

and with full knowledge thereof, instead of some decades earlier. Note 48 (p. 80) should refer specifically to the second and enlarged print of Yuan Ke's 袁珂 edition of the *Shanghai jing*; the reference to the *Han shu* 漢書 simply by page number and without indication of the chapter (p. 82, n. 74) is insufficient. Similarly Wang's references to the *Huainanzi* simply by the page of the edition that he chooses to use, without the title of the chapter, are simply useless to readers who work with different editions, such as Liu Wendian's original print (p. 83, nn. 87, 88, 103). Ames fails to give a reference to Pang Pu's 龐樸 views to which he pays some attention (p. 129). It is insufficient simply to refer to *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 by the month of issue, without pagination (Csikzentmihalyi, p. 188, n. 3).

The publishers have treated both the authors and their readers shabbily with the poor quality of the illustrations, where it is not always possible to discern the points at issue (e.g., pp. 46–47, fig. 4, 5). Figure 21 (p. 99) is reduced to a size that is far from comfortable; readers would have been served better by reproduction of the line drawings of the inscriptions, presented with admirable clarity in *Wenwu*, 1993, no. 8, pp. 16–17.

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Ming Erotic Novellas: Genre, Consumption, and Religiosity in Cultural Practice. By Richard G. Wang. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011. Pp. xiv + 319. \$52.00.

Richard Wang's book is about a group of Ming novellas that are vital in understanding the history of Chinese fiction between the Tang and the Qing. They are middle-length stories, longer than Tang *chuanqi* 傳奇, but shorter than the full-length *xiaoshuo* 小說, that tell of romantic and erotic liaisons between young literati and talented female counterparts. Taken as a group, they span the range of relatively chaste stories about monogamous love to polygamous extravaganzas that become the models for later vernacular romances in the late Ming and early and middle Qing. They are important for having established what I call the classic polygamous love story, in which a young man meets a series of women with whom he has sexual liaisons, including unmarried women, nuns, prostitutes, and other men's wives and concubines, a group of whom he finally marries in a grand polygamous finale. Nothing of the sort ever existed before, except in the historical and fictional reports of libertine emperors or other such figures. Wang launches the most thorough study to date by placing the works not only in their literary historical framework but examining their production, consumption,

and their intellectual and religious dimensions. His work is the result of many years of wide-ranging research, consultation with Chinese, Japanese, and Western sources, including studies of Western literature, and close analysis of both textual and contextual features.

Placing the novellas in the context of how they were produced and consumed serves an important purpose. Wang pursues a recent trend in China studies of tracing back from literary and other texts to their material origins and social and economic context, including publishers, commercial promotion, pricing, and readership. Since we lack the depth of information that exists for such things in Europe, Wang must infer many of his conclusions, but relies on Japanese, Chinese, and other scholars, plus his own meticulous scholarship. This also means travelling to many libraries to examine extant editions. The result is to provide a credible social and economic context for these works and to prove that, though obscure to us now, the novellas were prominent features of almanacs and fiction miscellanies of the Ming and were probably available to a wide range of consumers. As Wang shows, they were published and republished both entirely and in parts. They refer to each other, while many other works of fiction refer to them, showing that they were widely read and were considered important as reference points and sources. Letters written by characters in them became part of anthologies of model love letters. These letters perhaps served as models for love messages exchanged between patrons and courtesans, if not men and women in general. The novellas were sold at relatively affordable prices. Though no extant edition lists its price, Wang carefully works out likely prices (which he estimates to be between less than 0.1 to 0.61 taels for the Ming editions) and proves that the works were probably popular among a wide range of common and élite readers.

