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The Re-institutionalisation of Popular Fiction – the Internet and a New Model of Popular Fiction Prosumption in China

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Abstract

The rising popularity of internet literature is closely associated with a new model of production and consumption of popular literary works as the internet has become the platform for the new model. Acknowledging this transformation, this paper aims at examining various changes in a digital Chinese literary field rendered by the internet. By adopting Bourdieu's notion of the literary field, this paper attempts to analyse the rise of the new digital literary field in China using Qidian Zhongwen Wang as a case study. The example of this most commercially successful literary portal website demonstrates the shift in the roles of various agents in an online literary field.

Keywords: *China, Internet Literature, Literary Field, Popular Literature, Prosumption*

Popular Literature from Mass Media to Social Media: the Notion of the Prosumption of Literature

Part of the production and consumption of popular literature has today moved from mass media (printed works) to social media (the internet). Whereas one major attribute of the mass media is regarded as being “[...] a unidirectional relationship between a few trained professional media producers and many untrained media consumers [...]” (Mandiberg, 2012: 1), social media reconfigure this into a multi-directional relationship flowing around producers and consumers. The boundary between producers and consumers has become blurred owing to the fact that consumers can now

produce and disseminate their own media contents. This profound change in the model of production and consumption is rendered into a model of 'prosumption', where production and consumption can be easily crossed over, or merged into one. This allows participants who used to be conventionally confined to the role of 'consumers' a chance to produce and publicise pieces of work of their own.

The notion of prosumption was initially proposed by Toffler (1981). He argued that prosumption was nothing new in a pre-industrialised society as people always produced the food they consumed. It was the Industrial Revolution that brought about a division between the notions of production and consumption. Since the advent of the internet, the tendency towards prosumption has been growing. Tapscott and Williams (2008: 127) defined the digital economy as "a new model of prosumption, where customers participate in the production of products in an active and ongoing way". Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) theorised prosumption following in Baudrillard's footsteps by linking the notion with capitalism, stating that online prosumption leads to a new form of capitalism in today's world. They argued that the earlier form of capitalism, of which producer and consumer capitalism were the main constituents, was characterised by prosumption. With the easy accessibility of the internet, prosumption capitalism will be the main trend. Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson (2012) revisited their previous argument that prosumption capitalism was a primordial idea and further extended the notion of prosumption, indicating that prosumption has great significance and diversity in the present day, with people spending their everyday lives as users. The notion of prosumption not only refers to the possibility of consumers changing their roles to become producers because of the participatory culture created by the internet, but also indicates customers' active participation – suggestion, feedback or criticism – being integrated into the process of production. The extensively practised notion of prosumption can be best exemplified by the online streaming video site YouTube and the social media of Facebook. Users produce and upload their works for sharing, while other users offer various types of feedback on and insights into the product. They both provide a platform on which amateurs can produce and share their media contents as general users.

Interestingly, the notion of prosumption has not been widely applied to the study of popular literature even though it has already infiltrated the realm of

popular literature. Because of the internet, the prosumption of popular literature is a global phenomenon. Fanfiction.net, based in North America and claiming to be the largest fan fiction site in the world, set up a literary sphere where netizens can post their literary works by appropriating their favourite characters from mass-media contexts (such as the recent vampire phenomenon *Twilight Saga* series or the Japanese anime *Naruto*). Each piece of work comes with plenty of feedback and suggestions from readers. By doing this, netizens share their amateur creations with other fans. On Amazon, a new notion of 'CreateSpace' is provided for self-publication. Users can register an account, beginning their journey of publication to target potential readership for a royalty fee. In Japan, mobile phone users are encouraged to participate in the creation of *keitai shousetsu* (mobile phone fiction) by uploading their works to a designated server for public sharing over mobile phones as the platform (Erban 2009).

In China, the notion of the prosumption of popular literature is also widely practised, as more netizens engage in producing and sharing their own literary works, while others are enthusiastic about giving feedback and suggestions about those literary works. Being the world's largest wired nation, the number of netizens in China who participate in internet literature has reached 248.37 million, and internet literature was the eleventh most popular online activity up to June 2013 (CNNIC, 2013: 28). The prosumption of popular literature has been commercially institutionalised, leading to a rather exclusive Chinese online commercial model for the prosumption of popular literature. In this article, I shall attempt to examine the new commercial model of the online prosumption of popular fiction in China. Using Qidian Zhongwen Wang (Qidian Chinese Net), arguably the most popular literary portal website in China,¹ as a case study, I shall examine the notion of agents and institutions – two crucial elements in Bourdieu's literary field – to reveal the way in which and the extent to which overall literary practice on the internet has been reconfigured. The core of the examination will be the notion of literary text. Whereas in a paper-based publishing business authors, editors, publishers and printers are directly involved in the production of a literary text, with booksellers and readers placed at the receiving end as the end-users, in the new model authors and readers have been centralised into the heart of the production of

¹ Qidian indicates that their current market penetration rate in China has reached 80%. <<http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/default.html>> [Last accessed: 13 August 2013].

a literary text, with publishers, editors and printers edged out and decentralised. Booksellers, now playing a minimal role in terms of significance in distributing literary commodities, remain as receivers at the end of the line. The centralisation of authorship and readership into the core of production and the decentralisation of other agents and institutions will be discussed consecutively in the following sections.¹

The notion of prosumption has been previously explicated as consumers producing products and also offering feedback and suggestions which are to be incorporated in the process of production. In this article, however, I shall use the term 'user' rather than 'prosumer' to refer to general netizens who are engaged in popular internet literature, because the implication of a user in an online context usually includes prosumption behaviour to a certain extent. Any user is given access to the potential of full prosumption; however, there are some who choose to practise the notion of prosumption to a lesser extent whereas others prefer to put it into practice to the fullest. There are also users who are not at all interested in active participation in production. For this reason, I have decided to use the term 'user' in the following text to include various groups of users who practise prosumption to different extents. In addition, when I use the terms 'prosumption' or 'prosumerism', I do not intend to go so far as to claim that the notion of prosumption is being practised to its fullest extent. Many online readers still play the role of a traditional reader – they neither intend to become authors nor do they demonstrate proactivity towards the production process. Nonetheless, I prefer to use the terms 'prosumption' and 'prosumerism' to show the potential, possibility and relative ease of a user practising the notion owing to the existence of the internet, which forms a sharp contrast to printed literature, where production and consumption are not so easily interchangeable.

¹ As previously mentioned, prosumption is a global phenomenon. However, this paper will focus on the prosumption of popular literature in China. While I recognise the significance of a comparison between different prosumption models of popular literature across the globe, a comparative study would divert the focus of this paper. By choosing Qidian as a case study, I aim to analyse the prosumption model of popular literature in present-day China. Arguably, there are a number of similar portal websites. However, Qidian is the most commercially successful of its kind and holds the largest number of works. Therefore, I believe that Qidian best reflects the prosumption model of popular literature in today's China.

Bourdieu and the Literary Field

Bourdieu's literary field has been widely examined and discussed in Western academia. His notion of field, much of which was inherited from Marxism, with power struggle being a key element, refers to a system that is internally structured by social agents, their position, and their position-taking in relation to power. It was defined by Dubois (2000: 89) as "[...] a structured site of relations as well as a dynamic competitive space, and this structuralization generates an ensemble of interdependently related positions [...]". Seeing fields as areas where struggle to control valuable resources takes place, Bourdieu believes that no position within a field is equal to another, and that various dominant and subordinate positions come with different types and amounts of capital. Thus, in a field, the aim of position-taking, which is a struggle for positions, is to acquire different types and amounts of capital, such as economic, political or symbolic capital, possessed by the field. The fact that social agents intend to control the capital objectifies the competitive struggles in a field where each type of capital is being pursued.

Bourdieu bases his discussion of the literary field on the nineteenth-century French literary field, dividing writers into two groups: best-selling writers and autonomous writers. Whereas the former group gained commercial success (economic capital) with relatively less symbolic capital, the latter group tended to seek recognition by their peers, rather than commercial success, for the wider acceptance of their works. In this regard, the latter group did not have much economic capital but they received, relatively speaking, much more symbolic capital. Bourdieu's initial notion of various types of capital applying to writers in a literary field can arguably be applied when examining various literary agents. All literary agents – be they authors, publishers, editors or readers – are going along a similar path. Having once assumed the position of a literary agent, an individual, a group or an institution is given access to capital of different kinds. For example, a best-selling author, such as Dan Brown, can have access to substantial economic capital. A prestigious publishing house, such as Cambridge University Press, can gain significant symbolic capital. The general readership does not attract much capital. Because of the different forms of capital, various literary agents are vying for various types of capital to establish their power in the field.

From a Printed Literary Field to an Online Literary Field

In Western European countries, a printed literary field can be divided into material production (authors, literary agents, publishers), distribution (bookshops, book clubs, public libraries) and reception (symbolic production such as criticism, the reading public) (Hocks, 1999: 17). In Republican China, authors, most of whom came from well-educated backgrounds, assumed multiple roles in the material production by taking up different positions, whereas the reading public was placed at the receiving end without getting involved in either material or symbolic production (*ibid.*: 61-78). After 1949, the literary field in China was somewhat less market-driven. Instead, it was more policy-driven and state-dominated. In the context of the literary field in Communist China, where state-run publication was the norm, playing a role in the material and symbolic production process involved conforming to the notion of political and ideological correctness. Market-driven popular literature was to a great extent pushed to the margins.

In the sphere of contemporary online Chinese popular literature, where authors and readers possess unprecedented autonomy,² Bourdieu's literary field is restructured to reflect the new online literary phenomenon, in the sense that agents and institutions have been repositioned. While Bourdieu emphasises the symbolic capital in a literary field, describing "[...] the literary world as 'the economic world reversed' and symbolic capital [...] as the opposite of economic capital" (Hockx, 2011: 59), Hockx (*ibid.*: 60) argues that "[o]ne aspect of Bourdieu's reversed economy never gained ground in modern China", since the notion of receiving "[...] greater recognition (symbolic capital) is alien to the modern Chinese writer" because "[v]irtually all modern Chinese writers write fast and publish much. Distinction is achieved through frequent interaction with the readership". In other words, the popular literary works produced and consumed for the mass and by the mass in the Chinese online sphere are largely market-driven.

With the internet serving as the platform for the production and consumption of literary commodities, the power dynamics among the various literary agents have undergone several major and dramatic changes. In terms of material production, authors can publish almost anything online without

² The unprecedented autonomy does not mean that it is censor-free. China is well known for its heavy censorship online. The term 'autonomy' is used in a relative sense as a contrast to the previously state-controlled publications in China before the 1980s (Hockx, 2011: 58-62).

consulting editors. Editors have been disempowered, since they hardly have any say on the formation of a literary commodity. On the other hand, readers have a direct impact on this formation as a result of their symbolic production, such as feedback and suggestions. Readers' suggestions and feedback can, to a certain extent, dictate the formation of a literary commodity when it is presented online in a serialised form. Moreover, readers can assume the position of an author much more easily than they could during the Republican and Communist eras in a printed literary field. As for distribution, institutions such as bookshops and libraries are facing the challenge of competing with the convenience of reading online or on a portable device such as a tablet PC or an e-reader. As far as reception is concerned, readers are given equal access to resources in an online literary field only if they are willing to write and publish in a designated virtual space. In other words, authors and readers have been centralised as the core of prosumption, whereas other agents and institutions have been decentralised to the periphery of the formation of a literary commodity.

In the case of Qidian Zhongwen Wang (Qidian Chinese Net; hereafter Qidian),³ the above-mentioned features demonstrating the centralisation and the decentralisation are clearly visible. Those features will be elaborated and illustrated in the following sections. It is true that applying Bourdieu's notion of the literary field to the exploration of modern Chinese literature does cause debates.⁴ Nonetheless, I shall still use Bourdieu as the theoretical framework for this paper because the notion of a literary field helps in addressing the drastic change in the Chinese online literary sphere for popular literature.

Qidian Zhongwen Wang: a New Model of Prosumption of Literary Commodities in China

Qidian is a fully-fledged and frequently replicated commercial model that has emerged in China to encourage the prosumption of popular literature.⁵ Qidian

³ The homepage is <www.qidian.com>.

⁴ Some scholars of modern Chinese literature express their doubts about the extent to which Bourdieu's notion can be applied to modern Chinese literature. See Lee (2001) and Liu (2003).

⁵ At <<http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/default.html>>, Qidian specifies that they have 200,000 contracted authors, with more than 30 million registered members [Last accessed: 31 August 2013]. Looking at the proportion of authors to readers, the notion of prosumption is not that obvious. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasise the fact that when the notion of

has several allied websites (such as Yanqing Xiaoshuo Ba [Romance Fiction Bar], Hongxiu Tianxian [Perfumed Red Sleeves] and Xiaoshuo Yuedu Wang (Read Novel Net), all together taking a large market share of internet literature. Qidian commenced in 2001 as a small-scale fan club sharing works of fantasy fiction, and is now run by an international enterprise called Shengda Zaixian (Shanda Online, hereafter Shanda) based in Shanghai.⁶ All of Qidian's allied websites are heavily popular-literature-oriented. In this regard, the mass readership is Qidian's target group.

Initially, when it started as a fantasy fiction fan club, Qidian mainly attracted a young male readership. In November 2009, Qidian launched a new literary portal website, Qidian Nüsheng Wang (Qidian Female Net), on popular romance, mainly targeting a young female readership.⁷ In November 2010, Qidian launched another new portal website known as Qidian Wenxue Wang (Qidian Literary Net), with the specific intention of encouraging more serious literary works.⁸ On these websites, users are provided with multi-functional, interactive services to make prosumption relatively easy (see Illustration 1). The model has generated an unbeatable profit, with many other literary portal websites becoming their allied partners.⁹

Illustration 1: Homepage of Qidian Chinese Net (*at the top is a list of interactive functions; slightly lower down is a list of fiction genres*)

'prosumption' is used, I intend to point more to the potential and possibility of users performing prosumption than to their actual performance.

⁶ See <<http://www.qidian.com/HelpCenter/default.aspx?type=0&categoryid=28&id=32>> [Last accessed: 09 March 2013].

⁷ <<http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/aboutus.aspx>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013]. Qidian Female Net was formerly a channel affiliated to Qidian. However, owing to its massive popularity among female readers, the Qidian female channel was upgraded into a literary portal website in its own right.

⁸ This is an interesting concept that Qidian intends to incorporate, because by using the phrase *wenxue* (literature), Qidian seems to imply that they know that the works of fiction they carry are far from being regarded as real literary works. It seems that the most obvious difference between works on Qidian Zhongwen Wang and Qidian Wenxue Wang is that the former are more fantasy-oriented, whereas the latter are more realism-oriented. See: <<http://www.qidian.com/News/ShowNews.aspx?newsid=1016883>> [Last accessed: 02 Sept. 2013].

⁹ For the list of the websites, please see the bottom of the page at <<http://www.qidian.com/Default.aspx>> [Last accessed: 02 Sept. 2013].



The image shows the main content area of the website. It includes a sidebar on the left with "本周强推" (This Week's Highlights) and "月票排行榜" (Monthly Vote Ranking). The central area features a large article titled "三江专题之从原始到未来" (Three Rivers Special: From Original to Future). The right sidebar contains "白金作品" (Platinum Works) with two featured items: "遮天" (Zhe Tian) and "御衣夜行" (Yi Yi Ye Xing).

Screenshot Taken on 9 Sept. 2012

The Repositioning of Agents in the Online Chinese Literary Sphere: the Centralisation of Users to the Core of Text Production and the Decentralisation of Mediators

*Users: A Virtual Space of One's Own*¹⁰

Qidian, as well as many other literary portal websites (or weblogs), offers a space for users to create and publish their works of fiction. The gradually disappearing borderline between authorship and readership leads to the rise of users who assume various roles in the core production process. Internet users put the notion of prosumption into practice to different extents, and it cannot be denied that they include 'passive' users who only browse and read. For the purposes of this discussion, I shall analyse the different roles assumed by users from the basic notion of authorship and readership to show the way in which they integrate into the core of production, and the extent to which authors and readers overlap, leading to prosumption, because of the existence of the internet. However, with regard to the use of the terms 'author', 'reader' and 'member' in the following text, I would like to emphasise that these three terms are used in a context where the practice of prosumption is becoming the norm and where the borderline between authorship and readership is becoming blurred.

*From Online Users to Users in a Virtual Literary Sphere - (Active) Readership*¹¹

In a commercial printing market, readers are seen as a major source of profit; luring readers to pay for the literary products is therefore strongly encouraged. Nonetheless, readers in the online literary Chinese cyberspace are also given unprecedented opportunities to be involved in editorship and marketing, enabling them to interact with authors, literary texts and other readers. If a

¹⁰ The following analysis of what functions a user can perform and the extent to which they can perform various functions on Qidian is based on my own experience as a registered member.

¹¹ There are readers who do nothing else but consume literary works online. Therefore, I intend to divide readers into 'passive readers' and 'active readers'. Active readership refers to those who are active in fully exploring the interactive features on Qidian, because the right to use some of the important interactive features is not simply given out to any reader; it has to be 'earned'. The 'earning' process will be elucidated later in the article. In this article, whenever the terms 'readers' or 'readership' are used, they refer to the notion of active readers/readership unless indicated otherwise.

reader is deeply interested in being an author, he/she can simply apply to become one with Qidian¹² in order to engage in prosumption to a greater extent.

In terms of profit-generation, Qidian has designed a new pay-to-read scheme so that readers can decide the extent to which they want to be involved in the consumption of various literary products. The relationship between the profit-generating target of Qidian and the potential of being a user on Qidian has become reciprocal, in the sense that the more actively a reader engages with the scheme, the greater the variety of functions he/she is able to access.

Someone visiting Qidian for the first time can choose any '*gongzhong zhangjie*' (public chapters, meaning non-VIP chapters; hereafter non-VIP chapters) to consume, but only for a limited number of chapters. If users are interested in consuming more chapters, they are encouraged to register an account for free with Qidian to receive general membership. General membership is the first step into using a number of interactive features, which helps to produce prosumption. The registered account is known as a '*Shengda tongxin zheng*' (Shanda Pass). With this pass, not only can a general member consume more non-VIP chapters for free, but he/she can also wander from Qidian to other literary portal websites affiliated to the Shengda Online enterprise to enjoy a service similar to that which they receive on Qidian.

Usually the first few volumes (each volume carries roughly ten to thirty chapters, but this is not always the case) of each work of fiction are labelled non-VIP chapters and they can be accessed for free by general members. Later volumes only become accessible when general members pay a specific rate per thousand words. They can obtain information on this by visiting a 'book cover section' (see Illustration 2). Not only can general members receive more information about a work of fiction, but they will also find a link on the 'book cover' page for a function called '*dianji yuedu*' (Click-to-Read), which will direct them to a Table of Contents, where they can get a clear idea of the chapters for which a reading fee applies (see Illustration 3).

Illustration 2: The 'Cover' of a Work of Fiction and the Interactive Functions for Readers

¹² The way in which readers move towards becoming authors will be discussed in the second part of the article.

The image shows a screenshot of a Chinese fiction website with several annotations. On the left, a vertical list of boxes contains labels for various UI elements: 'Click to Read', 'Add to my Virtual Bookshelf', 'Recommend this work', 'Download to read', 'Bonus chapters', 'Publish this work', 'Tip this work', and 'Buy the physical copy'. On the right, a box labeled 'Post my feedback on the work' points to a '我要评价' (I want to review) button. At the bottom, two boxes labeled 'Key words for this piece of work' and 'Latest news regarding this chapter' point to the synopsis and the '本书最新消息' (Latest news) section respectively. The website content includes the title '盘龙', author '我吃西红柿', a synopsis, and a list of updates with user avatars and names like '雨细喃喃' and '蓬莱'.

'Click to Read': the table of contents for the work of the fiction can be found here.

Add to my Virtual Bookshelf

Recommend this work

Download to read

Bonus chapters

Publish this work

Tip this work

Buy the physical copy

Post my feedback on the work

Cover of the work of fiction

Title of the work of fiction

Author

Synopsis

Different ways to download the work of fiction: iPhone version; iPad version; Android Version; Window 7 Version; Window 8 Version; 3G Mobile Version; HTML 5 Version

Key words for this piece of work

Latest news regarding this chapter

Illustration 3: Table of Contents of a Work of Fiction (using *Coiled Dragon* as an example):

The screenshot shows the Qidian website interface for the novel 'Panlong' (Coiled Dragon). The page is annotated with callouts explaining the structure of the work:

- Title:** *Panlong* (Coiled Dragon)
- Author's words:** about this work
- Volume 1: The Ring of the Coiled Dragon**
- Volume 2: The Growth**
- Volume 3: The Enchanted Animal Mountain**
- Volume 4: The Warrior of Dragon Blood**
- VIP Volume:** Subscribe to VIP chapter and become a VIP member of Qidian

The table of contents is organized into volumes and chapters:

- 作品相关 [分卷阅读]** (Total 34435 characters)
 - 汶川地震——母爱?
 - 《星辰变》简体出版了
 - 做好自己?
 - 王立群读《史记》<第一讲, 第...>
 - 《盘龙》自此跨入‘地狱卷’
 - 推荐新书?
 - 番茄的新书《九鼎记》上传了
 - 番茄新书《莽荒纪》进入高...
- 第一集 盘龙之戒 [分卷阅读]** (Total 71070 characters)
 - 第一章 小辮的早晨
 - 第五章 成长 (下)
 - 第九章 魔兽‘迅猛龙’ (下)
 - 第十三章 强者之心 (下)
 - 第十七章 灾难 (下)
 - 第二十一章 地系魔法 (下)
 - 第二章 龙血战士家族 (上)
 - 第六章 盘龙戒指 (上)
 - 第十章 火蛇之舞 (上)
 - 第十四章 天空中的战斗 (上)
 - 第十八章 盘龙之灵 (上)
 - 第二十二章 春去秋来 (上)
 - 第三章 龙血战士家族 (下)
 - 第七章 盘龙戒指 (下)
 - 第十一章 火蛇之舞 (下)
 - 第十五章 天空中的战斗 (下)
 - 第十九章 盘龙之灵 (下)
 - 第二十三章 春去秋来 (下)
 - 第四章 成长 (上)
 - 第八章 魔兽‘迅猛龙’ (上)
 - 第十二章 强者之心 (上)
 - 第十六章 灾难 (上)
 - 第二十章 地系魔法 (上)
- 第二集 成长 [分卷阅读]** (Total 73671 characters)
 - 第一章 魔兽‘影鼠’
 - 第五章 影鼠‘贝贝’ (上)
 - 第九章 魔法测试 (下)
 - 第十三章 天才集中地
 - 第十七章 学习生涯 (上)
 - 第二十一章 普鲁克斯会馆
 - 第二十五章 六年
 - 第二章 笨办法 (上)
 - 第六章 影鼠‘贝贝’ (下)
 - 第十章 《龙血密典》 (上)
 - 第十四章 1987四兄弟 (上)
 - 第十八章 学习生涯 (下)
 - 第二十二章 普鲁克斯会馆
 - 第三章 笨办法 (下)
 - 第七章 芬莱城
 - 第十一章 《龙血密典》 (下)
 - 第十五章 1987四兄弟 (下)
 - 第十九章 谁是第一? (上)
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- 第三集 魔兽山脉 [分卷阅读]** (Total 70747 characters)
 - 第一章 石雕作品 (上)
 - 第五章 价格 (下)
 - 第九章 魔兽山脉 (上)
 - 第十三章 危机 (上)
 - 第十七章 贝贝的实力 (上)
 - 第二十一章 迷雾山谷 (上)
 - 第二十五章 夜风中的紫色
 - 第二章 石雕作品 (下)
 - 第六章 邀请
 - 第十章 魔兽山脉 (下)
 - 第十四章 危机 (下)
 - 第十八章 贝贝的实力 (下)
 - 第二十二章 迷雾山谷 (下)
 - 第二十六章 夜风中的紫色
 - 第三章 碧水天堂的夜
 - 第七章 路途 (上)
 - 第十一章 群狼 (上)
 - 第十五章 残酷 (上)
 - 第十九章 黑色短刃 (上)
 - 第二十三章 叫艾丽斯的女孩
 - 第四章 价格 (上)
 - 第八章 路途 (下)
 - 第十二章 群狼 (下)
 - 第十六章 残酷 (下)
 - 第二十章 黑色短刃 (下)
 - 第二十四章 叫艾丽斯的女孩
- 第四集 龙血战士 [分卷阅读]** (Total 38195 characters)
 - 第一章 归乡 (上)
 - 第五章 冬天的玫瑰 (上)
 - 第九章 裂痕 (上)
 - 第十三章 十天十夜
 - 第二章 归乡 (下)
 - 第六章 冬天的玫瑰 (下)
 - 第十章 裂痕 (下)
 - 第三章 霍格
 - 第七章 高手如云 (上)
 - 第十一章 见面
 - 第四章 石雕价格
 - 第八章 高手如云 (下)
 - 第十二章 凄凉雪
- 盘龙VIP卷 打园VIP章节 成为起点VIP会员!** (Total 38195 characters)
 - 第四集 第十四章 液化
 - 第四集 第十八章 棘背铁甲龙
 - 第五集 第五章 练剑
 - 第五集 第九章 绑架
 - 第五集 第十三章 去教堂
 - 第四集 第十五章 再入迷雾山
 - 第四集 第十九章 狼
 - 第五集 第六章 申请毕业
 - 第五集 第十章 地位
 - 第五集 第十四章 拍案
 - 第四集 第十六章 上天无门
 - 第四集 第二十章 龙晶之变
 - 第五集 第七章 历史第二
 - 第五集 第十一章 残缺
 - 第五集 第十五章 天价 (番茄)
 - 第四集 第十七章 幽深地穴
 - 第四集 第二十一章 龙血战士
 - 第五集 第八章 玉兰大陆的8
 - 第五集 第十二章 愤怒
 - 第五集 第十六章 温平

If a member is strongly attracted by the free chapters and would like to continue reading, the charge will apply. Once a member decides to continue reading, he/she has three options: (1) remaining a general member; (2) being upgraded to a 'Primary VIP', or (3) being upgraded to an 'Advanced VIP'. Different status is attached to different reading fees. For a general member, the reading fee is 0.005 RMB per thousand words; for Primary VIPs, it is 0.003 RMB per thousand words, and for Advanced VIPs it is 0.002 RMB per thousand words.¹³ Topping up a registered account is easy, and can be done by mobile phone, an ATM machine, Paypal, or just over the internet by using a credit card.¹⁴ The top-up value is transformed into Qidian virtual currency; at the time of writing (October 2013) the exchange rate stands at 0.01 RMB to one unit of Qidian currency. Qidian has come up with a variety of methods to encourage members to upgrade their membership status.¹⁵

¹³ More details regarding VIP status can be found on the Qidian website at <<http://www.qidian.com/Help/vipshenqin.aspx>> [Last accessed: 09 March 2013]. Qidian is extremely dynamic in terms of commercialisation. As a result, there are always new features being introduced which have not been formally updated in Qidian's membership section. For instance, I came across a new stratification of membership (general user; general member; advanced member; primary VIP, and advanced VIP). The five types of membership are listed in the page linked to the 'subscription to the VIP chapters' of a newly popular work of fiction called *Dazhuzai* (Grand Master) at <<http://vipreader.qidian.com/BookReaderBuyVIPChapterList.aspx?BookId=2750457>> [Last accessed: 29 August 2013]. This work is unfinished and new chapters come out in serialised form. On this page, a cross-table is given to show the different reading rates for different types of membership. The more advanced the membership, the cheaper the reading rate is. When I visited other pages linked to works of fiction which were published some time ago, such as *Panlong* (Coiled Dragon), the five types of membership were not there. Therefore, I assume that the five types of membership have been recently added and that it will take some time for the information to be officially updated on Qidian's help centre section. For this paper, I still treat the information I received from Qidian's help centre as definitive.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that users around the world can top up using various methods (for example, Qidian has set up a top-up zone only accepting New Taiwan Dollars). This suggests that Qidian, although targeting Chinese netizens, also aims at netizens in the Greater China Region. Those who live outside the Greater Chinese area can purchase Qidian currency using a credit card. Hongxiu Tianxian (Perfumed Red Sleeves), one of the literary portal websites affiliated to Qidian, also accepts Paypal as one of the payment methods.

