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Supernatural Crossing in Republican Chinese Fiction, 1920s–1940s

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Abstract

This dissertation studies supernatural narratives in Chinese fiction from the mid-1920s to the 1940s. The literary works present phenomena or elements that are or appear to be supernatural, many of which remain marginal or overlooked in Sinophone and Anglophone academia. These sources are situated in the May Fourth/New Culture ideological context, where supernatural narratives had to make way for the progressive intellectuals’ literary realism and their allegorical application of supernatural motifs. In the face of realism, supernatural narratives paled, dismissed as impractical fantasies that distract one from facing and tackling real life.

Nevertheless, I argue that the supernatural narratives do not probe into another mystical dimension that might co-exist alongside the empirical world. Rather, they imagine various cases of the characters’ crossing to voice their discontent with contemporary society or to reflect on the notion of reality. “Crossing” relates to characters’ acts or processes of trespassing the boundary that separates the supernatural from the conventional natural world, thus entailing encounters and interaction between the natural and the supernatural. The dissertation examines how crossing, as a narrative device, disturbs accustomed and mundane situations, releases hidden tensions, and discloses repressed truths in Republican fiction.

There are five types of crossing in the supernatural narratives.

Type 1 is the crossing into “haunted” houses. This includes (intangible) human agency crossing into domestic spaces and revealing secrets and truths concealed by the scary, feigned ‘haunting’, thus exposing the hidden evil and the other house occupiers’ silenced, suffocated state.

Type 2 is men crossing into female ghosts’ apparitional residences. The female ghosts allude to heart-breaking, traumatic experiences in socio-historical reality,
evoking sympathetic concern for suffering individuals who are caught in social upheavals.

Type 3 is the crossing from reality into the characters' delusional/hallucinatory realities. While they physically remain in the empirical world, the characters’ abnormal perceptions lead them to exclusive, delirious, and quasi-supernatural experiences of reality. Their crossings blur the concrete boundaries between the real and the unreal on the mental level: their abnormal perceptions construct a significant, meaningful reality for them, which may be as real as the commonly regarded objective reality.

Type 4 is the crossing into the netherworld modelled on the real world in the authors’ observation and bears a spectrum of satirised objects of the Republican society.

The last type is immortal visitors crossing into the human world. This type satirises humanity’s vices and destructive potential.

The primary sources demonstrate their writers’ witty passion to play with supernatural notions and imagery (such as ghosts, demons, and immortals) and stitch them into vivid, engaging scenes using techniques such as the gothic, the grotesque, and the satirical, in order to evoke sentiments such as terror, horror, disgust, disorientation, or awe, all in service of their insights into realist issues. The works also creatively tailor traditional Chinese modes and motifs, which exemplifies the revival of Republican interest in traditional cultural heritage. The supernatural narratives may amaze or disturb the reader at first, but what is more shocking, unpleasantly nudging, or thought-provoking is the problematic society and people’s lives that the supernatural (misunderstandings) eventually reveals. They present a more comprehensive treatment of reality than Republican literature with its revolutionary consciousness surrounding class struggle. The critical perspectives of the supernatural narratives include domestic space, unacknowledged history and marginal individuals, abnormal mentality, and pervasive weaknesses in humanity.
The crossing and supernatural narratives function as a means of better understanding the lived reality.

This study gathers diverse primary sources written by Republican writers from various educational and political backgrounds and interprets them from a rare perspective, thus filling a research gap. It promotes a fuller view of supernatural narratives in twentieth-century Chinese literature. In terms of reflecting the social and personal reality of the Republican era, the supernatural narratives supplement the realist fiction of the time.
Lay summary

I have selected Chinese short stories and novels from the 1920s to 1940s in which characters had or believed they had supernatural experiences. The supernatural is worth studying because it came from a period of time when supernatural imagination had fallen out of favour among writers of fiction. At the time, writers were expected to write in a faithful manner about how common Chinese people led their struggling lives. By contrast, supernatural narrative tapped into traditional mythical and spectral beliefs and imagination, seemingly representing something irrelevant to ordinary life in the 1920s–40s.

This study shows that supernatural narrative was not detached from or ignorant of its contemporary reality. I observe that Chinese fiction of the 1920s and 40s featured characters who crossed physically or mentally between the ordinary world and supernatural realms. I term it “crossing.” In some cases, the supernatural was eventually debunked as characters’ misunderstandings.

I argue that the crossing was not meant to fantasize the cognitively unknown but to facilitate writers’ reflection on society and individuals’ life experiences through mystical or irreverent imaginings. I came up with a theoretical framework of five types of supernatural crossing in literary representation based on the short stories and novels I found. Looking into the reasons for the supernatural narratives, I identify what realistic concern was behind them.