In terms of literary history, Wang's main thesis is that the novellas are a hybrid genre that marks a transition between the Tang *chuanqi* and the Ming vernacular *xiaoshuo*. They explain the gap between the two, carrying features from the one and anticipating features of the other, though signalling a distinct genre that eventually will no longer exist. They are in classical language, though not as literary as the *chuanqi*, and contain great amounts of verse, which they showcase in a way that takes up much more of the story than either classical tale or vernacular fiction. In addition, they contain the same kind of exhaustive description not present in the *chuanqi* but typical of the vernacular *xiaoshuo*. Also, they contain an amount of direct speech that far outstrips the classical tale but that resembles vernacular fiction. With their detailed descriptions of gardens and inner quarters (p. 23), Wang claims that they initiated such settings into Chinese narrative, which are likewise prominent in vernacular fiction. Further, they display an incipient form of chapter division, mainly because of their much greater length than the classical tale. Wang's thesis that the novellas were

successors to the Tang *chuanqi* and the immediate precursors to the chaste and erotic romances of the seventeenth century is credible. I am not so sure that fiction has such an easily determinable direct line of descent, however, and he would probably agree, since in spite of fiction's wide transmission and popularity it was still always considered a marginal part of the literary corpus and hardly received the same kind of critical and historical analysis that poetry did all along. That is, people would have already long ago pointed out and debated at length the novellas' historical and generic status if fiction in general had received the same kind of love and attention as poetry in all its forms. Fiction always knocked about as it took on both rough and refined forms, oral and written delivery, went through many editions, underwent abridgement and expansion, and adopted varying registers of language. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the novellas fill an important gap. Not knowing about them would be similar to not knowing about the Qing dynasty *tanci* 彈詞, for example, which have also become more prominent in recent studies.

One of the most surprising features of the novellas is their anticipation of trends in the late Ming and after, such as the promotion of the notion of *qing* 情. In *Zhongqing liji* 鍾情麗集, for example, written in either 1486 or 1487, or *Wushan qiyu* 巫山奇遇, from the first half of the Wanli 萬曆 period (1573–1596), if not earlier, *qing* is a cosmic force that links all things and through which lovers can conquer all barriers. The gist of such notions was already present in the earlier Yuan play *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 or the classical story *Jiao Hong ji* 嬌紅記, where lovers meet, have sexual trysts, and fall deeply in love. In these cases the lovers separate or die, but in the story *Jia Yunhua huanhun ji* 賈雲華還魂記 of 1412 (not discussed in Wang's book), the woman dies but comes back to life for the sake of their love. As Wang shows, in *Zhongqing liji* the role of *qing* is most prominent in a rhapsody (*fu* 賦) composed by the main male protagonist which anticipates the words and thoughts of Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 and Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 of one-hundred years later (p. 123). Another feature that later becomes common is the man having sex with multiple women at once. Wang posits that such a scene appears for perhaps the first time in Chinese fiction in *Huashen sanmiao zhuan* 花神三妙傳, written between 1550 and 1587 (though such a scene was part of an earlier historical description of the dissolute emperor Hailing 海陵 of the Jin 金, though not in such explicit detail; see the *Jinshi* 金史, *juan* 63). In the stories of polygamous affairs, a feature that likewise appears repeatedly in later vernacular fiction (which Wang mentions in passing but does not refer to as such) is the portrayal of the primary wife as more restrained than the other wives, as in *Tianyuan qiyu* 天緣奇遇, or one woman insisting on chastity longer than others, as in *Xunfang yaji* 尋芳雅集 or *Liusheng mi Lian ji* 劉生覓蓮記. This feature reflects the general phenomenon of the more exalted place of the main wife and her more precious nature. In some later works, sex with her is more exquisite, though

at the same time she may tire more easily such that the man has robust and libertine sex only with the lesser women. Such a sexual division of labour is in general a prominent part of polygamy as reflected in pornographic novels of the Ming and Qing.