¹⁵ It is only necessary to top up 50 RMB to obtain primary VIP membership, but acquiring advanced VIP membership will need top-ups amounting to 3,650 RMB within twelve months. <<http://www.qidian.com/Help/vipshenqin.aspx>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

Apart from the top-up system, which obviously is the ultimate goal of Qidian because of the profit-generating purpose of the portal website, Qidian has also designed a system to generate a sense of achievement among members, regardless of their level of membership. The system is known as 'Qidian *jingyan zhi*' (Qidian Experience Value). Experience value is offered to any member in the form of 'points' based on various factors, such as how regularly a member logs into his/her Qidian account, how long the member stays on Qidian, how frequently the member participates in the feedback-giving scheme, the extent to which a member takes part in the various activities that Qidian offers, and how willing a member is to take over the responsibility of helping to manage a discussion forum for Qidian.¹⁶ There are a total of fifty levels in the Experience Value system. Some activities through which members can earn Experience Value Points simply expect members to show the extent to which they devote themselves to Qidian; other activities require members to pay a small fee. Overall, what Qidian has come up with is a system which will not only generate profit but also establish a sense of achievement among readers by outsourcing some responsibilities to them.

Having obtained membership (either general or VIP), a member is allowed to move back and forth freely between a public literary space (such as the portal website homepage displaying the main menu, see Illustration 1) and a more private sphere (a designated virtual space of one's own with membership, see Illustration 4). The notion of a virtual private space is similar to that of a social networking website such as Facebook, where a registered member is allocated a private space on the platform to build a personal community for socialising online. In this private space, the member, who can be a potential user, is offered various interactive features to individualise his/her private space. This is where members can maximise their experience by using a number of interactive features (some of them require extra payment depending on membership status). Generally speaking, a member can conduct two types of activity: literature-related activities and non-literature related activities.¹⁷

¹⁶ For more circumstances in which a member can be rewarded with points, see <<http://www.qidian.com/HelpCenter/default.aspx?type=0&categoryid=37>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

¹⁷ There are a number of non-literature-oriented features such as game playing and merchandise exchanging or purchasing, which constitute the grand picture of Qidian's

Literature-related activities are more complex than the other type, which consist mainly of game playing, online shopping, online socialisation and networking.

To use literature-related interactive features (some of them request a small fee depending on membership status) to the fullest extent, in his/her space a member is given unprecedented opportunities to be involved in the process of literary consumption and production. Generally speaking, members can do the following: browse and search for preferred literary texts via Qidian's rapidly growing database; vote for their preferred works of literature (this function requires Qidian currency);¹⁸ compose literary criticism or (principally) offer suggestions and feedback on works already published on Qidian; order their virtual bookshelf and library according to their favourite works on Qidian; share their reading habits by organising a book or reader's club (a club of any other kind is also welcome), and start any topic for public discussion, ranging from gossip concerning authorship to topics of national interest. Last but not least, a member can apply to become an author in his/her personal space. All of these features can be easily managed on one's Qidian account.

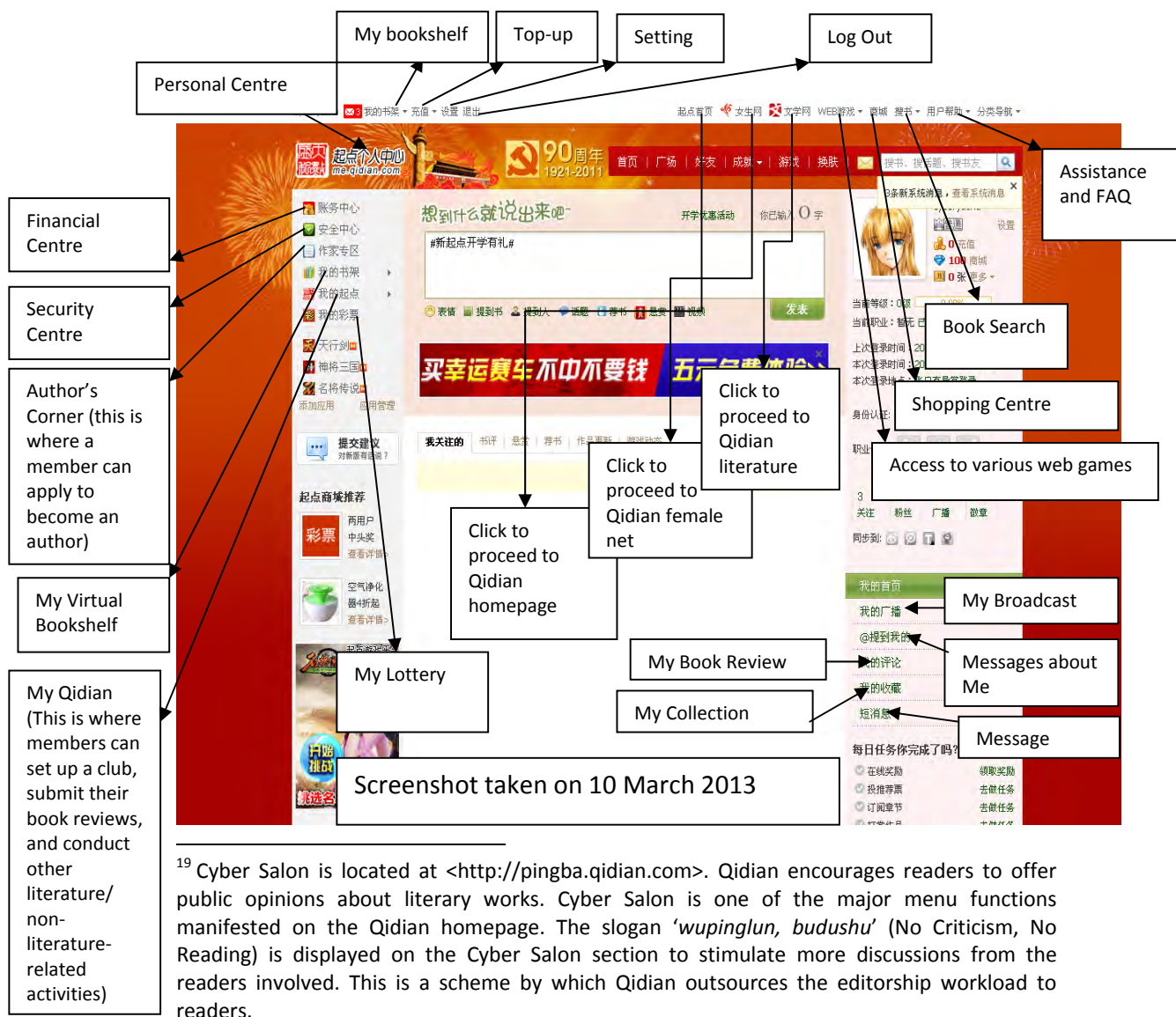
The interactive literary features enable members to move efficiently between different roles, such as those of readers, editors or even authors, which is part of the notion of prosumption. The Qidian homepage offers a simplified flowchart of five steps explaining how to join the readership: '*zhuce – kanshu – chongzhi – shengjiwei* VIP – *dingyue*' (Registration – Read – Top-up – Upgrade to VIP – Subscription). However, in the role of a reader, a member can do much more than the steps illustrated on the simple flowchart. While it is clear that a member can search for and consume his/her preferred text, which comes out in serial format or as a complete piece, he/she can also oversee the process of production by actively participating in criticism, suggestions and feedback, all of which will be centralised in a section entitled '*pingba*' (Cyber

business model of marketing and profit generation. These features will be briefly discussed in the section about the changed role of a publisher.

¹⁸ There are several different types of ranking on Qidian that determine the level of popularity. For example, at the bottom of Illustration 1, there is the word '*guan*' (champion). In this context, 'champion' refers to the work of fiction which has been the best-seller in the past 24 hours. Even though the notion of 'best-seller' is not specified, I assume that it indicates the subscription rate of a work of fiction during the last 24 hours. Qidian has diverse approaches to achieving its goal of promoting the notion of the 'popularity' of a work of fiction and getting users involved.

Salon of Criticism and Feedback, hereafter Cyber Salon, see Illustration 5).¹⁹ The function of Cyber Salon not only enables members as readers to interact directly with authors, but also facilitates the outsourcing of editorship to readers.

Illustration 4: The Designated Private Space with a Qidian Account



¹⁹ Cyber Salon is located at <http://pingba.qidian.com>. Qidian encourages readers to offer public opinions about literary works. Cyber Salon is one of the major menu functions manifested on the Qidian homepage. The slogan 'wupinglun, budushu' (No Criticism, No Reading) is displayed on the Cyber Salon section to stimulate more discussions from the readers involved. This is a scheme by which Qidian outsources the editorship workload to readers.

Nonetheless, members are not simply given the opportunity to switch easily into other roles; they have to earn it. The setup of Cyber Salon epitomises the notion. Newly registered members cannot post an opinion by simply participating in Cyber Salon; they can only do so either by purchasing top-up credits or by having successfully obtained 500 points worth of Qidian Experience Value. Some members prefer to go for both systems, while others decide to go for either top-up or earning Qidian Experience Value. In this regard, members are given considerable freedom to decide how they want to be engaged with Qidian. Whereas top-up is a more straightforward way to show support for Qidian, members can be awarded Qidian Value points by engaging in various designated activities, such as staying on the Qidian webpage for a particular length of time, logging into their accounts on a regular basis, and various other options.²⁰ These methods are designed to show how willing a member is to take part in the various activities which Qidian offers. The notion of Qidian Experience Value is similar to the notion of '*shengji*' (On to the Next Stage), which a player encounters in game playing. The more Value a member earns, the higher the rank to which he/she can be promoted to enjoy more of the resources that Qidian provides.

If a member has obtained sufficient Qidian Experience Value points or has purchased enough credits, the extent to which he/she can put into practice the notion of 'user' is rapidly augmented. This is when he or she can become part of Cyber Salon and interact directly with authors and readers. Upon finishing a selected piece of work on Qidian, a member is invited to click on the '*canyu benshu taolun*' (Participate in Discussion of This Book) icon at the bottom of the page which brings up the literary text (or a reader can do this in his/her private space, see Illustration 4), and then redirects the member to Cyber Salon to publicise his/her opinion on the message board allocated to the specific popular work (see Illustration 5).

²⁰ For example, one thing a member can do to earn points is to stay longer than ten minutes on Qidian and thus claim five points of Qidian Experience Value. Users can claim up to twenty points per day if they stay on for at least one hour. This is only one of the many ways to earn Qidian Experience Value. For more details regarding Qidian's 'Experience Value' earning scheme, see <<http://www.qidian.com/HelpCenter/default.aspx?type=0&categoryid=114&parented=20>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

Illustration 5: 'Pingba' (Cybersalon) (using Coiled Dragon as an example)

Screenshot Taken on 10 March 2013

【起点女生网】：简体版 繁体版 手机版 设为首页

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Start a new vote Start a new topic

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| 盘龙感言！ | 金利君 | 96213/1189 | 01-03 20:59 |
| [书评悬赏] 番茄新书《莽荒纪》进入高潮，可以看了~... | 我吃西红柿 | 235/8 | 03-02 16:13 |
| 2010年度评选开始了，请盘龙读者们支持番茄一下 | 翻香看寂寞 | 5502/160 | 11-18 01:11 |
| 坚持+努力=成功。芒果写给盘龙这部励志的小说。 | 墨者芒果 | 1734/22 | 01-04 03:12 |
| 更新保证新书求支持《熔铸晶晨》 | 书友11121700... | 0/0 | 03-10 11:50 |
| 绝对好书，敬请关注 | 梅笑竹 | 0/0 | 03-10 08:15 |
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| [相关]加油 | 暮夜未央 | 2/0 | 03-08 17:40 |
| 《天子宫》 | 范范思哲 | 18/0 | 03-06 15:14 |
| 我是新人，需要你支持~！这本书更需要支持！ | 小白撰文 | 17/0 | 03-06 13:26 |
| 轻松幽默的段子，大家看看，瞧瞧，不要错过哟~ | 果巧 | 16/0 | 03-06 10:16 |
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盘龙书评区基本信息

版主：我吃西红柿
副版主：笨蛋0101

申请副版主

共 68997 书友参与讨论

Cyber Salon is proving to be a popular community where readers and authors can interact directly, which helps to lessen the editorship task for/of Qidian. Topics ranging from typographical mistakes to severe criticism of the whole work are allowed for open debate and discussion unless a public objection is made, requesting the intervention of the webmaster. Readers can freely express their opinions about the work to be heard by authors. On the one hand, authors have the autonomy to decide whether they will react to the public opinion expressed on Cyber Salon; on the other hand, it can be said that readers on the internet have largely taken over the role of editors, whose role has been minimised²¹, to the point where the authorship cannot ignore readers' opinions.

Given the significance of the opinions and the active participation of readers,²² authors usually tend to pay attention to the overall reaction of readers. After all, the attention given by readers is the main concern of an author who is competing for popularity with other authors across the portal website. In this regard, part of the task of online editorship has been outsourced to readers, providing more direct feedback to authors, who are obviously eager to know readers' consumption preferences. Thus, a development of the reader from being a 'passive' reader who consumes literary products to being an 'active' reader who actively participates the formation of literary products through the outsourcing of the task of

²¹ In spite of the fact that readers can interact and communicate with authors over the internet, this does not mean that readers comprehensively take over the role of editors. That is why I emphasise the point that the responsibility of editorship has been 'largely' taken over by readers. The way in which and the extent to which the role of editors has been minimised will be examined in the section on mediators.

²² Popular works of fiction and the discussion surrounding the works epitomise the active influence of the readership opinions being shared on Qidian. *Fanren Xianxiu Zhuan* (From Everyman to Demigod), one of the most popular works of fiction on Qidian, has given rise to 545,468 relevant topics for discussion. The total number of messages posted on this discussion forum reached 4,693,347. <<http://forum.qidian.com/bookforumnew.aspx?BookId=107580>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013]. Another extremely popular work of fiction, *Panlong* (Coiled Dragon), has generated 223,080 topics concerning the work, with the total number of messages amounting to 1,631,539. <<http://forum.qidian.com/bookforumnew.aspx?BookId=1017141>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013]. Both authors make good use of the forum to communicate directly with their readers. The authors' participation always leads to voluminous amounts of replies to the message initially posted.

editorship can be observed, and this is helping to shape literary prosumerism in the online Chinese literary sphere.

Authorship

Apart from online activities involving criticism, feedback and other social networking behaviour, Qidian members can apply to become authors. Those who compose internet literature are also known as '*xieshou*' (writing hands). This term suggests that many writers have a high volume of output, which does not necessarily indicate a high quality of literary text. The standard or quality of writing expected from an author is not necessarily lower, but is definitely looser than in traditional paper-based publishing. Anyone who is interested in telling a story simply needs to start the online application, which is advertised on the Qidian homepage as an easy four-step process: '*shenqing zuozhe – fabiao zuopin – shenqing qianyue – huode gaochou*' (Applying to become an author – Publishing one's original work of creation – Applying and agreeing to sign a contract with Qidian – Being Rewarded with Author Payment and Royalties). In reality, the initial two stages are a lot easier than the latter two stages.

To set out on the path towards authorship, a member needs only to send an application to join authorship to the webmaster. Afterwards, the 'author's corner', already present in each member's private space, will be activated (see Illustration 4). The applicant is required to upload a writing sample – the first few chapters of his/her work consisting of a maximum of 5,000 words – within forty-eight hours (the 'corner' will be deactivated either when no activity in it is detected within forty-five days following the activation, or when the quality of the work submitted is too low to be granted the opportunity for publication).²³ The applicant will receive notification of whether or not the work will be published. The review of the 5,000-word sample is conducted by Qidian editors. Once authorship is granted, Qidian editors virtually withdraw from supervising the new author's work, presumably because of understaffing, and partially owing to the marketing strategy of allowing authors to tell their

²³ There are no clear statistics about the 'passing rate' from readers to authors. However, it can be assumed that the passing rate could be high given the rapidly growing number of literary works published on Qidian.

stories, unless special circumstances arise.²⁴ This overseeing job will be continued by fervent readers, whose public opinions flowing into Cyber Salon help to scrutinise all aspects of the ongoing process of text production.

The granting of authorship means that autonomy is placed mainly in the hands of authors. The only counterbalance is generated from their readers' participation. Editors and publishers will neither approach an author to rush the appearance of the next chapter (which used to be part of an editor's job description), nor will they halt the serialisation (again, unless special circumstances arise). This job of pushing forward new chapters has been largely outsourced to readers.²⁵

In the face of a large amount of feedback and numerous suggestions, authors are also given full autonomy to manage the readers' responses. In other words, once authorship is granted to a member, he/she is also granted the task of managing the discussion forum/Cyber Salon section of the work.²⁶ Authors can log into their accounts to manage all the responses, many of which might prove to be valuable because readers tend to express directly what they want

²⁴ There are generally two circumstances in which editors will presumably resume their role of reviewing a text: one is when a public concern is raised through peer censorship such as issues of plagiarism or guideline-breaching regarding a piece (or a section) of work being reported; the other circumstance is when an author makes a request to sign a contract with Qidian. In this case, editors will review his/her written works, ensuring that the works meet specific writing standards before a contract is signed. Other than these two circumstances, editors generally assume a more passive role.

²⁵ There is no specific rule to indicate how frequently an author is expected to renew his/her works. Authors are, however, fully aware that the more frequently a piece of work is renewed, the more likely it is that readers will be attracted to it. To outsource the job of pushing forward new chapters from authors and editors to readers, Qidian has devised a system called '*gengxin piao*' (Renewal Ballot). Anyone who is not satisfied with the renewal speed of a serialised work can use the Renewal Ballot system to urge the author to produce new chapters. One ballot represents the demand for a 3,000 word renewal, and each reader can cast four ballots at most. Each ballot will cost 100 units of Qidian virtual currency. If the author adds the number of words that readers demand within 24 hours, he/she will be rewarded with credits into his/her account in proportion to the ballots submitted asking for the renewal. Otherwise the renewal ballot will be returned to the readers for them to use on future occasions. See <<http://big5.qidian.com/help/gengxin.aspx>>

[Last accessed: 09 March 2013].

²⁶ See <<http://www.qidian.com/HelpCenter/default.aspx?type=0&categoryid=61&parentid=59>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

to read. If an author finds the management task too much, he/she can recruit enthusiastic readers as assistant managers. Any reader who has earned at least 500 points of Qidian Experience Value can apply for the role of assistant manager, maintaining and overseeing the Cyber Salon section for a specific work. In this regard, Qidian once more outsources editorship to both authors and readers, creating an online environment where readers and authors can interact directly with each other.

Notwithstanding the pressure from readers, authors are entirely in control of their writing process and can choose to revise, to delete any chapters, or even to stop serialisation at any time. In addition, authors are allowed to publish as many works of fiction as possible simultaneously.²⁷ Moreover, authors have the absolute autonomy to decide which genre/subgenre their works will be categorised under. Once a work has been categorised, the author is strongly advised that the work's category should remain unchanged.²⁸ Finally, authors are marketers as well. On publishing, authors must put together a synopsis of their work (not more than 400 words, see Illustration 3 for the 'cover' of an internet work of fiction), carefully providing several key words highly relevant to the work for search purposes. Authors normally know that this is the key to self-promotion/self-marketing, so the plot synopsis and the key words must be eye-catching and directed straight at the basic desires of readers in order to attract their attention.

Even though authors are granted a high degree of autonomy, this does not necessarily mean that they are rewarded with high payment. Authors appear to be paid according to the number of words they publish on Qidian, along with the royalties from copyrights and future franchises.²⁹ Nevertheless, it is

²⁷ Qidian has a rule requiring that there should be a difference between the word count of two works by the same author. An author can publish as many literary works as he/she wishes only if the difference between the word count of each work is at least 20,000 words. <<http://www.qidian.com/Help/tougao.aspx>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

²⁸ More details regarding genre/subgenre categorisation, key word selection, upload of plot synopsis and other features of an author's corner can be found at <<http://www.qidian.com/Help/zuoping.aspx#管理>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

²⁹ Only extremely popular works of fiction will be given the opportunity to receive royalties from paper-based publication and franchise. Qidian indicates that the total number of works of fiction being released into book form is around 40. This number was initially accessed on 10 December 2010, and it has not been updated since then; see <<http://www.qidian.com/Help/qianyue.aspx>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013]. Therefore, we

not as easy to become an author with Qidian as indicated on the 1-2-3-4 flowchart. To receive payment from Qidian, authors need to choose whether or not to operate on a contract basis with Qidian. Only authors whose works amount to at least 100,000 words and are exclusively published on Qidian will be considered for a contract. Even so, signing a contract does not guarantee a profitable income.³⁰ The payment made to authors seems to be low. The income relies heavily on several factors: (1) how many words an author produces; (2) the number of readers (both general members and VIPs) who are willing to pay to read a VIP chapter – a proportion of the reading fee per thousand words goes to the author; (3) how willing readers are to ‘tip’ an author for a job nicely done³¹ – on Qidian a public broadcasting system placed in the top left corner of the Qidian screen will regularly show how much a reader tips his/her favourite author for a satisfying job.³²

The relationship between authors and readers, two crucial agents (the former as the original literary text provider and the latter as the ultimate consumer of the literary commodity) in a digital literary field, has been modified by a number of features precipitated by the gravitation of the internet towards

can assume that the number 40 does not necessarily reflect the current situation. Despite lacking the latest number of works being franchised into paper-based publications, however, we can still safely assume that the number must be rather low in proportion to the actual number of works of fiction flowing on Qidian if we convert the two sets of numbers into percentages, especially given the fact that the cumulative number of literary works published on Qidian had reached 903,069 by 10 March 2013.

