professor Hanan's post-retirement activities have brought to light another outstanding quality, the spirit of adventure that carries him ever forward into new research frontiers. His writings on late Qing and missionary publications were not foreshadowed in the milestones of his career before retirement, yet they are no less seminal than the scholarship we came to celebrate when we gathered in December 1997.

Those of us who were Professor Hanan's students share an acquaintance with his methodology and a long history of collaboration with one another. These range from jointly published research to panels at professional meetings to more informal critical readings of one another's writings to mutual citation. Those of us who never studied under Professor Hanan, too, are in-

debted to his insights, whether through interactions with his students and their students or through direct contact with his ideas. Such interrelations are part of what bind this volume into a single whole. Less a festschrift than an outgrowth of shared scholarly affinities, *Writing and Materiality in China* joins sinological positivism to a wide range of contemporary concerns.

The collaboration underlying this volume draws on support of another, more practical but no less important kind. As the primary source of funding for the symposium, Harvard's Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures cannot go unmentioned. Peter Bol, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and Stephen Owen, in particular, deserve thanks for their help and vision in steering it toward a workable schedule, given the large number of scholars who wanted to attend. From the same department, Susan Kashiwa and Frankie Hoff must be thanked for their unstinting staff support when there were many competing claims on their time. Those present at the symposium and who contributed so much to its success include Victor Mair, Meir Shahar, Paul Clark, Yenna Wu, Angelina Yee, Sally Church, Tina Lu, Laura Hua Wu, Paul Clark, Alice Cheang, Sally Church, Margaret Wan, Daisy Ng, George Hayden, Ron Egan, Jeff Kinkley, Perry Link, David Wang, Wang Ch'iu-kuei, Li-li Chen, Graham Sanders, Nancy Hodes, Eva Chou Shan, Jeanne Tai, and Lin Hua. Finally, John Ziemer, director of the Asia Center Publications Program, was the first to encourage us to translate our oral presentations into something more permanent. His active involvement and intellectual engagement throughout the project continuously reinforced one of the volume's main points: that the editor's role in making a book is as fundamental as that of its authors.

The importance of these contributions does not diminish Professor Hanan's role as progenitor of this volume, and it is to him that it is dedicated. We thank him for his wise and good-humored counsel over many years.

Ellen Widmer
Wesleyan University

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Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan

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Introduction

Lydia H. Liu and Judith T. Zeitlin

Speaking about writing, especially Chinese writing, entails thinking about the ways in which writing speaks to us through a variety of media and forms. Whether it be a consideration of the written character or its imprints, traces, or ruins, writing always appears in its multifarious guises to be much more than an embodiment of textuality. To reflect on this and related features of writing is the goal of this volume, as we consider a fundamental problem: What is the relationship of writing to materiality over the course of China's literary history? In some manner or other, all the chapters in this volume ponder the physical aspects of the production and circulation of writing as a dynamic process—something that can be collected and exchanged, bought and sold, bestowed as a gift or entered in a contest; something that can be cut up, pieced together and recycled, borrowed, copied, or appropriated; something that can be stolen, ruined, lost, or destroyed. To speak of the thing-ness of writing is to understand it not as an artifact inert and complete unto itself but as something in a constant state of motion and flux, which is continually transported from one place or time to another, one genre or medium to another, one person or public to another.

To put it yet another way: How does thinking about writing as the material product of a culture affect the way we do Chinese literary history? For one thing, it shifts the emphasis from the author as the main creator and ultimate arbiter of a text's meaning to the editors and publishers, collectors and readers, producers and viewers, through whose hands a text, genre, or

legend is reshaped, disseminated, and given new meanings. For another, it means taking seriously the arguments of recent European historians of the book and print culture such as D. F. McKenzie and Roger Chartier, that the form—or more precisely, the format, location, and technical medium—of a work and the meanings it generates at a particular moment are inseparable. Yoking writing and materiality, this volume aims to bypass the commonplace tendency to oppose form and content, words and things, documents and artifacts, to rethink key issues in the interpretation of Chinese literary and visual culture.

How, for example, does taking into account the physical properties of an inscription and rubbings of it expand our definition of the sign, of that which constitutes meaning? What effects have technical developments in China's particular experience of print had on the ways different literary and visual genres have been produced and perceived? How did the continual process of exchanging, copying, and commenting on manuscripts not necessarily meant for publication serve to build literary networks among the elite and open a space for elite "wannabes" to join existing networks or create their own? In what respects are maps, diagrams, and charts—words arranged in a spatial structure—simply another form of "writing"—and in what respects do they demand alternative ways of looking? How does physical writing—inscriptions present both *in situ* and in books—literally turn a natural site into "landscape" or "empire"? What role do modern forms of media play in the process of transcribing oral culture into tangible products whose ownership can then be contested and controlled?

Emphasizing writing as a mode of material production is hardly new to contemporary theorists or scholars of Chinese literature. Pierre Bourdieu's extensive work on language, symbolic exchange, cultural fields, and *habitus* has taught us a great deal about how symbolic capital functions at different social levels and how the production of knowledge forms an integral part of material production.¹ Walter Benjamin's earlier work on the Baroque allegory, material artifacts, memory, and ruins has been revived in recent years to generate a vast amount of scholarship and a whole new range of interpretations.² Others, such as Jacques Derrida, tackle writing as a mode of reading and thinking that would effectively obstruct or put under "erasure" the self-evidence or truth of metaphysical knowledge.³ As scholars and teachers of Chinese literature, art history, and culture, we are interested in the new developments in poststructuralist theory but are fully aware of the self-