Asia Orientale 古今東亞
28

Asia Orientale 古今東亞

La collana Asia Orientale 古今東亞 propone testi di elevato livello didattico, scientifico, divulgativo nel campo delle varie discipline relative alla storia e alla cultura dell'Asia Orientale. L'interesse per l'area è certamente cresciuto in seguito all'importanza economica e strategica assunta negli ultimi decenni, come dimostra il fiorire di varie recenti iniziative editoriali in Italia presso piccoli e grandi editori. È ovvio che la prevalenza globale di quest'area ha portato un cambiamento negli orientamenti degli studi di settore, decretando il superamento sia dell'orientalismo 'vecchia maniera' che di quello 'impegnato' a carattere terzomondista. Con il declino dei vari 'orientalismi' è sempre più necessaria una conoscenza che corrisponda alle esigenze presenti, e che non può prescindere tuttavia da una specializzazione che tenga conto delle differenze culturali persistenti, e dal confronto fra civiltà diverse.

La presente collana intende concentrarsi sulla realtà di quest'area, offrendo e sollecitando contributi che coprano non solo la realtà immediata di cui dobbiamo tenere conto, ma vari aspetti delle antiche civiltà che ne costituiscono la base culturale. Perciò la collana intende promuovere varie discipline, oltre ai settori storici, filosofici e letterari, come quello linguistico e politico-economico. La collana si propone, inoltre, di incoraggiare la pubblicazione di monografie etnografiche sulle culture e società dell'Asia Orientale, con particolare riguardo all'antropologia della Cina.

La collana adotta un sistema di valutazione dei testi basato sulla revisione paritaria e anonima (peer review). I criteri di valutazione riguarderanno la qualità scientifica e didattica e la significatività dei temi proposti. Per ogni proposta editoriale, tali requisiti saranno accertati dal comitato scientifico, che si avvarrà di almeno un revisore esperto.

La possibilità di avere edizioni online oltre che a stampa permette l'utilizzo di sistemi multimediali e di comunicazione di particolare interesse per la distribuzione, la didattica e la fruizione su vari supporti.

Il direttore della collana, Paolo Santangelo (paolo.santangelo@uniroma1.it), è coadiuvato da un comitato scientifico composto dal Prof. Guido Samarani (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia), dalla Prof. Stefania Stafutti (Università di Torino) e dal Prof. Alessandro Dell'Orto (Pontificia Università Urbaniana).

Web content

Ming Qing

Studies 2017

edited by
Paolo Santangelo

Ming Qing Studies 2017

Subscription orders must be sent directly to info@aracneeditrice.it

www.gioacchinoonoratieditore.it
info@gioacchinoonoratieditore.it

via Vittorio Veneto, 20
00020 Canterano (Rome)
(06) 45551463

ISBN 978–88–255–0927-4

I[st] edition: December 2017

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The issue of *Ming Qing Studies 2017* is mainly dedicated to history and literature. An anthropological essay is "The Speaking Garment: Clothes in Women's Everyday Practice in Ming-Qing China", by **Lin Zhihui** 林稚暉, Hong Kong Baptist University, an example how material history can tell much if accompanied by an intelligent reading of literary writings and iconography. This study aims at proposing a different interpretation of women's daily practice: by examining how everyday life manifested womanhood and how women applied their agency to re-shape the nature of everyday practice, it contributes to understand gender identity perception and moral values in late imperial society.

"Donglin" had different and overlapping referents: the physical place of the Donglin Academy in Wuxi; the empire-wide ethical revival movement derived from the networks of Donglin leaders; the Beijing political faction based on such networks. The article "Local History and National Politics in the Reconstructions of the Donglin Academy" by **Lin Hsueh-Yi** 林學儀, Department of Chinese Culture of Hong Kong Polytechnic University Teaching Fellow, examines the evolution of the multifaceted idea of Donglin, its historical symbol and ideological impact, and their influence on the changes concerning local identity of Jiangnan elites, the religious cults and the role of rites in modern Confucianism practice.

Bartosz Kowalski, Department of East Asian Studies, University of Lodz, in **"**Holding an Empire together: Army, Colonization and State-building in Qing Xinjiang", discusses the connection between the army's military and non-military activities and the creation of state administrative structures, infrastructure, educational institutions and pursuit of a policy of settlement in Xinjiang from the mid-18th to early-20th centuries. *Ming Qing Studies* has already published an article on the *tuntian* system by Zhang Anfu and Alessandra Cappelletti in its issue of *2012*.