³⁰ Interestingly, Qidian specifies how the model works in great details, but not with regard to the payments made to authors who agree to enter into a contract. It is vaguely mentioned that the payment is made differently based on different types of contract; some successful authors have been rewarded up to as much as a few hundred RMB per thousand words. <<http://www.qidian.com/help/qianyue.aspx>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013]. However, other sources indicate that the standard payment made to authors is 20 RMB per thousand words (Shangjin, 2009). The more successful an author becomes, the higher the payment he/she gets per thousand words. For more details regarding the ways in which an author receives payment and royalties, see *ibid*.

³¹ This is a new scheme devised by Qidian to encourage readers to tip their favourite authors for doing a good job of writing a satisfying chapter. By doing this, Qidian transfers part of its payment obligation directly to the readership. This scheme also cleverly encourages users to consume Qidian virtual currency so that more top-ups are needed.

³² The public broadcasting system also functions as a marketing and social networking device. Marketing messages to inform users of special promotions and activities, or social networking messages such as wishing someone a happy birthday can be broadcast through this system.

prosumerism. Their relationship has become closer to the core of production where the responsibilities of editorship and censorship are outsourced to readers. Readers are encouraged to become involved in the process of production by voicing their opinions about authors. By doing this, readers can receive financial rewards. Authors, on the other hand, are regulated more by Qidian because of the rules they have to abide by when it comes to publishing their works on Qidian. While following the regulations, authors are also involved in editorship because they are encouraged to interact directly with readers so that readers' opinions can be properly incorporated during the writing and editing process of their works. Nevertheless, this is not to say that authors aim for approval by Qidian. Given the fact that authors are not generously rewarded by Qidian, and readers can have a strong voice regarding any works on Qidian, authors are fully aware of the importance of readers to them.

Thus far, I have examined the significance of readers' attention and the extent to which authors and readers cooperate to be integrated into the core of the production of literary texts. While producing and consuming works of fiction on the internet has been becoming a popular trend, other agents in a literary field where paper-based literary works are the cultural product have been repositioned and their functions have been modified. In terms of the repositioning of agents, in the next section the roles of publishers, editors and booksellers will be examined to exemplify the ways in which this repositioning takes place.

The Decentralisation of Mediating Agents/Institutions: Publishers (Publishing Companies), Printers (Printing Houses), Editors, and Distributors (Bookshops)

Commercial publishers,³³ printers,³⁴ editors and booksellers³⁵ are mediating agents and institutions which have been indispensable mediators between authors and readers in the paper-based publishing business. As a literary

³³ There is a blurred line between publishers (the agent) and publishing companies (the institution), both of which are crucial elements in a literary field. Because of this blurred distinction, in this section the discussion of the agents and the institution to which they pertain is combined into an overall discussion of their decentralisation and reformulation.

³⁴ The term 'printer' is used to refer to the agent, whereas 'printing house' is used to refer to the institution.

³⁵ The term 'bookseller' is used to refer to the agent; 'bookshop' is used to refer to the institution.

commodity, the text of a popular literary work will have come under various forms of scrutiny before it hits the market. The text will have been created and revised by the author, and then proofread with suggested changes or censored by editors before it goes through several institutions (printing, publication, delivery service, bookshops/educational institutions/libraries), eventually to be accessed by readers. Marketing strategies such as promotion and advertisement are also involved to make the literary commodity popular enough to generate economic capital that will support the institutions and agents in the literary field in producing and promoting cultural capital.

Before the advent of internet literature, the relationship between authors and readers was like two ends of a production line with mediators coming in between. Nowadays on the internet, authors and readers are two merging bodies overlapping with one another. Conversely, the role of mediators has been reformulated or minimised owing to the percolation and permeation of prosumerism. The issue of the reformulation of the mediators' role can be tackled by examining publishers, printers, editors and booksellers one by one.

Publishers

The traditional role of a publisher has been described as that of the “the boss” of the publishing business, “the power behind the throne”, who “must give the lead [...] and must co-ordinate, guide, support, counsel, coach and inspire [...]” (Wharton, 1992: 12). However, the digital trend is diminishing and challenging the dominant role of the publisher. As the leading figure in publishing, a commercial publisher has to be versatile in order to make publishing a sustainable and profitable business. To achieve this goal, he/she usually needs to assume multiple roles, which I generalise as follows: provider (providing economic capital to recruit appropriate agents and equipment), coordinator (coordinating between agents and institutions to work towards one goal), decider (determining what to publish, what tasks to prioritise), regulator (censorship issues and making rules for agents to follow), and marketer (promoting literary commodities independently or through cooperation with booksellers). These five roles overlap with one another to various extents.

On literary portal websites such as Qidian, publishers still assume these five roles, but the roles are performed in a technical-oriented and profit-driven fashion, except for the role of coordinator, which remains much the same in

terms of making the different agents and institutions under the business model work smoothly together. To begin with the role of provider, online publishers still provide economic capital, yet a large proportion of this capital is used to recruit new agents – software developers, web designers, computer engineers – to offer technical support such as running servers, maintaining webpages and adding new online interactive features. In this regard, the online publishers' role of a provider is closer to that of a technical supporter who aims to offer users an up-to-date virtual environment in which they feel comfortable producing and consuming literary commodities, and exercising their presumptive power in different roles.

The roles of regulator and decider, both of which used to be closely and directly associated with the production of a piece of literary text, have been minimised or weakened on the internet.³⁶ Publishers do not have much of the final say about what literary commodities to produce – that decision will be made by users. Conversely, publishers are tolerant toward users, allowing almost anything to be created on their websites (as long as the state censorship is not breached), for two practical reasons: one is because literary commodities can be produced and consumed without the cost of traditional publishing and printing; the other is that, with a voluminous flow of literary texts pouring in, online publishers presumably do not have enough manpower to evaluate the market potential of each piece of work.³⁷

Apart from these practical reasons, the priority on Qidian's overall agenda, similar to that of all commercial publishers throughout Chinese history, is to generate profit, which will only be gained through fierce competition with all other similar literary portal websites and by maintaining a market-leading advantage.³⁸ By observing the popularity rankings, it is easy for online

³⁶ The way in which the publisher's role has been minimised has been discussed in the previous section. With regard to regulating and making decisions concerning a literary text, editorship is also tightly related to the production of a literary text. The changed role of editors is discussed after the discussion on publishers and printers.

³⁷ In 2009, the average number of users applying to become authors on a daily basis on Qidian was 1,100 (Shangjin, 2009). The statistics, though taken a few years ago, show the difficulty of evaluating the market potential of each piece of work given the high volume of works submitted.

³⁸ In an effort to convince advertisers to cooperate, Qidian claims that its current market penetration rate has reached 80%. Of the remaining 20%, one half pertains to other literary portal websites which are part of Qidian's alliance partnership, such as Hongxiou Tianxian

publishers to discover which type, or what popular works of fiction grassroots' attention has been redirected towards. The users' attention becomes the best index for online publishers to determine which works to publish in book format later. Moreover, the presumption model points to a path of other forms of franchise for a higher return. As a result, online publishers are more concerned about the management of the portal website and the quantity of output, and arguably less concerned about controlling the quality of the literary commodity.³⁹

In drafting guidelines and making rules, online publishers appear to play the dominant role of regulator and decider. However, the content of guidelines and rules can be divided into two areas: state security and copyright issues. With regard to state security, publishers execute PRC State Council Order No. 292 from the central government.⁴⁰ Since 2000, the CCP government has generated a list of forbidden contents for any online publication, such as pornography or politically sensitive material. Qidian, in accordance with this state order, reminds users at the bottom of the website that it is imperative that they abide by the order of the state council, or any messages posted will be removed and their membership will be revoked. In spite of the endeavour to execute the state order, Qidian is constantly being accused of circulating pornographic and violent texts.⁴¹ As far as the issue of intellectual property

(Perfumed Red Sleeve) and Yanqing Xiaoshuo Ba (Romance Fiction Bar), and the other half is shared by all other similar literary portal websites independent of Qidian. <<http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/default.html>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

³⁹ A piece of advice to writers has been offered on the Qidian author login page. The adviser describes him/herself as an editor on Qidian, and suggests that the list of factors that a new writer should take into account are (in order of importance) plot, high frequency of new chapters, characters and rhetoric/language. This editor depicts internet readers as the most tolerant readers who are not meticulous about typographical mistakes or inconsistency over details. They only need a smooth story to satisfy their daydreams and fantasies, without caring much about the artistic achievement of the story. In this regard, internet readers can be described as extremely easy to satisfy. <<http://forum.qidian.com/ThreadDetail.aspx?threadid=90000025>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

⁴⁰ For details of Order 292 see <http://big5.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/fwxx/bw/gjgbdydszj/content_2263004.htm> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013].

⁴¹ In 2010, a news programme aired on CCTV's financial channel openly accused Shanda of promoting pornographic and violent texts as an extreme marketing strategy for commercial profit. This programme called for the intervention of the central government (Hu, 2010). This

rights is concerned, Qidian declares that it owns the copyright to all the works published on its platform, yet plagiarism and piracy permeate the internet.⁴² The pressure from plagiarism and piracy come not only from outside Qidian, but also from within.⁴³ As a seemingly weak executor of the state council order and a weak protector of copyright, Qidian therefore depends on users to adhere to the guidelines and rules. The way to achieve this is through peer censorship carried out by users, who report any works breaching the state council order, violating copyright or committing plagiarism. Thus, although limited by actual manpower, the responsibility which Qidian strategically outsources to users not only involves producers/consumers, but also helps Qidian with regulating and decision making in managing the literary portal website to ensure the integrity of the virtual community.

In contrast to its minimised role as regulator and decider, the online publisher's role as a marketer has grown enormously. Behind this growth lies the overwhelming bombardment of the user with online advertisements, along with the rapid and large-scale enfranchisement of literary commodities which a literary portal website carries. Advertisements designed to impress readers with non-literary commodities appear on the same page where the

is not the first time that Shanda has come under suspicion for breaching State Council Order No. 292.

⁴² Many online users copy and paste original works from Qidian (including VIP chapters) into a multitude of discussion forums, BBS or portal websites. With *Xie Long Dao* (The Way of Evil Dragon) for instance, 562,000 matching outcomes were generated by using the title as the key word search on Baidu (the Chinese counterpart of Google), indicating that this work of fiction can be fully accessed on many different websites other than Qidian.

<http://www.baidu.com/s?wd=%E9%82%AA%E9%BE%8D%E9%81%93&rsv_bp=0&ch=&tn=baidu&bar=&rsv_spt=3&ie=utf-8&rsv_n=2&inputT=546> [Last accessed: 10 March 2013]. In 2010, the Copyright Society of China issued a strong statement claiming to support the legal actions taken by Qidian against Baidu, because for a long time Baidu has tacitly permitted its users to copy and paste works of fiction from various internet portal websites, including Qidian, thus compromising the copyright of the authors and the portal websites they belong to (Zhongguo Wenzhi Zhuzuoquan Jiehui, 2011).

⁴³ Qidian does not seem to have an impeccable record of protecting intellectual property rights. One author filed a charge against Qidian, believing that Qidian had intentionally appropriated the title of his popular internet work of fiction to confuse readers on the internet (Jia, 2010). One paper-based publisher complained that users on Qidian were downloading their publications without legal authorisation (Dong, 2010).

readers consume their preferred literary texts.⁴⁴ Even though publishers do not have much of the final say on literary texts, they do have considerable influence on the franchising of literary commodities, such as the right to adapt them into online games or films. Large-scale literary portal websites like Qidian have their own economic capital that enables them to dominate the rights to franchise the literary commodities produced and consumed on their websites, whereas other smaller-scale portal websites choose to collaborate with other businesses for a profit share from the enfranchisement. Whether by advertisement or franchise, whether through domination or cooperation, online publishers come up with new marketing strategies to expand their businesses into other areas and promote their literary commodities.

Qidian was one of the first of these websites to bring literary commodities into the next phase by its introduction of virtual currency. Virtual currency is nothing new in the online game sector, but it is a relatively new idea in the online literature sector. On the one hand, Qidian promotes the virtual currency system with the intention of converting as much free membership as possible into VIP membership (at the point of writing, 26 out of every 1000 registered members were VIPs);⁴⁵ on the other hand, using its high market saturation rate and versatility, Qidian aims at attracting more advertisers to use the Qidian platform as a showcase for their products. Qidian initiates strategies to link the notion of virtual currency with consumers' physical products (well-known enterprises such as McDonald's). Marketing strategies such as encouraging users to purchase consumer goods by using their account

⁴⁴ A list of the famous international brand manufacturers and merchandise providers cooperating with Qidian can be found at <<http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/client.html>> [Last accessed: 11 March 2013].

⁴⁵ The figure is calculated from the statistics published on Qidian. The company's webpage indicates that so far there are 30.58 million registered members, and 800,000 VIP members. This page does not indicate if the 30.58 million include VIP members, nor is there further indication about the ratio of primary VIP accounts to advanced ones. In calculating the ratio between registered members and VIP members, I assume that the number of VIP members is included in the figure of 30.58 million <<http://www.qidian.com/aboutus/ads/default.html>> [Last accessed: 11 March 2013]. It is also worth noting that the statistics have not been updated since 2009. Therefore, it may be assumed that the actual ratio between VIP members and general members today is quite different from the figure calculated here.

credits, many of which can be earned through Qidian currency top-ups and other credit-rewarding schemes, are set out.⁴⁶

Literary commodities are closely associated with the notion of enfranchisement. As the literary portal website which dominates the internet literature market in China, Qidian endeavours to maximise business opportunities. Many popular works of fiction on Qidian have been adapted into online games to be promoted by Shanda, Qidian's online game sector. Not only online games, but also TV dramas and films are the targets of the Qidian enfranchisement scheme through cooperation with the TV or film industries. In terms of literary commodities *per se*, different formats for enjoying literary commodities have been newly introduced into the publication business. Members of Qidian are encouraged to take advantage of the notion of media convergence by consuming works of fiction on portable devices such as their mobile phones, Jinshu (Bamboo, the e-reader which Qidian has specifically developed for Qidian users),⁴⁷ or tablet PCs (see the bottom of Illustration 2). As well as consuming literary commodities in the traditional sense of reading texts, members can also listen to the audio version of the text when they go online or on their mobile phone by subscribing to an audio book service.

Qidian dominates the market of literary portal websites which produce and consume popular literature. But this does not mean that Qidian does not face any domestic competition. In addition to the competition from other literary portal websites,⁴⁸ Qidian also has to handle issues such as pirate copies

⁴⁶ This goes back to my previous explanation about Qidian Experience Value Points. Apart from active participation in helping to form a literary product by offering feedback and by voting for their favourite works, users can also earn points by clicking on information about commercial goods advertised on Qidian. For more details, see <<http://www.qidian.com/help/jifenxitong.aspx>> [Last accessed: 11 March 2013].

⁴⁷ Bamboo has a Wi-Fi function. Users can get online, consume literary texts and subscribe to works of fiction from other bookshops which are in alliance with Qidian. Qidian boasts about having recruited 220 different publishers to provide publications open for subscription through an alliance named Yunzhong Shucheng (Book Castle in the Clouds). The number of books provided by the alliance is as many as 3 million. <<http://cloudary.sdo.com/index.aspx>> [Last accessed: 11 March 2013].

⁴⁸ One example is 17K Xiaoshuo Wang (17K Fiction Net; hereafter 17K) at <www.17k.com>. 17K is not part of Qidian's alliance. They publicise that they offer better benefits to authors who successfully sign a contract with them. Unlike Qidian, 17K is also willing to pay authors for short and mid-length works. See <<http://www.17k.com/fuli>> [Last accessed: 02 Sept. 2013].

circulating on discussion forums and BBS. On the one hand, Qidian takes legal action against pirate copies circulating online;⁴⁹ on the other hand, Qidian fiercely promotes its business model by advertising some of the most well-known internet fiction authors who have acquired prestige, fame and wealth in China. Well-known authors such as Tangjia Sanshao (The Third Son of the Tang Family), Tianchan Tudou (Silkworm Potato) and Wochi Xihongshi (I Eat Tomato) acquired their economic and symbolic capital by publishing on Qidian. Apart from advertising authors who have gained economic and symbolic capital from them, Qidian also aggressively recruits new writers to provide a larger quantity of original works than other non-allied literary portal websites. Qidian already has more than one million pieces of original work in its database.⁵⁰ One of its major opponents, 17K, only has 250,000 pieces of work.⁵¹ In this regard, Qidian tries to differentiate itself from other similar, non-allied portal websites, BBS or discussion forums.

Examining Qidian from the perspective of an online publisher reveals features which distinguish an online publisher from a traditional paper-based publisher. For online publishers, the tendency is to minimise their role in interfering with the contents of literary commodities because users registered with their websites will clearly show what is popular by gravitating towards specific types of literary commodities, meaning genres or subgenres. Only when special circumstances arise will publishers (along with editors) intervene to resolve disputes or conflicts of interest, or to ensure that state laws are properly exercised, after peer censorship raises a concern. The roles which an online publisher assumes with great significance are those of technical supporter and marketer. By creating a comfortable environment in which users can devote themselves to producing and consuming, online publishers are dedicated to generating profits through franchise and media convergence consumption. Various innovative marketing schemes are designed to attract more general

⁴⁹ In June 2012 the webmasters of the website Xiaoshuo 5200 (Novel 5200) were sentenced to several years in prison for illegally distributing Qidian's works of fiction on their website for general readers to consume. One of the extremely popular works on Qidian - *Doupo Cangqiong* (Break through Sky) - had received more than 130 million clicks. <<http://www.qidian.com/News/ShowNews.aspx?newsid=1028451>> [Last accessed: 02 Sept. 2013].

⁵⁰ The exact number is 1,034,467. <all.qidian.com/Default.aspx> [Last accessed: 03 Sept. 2013].

⁵¹ The exact number is 258,715. <all.17k.com> [Last accessed: 03 Sept. 2013].

users to their websites, where profits can be generated to sustain the growing online publication business at the same time.

Editors, Printers (Printing Houses) and Distributors (Bookshops)

The multiple tasks performed by online publishers arguably cast a shadow over the existence of editors, printers and booksellers, who used to be an essential element of the commercial publishing and printing business as a whole. However, the crucial role which editors enjoy in a paper-based publishing company where editors, authors, and publisher form a close, triadic relationship is not to be found in today's online literary sphere. The notion of editorship in a traditional paper-based publishing business is an umbrella concept which covers different types of editor, such as commissioning editors, copyeditors and line editors. Their job descriptions, according to the type of editor, include "[...] drawing up the project plan to organising the launch [...] developing the concept with the author, negotiating the contract, writing the publishing proposal, drawing up the budget, assembling the publishing team and supervising production" (Mackenzie, 2004: 6). In contrast, editors in the online publishing sphere, based on the previous analysis, seem to have lost their traditional prestige. Unlike online publishers, whose multiple roles have been transformed – some minimised and others aggrandised – editors face a reduction in their significance in the Chinese online literary sphere. The most prominent part of the job of choosing a potentially profitable text and communicating between a text, the authorship and the readership at which it is targeted has been largely outsourced to users. Users are the agents who determine which texts to produce and to consume. Their collective literary taste, either good or bad, is the index of both attention and profits.

It is true that editors on Qidian still exercise the power of evaluating a text and making a decision about whether or not it is suitable for publication. Nevertheless, this power remains only at the very beginning of the publishing process. As stated earlier, when a user decides to assume the role of an author, he or she is required to submit a piece of work of 5,000 words to the Qidian editors. The editors then review the work to see if the user has the potential for writing. It does seem like an important job. Yet as soon as a piece of work has been approved for publication on Qidian in serial form, readers can be said to take over the role of editors. Their feedback and suggestions, to a certain extent, have a direct impact on the formation of a piece of ongoing work,

arguably, for one simple reason: authors want to keep readers with them, and to attract more readers to consume their works. After all, everything on Qidian is about 'being popular'. Thus editors, in going from being active agents who engage with the production of a text to passive agents who intervene only when called upon to review a writing sample and to respond to readers' requests over a piece of work if a censorship issue is involved, have undergone a dramatic transition from being in positions of great power to having minimal roles.

The remaining two agents (institutions) – printers and distributors – perform even more menial roles in the digital world of publishing. Although printers were not traditionally involved in the production of a text, they were involved with the materials through which a text would be circulated. Since today a literary commodity can be produced and consumed without the use of paper, printers (and printing houses) are being edged out of the role of mediator into the role of end-user, because printers have to wait for the decision of online publishers to determine whether the digital literary commodity will be converted into book form. On Qidian, there is a menu beneath the 'cover' of a book (see Illustration 2), which comes with an option of 'Publish this Book'. Once this option is clicked, three further options (publication in book form; adaptation into online games, and adaptation into films and TV dramas) are provided, asking the user which form of publication the user is interested in: Qidian will contact the user for further discussion in terms of publication issues. Even though Qidian has not specified what types of institution make contact over publication issues, it can be assumed that the institutions that contact Qidian include not only printing houses, but also publishing houses targeting the printed literature market.⁵²

A similar situation applies to booksellers. The fact that the physical literary commodity has been substituted by a virtual commodity implies the decline of the traditional book. Documents created and converted for e-readers, mobile phones, computers (desktops and laptops) and tablet PCs are gradually but steadily coming to dominate the reading preference of general consumers. Arguably, nowadays it is becoming more difficult to promote Qidian works in physical form, given the fact that popular works on Qidian are usually

⁵² The relationship between Qidian and other print –media-based publishing houses will be an interesting topic for further examination. Owing to the length of this paper, I shall not pursue this topic further here.

lengthy.⁵³ The cost of acquiring a whole set of one popular piece of work can be quite high. Booksellers (as well as non-profit, educational institutions such as libraries) are withdrawing from the field of circulation and seemingly becoming less significant. Bookshops have to promote different platforms of literary consumption, like Barnes and Noble with their e-reader Nook. Today, bookshops also engage in providing more electronic versions of books for tablet PC owners to download to their portable devices.

The rise and ebb of the roles of agents/institutions illustrated here illuminates a dynamic reformulation of the digital Chinese literary field. Since authors and readers are combined in the single role of users taking charge of producing the literary commodity for mass consumption in line with the preferences of the general readership, mediators such as editors, printers and booksellers have been marginalised. Publishers, although still appearing as dominant figures in charge of the overall management of the new production and consumption model on the internet, have had their power internally eviscerated, in the sense of making way for more grassroots tactics for producing literary commodities, but externally fortified, in the form of aggressive marketing strategies to transform the literary commodities which are carried on Qidian into a variety of entertainment formats through franchises, media convergence and alliances with other agents/institutions.

Conclusion: The Impact and Implication of the Prosumption Model of Virtual Literary Commodities

The prosumption model, such as that presented on Qidian, paves the way for general readers to head towards authorship and editorship. Formerly the prerogative of an elite, writing has now been transformed into an activity practised in everyday life by anyone. Theoretically, anyone who has access to the internet and who has a basic knowledge of using word processing programmes can come up with their own stories and search for an opportunity to publicise their works in the virtual space. Whether or not their works will become popular is determined solely by other users sharing the same space.

⁵³ For example, on Qidian there is a 'total word count' ranking. The number one work is *Congling Kaishi* (Scratch from Zero). Its current word count is 15,521,628 <<http://top.qidian.com/Book/TopDetail.aspx?TopType=5>> [Last accessed: 09 Oct 2013]. Eight works of fiction out of the top ten ranking have their word count amounting to more than 10 million words respectively.

Yet what sets an elite and an everyman apart, arguably, is that the latter is satisfied with narrating a story which appeals to ordinary people like himself/herself. To common users, being a storyteller narrating an entertaining and attractive story serves as the priority at the top of the agenda today. The story does not necessarily have to make sense; neither does it need to contain a high standard of moral values, or literary/rhetoric aesthetics. As an average consumer him/herself, a user understands the motivation which drives other similar users towards internet fiction. Consuming internet fiction is mainly for leisure. A work of fiction which contains a philosophical discussion or a serious contemplation on the meaning of life would be the last one readers would want to consume.

