

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY OF THE ORIGINS OF COLLOQUIAL FICTION IN CHINA FOR THE STUDY OF ITS DEVELOPMENT AND CRITICISM

In this volume I have brought together two studies on the earliest phase of the development of traditional Chinese fiction written in the vernacular. The first investigates the origin of the novel and treats its earliest examples, the *p'ing-hua* 平話, published in the 14th century (some of them perhaps slightly earlier); it also discusses the relation between these *p'ing-hua* and the traditional Chinese novel of the 16th century. The other article discusses the short story, commonly called *hua-pen* 話本, of which the earliest preserved printed examples date from the middle of the 16th century. Here again the earliest examples are analyzed and then compared to the later and much better known collections of the first half of the 17th century. Together they represent a comprehensive survey of the subject.

The idea of publishing these studies in one volume, however, did not occur to me until after the completion of the articles. It is therefore inevitable that there will be some overlapping and repetition. On the other hand this "General Introduction" provides an opportunity to discuss in greater detail some issues only briefly mentioned in the two articles.

My interest in the subject of the origin of traditional Chinese vernacular fiction was aroused in the course of work on the development and characteristics of traditional Chinese fiction, as it flourished from the 16th through the 19th century. The richness of the Chinese narrative prose literature in the vernacular of this period was probably unequalled in European literature until about the middle of the 18th century. The variety of this literature and its

qualities may be suggested by just mentioning the six most famous novels which, in full or partial translations, are also well known in the West: *San-kuo chih yen-i* 三國志演義 (*The Three Kingdoms*, written around 1400, first preserved edition 1522), the story of the civil wars from approximately 180 a.C. to 260 a.C.; *Shui-hu chuan* 水滸傳 (*Water Margin*, written around 1400, first preserved edition 1589), the story of 108 Robin Hood-like brigands; *Chin-P'ing-Mei* 金瓶梅 (*The Golden Lotus*, written in the years 1580-1590, first preserved edition 1619), an *exposé* of the life of a greedy and immoral upstart, and of his many wives; *Hsi-yu-chi* 西遊記 (*Journey to the West*, written around 1580, first edition 1592), the tale of a dangerous pilgrimage by a holy monk to the Western Paradise, centering on the marvelous exploits of the supernatural monkey which accompanies him; *Ju-lin wai-shih* 儒林外史 (*The Scholars*, written in the middle of the 18th century, first preserved edition 1803), a satirical view of the intellectuals of its time; and *Hung-lou meng* 紅樓夢 (*Red Chamber Dream*, written in the middle of the 18th century, first printed edition 1791), the story of thwarted young love amidst declining splendor.

The thematic variety and artistic excellence of the traditional short story in the vernacular, whether those compiled by Feng Meng-lung 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) or those written by Ling Meng-ch'ü 凌濛初 (?1580-1644)—to mention merely the two most famous names in this respect—are also quite well-known through numerous translations of selections from their collections ¹⁾.

Nevertheless, when comparing this rich tradition to Western fiction as we know it from the middle of the 18th century onward, many critics have found colloquial Chinese fiction wanting. One reason for this would appear to be that these critics have compared the whole of colloquial Chinese fiction to a few Western masterpieces. But traditional fiction in China, like its Western counterpart,

¹⁾ Books in Western languages devoted to a general survey of Chinese fiction are Ou Itai, *Le roman chinois*, Paris 1933, and Lu Hsun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Peking 1959. The work of Ou Itai relies heavily on the original Chinese edition of Lu Hsun's work: Lu Hsün 魯迅, *Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shih-lüeh* 中國小說史略, Peking 1923. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel, A Critical Introduction*, New York 1968, devotes one chapter to each of the six famous novels enumerated in the text. His bibliography includes a reliable list of the most important translations of Chinese fiction into English, French and German up to 1968. An excellent anthology covering both the novel and the short story is H. C. Chang, *Chinese Literature, Popular Fiction and Drama*, Edinburgh 1973.

does not constitute one undivided whole. In the novels just mentioned a very marked development is discernible. However, one factor is usually overlooked: beginning in the last quarter of the 16th century if not earlier, Chinese colloquial fiction can be roughly divided into at least two broad categories according to the language used. True, all novels and short stories are written in the vernacular, *pai-hua* 白話, of their time, or at least in a classical idiom, *wen-yen* 文言, adulterated with many elements derived from the colloquial. But in some novels the vernacular, often some still recognizable local dialect, is used inventively, whereas the text is also interspersed with many pieces in an impeccable *wen-yen*, and the puns and parodies require an extensive knowledge of the whole of traditional Chinese literature. Often these novels are also those which have an original plot, and their text is often prefixed with prefaces and followed by commentaries, all in *wen-yen*. For the moment, we might call these works "literary novels". All of the six novels mentioned above, as well as the writings of Feng Meng-lung and Ling Meng-ch'u, would appear to belong to this category. Actually, the great majority of the works usually discussed in histories of Chinese colloquial fiction fall within this group.

On the other hand, there are also countless novels written in a most stereotyped language, better characterized as simplified *wen-yen* than as real *pai-hua*, a dreary, repetitive and monotonous "novelese". In this category poems, letters, edicts and other documents in *wen-yen* are almost completely absent, and there are few if any historical or literary allusions, besides the most obvious. Most often such works are on "historical" subjects; these are known as *wu-hsia hsiao-shuo* 武俠小說, "novels on righteous swordsmen", but also some works on religious or legendary subjects would fall within this category. Such novels derive their interest, if any, not from their refined language but from the action that packs their pages. The 19th century novel *San-hsia wu-i* 三俠五義 (*Three Heroes and Five Gallants*, first edition 1879), based on a storyteller's version of the adventures of the famous judge Pao, is probably the best known example of this group. In it would belong also e.g. the novels on the founding of the T'ang dynasty (618-906), like the anonymous *Shuo T'ang* 說唐 of the 18th century (first preserved edition 1783) and its many sequels, and the late 16th century repository of popular legends, the *Ssu-yu chi* 四遊記 (*The Four Romances of Wandering Saints*) by various hands. In contrast to the literary novel, we can designate the writings in this category as chapbooks. A few novels

transcend such a distinction, like the *San-kuo chih yen-i* and *Shui-hu chuan*, being of universal appeal. Although, of course, there will remain some questionable cases, it seems to me indubitable that a broad distinction can be made ²⁾, and it will be useful for the following discussion to keep this distinction in mind.

When discussing the traditional Chinese novel, one should indicate what kind of novel one is referring to; one cannot discuss works from these two categories in the same terms, any more than would be possible for Henry James and Ian Fleming.

But even when it is clear that the discussion is confined to the Chinese literary novel, many modern critics still find fault with the Chinese novel. In their eyes it does not show the concern for individual characterization that is considered typical for the modern Western novel; it does not show its tight construction or its concern for one sustained point of view; it is of extraordinary length, allows authorial digression and explicit didacticism, it has a thoroughly episodic structure and links its disparate elements together by the mechanical device of the "storyteller's manner", the rhetorical formulas of the professional entertainer. And here one meets with a curious argument, viz. that colloquial fiction in China could not, on more than one or two rare occasions, rise to the artistic heights of Western realism because it was hampered in its growth by the conventions it inherited from professional storytelling during the Sung dynasties (960-1126, 1127-1278) from which it is generally thought to have originated. Phrased more elegantly: "we cannot expect colloquial Chinese fiction, with its humble oral beginnings, to have been designed for the cultivated modern taste" ³⁾. And whatever a particular critic may happen to dislike is put down to the novels' past as a market-place entertainment.

²⁾ A similar distinction is employed in the literature on traditional colloquial fiction in the fifties in the People's Republic: some novels were designated as *ku-tien hsiao-shuo* 古典小說 (classic novels), others as *t'ung-su tu-wu* 通俗讀物 (popular reading materials). Novels that fall into the first category have been edited with all the scruples scholarship can muster; the editors of works classed in the second category, like the *Ying-lieh chuan* 英烈傳, *Yang-chia Chiang yen-i* 楊家將演義, *Shuo T'ang* and *San hsia wu-i* have felt at liberty to strip these works of feudal morals and superstitious ideas.

A comparable dichotomy is also to be found in traditional drama. Opposed to *tsa-chü* and *ch'uan-ch'i* composed by the literati there are also, from an early date, the many varieties of regional theatre; the texts of the latter, if published, are usually anonymous.

³⁾ C. T. Hsia, 1968, p. 6.

Accordingly, an inquiry into the origins of Chinese vernacular fiction is not only important as an aim in itself, viz. to obtain a better understanding of the earliest examples of the genre, but it also has a direct bearing on our reading and understanding of the whole of traditional colloquial fiction in China in later centuries: whether we should continue to see the development of Chinese novels and short stories as a tradition from the outset doomed by stifling conventions, or whether we should see the Chinese novel as an equally original attempt—on a par with the Western novel—to detect a pattern in the seeming chaos of human experience.

The two studies in this volume cannot claim to introduce important new materials. They cover ground that has often been covered before. They try to make full use of materials that have long been known to exist but were not readily available to scholars at large when the generally accepted views on the origin of colloquial fiction were formulated, like the *Ch'üan-hsiang p'ing-hua wu-chung* 全相平話五種 or the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* 清平山堂話本. However, since they became more accessible both in facsimile and critical editions, in the fifties, they do not seem to have received the attention they deserve from the academic world (with a few exceptions). This renewed reading of these materials has, however, led me to a new interpretation, which at times can only tentatively be formulated, but which is radically different on a great many points from the established views on the origins of vernacular fiction in China.

II. THE ESTABLISHED THEORY ON THE ORIGINS OF COLLOQUIAL FICTION IN CHINA

The central theme of these two studies is an inquiry into the nature of the relation between storytelling and Chinese colloquial fiction. In both these articles the inquiry goes into two related problems: on the one hand the relationship between professional storytelling and the earliest examples of vernacular fiction in China, whether novel or short story; and on the other hand the relation between the earliest examples of the novel and short story and the first typical examples, together with the development of the "storyteller's manner".

Storytelling has probably always been a part of Chinese life ⁴⁾.

⁴⁾ An excellent general study of this subject is Ch'en Ju-heng, 陳汝衡 *Shuo-shu shih-hua* 說書史話, Peking 1958. Little has appeared in Western languages on the subject. The most important publications are Vera

Of the early history of storytelling, however, practically nothing is known. A fuller picture does not emerge until the T'ang dynasty (618-906), from some scattered references, mainly on the activities of Buddhist monks, and from the *pien-wen* 變文 texts that were discovered by accident in Tunhuang in the beginning of this century. These texts were no doubt meant to be performed—to be recited and sung—and treat for the most part Buddhist subjects, but also subjects from Chinese history and traditional lore. They can be divided into two groups: those texts in which the story is told in prose throughout, and those in which the story is told both in prose and in poetry. In the latter case the poetical parts make use of epical lines in 5, 6, 7 or 10 characters, and no great functional difference between the prose parts and the poetical passages is discernible at first glance. There are also some texts that are completely in epical lines. The prose is mostly written in a simple but euphuistic, parallel style ⁵⁾.

Professional storytelling continued to flourish in later centuries, down to the present. From the Ming (1368-1644) onward, an enormous host of texts has been preserved, both in manuscript and in print, of the many varieties of storytelling that made use both of prose and of epical lines of 5, 7 or 10 syllables, like e.g. the *pao-chüan* 寶卷, *t'an-t'zu* 彈詞 or *ku-tz'u* 鼓詞. The subject matter of such texts is unlimited; one finds heroical tales, stories of miraculous adventures and stories on love, crime, sacrifice or devotion, in addition to pious religious texts. The study of these texts has, however, only very gradually gained momentum in the first half of this century, despite the labours of such scholars as Cheng Chen-to 鄭振鐸, Ah Ying 阿英 and Chao Ching-shen 趙景深. The situation changed with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Many texts were reissued ⁶⁾. Also, for the first time,

Hrdličková, "The professional training of Chinese storytellers and the storytellers guilds", in *Ar. Or.*, XXXIII, 1965, pp. 225-248, Bertha Hensman and Mack Kwok-Ping, *Hong Kong Tale-Spinners, A Collection of Tales and Ballads Transcribed and Translated from Story-Tellers in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong 1968, and its sequel: Bertha Hensman, *More Hong Kong Tale-Spinners, Twenty-five Traditional Chinese Tales Collected by Tape-Recorder and Translated into English*, Hong Kong 1971. The tales in this last volume were not, as in the earlier one, told by professional story-tellers, but it has a fuller historical introduction on professional storytelling than its predecessor.

⁵⁾ For a general introduction to the *pien-wen* and a nice anthology, see A. Waley, *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang, An Anthology*, London 1960.

⁶⁾ Texts of *ku-tz'u*, *t'an-tz'u* and other varieties of prosimetric texts

performances of the famous storytellers that used only prose as their medium, a genre usually called *p'ing-hua* 評話 or *p'ing-shu* 評書 were recorded, edited and published ⁷⁾. Besides these two types of storytelling, the all-prose narrative and the narrative in alternately prose and epical lines, there also existed at times more complicated forms, like the *chu-kung-tiao* 諸宮調, which flourished from the 12th to the 14th century. There the narrative was mainly carried on in sequences of songs, each with a different melodical and metrical pattern ⁸⁾.

The generally accepted theory of the origin of colloquial fiction

circulated both in manuscript and in print during the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. Ch'ing printed editions appear to have been very simply executed. The first half of this century also saw many cheap editions of individual titles. In the People's Republic a number of volumes were published in which different versions in different genres of the same story were collected making many rare materials available: Fu Hsi-hua 傅惜華 comp., *Pai-she chuan chi* 白蛇傳集, Shanghai 1955, Fu Hsi-hua comp., *Hsi-hsiang chi shuo-ch'ang chi* 西廂記說唱集, Shanghai 1955; Tu Ying-t'ao 杜穎陶 comp., *Tung Yung Shen Hsiang ho-chi* 董永沈香合集, Shanghai 1955; Tu Ying-t'ao comp., *Yüeh Fei ku-shih hsi-ch'ü shuo-ch'ang chi* 岳飛故事戲曲說唱集, Shanghai 1957; Lu Kung 路工 comp., *Meng Chiang-nü wan-li hsün-fu chi* 孟姜女萬里尋夫集, Shanghai 1955; Lu Kung comp., *Liang Chu ku-shih shuo-ch'ang chi* 梁祝故事說唱集, Shanghai 1955; Lu Kung and Fu Hsi-hua comp., *Shih-wu kuan hsi-ch'ü tzu-liao hui-pien* 十五貫戲曲資料彙編, Peking 1957. Chao Ching-shen 趙景深 compiled two useful anthologies: *T'an-tz'u hsüan* 彈詞選, Shanghai 1937, and *Ku-tz'u hsüan* 鼓詞選, Shanghai 1957. The only full translation of a *t'an-tz'u* into a western language is the Dutch translation of the *Hua-chien chi* 花箋記 by G. Schlegel, *Hoa Tsien Ki of Geschiedenis van het gebloemde briefpapier*, Batavia 1865 (also included in *Verhandelingen van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van kunsten en wetenschappen*, vol. XXXII, Batavia 1866).

⁷⁾ E.g. the *P'ing-shu ch'uan-t'ung tso-p'in hsüan*, 評書傳統作品選 Peking 1958, an anthology; and Wang Shao-t'ang's 王少堂 version of the saga of Wu Sung, *Wu Sung* 武松 I, II, Nanking 1959. Tatsuma Shōsuke 立間祥介 has translated a number of such texts into Japanese as *Chūgoku kōdan sen* 中國講談選, Tokyo 1969.