The narrative on abnormal and supernatural events is object of several researches, that are interesting not only in the literary field, but also for ideological and religious implications. On the *Liaozhai Zhiyi,* the contrast between the *chuanqi*-type tales of enchantment and romance of humans with ghosts or fox spirits, on one hand, and the *zhiguai*-type horror tales, with ugly, frightening, malignant ghosts and monsters, on the other, Sarah Dodd, has already published an article in *Ming Qing Studies* 2016. Less studied is Wang Tao as author of a collection of *zhiguai*. This subject has been discussed by **Fu Mengxing** 符梦醒, City University of Hong Kong, in "Tales of the New Strange: Wang Tao's *Zhiguai* Writing (1880-1890)", topic very intriguing because a new element is present besides the traditional problematics of the

utopia-dystopia, reality-dream and retribution: the effects of Western encounter, political and ideological instability, the scientific discourse. Moreover the epistemological question of the relativeness of 'reality' - which already Yuan Mei had raised before the pressing confrontation with the West – is here discussed.

"The Concept of Qing in *Honglou meng* - illumination from the Zhiyan zhai commentaries" is the second part of the article published in *Ming Qing Studies* 2016 (The Concept of *Qing* in *Honglou Meng* – Historical Inheritance), a study by **Chunlam Yiu** 姚春琳, the School of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong, which crosses both literary inquiry and history of ideas. Through the comparison of the personalities of Baoyu and Daiyu, it offers new explanations on the perception of love in late imperial China. Other articles appeared recently in *Ming Qing Studies* concerning *Honglou meng* "Picturing Lin Daiyu: *Honglou Meng* Across Media" by I-Hsien Wu 吳逸仙 (2016), and Zhang Zhiyan 张之燕, "Emotion qing in Early Modern England and Late Imperial China, With a Focus on Emotion in Shakespeare's Plays and Ming-Qing Literature" (2012).

We finally express our gratitude to **Prof. Guo Yingde** 郭英德 for accepting to join the Board of *Ming Qing Studies*. Guo Yingde (b. 1954) is a leading professor at the Department of Traditional Chinese Literature, School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University. He received his BA, MA, and PhD from Beijing Normal University in 1982, 1985, and 1988, respectively. Guo is specialized in traditional Chinese literature of the late imperial period. He has published many books and articles on the studies of drama and novels of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Guo also pays attention to the reconstruction of the history and philology of traditional Chinese literature. In recent years, Guo shifts his scholarly interests in the study of prose and literary criticisms of prose, especially of the Ming and Qing periods, and promotes both stylistic and cultural approaches in his research.

We are grateful also to Carmen Casadio for her precious help in revising the English of the preface and her advices.

Paolo Santangelo

TALES OF THE NEW STRANGE: WANG TAO'S *ZHIGUAI* WRITING (1880-1890)

FU MENGXING 符梦醒
(City University of Hong Kong)

Wang Tao 王韬 is often hailed as an important late Qing reformist thinker and modernizer who was among the first to advocate 'learning from the West'. Working closely with Western missionaries in Shanghai and Hong Kong, he published numerous articles introducing Western sciences, history and political institutions to his compatriots and was widely recognized as an expert on 'Western learnings' 西学 by the 1880s.[1] He died in 1897, one year before the 'One Hundred-day Reform' and seemed already an outdated figure when the 1911 Revolution struck a final blow to imperial China. Yet according to Paul Cohen he was "newer" for his generation than Sun Yat-sen in that without precursors like Wang Tao, Sun's generation of revolutionists would have no place from which to start.[2]

This paper focuses on Wang Tao's *zhiguai* writing in the 1880s. *Zhiguai* 志怪, literally meaning the 'records of the strange', is a potent Chinese genre of short stories dealing with topics that were famously cautioned against by Confucius: ghosts, gods and demons. Traditionally three periods in history are recognized as the high point for this literature of the strange: the chaotic Six Dynasties which witnessed the rise of the earliest *zhiguai*, the late Tang during which *chuanqi*, or tales of the marvelous flourished, and the high Qing under the reigns of emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong, which saw *zhiguai* masterpieces like *Liaozhai Zhiyi* 聊斋志异, *Yuewei Caotang Biji* 阅微草堂笔记, and *Zibuyu* 子不語.[3] The late Qing and early Republican era was another and the last height for this genre, although it was often unacknowledged.[4] Few

[1] Pan Guangzhe 2011, pp. 113-58.