Thus, the majority of general readers, including users, tend to crowd towards a story with an exciting plot and fantastic adventures to take them to an imaginary wonderland, replete with amazing characters fresh from Japanese Manga, where anything can happen and where they can achieve everything, as a way to escape the harsh reality and repetitive daily routine of being human pawn in an aggressively industrialised/capitalistic society like today's China.⁵⁴ With popular literature pouring into the online market, prosumption indeed facilitates the rapid dissemination of internet literature; however the quality and the aesthetics of this popular literature become questionable. This is an issue that deserves further academic attention within the general topic of the prosumption of internet literature in China.

⁵⁴ One link located at the section of 'Applying to become an author' will lead users to a webpage where one piece of advice to novice authors is displayed. It advises new authors to learn the skill of creating characters from Japanese Manga. A section entitled 'Wangluo Shangye Xiezuo Xinshou Zhinan zhi Jiaose Suzao' (How to Create Characters for Your Work: Guidelines for Newbie to Internet Fiction) carries information and advice on the formula of a commercially successful piece of work. According to this section, a character distinctive enough to be remembered helps a story with a repetitive, similar plot to stand among the ocean of works of fiction on Qidian. One important piece of advice on creating a distinctive character is to consult the way a character is created in Japanese Manga. For more details, see <<http://forum.qidian.com/ThreadDetail.aspx?threadid=90000024>> [Last accessed: 13 March 2013]. This notion is interestingly consistent with Wang's argument in *Brand New China* that the literary sensibilities of the younger Chinese generation are nurtured by Japanese Manga (Wang, 2008:204).

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Psyching a Paragon: A Sinitic Excursion in Practical Ethics

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Abstract

This essay discusses ethical issues in biographical historiography through the case of Huang Chunyao (1605–1645). Addressed in particular are the aversion of disciplinary history to psychological interpretation, and the questioning of selfhood and empathy in postmodern humanistic discourse. Suggestions for dealing responsibly with such issues are drawn from post-Freudian psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and ethical philosophy.

Keywords: *Huang Chunyao, biography, ethics, psychohistory, selfhood, self psychology, historical empathy, Ricoeur*

On August 24, 1645, forces aiding the Manchu-Qing conquest of the Lower Yangzi region of China breached the eastern wall of Jiading City, which was being defended by local people loyal to the crumbling Ming dynasty (1368–1644). One figure, Huang Chunyao (1605–1645), who had emerged from seclusion to take charge of holding the Western Gate, realized that the cause was lost. Moreover, he was devastated by (mistaken) news that his father had been killed in the fighting. Huang's companions encouraged him to escape, but he staunchly refused to do so and, reinforced by his much younger brother, Huang Yuanyao (1624–1645), made his way to a Buddhist abbey with the clear intent of committing suicide. The resident monk and a bevy of associates who had followed Huang there failed to dissuade him. Yuanyao helped his elder brother bolt the door against the wailing crowd, and Huang the senior set

about composing his final statement, which acknowledged his irrepressible heart-and-mind but lamented his inability to serve the court or make adequate progress in personal conduct, scholarship, or moral-ethical learning. Having finished writing, he bowed to the north (the direction of the Ming capital) and forthwith hanged himself from a roof beam. The younger brother, seeing that the elder's cap had fallen off, placed it back properly on his head and then hanged himself at his brother's side. In the chaotic conditions of the Qing massacre of Jiading, during which at least half of the Huang brothers' cohort also perished, Chunyao's body could not be recovered for seven days. But, unlike the remains of his dead comrades, which had disintegrated into maggot-ridden piles of bloody flesh, Huang's face remained natural and his body uncorrupted. Blood from the two brothers' throats, however, had penetrated the proximate wall of their death chamber to a depth of about one inch and was visible there for a long time afterward (Hou Xuanhong, 1891; Chen Shude, 1879; Dennerline, 1981: chaps. 8–10).

Such was the prime stuff of biographies of Confucian martyrs in imperial China: loyalty to, and self-sacrifice for, one's state and society; paternal and fraternal filiality; single-minded, unwavering commitment to the righteous course; appropriate modesty in self-assessment; death by means that did minimal violence to the body (a gift from one's parents); touches of hagiographical postmortem detail. The Buddhist location is mentioned incidentally, as the only 'clean place' Huang could find nearby; the nameless monk, acknowledged to be an acquaintance, is nevertheless deployed as someone Huang can berate for not understanding correct principles. All the necessary ingredients are here for elevating to paragon status a man who in life had been well known as an essayist, poet, scholar and calligrapher, but especially as a stringent Confucian ethicist, unsparingly critical of himself and others in matters of morality and conscience. This well cultivated man, the accounts of Huang's last days imply, embraced righteous death as naturally as a thirsty man seeks water.

After Huang Chunyao's dramatic suicide, no one who had known him personally would write about him in such a way as to detract from his apotheosized image. And as the Qing period (1644–1911) went on, the encomiums grew ever more fulsome—encouraged by an eighteenth-century imperial ploy to desensitize Ming martyrdom by transvaluing righteous death for one's dynasty—*any* past dynasty and especially the current one, the Qing

(Struve, 1998: chap. 3). Although several editions of Huang's collected writings were published during the Qing period, not until the last ones, of 1881 and 1891, were even a few items included that offer glimpses of his initial reluctance to actively resist the Manchus. Left unpublished except in carefully excised snippets was Huang's last surviving diary, from two and one-half months in the spring of 1644, which would have revealed the painful withdrawal, aporia, self-doubt and depression that he experienced, as well as the degree to which he sought spiritual solutions in Chan (Zen) Buddhism.

Specialists today are beginning to show the extent and nature of literati involvement with Buddhism in the late Ming. But such involvement did not escape charges of heterodoxy in Huang's day, and during the subsequent Qing period it was predominantly disparaged as symptomatic of decay in Ming elite culture. Thus, when the surviving text of the diary was published in 1925 under the title *Huang Zhongjie gong jiashen riji* (Diary of 1644 by the Loyal and Principled Sir Huang), the editor-publisher, like his Qing predecessors, commended Huang in a Confucian tone for the strenuousness of his self-cultivation without mentioning what the diary makes obvious: the importance of Chan mind-control techniques in Huang's desperate search for equanimity in distressing times.

My study of Huang Chunyao's diary, initially out of interest in seventeenth-century Chinese 'dream culture' because of its occasional dream reports, eventually resulted in two publications, one on Huang's struggles with his times and himself (Struve, 2009), and one on the dynamics of cultural memory as manifested in biographies of Huang and the vagaries of his diary's transmission during the Qing period (Struve, 2013). These writings, however, were not produced without certain ethical and methodological trepidations on my part, which the remainder of this essay attempts to share, along with some philosophical ideas that I have found useful in dealing with those issues.¹

Cause for Pause

For a professional, academic historian of late-imperial China, Huang's diary is an irresistible source. The daily entries not only reveal Huang's deeply

¹ Much of my thinking in this vein was motivated by participation in an interdisciplinary faculty seminar at the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions, Indiana University, Bloomington, in 2006–2007. I am grateful to the Center for that opportunity and to the other seminar fellows for our challenging and stimulating discussions.

subjective self-reflections, memories and dreams in direct relation to his textual studies, social interactions, and correspondence with other literati, they also cumulatively exhibit a gradual shift of Huang's principal spiritual identification away from Neo-Confucianism toward Chan. More so through the diary than through his posthumously edited *wenji* (collected writings), one can purport to show *how things really were* with an important personage and, moreover, partake of the modern joy in dismantling icons. Why, then, might one hesitate to proceed with such a 'project exposé'?

After all, Huang has been dead for a very long time, and there is no family trust to contend with. Why eschew the handy advantage of the remote historical biographer who does not need to worry about invasively affronting a live subject or doing injury to the living memories of heirs? Most people, anyway, think that real Confucianism, which Huang's life and death are taken to represent, itself expired in the early twentieth century along with the imperial-dynastic political system with which it was bound up. Moreover, a modern biographer might find little personal affinity with the rather cold, self-absorbed Huang Chunyao and thus feel no compulsion to treat him deferentially. But such underlying negativity can lead to interpretive errors. For example, I long suspected rigid Confucian social bias in favour of the legal wife's sons as the reason why Huang often recorded edifying exchanges with his full, 'same-womb' brother, Yuanyao—nineteen years his junior but recently 'capped' as an adult gentleman—while never mentioning his two half-brothers, born to his father by a concubine. That is, until I ran across evidence that the half-brothers were still quite young boys (Hou Kaiguo, 1891: 1a). Therefore they fell under 'household affairs', which generally were not considered appropriate subjects for a scholar's self-cultivation diary. In such ways as this, Huang Chunyao initiated me into the issues of empathy and the lack thereof in addressing a biographical subject.

Another deterrent to proceeding with 'project exposé' for a twenty-first-century Western historian might be the diary's intensity of introspection, redoubled by Huang's reflections on his dreams. This would render inescapable a serious attempt at the most invasive approach of all, psychological interpretation, when so-called 'psychohistory' has long been 'in a grand canyon of intellectual disrepute' and the discipline of history has for even longer been anti-psychological (Hunt, 2002: 338–47, quote 339). The

following diary entry, representing key themes, may serve to briefly convey the flavor of the source:

At night I dreamed that an animal resembling a human was before me. I queried [the creature] and it said, 'I am a *xingxing*'. [Though it] could speak, this did not distinguish it from the birds and beasts. If [a man] is like this, he cannot accomplish great things; muddling through the days, how does he differ from a *xingxing*? This was a warning from the spiritual light in me. (Huang, 1925: 34a)

To the sinologist, this dream obviously recalls a passage in one of the Confucian Five Classics that Huang recently had been consulting, the *Liji* (Ritual record), in which a type of large ape, traditionally thought to have limited speech abilities like a parrot, is used to distinguish people who just 'ape' being human from people who really fulfill their human potential by embodying ritual wholeness ('Quli' sec., pt. 1). Not from the *Liji* but from Huang's own psyche comes the concern about muddling along and wasting the time one has in life (Huang having just reached the age of forty) to attain the goal of perfectly integrating the mind-and-heart (*xin*) with the Ultimate (whether conceived in Confucian or Buddhist terms). Short of this, he would not fulfill Heaven's intent in giving him life.

As the Ming political fabric had become frayed by corruption and factionalism, Huang had felt more acutely than many of his peers the contradiction between one Confucian injunction: to serve the state (thereby bringing honour to one's family and social cohort), and another Confucian injunction: to withdraw from public affairs when times were too compromising (thereby preserving the purity of one's heart and mind for other good purposes and for a better day). He was not unaware that a powerful force of ego persistently sharpened the conflict he felt—one that reached critical proportions in the winter of 1643–1644 when, having finally fulfilled the decades-long expectations of family members and patrons, he passed the metropolitan examinations at a high level but, because of endemic political dysfunction, he was not given an official post. The diary, thus, represents a period in Huang's life of determination to belatedly forge an independent spiritual identity coupled with painful anxieties of self-doubt.

Two matters—the achievement of calming yet action-liberating spiritual unity, and keeping up with the life-course expectations of learned gentlemen²—are pursued so repetitively and unself-forgivingly in the diary as to indicate genuine mental crisis in a man of a compulsive psychological profile. In a typical entry, for instance, Huang likens his lack of progress to punting a boat upstream against a rushing current: one inch forward, one foot back. Still finding his wrong points many and right points few, he concludes: ‘Truly my mind is sick’ (Huang, 1925: 11a–b). Even in a period especially marked by writings of self-stricture (Wu, 1979), Huang’s diary evinces unusual degrees of mental suffering and frustration, beyond what one would expect from reading later accounts of his life which refer only in generalities to his arduous self-demands. Could this be adequately explored for a modern readership without misapplying modern psychological assumptions, without impugning a culture that lauded moral-ethical introspection, and without portraying a scrupulous man as deranged?

For most historians, the revelation of complexities in the past is an absolute virtue in the service of an axiomatic cause that overrides other considerations. But how does this self-assigned mission to reveal the past differ from the contemporary journalist’s often questionable claim to serve the public’s ‘right to know’? Or the literary biographer’s right to exercise imaginative, artistic license with the documentable facts of someone’s life? To be ethically cogent, the questions should be posed in terms of goods, not rights. What might come from scholarly exposure of Huang’s inner struggles and his affair with heterodoxy, apart from sustaining the academic publishing enterprise? Not everyone readily accedes to the views of Anne Sexton’s biographer: that it is meaningless to ask what the preferences of dead people might be about biographical disclosures; and that ‘all records left by the dead, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are a legacy with absolute value...[as] ‘cultural property’’ (Middlebrook, 1996: 127–28). The property of *whose* culture, one might ask? Moreover, Huang Chunyao was no Anne Sexton.

But then, was it not Huang himself who wrote the diary, and Huang himself who shared the diary with his gentlemen friends in a mutual-support group,

² For a representative lecture on the decade-by-decade prescriptions for personal progress in cultivated gentlemen, based on Confucius’s review of his own life’s progression in the *Analects*, by a somewhat younger contemporary of Huang Chunyao, see Wei Xiangshu, 1996: 642–43.

the Straight Talk Club (Zhiyan she), which he himself helped to initiate? Nobody of his social class or literary stature would show any piece of writing to any peer except in awareness that it might be published some day. What's more, Huang prided himself on setting his moral-ethical learning and self-explorations before others, implicitly challenging them to best him on the harrowing path toward sagehood.³ Was not the diary just another form of this quasi-public performance?

Two problems arise here: Huang surely had some idea of how contemporaries and his *conceivable posterity* would respond to his experiences and confessions, but he could hardly anticipate an *inconceivable posterity* in twenty-first century Euro-America. In other words, he was not performing *for us*. Second, there is evidence that Huang actually was quite chary of showing his personal writings to others, even his close disciples, and that he routinely discarded many of his notes and compositions. By 1644 he had been a dedicated diarist for ten years, yet he never had shown any of his earlier diaries to anyone, and even the second half of the last, extant diary does not seem to have been shared with Club members. Despite—or perhaps because of—his public self-promotion as a stringent ethicist, Huang was, as we would say, a very private person. Close associates knew this, and those who survived him debated about what to include in the first edition of his collected works. The diary, clearly known to them, was set aside (Struve, 2013: 16–17). Perhaps they sensed that the dead as well as the living can be 'vulnerable subjects' (Couser, 2004) and that when they die in frenetic, turbulent circumstances without any chance to edit or cull their writings, their vulnerability is increased. Woe truly betides the ghosts of those whose lexical traces reach the eyes of unsympathetic biographers.

But we don't really believe in ghosts anymore. So what or who gets hurt? Should we care that the venerable tradition of Confucian exemplars gets hurt? Actually, I argue, we should. For one thing, Confucianism is far from being a dead creed. Twentieth-century 'New Confucianism' has constituted an impressive philosophical movement, and various East Asian governments have been touting Confucian values to shore up social order. While such an identification may seem superficial compared to that in the past, many people

³ Huang's best-known works of this nature, the *Wushi lu* (Record of learning from others) and *Zijian lu* (Record of self-monitoring), are available in most editions of his collected writings, a list of which can be found in Struve, 2009: Appendix B.

in the ‘Greater China’ culturesphere are quite proud nowadays of their Confucian heritage. Moreover, we should not disparage people’s need for heroes, saints and other inspiring models—for ‘biography as a brassière’ (White, 1995: 220; Barnes, 1984: 136). Only when such figures are portrayed simplistically or unidimensionally, without their full-bodied humanity, do the means fail to serve the best ends.

A particular difficulty arises, however, when psychological dissection seems needed to capture that full-bodied humanity, especially the inner sources of doubt-ridden but sustained religious quests. Adherents of various belief systems often prefer to think that what they believe in has its own power to compel extraordinary conduct in aspirants who really grasp it. The suggestion that people are attracted to certain creeds, and partake of them in certain ways, because of idiosyncratic psychological dispositions undermines cherished assumptions about the universality of spiritual forces. Not only might the subject be reduced to ‘nothing but’ a psychopathology, his or her religion, as well, might be reduced to nothing but a set of psycho-prostheses. Skirting these pitfalls, presenting Huang, through his struggles, as *more than* either his neuroses or his creeds, required, in addition to historical knowledge of Huang’s milieu, an appreciation of the moral-ethical and religious ideas on which he fixated, as well as some insights from personality psychology that proved both appropriate to Huang and compatible with the discourse of his era (Struve, 2009: 357). The latter, however, encountered resistance from reviewers.

The Inferior Interior Complex

Unfortunately, in my view, the past half-century in Western historiography has, on one hand, ignored, evaded, or denied the possibility of knowing about individual interiority, or, on the other, has tackled it with catastrophic psychoanalytical overreach and dogmatism. During the early postwar years the discipline of sociology valorized the empirical, especially quantitative, study of sociopolitical groups rather than individuals. In Chinese studies this gave rise to the first systematic analysis of late-imperial elite social mobility using records of the all-important civil service examinations (Ho, 1962), in which certain facts about Huang Chunyao—his patrimony and patrons, his eventual success, after decades of self-subjection to the examination cells, the devastating denial to him of an official appointment—could only be ciphers. With growth in enthusiasm for the ‘history of mentalities’, concern eventually

was expressed over people's 'lived experience', but primarily its crystallization in social, cultural and political institutions. And a thematic approach called 'emotionology' or 'emotions history' was proposed to study the attitudes or standards that social groups maintain toward emotions and their expression (Stearns & Stearns, 1985, 1988). As cultural history, inspired by anthropological paradigms, gained ascendance, the 'history of sensibilities' succeeded to purview over people's feelings as they are expressed through imagistic and symbolic patterns in the target culture and period, taking evidence like Huang Chunyao's diary as linguistic documents, not as direct records of experience (Wickberg, 2007: 661–62, 675). In other words, there has been a shift in historiographical style from social-historical scholarship that simply did not find the study of individuals productive, to cultural-historical scholarship that attends to individuals as vectors of culture but thinks that any aspiration to probe an informant's inner being should be checked at the seminar door.

Underlying this shift, of course, has been the poststructural 'turn'. Fundamentally questioning the pretence of one mind to peer into another mind—indeed, questioning the very idea of minds as entities, squadrons of structuralists-cum-poststructuralists have exposed the idea of a pristine, first-person, core consciousness as a peculiarly Western fiction. With this postmodern exposure of the ultimate non-reality of essential human-being, the 'modern self' of individual autonomy, agency, creativity and self-actualization became a period-piece, an artifact of a by-going age, amenable to being queried about its wherefores and guises from a new, higher platform of awareness.⁴ The intent was to show that the stories we tell about the past, the causalities we impute, are forms and lineaments dexterously imposed on discontinuous, scattered, 'archaeologically' discovered shards in a manner not really distinguishable from the writing of historical fiction (Kramer, 1989). Thus, the pretence of biography to capture another person narratologically is simply the grand-narrative compulsion exercised on the microlevel; a life story, too, is an artful construction of the metaphorical imagination.

Thus, if I were to do the usual work of a biographer, picking through the shards of Huang's *wenji*, selecting a letter here, an essay there, and matching those with expressions in his diary, his monographic reflections on self-

⁴ The advent of the postmodern historicization of individuality and selfhood can roughly be placed in the 1970s, signaled, for instance, by Weintraub, 1978.

cultivation, and his guide to reading the *Yijing* (Book of Changes; Huang, 1901), thereby to construct a continuous identity named Huang Chunyao, it would be an illusory exercise. Further, it would naively assume a transparency, through the medium of seventeenth-century high-register Chinese prose, between that identity and the constructing identity, my own. Some may feel that poststructuralist exposure of biographical constructedness has liberated writers to narrate past lives more frankly out of their own informed subjectivity (see, for instance, Mann, 2007), thus promoting the celebration rather than concealment of history as storytelling. But this felt license to imagine others' thoughts and feelings is countermanded by a fundamental questioning of the existence of purportedly communing selves, which ironically places postmodernism at intersection with evidentiary positivism: people's interiors are to be, or can only be, objects of imagination, not investigation.

In essence, the postmodern self has been conceived only spatially, as a continually changing position in relation to various 'others', as a site at which multiple, contingent social and cultural forces intersect, as a field where semiotic systems such as languages play. Texts that traditionally had been read as intentional communications from another self-presenting human mind now are seen as culturally generated structures the meanings of which float free of the incidentalized writer. In such a hermeneutic as this, the fascinating responses on Huang's part to the appearance in a dream of images from the *Yijing* (Struve, 2009: 377–79) would be reduced to the movement of visual associations according to culturally-supplied rules of interpretation, thus avoiding any implication that Huang recorded that dream and his response in order to convey his state of anxiety.

The humanistic idea (certainly *not* solely a Western one) that persons can know and respect one another by extrapolating from direct knowledge of a commonly shared inner makeup has been trumped by a cultural-political Self that only exists in parasitic relation to Others. It is an imperialistic Self that necessarily subordinates the Other to supplying its own maintenance needs. The implication is that any knowing of another entails an arrogant condescension toward the latter, the activation of a 'will to power' that belittles the known (Tridgell, 2004 chap. 7; Jopling, 1992). Though I do not believe this to be *necessarily* so, the point recalls my initial urge to make

something of Huang Chunyao by exposing his historical image as at least somewhat fraudulent.

Human 'experience' as a bedrock of reference also has cracked under accusations that it is a bad-modern 'foundational' concept, a stealthy attempt ahistorically to re-essentialize humanity or reify truth as subjective witness.⁵ The strong position here has been that individual experience should be recognized as a post-linguistic cultural construct with no self-ground. Historians who want to write about people's inner lives, thus, find it hard to skirt the postmodern iteration of a recurrent twentieth-century tendency, 'the paradoxical positing of experience without a subject' (Jay, 2005: chap. 9; quote 156). Thus, evidence in Huang's diary of chronic struggles to integrate Neo-Confucian dyads such as activity and quiescence (*dong jing*), interior and exterior (*nei wai*), and the minds of humankind and the Way (*renxin Daoxin*), of failures to find a unitary equanimity within these (Struve, 2009: 374), become linguistic performances unrelatable to any entity that seems to be in mental pain.

And then there is the still resounding 'memory boom', which has been vastly consequential for how human consciousness is viewed. Attention to memory functions has been very productive in illuminating the dynamics of identity-formation and how the remembered past guides expectations (and thus self-orientations) toward the future. Moreover, it is now well recognized that memory functions are central to dream reportage (and to the generation of dreams in the first place). Yet on balance, close scrutiny of memory has confirmed suspicion of its 'sins' (Schacter, 2001), including psychological lapses and self-trickery. In Huang's diary, for instance, the transience of recall about his good conduct and spiritual progress contrasts so markedly with the perdurance of memories about regrets and shortfalls, it exceeds the norm of monitoring one's flaws and avoiding self-congratulation. What credence, then, can we accord his memory and reporting of ephemerality in his *non*-waking consciousness? Dream contents, like 'limit-events', in defying rational construal invite either silence or fabrication. Did Huang *really* dream of talking with a *xingxing*? Did what he wrote correspond with what he dreamed? Or was the recorded encounter a conscious or nonconscious construction from cultural materials that suited Huang's rhetoric of self-criticism?

⁵ The poster-work for this viewpoint is Scott, 1991. For a critique of Scott on this score, see Zammito, 2000.

猩猩圖



In Huang Chunyao's day, the species of red orangutan called *xingxing* was no longer native to China, so what sort of creature did Huang Chunyao confront in his dream, prompted by a passage in the *Liji*? That such a question is unanswerable adds to the deterrents against probing the historical subconscious. Yet we can derive some sense of possibilities by investigating a given subject's visual environment. In this case, Huang's experience of speaking oneirically to a *xingxing* seems more plausible in view of this highly anthropomorphic drawing of a *xingxing* in a source that Huang might well have seen, the *Sancai tuhui* (Illustrated [encyclopedia] of the heavens, earth, and humankind; *niaoshou* sec.), widely published since 1607.

Whether of waking or nonwaking experience, memory is credited with constituting 'who we are'. But its patent mercuriality casts doubt on the rememberer as an enduring entity, thus reinforcing the postmodern conception of selfhood as vertical, not horizontal, transactional space.

However noble may be the ultimate aims of thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida to free human subjectivity from (de)limitation and from subjection to the (de)finite, no small number have been troubled to find no *there* there in the space of the postmodern self (Haines, 1997; Siegel, 1999).

If any discipline has made its business the establishment of place in the space of the (conscious or nonconscious self), it is psychoanalysis, which had a colourful career in postwar historiography. As is well known, a historical subfield called 'psychohistory' emerged in the 1970s and flourished in the 1980s, only to be hit by a tsunami of criticism in which it eventually drowned. Lynn Hunt has incorporated this story in an astute survey of the uncomfortable or absent relations between psychology and history in the past century. Among her several broad points are: that historians interested in poststructuralist approaches have favoured either social-constructionism or the view that human subjects are shaped by culture and language, not by inner drives; and that psychoanalysis has been weakened by a barrage of attacks on Freud himself, internal dissension and the hiving off of disparate schools, and the growing influence of biochemistry, cognitive studies and neuroscience on the field of psychiatry (Hunt, 2002: 338–47).