⁸⁾ For a discussion of this genre, and a translation of the earliest (partly preserved) specimen, see M. Doleželová-Velingerová and J. J. Crump, *Ballad of the Hidden Dragon (Liu Chih-yüan chu-kung-tiao)*, Oxford 1971 (also my review of this book in *TP* LVIII (1972), pp. 260-277), and the studies by Li-li Ch'en, "The Relationship between Oral Presentation and Literary Devices Used in the *Liu Chih-yüan* and *Hsi-hsiang chu-kung-tiao*", in *Literature East and West*, XIV (1970), pp. 519-528; "Outer and Inner Forms of *Chu-kung-tiao*, with Reference to *Pien-wen*, *Tz'u*, and Vernacular Fiction", in *HJAS* 32 (1972), pp. 124-149; "Some Background Information on the Development of *Chu-kung-tiao*", *HJAS* 33 (1973), pp. 224-237.

in China holds that its earliest examples, the *p'ing-hua* (earliest known editions first half of the 14th century, perhaps in one case still earlier) and the *hua-pen* (earliest known edition middle of the 16th century) derive from the texts of the professional storytellers of the Sung (960-1278) and perhaps Yüan (1260-1368) dynasties. According to most, the *p'ing-hua* and *hua-pen* would be directly or indirectly based on the storytellers' promptbooks which supposedly provided these artists with the bare outlines of their stories, or, sometimes, completely written-out texts, that were recited in the very form which is preserved in the extant texts⁹). It has also been supposed that the original texts should have been something like the earlier *pien-wen* or later *ku-t'zu* or *t'an-tz'u* and that our *p'ing-hua* and *hua-pen* texts preserve only the prose parts, omitting the metrical passages¹⁰). These theories are suggested by the characteristics of the first typical examples of Chinese colloquial fiction, like the *San-kuo chih yen-i* and *Shui-hu chuan* for the novel, and the *hua-pen* edited by Feng Meng-lung for the short story. These read like the transcript of a storyteller's performance; in any event, at every twist and turn, expressions occur which could have been derived from the store of rhetorical formulas of professional storytellers—a whole set of characteristics which is subsumed under the heading of the "storyteller's manner".

Moreover, Feng Meng-lung, in the preface to the first of his three collections of *hua-pen*, the *Ku-chin hsiao-shuo* 古今小說, states that this kind of tale originated during the Southern Sung dynasty (1126-1278), and some of the titles he includes carry the annotation *Sung-jen hsiao-shuo* 宋人小說 (a story by someone from the Sung). We also know that many of the subjects of these *hua-pen*, and the subject-matter of the two novels just mentioned, were already popular with professional storytellers in the two Sung capitals, K'aifeng and Hangchow, in the 12th to 14th century. The texts of *p'ing-hua*, but especially *hua-pen*, have therefore been used to construct a picture of storytelling in the Sung capitals, and to

⁹) For a few of the many statements of this theory, the reader is referred to Lu Hsun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, p. 141, p. 143; Richard G. Irwin, *The Evolution of a Chinese Novel*, *Shui-hu chuan*, Cambridge Mass. 1953, pp. 24-25; John L. Bishop, *The Colloquial Short Story in China, A Study of the San-yen Collections*, Cambridge Mass. 1956, pp. 11-13; J. Průšek, *The Origins and the Authors of hua-pen*, Prague 1967, pp. 22-30.

¹⁰) See e.g. Sun K'ai-ti 孫楷第, "Chung-kuo tuan-pien pai-hua hsiao-shuo ti fa-chan" 中國短編白話小說的發展 (1951), in his *Ts'ang-chou chi* 滄州集 vol. I, Peking 1965, p. 76.

interpret the scarce references to the art of storytelling in Sung and early Yüan sources.

Storytelling has been seen as a commercial entertainment, catering to the taste of new urban middle classes that arose together with the ongoing urbanization of Sung and later China. It has been assumed that the printed versions of the storytellers' tales were intended for the same public, the literate shopkeeper and the like, an urban bourgeoisie as opposed to the traditional élite of the landholding gentry and the class of officials that sprung from it. Colloquial fiction has therefore been held to be an expression of the ideals and values of this new social class, as opposed to the orthodox literature in the classical idiom which propagated the Confucian ideology of the rulers. And when, from the beginning of the 17th century on, colloquial fiction, at least what I have called literary fiction, had become part and parcel of the intellectual life of the cultural elite, it continues to be seen as a receptacle of discontent with traditional society. As summed up by Liu Wu-chi: "... of the known novelists, almost all lived obscure lives, unrecorded in dynastic history. The highest recognitions they attained were minor official positions and local fame among small groups of friends. An undertone of frustration and bitterness seems to have prevailed in their writings" ¹¹).

Most studies based on this theory have focused their inquiries on the history of the development of a story, as it may be deduced from scattered references, up to its taking final shape in the novel or short story under discussion, and many outstanding works along these lines have been published. Not until recently has a distinction been stressed between oral literature and colloquial literature as texts for reading with a life of their own (see particularly P. Hanan ¹²). In the same way as the distinction has often been obscured between, on the one hand, the story as it may live and develop in the mouth of storytellers and actors and, on the other hand, some specific written-out text on the same story, the distinction between the storyteller and the novelist, between telling and writing down, has often remained unclear ¹³).

¹¹) Liu Wu-chi, *An Introduction to Chinese Literature*, Bloomington 1966, p. 228.

¹²) P. Hanan, "The Development of Fiction and Drama", in R. Dawson ed., *The Legacy of China*, Oxford 1964, p. 117.

¹³) See e.g. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, New York 1968, "Introduction", pp. 1-33, *passim*.

The plausibility of this theory (the origin of traditional Chinese fiction in the vernacular from Sung story-telling) is strengthened by the known fact that during the 19th and early 20th century writing down some item of a storyteller's repertoire was not a rare occurrence. The known instances would all fall into what I have called the chapbook category, and with their simple language must have aimed at an only moderately literate public. The best-known instance is that of the *San-hsia wu-i* (first edition 1879). This novel is based on the version of the story of the incorruptible judge Pao, and the heroes that surround him, by the famous mid-19th century storyteller Shih Yü-k'un 石玉崑, who hailed from Tientsin ¹⁴). Shih Yü-k'un created a variety of storytelling, all his own, a variation on the *ku-tz'u*, called *Shih-p'ai-shu* 石派書. Many manuscript texts in this genre, including some dealing with episodes from stories about judge Pao, have been preserved, although it is impossible to know whether these are by Shih Yü-k'un himself, or by some later hand ¹⁵). The novel does not derive from these completely written out scripts, as would appear to have happened in some other cases, but from a prose rendition of the storyteller's performance made by a listener; this rendition, under the name of *Lung-t'u erh-lu* 龍圖耳錄 has been preserved. The novel was apparently based on this text ¹⁶). The *San-hsia wu-i*, in its turn, was edited by the famous Ch'ing scholar Yü Yüeh 俞樾 (1821-1907) and published as the *Ch'i-hsia wu-i* 七俠五義 ¹⁷). But although there exist quite a number of articles on the *San-hsia wu-i*, most of them centering their attention on the development of the legend of judge Pao, I know of none which has compared the storyteller's scripts, the *Lung-t'u erh-lu* and the two versions of the novel, to provide a case-study of how such a transformation from script to novel takes place, what is left out and what is retained, and whether changes as to values and attitudes are introduced.

Other examples of novels taken from the storyteller's repertoire in the 19th century include, apart from the sequels to the *San-hsia wu-i*, more stories on incorruptible judges who curb the strong and

¹⁴) On Shih Yü-k'un see Ch'en Ju-heng, *Shuo-shu shih-hua*, Peking 1958, pp. 228-230.

¹⁵) See Fu Hsi-hua 傅惜華 comp., *Pei-ching ch'uan-t'ung ch'ü-i tsung-lu* 北京傳統曲藝總錄, Peking 1962, pp. 318-332.

¹⁶) Sun K'ai-ti 孫楷第, *Chung-kuo t'ung-su hsiao-shuo shu-mu* 中國通俗小說書目, Peking 1957, p. 191.

¹⁷) For a biography of Yü Yüeh, see Arthur W. Hummel ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period 1644-1912*, Washington 1943, pp. 944-945.

mighty and redress the wrongs the weak have suffered, like the *Shih kung-an* 施公案 and the *P'eng kung-an* 彭公案; stories on a mad monk who works miracles and helps the poor, the *Chi kung-an* 濟公案; and stories about emperors traveling incognito through the empire, gathering men of talent from the popular masses, and alone or with their help, checking the misdeeds of officials and their familiars and helping the oppressed. Examples of this last type are the *Yung-ch'ing sheng-p'ing* 永慶昇平, which centers on the K'ang-hsi emperor (r. 1662-1722), and the *Wan-nien ch'ing* 萬年清 (nowadays usually called *Ch'ien-lung yu Chiang-nan* 乾隆遊江南) which treats the Ch'ien-lung emperor (r. 1736-1796) as a formidable fist-fighter. Some of these stories originated in the Peking area, and others in Central or South China. It is perhaps not always possible to establish with complete certainty which came first, the novel or the storyteller's version, as storytellers could, of course, pick up any material that seemed promising to them, whether from folklore, classical literature or the colloquial literature. In this way the stories from P'u Sung-ling's collections of *wen-yen* stories, the *Liao-chai chih-i* 聊齋誌異, had become an item on the repertoire of storytellers in Peking and Tientsin by the end of the 19th century. Little study has been devoted to the books mentioned above; articles that appeared in the Mainland Press in the early 'sixties limited themselves to warning their readers against the pernicious feudal moral these works embodied ¹⁸⁾.

For the following discussion it may be useful to add two comments. In the first place, when reworking a *t'an-tz'u*, *ku-tz'u* or some

¹⁸⁾ The eve of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution witnessed a full-scale attack on the *wu-hsia hsiao-shuo*, in which the *Chung-kuo ch'ing-nien pao* 中國青年報 was very active—see its issues of May 26th, June 2nd, 13th, 18th, August 1st, 3rd, 28th, 30th, October 7th, 1964. See also Liu Shih-te 劉世德, Teng Shao-ch'i 登紹基, "Ch'ing-tai kung-an hsiao-shuo ti ssu-hsiang ch'ing-hsiang" 清代公案小說的思想傾向, in *Wen-hsüeh p'ing-lun* 文學評論, 1964-2, pp. 41-60. James Liu mined the *P'eng kung-an* for information on secret societies in Late Ch'ing China, "Rebels between Rebellions—Secret Societies in the novel *P'eng kung-an*", *JAS* XXIX-4 (1970-8), pp. 807-822. Harold L. Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor's Eyes, Image and reality in the Ch'ien-lung reign*, Cambridge Mass., 1971, reproduces among its illustrations the title page of the modern popular editions of the *Ch'ien-lung yu Chiang-nan*, but he does not discuss its contents, nor does he do so in his "Some Mid-Ch'ing Views of the Monarchy", *JAS* XXIV (1965), pp. 229-243, in which his discussion on the popular conception of the emperor is based on *pi-chi* sources (*wen-yen* collections of sundry notes by literati).

other variety of storytelling into a novel, the anonymous 19th century rewriters were well aware that the novel as a form had aims and requirements different from those of storytelling. This becomes apparent from a remark in chapter 52 of the *Chin T'ai ch'üan-chuan* 金台全傳 (first edition 1895), a novel centered on the rebellion in Pei-chou 貝州 by Wang Tse 王則 in the middle of the 11th century, which is also described in the *P'ing-yao chuan* 平妖傳 (first edition of the standard 40 chapter version by Feng Meng-lung in 1620); in the 19th century version a prominent place in the suppression of the revolt is given to Chin T'ai, a yamen-runner from Pei-chou whose early adventures form the main content of this book. This remark reads: "When it comes to the point that our man from Pei-chou, Chin T'ai, travelled all through the world, it is a fact that he won seventy-two prize-fights. When the storyteller (*ch'ang-shu hsien-sheng* 唱書先生) is performing before his public, every extra prize-fight means an other day of work and some extra earnings. Of course there comes no end to it, but he goes on singing! If now, in a novel (*shuo-pen* 說本) you would want him to fight all these seventy-two prize-fights, in the first place it would be a waste of energy to tell it, in the second place the readers would become bored by it, and in the third place it would cost too much paper, and (the book) would become far too large. So it is better dispatched in one single sentence, and not told in detail" ¹⁹).

In the second place, this rewriting of items of the storytellers' repertoire in the form of novels, would appear to be a phenomenon which developed rather suddenly in the course of the 19th century, aided towards the end of this century by the introduction of new printing techniques like the lithographic process. In the 18th century comparable novels, like the *Shuo T'ang* and its sequels on the fortunes of Hsüeh Jen-kuei 薛仁貴 and his descendants, would seem rather to have come into being through the continuing expansion of simpler and shorter extant texts of the same genre. So the *Shuo T'ang* (first preserved edition 1783) would appear to be based on the same textual source as the late Ming novel on the same subject, the *Sui-shih i-wen* 隋史遺文 by Yüan Yün-yü 袁鞏玉, a friend of Feng Meng-lung ²⁰). The main part of the *Shuo-T'ang hou-*

¹⁹) Edition used: *Chin T'ai p'ing-yang chuan* 金臺平陽傳, Hong Kong, Wu-kuei t'ang 五桂堂, n.d.

²⁰) The *Shuo T'ang* is therefore not based on the late 17th century *Sui T'ang yen-i* 隋唐演義 as stated by Sun K'ai-ti, *Chung-kuo t'ung-su hsiao-shuo shu-mu*, Peking 1957, pp. 44-45. The edition of the *Shuo T'ang* I

chuan 說唐後傳, the story of Hsüeh Jen-kuei ²¹), still shows a startling resemblance to the same story as told in the *Hsüeh Jen-kuei cheng Liao shih-lüeh* 薛仁遣征遼事略, a *p'ing-hua* preserved in the still extant fragments of the early 15th century encyclopedia, the *Yung-lo ta-tien* 永樂大典 ²²). The first twenty-two chapters of the *Cheng-hsi shuo-T'ang san-chuan* 征西說唐三傳, that tells the story of Hsüeh Jen-kuei's son, Hsüeh Ting-shan 薛定山 ²³), present in broad outline, the same story as the anonymous 16th century play *Chin-tiao chi* 金貂記 ²⁴); chapters 23-45 describe how Hsüeh Ting-shan wins his wife Fan Li-hua 樊梨花, after which an author who evidently was much influenced by the *Hsi-yu chi*, added the chapters 45-69 in which Fan Li-hua inflicts crushing defeats on enemies aided by a variety of monsters; finally, the chapters 70-88 tell the story of Hsüeh Ting-shan's son Hsüeh Kang 薛剛, which is also the subject of another full length novel, the *Fan T'ang* 反唐 ²⁵). Whereas the 19th century adaptations of storytellers' items show an extreme homogeneity of—pedestrian—style ²⁶), a novel like the *Cheng-hsi shuo-T'ang san-chuan*, whatever its overall lack in literary qualities may be, shows quite different stylistic characteristics in its several parts. During such a process of accretion these novels did, of course, incorporate many popular elements, but the process by which this happened, appears to have been still very much like the one I have

used was *Shuo T'ang ch'üan chuan* 說唐全傳, Hongkong, Hsiang-chi shu-chü 祥記書局, n.d.; the edition by Ch'en Ju-heng, *Shuo T'ang*, Shanghai (1955) 1957⁴, suffers from heavy, ideologically inspired editing. The edition of the *Sui-shih i-wen* I consulted, is the block-print edition in the possession of the Library of Tokyo University, referred to in Sun K'ai-ti's catalogue.

²¹) The edition used is *Shuo T'ang hsiao ying-hsiung* 說唐小英雄, Hong Kong, Wu-kuei t'ang, n.d. The story of Hsüeh Jen-kuei fills the chapters 17-58.

²²) Chao Wan-li 趙萬里 ed. *Hsüeh Jen-kuei cheng Liao shih-lüeh*, Shanghai 1957.

²³) Edition used: *Hsüeh Ting-shan cheng-hsi* 薛定山征西, Shanghai 1934.

²⁴) The full title of the play reads: *Hsin-k'e ch'u-hsiang yin-chu Hsüeh p'ing Liao Chin-tiao chi* 新刻出像音註薛平遼金貂記; it was printed by the Fu-ch'un t'ang 富春堂 of Nanking. It is included in the *Ku-pen hsi-ch'ü ts'ung-k'an ch'u-chi* 古本戲曲叢刊初集, Shanghai 1954.

²⁵) Edition used: *Hsüeh Kang fan T'ang* 薛剛反唐 (100 chapters), Shanghai 1934.