[2] Cohen 1974, p. 6. Sun met Wang in 1894 and the latter offered to help introducing Sun to one of Li Hongzhang's 李鸿章 assistants. The 1894's meeting between Wang Tao and Sun Yat-sen in a sense symbolized the exit of one model of modernization for China and the emergence of the other.

[3] The distinction between *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* 传奇 is a contentious issue which lies outside the scope of this essay. As I am primarily concerned with the themes instead of the form of the story, I use *zhiguai* to refer generally to both types of stories.

[4] The second half of the nineteenth century saw a much larger scale of publication of *zhiguai* works. Zhan Xiaoyong (2003, p. 27) estimated that averagely nine volumes of *zhiguai* saw publication per year between 1862 and 1911, the highest throughout the Qing Dynasty.

people could name a *zhiguai* title in this period and many of these works are out of print by now. The reason for this undeserved neglect of late Qing *zhiguai* is twofold. First, being short stories about the supernatural written in classical instead of vernacular Chinese, *zhiguai* as a genre did not meet the requirements of the 'new literature' in form and content promoted by the May Fourth literature reformers like Hu Shi 胡适, who advocated vernacular Chinese and 'the literature of the people' instead of 'the literature of the ghost'. When scholars of Chinese literature did look back on the late Qing, they tend to focus on the long exposé novels instead of these short stories of ghosts and foxes. Indeed, the anti-ghost movement in literary and political discourses in twentieth century China ensured that fictions on ghosts remained more or less a taboo until the 1980s[5] except one book, the canonized seventeenth century *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (hereafter as *LZZY*).[6] The canonization of a few high Qing *zhiguai* masterpieces, especially *LZZY*, constitutes the second factor that leads to the suppression of the later *zhiguai*. Later *zhiguai* tales are often unfavorably compared with *LZZY*. Lu Xun 鲁迅 did this in his pioneering *Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Shilüe* 中国小说史略 [A Brief History of Chinese Fiction]. While categorizing Wang Tao's three collections as "pure imitation" of *LZZY*, he remarks not without lamentation that in these works there are fewer ghosts and foxes and more courtesans and romance.[7] Unfortunately, too many later scholars just endorsed Lu Xun's comments and regard late Qing *zhiguai* as bad imitations of two prominent predecessors: either the flamboyant *LZZY* or the terse and didactic *Yuewei Caotang Biji*, which does not do justice to the large body of highly innovative *zhiguai* works produced in the late Qing and early Republican era.

Wang Tao wrote three collections of short stories in *zhiguai* style—*Dunku Lanyan* 遁窟谰言 [Unverified Words from the Cave of Retreat], *Songyin Manlu* 淞隐漫录 [Random Records upon the Song River] and *Songbin Suohua* 淞滨琐话 [Trivial Words upon the Song River]. Compared with Wang Tao's significance in late Qing ideological transform, these *zhiguai* works received relatively lesser scholarly attention before 2000, partly because of the general contempt of late Qing *zhiguai* in academia discussed above. You Xiuyun's *Wang Tao Xiaoshuo Sanshu Yanjiu* 王韬小说三书研究 [Study of Wang Tao's Three Books of Fiction] remains till now the only book-length study of Wang's fiction writing, which offers a good thematic study of Wang's *zhiguai* collections and recognizes Wang's fiction as a transit between traditional and

[5] On the suppression of ghost in the Republican era, see David Der-wei Wang 2004, pp. 264-6; see also Luo Hui 2009, pp. 204-49 for a review of the ups-and-downs of Chinese ghost discourse in the twentieth-century.
[6] The pages quoted all refer to Zhang Youhe's 2nd critical edition (2011), *Liaozhai Zhiyi Huijiao Huizhu Huipingben*.
[7] Lu Xun 1973, p. 188.

modern Chinese fiction.[8] What, precisely, is it that differentiates the traditional from the modern? Other scholars give a more focused examination of modernity in Wang Tao's strange tales: while Sheldon Lu (2003) and Zheng Huili (2014) explore the genderized transnational encounters and the cultural anxiety of the Chinese man implicated therein, Wang Yichuan (2003) and Dang Yueyi (2004) trace the 'globalization' inclination in prototype in some of Wang Tao's stories.[9] All these studies help to show the complexity of Wang Tao as a reformist, as well as the various facets of the encounter between tradition and modernity as experienced and appropriated by the author.