In such a climate, clearly I should not interpret Huang Chunyao's dream encounter with the *xingxing* as a symbol of the repressed animalistic sexual and aggressive drives of Huang's id, drives which had to be defended against by his ego (especially given the tremendous weight of a superego inculcated with values that disdained physical desires and abhorred disharmonious behaviour). The recurrent theme in Huang's oeuvre of struggle to control anger, insolence and arrogance must be discussed in other—perhaps socio-ideological—terms. But does his diary constitute only a site of intersection among ambient cultural forces? By what recourse but the psyche can we explain why this individual felt certain cultural injunctions so acutely and responded to them in such extreme ways?

Fred Weinstein, in the 1970s an enthusiastic proponent of joining psychology with history, in 1995 wrote in discouragement not of history's rejection of psychoanalysis but of psychohistory as an instructive case in a general 'crisis of heterogeneity' in the social sciences. He faulted not Freud himself but the application of his ideas in tune with a common assumption in all the disciplines, 'the underlying unity of motive of historical actors'. Psychoanalysis, according to Weinstein, has been complicit in an across-the-board failure to account for

‘how diverse individuals and populations are connected’, ‘how...social events and subjective responses [are] related’, and how the stubborn idiosyncrasy, unexpectedness and discontinuity of individual social life are to be explained. He and Lynn Hunt have looked toward newer forms of psychoanalysis as means not only of opening what historians have regarded as the ‘black box of the psyche’ but also of ‘link[ing] the “inner” world of wishes, fantasies, relationships, and expectations to an “external” social world’ of ideologies and institutions (Weinstein, 1995: quotations 302, 314; Hunt, 2002: 347).

Working through the Complex

We might well take two main lessons from surveying the ‘inferior interior complex’ in historiography. First, in working closely on any individual, but especially one who aspired to such acute self-awareness and marshalled such immense force of will as Huang Chunyao, we must come to terms with postmodern issues surrounding ‘the self’. Here, the recurrent spectacle of highly self-assertive scholars vigorously denying the reality of selfhood is intimidating enough to send one in desperation to the opinions of people who specialize in studying the indisputable *sine qua non* of even illusory selfhood: the human brain. Second, we sense the folly—and hubris—of trying to understand or explain too much about other people, especially ones who are long dead. To expect a certain line of psychological analysis to yield the whole, or the core, truth about someone is to sanctimoniously pursue a holy grail. Most professionals today in clinical psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry are pragmatically eclectic, using what works for them and the patient under given circumstances. For biographical historians who sense that ideas from psychology might be useful, not in curing, but in more deeply exploring their subjects, the corollary of this is to use what feels comfortable in oneself, what squares with the material from and about the subject, and what helps to situate the latter in his or her mental world. Both of these lessons have ethical dimensions, particularly in dealing with figures who have inspired many others.

From the psychological angle, Huang Chunyao offers a prime case of the difficulty historians have encountered in applying Freudian analytical concepts. There survives no direct evidence about his childhood or his relationship with his mother, who was long-deceased by the time of the diary in question. And precisely because of Huang’s Confucian principles (as well as his Buddhist inclination), sexual matters receive only infrequent, opaque mention in his writings. Seemingly tense relations with his father and his wife could not be

frankly disclosed, the former because of the cardinal value of filial piety, the latter because of the cardinal rule to keep male ('outer', public) and female ('inner', domestic) affairs separate. Not only would an attempt at classical Freudian analysis have to be wildly speculative, it would be inappropriate for me to emphasize 'the unconscious' while relying principally on a source, the diary, that shows the keenest consciousness by a man of his own mind's dynamics that I have ever read. The problem is not that Freudianism, or any other modern psychiatric method, is 'anachronistic' when applied to premodern figures; the issue is whether it is truly *applicable*. Any modern concept, used in reference to remote history, must pass this test.

Unfortunately, few scholars in the humanities, and fewer still among historians, have explored post-Freudian trends in psychology or psychiatry in search of more usable concepts. Let me offer by way of illustration one school of psychoanalysis that began with high hopes of relevance to history, but which in the long run has been little used among historians:⁶ self psychology. The founder of the postwar self-psychology movement, Heinz Kohut (1913–1981) of the 'Chicago School', placed a holistic concept of a growth-prone but homeostasis-seeking 'self' at the centre of psychoanalytical inquiry. He came to see normal selfhood—relatively cohesive and stable or loose and friable—as gaining in distinctiveness from infancy onward as people internalize ('transmute') certain qualities or attributes of 'objects' in their environments. Once fully internalized, those object-attributes become part of individuals' self-experience as 'selfobjects', conditioning their subsequent degree of comfort with themselves and their relations with society. In original Kohutian analysis there were three prime, functional selfobject qualities:

- (1) discipline (the 'mirroring' function): the perceived ability to contain and modulate affect, to smoothly (rather than forcibly) exert control over things, circumstances, others and oneself, which, transmuted as a selfobject, enables self-confidence and supports ambitions;
- (2) admirability (the 'idealizing' function): such qualities as steadfastness, competence and caring sensitivity toward others, which grounds the developing ability to esteem both others and oneself and to form abstract ideals;

⁶ To my knowledge, the most serious application of self psychology in historiography has been Demos, 2004, esp. Part Two.

(3) alikeness (the 'twinship' function): the perception of self-similarity, sharable interests and fellow-feeling which underlies a sense of acceptance by others as a valuable individual (Lee & Martin, 1991; Teicholz, 1999; Mollon, 2001).

In the very young, intimate other persons are the sources of selfobject formation, but as people's capacities for abstraction mature, the attributes that are needed for selfobject adjustment and maintenance are increasingly found in objects of the cultural, social, institutional and ideological environment. The perspective of self psychology, thus, brings more attention to psychic challenges and responsive creativity in adulthood, and it places more confidence in people's own ability to effect self-adjustment than does classical psychoanalysis.

In self psychology, dreams, for instance, are not regarded as disguises but rather as fairly straightforward reflections of the patient's current concerns over the cohesiveness and workability of his or her sense of self. Though it is recognized that dream imagery often is metaphorical in ways that require co-exploration by analyst and analysand, suppression of conflict and defensive operations are not assumed, and the distinction between manifest and latent content thus becomes less important. Dreams are seen as representing the dreamer's current organization of self-experience, his or her relative satisfaction or dissatisfaction with that organization, and any ongoing changes therein. Selfobject problems from childhood naturally are of interest, but dreams are looked to for situations, feelings and images that disclose the subject's present self-structure.⁷

Of course, historians cannot 'psychoanalyze' figures in the past; we cannot relate to our subjects as a psychologist or psychiatrist relates to a patient or client. But the idea that mutable individuals seek to fulfil a wide variety of selfobject needs and thus enhance personal agency (which might be exercised in group action) by relating transferentially to objects, broadly construed, in their changing external worlds—persons, ideals, institutions, events, figurations—offers historians a useful interpretive framework. It provides the sort of dynamic connection, so elusive to Fred Weinstein, between ultimately unpredictable, subjectively motivated individuals and the unanticipatable

⁷ For comparisons between Freudian and self-psychological dream interpretation, see Aron, 1989; Alperin, 2004; or Gabel, 1991. See also articles by Fosshage, Fiss and Greenberg in Goldberg (ed.), 1989.

course of wider affairs. It helps to explain, for instance, why Huang Chunyao could not just walk away, psychologically, from the dreamed ape before him, but equally could not shake off the 'monkey on his back': the civil service examination system.

In the history of late-imperial China, a lot has been written about the tremendous psychological pressures (not to mention financial and physical hardships) to which highly educated boys and men were subjected by this extraordinary institution (Miyazaki, 1981; Elman, 2000). By late-Ming times when Huang Chunyao lived, the competition was intense on all levels; the stakes of participation, in terms of investment and reputation, were very high; the system was fraught with cheating, bribery and patron-client favouritism; and the prescribed canonical interpretations and stylistic requirements of the exams were off-putting to many talented intellectuals. The exams were not compulsory. Why did men like Huang continue to enter this race and spur themselves onward so obsessively? Explanations have largely been mounted in terms of sociopolitical self-interest: the power, prestige and privilege gained by even low-level affiliation with the imperial state, which restrained the growth of non-state sectors that might compete with it for the allegiance of monied and educated elites.

The self-psychology perspective, on the other hand, is useful in identifying the enduring psychological needs that were served by the examinations, as well as in understanding the acute fear of self-dissolution that men like Huang expressed when the edifice of which the exam system was a mainstay shuddered, cracked, crumbled and fell. Simply put, the system presented all selfobject essentials in one: The *discipline* it required was an extension of the controlling attributes of the imperial state, which as a whole was *admired* for its employment of soft-power principles (i.e., the Confucian ideals inculcated through the exam curriculum) to contain juvenile impulses and foster mature harmony in society. And the *camaraderie* that the system engendered among men who competed so intently against one another was a distinct upper-class adhesive, especially among those who succeeded but also among those who did not. Thus, we find Huang Chunyao, having rejected the culture of the exams and officialdom, staggering in a slough of despondency. He chastises himself over a reverie of socializing with examiners and fellow candidates in the capital, and he finds confirmation of his decision to leave the bureaucratic scene in a dream of standing in filth while officiating in a mandarin robe

(Huang, 1925: 26b)—all the while complaining about depression, aporia and the lack of unity in his mind-and-heart.

Focusing on Huang's inner struggles, self psychology provides a particularly apt framework for understanding in more than just cultural terms his chronic sense of disunited consciousness, which led him to so sanguinely undertake Chan meditation on non-duality. It allows me to confidently use Huang's diary as a valid source on his psyche, taking its contents as self-state testimonies to his object-needs. Employing again just Kohut's three classic kinds of such needs: (1) It is clear that Huang had great difficulty *modulating discipline*. His relentless dissatisfaction with his already highly self-disciplined habits and skills (such as examination essay-writing) propelled him to extremes—in the end to the extreme of a performatively self-controlled suicide. (2) Huang's capacity for intellectual *idealization* is hyper-developed: he subscribes absolutely, for instance, to the Classics on which the exams were based. But he finds little *admirability* in his fellow exam candidates or in other people around him. Thus, he is inclined to rather dogmatically chart his own course. (3) Chunyao's need for an object of *aliveness* is focused singularly on the spiritual precocity of his much younger full brother, to such a degree that the latter is compelled, on that fateful day, to be Chunyao's 'twin' in death.

Acceptance of self psychology, however, demands that one work through postmodern objections to the reification of selfhood, especially since the school has been typically Anglo-American in conceiving a highly *present* self, one of fulfilment and realization (Socor, 1997: Pt. 1, chap. 4). So adherents have been at pains to argue that in self psychology 'the structure of the self' means the structure of a person's *experience* of selfhood, of his or her phenomenologically observable cognitive-affective schemata, not an internal scaffold, and that selfobjects are *processes* of auto-orientation in the world, not entities in the mind (e.g., Trop et al., 2002: 141). One value of studying Huang's diary, for instance, lies in being able to observe the homologies by which a gradual shift occurred in the objects that provided strength to Huang's sense of self-integrity: ironically, from the concepts and behavioural models of selflessness in his Confucian heritage to the ideal of no-self as achieved by great masters in the history of Chan.

Yet rehabilitation of the usage of 'self' among historians, I aver, requires more work of the kind done by William Reddy (2001), who draws insights from cognitive psychology, cultural anthropology and literary criticism in order to

treat more adequately the attentive, agentive, interpretive dispositions of individual minds. Indeed, a batch of books and articles that neuroscientists have published for laypeople in recent years has opened a comfort zone in conceiving human selfhood, a zone which, in my view, accommodates self psychology well.

Most important to any up-to-date view of selfhood has been the gradual discovery of the simultaneous presence in every human brain of multiple modules and multiple neural networks, generating mental representations while keeping us alive with multiple nonconscious monitors. This accounts, most basically, for the *state of reflexivity* that we call 'self awareness'. Both the evolutionary and structural approaches to understanding this modular multiplicity and connectivity offer insights to humanists into conceiving individual selves. Representing the evolutionary approach is Joseph LeDoux, who points out that connectivity among the cognitive, emotional and motivational systems of neurons is not yet perfect, allowing differences between what is encoded implicitly (such as the dubious aspects of late-Ming official culture) and what is focused on explicitly (such as the norms enshrined in the Five Classics). This imperfection explains how the 'synaptic self', for all its wonder, is breakable and why the strong intellectual acumen of someone like Huang Chunyao is no buffer against psychosis (LeDoux, 2002: 322–23; Edelman, 2004).

Antonio Damasio, for his part, takes a structural approach to human consciousness and sense of self. Drawing attention to the work of the brain in mapping and monitoring the homeodynamic (including emotional) state of the whole organism, he begins with the entirely nonconscious but highly sophisticated 'proto-self' which imprints awareness that we are alive and awake and of the extent of our physical being—what is of-our-body and not-of-our-body. The most basic level of consciousness, on which we are wordlessly cognizant of internal and external things and are aware of being aware, Damasio calls 'the (transient) core self'. Beyond this are 'extended consciousness' and its accompaniment, the 'autobiographical self', which depends for its development on the aggregation of long-term memory. This self, which prominently involves verbal concepts and narration, enabling complex civilisational activity, is enlarged and refashioned throughout a lifetime (Damasio, 1999: Pts. II–III).

The autobiographical self is usually the only kind of self considered in humanistic and social scientific discussions of selfhood, and this limited purview is the source of endless malassertions—for instance of the fictionality of our sense of agentive selfhood, or of the totally cultural or linguistic constructedness of self, which equate changeability with nonexistence and mistake the multiplicity of reflexive *faculties* for the unity of being that those faculties support. Thinking back to Huang Chunyao's dream of confronting a *xingxing*: The view that this constitutes only a cultural-textual representation of selfhood in a man who was someone only by dint of moulding by a certain environment—in his case particularly by the normative thrust of the *Liji*—is to ignore the somatic dimension of Huang's dream experience. By this I mean the essential involvement of what Damasio would call Huang's proto- and core selves in the *feeling* of facing and interlocuting with a verbal primate. Attending only to the way in which Huang's autobiographical self construed the dream is to lose touch with the physiological and sensorial underpinnings of consciousness and—worse for the biographer—to fail in realizing the full effect of the dream on the subject's self-awareness.

The Kohutian belief in 'vicarious introspection', that is, the ability of a skilled analyst to enter deeply and empathetically into the experiences of analysands, also has received support from cognitive-neuroscientific research on people's remarkably strong responsiveness and fine attunement to the feelings of others. The mechanisms of interpersonal affect, the 'mirror neural systems' of the brain, it is found, actually 'replay' in us the observable expressions or conditions of others. This is why one might find it genuinely painful to read Huang Chunyao's diary. From the neuroscience point of view, this is 'empathy', distinguishable from 'sympathy' in the presence of experience-matching in addition to rational understanding (Rizolatti et al., 2001; Adolphs, 2003: 172; Casebeer, 2003: 843–44; Hauser, 2006: 224–25). Of course, no one claims that we can 'get inside other people's skin', but science is providing some push-back against strident insistence that only intersubjective relations are possible, that is, interactions between mutually non-interpenetrating subjectivities. In literary and historical studies, vicariously introspective immersion in a subject's mental state usually must be attempted face-to-typeface with texts, not with living people.⁸ Nevertheless, I am encouraged that an empathetic

⁸ On lessons from self psychology for dealing with poststructuralist conundrums in reading literary texts, see Bouson, 1989.

exercise in historical inquiry—as called for in the ethical treatment of paragons—can be well founded not only in evidence but also in the mirror-function of the skilled historian’s brain.

The Empathy Issue

The rise of intersubjectivity as a canonical principle across the disciplines has spawned debates about whether historians who advocate empathy really mean sympathy, and about what the real point of such affective involvement with sources might be. Samuel Moyn, in a review essay, has raised the relevant issues provocatively, posing three main questions: Can empathy really be distinguished from sympathy? *With what* are we supposed to empathize? And *for what* moral reason? After arguing that empathy and sympathy are mutually inextricable, Moyn gives examples of how the exercise of fellow feeling with historical subjects can either exhaust one’s compassionate resources (as in my case with Huang Chunyao) or end up simplistically valorizing the subjects’ struggles and ‘sending them symbolically to heaven’ (as with Huang’s Qing-period biographers). Then Moyn asks, with *what* in people’s complex responses to suffering is the historian supposed to validly empathize? After all, many victims in history have claimed to learn that the lesson of their experience is triumph, including in the aftermath of the Holocaust. What if a victim insists on redemption, whether personal or theological or revolutionary or nationalist? What if a victim feels her ability to survive

illustrates her capacity to sustain horror with resolve, or concludes that her story vindicates the premise of God’s benevolent providence? What if another takes it to illustrate the sempiternity of his people or the need for socialist revolution? What if it illustrates the ability to put the past, for all its scarring, behind for good? What, indeed, if some victims wanted to be sent to heaven? How can an ‘empathetic’ approach cut through the plurality of possible and actual responses to pain...in order to insist on the viability of one alone? What kind of empathy turns out to be the vehicle of a contested set of values, one only a few victims have preferred? (Moyn, 2006: 404–05)

If the answer to Moyn’s question is that we should generally empathize with people’s ‘humanity’, then how are we to deal with the bankrupting of humanity as an object, its removal as a ground of knowing, by

poststructuralism? Moyn asks, can we reconcile poststructuralist influence with a 'belief in humanity as a moral ground, as a justifiable and indeed obligatory activity?' The only recourse that he offers is to concede the arduousness of true empathy without giving up on it (Moyn, 2006: 404, 422–14, quote 412).

A way out of this quandary, somewhat curiously, lies in the moral hermeneutics of one of the most seminal figures in postmodern thought, Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005). His last two monographic works, *Oneself as Another* (*Soi-même comme un autre*, 1990) and *The Just* (*Le juste*, 1995), are especially useful here because Ricoeur's view of the self and of how we can know about it is highly compatible with both the neuroscientific and self-psychological perspectives sketched above.⁹ His thought also is compelling because it guides a historiographical ethic that deals 'responsibly' with individuals, upholding the ego's obligation and humility when 'faced' by an irreplaceable other person, as enjoined in the supra-ontological ethics of Emmanuel Levinas (Critchley, 1992: 4–9; Ciaramelli, 1991).

For Ricoeur, the self is a multi-dimensional activity that displays structure through speech and action. It is grounded in a sense of sameness, the 'I' or *idem*, which is posited in moment-to-moment statements or acts that presume an agent. Beyond that, what Ricoeur calls the *ipse* resides in our sense of continuity over time, in the capacity to narrate identity. People cannot know other selves positively or even know their own selves absolutely, but the reality of selves can be 'attested' through what they strive for and produce. Ricoeur defines 'ethical intention' as '*aiming at the "good life" with and for others in just institutions*' (Ricoeur, 1992: 172, orig. italics). Truth in attestation does not come easily, since the self subjects its attestatory inclinations to 'suspicion'. Unchallenged by suspicion of illusion, attestation is naïve; checked by suspicion it is rendered fragile, but only thereby can it gain strength.¹⁰

⁹ For my realization of the relevance of Ricoeur to self psychology I am indebted to Salter, 2002.

¹⁰ The focus on evaluating 'languages of the good' in the auto/biographical ethics advocated in Parker, 2007, is eminently compatible with Ricoeur's argument. However, in laudably trying to illustrate the universality of his approach with a non-Western autobiography, that of Wang Shimin (1592–1680), Parker, a non-sinologist, inadvertently shows that Ricoeur's 'suspicion', if not exercised by the subject, is best supplied by specialists in the subject's culture and period. For he does not 'suspect' that Wang's attestation to himself as a four-square Confucian may

I suggest that we can proceed as historians by exercising the attestatory faculties of our selves, affirming the selfhood of persons whom we study in the past by inferring judiciously from what is recorded of their words and actions. We should take attestation as the fundament of both our own quest for the good of finding truths about the past *and* as the fundament of efforts by the people we study to find ‘the good life’ under their various sociocultural and institutional conditions. Transcending temperament, attestation can serve broadly as a basis for empathy with historical figures, regardless of whether they were victims of others or themselves, or whether we would invite them to dinner.

Let me conclude by bringing Moyn and Ricoeur to bear on Huang Chunyao’s death. As explained above, Huang and his brother are renowned as martyrs in traditional Chinese historiography because they hanged themselves rather than submit to Manchu-Qing troops who were seizing their home city, Jiading. The prominence of those two fastidious gentlemen among leaders of the resistance and as prestigious literati dictated that they would be run down and manhandled by coarse soldiers. Then they would be killed on the spot or pressured mercilessly, under threat of execution, to serve the Qing side. What considerations were uppermost in Huang’s mind as he decided to take part in the resistance and eventually to end his life in a noose? Even with better documentation, it would be impossible to pin this down. But here are some possibilities, given Huang’s class culture, personal background, and specific situation:

- He adhered stalwartly to the Neo-Confucian principle of dying in loyalty to the state that had ‘nurtured’ him (the Ming).
- He chose hanging as the quickest practical way to fulfil the Confucian injunction to keep the body whole, even in death (rather than, say, cut his own throat or be hacked to pieces or beheaded by others).
- Taking very seriously the Confucian obligation of elder brother to instruct younger brother, he was implicitly goaded by the presence of Huang Yuanyao to set a sterling example, even though it ended both of their lives.

be driven by a need to overcome the reputation of his politically and religiously controversial grandfather, Wang Xijue (1534–1611), the *bête noire* of reformist Donglin partisans and subscriber to the heterodox cult of his visionary daughter, Wang Daozhen (a.k.a. Tanyangzi). See Parker, 2007: 19–24.

- A prideful man, he preferred to submit to his own will rather than to the will of others.
- As someone who was supercilious toward ‘vulgar’ people, he preferred death to being mauled by common soldiers, much less by ‘barbarian’ Manchus.
- Through Chan Buddhist meditation, he had transcended in purity the dualism of life and death and simply put his body in the same state as his mind—beyond being.

With *which* of these possibilities, Moyn would ask, should I empathize? To choose one from the plurality would be simplistic; any choice would invite a subconscious transference of my own values to Huang; and my life, in any case, offers almost no firsthand experiences to match up with his.

I can attest, however, from careful reading of Huang’s oeuvre that there was much more than self-abasing Confucian platitude in his final statement, which otherwise might be read merely as pro forma. Each phrase distills a life-issue that Huang seized by the horns, demanding to know what was right by Heaven: public service versus principled withdrawal; scholastics versus spirituality; ardor versus peace of mind. I can attest that until his last breath Huang Chunyao excruciatingly pursued attestation—through harrowing self-suspensions—to the good in himself and the universe, to the absolute good of self-integrity as a necessary foundation for effective action on behalf of one’s family, society and state. With this I can empathize, without necessarily endorsing his self-punishing manner or specific values. I could never have been an acquaintance, much less a friend, of Huang Chunyao, if only for the reason that he would never have agreed to even correspond with me, a woman not of his close kin. But who wants to befriend paragons, anyway? We want, rather, to ‘hand it to them’, *it* being acknowledgment that they make big what most of us keep small in ourselves—willing the good.

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Britain through Chinese Eyes: early perceptions of Britain in pre-Opium War China¹

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Abstract

This article explores early Chinese perceptions of Britain prior to the 1840s. It shows that, from the Qianlong reign to the eve of the Opium War, although knowledge of Britain in China was indeed limited, this was not a period in which Chinese understanding of Britain was either negligible or unchanging. As contacts between the two nations increased, both the local elite in the south-eastern coastal areas and the elite at the imperial court in Beijing obtained credible as well as inaccurate information on Britain and the British people. Although in these years a potential challenge from the British was becoming increasingly imaginable and China's attitude towards Britain was quickly changing, the Qing government did not pay serious attention to studying Britain as an emerging world power. Nor did it institute a wide-ranging investigation of British power and influence as a preparation for self-defence. As a result of some misperceptions, the Chinese government and people were largely unprepared for serious aggression from Britain, even though they had been aware of Britain's naval ambition for decades.