²⁶) It might also be appropriate to point out that these novels and the *p'ien-wen* texts, as well as the *t'an-tz'u* and *ku-tz'u* and the like, show very little of that specific explicit rhetoric of fiction encountered in Ming novels as the "storyteller's manner", a rhetoric which often lends so much vivacity to their style.

described for the 16th century in the article on the history of the *p'ing-hua*, and markedly distinct from the process of direct derivation from the storyteller's art, as outlined above for the 19th century.

But apart from the implications of the parallel provided by the 19th century, the established theory (which connects the *p'ing-hua* and *hua-pen* with professional storytelling of the beginning of the second millennium) contains, despite its seductive simplicity, a number of points which seem questionable, to say the least. First of all, especially in the case of the *hua-pen*, there is the long period that is assumed to have passed between the date of origin of the genre and its first recorded appearance in print, or even in manuscript. Secondly, the *hua-pen* which are thought to belong to the same period as the *p'ing-hua* show a much more developed use of colloquial prose for narrative purposes than the often very clumsy *p'ing-hua* whereas the *p'ing-hua* appeared in print much earlier than the *hua-pen*. Thirdly, the first examples, both in the case of the novel and of the short story, possess characteristics that do not show anything like the same uniformity as the earliest typical examples, and the characteristics they do present are quite different. And lastly, to name but the most obvious weaknesses, there are the vague and often contradictory accounts regarding the degree and kind of rewriting undergone by the preserved texts in those many years of their assumed existence before their first appearance in print. These points seem to me to justify a renewed inquiry into the relationship between professional storytelling during the 12th to 14th century on the one hand, and on the other, the earliest preserved printed specimens of colloquial fiction. On one point there need be no doubt: storytelling played an important role in the development of the themes treated in the earliest novels, like the *San-kuo chih yen-i*, *Shui-hu chuan* and *Hsi-yu chi*, as well as in the short stories included in Feng Menglung's collections. However, my concern in these two articles has been to try and delineate the relationship between storytelling and colloquial fiction more exactly; to test whether the prevalent promptbook theory can be justified by our materials; to establish whether storytelling is responsible for the formal characteristics and structures of the earliest specimens of vernacular literature and—if the answers to these questions turn out to be negative, as they do—to establish a hypothesis to provide an alternative explanation for these characteristics and structures, as well as to trace the development of the storyteller's manner.

III. THE SCOPE OF THE PRESENT INQUIRY

On approaching the subject along these lines, it is evident that our first task is to describe in the greatest possible detail professional storytelling during the 11th to 14th century, without, of course, accepting the *p'ing-hua* and *hua-pen* as the basic materials on which to build such a reconstruction, as has hitherto been customary. This is what I have tried to do in the first section of my first article, "Storytelling and the Short Story in China". Once the *p'ing-hua* and *hua-pen* are no longer considered for such a task, we are left with few materials. Most of our materials are contained in a limited number of works. Apart from the *Tsui-weng t'an-lu* 醉翁談錄 (An Old Drunkard's Commonplace Book) by a certain Lo Yeh 羅燁²⁷), which in its present shape dates from the Yüan dynasty (1260-1368) and is probably after all best considered within the context of a tradition of joke-collections, these are all descriptions of the Sung capitals K'aifeng and Hangchow²⁸). Some of these works were written after the fall of the two capitals, respectively in 1126 and 1276, and try to recapture the splendor that has gone forever; others were intended as guidebooks for Hangchow while it flourished. The *Tsui-weng t'an-lu* opens with two short discussions of the storyteller's art; the picture given by the descriptions of the capitals is even more concise. These latter works provide extensive lists of names of the performers, designated by their nicknames, sometimes with the subject and subgenre in which they excelled, whereas the *Tsui-weng t'an-lu* gives a long list of subjects.

Putting these scraps of information together, I have found no indication that storytelling during these years differed much either from storytelling of earlier times (as known through the medium of *p'ien-wen*) or from later storytelling, known from mainly Ch'ing texts and from 20th century observation. There existed side by side prose forms and prosimetric forms; the distinctions in subgenres some of the sources made were found to correspond to distinctions according to subject matter that were still in use in later times. These texts provide no evidence that could be construed so as to prove the existence of the short story, as might be represented by the *hua-pen*, as a distinct subgenre of storytelling. Little evidence was found of the use of written texts by professional storytellers in

²⁷) Lo Yeh, *Tsui-weng t'an-lu*, Shanghai 1957.

²⁸) These works have been brought together in Meng Yüan-lao 孟元老 e.a., *Tung-ching meng-hua lu (wai ssu-chung)* 東京夢華錄 (外四種), Shanghai 1962.

their performance; in the cases where the use of texts in performances was mentioned these could not be definitively identified as either *p'ing-hua* or *hua-pen*. It was found, however, that professional storytellers did use *wen-yen* sources, and there is nothing to contradict the possibility that they might very well have used texts like the earlier prosimetric *p'ien-wen* or later *t'an-tz'u* and *ku-tz'u* texts.

However, in view of the paucity of information we possess on storytelling during the centuries under discussion (and up to the 16th century), these findings do not definitively exclude the possibility of the generally assumed exclusive link between storytelling and colloquial fiction, if one could show that the earliest preserved specimens of the genre were either something like the 20th century *mi-pen* 秘本 (little notebooks containing outlines of stories and set descriptions, transmitted amongst storytellers from master to pupil), or were in some way intrinsically suited for use as storyteller's promptbooks. Our second task, therefore, is to describe the characteristics of the earliest preserved specimens of Chinese colloquial fiction, taking into account all possible indications: texts, editions, publishers, early references, and to evaluate these as to the possible purpose and use of these texts at the time they were printed (the only form in which we know them). Only when the characteristics, purpose and use of the earliest texts have been, however tentatively, established, can we say anything about the way they relate to their sources, if any.

My findings have been that the *p'ing-hua* (mainly 14th century), with the exception of the *Ta-T'ang San-tsang ch'ü-ching shih-hua* 大唐三藏取經詩話, are best understood as educational texts, which presented a moderately literate public with a very popularized and moralizing version of Chinese history, leavened by a smattering of the highlights of traditional literature up to that time. In view of the specific tendency of the moralizing—aimed at the highest rulers, warning them against war and other costly expenditures, and praising rulers who paid attention to the civilian aspects of government, despite the warlike topics most of them treat—and the sometimes costly execution of the editions, I have ventured the speculation that the *p'ing-hua* as we know them may have mainly originated as educational texts for China's Mongol rulers of the time, and that they were published with an eye on this only partly sinicized ruling minority. Apart from *wen-yen* sources, the *p'ing-hua* used vernacular sources, whether *p'ien-wen*-like prosimetric texts or prose texts, or both, but it would appear that such texts were very

much summarized or otherwise shortened in the process, and we have no way of knowing what they may have looked like originally. Neither the *wen-yen* sources nor the colloquial sources can be shown to have impressed their form as a model on the *p'ing-hua*; the literary form of the *p'ing-hua* is exclusively its own. In the case of the *Ta-T'ang San-tsang ch'ü-ching shih-hua*, which I would consider as a devotional text on a popularly venerated saint, I have limited myself to a discussion of the recently published, extensive research on the topic by G. Dudbridge ²⁹).

A preliminary difficulty was the problem as to which texts to include as *p'ing-hua*. I have included everything that could fall under this heading—the *Ch'üan-hsiang p'ing-hua wu-chung* 全相平話五種, *Wu-tai shih p'ing-hua* 五代史平話, *Hsüan-ho i-shih* 宣和遺事, *Hsüeh Jen-kuei cheng Liao shih-lüeh* 薛仁貴征遼史略, and *Ta-T'ang San-tsang ch'ü ching shih-hua* 大唐三藏取經詩話—with two exceptions: the *San-fen shih-lüeh* 三分事略 and the *Liang-kung chiu-chien* 梁公九諫 ³⁰). The *San-fen shih-lüeh* which is preserved in the Library of Tenri University in Japan, was not available to me when I conducted my research on this particular topic; it is said to be substantially the same as the *San-kuo chih p'ing-hua* 三國志平話 included in the *Ch'üan-hsiang p'ing-hua wu-chung*. Consequently, it is not very likely that its omission from my article would drastically invalidate my argument.

The *Liang-kung chiu-chien* is a very short text of uncertain date, written in crude *wen-yen*. On account of the last two factors I have not included it in my discussion. If we give it the benefit of the doubt and assign it to the same period as the *p'ing-hua* (1250-1400), I think it would rather strengthen than weaken the probability of my speculations concerning the origin and function of *p'ing-hua*. The contents of the *Liang-kung chiu-chien* are the nine remonstrations by which Ti Jen-chieh 狄仁傑 persuades the empress Wu Tse-t'ien 武則天 (r. 684-705) to return the throne she occupies to the legitimate heir; a short moralistic piece not without its relevance to the Yüan court that had its fair share of succession strife during the years of its existence. One might perhaps even go further and point to the fact that as evidence of the Mongols rulers' knowledge of Chinese history, the questions by emperor Jen-tsung (reigned 1312-1320) about Chang Liang 張良, the famous statesman who helped Liu

²⁹) G. Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu chi, A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel*, Cambridge 1970, pp. 25-45.

³⁰) For details on editions used, see the article on the subject.

Pang to found the Han dynasty (206 b.C.) and who figures prominently in the *Ch'ien Han-shu p'ing-hua* 前漢書平話 (included in the *Ch'üan-hsiang p'ing-hua wu-chung*), and Ti Jen-chieh are quoted ³¹). Comparatively speaking, Ti Jen-chieh was not such a famous statesman as some others, like Chang Liang, and one is tempted to connect the emperor's knowledge of his name with this text. Though I think this is a rather far-fetched speculation, as there were other means by which the emperor could have acquired his knowledge, it may perhaps make clear that I did not dismiss the *Liang-kung chiu-chien* from consideration simply because it might have invalidated my thesis.

My decision as to what to consider as the earliest *hua-pen* may appear even more controversial than the omission of the *San-fen shih-lüeh* and the *Liang-kung chiu-chien* from my discussion of *p'ing-hua*. As the earliest preserved *hua-pen* I discuss only the *Ch'ien-t'ang meng* 錢塘夢, a very short *hua-pen* included in the sumptuous 1498 edition of the *Hsi-hsiang chi* 西廂記, and the texts that were printed in the middle of the 16th century and are now generally known as the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* ³²). Many authors have tried to date the individual titles contained in Feng Meng-lung's collections, but none of the methods employed can stand close scrutiny, and the results of these inquiries must be ignored on the basis of P. Hanan's thoroughgoing criticism ³³). Even the evidence provided by Feng Meng-lung's annotations to some titles has been proved to be unreliable. The same had already been the fate of a comparable assertion by the famous 17th century bibliophile, Ch'ien Tseng 錢曾 (1629-1701) ³⁴); their designations *Sung-jen hsiao-shuo* or *Sung-jen tz'u-hua* 宋人詞話 (tales by persons of the Sung) only testify to the fact that Feng Meng-lung and Ch'ien Tseng thought the works so designated were very old. Although the existence of a given *hua-pen* as a written text, printed or in manuscript, at about the same time as the date of the printing of the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan t'ang hua-pen*, is known from the mid-16th

³¹) Herbert Franke, "Could the Mongol Emperors read and write Chinese?", *Asia Major* III (1953), p. 32. The incident is recorded in the biography of Čayan 察罕, *Yüan-shih* 元史, *chüan* 137.

³²) For details on the editions used, see the article on the subject.

³³) P. Hanan, "Sung and Yüan Vernacular Fiction, A Critique of Modern Methods of Dating", *HJAS* XXX (1970), pp. 159-184.

³⁴) J. Prüšek, "Popular Novels in the Collection of Ch'ien Tseng", *Ar. Or* 10 (1938), pp. 281-294, and *Chinese History and Literature*, Dordrecht 1970, pp. 201-213.

century private catalogue, *Pao-wen t'ang shu-mu* 寶文堂書目, I have excluded it from discussion if its text is only known through Feng Meng-lung collections or from some other work which chronologically follows the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen*. This is because Feng Meng-lung on occasion extensively rewrote the stories he chose to include; also, it is not possible to determine how much rewriting these stories possibly underwent between $\pm$ 1550 and 1620 ³⁵). Feng Meng-lung's three collections indubitably contain many materials that are much older than their date of publication (1620/21-1624-1627), but for the features of the earlier *hua-pen* the *Ch'ien-t'ang meng* and the texts collected in the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* are our only reliable sources.

The contents of the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* were found to be very diverse. A small number of the 27 texts preserved completely or in part derive from storytelling, or, at least, represent genres that are known to have constituted a genre in storytelling: the *Wen-ching yüan-yang hui* 勿墮鴛鴦會 is a *ku-tzu tz'u* 鼓子詞, a form of which one other (Sung) example is known; the *Chang Tzu-fang mu-tao chi* 張子房慕道記 can be viewed as a *tao-ch'ing* 道情, usually short pieces for song and declamation on the vanity of human life, a genre to which one might also reckon the *K'uai-tsui Li Ts'ui-lien chi* 快嘴李翠蓮記, though I would rather read it as a parody. A number of other items in these collections are *wen-yen ch'uan-ch'i* 傳奇, short stories in the classical language flourishing between 750 and 850 and continued to be written also in later ages; some of these could be distinguished from such *ch'uan-ch'i* not on formal criteria, but only by the fact that the prose of their narrative part is not always in pure *wen-yen*. In an important number of cases it could be demonstrated (or shown to be highly likely) that the items were prose summaries of plays. In most of these cases the

³⁵) One problem remains. Of the stories mentioned in the *Pao-wen t'ang shu-mu* but only preserved in Feng's collections, a great number show an outspoken homogeneity in their predilection for gruesome detail and in the use of a well developed "storyteller's manner" with rhetorical formulas all its own. So it would appear that at one given time, but before 1620, these stories formed one collection edited by one hand. But we have no proof that such a collection was the basis of the *Pao-wen t'ang shu-mu*, or even that the titles there refer to *pai-hua* stories; the entries there might also refer to *wen-yen* sources. For a list of the stories mentioned in the *Pao-wen t'ang shu-mu* and known through a contemporary or later edition, see P. Hanan, "The Early Chinese Short Story: A Critical Theory in Outline", *HJAS* XXVII (1967), pp. 204-207.

texts were shown to be adaptations of *tsa-chü* 雜劇, the four-act plays with one leading character, that constituted the main dramatic form from 1250 to 1400. In some cases, I suggested, the texts might be derived from *hsi-wen* 戲文, plays with an undertermined number of scenes and more leading roles, which existed side by side with the *tsa-chü* which they were gradually to replace. In all these texts I found the "storyteller's manner" to be still largely undeveloped. No indication was found that these texts would antedate the moment of publication by many centuries; the earliest texts probably originated only in the 15th century.

The *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* were privately published between 1550 and 1560 by Hung Pien 洪樞, from Hangchow, who had an undistinguished official career. Besides the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* he published a few other texts that would all seem to belong to the sphere of *belles-lettres*. We can probably do little more than surmise that he viewed the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* in the same light as his other editions and that its publication was aimed as the same public: gentlemen of his own class with an interest in—light—literature. The sumptuous 1498 edition of the *Hsi-hsiang chi*—which contains the *Ch'ien-t'ang meng*—could also only have been printed for a rather well-to-do public.

The following step in my inquiries has been, in both cases, to compare the earliest preserved specimens both of the novel and of the short story, with the earliest typical examples of the genre. Not only have I tried to give an overall comparison, but I have also attempted to provide a detailed comparison of specific texts. More precisely, through the study of how these earliest preserved texts were used in the compilation of later works, I have tried to gain a deeper insight into the development of Chinese fiction in this early phase in general, and into the characteristics of both the earliest specimens and the later (earliest) typical examples of colloquial fiction. As in the case of the earliest preserved examples I have tried to understand these later works first of all by placing them within the cultural context of their time, and only secondly by considering their origins.