The late Qing was an important moment for *zhiguai*, not only because of the sheer quantity of works that saw publication over this time (which was largely due to the importing of Western printing facilities and the burgeoning commercial publishing industry), but also for the innovation in form and content of these works. The encounter with the West and the new possibilities for *zhiguai* to transgress genre boundaries to permeate journalism and even literature translation,[10] inevitably transformed how the traditional 'records of the strange' was conceptualized and how the world was conceptualized in it. To offer a thorough re-examination of late Qing *zhiguai* would be out of the scope of this paper, but I hope my reading of Wang Tao's *zhiguai* during the 1880s will at least locate some of the new thematic and formal innovations of late Qing *zhiguai*. Being a typical man caught in social transition, Wang Tao's turn to *zhiguai* itself deserves attention. In his hands, the traditional genre to 'record the strange' is appropriated to reflect on China's past and present, to negotiate with cultural and personal crises in the face of Western influence, and captures vividly the agonies of China's early modernity.

1. Reading the Supernatural from the Outside: the Prefaces

Wang Tao's *Dunku Lanyan* (hereinafter as *DKLY)*, *Songyin Manlu* (*SYML*) and *Songyin Suohua* (*SBSH*) were published by the Shanghai publishing house *Shenbao Guan* 申報館 in 1875, 1884 and 1887 respectively. Almost a decade separated *DKLY* from the two later works. Most of the stories in *DKLY* were written during Wang Tao's exile in Hong Kong after his letter with the Taiping leaders was exposed to the Qing authority, and an uncertain portion of it may

[8] You Xiuyun 2006, p. 13.

[9] Other studies of Wang Tao's fiction in Chinese language: Gao Guihui (2010) studies Wang Tao's *Dunku Lanyan* as a reaction towards the Taiping rebellion; Zhan Xiaoyong (2003, pp. 249-53) and Zhang Zhenguo (2011, pp. 174-93) offer a short discussion of Wang Tao's *zhiguai* stories in their respective monographs on Qing Dynasty *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*.

[10] On late Qing *zhiguai*'s interaction with other modes of writing, see Huntington 2003a; Hanan 2004, p. 119; Kim 2007, and Zhan Xiaoyong 2003, pp. 301-5.

have been written even before his Hong Kong years.[11] Both in style and subject, *DKLY* was closer to *LZZY*, consisting of longer polished pieces as well as shorter sketches. Stories in *SYML* and *SBSH* were first serialized in *Shenbao*'s affiliated pictorial magazine *Dianshizhai Huabao* 點石齋畫報 upon Wang Tao's return to Shanghai in 1884. The initial publication media may have influenced the author's writing strategy, for stories in *SYML* and *SBSH* are more even in length and a significant portion of them are romance. But apart from these formal and thematic differences, what truly sets the first book apart from the two later works is their different perceptions of *zhiguai*'s own standing and in extension their understanding of China's position in the world. If the former is the apprentice work of a disciple of Pu Songling who was not yet fully disillusioned with his ability to 'rectify the world', the latter two were the works of a worldly old man who had seen as much as any Chinese at that time had chance to see (Europe and Japan). This piece focuses on stories in the two later works, but first an investigation of Wang Tao's prefaces over time will help to illuminate his gradual change of positions.

The preface of a book is the place where the author sets the framework for his audience to understand his work. As *zhiguai* was traditionally regarded as a marginal literary genre unbefitting a serious scholar, a writer of *zhiguai* would often make a justification for his act of writing this very book in the preface. Pu Songling made an exemplar model of such apologies. In his "Self-record of *Liaozhai*" (his preface to *LZZY*), he not only enacted a genealogy of ghost story collectors including familiar names like Gan Bao 干寶 and Su Shi 蘇軾, but also placed himself among highly imaginative poets like Qu Yuan 屈原 and Li He 李賀. Moreover, he sketches for his reader a touching autobiography permeated by ghostliness through and through.[12] Such an apologetic act since then has become the norm: the author either appeals to *zhiguai*'s own canon, or resorts to his personal history to vindicate his affinity with the supernatural.