Several of Wang's points need elucidation, including his reference to a point I made in *Causality and Containment*,¹ which I wrote before I was aware of the erotic novellas and even before I had read the erotic romances that I wrote about later. One of my statements about the portrayal of sexual love is now outdated. In *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, the stories of Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, and works such as *Huanxi yuanjia* 歡喜冤家 and *Yipian qing* 一片情, not to mention later novels such as *Yesou puyan* 野叟暴言 and *Luye xianzong* 綠野仙蹤, it is uncharacteristic for the *xiaoshuo* to portray harmonious sexual love explicitly and straight-forwardly, as I once said (Wang, p. 152). More accurately, in general when there is explicit description, problems will arise, whether it is the disastrous ending to illicit love or excess leading to illness, injury, or death. The explicit description, moreover, includes grotesque details. The erotic novellas, however, such as *Huashen sanmiao zhuan*, *Xunfang yaji*, *Tianyuan qiyu*, and *Lisheng liuyi tianyuan* 李生六一天緣, are like later vernacular erotic romances in which explicitly described sex can be harmonious and end in marriage and permanence; even illicit sex succeeds into marriage and permanence. The description, though explicit, uses lofty and adumbrative language. The affairs are not without problems, but the problems are either secondary to the portrayal of robust sexual love or are merely complications of plot that are followed by further erotic adventures that finally end happily. Some casualties occur, but not on the total and disastrous scale of works like *Jin Ping Mei* and the others listed above.

Another point relates to the one just made and has to do with the relation between the *ars erotica* and Ming and Qing erotic fiction. Wang says that "the Ming erotic novellas . . . share far more with the sexual manuals than the vernacular novels in presenting ideal sexual models with little or no problematic. In this sense, the Ming novellas can be considered as the unfolding of *ars erotica*" (pp. 149–50). This is true in the sense that the *ars erotica* and the erotic novellas emphasize the goal of successful sex in which pleasure is not only the main goal but is an actually attainable one. Still, some of the central teachings of the *ars erotica* hardly appear in fiction in general, in particular the advice to suppress ejaculation or to master slowness and await the woman's arousal. Instead it is more likely for the man to have no need to suppress ejaculation and simply to be innately vigorous and competent, especially in the erotic novellas and vernacular erotic romances. The premise of ejaculation retention tends to appear negatively in the form of the problem of excess ejaculation

¹ Keith McMahan, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 64.

and its threats to the man. Both the erotic novellas and the vernacular erotic romances are alike in this respect. As to the question of how often and to what extent technical terms from the *ars erotica* appear in the erotic novellas, Wang does not address this, but it would be interesting to know.

A third point has to do with the religious dimension, namely, Wang's point that religious awakening "can hold serious messages" and is not just a literary cliché or a formula of retribution. Wang does an excellent job of explicating the religious dimension, especially in terms of the theme of the male mortal's sexual encounter with the female immortal or her bestowal of sexual knowledge and skills upon him. The Daoist tradition of romances between mortal man and divine woman plays a strong role in Chinese literature in general and in Ming society in particular. However, it may not be so easy to believe that the religious dimension is much more than a motif that plays easily into the portrayal of sexual affairs. In a sense, the affair between the immortal woman and the mortal man (which goes back at least as far as the *Chuci* 楚辭) was always waiting for the kind of explicit rendition it finally receives in the Ming erotic novellas. Such stories were always erotic in nature, though in earlier times without the particularistic detail, which first became a major feature in the Ming. Particularistic detail is in fact one of the most notable new features in Chinese literature of the time in general; and it is precisely in erotic fiction that such detail makes some of its first appearances. This is a key point that Wang's study allows us to reconfirm. Exhaustive, particularistic detail is that which is elsewhere and heretofore considered marginal, superfluous, or indecent. The erotic novellas make such detail one of their primary features, which as such signal yet another of the major innovations of these works.

Whether or not any of the novellas will ever be translated into foreign languages still awaits us. They are probably too idiosyncratic and time-bound to translate easily, but they are nevertheless remarkable and worthy of recognition. As Wang says, it is amazing that the novellas have so far received so little attention, but it is safe to say that the tumultuous history of China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not lead to the same kind of continuity of scholarship experienced in Europe, which though it experienced tumult as well never went through such disastrous times and interruptions for as long as China. So in general we are still catching up and even in the early 2000s still uncovering new historical and literary realms, while scholars of the Euro-West are left to dig deeper in realms others have already scoured for decades and more.

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