As for the novel, after a short survey of the work that has been done on the relation between the *San-kuo chih p'ing-hua* and Lo Kuan-chung's 羅貫中 *San-kuo chih yen-i* (2nd half 14th century), I discuss the ways in which *p'ing-hua* were incorporated into some of the novels (or, if one wishes, military romances) Hsiung Ta-mu 熊大木 (fl. 1560) compiled. The *Shui-hu chuan* undoubtedly would

provide a more typical case, but its earliest preserved edition is rather late (1589), and there exist no earlier texts that might make possible a close textual comparison, even though the *Hsüan-ho i-shih* contains the first version of its story ³⁶). The fragments of earlier versions of Wu Ch'eng-en's *Hsi-yu chi* (from around 1580) preserved in the *Yung-lo ta-tien* and the 15th century Korean hand-book for Chinese conversation *Pak t'ongsa ònhæ* 朴通事諺解, are very small, and have been extensively studied elsewhere ³⁷). Moreover, the *Hsi-yu chi* and the contemporaneous *Chin-P'ing-Mei* (written 1580-1590), though only slightly later, already belong to a quite distinct phase in the development of Chinese fiction as far as the attitude of the author towards his sources is concerned ³⁸). Whereas Hsiung Ta-mu's activity can still be designated as compiling, it must be said that the authors who followed him, at least as far as literary fiction is concerned, use their sources with self-conscious creativity.

But in the first three quarters of the 16th century, as far as our present information goes, the military romance, standing with its subject-matter halfway between the *San-kuo chih yen-i* and the *Shui-hu chuan* (if one also takes into account the second half of this novel in its original, untruncated version) as exemplified in the works by Hsiung Ta-mu, was the dominant type of fiction produced. Hsiung's works were popular during the last century of the Ming, if the number of editions they went through is any indication, not only among the nobility and military officers for whom they may have been particularly compiled, but also among the literati of the time, even though in later centuries these novels would become part of the "chapbook tradition".

His works, like the *San-kuo chih yen-i* before them, were compiled on the basis of written texts, notwithstanding the fact that the subject-matter had been popular with professional storytellers for centuries. Besides *p'ing-hua*, use was made of the orthodox historical literature, mainly in the form of the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien kang-mu*

³⁶) For the early development of the story of the *Shui-hu chuan*, see R. G. Irwin, *The Evolution of a Chinese Novel: Shui-hu chuan*, Cambridge Mass. 1953.

³⁷) See Ogawa Tamaki 小川環樹, *Chūgoku shōsetsu shi no kenkyū* 中國小説史の研究, Tokyo 1968, pp. 73-124, and G. Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu chi*, Cambridge 1970, pp. 52-74.

³⁸) The sources of the *Chin-P'ing-Mei* have been studied in detail by P. Hanan, "Sources of the *Chin-P'ing-Mei*", *Asia Major* X (1963), pp. 23-67; see also his, "The Text of the *Chin-P'ing-Mei*", *Asia Major* IX (1962), pp. 1-57.

資治通鑑綱目 and its sequels, *wen-yen* stories, *pi-chi* literature, plays etc. But these very works, beginning with the *San-kuo chih yen-i*, also gradually began to show the features usually associated with the "storyteller's manner", or to put it differently, those features usually thought to derive from the novel's origin in professional storytelling. The division into *chiian* 卷 (scrolls) and *tse* 則 (items) was replaced by one into *hui* 回 (session; usually translated as "chapter"). The chapters acquired their ending on a note of suspense. Poems and other ornate pieces were added. History, less so in the *San-kuo chih yen-i* than in the 16th century works, was reduced to military history and its protagonists received epical trappings with increasing descriptions of their armour, etc. This change of emphasis within the stories, the form of the early editions and the fact that in the early 16th century the organs of state and one of the highest officials, Kuo Hsün 郭勛, the favorite of emperor Wu-tsung 武宗 (reigned 1506-1521), published novels, have led me to believe that these works may have been specifically written and printed in the early 16th century for the nobility and the military officers. I think there might well exist a certain convergence of purpose and function between the early 16th century novel and the *shan-shu* 善書 of the preceding century and a half, which were easily-understandable moralistic works printed by the court and distributed to military officers and imperial kinsmen³⁹⁾; with these works the novels share also some formal characteristics, e.g. in their use of poems.

In his relation to his sources Hsiung Ta-mu still belongs to the novelists who antedate him, but in the overall conception of his stories he clearly belongs to a later phase in the development of Chinese fiction, as exemplified by the *Hsi-yu chi* and *Chin-P'ing-Mei*. The clearest example of this is his version of the story of the life of the famous patriot, general Yüeh Fei 岳飛, entitled *Ta-Sung chung-hsing ying-lieh chuan* 大宋中興英烈傳. The *p'ing-hua* can be read as stories of conflict or struggle—man against man: sorcerer

³⁹⁾ These early *shan-shu* should be distinguished from the later *shan-shu* that became popular in the middle of the 16th century. The later *shan-shu* are short moralistic tracts, distributed by private individuals as an act of piety. Their contents often teach the reader how to compute his evil and good deeds so as to know the reward or punishment in store for him. See Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫, *Chūgoku zensho no kenkyū* 中國善書の研究, Tokyo 1960; also his "Zensho" 善書, in Kubo Noritada 窪徳忠 and Nishi Junzō 西順藏 eds., *Shūkyō* 宗教 (*Chūgoku bunka zōsho* 中國文化叢書 VI), Tokyo 1967.

against sorcerer: the powers of evil against mankind; man against his fate, death—with one party as the final victor, or they depict man as the victim of a fate he cannot change. The *San-kuo chih yen-i* and the *Shui-hu chuan* are more sophisticated; they are held together by a conflict of values. In the *San-kuo chih yen-i*, the adherence of Liu Pei to his friendship (*i*, 義) for Kuan Yü and Chang Fei leads to defeats which entail the end of the state they had founded and which will eventually render Chu-ko Liang's loyalty (*chung* 忠) futile. At the end of the *Shui-hu chuan* Sung Chiang, the leader of the sworn brotherhood whose members have gradually assembled in the course of the novel, in a final act of loyalty towards his emperor, poisons his most intimate friends. There is of course much fighting and conflict in the *Ta-Sung chung-hsing ying-lieh chuan* but its basic conception is different. Its opening, the fearful year 1126, when the capital K'aifeng was taken by the Nürchen, confronts its protagonists with an unambiguous choice, treason or resistance. Those who, like Yüeh Fei, choose the right side and through loyalty put up a forceful resistance to the invaders, find an eventual felicity. Those, who like Ch'in K'uai betray their sovereign for personal gain, meet ultimate doom. The characters in the novel who (by their free moral behaviour) create their own ineluctable future, exemplify in this way the process of retribution. And whereas in earlier fiction the characters are usually of a heroic mould and more than life size, here they are definitively human. This exemplification of the rule of retribution (*pao-ying* 報應) that stresses man's stature as a free moral agent and focuses its attention on the ethically measurable aspect of man's doing, is typical for the literary novels of the last century of the Ming dynasty (roughly speaking 1550-1650): the *Chin-P'ing-Mei* of course; the *Hsi-yu chi*, read as the story of the monkey Sun Wu-k'ung's misdeeds and atonement; the *P'ing-yao chuan* in Feng's version; the *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (1640-1650) where crime and punishment are spread over two lives⁴⁰). And when the literary novel of this period turns to history, it either chooses the replacement of one dynasty (ruined by its wicked ruler)

⁴⁰) Edition used: P'u Sung-ling 蒲松齡, *Hsing-shih yin-yüan* 2 vols., Hong Kong 1959. The attribution to P'u Sung-ling (as well as the implied late-17th-century date) has been proved unfounded, see Lu Ta-huang 路大荒, "Liao-chai ch'üan-chi ti Hsing-shih yin-yüan yü ku-tz'u chi ti tso-che wen-t'i" 聊齋全集的醒世姻緣與鼓詞集的作者問題, in *Kuang-ming jih-pao* 11-9-1955, and Wang Shou-i 王守義, "Hsing-shih yin-yüan ti ch'eng-shu nien-tai" 醒世姻緣的成書年代, in *Kuang-ming jih-pao* 28-5-1961.

by another, more virtuous one, as in the *Feng-shen yen-i* 封神演義 (late 16th century) ⁴¹), or it treats the rulers of antiquity in their private capacity, as does the anonymous *Sui Yang-ti yen-shih* 隋煬帝豔史 (late Ming) which tells how emperor Yang-ti (r. 605-617) of the Sui dynasty enjoys to the full his total power but gradually becomes more and more listless while he seeks new pleasures, finally lapsing into a fateful inactivity that brings on his own ruin and that of his house ⁴²).

Whereas in some *p'ing-hua*, like the *San-kuo chih p'ing-hua*, retribution appears in the form of fate, of which the causes lie outside the scope of action of the narrative and remain inscrutable to its victims, in these novels the organizing principle is retribution, working strictly according to inverse proportionality. These novels, which start from a zero-situation, present man as the active master of his own destiny. Far from giving their stories "an air of childish unreality" ⁴³), this specific view of the working of retribution must, to the readers of the period, have seemed much more plausible than the earlier fiction where more than life-size characters were caught in inescapable conflicts with their fellow heroes or some higher power. Far from being a sign of the close link between storytelling and the novel ⁴⁴), the concept of *pao-ying* as the structuring element in fiction means a radically new departure in literary fiction in the middle of the 16th century.

In view of the importance I have attached to textual comparison, it must be considered a serious weakness of this study that I have not relied on the earliest preserved versions of the 16th century novels concerned; on the contrary, I have often used cheap modern

⁴¹) For date, authorship and sources of this novel, see Liu Ts'un-yan, *Buddhist and Taoist Influences on the Chinese Novel I, Feng-shen yen-i*, Wiesbaden 1962.

⁴²) Edition used: Ch'i-tung yeh-jen 齊東野人, *Sui Yang-ti yen-shih* 隋煬帝豔史, Shanghai 1936². The novel has been used by Arthur Wright in his, "Sui Yang-ti: Personality and Stereotype", in Arthur Wright ed., *The Confucian Persuasion*, Stanford 1960, pp. 47-76, where he analyzes the topos of the "last bad ruler". The novel is more, however: a harrowing psychological account of the corrupting effect of total power on a gifted individual. It may well have been inspired by the behaviour of the Wan-li emperor (reigned 1573-1620).

⁴³) See C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, New York 1968, p. 27.

⁴⁴) Cf. C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*, New York 1968, p. 28: "It is generally true that the further removed from that tradition (i.e. of the storytellers' colloquial tales, W.I.) a novelist is, the less likely he is to make serious use of moral retributoid".

editions. The reason is that these novels have attracted little attention from literary minded editors in later centuries, unlike the *San-kuo chih yen-i* and *Shui-hu chuan*, and later versions of the stories are not reworkings of the old text, but completely new novels. So, the texts of these 16th century novels seem to have undergone little change in the many years up to the 20th century: the *Nan-Sung chuan* 南宋傳 (which deals with the last half of the Five Dynasties and the founding of the Sung dynasty) in its modern edition still reproduces in places the exact wording of the passages from the *Wu-tai shih p'ing-hua* that were copied into it. It would appear then, that these texts may well be adequate though it should be borne in mind that this part of my article is therefore very much in the nature of a pilot-study.

In the case of the short story, I have compared the *hua-pen* in the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* with those in Feng Meng-lung's three collections: the *Ku-chin hsiao-shuo*, or *Yü-shih ming-yen* (1620/21), the *Ching-shih t'ung-yen* 警世通言 (1624), and the *Hsing-shih heng-yen* 醒世恒言 (1627), each collection containing 40 *hua-pen* and together commonly known as the *San-yen* 三言. Feng Meng-lung's collections, though not the first of this kind, but vastly surpassing in scope such earlier works as the *Shih tien t'ou* 石點頭 (1620), initiated a rush in the publication of *hua-pen* collections during the last twenty years of the Ming dynasty. The publication of Feng's collections, in turn, might well have been suggested by the example of the *Yüan-ch'ü hsüan* 元曲選, a selection of 100 *tsa-chü* from the Yüan and early Ming, published in 1616 and 1617. The almost complete absence of any overlapping in subject-matter, and a comparable execution, would also make it seem probable that Feng's collections were aimed at the same well-to-do, literarily inclined public.

First of all, I have tried to place Feng Meng-lung in the context of his time through a survey of the studies of his biography. I have also tried to relate his views on the origin of the *hua-pen*, and his activities as an editor of colloquial fiction, to the views and activities of his colleagues. His career would seem to belie our conception of the Chinese novelist as a frustrated person venting his spleen in fiction; his view of the origin of *hua-pen* in court storytellers of the Southern Sung is seen to have its predecessors (one may wonder to what extent his expressed views were instigated by the commercial motive of providing his tales with an ancestry that surpassed the plays in the *Yüan-ch'ü hsüan*). Also, the freedom he allowed him-

self with his texts, even the outright mystification to which he resorted, found their parallels with other editors.

In Feng's collections we meet for the first time with the typical *hua-pen* as the dominant form. Actually, Feng's collection still provides a wide variety of forms, but the later collections of the last twenty years of the Ming (e.g. Ling Meng-ch'u's collections) are restricted almost without exception to this form. The typical *hua-pen* consists of two stories, a short introductory tale, usually very well known, and the longer main story which is usually less well-known, more recent and more complicated. Both stories exemplify the same particularized rule of the general law of retribution. The narrator assumes the attitude of an anonymous, impersonal, professional storyteller, who at every twist and turn connects the particular instance to the general rule by his citation of set-expressions and gnomic verse and who enlivens the story by imagined altercations with the public. The subject matter is in sharp contrast to the earlier stories, where the protagonist is either more than life-size and imposes his will on the other characters in the tale, or is less than life-size and "diabolically schemed against", and where the narrator often implies impending doom. Typical subject matter here is that "of love between a well-matched couple who triumph over difficulties", "of a young man succeeding in the examinations and launching his career", "the patient artisan or tradesman who makes good and is able to rise in society", or the pornographic story of debauchery leading to ruin ⁴⁵). It will be evident that this type of *hua-pen* is an expression of the same world-view as manifested in the novels of the period 1550-1650 discussed above.

The selection of *hua-pen* from the *Ch'ing-p'ing shan-t'ang hua-pen* by Feng, and the direction and extent of his subsequent rewriting of the selected pieces was found to be determined by the degree to which these texts fitted Feng's requirements as to form and content. As in the case of the texts of the *p'ing-hua* in the compilation of the 16th century novels, it was found that those very features that have been adduced to trace the origin of these short stories to professional storytelling, were later additions to texts which completely lacked those features originally, or showed them only in a very rudimentary manner.

⁴⁵) P. Hanan, "The Early Chinese Short Story: A Critical Theory in Outline", *HJAS* XXVII (1967), p. 198.

IV. SOME PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY THE SOURCES

On almost every point, the conclusions of my research contradict the established theory concerning the origin of Chinese colloquial fiction. Though I think my conclusions accord best with our present sources, and though I feel far more sure on some points than on others, I can only present them together as a very tentative hypothesis. My reservations regarding my own conclusions are inspired by a number of factors, that will continue to make any future research in this field very speculative, no matter how theoretically sound our methods may be. Such factors are the nature of our sources; the present state of knowledge with regard to some issues that are basic to a thorough understanding of the use and purpose of colloquial fiction, such as e.g. the percentage of literacy, the composition of the reading public, and the diffusion of books.

First of all we know that many materials have been lost. Sometimes we know specific titles from contemporary works; at other times we have a general reference to a genre, indicating clearly that written texts are meant, as when the table of contents of that immense early 15th century encyclopedia, the *Yung-lo ta-tien*, has a heading "*p'ing-hua*". At still other times the existence of a specific text may be surmised with a high degree of certainty for some period, as when two later texts appear to share a common source; or the existence of a specific genre of literature, with its own body of writings, may be safely postulated, e.g. a *pien-wen*-like literature during the Sung dynasty. In view of the frantic archaeological activity in present-day China, we cannot exclude the possibility of finds that will, like the discoveries at Tun-huang, call for an intense rethinking of our conceptions of the literature of a given period. The recently found 15th century texts, the *Shuo-ch'ang tz'u-hua* 說唱詞話 may be an indication of things yet to come⁴⁶). For the time being, however, we will have to make do with the materials at hand and limit ourselves to the theories they can sustain.

These *Shuo-ch'ang tz'u-hua* discovered in 1967 in the coffin of a 16th century official's wife, were printed during the Ch'eng-hua period (1465-1487). They have not yet been published and we possess only a rather short article on them by Chao Ching-shen.