A slightly different legitimization act is to appeal to the didacticism of ghost stories.[13] This is a position more akin to the Confucian tradition of 'moralizing by poetry' and indeed the one held by another Qing *zhiguai* writer Ji Yun in his *Yuewei Caotang Biji*.[14] A less confrontational yet not infrequent justification is to trivialize the act of *zhiguai* writing or to term it simply as amusement. Both Ji Yun and Yuan Mei adopted this approach. While Yuan Mei states clearly in his preface to *Zibuyu* his obsession of collecting stories "pleasing to the heart and shocking to the ear",[15] Ji Yun seems to consider it unbefitting to even write a

[11] *DKLY*, Wang Tao's preface I, p. 1, Wang Tao's preface II, p. 3.
[12] On an analysis of Pu Songling's self-preface to *LZZY*, see Zeitlin 1993, pp. 43-58.
[13] On an analysis of *zhiguai* writers' motivation as revealed in their prefaces, see Leo Tak-hung Chan 1998, pp. 19-24.
[14] *Yuewei Caotang Biji*, 1: 1.
[15] *Zibuyu*, p. 1.

preface for *Yuewei Caotang Biji*, leaving only a few lines of notes before each volume.

A close adherence to such traditional legitimization acts can be traced in the two prefaces Wang Tao wrote for *DKLY*. Preface I, a verse piece composed mainly of couplets with dense allusions, is clearly modeled on Pu Songling's "Self-record of *Liaozhai*". Wang Tao begins this preface by reviewing the tradition of Chinese fantastic literature and proceeds to describing his bleak studio in Hong Kong; in Preface II, he argues that his "withdrawing from the world" (gesturing to the phrase *dunku*—"cave of retreat"—in his title) is not different from the traditional Confucian man's mission of "rectifying the world" (Preface II, 3), and his claim lies in his great faith in the moralizing force of supernatural stories:

> The reason that works on ghosts and spirits were not dispelled, is that they aim at persuasion and admonishment and connect with customs and rituals; they praise the good and punish the evil, elevate the chaste and reduce the licentious, enlighten the foolish and stubborn and affect women and children, so that the ghost chronicler's work is not so different from the wooden bells of the moralizing officials—what I record in this book is just like this.[16]

If the author of *DKLY* is still a loyal disciple of Pu Songling and to some extent of Ji Yun, both of whom believe in the moral value of talking about the supernatural, Wang Tao's preface to *SYML* is a defiant assault on such traditions. From the beginning, he attacks squarely on the root of Chinese beliefs in fantastic creatures: *Shan Hai Jing* 山海经, or *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, and he did so by using Westerners and their knowledge as reference:[17]

> Today the Westerners have set foot on the extremes of the world, but they have not found fantastic creatures with round head and square feet, stretching to the heaven and to the earth as described by *The Classic* [of Mountains and Seas]. Therefore what *The Classic* says is not true. *Qilin*, phoenix, turtle and dragon, these are the four holy creatures respected by the Chinese, but the Westerners say there is no *qilin* among furred animals, no phoenix among feathered animals, and no dragon among scaled animals.[18]

He continues the polemic and extends it to a comparison of Western and Chinese beliefs and behaviors. The Westerners, according to him, are good at

---

[16] *DKLY*, Wang Tao's preface II, pp. 3-4. If not otherwise indicated, the English translations in this piece are mine own.

[17] Zheng Huili 2014, pp. 280-1, asserts that Wang Tao was the first of Chinese writers to use the West as a frame of cultural reference. Gao Guihui (2010, p. 25) and (Liu Yongqiang 1992, p. 23), both note the singularity of this blatant denial of the existence of the supernatural in a *zhiguai* preface. In my knowledge Wang Tao probably is the only *zhiguai* writer to do so.