Keywords: China, Britain, perceptions, encounter, the Opium War

Introduction

The First Anglo-Chinese War (1840-42), also known as the 'Opium War', was a fateful conflict that had profound consequences for the histories of both China and Great Britain. Although the periodisation of modern Chinese history as

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beginning with the Opium War has been challenged,² research on China's engagements with Britain prior to the 1840s remains inadequate. In terms of early Chinese knowledge about Britain and the rest of the Western world, previous scholarship has usually highlighted the Chinese people's extreme ignorance of Western geography, science and technological innovations. Based on accounts written by early British travellers to China, some scholarly books, such as Michael Adas' *Machines as the Measure of Men*, provide a sharp contrast 'between static, past-minded, backward China and the continually improving, forward-looking, industrializing states of Europe' (Adas, 1989: 180). Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* influentially challenged the patronising attitudes which Westerners often adopted towards oriental societies during their encounters with the latter (Said, 1995: 1-28), a wave of new scholarship has interpreted Chinese society as being more advanced than was previously thought. By studying, for example, primarily the imperial court's knowledge about Western technology, Joanna Waley-Cohen has maintained that, during the Qianlong reign, 'the Chinese were extremely interested in technological advances and in what the West had to offer' (Waley-Cohen, 1993: 1543-4). Mark Elliott, in his recent book, has asserted that the Qianlong emperor 'was unquestionably familiar with Western geography' (Elliott, 2009: 140) especially because His Majesty had a world map painted as a mural upon a wall in the Yuanmingyuan palace. These studies are useful correctives to the previous belief about the Chinese 'ignorance' of the West, but they may have gone too far the other way in claiming that the Chinese, including their Manchu rulers, were generally better informed than they may have been. Although the debate between James Hevia and Joseph Esherick has prompted widespread discussion on the applicability of 'post-modern' theory to this period of Qing history (Hevia, 2000; Hevia, 1998; Esherick, 1998a; Esherick, 1998b; Bickers, 1993; Huang, 2007), this controversy, which concentrates on court ritual, has not seriously investigated how Britain was known to or perceived by the Chinese government and people at this time. Matthew Mosca's new book, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy*, tells his readers much about the representation of British India in Qing strategic thought from the mid-

² Philip A. Kuhn, for example, doubts whether the modern period of China's history can be demarcated by largely external events. Instead, Kuhn suggests that 'we can reasonably seek the beginning of the old order's decline ... no earlier than 1864, the year the Taiping Rebellion was destroyed'. See Kuhn, 1970: 5-8.

seventeenth century to 1860 (Mosca, 2013), but it does not sufficiently explain the exact extent to which the Chinese, within and without the imperial government, were acquainted with the British during the pre-Opium War era. This article, based on a wealth of primary materials in the Chinese language, shows that, as Sino-British contacts increased dramatically in this period, both the central government in Beijing and the local elite in the south-east of China achieved a certain degree of understanding of Britain and the British people. Despite an awareness of the potential trouble which the British might cause, the imperial government did not pay serious attention to Britain as an emerging world power. Since a serious state-directed effort to understand the British and the extent to which they could really threaten the safety of the Chinese empire was not undertaken, precautions were not taken to prevent possible military aggression by Britain. As a result, when the Opium War broke out in 1840, both the imperial court and the majority of the south-eastern elites were caught unprepared for the extent of British power, even though they had been conscious of Britain's naval ambition for decades.

From the late-eighteenth century, significant changes had begun to take place in both the British and the Chinese empires. After the American War of Independence, growing importance was attached by Britain to its trade with Asia. Britain's trade with China hence became increasingly crucial to British overseas commerce. Nevertheless, China's Canton commercial system, which confined the country's foreign trade to a small area outside the city walls of Canton (Guangzhou) and only allowed it to be conducted through a handful of state-authorised merchants, resulted in a trade imbalance unfavourable to the British. In order to reverse this situation, from the late 1780s to the 1810s, three British embassies were sent to China with the aim of securing improved trading rights. Although the first mission, the Cathcart embassy of 1788, was called off because of the sudden death of Lord Cathcart, the latter two, the Macartney embassy of 1793 and the Amherst embassy of 1816, did reach the imperial court of China. An era of official Sino-British encounters was hence begun. As engagements between the two countries were being intensified, however, China's '*Kang-Qian shengshi* (prosperous age of the Kangxi until the Qianlong reigns, 1662-1795)' was drawing to a close and the Chinese empire was encountering a series of crises. Overpopulation, land shortage, the fiscal weakness of the government, and unceasing rebellions had a major impact

upon China's internal history.³ The task of maintaining order over an expanding and increasingly belligerent population became more and more difficult for the financially troubled Qing government. In the context of the Qing dynasty's decline, the three major Sino-British encounters between 1793 and 1840, namely the Macartney and Amherst embassies and the lead-up to the Opium War, took place in the three different reigns of these decades. In the following sections, details about the Chinese people's and government's perceptions of Britain in each of these reigns will be introduced and analysed.

Chinese perceptions of Britain in the Qianlong period

Probably because of China's enormous population, Chinese knowledge about Britain in the Qianlong period (1735-95) was often believed to be minimal or even negligible. Although at this time the vast majority of Chinese people might indeed have had no impression of the British, the initial encounters between the two peoples and governments did make some Chinese aware of this nation from afar. In general, the early notions of Britain were introduced into China through two channels: one was the imperial government in Beijing, the other was the local elites and merchants in the south-eastern coastal areas. As a result of their respective contacts with the British, credible as well as inaccurate information about these 'outsiders' was introduced into China.

Although the Qianlong emperor was known for his appetite for and interest in foreign artifacts, it was his subjects who lived in the south-eastern coastal areas who reached a deeper understanding of Britain during the Qianlong reign. From the latter part of the seventeenth century, Britain's commercial intercourse with China had increased steadily. During the Qianlong period, Britain replaced Holland as China's biggest trading partner from Europe, and British merchants who came to trade with China considerably outnumbered those from other Western nations. Although, according to Chinese law, commerce with foreign countries was restricted to only a limited number of ports,⁴ the smuggling of British goods was in fact widespread along China's south-east coast, especially near the ports of Amoy (Xiamen), Ningbo and Shanghai. In these areas, growing commercial activity enabled local residents

³ Details about Qing's dynastic decline can be found in Johns & Kuhn, 1978: 107-62; Naquin & Rawski, 1987: 217-32, and Wei, 1992: 39-44.

⁴ In 1757, the Qianlong emperor ordered the closure of all these ports to foreign trade, with the exception of Canton.

to have more contacts with the British people and their culture. In consequence, not only were British commodities more welcomed in this region than in the rest of the Chinese empire, but Britain as a nation was also generally better understood.

In particular, because of the Western products, which were generally known as *yanghuo* (foreign stuff), that were introduced mainly by British merchants, Chinese people in these areas acquired some positive impressions of Britain. Since these commodities, such as fragrances, glasses, matches, 'singsongs'⁵ and so on, were usually delicately made and reasonably priced, they were not only greatly admired and sought after, but eventually came into vogue in this region.⁶ In general, everything relating to Britain or the West was considered to be in good taste. In Guangdong, for example, in order to satisfy the region's great demand for tasteful *yanghuo*, some factories were established to fabricate comparable products. In Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, 'whatever was valuable and finely crafted was referred to as western goods' (Bao, 1828: 800), even if they were not really made by Westerners. Compared with *Chinoiserie*, the almost concurrent British interest in Chinese goods and Chinese-inspired artifacts, this Chinese craving for Western commodities, although largely restricted to the south-east of the country, seems to have been more extensive among the ordinary populace. As Guan Tong, a famous scholar from Jiangning, recalled, '*Yanghuo* were heatedly talked about, so much so that even the poorest wanted to exhaust their money in order to follow this trend' (Guan, 1833: 819). Since Britain was constantly examined and looked upon favourably from a material point of view, an interest in other aspects of Britain was naturally aroused in this region. As a result, greater knowledge about Britain and the British people was introduced into China by residents on China's south-east coast.

First, *Huang Qing siyi kao* (*The Qing imperial examination of the outside peoples*), a book compiled from the oral accounts of a Cantonese sailor who had travelled to Britain, was a notable contribution to Chinese knowledge of Britain at this time. According to the research of Yang Xianyi, the author of

⁵ 'Singsongs' most typically refers to 'a clock, watch or fantastically shaped mechanical toy, such as a snuff box that conceals a jewelled bird which sings when the lid is open'. See Zheng, 2005: 73.

⁶ Details about British exports to China and the circulation of *yanghuo* in China can be found in Conner, 1986: 141-7 and Zheng, 2010: 37-52.

Huang Qing siyi kao landed near Liverpool and visited the north of England (Yang, 1983: 141). In a few sentences, this Chinese sailor not only gave a brief description of what he saw in Lancashire and Hampshire, but he also introduced some details about Britain such as the succession to the British throne from George I to George III. This kind of first-hand knowledge about Britain had never been communicated to China before, especially by a Chinese person. In addition, it was also from the Qianlong period onwards that visual images of British people began to be circulated among the Chinese. In *Huang Qing zhigong tu* (*The Qing imperial illustrations of tributaries*), two portraits of a British 'barbarian' male and female were included (as shown below) (Fu & Dong, 1761: 121-2). It is not known whether these pictures were drawn from life or, which is perhaps more likely, from some imported images. Since no British man or woman had ever travelled to Beijing at this time, nor was any extensive Sino-British commerce being conducted in north China, it is almost certain that these images were introduced into China thanks to the early commercial contacts between the British and the south-eastern coastal Chinese. This is the first time British figures were illustrated in an official Chinese publication, by which the physical appearance of British men and women was presented to a wider readership across the country.



'A barbarian man from *Ying-ji-li*'⁷

'A barbarian woman from *Ying-ji-li*'

Despite this advance in knowledge of Britain achieved in some south-eastern maritime provinces, a similar grasp of British facts or collective interest in British products was not so clearly seen in other parts of the Chinese empire. The imperial court in Beijing, in particular, does not seem to have had a strong interest in investigating Western nations, let alone Britain. The state-funded *Da Qing yitong zhi* (*The great Qing gazetteer*)⁸ does not mention the country of *Ying-ji-li* at all. Although *Qinding huangqing wenxian tongkao* (*Imperial comprehensive investigations based on literary and documentary sources*), a later official work published in 1787, noted some British social customs, such as 'Its people believe in the Christ', 'Their marriages are based on the agreement of the two sides', 'Concubinage is prohibited', 'In greetings, people take off their hats and shake hands' (Zhang, 1787: 7471) and so on, it seems to be a collection of random findings obtained through actual contacts with

⁷ *Ying-ji-li* was probably transliterated from the word 'English', or 'England'.

⁸ This gazetteer was edited under the order of the Qianlong emperor and was published in 1784.

British people rather than a careful and in-depth survey of Britain's social, political or military situation. Given the enormous size of this work, the tiny section that is devoted to introducing knowledge about Britain shows how little importance was attached by the Qianlong court to studying Britain at this time.

Although it remains debatable whether the Qianlong emperor was really unaware of the potential threat from Britain, some clear signs of the imperial court's attitudes towards Britain can be found in the manner in which it received the Macartney mission. In the late eighteenth century, despite the early signs of the Qing's dynastic decline, the Chinese empire still possessed a vast territory and a huge population that easily dwarfed that of any European country. As Mark Elliott has pointed out, with the confidence derived from 'an unprecedented period of peace and wealth', there was 'no pressing reason' for the Qing court to be curious about European matters, nor did the Qianlong emperor '*need to be interested in them*' (Elliott, 2009: 140-2).⁹ Probably for this reason, in 1792, when the Qing court was first informed of the proposed visit from a British royal embassy, no official in Beijing was certain from which country this embassy was despatched or its exact geographical location.¹⁰ It was with the help of some European missionaries that the Qianlong court found out that 'It is situated in the north of the west ocean, and to the northwest of our celestial empire' (Department of Historical Anecdotes, the Palace Museum, 1990: 616). As the Macartney mission was despatched under the pretext of presenting congratulations on the Qianlong emperor's eightieth birthday, the Qing government was largely unconscious of the embassy's real commercial and diplomatic intentions. Although, as Hevia and Mosca have suggested, the Qianlong court might have known something of Britain's influence (Hevia, 2000: 181-91; Mosca, 2013: 127-60), particularly in India and

⁹ Italics in the original.

¹⁰ Elliott's assertion that the Qianlong emperor 'was unquestionably familiar with Western geography' does not seem tenable, because even though the Qianlong emperor indeed possessed some world maps, this does not necessarily mean that he knew where exactly particular European countries were located on them. Since Elliott is unable to explain why the Qianlong emperor inquired of Macartney how far Britain was from Russia and whether Italy and Portugal were not near Britain and tributary to it, Elliott suggests that the Qianlong emperor might have asked these questions deliberately in order to conceal his knowledge about Britain. No evidence, however, has been presented to support this conjecture. See Elliott, 2009: 140.

in the vicinity of China's south-western frontiers, the British envoy was nevertheless regarded as a tribute bearer and was received in the traditional Chinese court manner. In this respect, it can be clearly seen that, no matter how much the Qing government really knew of Britain in 1793, or how much the Qianlong emperor was offended personally by Macartney's refusal to kowtow, the imperial court was keen to represent Britain as a sincere and reverent barbarian state which admired Chinese civilisation. For instance, the Qianlong emperor stated in his official letter to the British monarch:

Although your country, O King, lies in the far oceans, yet inclining your heart towards civilisation you have specifically sent an envoy respectfully to present a state message, and sailing the seas he has come to our court to kowtow and to present congratulations for the imperial birthday, and also to present local products, thereby showing your sincerity (Cranmer-Byng, 1962: 337).

In line with this tone, Macartney's refusal to comply with the kowtow ceremony was interpreted in a tolerant light. According to the Qing government's representation, it was more the unique British custom than the envoy's personal feelings that prevented the British visitors from performing kowtow, because 'It is this country's custom to bind people's legs by cloth. This practice makes prostrations very difficult for them. They are ignorant of the ritual of paying respect by kowtows' (The Palace Museum, 1990: 671). Since kowtow in Chinese culture was such an essential ritual that required every polished person's observance, those who were notified of this official explanation, but who were out of touch with the British mission or merchants, might reasonably infer that Britain was just an uncivilised country.

In sum, during the Qianlong reign, compared to the imperial government in Beijing, the south-eastern coastal Chinese achieved a deeper understanding of Britain. Although some of this new knowledge might have been communicated to Beijing, the Qianlong emperor's government was largely unaware of Britain being a rising global power or of its real purpose in sending the Macartney mission. In consequence, no serious attention was paid to studying this major partner in external trade. Instead, whether intentionally or not, the Qianlong court tended to imagine and believe that Britain was but one of the many barbarian countries that admired and revered the refined and sophisticated

Chinese culture. In other words, no matter how much it believed this itself, the Qing government at this time was certainly eager to promote a twofold image of this little known country: first, in terms of civilisation - uncivilised Britain could not compare with the great Middle Kingdom; second, this peaceful and submissive barbarian state could not pose a threat to the existing order of China's 'world'.

Chinese perceptions of Britain in the Jiaqing period

As shown above, Chinese perceptions of Britain, whether along the south-eastern coast or within the imperial court, were without serious negative elements during the Qianlong period. These impressions, however, began to change at a rapid pace during the reign of Jiaqing (1796-1820). As Britain and its merchants continued to strengthen their presence in south China, tensions between the two nations gradually built up. For this reason, not only some of the coastal Chinese but also the Qing government itself begin to feel concerned about the difficulties the British might cause China. Possible challenges from Britain became imaginable. Even though the Jiaqing emperor and his courtiers remained optimistic about China's ability to check Britain in any emergency, the image of a deferential and peaceful Britain was quickly diminishing. Instead, the British were increasingly viewed as insolent and crafty savages.

British merchants had come to dominate China's foreign trade through Canton not long after the Macartney mission left China. On the one hand, they contributed eighty per cent of the tariff paid to Canton customs (approximately 900,000 taels¹¹ of silver per annum around 1816) (The Palace Museum, 1968: I, 22). On the other hand, the number of economic and civil disputes between British merchants and coastal Chinese people increased significantly. Perhaps as a result, the image of Britain among the well informed people in the south-east shifted from a focus on the attractiveness of British goods to a consciousness of Britain's maritime influence, as well as its powerful military strength. For example, it was reported by Wang Dahai, a

¹¹ The tael currency at Canton was treated as equivalent to 6s. 8d. It was a hypothetical coin of pure silver used only in the East India Company's accounts and in all cotton transactions. The basic circulating coin in foreign commerce at Canton during this period was the Spanish dollar, with an intrinsic value of 4s. 2d. and an exchange value ranging from 3s. 11d. to 5s. See Greenberg, 1951, vii.

Fujian native who travelled around South-east Asia, that Britain ‘predominates in northwest Europe in terms of military instruments’ (Wang, 1806: 752), and that it ‘occupies the most crucial forts on the world’s main trade sea-routes; ... Countries like Holland and France are often harassed by them’ (Wang, 1806: 751). In 1820, a Cantonese sailor named Xie Qinggao verified these facts as a result of his visit to Britain. In *Hai lu* (*An Account of the Seas*), his maritime record,¹² Xie confirmed the widespread opinion that ‘Britain vies to obtain all profitable places within the seas. ... it uses powerful military forces to back its mercantile activities’ (Xie, 1820: 1432).

In addition to this apprehension among the Chinese coastal people, causes of discontent with Britain were also beginning to influence the Jiaqing government. In 1802 and 1808, in order to take advantage of the chaotic situation resulting from the Napoleonic wars, as well as to secure its trade with China, Britain made two attempts to occupy Macao, the Portuguese settlement near Canton.¹³ These expeditions, although unsuccessful, greatly heightened the Qing court’s concern over Britain’s naval ambitions. From then on, in the official letters that the Jiaqing emperor received from Canton, positive words about Britain can rarely be found. Instead, the character of the British was represented in a clearly unfavourable light. In contrast to what was noted in the Qianlong period, the British were now denounced as ‘crafty (*jiaozha*)’,¹⁴ ‘greedy (*tanli*)’,¹⁵ ‘fierce and cunning (*qiangheng jianzha*)’,¹⁶ ‘interest-oriented (*liyu xunxin*)’¹⁷ and they were, in general, ‘the most harsh

¹² *Hai lu* was edited from Xie Qinggao’s oral accounts.

¹³ Details about these two expeditions can be found in Morse, 1926: II, 357-72, III, 76-95 and Ma & Huang, 1996, 21-7.

¹⁴ Report from the governor of Guangdong to the Jiaqing emperor on Britain’s occupation of Macao, 28 October (lunar calendar), the thirteenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1808), in The Palace Museum, 1968: II, 35.

¹⁵ Report from the viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi to the Jiaqing emperor on the cause of Britain’s intrusion into Macao, 20 September (lunar calendar), the thirteenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1808), in The Palace Museum, 1968: II, 28.

¹⁶ Report from the viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi to the Jiaqing emperor on the current state of Britain, 8 April (lunar calendar), the fourteenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1809), in The Palace Museum, 1968: III, 6.

¹⁷ Report from the viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi to the Jiaqing emperor on the British ships’ intrusion into Macao, 13 October (lunar calendar), the thirteenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1808), in The Palace Museum, 1968: II, 32.

and cruel barbarians (*zhufan zhong zuiwei jie'ao*),¹⁸ who 'live[d] by plunder (*jielue weisheng*)'.¹⁹ Although, at this time, neither the Chinese government nor the coastal Chinese people had pointed out that the British might be able to threaten the order of the Chinese empire, an awareness of some potential challenge from Britain became embedded in the minds of the Jiaqing emperor and his courtiers.

In this context, when the Amherst embassy arrived in 1816, the Qing government was no longer deluded about the British mission's pretence that it had come to pay respect to the emperor. Instead, the imperial court believed that the 'crafty' British must have some ulterior motives. The Jiaqing emperor, for example, openly stated that:

In the letter of Ying-ji-li's tributary bearer, it is alleged that their people are adorers of the Middle Kingdom's morals and greatness. This is the barbarians' usual statement. They travelled an extremely long distance to my imperial court under the name of paying respect, but in fact they must have other intentions (The Palace Museum, 1968: V, 6).

The Jiaqing emperor's suspicions about the intentions of this British mission, moreover, were increased by Amherst's refusal to comply with the Qing court ritual. The British envoy's claimed reverence for the Chinese empire was hence further distrusted. For this reason, Amherst's insistence on not performing kowtow was not interpreted in as tolerant a spirit as it had been in Macartney's case. On the contrary, it strengthened the Jiaqing emperor's personal dislike of the British, who His Majesty had already found 'disgusting in the extreme (*kewu yiji*)'.²⁰ In consequence, contrary to the Qianlong emperor's declared willingness to receive more British missions after the

¹⁸ Letter from the viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi to the Jiaqing emperor on Britain's intrusion into Macao and the stoppage of Britain's trade, 4 September (lunar calendar), the thirteenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1808), in The Palace Museum, 1968: II, 23.

¹⁹ Report from the viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi to the Jiaqing emperor on the mission to drive out the British barbarians, 27 October (lunar calendar), the thirteenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1808), in The Palace Museum, 1968: II, 35.

²⁰ The Jiaqing emperor's remark on the viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi's report on the cause of Britain's intrusion into Macao, 20 September (lunar calendar), the thirteenth year of the Jiaqing reign (1808), in The Palace Museum, 1968: II, 27.

Macartney embassy, the Jiaqing emperor clearly stated in his letter to the Prince Regent, the future George IV, that:

Hereafter there is no occasion for you to send an Ambassador so far, to be at the trouble, passing over mountains and crossing seas. If you can but pour out the heart in dutiful obedience, it is not necessary at stated times to come to Court, ere it be pronounced that you turn towards the transforming influences (which emanate from this Land).²¹

From these words, it can be observed that the Qing court's attitude towards Britain had indeed changed remarkably during the Jiaqing reign. The image of a sincere and deferential Britain that had previously been held by the Qianlong court had largely been discarded.

In spite of this changed view of the British character, the Jiaqing government did not entirely abandon all earlier notions about Britain. In particular, the Qing court considerably overestimated the importance of the tea trade to Britain, so that it was still believed that the British were unable to afford to lose this crucial trade by challenging the authority of the Chinese empire. According to John Francis Davis, one of the 'China experts' who participated in the Amherst embassy, some Chinese officials even claimed to him privately that it was only through the tea trade, which was granted by the benevolent Chinese emperor, that all the British people were able to survive (Davis, 1841: 179). On the basis of these unfounded assumptions, the Jiaqing emperor and his courtiers gained the impression that, even though the British might dare to cause some disturbances, they could be checked with ease simply by applying some pressure on Britain's tea trade with Canton. Confirmation of this can be found in the well known conversation between the Jiaqing emperor and Sun Yuting, who recorded it when he was the governor of Guangdong:

The Jiaqing emperor: Is Britain wealthy and powerful?

Sun Yuting: This country is larger than other west ocean countries, therefore powerful. Its power is owing to its wealth, which is derived from China.

²¹ The Jiaqing emperor's letter to the British monarch, in Morse, 1926: III, 302.

The Jiaqing emperor: Why?

Sun Yuting: This country trades at Canton. It exchanges its goods for our tea. It then resells the tea to its neighbouring small countries in the west ocean, thus becoming wealthy and powerful. Yet, tea to the West is like rhubarb to Russia. If we put an embargo on tea exports, that country will fall into poverty and its people into sickness, then how can it be powerful? (Sun: 50)

Because of this perception, Britain's power and influence were once again seen as being significantly overshadowed by the imagined might of the vast empire of China. This optimism in the Jiaqing court, to some extent, did not differ greatly from the well established notion in the Qianlong period that Britain was not capable of posing a serious challenge to China. In consequence, as in the previous reign, no effective measures were taken by the Chinese state either to prevent potential British aggression or to learn more about this emerging Western power.

In the reign of Jiaqing, therefore, some negative perceptions of Britain quickly took root in China. Both the central government in Beijing and informed people in the coastal areas gained clearer views of the character, ambition and military strength of the encroaching British. China's attitudes towards Britain, especially the notion that Britain was a peaceful and submissive state, changed significantly compared to the views previously held during the Qianlong period. Nevertheless, both China's ability to check Britain by restricting its tea trade, as well as the way the British were most likely to respond to this threat from the Chinese state, were greatly exaggerated. For this reason, the Chinese government during the Jiaqing reign was still not alarmed about the critical external threat that might be posed by the British. This conviction of Britain's inability to cause China any trouble was soon to change, however, during the Daoguang period.

Chinese perceptions of Britain in the early Daoguang period (prior to 1840)

In September 1820, the Daoguang emperor, son of the Jiaqing emperor, ascended the imperial throne. In the first two decades of the Daoguang reign (1820-50), China became more conscious of Britain's worldwide influence as well as more aware of the severe domestic problems which arose from the opium trade. Under these circumstances, some perceptive individuals within

and without the Chinese government made considerable progress in learning about Britain. A growing number of British studies were produced both in Beijing and in the south-eastern coastal areas. Although as a result of these individual efforts the uncivilised image of the British, which had been a key element in the Qing government's earlier propaganda, was greatly modified, this increase in knowledge of Britain still did not result in a state-directed search for reliable intelligence about Britain. Some of the Qing government's misunderstandings about Sino-British relations even misled the public, including some coastal elites, into underestimating Britain's ability to strike against the Chinese empire.