⁴⁶) See Chao Ching-shen 趙景深, "T'an Ming Ch'eng-hua k'an-pen 'Shuo-ch'ang tz'u-hua' 談明成化刊本說唱詞話", in *Wen-wu* 1972-11, pp. 19-22, p. 68. Also Wang Ch'ing-cheng 汪慶正, "Chi wen-hsüeh, hsi-ch'ü, pan-hua shih shang ti i-t'zu chung-yao fa-hsien 記文學戏曲版圖史上的一次重要發現", *Wen-wu* 1973-11, pp. 58-67.

They could therefore not be given the full consideration they will doubtlessly claim in future studies on the early development of colloquial fiction in China and its relation to other genres. According to Chao Ching-shen's description, the *Shuo-ch'ang tz'u-hua* represent eleven independent texts of moderate length, all partly in simple prose and partly rhymed. For the rhymed passages use is made of the standard seven-syllable epical line. They fall, therefore, into the same category as the earlier *pien-wen* and later *t'an-tz'u* and *ku-tz'u*. It is quite possible and even highly probable, that such *tz'u-hua* were one of the many important sources of the 16th century novel. Such a close connection is also suggested by the fact that in the 16th and 17th century *tz'u-hua* could be used as a general designation for colloquial fiction. I have pointed out one specific case in which one of the 16th century novels might have used one of these recently discovered texts (the *Ts'an T'ang Wu-tai shih yen-i* 殘唐五代史演義, chapters 45-50). But if the novel fed on the *tz'u-hua*, it does not mean that the latter developed into the former and throughout the 16th century the novel and the *tz'u-hua* continued to exist side by side as independent genres, however much they may have influenced, or been derived from, each other. This is evidenced by the 16th century *Ta-T'ang Ch'in-wang tz'u-hua* 大唐秦王詞話, according to its own preface, a reworking of some earlier texts of the same kind, on the same subject ⁴⁷). This *tz'u-hua*, with its 64

⁴⁷) Edition used: Chu Sheng-lin 諸聖隣, *Ta T'ang Ch'in-wang tz'u-hua*, 2 vols., Peking 1956; this edition is based on two incomplete Ming editions. The complete edition of 1783, entitled *Ta shuo T'ang ch'üan-chuan* 大說唐全傳, is described by Liu Ts'un-yan, *Chinese Popular Fiction in two London Libraries*, Hong Kong 1967, pp. 255-256. The library of the Sinological Institute of Leyden State University, also possesses a complete edition, dated 1782, and carrying on the title page the same name of the printing firm as the preface, so it would appear to be printed from the same blocks as the London copy, the original firm having sold the blocks to a second firm, which then merely prepared a new title leaf. The preface was written by Lu Shih-k'o 陸世科 from Yin-hsien 鄞縣, who in 1607, at the age of 50, obtained the highest degree of chin-shih and subsequently pursued a moderately successful career (Ch'ien Ta-hsin 錢大昕 ed., *Yin-hsien chih* 鄞縣志, 1788, *chüan* 16, pp. 33^b-34^a). About the author, Chu Sheng-lin, nothing is known apart from the information Lu provides in his preface, where he calls him his friend and mentions that Chu was known for his sophistication (*feng-liu* 風流) and his mastery of swordsmanship. Perhaps we may guess that Chu Sheng-lin was a military officer, who wrote his work in the second half of the 16th century. His work would belong to the same phase as the *Hsi-yu chi* and *Chin-P'ing-Mei*. The *Ta T'ang Ch'in-wang tz'u-hua* is usually classed as a

chapters on the scale of a novel, would appear to be artistically far superior to the earlier *Shuo-ch'ang tz'u-hua*. In its rhymed parts it uses not only the 7-syllable line, but also the 10 and 5 syllable line; poems are used in the texts; poems and songs introduce each chapter, and at the beginning of each *chüan* (book) a particularly long sequence of poems or songs is used.

The story of the *Ta-T'ang Ch'in-wang tz'u-hua*, which relates a crucial period in the life of Li Shih-min 李世民, the de-facto founder of the T'ang dynasty, is built around the tragic conflict between *hsiao* (孝 filial piety) and *te* (德 virtue, the qualities and the power that make for a future emperor). The story opens in the first chapter with Li Shih-min forcing his father to revolt against the Sui dynasty. The Sui puppet emperor Kung-ti wants to abdicate in favor of Li Shih-min, but the latter refuses, and as filial piety dictates, he offers the emperorship to his father and the position of crown-prince to the eldest of his two elder brothers, while he contents himself with the title Prince of Ch'in (*Ch'in-wang*). In the following chapters, as Li Shih-min eliminates one rival to the new T'ang dynasty after another, he builds up a following of military heroes and advisers. His two brothers feel more and more threatened in their positions as his power rises. Their attempts to gather a similar following fail, as do their attempts on the life of his generals and of Li Shih-min himself. Li Shih-min, however, refuses to act against them. Eventually, the two brothers succeed in persuading their father to condemn Li Shih-min to death. As a filial son Li Shih-min drinks the cup of poison, not knowing its contents had already been changed. And when the two brothers eventually succeed in actually poisoning him, he is miraculously restored to life. But when he is ordered to disband his following, the generals and advisors he had attracted over all these years by his *te*, force him to act, and in the fighting that ensues his two most prominent generals kill his two brothers. His father abdicates, and Li Shih-min ascends the throne, manifesting the imperial virtue which had forced him to negate his filial piety, by inflicting a defeat on the invading barbarians. So the *tz'u-hua* ends with the resolution of a conflict that was implied by the very first chapter. But whereas the story shows the power of Li Shih-min which crushes everything before it, the poems and songs prefixed to each chapter continually recall a still higher power,

ku-tz'u, but it is obviously intended for reading. As in the case of the *Shuo-ch'ang p'ing-hua*, the nice execution and the names associated with the work, suggest a rather well-to-do public.

ongoing time, which reduces all human effort to dust. The *Ta-T'ang Ch'in-wang tz'u-hua* is a stirring tale, often told with classical epic grandeur, and it is remarkable that it has not attracted more scholarly attention.

Once the *Shuo-ch'ang tz'u-hua* have been published, they will require fuller discussion. However, as far as is possible to judge at this moment, they do not appear seriously to affect our views on the origin of Chinese fiction, since in their present known published form they date from well after the earliest printed specimens of the novel, the *p'ing-hua*.

One of the problems presented by the available external sources on storytelling and colloquial fiction is that for some periods a type of work with information relevant to our subject, is available, while the same type of work is lacking for other periods. As we possess books describing the splendor of K'aifeng and Hangchow, we have information on professional storytelling in those two cities, but the sections dealing with storytelling are of minor importance within these books as a whole. Information on storytelling from other sources for this period (1100-1300) is very rare. As soon as this specific type of book which describes the life of a great city in detail, appears again, like in the 18th century *Yang-chou hua-fang lu* 楊州畫舫錄⁴⁸), we meet with comparable information. But the fact that we have at our disposal more complete information for one period than for another does not in itself warrant the conclusion that storytelling was in fuller flourish during Sung times than earlier or later, or that it reached unprecedented heights of perfection.

Another problem presented by our sources on storytelling and colloquial fiction, apart from the texts themselves, is the fact that such sources all belong to the *wen-yen* literature (apart from occasional references in drama), and that this literature written in the classical idiom is almost *ipso facto* the product of China's traditional cultural élite, the gentry who had prepared themselves to take one of the state-examinations through a rigid education in the Confucian classics. It is generally held that this leading segment of the population despised the colloquial literature. This supposedly led to various forms of suppression, the mildest being a refusal to mention it, the severest being a government ban. Now, even before we embark upon a fuller discussion of the composition and size of the reading public, it may well be worthwhile to go into this question somewhat more deeply.

⁴⁸) Li Tou 李斗, *Yang-chou hua-fang lu*, Peking 1960.

It is an undeniable fact that references to colloquial and oral literature are scarce in *wen-yen* literature all through the period under discussion ⁴⁹). But the overwhelming majority of the Chinese records were written by persons acting in some official capacity. It is only natural that dynastic histories and the like should not yield any material on these subjects; one could as well try to reconstruct the development of the 19th century European novel from the *Hansard* and the Vatican archives. Moreover, the most generally supported traditional view on literature employed a moral standard. The Classics, containing the eternal truth, were the most important writings; history and the philosophers were next in importance, and the collected writings of individual authors came last. Such an evaluating classification is nothing peculiar to China; Europe classified its books in a comparable way, and the vestiges of this attitude can still be detected in the standard decimal systems of classification used in most libraries. To the weight of such a normative classification was added the prestige of *wen-yen*, in which the overwhelming majority of this literature was written. This normative classification was also immensely strengthened by the direct practical importance of the Four Books and Five Classics for one's social career, as during the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties they were the required materials for the prefectural examinations which conferred the *sheng-yüan* (student) degree, entitling the holder to sit for the higher examinations (a knowledge of the historical literature was required only at these higher examinations ⁵⁰).

But even if some part of the total corpus of literature may be considered both useless and untrue, and suffer from severe "comparative disesteem", this fact does not in itself imply active sup-

⁴⁹) References to colloquial fiction in *wen-yen* literature were brought together by K'ung Ling-ching 孔另境, *Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shih-liao* 中國小說史料, Shanghai 1957. Much more material might still be found, as suggested by the size of I Li 一粟 ed., *Hung-lou meng chüan* 紅樓夢卷 2 vols., Peking 1963, which collects references to the *Hung-lou meng* alone.

⁵⁰) Cf. S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom* 2 vols., New York 1883, p. 520: "The great stimulus to literary pursuits is the hope thereby of obtaining office and honor, and the only course of education followed is the classical and historical one prescribed by law. Owing to this undue attention to the classics, the minds of the scholars are not symmetrically trained, and they disparage other branches of literature that do not advance this great end. Every department of letters, except jurisprudence, history and official statistics, is disesteemed in comparison; and the literary graduate of fourscore will be found deficient in most branches of general learning."

pression of that which is "disesteemed". One may well subscribe to such a normative classification of literature, and yet be an avid reader of such "unimportant works" in his spare time. Colloquial fiction in traditional China never gained the status of the Western novel, but the western novel also attained its status only in the middle of the 19th century, at a moment, one may add, when literature was starting to lose ground fast as an essential part of good breeding. Up until that time it had also been viewed as frivolous, light reading. A man like Daniel Defoe was almost unknown during the century after his death. No sign is to be found of any kind of positive suppression of colloquial fiction all through the 16th century in China. On the contrary, the *Yung-lo ta-tien* had included *p'ing-hua*, and from the 16th century some emperors are known to have been avid novel-readers; officials or retired officials published fiction, and a number of catalogues included works of fiction. From the 17th century onward, colloquial fiction is generally assumed to have been a part of the reading habits of the gentry, and references to it increase. But if references to colloquial fiction increase, it is probably first of all because the printing of colloquial fiction increased rather rapidly after the last quarter of the 16th century (as part of the publishing boom of the 16th century, itself part of the sustained economic growth China witnessed in the period 1500-1800).

If one consults the rich materials collected by Wang Hsiao-chuan 王曉傳 in his *Yüan Ming Ch'ing san-tai chin-hui hsiao-shuo hsi-ch'ü shih-liao* 元明清三代禁毀小說戲曲史料⁵¹) (Historical materials on the suppression of fiction and drama during the three dynasties Yüan, Ming and Ch'ing), which covers the period 1260-1911, one can find no official government pronouncements opposed to colloquial fiction as such, or, for that matter, to storytelling or the theatre as such. When storytelling or the theatre appears in edicts, the concern is usually with such matters as the undesirability of the gathering of large mixed crowds, the necessity to prevent the activities of gamblers and prostitutes; in short, the maintenance of public order as this was understood by an often uneasy, autocratic government. For the first ban on a novel we have to wait for 1642,

⁵¹) Wang Hsiao-chuan comp., *Yüan Ming Ch'ing san-tai chin-hui hsiao-shuo hsi-ch'ü shih-liao*, Peking 1958. On this subject, see also A. Lévy, "La condamnation du roman en France et en Chine", in his *Etudes sur le conte et le roman chinois*, Paris 1971, pp. 1-13, Lévy's views are more along traditional lines than mine.

when the *Shui-hu chuan* was forbidden ⁵²). This measure was inspired by the widely ranging banditry then ravaging much of China. The uprisings had already been going on for more than ten years at the time the ban was pronounced, and I wonder if the proscription at this time may not have been occasioned by the fact, that some of the rebel leaders finally had started to attract followers among the educated gentry. Those late 16th and 17th century writers, like the philosopher Li Chih 李贄 (1527-1602), also often designated as Li Cho-wu 李卓吾, or the eccentric Chin Sheng-t'an 金聖歎 (ca. 1610-1661), who ranked some colloquial novels on a par with some of the most famous works of the *wen-yen* literature, were probably not so radical in reading fiction, but in according it the place they did. And though both of them eventually came into conflict with the authorities, their connections with the novel, in both cases the very *Shui-hu chuan*, were not counted among their crimes ⁵³).

The Ch'ing (1644-1911) government was more active in the field. A small number of novels which treated the struggle of Ming generals against the Mandchus were effectively suppressed. The *Shuo-Yüeh ch'üan-chuan* 說岳全傳 (late 17th century?) on the patriotic general Yüeh Fei, was proscribed during the inquisitions of the Ch'ien-lung period. These novels were forbidden by the foreign rulers as politically subversive. In 1687 a first general order against licentious novels (*yin-tz'u hsiao-shuo* 淫詞小說) was issued; it was later repeated a number of times ⁵⁴). Suppression of the forbidden books does not seem to have been very effective, however ⁵⁵), and

⁵²) Wang Hsiao-chuan, *op. cit.* p. 15. In an edict of 1602 (p. 14), the use in memorials to the throne of *hsiao-shuo li-yü* 小說俚語 (vulgar phrases from novels) had been forbidden, but as this is coupled with an injunction that only the language of the classics and histories be used, probably nothing more than "vulgar phrases" is meant. Such a regulation on the style of official communications is, of course, no interdiction of fiction.

⁵³) On Li Chih and colloquial fiction, see R. G. Irwin, *The Evolution of a Chinese Novel*, Cambridge Mass. 1953, pp. 75-82; on Chin Sheng-t'an, John Ching-yu Wang has just published a concise and lucid monograph, *Chin Sheng-t'an*, New York 1972.

⁵⁴) Wang Hsiao-chuan, *Yüan Ming Ch'ing san-tai chin-hui hsiao-shuo hsi-ch'ü shih-liao*, Peking 1958, pp. 17, 23, 24, 29, 38, 52, 59, 69.

Occasionally the prefix *yin-tz'u* (licentious) is dropped, but it is clear that all these orders are repetitions of the original ban.

⁵⁵) Cf. Charles Gutzlaff, *China Opened* 2 vols., London, 1838, p. 468: "... among the Shih-tsae-tsze ... there is one which cannot be read without shuddering ... The government prohibits these licentious books;

only a few local systematic attempts are known, notably the one in 1868 by Ting Jih-ch'ang 丁日昌 (1832-1882) at the time governor of Kiangsu. If one goes through the lists ⁵⁶⁾ of works deemed obscene at that time, one finds that most of the titles mentioned were pure pornography by any standards one might choose to use in China or the west until the permissive sixties of this century changed our conceptions drastically. The lists also contain many works now deemed to be masterworks, like the *Hung-lou meng*, but almost every-one of these contains passages that might easily have been considered pornographic; and the habit of condemning books for isolated passages was not peculiar to China. Even in the "enlightened 20th Century", if published at all, most of these works, like the *San-yan* and Ling Meng-ch'u's collections, the *Chin-P'ing-Mei* etc., have appeared only with (sometimes extreme) bowdlerization. Most translators have also been careful to omit passages objectionable to their western public, and David Hawkes' first full translation of the *Hung-lou meng* ⁵⁷⁾ contains many passages that would until quite recently have shocked the English-speaking reader, with their explicit descriptions of masturbation etc. These mid-19th-century lists of forbidden works, on the other hand, do not contain historical romances, nor novels of miraculous adventures, and none of the satirical novels like the *P'ing-kuei chuan* 平鬼傳, *Ju-lin wai-shih* 儒林外史 or *Ching-hua yuan* 鏡花緣.