[18] Wang Tao's preface to *SYML*, p. 1.

practical knowledge, scientific investigation, accurate observation, and machine-making, all of which can benefit the people and strengthen the country, while the Chinese "do not do this, but seek such ends in fractured, illusory, and unverifiable lands—this is not merely the folly of curiosity, but pertaining to absurdity!"[19]

The exaltation of Western practical learning and denigration of Chinese supernatural beliefs is unequivocal.[20] A comparison of the rhetoric used here with a preface to a contemporary *zhiguai* collection *Yeyu Qiudeng Lu* 夜雨秋燈錄 [Records of a Rainy Night under an Autumn Lamp] can reveal how far Wang Tao has deviated from the *zhiguai* discourse: the latter was clearly stylized on Pu Songling's preface, consisting of an autobiography colored with mystic reincarnation and ghostly existence and an endorsement of the moralizing function of talking about ghosts.[21] However in this preface, the last redeeming virtue of supernatural stories he had clung to in his previous work—*zhiguai*'s didacticism, is dismissed as expedient and impractical:

> The sage uses the supernatural as a moral lesson, but this is only a lesson for the foolish ones—in the human world there is the law of the emperor, while in the netherworld there is the law of ghosts and spirits, so that the foolish ones are cautioned to do good things and shun the evil. […] The self-deluded make all kinds of strange stories so that the cave of the fox is made to look like an alternative world. All these are what the Westerners resolutely refuse to believe, because they hold that practical deeds are much better than illusory words.[22]

By now, Wang Tao has nullified every merit of talking about the supernatural: they are not real, they do not serve as good moral lessons, and they do not do our country good. It seems that Wang Tao is not writing a preface to a *zhiguai* collection but a polemic on it. One may ask: what kind of a framework is the author setting for his reader?

Wang Tao's next move is somewhat surprising, for without resolving the fissure between the Western practicality and Chinese supernaturalism in his re-conceptualization of *zhiguai*, he begins a sketch of his life foregrounding the

---

[19] *Ibid*., p. 2.

[20] While it is true that many *zhiguai* writers invent their own ghosts and spirits, the existence (or non-existence) of ghosts and spirits, or at least the verifiability of ghost stories, is still an important issue for them, for the moralizing validity of the stories hinges on it. This is the major issue that Ji Yun finds with *LZZY*—Pu's ghosts and foxes are invented by the author therefore cannot serve as good moral lessons; Ji Yun himself leads the "veridical school" of *zhiguai* and proposes didacticism as a third major justification for *zhiguai*. On *zhiguai*'s didacticism, see Leo Tak-hung Chan 1998, pp. 149-86.

[21] Xuan Ding 宣鼎, Preface to *Yeyu Qiudeng Lu*. Xuan Ding was Wang Tao's contemporary and their works were evaluated together in Lu Xun's *Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Shilüe* as imitations of *LZZY*.

[22] Wang Tao's preface to *SYML*, p. 1.

injustices he has endured. This is a relatively conventional move: in line with the traditional poetic discourse that literature is the outflow of the author's pent-up emotions originating from the pre-Qin philosopher Han Fei 韓非,[23] the *zhiguai* writer sometimes would fashion himself as a frustrated and neglected talent, who with no solace in the human world has to seek friendship among the ghosts and foxes.[24] Wang Tao establishes a similar image of himself: once an ambitious man who was eager to benefit his country with practical knowledge, his candor and unconventionality caused him enemies and slanders.[25] What can one do with such a frustrating life? Wang Tao's solution is familiar but not so compatible with the worldview he has set up in the previous part—he resorts to literature writing:

> When [one is] direly trapped, one has to find a way out; when [one is] desperately depressed, one has to command his energy to some channel. When one ends up being unrecognized by the world, one has to go to the deepest of the mountains and the heart of the forests, and his sorrows, agonies, melancholy and delicate sentiments have to be commanded to the book. If [I] cannot find this end in China, I seek it in the extremes of the world and the strange lands; if I cannot find it in my contemporaries, I seek back in the origins of history and towards the far ends of the future; if I cannot find it among creatures like me, I seek it among ghosts and foxes, immortals and Buddhas, plants and birds and beasts.[26]

After deciding that the fantastic world of the foxes and ghosts is illusory and non-beneficial in the first part, Wang Tao now appeals to the traditional apology of *zhiguai* writing and stages the fantastic world as the last resort for a frustrated scholar. Following the above quoted section and before the final section on the particulars of the publishing of the book, Wang Tao hurriedly stiches up a fantastic story-telling tradition including typical figures like Qu Yuan, Zhuangzi 莊子 and Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 as his precursors—a belated act almost by hindsight.

Certainly, the beliefs in the supernatural and the fictional narration of the supernatural are different things;[27] while Wang Tao certainly is not a supporter

---

[23] On the relation between the author's anguish and literary creation in Chinese literary discourse from Han Fei through Sima Qian to Pu Songling, see Zeitlin 1993, pp. 50-1.