In the 1820s and 1830s, the rampant opium smuggling caused a range of social and financial crises for the already declining Qing empire. As the harmful effects of the opium trade became progressively serious, not only the Qing government, but also many coastal Chinese people, came to believe that this trade was a British plot against the Chinese empire. In this regard, Yao Ying, a famous scholar-official from Anhui, maintained that, '*Ying-ji-li* has malicious intent. It produces opium and tobacco in order to poison China. These products not only exhaust our nation's wealth, but also drive our people to sickness' (Yao, 1845: 3327-8). Apart from this impression of Britain's 'sinister' intentions towards China, Britain's influence all over the world was also better known to the Chinese as contacts between the two peoples continued to increase. Xiao Lingyu, a Jiangsu geographer working for the Canton provincial government, stated that:

[*Ying-ji-li*] has a practical tradition, and is very interest-oriented. It lives on its commerce at sea. They try to take control of every seaport that they may take advantage of. They build powerful ships and cannons to serve this purpose (Xiao, 1832: 509).

...

In the later Qianlong period, it has already had strong influence overseas; its power grows progressively in the Jiaqing reign. ... The British have garrison forces in all its possessions in America, India, and South-east Asia, where they impose taxes and annual tributes (Xiao, 1832: 766).²²

²² It can be seen that Xiao Lingyu was interpreting Britain according to the Chinese practices. British gains were actually by trade rather than by tribute.

Britain's occupation of Singapore in 1819 and its expansion in South-east Asia in the 1820s, in particular, made the menace from the British more perceptible than ever to the better informed people in the coastal areas of China. For example, He Dageng, a Zhejiang scholar who resided in Canton, claimed that:

The British influence used to be thousands of miles northwest from us. Since Britain is extraordinarily distant from the Canton sea, it did not pose an immediate concern to the Middle Kingdom. At present, however, all maritime countries in the south ocean [Indian ocean] ... are compelled to pay tribute to the British. ... Britain's ambition is growing day by day. When are they going to be satisfied? (He: 578)

Yan Sizong, another intellectual from Guangdong, also expressed his apprehension about the looming threat from Britain. He maintained that:

Throughout history, no commerce has been supported by military forces in such a way as the British barbarians are doing at present. ... Despite the distance up to thousands of miles, Britain now does not differ greatly from a bordering nation. ... Its ambition is ... to monopolise the Chinese market, so that all other countries can be within its grasp (Yan: b, 798).

Because of these concerns over a potential British threat, a number of perceptive individuals, whether they were independent of or working for the Qing government, pointed out the importance of learning more about Britain as well as about current affairs in the Western world. For instance, Yan Sizong stated that, 'in order to contain these barbarians, first and foremost, we ought to know about their circumstances; thereafter we will be able to subdue their insolent spirit' (Yan: a, 797). Cheng Enze, an eminent scholar-official, also declared that, 'Attention should be paid to the information that was formerly ignored ... This knowledge could be used as guidance for tens of thousands of people in China' (Cheng, 1935: 142). Ye Zhongjin, another Anhui scholar in Canton, specifically mentioned that it was advisable to collect and study the foreign-language publications that were being circulated in China, because

‘they provide intelligence on foreign affairs and hence cannot be overlooked by the coastal defence’ (Ye, 1834: 792). Perhaps owing to similar concerns, when Commissioner Lin Zexu reached Guangdong in 1839 on his mission to stamp out the opium trade, ‘on a daily basis, [he] sent people to pry into western affairs, to translate western books, and to buy their newspapers’ (Wei, 1983: 174).

As a result of this growing awareness of the necessity to learn more about Britain, a number of studies on Britain were produced in China in the 1820s and 1830s. Various hitherto unrevealed facts were introduced to the Chinese for the very first time, and knowledge about Britain hence increased significantly. Compared to what was known previously by even quite well informed Chinese people, these works referred to different aspects of Britain’s politics, society and economy, which generally showed that Britain was not at all backward in terms of its civilisation. For example, in *Yingguo luelun* (*Brief observations on Britain*), British parliamentary politics, insurance system and modern industrial techniques were noted:

Important issues are discussed in the parliament, where members exchange their viewpoints. The aristocracy [of the House of Lords] is categorised into five classes: duke, marquis, earl, viscount and baron. They are the masters of the parliament. In addition, residents of each city are able to elect one or two trusted representatives to participate in the meetings at the nation’s capital. If the monarch would like to impose a tax, he would have to have the permission of the gentry. If the gentry do not approve, the monarch will not be allowed to do so.

...

As the safety of ships and cargoes are always uncertain, there are persons in Britain who are paid to take the risk. The principle is, if the ship arrives safely, three to four hundred taels of silver would be paid out of every ten thousand. That is to say, if somebody’s cargo is worth twenty thousand taels, he pays eight hundred in advance to insure its safety. If his ship sinks, all twenty thousand would be paid back to him.

...

In mills, fabrics are not manufactured by people's hands or feet. Machines are powered by fire and smoke instead of human power. They produce textiles from wool and cotton smoothly and swiftly. ... Fire-powered ships sail through rivers and seas, regardless of the wind and water conditions. Railways are made for trains to travel on. The speed [of these trains] could reach 180 *li* per hour (Xi, 1835: 1408-9).²³

The landscape and social life of London, as well as British education and patent systems, were introduced to Chinese readers by Ye Zhongjin:

Its [British] monarch resides in the city of London. Bridges are built over rivers. Horses and vehicles travel above; boats and ships sail below. Affluent families all have their own gardens. ... Oil lamps are hung all over the streets in the evening. ... There are comedies performing from nightfall onward. They are prohibited during the day because they may disturb people's work.

...

The state sets up universities. Counties found middle schools. Towns build primary schools. [These institutions] extend teaching to the people to make sure they can read. ... If somebody has a brilliant invention, he will obtain a patent for thirty years. During this period, others are not allowed to copy it. (Ye, 1834: 787-8)

With regard to British social customs, Xiao Lingyu described marriage in Britain and some of the British court's rituals:

Women are entitled to choose their husbands. They have their own property. Husbands are prohibited from taking concubines. Below the Crown, more respect is paid to women than men. When ministers greet each other, they take off their hats. The supreme

²³ One *li* equals 0.5 kilometre, and a Chinese hour at that time was two hours by Western standard.

form of salute is to put a hand on the forehead. They stand upright even when the monarch is present. (Xiao, 1832: 767)²⁴

It can be observed from these examples that, in the first two decades of the Daoguang reign, both the deferential and the uncivilised images of Britain, which were advocated by the Qianlong government, were considerably revised. Despite this notable progress, it should be noted that this new knowledge was being obtained through some individual efforts made by a small number of perceptive and well informed people, rather than through a wide-ranging state-directed effort for the sake of improving the nation's defence. As a matter of fact, the Daoguang government was more concerned with exterminating the immediate evils occasioned by the opium trade than with making preparations to meet any future British threat. In this respect, there was no direct government involvement in China's search for accurate intelligence about Britain, in spite of rising concern over the opium trade. As a result, the majority of the Chinese people, including some of the aforementioned persons in and out of the government, were unaware of some of their critical misconceptions about Britain. For these reasons, if China's knowledge of Britain before the 1840s is examined from a utilitarian or defensive point of view, it was weakened by some mistaken views and was inadequate to meet China's defensive needs.

First, although a looming British threat was perceived by a number of Chinese scholars and officials, it was widely believed that, despite or even because of their maritime dominance, the British 'are on the ocean all the time. [They] rise up and fall down with the wave every day, hence they cannot stand firmly when they are on land', and that 'their legs are bound so they can hardly bend ... These barbarians will lose their skills as soon as they reach land' (Wen, 516). On account of such misconceived assumptions, the British were regarded as being incapable of launching an attack on China.

In addition, the overestimation of the importance of the China trade to the British economy, as during the Jiaqing reign, led most influential Chinese to believe that the British would not be bold enough to invade the Chinese empire. Even though it was known to some informed Chinese that 'its

²⁴ For China's male ruling class, however, this might not necessarily be a positive sign of Britain's civilisation, because it indicated that the British people did not pay sufficient respect to social hierarchy and deference, which were more highly admired in China.

[Britain's] strategy is to ... hang up cannons on the masts and set fire on land' (Yan: a, 797), there was no real anxiety on the part of the Chinese that the British might apply the same violent approach to China. In this respect, even Yan Sizong alleged that, if China stopped the British trade in Canton, 'where could their piece goods and Indian cotton be sold? Where could they purchase tea and other Chinese products? In consequence, would not it matter greatly to the survival of the British nation?' (Yan: a, 797).

In particular, with regard to the British demand for Chinese tea, the Qing court's misunderstanding of its significance to British society did not lessen during the early Daoguang period. On the contrary, the notion that the British people could not live without Chinese tea became even more engrained in the Chinese imagination and even some local elites in the coastal areas were influenced by this opinion. For example, just as with some government officials who reported to the Daoguang emperor that 'If the barbarians do not use our tea and rhubarb, they will get blind in a few months, with intestines blocked. Their whole nation, therefore, can hardly survive' (Wen, 115), Ye Zhongjin was convinced that 'Tea and rhubarb are indeed crucial to their lives' (Ye, 1834: 792). Xiao Lingyu, furthermore, developed the idea that 'The [British] barbarians are fond of milk and cheese, which block their stomach and intestines. Only Chinese tea and rhubarb can dissolve them. Once the barbarians fail to obtain [them], they will fall into illness' (Xiao, 776). As a consequence of these gross misunderstandings, a stoppage of the tea trade had long been regarded as the most effective means of compelling the British to return to a position of obedience should a conflict break out. For this reason, in both Beijing and the coastal areas, the general belief that the British could be handled with ease was strengthened, regardless of the fact that a threat from Britain was becoming more conceivable than ever. This belief seemed justified when minor disputes occurred in the decades before the Opium War and China was not subject to attack, but, in this regard, both the Qing government and the south-eastern elites oversimplified the reasons why the British compromised on these occasions. Since no intensive state-directed investigation was undertaken to understand British power and objectives, when a serious challenge from Britain did occur in the form of the Opium War, both the imperial court and the majority of coastal elites were caught unprepared for the scale and extent of British power.

In conclusion, it can be seen from the evidence presented above that, from the Qianlong reign to the eve of the Opium War, although in China knowledge of Britain was indeed limited, this was not a period in which Chinese perceptions of Britain were entirely negligible or unchanging. As the British increased their influence on China's coast, Chinese understanding of Britain advanced accordingly. Both the local elite in the south-eastern coastal areas and the elite at the imperial court in Beijing obtained credible as well as inaccurate information about Britain and its people. In this regard, the Qing governors and some perceptive individuals gradually realised that Britain was by no means a submissive and uncivilised state and, as a result, potential threats from Britain became increasingly imaginable. Despite this progress in understanding British power and the British character, in the pre-Opium War era, China did not seek to institute a state-directed investigation of British power and influence. Since active state involvement was crucial to almost every major undertaking in late imperial China, Chinese perceptions of Britain prior to the 1840s from a defensive point of view were still superficial and fragmentary, and were undermined by a variety of mistaken views. Some serious misperceptions, such as the overestimation of the importance of the tea trade to the British economy and to the health of British people, ensured that the Qing government was poorly prepared to meet the serious threat which Britain posed in the early 1840s.

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Superpower, China?! New Narratives of Global Leadership under Examination

‘Chinese understanding of the United States
remains shallow and seriously distorted’.
(David L. Shambaugh, 1991)¹

**William A. Callahan, *China Dreams: 20 Visions of the Future*, New York:
Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 212, ISBN 9780199896400, US\$ 25.95**

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Introduction

China watchers could hardly imagine a more timely, authoritative and original piece of work than the one under review. This is because this year’s leadership transition at the helm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping has arguably laid to rest Deng Xiaoping’s long-running ‘hide and bide’ (*taoguang yanghui* 韬光养晦) policy, if not in substance than surely in form.

Evidence to that effect was on full display, for example, in Trinidad and Tobago last June, when Xi and First Lady Peng Liyuan touched down in the small oil-rich island for a state visit. There was something unmistakably ostentatious – almost a swagger – in Peng’s turquoise attire and Xi’s matching tie, as the pair strode down the gangway. Such a swagger would have been

¹ David L. Shambaugh, [*Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972-1990*](#), Princeton University Press, p. 41.

less remarkable had this been any other first couple. Yet, perhaps owing to the haunting memory of Jiang Qing, Chinese first ladies had hitherto shunned the limelight. Also, in comparison to Xi, there is something very drab in how Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao now seem to have conducted themselves in public.

In short, China is nowadays seeking to project soft power in parts of the world where it had been operating more quietly hitherto. To be sure, the literature on Chinese soft power is fast growing, as is the literature on China as global economic powerhouse. However, to date little has been published in English on the new aspirational narratives of global leadership that are presently being spun in Beijing for domestic, academic and foreign audiences. Callahan, who is the Chair in International Relations at the London School of Economics, may be the first to attempt such an account in a comprehensive manner. He succeeds at that task precisely because he does not purport to break through the 'opaque nature' of *Zhongnanhai* 中南海, in a bid to glean titbits of information on elite politics (p. 45). Neither is he at pains to read much into party-state communiqués, or to make sense of the inchoateness of current Chinese foreign-policy rhetoric.

Rather, Callahan argues that in order to fathom how the rhetoric of Chinese foreign policy might sound in 2020 and beyond, one needs to recognise the new discursive ferment in Chinese academe at present. Ultimately, it is the academics' discourse that will seep into, excite and reshape *Zhongnanhai* policy articulation simply because the latter's old Marxian-Maoist tropes have lost traction, even if 'socialism' remains popular. That academic discourse is much more genuine and readily accessible than in-house CCP material, but it has hitherto attracted less attention amongst Western China-watchers.

Far from confining himself to dissident academics, émigrés and firebrand artists all-too familiar in the West, Callahan is also minutely attuned to proponents of the CCP and the 'China Model' within PRC academe. These academics often advise senior officialdom, and are busy cogitating alternatives to American global leadership, or the 'American Dream' more broadly. Callahan is well attuned to them, as he is attuned to influential bloggers like

Han Han, who operate for the most part within the prescribed parameters of public discourse.

The alternative 'China Model' (*Zhongguo moshi* 中国模式) ferment in Chinese academe matters a great deal, and should be taken more seriously in the West, not least because its authors are much better informed, worldly and arguably much less doctrinaire than professional Chinese US-watchers were in the late 1980s, as indicated in Shambaugh's observation above. In fact, as Callahan himself tells us (Chapter 3), at least three of the boldest critics of the 'American Model' in Chinese academe were trained by elite American universities: economist Hu Angang 胡鞍钢 (Yale postdoc, 1991-2), political scientist Pan Wei 潘维 (Berkeley PhD, 1996) and international relations expert Yan Xuetong 阎学通 (Berkeley PhD, 1992).

Callahan seriously engages with these and other 'China Model' thinkers. He is particularly critical of what he sees as their triumphalism and their notion of China as being an un-shifting, timeless 'civilisational-state'. Moreover, Callahan's meticulous handling of the literature in Chinese on the so-called 'China Model' is greatly enriched by his intimate familiarity with earlier pioneering work in English that discussed how China's breakneck economic growth might (or might *not*) one day alter the way this world works. Thus, readers will often find here useful reference to – but also much elaboration on, and lively debate with – authors such as Rosemary Foot, Alastair Iain Johnston, Mark Leonard, Marc Matten, Pál Nyíri, John Naisbitt, Zhang Weiwei, Richard Madsen, James Mann and – last but not least – Martin Jacques.

Structure and Arguments

China Dreams is divided into six chapters in addition to the Introduction (pp. 1-16, 'China Is the Future') and Epilogue (pp. 163-176, 'A Chimerican Dream'). If the Introduction and much of what follows bemoan what Callahan sees as misguided, essentialist and static notions of Chinese (or American) exceptionalism, the Epilogue seems to allude to the strong likelihood of a more syncretic future where the battle of ideas will *not* be won by either state, but

shaped in equal measure by transnationalism, multiculturalism and consumerism.

The popular 2010 romantic comedy *Du Lala's Promotion Diary* (*Du Lala shengzhi ji* 杜拉拉升职记) is about a young Chinese lady working for a big American corporation. Freely drawing on Du's fictional escapades, Callahan concludes in the Epilogue that Americans and Chinese have a lot more in common than their politicians are usually prepared to admit. But Du's escapades should not distract: this book is no 'media studies' study. Right from the outset, Callahan explains that he is basically in agreement with commentators such as Howard W. French who famously castigated Martin Jacques' best-seller *When China Rules the World* (Penguin, 2009) as pro-CCP boosterism that sounds like '...a compilation of ideas gleaned by the water cooler at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the state's official think tank'.²

However, in fairness to Jacques, one would note that he has expressed concerns that China's rise might not only change the world for the better, but that it could also inflame Han chauvinism in the long run. Jacques' sober and politically *incorrect* treatment of this issue clearly departs, for example, from that of Zhang Weiwei (*The China Wave*, World Century, 2012), even though the two share the belief that modern China is a non-aggressive 'civilisational state'. In fact, Jacques' concerns underscore much of Callahan's discussion about the spectre of Han chauvinism in Chapter 4 of *China Dreams*, where he describes the abuse that debutante singer Lou Jing was recently subjected to, as daughter of a Chinese mother and African-American father.

Chapter 1 (pp. 17-43, 'Officials, Dissidents, and Citizen Intellectuals') ably describes the new streak of photogenic, confident and media-savvy CCP leaders from the ill-fated Bo Xilai right through to Xi Jinping. Interestingly, both Bo and Xi sent their children to study at Harvard, although in public they subtly nurtured an image of leaders who would stand up more proactively to the US.

² Howard W. French, 'In Case You Missed Them: Books by Martin Jacques and Yasheng Huang', *The China Beat*, 1 February 2010 <http://www.thechinabeat.org/?p=1446> [Last accessed 21 July 2013].

Callahan then shifts to the other end of the spectrum to discuss briefly dissidents like artist Ai Weiwei and Nobel prize laureate Liu Xiaobo. Focused on the middle ground between the establishment and its *nemeses*, later in the chapter Callahan is mainly concerned with China's version of public intellectuals ('Citizen Intellectuals'). Because of the constraints of censorship, these intellectuals may be less outspoken and contrarian than their Western peers or exiled dissident comrades, but they do nevertheless carry much weight through the internet. For by 'Citizen Intellectuals', Callahan means not just pro-CCP 'China Model' proponents but also Neo-Maoist (i.e., Cui Zhiyuan) or liberal (i.e., Xu Jilin) critics of the CCP who operate *within* rather than *against* the system.

This chapter is also of much value because it carefully charts the evolution of Chinese perceptions of the US since the early 2000s. Early on, Chinese popular and academic sentiments negatively revolved around US 'plots' to subvert China's rise, whether they be through the bombing of the Belgrade embassy, or Beijing's 'denial' of holding the Olympic Games in favour of Sydney. Underlying the 'plots' was of course deeply entrenched – if not CCP-fanned – resentment of the insults that imperialist Europe and Japan had inflicted on China before 1949, namely, during the 'Century of National Humiliation' (*Bainian guochi* 百年国耻).

Hu Jintao was lacklustre compared to Xi on the world stage, but – as Callahan tells readers – it was he who in 2005 started shifting China's narrative from indignation to worldly optimism when he envisioned a more 'Harmonious World' at the UN. This brings to mind an important point: the lack of reliable information from inside *Zhongnanhai* can potentially lead to an overemphasis on differences in style, clique, generation and personality within the CCP leadership, whereas in fact there has also been quite a bit of substantive continuity from Deng to Xi.

In 2009, Chinese narrative optimism continued along the same lines, as the country seemed for the most part to have avoided the Global Financial Crisis. Precisely at that point, an alternative 'Beijing Consensus' or 'China Model' began to be discussed more confidently and openly in Chinese academe. Sometimes, though perhaps not as ubiquitously as suggested here, these

discussions assumed triumphalist overtones about the coming of a new Tang-like cosmopolitan Chinese golden age (*shengshi*). The latest iteration of that optimism was embodied in Xi's 2012 pronouncement about the 'Great Awakening of the Chinese Nation' (*Zhonghua minzu weida de fuxing*) and the equivalence of the 'China Dream' (*Zhongguo meng*) to the American one.

Chapter 2 (pp. 44-65, 'Strategic Futures and the Post-American World Order') makes for an excellent exposition of the academic thought that underpins Xi's vision, and the extent to which it can be considered novel. As indicated above, Callahan is intrinsically suspicious of the emerging Chinese narratives of leadership, yet his suspicion is at once wonderfully reflexive and grounded in geo-strategic realities. He thus states, for example (p. 45, cf. p. 50):

Even with its many problems, the CCP is not about to collapse... While Chinese nationalism is strong and Confucianism is a growing force, Chinese tradition does not dominate the discussion of 'Chinese characteristics' as much as people in the West think.

For this reason, Callahan tends to dismiss philosopher Zhao Tingyang's argument that the world in the future might see the decline of the Westphalian nation-state order in favour of more fluid polities co-existing 'all under heaven' (*Tianxia*), perhaps along Chinese pre-modern tributary lines. By the same token, Callahan rightly observes that modern socialism, not just Confucianism, is still the touchstone of many Chinese thinkers as they assail American contemporary society as grossly inegalitarian, even whilst China itself is grappling with yawning gaps between rich and poor.

Hu Jintao's 'Harmonious World' overwrote Maoist belligerence to draw on China's rich Confucian legacy – one that from inception had arguably been averse to war. It cannot be purely coincidental that, PLA modernisation notwithstanding, the Chinese saying that good men do not serve as soldiers is still fairly ingrained in the popular mindset. Yet, Callahan is not easily impressed by such civilisational arguments (p. 48):

Actually, Chinese history – like most countries' histories – has involved many periods of violent expansion and contraction.

This is a rationalistic argument that would immediately appeal to the mind of the historian, even if mainly carried forward by political scientists such as Alastair Iain Johnston or, more recently, Wang Yuan-kang (*Harmony and War*, Columbia University Press, 2011). As Callahan keeps reminding his readers throughout the book, every new empire somewhat pathetically professes to be 'uniquely unique', namely, a kind of moral improvement on its predecessor. It remains the case, however, that the characterisation of early-modern Europe as much more prone to warfare and expansionism than imperial China is not merely a product of today's fashionable New Confucian discourse in the PRC.³

In fact, it was European history specialists like Paul Kennedy who made similar observations much earlier, based on painstaking comparative research. After all, in his critique of Wang Yuan-kang's work, even a US-trained proponent of the 'New Qing History' like Kirk Larsen, who often places Sino-Manchu imperialism on a par with Western imperialism, has conceded that there was something quite un-Western in how Ming China stopped short of occupying Korea back in the mid-1400s.⁴

Next, Callahan turns to explore Colonel Liu Mingfu's controversial and much discussed book (*Zhongguo meng*, 2010) about the urgent need for China to enhance its military capabilities (pp. 58-62, cf. p. 15). Liu has startled many a security analyst in the West. But his nationalistic, chest-thumping prose should be read precisely against those other deeply entrenched popular sentiments in China that abhor organised violence. Far from applauding Liu, Callahan nevertheless does a marvellous job of de-sensationalising some of his more judicious observations. Liu, Callahan tells us, is basically concerned about the prospect of the US militarily intimidating China in the future, hence his desire

³ Today's New Confucianism should of course *not* be confused with Song era neo-Confucianism, i.e., *daoxue*, a philosophy that dominated late-imperial Chinese statecraft.

⁴ Larsen's Roundtable comments on Wang's book were made available online <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-4-3.pdf> [Last accessed 21 July 2010].

for more military spending. Liu is *not* a simplistic triumphalist: though China's economic success seems compelling at the moment, he is acutely aware that the relative decline of the US has been diagnosed all too often in the past, only to be swept aside by resurgent energy and innovation.

Chapter 3 (pp. 66-97, 'The China Model and the Search for Wealth and Power') shows, in essence, how a few of China's most prominent economists have come to discard the kind of neo-classical/neo-liberal orthodoxy that still reigns supreme among Western economists even after the Global Financial Crisis. But there are also substantive differences between economists like Tsinghua University's Hu Angang, who sees the Mao era as having prepared China well for Deng's modernisation reforms, and economists like the World Bank's Justin Yifu Lin, who had fled his native Taiwan because he felt the future lay on the Mainland. Unlike Hu, Lin pins the success of Deng's reforms down to the repudiation of almost everything Mao Zedong had stood for. On the other hand, both Hu and Lin reject the 'Washington Consensus', namely, the notion that developing countries must privatise large swathes of their economies in order to catch up with the West.