Apart from government proscriptions, Wang Hsiao-chuan has brought together a vast array of pronouncements against fiction and drama from a wide variety of sources. In most of these fiction is decried as a corrupter of the innocence of the young or the women-folk. Comparable pronouncements might doubtlessly be collected from the Western world, though in recent years the comics, movies and television have largely replaced the novel in this function. The phenomenon is probably the same: the puritan fringe shows its concern for the morality of its fellow man. Sheer numbers alone do

but as the contents so very much incite the depraved appetite of man, people read them only with the greater avidity".

⁵⁶⁾ See Wang Hsiao-chuan, *Yüan Ming Ch'ing san-tai chin-hui hsiao-shuo hsi-ch'ü shih-liao*, Peking 1958, pp. 121-131, for Ting Jih-ch'ang's lists; another, shorter list of the same nature is found on pp. 114-116. A. Wylie, *Notes on Chinese literature*, Shanghai 1867, pp. XII-XIII, also provides a short list of much the same nature.

⁵⁷⁾ David Hawkes transl., *The Story of the Stone, A Chinese Novel by Cao Xueqin in Five Volumes. Vol. I The Golden Days*, Harmondsworth 1973.

not mean representativity—a matter which is not discussed by Wang Hsiao-chuan.

Moreover, the generality of many of these statements makes it very difficult to know what exactly had attracted the wrath of their authors. The term they usually employ, *hsiao-shuo*, includes in premodern times an extreme variety of texts; classical tales; plays; novels and *hua-pen*; *t'an-tz'u*, *ku-tz'u* etc.; broadsheets and ballads on recent scandals. Probably in most cases only the bad examples are meant. To the extent fiction was pornography and treated as such, it must have been the preserve of *afficionados* among the highest classes, if the historical parallel of another puritan period, Victorian England, is of any value.

Putting these various considerations together, I do not think that our sources misrepresent the development of Chinese fiction, because of some inherent bias. Another problem our sources present is that they inform us best on the top of the social pyramid of traditional Chinese society, and successively less as one descends towards the broader levels. This is a problem everyone working on China's past has to deal with, but it becomes very acute if one is working on a possibly more popular subject, like early colloquial fiction. The picture we form may well be severely distorted, as our sources by their very nature will over-represent the part played by the court, or the highest social elites, in the formation and further development of our subject. In the same way, it seems likely that the costlier the edition of some work of fiction was, the greater its chance of being preserved down to the present. One should, however, resist the temptation to construct large hypothetical structures postulating popular origins, as long as the available references and materials allow one to discern an internally consistent explanation. Only when the available references and materials do not add up to such a consistent picture, are we allowed to proceed to wider hypotheses. On no account should we disown the existing references, e.g. those to government editions of novels, or the connections of officials like Hung Pien and Kuo Hsün with colloquial fiction, as atypical, if only a meagre case against their typicality can be made on the basis of our available information. Otherwise we shall return to the "quagmire of speculation"⁵⁸) which characterizes so much of the available research on early vernacular fiction.

⁵⁸) P. Hanan, "Sung and Yüan Vernacular Fiction; A Critique of Modern Methods of Dating", *HJAS* XXX (1970), p. 168.

V. THE EXTENT OF LITERACY AND THE DIFFUSION OF BOOKS IN TRADITIONAL CHINA

An issue basic to the understanding of the functioning of traditional China's culture is the size and social composition of the literate population, together with the issue of the diffusion of books. In our case it is even more imperative that we should form some opinion on this matter, or at the very least try to establish the limits of the possibilities. In earlier researches, specific assumptions have been made as to the particular reading public in China of traditional vernacular fiction without such a preliminary inquiry into the nature of the reading public as a whole.

The most widespread view on this matter is to be found in summary in J. Gernet's recent survey of Chinese history, *Le Monde Chinois*. According to Gernet, the reading public of colloquial fiction in the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century (when this fiction became more easily accessible in print), was constituted by an urban public in search of amusement, not very well educated, but on that account also free of the intellectual constraints that were imposed on the gentry by their classical education⁵⁹). Especially in the fifties there appeared numerous articles in the People's Republic in which the colloquial fiction of this period was studied as the expression of a nascent bourgeois ideology, opposed to the conservative ideology of the gentry. In short, colloquial fiction was considered to have been produced by and for the emerging new social class of the bourgeoisie⁶⁰). The overly optimistic articles of those years were later criticized, and it was found that the bourgeoisie itself included an exploiting segment that shared the suppressive ideology of the gentry⁶¹). This view on the reading public of vernacular fiction—apart from the question of what establishes the bourgeoisie's own ideology—posits one major

⁵⁹) J. Gernet, *Le Monde Chinois*, Paris 1972, p. 390.

⁶⁰) E.g. Ch'eng Hung 程弘, "「Ching-shih t'ung-yen」 chung ti ai-ch'ing ku-shih" 「警世通言」中的愛情故事, in *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 25-3-1956; Hsüan Tsung 璇琮, "Lüeh-lun 「Chin-ku ch'i-kuan」" 略論「今古奇觀」, in *Kuang-ming jih-pao* 6-10-1956; Cheng Yün-chien 鄭允建, "T'an tsai San-yen Erh-p'ai chung so fan-ying ti shih-min sheng-huo ti liang-ke t'e-se" 談在三言二拍中所反映的市民生活的兩個特色 in *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 30-3-1958; Hsü Ling-yün 徐凌雲, "Shih-lun Ling Meng-ch'u ti 「Erh-p'ai」" 試論凌濛初的「二拍」, in *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 27-4-1958.

⁶¹) See Fu Chi-fu 傅繼馥, "Shih-lun ku-tai shih-min wen-hsüeh ti p'ing-chia wen-t'i" 試論古代市民文學的評價問題, in *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, 29-8-1965.

problem: one must assume that, whereas the economy continued its growth and showed an ongoing commercialization, this urban public of shopkeepers, clerks and the like disappeared overnight with the beginning of the second half of the 17th century, at the very moment when it should have been increasing ⁶²).

It seems highly unlikely to me that in the period 1500-1800 there would have been such a neat and clean distinction between two social classes, each with its own economic basis, its own economic interests and its own values and culture. If such a culture had actually existed, it would be most surprising that the only sign it had left would be colloquial fiction, leaving no other traces, in e.g. the field of law or in painting. More evidently plausible is the picture sketched by M. Elvin in his survey of the social and economic history of pre-modern China. He notes that by 1500 a manorial system of rural economy had definitively become a thing of the past. Landowners no longer directly supervised the work on their fields, and the need for them to reside in the countryside had disappeared. China entered around 1500 on a period of continued economic growth. The main feature responsible for this growth, and its specific nature, was the increasing degree of commercialization. Part of this commercialization was the increasing number of large and medium sized towns throughout China, but especially in the regions having access to cheap water transport. The gentry flocked to these towns and cities, and many of them invested part or almost all of their capital in commercial undertakings, which showed a much greater profit than landholding, even though most of them, as well as businessmen who had made good, would keep part of their capital invested in land as a kind of security. Moreover, participation in the official examinations was, with some negligible exceptions, free for all, and success in them depended mainly on the financial ability to provide one's sons with a good education—an official career still giving the highest return on investment. Elvin's con-

⁶²) J. Gernet, *Le Monde Chinois*, Paris 1972, p. 443: "Les romans corrompus sont mis à l'index en 1687 et la censure devient plus sévère encore en 1714. La nouvelle dynastie mandchoue est puritaine, hostile à la littérature de distraction écrite dans une langue proche de la langue parlée, et le fait est que cette littérature disparaît presque entièrement sous Kangxi... Peut-être l'action de l'Etat dans ce domaine allait-elle dans le sens souhaitée par les milieux lettrés eux-mêmes? Peut-être était-elle aussi en accord avec les transformations de la société et la disparition d'une certaine classe de lecteurs, cette bourgeoisie urbaine peu cultivée qui s'était développée à la fin des Ming?"

clusion is therefore that in this period we cannot set off a distinct urban bourgeoisie from a landowning gentry; the period is rather characterized by a unified, urban-based leading class whose status rested on the twin pillars of wealth and education. It goes without saying that such a change in its social role would entail a change in outlook on the part of the élite, which we may well continue to call gentry, and the 16th and later centuries reveal, not surprisingly, a great variety of developments in ideology ⁶³).

This development was most outspoken in the Kiangnan area, the region contained within the Nanking—Yangchow—Hangchow triangle, which had Soochow at its centre. This rich agricultural area was also situated at the juncture of the main waterways. Being China's most densely populated area and the centre of its commerce, the Kiangnan area was also, for that very reason, the centre of traditional culture during the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. This becomes evident e.g. from the fact that this area produced a number of *chin-shih* (graduates of the metropolitan examinations) far out of proportion to its population figures ⁶⁴). This same Kiangnan region was also, throughout the period, the centre of fiction writing and publishing.

The connection between prose fiction and the bourgeoisie appears to have been inspired by the development of the genre in the West, and the eagerness to accept such a connection would appear to derive very much from the modern desire to find in traditional society groups and values that were opposed to Confucianism. By the beginning of the 20th century, Confucianism, or rather the reformers' rigid caricature than the flexible and complex system of reference it was before the Western impact had made itself felt, had come to be viewed as the obstacle to China's modernization, together with the social group that represented it: the gentry. The first modern students of traditional colloquial fiction, whether Hu Shih or Lu Hsün, were very much caught in Levenson's dilemma of the Chinese in the modern world, shocked by the present state of China, yet wanting desperately to be proud of China's rich tradition. In the West the novel may well be called the typical form of literature of the capitalist society of the bourgeoisie, as evolved from the middle of the 18th century in England, France and other countries. But this does not mean that prose fiction is in any way

⁶³) M. Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, London 1973, pp. 235-289.

⁶⁴) Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*, New York 1962, pp. 244-254.

limited to this period or to the specific social class of the bourgeoisie. Classical antiquity knew a Greek and Latin novel, and the court circles of 17th century France produced an extensive range of novels, even if they are nowadays perhaps rightly forgotten apart from the writings of Mme de la Fayette. Mediaeval Japan saw its courtladies write novels, of which the *Genji monogatari* is the most famous. Moreover, the modern novel in the West is not the product of the merchant class, but of a very limited part of the bourgeoisie, i.e. the professions. Such a group of trained lawyers, medical doctors, ministers, teachers and other intellectuals (together with well-educated women), form a social group for which no parallel can be found in traditional Chinese society, since in China most of the functions of the professions were gentry functions. The typical features of the modern western novels: one individualized (anti)hero or heroine, usually at odds with the environment, and the full, detailed descriptions of each particular place, action and thought may well be closely connected to the social conditions of the period in which they were written. However, these features are not shared by the traditional Chinese novel, as all critics agree ⁶⁵).

Those who are acquainted with the literature on the subject of China's traditional vernacular fiction will have noticed that I have scrupulously avoided the designation "popular fiction". I have done so because I think the term is ambiguous. Its use suggests that the great mass of the population would know the works so denoted. Now, there is no doubt that the stories treated in early colloquial fiction (and in those later works that belong to the chapbook tradition) were widely popular, i.e. known to the majority of people from all walks of life, both in the towns and in the country, as such stories formed the repertoire of the storytellers, ballad-singers, actors etc. But if one wants to call a specific kind of *texts* "popular", one first has to know how large the *reading* public might have been in pre-modern China. Reliable data for computing the percentage of literacy for pre-modern China do not exist, but even so, rough

⁶⁵) For studies on authors and readers of the modern Western novel since the 18th century, and on the relation between the features of the modern Western novel and their social foundations, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel, Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, (original edition 1957) Harmondsworth 1968³, and Lucien Goldmann, "Introduction aux problèmes d'une sociologie du roman", in his *Pour une sociologie du roman*, Paris 1964, pp. 21-57. Their approaches are widely different, but probably not incompatible.

quantified estimates may be preferable to broad generalizing statements that are easily misleading to a 20th century reader accustomed in almost every case to compulsory general education.

China knew paper since the first century, and printing, developed in the 9th century, was diffused widely in the 10th. Up to this latter date the situation must have been very much like that in Classical Antiquity or in the European Middle Ages: books had to be copied by hand and were scarce, and the knowledge of reading and writing was limited to a very small group: members of the highest social elite of the hereditary great families, professional scribes and government clerks, and monks, who thereby collectively represented a very small cultural élite. Incidentally, this should warn us that the popular nature of the *pien-wen* of the T'ang is of a special kind; they may have been written to be performed in temple-grounds for the urban public at large, but they certainly were written by people who belonged to this very small cultured élite. Perhaps the status and function of the *pien-wen* may be compared to the literatures in the different national languages during the Latin Middle Ages up to about 1300.

This situation changed with the spread of printing and the process of total transformation which Chinese society underwent in the period 800-1300. The most important features of this process for us to note are the development of a new and broader leading class, the gentry, and the growing importance of the state-examinations as the means of selection of officials. If, for brevity's sake, we momentarily pass over the period of Mongol occupation during the Yüan dynasty (1260-1368), we may say that these two developments came to full fruition with the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The system of recruitment of officials then worked out survived with only slight adaptations until 1905. There were three main levels of examination: those at the prefectural capitals, at the provincial capitals, and at the national capital. The prefectural examinations awarded the first degree of *sheng-yüan* (also often called *hsiu-ts'ai*). Successful competition in the prefectural examinations was possible to a great number of people as the required study materials were rather limited, consisting only of the Four Books and the Five Classics with Chu Hsi's commentary. No wonder, then, that Chinese society as a whole became extremely "education-minded". Many schools and academies were founded in response to this demand. Ho Ping-ti concludes: "facilities for elementary education in a large historical society such as that of Ming-Ch'ing

China cannot be compared with those of modern industrialized societies where elementary education is compulsory . . . There can be little doubt that during at least the first half of the Ming community schools were established extensively in the country and they served an important educational purpose . . . it is likely that education in the first 150 years of the Ming was more widely available than in most countries of contemporaneous Europe" ⁶⁶).

This is still quite vague. F. W. Mote, has recently pointed out that there exist no overall studies on this subject. Criticizing R. Solomon for taking 1 or 2% as the figure of the literate population, Mote personally has tried to work out tentative figures for the province of Yünnan in the 18th century, based on the number of schools. He arrives at a figure of 5 to 7% ⁶⁷). The province of Yünnan, however, may well be atypical in this respect, in view of the high quota of *sheng-yüan* in proportion to population figures ⁶⁸). Another approach to the subject might be a study of the estimates made on the spot by observers of the second half of the 19th century when traditional society still prevailed. Perhaps it is not too dangerous a speculation that roughly the same percentages prevailed throughout the last two dynasties despite the drastic population increase. A very preliminary scanning of these 19th century observations produced the following results.

Arthur Smith, in his *Village Life in China*, estimated that only one in twenty, "and more probably, not three in hundred" of the pupils in the village schools, where education was in no way different from that in towns and cities, continued his studies so far that he might be examined for a degree ⁶⁹). Perhaps we may take it to mean that those who obtained the *t'ung-sheng* degree, a kind of preliminary degree awarded by the district magistrate, allowing one to sit for the prefectural examinations, were only 5 or 3 per cent of those who had attended a school for a shorter or longer period. As the *t'ung-sheng* numbered about 2,000,000 in the 19th century, it would have taken 40 to 60 million pupils to produce them. If we put

⁶⁶) Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*, New York 1962, p. 197.

⁶⁷) F. W. Mote, "China's Past in the Study of China Today—Some Comments on the Recent Work of Richard Solomon", *JAS* XXXII (1972), pp. 107-120.

⁶⁸) Chang Chung-li, *The Chinese Gentry, Studies on their Role in Nineteenth Century Chinese Society*, Seattle 1955, pp. 113, 164.

⁶⁹) A. H. Smith, *Village Life in China, A Study in Sociology*, Edinburgh 1899, pp. 106-107.

the 19th century population, for simplicity's sake, at roughly 400,000,000, and the male population at half this figure, it would mean that at some time or another, 20 to 30% of the total male population had attended school to some extent. This percentage must have been considerably higher in the cities and towns and lower in the inland areas; the figures for the Kiangnan area, both for town and country, were higher than those elsewhere, according to common testimony of both Chinese and foreign sources of the 19th century and before.