[24] Cf. Pu Songling's "Self-record of *Liaozhai*", especially the concluding question: "Are not those who know me among the green woods and black fortresses?" (知我者其在青林黑塞间乎)—which is an allusion to ghosts as well as to true friendship.

[25] *SYML*, Wang Tao's preface, p. 2. Here Wang Tao is referring to his suspected liaison with the Taiping's in 1861 which led to his escape to Hong Kong. On this dramatic episode, see McAleavy 1953, pp. 14-5; and Cohen 1974, pp. 39-56.

[26] *SYML*, Wang Tao's preface, p. 2.

[27] While the 'fictitious' quality of literature or fiction is self-evident in the term fiction in Western literary discourse (cf. Starr 2007, p. 17 on the transmission of the word 'literature' in English), it is a contested issue in traditional Chinese literature. In the Chinese context, beliefs

of the former, his rationale in writing even fictitious supernatural stories still seems suspicious. Throughout the preface, two incompatible cosmoses are wrestling with each other: on one hand there is the rational world navigated by Westerners where no fantastic creatures exist and only practical knowledge does anyone good—this is the world that Wang Tao, as a man admiring the Western efficiencies, lived and believed in; on the other hand, there is the cosmos backed-up with an entire genealogy of supernatural writing and a tradition of fashioning alternative identities and enclaves through writing the supernatural—this is the world that a disillusioned and displaced Chinese *literatus* can resort to, and to it Wang Tao resorted in the end. But still, Wang Tao's retreat to the *zhiguai* world is not a total one; it is worth noting that the places he envisions where he can seek his peace of mind include not only China but also a larger outside: "If I cannot find it in China, I seek it in the extremes of the world and strange lands." Indeed, the wonderlands in Wang Tao's writing stretch far beyond the traditional peripheries of Chinese culture to include Western countries like France, the UK and Switzerland.

Wang Tao's preface to *SYML* sets up for us a heterogeneous world where competing discourses co-exist, and this is the world that Wang Tao as a transitional (or in McAleavy's word, "displaced")[28] figure lived in. The tension between the two worldviews also sets up a potential space for the fantastic: as per Tzvetan Todorov's definition, when different interpretative frameworks haphazardly exist side by side in the narrative, we enter the realm of the fantastic.[29] In Wang Tao's stories we will see time and again the traces of conflicting interpretations: a true reflection of the anxiety and displacement felt by the first generation of Chinese who were forced to re-examine China and their own position in a global context. Here, the old potent genre *zhiguai* offers fertile land to explore the complexities of reality, self, and history—issues fundamental to modernity.

2. Encountering the Specters of History: the Remains and the Revenants

A somewhat unique cultural concept in China is *yimin* 遗民.[30] *Yi* means to leave behind, to be lost, and remaining, so *yimin* literally means 'the remaining

in the supernatural and the narration of the supernatural as fictitious are not so clear-cut in *zhiguai* writing, especially in early *zhiguai* writings where the texts were either regarded as 'quasi-history' or persuasions of Buddhism or Taoism.

[28] McAleavy 1953.

[29] On the notion of the fantastic as developed by Todorov and Rosemary Jackson, see Todorov 1975, and Jackson 1981. More on the issue of fantasy in the final section.

[30] 遗民 sometimes is used interchangeably with its homonym 逸民. Here I adopt the former as the unifying term.

people'. A polysemic word, it most often refers to the group of people 'left behind history' in dramatic dynastical changes. Sometimes, the 'leaving-behind' is a strongly-posed political gesture as living in recluse and refusing participation in the new political regime testifies to the subject's loyalty to the previous dynasty and rejection of the new one.[31] *Yimin* carved out for themselves a metaphorical vacuum space in history by sheer will: they absented themselves from the contemporary political and social scene and observed the customs of the previous dynasty, so while they actually lived simultaneously with the changed world, they made themselves the living remains of what was already dead. The first famous *yimin* in Chinese history were Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊 (ca. twelfth century B.C.), Shang Dynasty loyalists who would rather starve to death than to eat the crops grown in the new Zhou regime. Such loyalism and moral integrity was praised by Confucius.[32] In theory each dynastical change would produce its own *yimin*, but in reality the most conspicuous *yimin* groups emerged during the transition between Song and Yuan (Mongols) and between Ming and Qing (Manchus): both were occasions when an alien people replaced the Han Chinese as the new ruler. For the Han Chinese *yimin* of Song and Ming living under a foreign rule, they regarded their loss as not only the loss of their nation, but of the whole Chinese civilization.