The chapter then moves on to critique Peking University political scientist Pan Wei, arguably the founder of the 'China Model' school of thought, for what Callahan dubs 'Occidentalism', namely the mirror image of Edward Said's Orientalist bogey. According to Callahan, Pan's thought boils down to the notion that (p. 90, cf. p. 158):

For China to be good, it needs to understand all Western things as 'evil'.

Callahan is right here that 'China Model' scholars often rail against the 'evils' of what they see as rugged American individualism, as opposed to the 'selfless' and 'family-oriented' Chinese character. They thereby completely miss, for example, American conservatives' emphasis on family values and America's impressive, deeply-embedded culture of philanthropy and civic volunteering.

But, in fairness to Pan, it has to be recognised that he is one of the few thinkers in China who persuasively and eruditely relate to the implications of pre-modern Chinese history in his writing, when discussing, for example, what he sees as the perils of pursuing Western-style democracy in a Chinese setting.

To be sure, in the extended opening essay to his recent edited volume,⁵ Pan emphasises that he has great respect for the achievements of Western civilisation, and for just how far European democracy, egalitarianism and universal welfare principles have advanced since the Middle Ages.

Pan's aim is not to prove that the 'China Model' is more humane, only that it is different from Western understandings thereof, and better aligned with Chinese requisites. Equally importantly, Pan insists that the 'China Model' is not necessarily exportable to other parts of the world, whereas the 'Washington Consensus' was framed right from the outset as a one-size-fits-all.

Chapter 4 (pp. 98-123, 'Cosmopolitan, Fundamentalist, and Realist Dreams') builds on Frank Dikötter's and Barry Sautman's influential work to suggest that in fact, racism has historically constituted a much bigger problem in China than party-state rhetoric might acknowledge. The People's Republic version of multiculturalism casts the country as the domain of the *Zhonghua* 中华 nation, that is made up of the Han and 55 prescribed minorities, who all share distinctive features and provenance. Callahan ably problematises the *Zhonghua* trope as contradicting the more scientific, well known theory about the African origins of all *homo sapiens*. But he does so from an explicit 21st-century standpoint; from such a vantage point, even fairly traditionalist Chinese thinkers like Kang Youwei (1858-1927) – who was after all influenced by late-19th century European Social-Darwinism – do sound awfully racist nowadays.

Callahan then seems to suggest that the People's Republic still has an unacknowledged problem, particularly with African people. This is presumably because marriage between white males and Han females is widely tolerated, and at times even subtly approved of, whereas black-Han marriage is stridently frowned upon. That Obamania was, back in 2008, much less pronounced in China than in Berlin or Tokyo might be relevant in this context, but not much discussed.

⁵ Pan Wei 潘维 ed., 中国模式: 解读人民共和国的 60 年 (The China Model: a new developmental model from the sixty years of the People's Republic), Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2009.

Callahan does seem to believe, at any rate, that many Chinese interpret the concept of modern nation-statehood as racially grounded statehood, much as Japan did until 1945. In other words, the Chinese have perhaps *not* moved on with the times, as Western multicultural societies have (post-war Japanese multiculturalism is a non-sequitur). These are arguments that demand systematic assessment rather than purely anecdotal evidence, such as the anonymous online abuse hurled at singer Lou Jing whose father is African-American.

More generally, Dikötter's claims about the emphatic pre-modern (i.e., non-European) mainsprings of today's Chinese racist attitudes have been fairly effectively challenged by Yuri Pines,⁶ although Callahan does not engage with Pines' findings at all by way of balancing Dikötter's. Somewhat like Pines, Pan Wei argued that the dichotomy in Chinese eyes between Chinese and non-Chinese ('Barbarians') in pre-modern times was culturally rather than ethnically derived. According to Pan, it is this cultural derivation that has been informing up to the present an intrinsic – if subterranean – Chinese abhorrence of meddling in other peoples'/nations' affairs (*Hua bu zhi Yi* 华不制夷). In other words, Pan suggests that China will remain by and large disinclined to police other parts of the world or to remake them in its own mould. It is *not* preaching its 'Model' to the rest of the world, but other countries are of course free to 'borrow' from its culture if they so wish.⁷

Chapter 5 (pp. 124-143, 'Shanghai's Alternative Futures and China's New Civil Society') is a fascinating account of how some prominent artists in the People's Republic are managing to criticise the prevailing CCP order from *within* the system. Filmmaker Jia Zhangke thus provided a biting counterpoint to the Shanghai Expo 2010 state-led hype in his documentary on the city's anti-heroes (*Haishang chuanqi* 海上传奇) released the same year. Similarly,

⁶ Yuri Pines, 'Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of Sino-Barbarian Dichotomy', in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds., *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*. Leiden: Brill, 2005: 59-102.

⁷ See, for example, Pan Wei's Working Paper, 'The Chinese Model of Development' (11 October 2007), posted by the independent, London-based think-tank, the Foreign Policy Centre.

<http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/888.pdf> [Last accessed 22 July 2007].

Cai Guoqiang's exhibition *Peasant Da Vincis* presented at the new Rockbund Museum around the same time insisted on celebrating *not* Shanghai's illustrious past and euphoric future but the ingenuity of some of China's autodidactic peasant anti-heroes who, without much funding, came close to designing homespun aircrafts.

Chapter 6 (pp. 144-162, 'The American Dream and Chinese Exceptionalism') makes for an excellent summary of the complex 20-odd different visions set out by the book's protagonists for China's future. Callahan is at his best here, as he explores not just the vagaries on the Chinese side, but also the similarities between proponents of Chinese exceptionalism like philosopher Kang Xiaoguang and proponents of American exceptionalism like presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich. All along, he treats his subject matter with much reflexive sensitivity (p. 152):

The American dream is like the China dream: It has many versions, and it promotes diverse and often conflicting values. The tension between freedom and equality is indicative of its complexity.

For this reason, it is perhaps a little surprising that Callahan chooses to sign off with a passage that departs from his otherwise deliberative tone throughout previous chapters. In what is arguably a throwback to his *China: The Pessoptimist Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2010), Callahan asserts here that (p. 162):

During the imperial period, Chinese authorities often enforced a strict division between "civilisation" and "barbarism" that had serious political consequences. In other words, if China's neighbours did not accept imperial Confucianism, then they risked invasion – and even extermination.

It is difficult to assess this assertion, as it is not conveyed by the main thrust of the discussion up to this point. Either way, the assertion seems directed more at popular readership than at academic audiences, and chimes all too comfortably with the kind of rhetoric the American exceptionalists are enamoured of. Certainly, Chinese readers steeped in modern history might take umbrage at the use of the term 'extermination'. After all, both the Han-

dominated Ming dynasty and the Manchu-dominated Qing dynasty prohibited mass overseas emigration, so it is hard to see where the idea of early-modern China actively exporting Confucianism arose. Neither do we have record of Zheng He's (1371-1473) famous expeditions spreading the gospel by the sword.

One might perhaps in this context mention Emperor Qianlong's (r. 1735-1796) notorious massacre of the Zughars. But that massacre had little to do with Confucian exigencies. It was precipitated it seems by a broader Manchu-Mongol rivalry over control of Central Asia.⁸

Concluding Remarks

In 1998, Professor Lucian Pye made famous scathing remarks about East Asia's chronic memory blockage and the consequent identity malaise muting any East Asian claims to global leadership. At the height of the Asian Financial Crisis and merely a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Pye deemed neither China nor Japan capable of rising above their own parochialisms and cultural self-absorption to find an appropriate global idiom with which to envision an alternative East Asian world order. Pye was not even sure whether China, despite its economic promise, fitted at all into the dominant nation-state world order, being as it was a 'civilisation pretending to be a nation state'.⁹

Over the next decade, the Chinese nation-building project steamrolled ahead, and it would seem more than apposite to re-evaluate erstwhile strategic mind-sets. Indeed, until recently, Western readers were accustomed to the notion that much of the China boom was oversupply in disguise; that China's implosion was imminent; that at heart its 'economic miracle' was predicated on state-run banks diverting capital to resuscitate moribund state-owned behemoths; that China did not embrace the 'free-market' or 'deregulate' its economy quickly enough.¹⁰ These attributes might have stemmed from a Beijing-centric outlook rather than from a well informed survey of the three last decades of complex and often contradictory economic reform

⁸ Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁹ Lucian Pye, 'International Relations in Asia: Culture Nation and State', in *The Second Gaston Sigur Annual Lecture* (Washington, DC: George Washington University. Sigur Center for Asian Studies, 1998).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Gordon Chang, *The Coming Collapse of China* (New York: Random House, 2001).

thrusts in their entirety. As it turns out, the lingering economic crisis in the US is a constant reminder that leading Western banks do not seem to have allocated capital much more rationally than their state-controlled counterparts in the People's Republic.¹¹

In contrast to Pye, Warren Cohen suggested not long ago that the question was *not* whether China would eventually contend with the US, but precisely *how soon* this might happen. Cohen had little doubt that China would eventually act just as aggressively on the world stage as those late 19th-century European powers, which China sees as having humiliated China itself. Thus, Cohen did not accord much credence to the rhetoric emanating from Beijing since the 1980s, which has been emphasising the PRC's intent on a 'Peaceful Rise' (*heping jueqi*) and has considerably softened Mao-era references to 'Western imperialism', 'Soviet revisionism' or 'world class warfare'.¹²

Professor William A. Callahan has now heavily weighed into this discussion with *China Dreams*. He has brilliantly shown that, at least in the intellectual realm, the response to Cohen's *how soon* is *now*. In other words, many Chinese academics are *already* deeply – and at times fairly creatively – engaged in mounting a comprehensive challenge to US global leadership; in weaving disparate alternative narratives of leadership that curiously profess to reject any type of hegemony; and in stylising distinct 'China Models' with varying degrees of historicised evidence.

Like Cohen, Callahan is concerned that China might act more aggressively on the world stage in decades to come. He is rightly disturbed by Chinese expressions of triumphalism and Han chauvinism, although how widespread

¹¹ Until recently, an extensive banking reform was viewed by some as an urgent requisite for sustained PRC growth. See Nicholas R. Lardy, *China's Unfinished Economic Revolution* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998). For a more optimistic appraisal, see Barry Naughton, *Growing Out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978-1993* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹² Warren I. Cohen, 2009. 'China's Rise in Historical Perspectives', in Zhao and Liu, eds., *Managing the China Challenge: Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 23-40. On the strategy behind China's 'Peaceful Rise' – see also Yan Xuetong and Sun Xuefeng, *Zhongguo jueqi ji qi zhanlue (China's Rise and Its Strategy)* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2006).

and intrinsic these are may be open to debate. Crucially, Callahan also seems to entertain the possibility of a long and peaceful 'Chimerican' coexistence, girt by increasingly interdependent, urban and cosmopolitan society in both countries. In that sense, he is a *pessoptimist* rather than downright pessimistic.

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Sam Geall ed. (2013), *China and the Environment: The Green Revolution*, London and New York: Zed Books, pp. 247; ISBN: 978-1-78032-340-4

This is an extremely informative and useful book for those interested in Chinese politics, specifically the relationships between the Chinese state, citizens and the environmental movement. It contains a wealth of information about the various campaigns initiated and run by affected citizens, NGOs and professionals. The book provides great insights into the delicate balance between the various stakeholders vis-à-vis the state in contemporary China after the economic reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is one of the most comprehensive scholarly pieces of work that has so far been written about the state of Chinese ecology and the response of civil society in tackling environmental problems produced by unbridled, state-led economic development.

The book is not only a very credible source for further research about the subject, it is also an impressive product of investigative journalism, combined with a well-informed analysis of China's environmental movement today. This is a movement concerned with a wide array of issues ranging from nature conservation and fighting against industrial pollution and mega hydroelectric power stations to protecting local residents' rights against the encroachment of corporate interests. The book's very detailed documentation of a number of key environmental campaigns that have effectively changed the Chinese political and legal landscape in recent years makes it an invaluable witness to the transformation of Chinese civic consciousness and the empowerment of the people from the local to the national level. This book can also be read as a social history of contemporary Chinese society, illuminating in particular grassroots' perspectives on China's environmental challenges, as opposed to the propaganda of the Chinese state.

It is divided into six long chapters, including an excellent introduction by Isabel Hilton, editor of *www.chinadialogue.net*, a bilingual 'Chinese – English web publication on environment and climate change' (p.3). Hilton expands on the problem of how the 'retreat of the state from many aspects of life in China' has created 'both the need and the opportunity for non-state

organisations' (p.5). However, despite the government's recognition of the need for civil society organisations, 'it has been slow to create the legal and regulatory conditions that would allow civil society to fulfil its potential', according to Hilton (ibid.). It was not until 2007 that the state introduced the *Regulations on Open Government Information* (p.6) that gave citizens 'the legal right to obtain government information' (p.10), which in turn allows China's environment activists a wider field of action than mere protests (p.9). Hilton has also conceded that ideas 'voiced from the political and social margins ten years earlier' in China have today become incorporated by the state as its 'core declarations of values and developmental intentions' (p.12). Nevertheless, she ends her chapter urging for greater autonomy, 'more robust protection for civil society organisations' and 'rule of law that would help to equip China to cope peacefully with its difficult next phase of development' (p.13).

This is followed by Sam Geall's exposé of China's own brand of environmental journalism. He argues that the marketisation of the Chinese economy has resulted in the liberalisation of its mass media. Chinese mass media no longer function solely as the government's mouthpiece, because investigative, watchdog or 'citizen' journalism (p.17) operating within an increasingly commercialised and privatised milieu has allowed both traditional print media and new social media to play the role of whistle-blower. The increase in citizens' access to information via a more open media environment over the last three decades has helped to transform Chinese people's 'attitude to China's environment and the problems it faces' (p.21). Reports about sustainable development are increasingly utilised to address 'social issues, from institutional corruption to the lack of transparency or public participation in policymaking' (p.22). According to Geall, the contemporary Chinese media are characterised by the 'three 'C's: control, change and chaos' (p.23). He then concludes that the 'state of open government information reflects the delicate balancing act that defines governance in China today' (p.37). In its pursuit of achieving high economic growth by safeguarding the CCP's authority, the Chinese state is coming under increasing pressure to allow for greater public oversight, while at the same time retaining a firm hand over the burgeoning civil society to ensure political and social stability (ibid.).

The third chapter by Olivia Boyd delineates the recent significant environment campaigns that have emerged, ranging from a citizen-led

campaign over urban air pollution (p.40) and protection of the Tibetan antelopes to 'crusades against dam-building' (p.43). She also outlines their successes and failures. The author defines Chinese civil society 'as a space where multiple actors hold conversation about the kind of community...they want to live in', and this space has begun to 'roll back...state control' since China's opening up to the world. She reiterates that 'environmental protection was one of the earliest movements supported' by the widening participation of non-state actors, such as local residents, activists, NGOs and professionals, academia, the mass media and even individuals in the government, as well as prominent business figures (p.44). Thus, environmentalists have been successful in exerting some influence over government policymaking (ibid.) through their protests, direct actions, public education, lobbying of individuals in the government, and by exerting pressure on businesses that have transgressed through media exposure.

Consequently, China's environmental movement has become broad and diverse, ranging from 'campaigns on climate change, desertification and water depletion to corporate responsibility', from 'environmental health to dam building', and including animal welfare and protection (p.46). China's environmentalists have been able to affect 'policy at the most senior levels of the Chinese government' through the effective collaboration of local and national activists, NGOs, academics, top officials and the mass media. In her overview Boyd has painted the landscape of China's environmental activism in great detail. It is an immensely useful chapter for readers keen to map out the 'who's who' and 'what they do' in China's broad and dynamic environment movement over the past three decades.

She also highlights the shift in the movement from 'a non-confrontational stance and exclusive focus on ecology to a broader agenda that included social justice and government transparency' (p.62). The success of the movement in aligning certain interests of the central government with its objectives so as to put pressure on businesses to abide by environment standards as part of their corporate social responsibilities also indicates the increasingly sophisticated campaigning style of a movement coming of age. Moreover, the increasing use of social media as a tool for online campaigning has hugely bolstered the effectiveness of a burgeoning Chinese civil society in which 'citizens and NGOs, as well as state and business actors, contribute to decision-making', not only

on a day to day level but also at the national policy level, to build a 'greener, cleaner and more open society' (p.93).

The last three chapters of the book are equally important as they each highlight a particular case study, documenting the difficult journey of progress and regression Chinese environmental activism has experienced. The first case study is on the famous litigation case between a regional NGO and a state-owned coal power plant as a public-interest case written by Adam Moser. The second case study, by Jonathan Ansfield, is about a proposed Taiwanese-owned petrochemical plant that sparked off a 'not in my backyard (nimby)' style of citizens' protests, while the third case study, penned by former reporter on the *Southern Weekend* newspaper and the Beijing editor of *chinadialogue*, Liu Jianqiang, details how an alliance between the media, civil society and the public has successfully defeated the pact between government and big business in the proposed construction of mega dams for hydroelectric power at the Tiger Leaping Gorge.

In its analysis of the evolution of China's environmental movement this edited book has adopted a critical, in-depth and comprehensive approach that is also highly nuanced. It provides great insights into the impact of the movement on Chinese power structures, as well as its ambivalence towards the state. It attempts to transcend the formulaic characterisation of a monolithic Chinese state overpowering a burgeoning social movement by presenting a more complex narrative of tension-filled interactions among citizens, activists, NGOs, media, academics, professionals, businesses, and local and central government.

The book's most significant contribution to the current debate is its illumination of the weakness in China's rule of law in enforcing environmental standards and safeguards. Whilst many laws exist on paper, it has been difficult to implement or enforce these owing to corruption, corporate unaccountability and the disjuncture between local government interests and the goals of the central government. More often than not, existing laws on the environment are only enforced and/or the transgressing parties taken to task when citizens' protests are widely publicised by the mass media with the support of concerned stakeholders, as well as individual officials and leaders right up to the highest state level, whereby the interests of the campaigns are aligned with national interests. Even so, these campaigns do not always succeed because certain circumstantial factors may still intervene.

The only criticism I have of the book is its overwhelming amount of detail on specific examples and cases that tends to blur the overall focus of the book. Whilst these details may be useful for hands-on activists and journalists, they make it very difficult for the wider readership to formulate the different themes presented into a coherent whole. It is, nevertheless, an excellent resource of primary data, first-hand observation and documentation of China's increasingly sophisticated and diversified grassroots activism that continues to push the boundary of the state. However, a lot more research and debate still need to take place before the rather chaotic and changing dynamics among the various stakeholders of China's environment movement vis-à-vis the state can be properly understood and systematically articulated.

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Cal Clark ed. (2011), *The Changing Dynamics of the Relations Among China, Taiwan, and the United States*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.281; ISBN (10): 1-4438-2681-2, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2681-5

The Changing Dynamics of the Relations Among China, Taiwan, and the United States, edited by Cal Clark, analyses various aspects of the recent phase of this complex relationship. In the introductory chapter, Clark succinctly examines the trajectory of this relationship and introduces the contents of the 12 subsequent chapters contributed by eminent scholars in the field.

In chapter two, entitled 'Washington between Beijing and Taipei: A Triangular Analysis', Lowell Dittmer tests the theory of strategic triangle. In his opinion, US policy on cross-strait relations has moved between 'strategic considerations' and 'values' in an attempt to create a balance between these objectives.

In chapter three, entitled 'Strategic Triangle, Change of Guard, and Ma's New Course', Yu-Shan Wu applies the 'sequential model'. He argues that cross-strait relations since President Ma's presidency in 2008 have been unprecedentedly conciliatory.

Vincent Wei-cheng Wang, in chapter four, 'The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Taiwan Relations Act: Enduring Framework or Accidental Success?'

examines the impact of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), which guided US-Taiwan relations for over three decades. This 'unique' domestic US law (with international implications) was a blend of idealism and realism. It neither endorsed nor precluded unification. On the positive side, the Act provided trade, cultural and security guarantees to Taiwan, enabling it to gain economic development and democracy. On the negative side, it imposed restrictions on Taiwan's officials travelling to the US and on the island's inclusion in international bodies. The TRA is likely to remain in practice in the future.

Shelley Rigger's chapter, entitled 'Strawberry Jam: National Identity, Cross-Strait Relations, and Taiwan's Youth', is based on data collected from focus group interviews. It sheds light on Taiwan's generation born during the 1980s. This generation grew up at a time when Taiwan had already gained economic prosperity and democracy. Thus, according to the older generation, it got used to the good life and cared more about making money than about defending the country. This generation is labelled the 'strawberry tribe'. The author argues that Taiwan's current political structure did not properly accommodate the 'strawberry tribe', leading to the 'tribe's' ambivalence and a lack of confidence among leaders. This generation might be different from those of its parents and grandparents, but it is neither weak nor indifferent to the political process. It embraces a mixed Taiwanese and Chinese identity, but views Taiwan as its homeland.

In chapter six, entitled 'Hu Jintao's Pro-Status Quo Approach in Cross-Strait Relations: Building up a One-China Framework for Eventual Reunification', Jing Huang examines China's Taiwan policy under President Hu Jintao. At the start of the new century the world began to be concerned at China's rise. In this situation, a confrontational policy with Taiwan, which had the staunchest pro-independence President, Chen Shui-bian, could reinforce this perception. To avoid it, China renamed its strategy: from 'peaceful rise' to 'peaceful development', opted for the status quo over early unification and domestically, and passed an Anti-Secession Law in 2005. These measures were the continuation of the 'One China Policy'.

Elizabeth Hague's chapter, entitled 'China Debates the Way Forward for Cross-Strait Relations', is based on the writings of prominent Chinese scholars on Taiwan, the majority of whom supported stronger economic ties with Taipei. To pacify the tense situation and find a final political or military settlement with Taipei, China pushed for economic interdependence,

consolidated ties with the KMT and approached moderate members in the DPP.

Timothy S. Rich, in chapter eight, entitled 'Renting Allies and Selling Sovereignty: Taiwan's Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition', examines small states' politics of switching recognition between Taiwan and China. He argues that recognition based on ideology has largely been replaced by recognition based on economic and national interests. In 2008, Beijing and Taipei's tacit agreement not to bribe small states to switch recognition halted this trend. Rich rightly argues that recognition tied to economic assistance risks creating a perpetual cycle of shifting allegiances.

Chun-Yi Lee's chapter, entitled 'The Political Views of Chinese Businesses in China: Blue, Green, or Red?' is based on data collected during field trips to China in 2005 and 2009. The chapter studies the role of Taiwanese entrepreneurs known as *Taishangs* in cross-Strait relations. Although *Taishangs* claim that 'A businessman only talks about business', they are eventually drawn to blue (KMT), green (DPP) or red (PRC) politics. The author argues that most businessmen adopt a 'colour' which supports their businesses. *Taishangs* worked as a bridge during the tense phase of cross-Strait relations under Chen Shui-bian's two terms in office. Their role was, however, marginalized in the post-Chen period of relative tranquillity.

Kun-Ming Chen, Ji Chou and Chia-Ching Lin, in their joint chapter entitled 'The Impact of Trade Liberalization across the Taiwan Strait: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications', apply a computable general equilibrium model to investigate the possible impact of cross-Strait trade liberalization. They argue that regional trade agreements marginalized Taiwan's export-based economy. Taiwan's signing of the FTA with China will positively affect its economy, which is becoming tied more to East Asia than to the US. This trend might influence the future development of Taiwan's economic and political decisions.

In chapter eleven, entitled 'ECFA: The Emerging Crisis Facing Taiwan', Chung-Hsin Hsu criticizes the Ma Administration's signing of the ECFA with China. He argues that historically Taiwan's North-South trade pattern (with Japan, the US and Southeast Asia) offered greater benefits than its West-East trade pattern (with China). Taiwan's economic miracle (1960s to 1990s) was possible only because the island was separated from China. Hsu argues that the ECFA made Taiwan's economy dependent on China, leading to the 'destruction of the nation'.

Peter C.Y. Chow, in chapter twelve entitled 'The Emerging Trade Bloc Across the Taiwan Strait: The Implications of ECFA and its Aftermath for U.S. Economic and Strategic Interests in East Asia', states that Taiwan has become one of the largest of China's trade partners in the region, yet Beijing continues to exclude Taipei from regional trade arrangements. To counter this marginalization, in June 2009 the Ma Administration signed the ECFA with China. The ECFA may increase two-way trade, but it will also deepen Taiwan's economic and later political integration with China. This will affect US-China-Taiwan relations, US political and security interests in the region and Taipei's de facto sovereignty.

This book examines the intriguing triangular relationships between the US, China and Taiwan. It deals with both theoretical and policy-related issues and provides an insightful account of this complex relationship. It is a valuable addition to the existing knowledge on the subject and can be a useful reference for those engaged in East Asian studies, cross-Strait relations and US-China ties.

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