The proportion of the total male population that once attended school may well have been higher; estimates will depend largely upon one's personal opinion regarding the effectiveness of China's traditional education. We are well informed on the manner of traditional primary education. Pupils were required to learn by heart texts, written in the dead classical language. They also learned to write characters without having any idea of their meaning. Only when the pupils had learned enough texts by heart would the teacher begin explaining selected passages. Composition would be introduced only later on. As most boys attended school irregularly and in any event had to leave school very early to help their fathers in the family business, they derived scarcely any benefit from their schooling, apart from the ability to write their own names. Many others were able to recite some text, but without any idea as to its meaning. And Smith declares: "... it is absolutely necessary to take into account the innumerable multitudes who derive little or no benefit from their schooling. Nothing is more common than to meet men who, although they have spent from one to ten years at school ... reply ... that their knowledge of characters has been "laid aside" " ⁷⁰). In view of the insistence of many different authors on this point, we may perhaps put the proportion of those who derived no benefit from their schooling at one half. Not that the remainder might be called fully literate. "To many, the result of some years of study is that a simple book is understood more or less, but it must be written in a most easy style" ⁷¹). Such a class of readers might be called moderately literate; one may assume that they also could use their knowledge of characters in such specific practical tasks as book-keeping or letter-

⁷⁰) A. H. Smith, *Village Life in China, A Study in Sociology*, Edinburgh 1899, p. 106.

⁷¹) J. Dyer Ball, *The Chinese at Home, or The Man of Tong and his Land*, London 1911, p. 275.

writing. This class of readers must surely have been included when J. Dyer Ball states: "Some have estimated the educated class in China as 15,000,000. This is far too small an estimate" ⁷²). If we put the number at 20,000,000, it would mean 10 per cent of the total male population, and roughly 5 per cent of the population as a whole. This is also close to F. W. Mote's approximation.

Only those pupils whose parents could afford to pay for private tutoring, or to pay the classroom teacher for devoting particular attention to their child, stood much chance that they might reach a level qualifying them to sit for the examinations. "It is only the well-to-do, as a rule, that are fairly well educated" ⁷³). Those who might be called fully literate, being able to read the Classics and to write a composition according to a set pattern, were only a fraction of this 20,000,000; one authority estimates them to be one in twenty of the grown-up male population ⁷⁴). This would amount to roughly 5,000,000 or 1.25% of the total population. But this is still seven to ten times the number of *sheng-yüan* in the 19th century. China was a literate country not so much because of the high proportion of literacy, but by virtue of the absolute numbers of its literate population. After all, illiteracy was China's problem on entering the modern age ⁷⁵).

Those whom I have designated as fully literate were, as a rule, neither very well read nor particularly inclined toward literary pursuits. Williams comments: "The study of books being solely regarded as the means wherewith to attain a definitive end (i.e. official title and rank W.I.), it follows naturally that when a cultivated man has reached his goal, he should feel little disposed to turn

⁷²) J. Dyer Ball, *The Chinese at Home, or The Man of Tong and his Land*, London 1911, p. 276.

⁷³) J. Dyer Ball, *The Chinese at Home, or The Man of Tong and his Land*, London 1911, p. 275.

⁷⁴) J. Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese, Being Notes on various Subjects connected with China*, London 1892, pp. 126-127: "As to the number of men who can not only read, but mentally understand what they read, it is very hard to form an estimate. The proportion differs in different parts of the empire and even in the same part, it will vary greatly in the country and the town. Dr. Martin, of Peking, estimates it at one in twenty".

⁷⁵) According to official figures, pupils enrolled in elementary education numbered over 900,000 in 1907 and over one million and a half in 1909, surpassing the ten million mark in 1930-31. See Ronald Yu Soong Cheng, *The Financing of Public Education in China*, Shanghai 1935, p. 22. Illiteracy during the Republican period was often estimated to amount to 80 or 90 per cent.

to these implements of his profession for either instruction or pleasure" . . . "Moreover, in the Chinese language, different subjects demand different characters; and although a man may be well versed in the classics or in fiction, he may be easily posed by being asked to explain a simple treatise in medicine or in mathematics, in consequence of the many new and unfamiliar words on every page. This is a serious obstacle of obtaining a general acquaintance with books . . . consequently, few Chinese are well read in their natural literature" ⁷⁶). So far, the authors quoted on this topic agree that the average scholar possessed few books if any, outside of his Four Books, the Five Classics and a pocketsize rhyming dictionary.

In view of this fact, it might be useful to distinguish still yet a third level of literacy, I shall call "highly literate" those persons who actively prepared, or had once prepared, for the provincial examinations, either by studying at home or in one of the *shu-yüan* (academies), which meant a much wider reading program including the histories and the philosophers; those who served in an official capacity in the civil bureaucracy or on the private secretarial staff of some official; and those who had both the interest and the means to devote their leisure to studies, whether historical, medical, mathematical, or literary. If we put this group, which would be mainly recruited from the *sheng-yüan*, at about one third the number of the latter, it would be quite a fair estimate; it would mean about 200,000 people during the Ch'ing dynasty and more as the Ch'ing went on. As a fraction of China's total population the figure is infinitesimal, but in sheer numbers this group far surpasses the sophisticated public of e.g. 17th and 18th century England and France.

These three levels of literacy I have distinguished: moderately literate, fully literate and highly literate, must have coincided in large degree with social cleavages, but the overlapping was far from complete. Those I have called highly literate were either in the civil bureaucracy or stood a fair chance of entering it. The great majority of them would have been quite well off, or very rich; and if not, they could, if they wished, obtain relatively well-paid employment. The overwhelming majority of our sources on traditional China derive from this group. Those I have called fully literate constituted the main force of the local gentry; their income may occasionally

⁷⁶) S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom* 2 vols., New York 1883, p. 545.

have been very low, if they had no property of their own and had to eke out a living by teaching in a village school. But a gentleman's poverty probably was still preferable to a peasant's poverty. The social status of the moderately literate public, and their income, would in general have been slightly lower than that of the fully literate public.

In a discussion of literacy, we should also pay attention to several groups, especially within the social elite, which may have been very small in proportion to the total population, but which still constituted quite sizable markets on account of their absolute numbers. I am thinking of women in rich and scholarly families, (hereditary) military officers, the nobility, or, during their respective dynasties, the Mongol and Manchu ruling groups. To mention just one instance, the patented nobility of descendants of the founder of the Ming dynasty numbered 23,000 by the end of that dynasty! Their social position did not depend upon their performance in the official examinations; consequently, their motivation for study was probably relatively low, but the status and wealth of the families ensured that their children received an education. Hence, most of the members of these groups will have been at least fully literate. An exception to this might have been the Mongols and the other Central-Asians they brought with them. Many of these, and certainly the Mongol court, showed little interest in Chinese culture during their relatively short period of dominance; full literacy in Chinese may well have been exceptional among the Mongols of the Yüan (1260-1364).

If we now turn again to colloquial fiction and its reading public, I think it would be too simplistic to say that *wen-yen* literature as such was destined for the fully and highly literate groups, and colloquial literature as such for a less literate public ⁷⁷). Such a view neglects the distinction to be made between literary fiction and the chapbook tradition. It also appears to err in assuming that colloquial literature as such would be more easily understandable. Let us first consider this latter issue. Traditional education taught only the reading of *wen-yen* literature, with a specific vocabulary and a sentence rhythm all its own. Writing and reading the local dialect would require quite a different training. Moreover, the vernacular employed in the novels is—sometimes regionally coloured—*kuan-hua*, basically the Northern Chinese dialect of the Peking area, whereas

⁷⁷) P. Hanan, "The Development of Fiction and Drama", in R. Dawson ed., *The Legacy of China*, Oxford 1964, p. 117.

the local dialect of the Kiangnan area is the Wu dialect, which is quite a different thing. Probably many people of the Kiangnan area could speak the Southern *kuan-hua*, but in most cases only as a second dialect. It is therefore quite understandable that the most popular novels, and short stories, like the *Lung-t'u kung-an* 龍圖公案⁷⁸⁾, i.e. those in the chapbook tradition, were written in a very stereotyped "novelese", a very simple *wen-yen* with the occasional use of some *pai-hua* particles. And when it is stated that "Common novels are in the hand of everybody", and titles are provided, it becomes clear that works belonging to the chapbook tradition and *t'an-tz'u* and the like, are meant⁷⁹⁾.

The literary novel, on the other hand employing both abstruse *wen-yen* and racy local dialect, presumes a highly literate author as well as a similar reader, if only because these works are rich in puns and parodies. Evidence of this may also be seen in the fact that whereas our *wen-yen* sources contain references to the literary novel, they pass over the works in the chapbook tradition in almost complete silence. Where known, the authors of the literary novel turn out to belong to the highly literate group, even if they did not always have brilliant official careers. But then, the writing of a 100-chapter novel is a lifetime occupation which few busy bureaucrats in any country would find the leisure to compose. And when the author of a literary novel was unknown, it was attributed to some famous scholar: in such a way the 16th century official and dramatist Wang Shih-chen 王世貞 was often (until modern times) supposed to have been the author of the *Chin-P'ing-Mei*⁸⁰⁾. The authors of the chapbook-novels are practically without exception anonymous, and nobody bothered to find out who they were. Only a few novels enjoyed so much popularity that they were read by all segments of the literate public, viz. the *San-kuo chih yen-i*, the

⁷⁸⁾ The *Lung-t'u kung-an* 龍圖公案 is the name of a collection of very short stories from the late Ming, written in a very simple *wen-yen* with some vernacular elements, and treating a wide variety of criminal cases, solved, often miraculously, by the famous judge Pao. See Y. W. Ma, "Themes and characterization in the *Lung-t'u kung-an*", *TP* LIX (1973), pp. 179-202. The *Lung-t'u kung-an* is the best known example of this sub-genre of collections of short accounts of curious criminal cases; this sub-genre flourished in the 17th century.

⁷⁹⁾ Charles Gutzlaff, *China Opened; Or A Display of the Topography of the Chinese Empire*, 2 vols., London 1838, vol. I, p. 468.

⁸⁰⁾ Wu Han 吳晗, *Chin-P'ing-Mei yü Wang Shih-chen* 金瓶梅與王世貞, Hong Kong 1967.

Shui-hu chuan and later possibly the *Hung-lou meng*, though one wonders whether their public may not often have been limited to the fully literate group.

When we now turn our attention to the issue of book production, we are confronted with the same difficulty we encountered in our discussion of literacy. In the published studies I have seen ⁸¹), one may find much information on the technique of book production and its advances through the ages, but very little quantified data. Nevertheless, it would seem appropriate to attempt some kind of estimate, enabling us to form some idea, however tentative, of the relation between book production and the reading public.

The standard technique for book production was from the 10th century onwards block printing, although movable type was known and used from the 11th century on. After the blocks had been cut, a print was obtained by putting a sheet of paper on the inked block and rubbing it against it. The sheets were folded and stitched together into volumes. Several volumes were brought together within one protective cover. Book manufacturing was labour-intensive and time consuming, though books could still be produced cheaply on account of the low wages. The process had some advantages, e.g. the blocks could be easily stocked, and more prints could be made whenever the need was felt.

The organizations and individuals engaged in book production may be divided into three groups: the central government or its local agencies; private individuals, and commercial firms. Throughout the period from Sung to Ch'ing all these three groups continued to play almost equally important roles. Government editions were as a rule large compilations: the Classics, the Dynastic Histories, Statutes, dictionaries, encyclopedias and the like. Huge literary anthologies were also printed. The works produced were distributed to government agencies and members of the Imperial Household, or they might be bestowed by the Emperor as a gift on meritorious high officials. Private publishers produced books to which they personally had taken a fancy and which they wished to make accessible to a wider public; we are indebted to them for many of the finest *ts'ung-shu* (collectanea) and many editions of scholarly and

⁸¹) My main sources on the history of printing and the development of book-production are the studies by K. T. Wu, "The Development of Printing in China", *T'ien-hsia Monthly*, III (1936), pp. 137-160; "Ming Printing and Printers", *HJAS* VII (1942-1943), pp. 203-260; and "Chinese Printing under Four Alien Dynasties (916-1368 A.D.)", *HJAS* XIII (1950), pp. 447-528.

literary works that would otherwise have been lost. Friends or descendants might also put up the money to have someone's writings published. Both the central government and private individuals had religious literature printed as an act of piety. A precise line cannot always be drawn between active private publishers and commercial firms. The commercial firms published whatever the market would take, but first of all such useful works as cheap editions of schoolprimers, the Four Books and the Five Classics, rhyming dictionaries and other "study aids", collections of examination essays, shorter versions of the bulky historical works, etc. In general, the government and private editions that were not produced for the market were known for their quality. The work of most commercial firms was very sharply calculated, but it would be wrong to consider the quality of government and private editions as the standard, and to call all simpler editions popular.

Few figures are known, it seems, concerning the size of editions. They could be large; 16,000 prints could be had from one block, and after recutting, another 10,000 more ⁸²). Figures of the known size of some government editions suggest, however, that such figures were attained only rarely. The largest known government edition during the Sung numbered 3000 copies, two printings of a practical handbook on agriculture to be distributed to all districts, each numbering 1500 copies ⁸³). When, during the Yüan the dynastic histories of the preceding Sung, Liao and Chin dynasties were printed, the original edition numbered 100 copies ⁸⁴). And in the 18th century, the number of copies printed of the huge encyclopedia *T'u-shu chi-ch'eng* 圖書集成 was the same: a later edition of this work in the 19th century numbered 250 copies ⁸⁵).

⁸²) S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom* 2 vols., New York 1883, p. 602.

⁸³) M. Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, London 1973, p. 180.

⁸⁴) K. T. Wu, "Chinese Printing under Four Alien Dynasties (916-1368 A.D.)", *HJAS* XIII (1950), p. 497.

⁸⁵) Lionel Giles comp., *An Alphabetical Index to the Chinese Encyclopedia Ch'in t'ing ku chin t'u shu chi ch'eng*, London 1911, pp. XVII-XVIII.

When a copy of the original edition came on the secondhand market, it fetched the formidable price of 3,000 ounces of silver, see *P'in-hua pao-chien* 品花寶鑑, ch. 45.

K. T. Wu, "Ming Printing and Printers", *HJAS* VII (1942-1943), p. 221 quotes a more authoritative source to the effect that the first edition of the *T'u-shu chi-ch'eng* ran to only 66 copies; he also states that the edition ordered by the Tsungli yamen numbered 100 copies.

These figures may be very low, but there is little to indicate that private editions were as a rule much larger. The *P'in-hua pao-chien* 品花寶鑑⁸⁶) from the middle of the 19th century, which describes fashionable life in Peking around 1800 and the pleasures of the theatre, contains in chapter 31 a passage relating how a friend of a recently died *sheng-yüan* puts up 60 *tael* of silver to have this man's writings, amounting to two small volumes, printed in 100 copies. A private/commercial edition of the large Sung encyclopedia *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽, preface dated 1574, has a notice "over one hundred copies printed, by copper movable type" ⁸⁷). The rationale was, of course, that more copies could always be made if the blocks were kept. But blocks could also easily be mislaid, lost or damaged, and in the case of the government blocks, one reads regularly of damaged sets and fines imposed on those responsible ⁸⁸). The most notable exception to this rule of limited editions would be the freely distributed religious tracts ⁸⁹).

I have seen no figures on the size of editions of commercial firms. I think we may assume that the blocks were worked to the utmost in the case of readily sold works, like basic schoolbooks and almanacs. In other cases, I doubt that many editions numbered more than a few thousand copies. The continued use of the xylographic process, instead of the wider adaptation of printing by movable type has been explained by the generally small scale of the commercial editions. "Movable-type printing . . . was not widely employed in China immediately after it was invented . . . 'If one were to print only one or two copies' said Shen Kua (1032-1096) in appraising this method, 'it would be neither simple nor convenient, but for printing hundreds or thousands of copies it is amazingly quick'. In feudal society, reading was the privilege of a few. The demand for one particular book in a given period was almost always

⁸⁶) The edition of the *P'in-hua pao-chien* 品花寶鑑 by Ch'en Sen 陳森 which I have used is an undated woodblock edition in the library of the Jinbunkagaku kenkyūjo in Kyoto. I have also consulted a modern edition, *P'in-hua pao-chien*, in four volumes, Shanghai 1935.