Yimin is a term with strong moral and political connotations and actually affords limited accessibility to the common people—for the refusal to participate in the new government implies that the subject at least has had the right to participate in the first place: namely one has to be a male, scholarly elite or a man of prestige. But here I use the term in a broad sense to denote the group of people who deliberately or unconsciously leave themselves behind history; they preserve the practices and cultures of a past time and while they keep a moment of Chinese history alive, they inadvertently become the living dead—the remains of history. If we adopt this concept of *yimin*, we will find that such figures appear frequently in Wang Tao's *zhiguai*. The urgent political messages softened, *yimin* in Wang Tao's stories actually fades into the fantastic and even merges with another motif: the *Taohua Yuan* 桃花源 (Peach Blossom Spring) utopia.

Indeed, if we re-examine Tao Qian's 陶潛 fifth century fable *Taohuayuan Ji* 桃花源記 (*The Peach Blossom Spring*), we find it to be yet another *yimin* story. In the time of Eastern Jin (317-420 A.D.), a fisherman from Wuling one day found a cave at the origin of a spring with blossoming peach trees on either side

---

[31] On ramifications of the concept of 遗民, see Zhang Bing 1998; Fang Yong 2000.

[32] Confucius categorized seven luminaries as *yimin* 逸民, among whom Boyi and Shuqi were esteemed highest: "The Master said, 'Refusing to surrender their wills, or to submit to any taint in their persons—such, I think, were Boyi and Shuqi." *Analects*, 18: 336, translated by James Legge.

of the banks. He went in and at the end of a long and narrow tunnel he suddenly found himself in front of a peaceful village. The hospital villagers treated the stranger to banquets for several days. They were curious about the news from the outside, and told the fisherman that they once were refugees fleeing from frequent wars in the age of Qin and knew nothing about the succeeding dynasties. Returning, the fisherman broke his promise to keep the cave a secret and reported to the local magistrate. Yet although he had made marks on his way back, no one was able to trace the Peach Blossom Spring again.

At Tao Qian's time when dynastical changes and *coup d'état* were frequent and violent, a significant appeal of the story must be envisioning the possibility of living in a temporality forgotten by history and unperturbed by political struggles. Although the cave dwellers reserved no loyalty to any political regime, they inadvertently preserved alive the simplicity and innocence belonging only to an (imagined) by-gone golden age. Tang Dynasty poets who appropriated the Peach Blossom Spring motif tended to portray the villagers as immortals and the place as a fantastic land, but as Zhang Longxi stresses, there is a noticeable secular note in Tao Qian's original tale: what we know for sure about the villagers of the Peach Blossom Spring is not their immortality but their unconformity with their contemporary tyrannical regime. Utopian vision, Zhang asserts, is fundamentally a secular vision; it must be about a better society that can be realized through human efforts instead of miracles, "therefore the utopian vision invariably presents itself as social commentary" to convey some political message.[33]

In combining the Peach Blossom Spring motif with the *yimin* motif, no political message is lost in Wang Tao's tales, yet they are indeed about fantastic lands and more surprisingly, with a modern twist. The typical protagonist, often a contemporary young man as ambitious and practical-minded as Wang Tao himself, decides to see the world, takes a modern steamship and sets out. He suffers a shipwreck, lands on an apparently uninhabited island and then meets some benevolent immortals, who prove to have been Chinese *yimin* of the Ming or Song dynasties or even earlier. The utopian island is such a perfect limbo of time and history that both the immortals and the protagonist find their previous engagements with worldly affairs so shallow and repulsive; but unlike the immortals, the protagonist has to return to the human world in the end, just as the Wuling fisherman does in the *Peach Blossom Spring*.

Such a formula can be traced in "The Immortals' Island" 仙人岛 (*SYML*, 1: 13), "Scholar Min" 闵玉叔 (*SYML*, 3: 113), and "A Summer Resort" 消夏湾 (*SYML*, 12: 566). "A Summer Resort" is like an exposition of fossilized Chinese history: the protagonist Ji Zhongxian first meets on the island two old men in attires so antique as if transported from the ancient origins of Chinese history

[33] Zhang Longxi 2000, p. 1.