⁸⁷) K. T. Wu, "Ming Printing and Printers", *HJAS* VII (1942-1943), p. 220.

⁸⁸) K. T. Wu, "Ming Printing and Printers", *HJAS* VII (1942-1943), p. 226.

⁸⁹) D. Hawkes transl., *The Story of the Stone, A Chinese Novel by Cao Xueqin in Five Volumes. Vol. I Golden Days*, Hammondsworth 1973, chapter 11, p. 231, where an older Taoist-inclined member of the Chia clan distributes 10,000 copies of a tract on the occasion of his birthday.

limited, and circulation was slow. If thousands of copies were printed, years would pass before they were sold out" ⁹⁰). Another indication of the fact that the bookmarket was far from a modern development, is the fact that manuscripts continued to play an important role in cultural life all through these centuries, as epitomized by the *Yung-lo ta-tien* and the 18th century *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* 四庫全書, both attempts to bring together everything important ever written, and both reproduced only in manuscript. If under such circumstances some book would see a number of editions within a given period of time, say a century, the total number of copies would still be only a few ten thousands at the most and the highly literate public large enough to absorb them. Such a book might be called popular in comparison to other works, but it could not be called popular in the sense of being known to a large number of members of the literate population in all its diversity. A work should have passed through quite a number of editions before one could call it popular even in proportion merely to the fully literate public of the Kiangnan area.

Not only is the size of an edition important for gauging the possible public of an edition, but one should also know the price of the individual copies, and such prices must then be seen in relation to the income of the different segments of the literate public. Again, there are but few reliable data to work on, but as of approximately 1600 the price of a novel, the *Feng-shen yen-i* in this case, could be 2 ounces (*tael*) of silver, and a schoolteacher in the 18th century could still be hired for a year for the same amount of money (see the second chapter of the *Ju-lin wai-shih*) ⁹¹), despite the influx of silver since the first date, it is clear that books as such were expensive. It has recently been shown that from T'ang to Ming times the price of a printed book was in general one tenth of the price of a handwritten copy ⁹²), which brings out clearly the limitations of the traditional printing process in the general diffusion of

⁹⁰) Liu Kuo-chun, *Story of the Chinese book*, Peking 1958, pp. 59-60.

The same work notes (p. 81) that during the republican period editions of 2,000 copies were still considered fairly large.

⁹¹) This is of course an exceptionally small amount. Even so, the prices of books were high in comparison to incomes, except for those who held office. For the income of the gentry in the 19th century see Chang Chung-li, *The Income of the Chinese Gentry*, Seattle 1962.

⁹²) Weng T'ung-wen 翁同文, "Yin-shua-shu tui-yü shu-chi ch'eng-pen ti ying-hsiang" 印刷術對於書籍成本的影響, in *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, VI (1967), pp. 35-43.

books. The 19th century observers all note that books were cheap (from their point of view) but note at the same time that very few people were in the habit of buying books. In the words of one of them: "in a country where printing was invented, books are a luxury of the rich" ⁹³).

Under these circumstances book collection became very much like the collecting of art. Books were prized possessions; good private libraries were rare and gave their owners a decided benefit in the competition for higher examination degrees and the associated official functions ⁹⁴). Public libraries were even more rare, and more often nonexistent, and private families were very reluctant to let outsiders use their books. Arthur Smith, whom I have quoted before, noted that in some Shantung district only one family owned a set of the Dynastic Histories "which one could nomore 'borrow', than he could borrow the family graveyard" ⁹⁵). Only the *shu-yüan* presented library facilities to their students, a few even being known for the quality of their collections, but again, the total number of

⁹³) A. H. Smith, *Village Life in China, A Study in Sociology*, Edinburgh 1899, p. 96. Prices are mentioned in S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom*, New York 1883, vol. I, p. 602: "The price varies from one cent—for a brochure of twenty-five or thirty pages—to a dollar and a half a volume. A volume rarely contains more than a hundred leaves At Canton or Fuhchau, the *History of the Three States* (probably the novel *W.I.*), bound in twenty-one volumes of 12-mo, printed on white paper, is usually sold for 75 cents or a dollar per set. Kanghi's dictionary, in twenty-one volumes 8vo, on yellow paper, sells for four dollars; and all the nine classics can be purchased for less than two . . ." (The value of the silver dollar was about 70 per cent of the *tael*, see H. B. Morse, *The Trade and Administration of China*, London (1908) 1921³, p. 187).

⁹⁴) Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China*, New York 1962, pp. 214-215:

"On the other hand, later reproductions of vast numbers of specialized and expensive works, which were beyond the reach of the poor, would seem rather to help the well to do to achieve higher scholastic standards. In the early sixteenth century when printing facilities began to expand, the unusually observant scholar and retired official Lu Yung already deplored that poor studious scholars and people outside large urban centers had little means of getting hold of more specialized and expensive works. . . . But the coincidence that soon after the rise of great private libraries in the sixteenth century men of humble circumstances found it increasingly hard to compete successfully against members of official families in higher examinations is worth observing".

⁹⁵) A. H. Smith, *Village Life in China, A Study in Sociology*, Edinburgh 1899, p. 99. At the same place he also notes that the Dynastic Histories are "enormously expensive in price".

shu-yüan was very small even in proportion to the literate population, and heavily concentrated in some areas (like the Kiangnan area). If this was still the situation in later centuries, one can only assume that books must have been still more scarce in the first centuries after the invention of printing, during the Sung and Yüan dynasties.

Perhaps I have overstressed the relative rarity of books in pre-modern China. The sketchy outlines I have ventured to draw, on the basis of a perfunctory reading of some of the studies that first come to mind, are supported, however, by the general impression gained during the reading of the many novels that describe social life in pre-modern China from the late 16th century onwards, down to the minutest detail ⁹⁶). The study of books in preparation for the state examinations plays a predominant role, but reading for pleasure is rarely mentioned. The *sheng-yüan* may have had many different functions in many different places and periods, but he was only rarely a wine-sipping, book-browsing, rather formal country-gentlemen.

If we now direct our attention again to vernacular fiction in traditional China, we find that, in the case of the literary novel, many works often circulated for a long time in manuscript among friends of the author and lovers of fiction who had their private copies made, before the work appeared in print. In some cases, friends of the author put up the money to have a novel published privately (e.g. the *Nü-hsien wai-shih*). Occasionally, an author/compiler was rich enough to finance the publication of his own work, like e.g. Ch'u Jen-huo 褚人穫, the late 17th century lover of colloquial fiction and author of the *Sui T'ang yen-i* 隋唐演義, who also brought out a fine edition of the *Feng-shen yen-i*; and the slightly earlier Li Yü 李漁 (1611-1680) who was active as a publisher and author of colloquial fiction, apart from his many other activities.

In other cases the novels and short stories were brought out by the finest commercial firms of the moment. The get-up of the literary

⁹⁶) The works I have in mind are titles like the *Chin-P'ing-Mei*, *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*, *Yeh-sou p'u-yen* 野叟曝言 (first half 18th century), *Lü-yeh hsien-tsung* 綠野仙踪 (middle of the 18th century), *Ju-lin wai-shih*, *Lin-Lan-Hsiang* 林蘭香 (18th century or slightly later), *Hua-yüeh hen* 花月痕 (± 1850), *P'in-hua pao-chien* (± 1850), *Erh-nü ying-hsiung chuan* 兒女英雄傳 (± 1850) and the many collections of short stories from the 17th century onwards. These works all belong to the literary novels. The *Hung-lou meng* could also be included, but its subject matter is a very exceptional family.

novels is often quite lavish. Not unfrequently there is a wealth of superbly executed illustrations; the text of the novel may be accompanied by prefaces, principles of composition (*fan-li* 凡例), related materials (*wen-yen* sources, in full), and commentaries. Quite often the edition is large in size, and the type is bold, clear, and nicely cut; editions using two colours of ink also occur. There can be no doubt that such editions were costly deluxe publications, intended for a well educated, high-class public. Probably the literary novel and short story in general had only a very small circulation until the last quarter of the 19th century. Only in the case of a small number of very popular works in this category, the *San-kuo chih yen-i*, *Shui-hu chuan*, *Hung-lou meng*, *Chin-ku ch'i-kuan* 今古奇觀 (a very popular selection of short stories from the collections by Feng Meng-lung and Ling Meng-ch'u), do we find cheaper editions, but their public was probably still restricted because the price, one silver dollar or slightly less for the *San-kuo chih yen-i*, must still have been prohibitive to most possible readers.

In the case of the works belonging to the chapbook tradition, the situation is different. Nothing is known about manuscripts; we have only the commercial editions. Badly cut characters crowd the pages, and there are few extra materials, mostly no more than a two-page preface. Illustrations are few; in technique and execution they greatly resemble the popular Newyear-prints. The quality of the printing often shows that the blocks had become worn out. As I am anything but an expert bibliographer, I shall not venture too far into this subject; still, to my untrained eye it would appear that in the main, at least from about 1600 onwards, the distinction between the literary novel and the chapbook finds its parallel in the manner of publication and execution, the chapbook being aimed at the moderately literate, and probably also at the fully literate, public after having been adapted to their purchasing power. There remains the problem of the nicely executed but simply written works of the first three quarters of the 16th century, which I think might have been designed for some of the not very highly-literate groups within the social elite.

As the social novels provide little material on reading in general, they provide still less material on the diffusion and the reading public of the different classes of fiction. The anonymous author of the *Shih tien t'ou* 石點頭 remarks: "It has always been the case that, when scholars have finished their main studies for the day, some of them in their spare time will practise calligraphy; some of

them will study the painting of some old trees, bamboos and rocks; some of them will study the composition of verses and songs; and even the least intelligent will read some light literature (*hsien-shu* 閒書) and *tsa-chü* plays" 97). Probably the "light literature" would also include vernacular fiction. Most authors and commentators of literary fiction show implicitly and explicitly they have read the main works in that tradition, and we would not expect otherwise. From time to time characters in the novels also discuss characters occurring in other novels and stories. But often when some character from fiction is mentioned, one cannot be sure whether this knowledge was derived from fiction, or from some other source, like the theatre.

I have only noted a few cases in which the possession of a specific work of fiction by a specific person is mentioned in novels. These cases are too few to be representative and are also rather late, it may be possible to find more cases; but they concur with my other findings and I would like to introduce them. In the *Yeh-sou p'u-yen* 野叟曝言 (18th century), chapter 31, the son of a minister of war tries to seduce another man's concubine who has taken refuge with one of the families living in his mansion. He had put in her room "a copy of the *Hao-ch'iu chuan* 好逑傳 clearly printed on white paper; the illustrations at the beginning were extremely refined". His attempts fail 98). The *Hao-ch'iu chuan*, the best-known example of the *chia-jen ts'ai-tzu hsiao-shuo* 佳人才子小說, the love-romances that started to flourish in the second half of the 17th century 99), is a

97) The *Shih tien t'ou* 石點頭 is a collection of *hua-pen* by an anonymous author, with a preface by Feng Meng-lung dated 1620. The edition I have used is the original woodblock edition by Yeh Ching-ch'ih 葉敬池, in the library of the Jinbunkagaku-kenkyūjo in Kyoto. The quoted remark appears in chüan 14, p. 10^a. As the *hua-pen* concerned deals with a homosexual love-affair between two young students in a monastery which serves as a school, it is omitted in the modern edition, (T'ien-jan ch'ih-sou 天然痴叟 *Shih tien t'ou* 石點頭, Shanghai 1957).

98) The *Yeh-sou p'u-yen* 野叟曝言 was written by Hsia Ching-chü 夏敬渠, hao Erh-ming 二名 (1705-1787), a living encyclopedia, whose talents were recognized by a number of high-ranking persons, but who never attained an official post. His novel touches on every branch of learning, and his Confucian fervor and knowledge of the Chinese writings of the Jesuits, made him envision the Confucianization of Portugal and Spain! The novel may not always be good literature, but it makes interesting reading. The first edition dates from 1881; the edition I have used is Hsia Ching-chü, *Yeh-sou p'u-yen* 2 vols., Taipei 1962.

99) The *chia-jen ts'ai-tzu hsiao-shuo* belong to literary fiction. One of the

short novel by Chinese standards, yet this passage would seem to indicate that nice editions of it were only to be found in very wealthy hands. Another example concerning literary fiction is to be found in Wu Chien-jen's 吳研人 *Chiu-ming ch'i-yüan* 九命奇冤 (± 1905). In chapter 20 of this novel the district magistrate Huang, a self-righteous puritan, reproves his good-for-nothing brother-in-law Yin Ch'eng with the following words: "I advise you to keep somewhat more quiet. Practice your calligraphy in your study and read a few books. And if you can't understand serious books, read some novels! Those might quiet you down". Yin Ch'eng says: "Brother-in-law, you're the one to blame me for not reading books! That large-sized *Chin-P'ing-Mei* I brought along last time from home, you took away and burned!"¹⁰⁰). Again we find the literary novel in a milieu of officials.

As for the novel in the chapbook tradition, I would like to point out a passage in the *Erh-nü ying-hsiung chuan* by Wen K'ang 文康, a Manchu of a distinguished family who occupied a number of official posts in the Hsien-feng period 1851-1861. In chapter 39 An Hsüeh-hai, a retired scholarly Manchu official comes to stay for a while with Teng Chiu-kung. Teng Chiu-kung is a good-hearted boisterous country squire who has made his fortune as an armed escort and now lives quietly on his estates. He has helped out the Ans on an earlier occasion and has stayed a while with them in their home near Peking. When An Hsüeh-hai sees the room the Teng's have prepared for him, he finds: "In front of the window they had also installed a writing table. On it they had placed some ink and inkstones. The most astonishing thing was that in this old man's house they even managed to have books! On the table they had also put some books for him. When his lordship (An Hsüeh-hai W.I.) took a look, they turned out to be a *San-kuo chih yen-i*, a *Shui-hu*

earliest and finest examples of this specific subgenre, the *P'ing-Shan-Leng-Yen* 平山冷燕 even carries a commentary by a brother of the K'ang-hsi emperor! Some of the best examples have a light-footed charm that may be compared to the comedies of Marivaux, and they were among the first examples of Chinese literature to be translated into Western languages. In modern times they have met little appreciation; the author of the most intensive treatment of this subject, Kuo Ch'ang-ho 郭昌鶴, in his "Chia-jen ts'ai-tzu hsiao-shuo yen-chiu", *Wen-hsüeh chi-k'an* 文學季刊 1 (Jan. 1934), pp. 194-215, 2 (April 1934) pp. 302-323, states his object to be "to bury this subject forever".

¹⁰⁰) Edition used Wu Chien-jen 吳研人, *Chiu-ming ch'i-yüan* 九命奇冤, Hong Kong, Kuang-chih shu-chü 廣智書局, n.d.

chuan, a *Lü-mu-tan* 綠牡丹. There were also the recently published *Shih kung-an* and *Yü kung-an* 于公案¹⁰¹). Of the works mentioned here only the *Lü-mu-tan* and *Yü-kung an* have not been mentioned before. They both date from ± 1800 , and belong to the *wu-hsia hsiao-shuo*. Teng Chiu-kung is perhaps a fair example of a well-to-do, moderately literate reader and his literary preferences.

The above remarks on the extent of literacy and the spread of books do not aspire to completeness. I have added them, however, to point out the size of the problem and to show how little is yet known about it, especially in quantitative terms. These remarks are indispensable also because one's assumptions concerning these matters very heavily influence one's conceptions about the role and diffusion of fiction in traditional Chinese society. The prevailing uncertainty in these matters means that any view on the origin and role of Chinese colloquial fiction can only be advanced with diffidence.

¹⁰¹) The earliest edition of the *Erh-nü ying-hsiung chuan* dates from 1878. The edition I have used is Wen K'ang 文康, *Cheng-hsü Erh-nü ying-hsiung chuan* 正續兒女英雄傳, Hongkong, Kuang-chih shu-chü 廣智書局, n.d.