The five types are as follows:
1) Characters entered houses that were initially believed to be haunted but later proved non-supernatural. The crossing expresses concern about violence in enclosed domestic spaces.

2) Male characters were attracted by female ghosts to their apparitional residences. The crossing implies concern for suffering individuals caught in socio-political upheavals.

3) Characters believed they had psychic experiences and saw female demons or apparitions lurking in their surroundings. The question regarding the credibility of the men’s claims went throughout the stories. It leads to the argument about what counts as reality: a person’s subjective perception constructs his/her reality, whether the perceived object exists as real or as an irrational delusion.

4) A human character crossed into the netherworld. What he saw and heard satirises the real world through a series of absurd, exaggerated, and hilarious characters and social phenomena.

5) Supernatural characters, a divinity in traditional folk belief and a walking dead, crossed into the living world and interfered with human society respectively. Their common theme is to target the vices in humanity.

This study fills the research gap by gathering diverse primary sources written by Republican writers from various educational and political backgrounds and interpreting them from a rare perspective. In terms of reflecting social and personal
reality in the Republican era, the supernatural narratives were a supplement to fictional realism. Meanwhile, the study promotes a fuller view of supernatural narratives in Chinese fiction of the 1920s to the 1940s.
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Introduction

This dissertation examines a selection of Republican Chinese fictional works from the mid-1920s to the 1940s that are characterised by supernatural narratives. Most of these works feature supernatural manifestations of a dark nature in settings that allude to the contemporary Republican era. When May Fourth intellectuals attacked Chinese tradition (including supernatural beliefs), the literature featuring supernatural representations trod on fragile ground, rendering the primary sources in this thesis different from other realist works. These sources have been rarely or insufficiently studied. Few attempts have been made to juxtapose them within a single study due to their authors' various educational or political backgrounds and the style and genre of the works. Moreover, in previous studies on Republican fiction, supernatural crossing has not been the focus of interpretation. This study therefore aims to explore the purposes of crossing as a plot component in Republican fiction, especially with regard to how it facilitates musings on personal fate and social reality in the Republican period.

1 Research purpose and clarification of terms

Supernatural narratives exemplify the diversity and complexity of Republican fiction with respect to both form and aesthetics. Literary imaginings of anything supernatural were viewed as deviant at a time when, in the eyes of the Republican iconoclastic intellectuals, the connection of supernatural imaginings with Chinese tradition and folkloric superstition was perceived to impede national progress, as explained in Chapter 1. Supernatural narratives in Republican fiction have not escaped the attention of researchers. Nevertheless, there have been critical lacunae about them.

The concept of “crossing” can be found in numerous Republican short stories and novels; it denotes the phenomenon whereby characters experience transitions in
their physical locations or mental states as they cross a boundary between the supernatural and the natural. I am aware of the existence of other types of crossing in fiction, such as crossing the boundaries of social hierarchy or gender. However, in this thesis, crossing simply refers to an activity or a prolonged process whereby human characters and (likely) supernatural beings encounter each other and interact. A typical instance of crossing is when humans cross into supernatural realms or a new state where they believe they have encountered something supernatural. In this thesis, I expand the notion of crossing to refer to happenings and experiences where characters appear to have abruptly encountered something supernatural. “Supernatural” in this thesis refers to phenomena or elements that scientifically verified laws of nature cannot explain or do not acknowledge, regardless of how natural those phenomena and elements are made to seem in fictional works. A “supernatural narrative” thus refers to descriptions of supernatural beings or events. It can also refer to the depiction of story events or beings as if they were supernatural. In the literary imagination, the supernatural is characterised by a spectrum of manifestations ranging from the dead (“ghosts, zombies, vampires”, Purkiss xii) and the magical (“witches, wizards, fantastical places, supernatural quests, fairies and prophecies”, ibid., xiii) to monsters and beasts (ibid.). The imagery and motifs of those strange beings are significant elements of the supernatural narratives that this thesis examines.

Another term that frequently appears in this thesis, “reality”, is the opposite of the supernatural. “Reality” refers to that which complies with the scientific worldview and represents a consensus as to what constitutes objective reality, namely facts and events that people with common sense acknowledge as existing or used to exist in the material world. Accordingly, this thesis often mentions “reality” as the social conditions under which a fictional work was written. As well as pointing to the external world, “reality” refers to a character’s “sense of reality” and what s/he believes to be real. In this thesis, such a case may be rare but is worth noting as it forms the foundation of certain arguments.
Adopting a realist interpretative approach, the primary concern of this thesis is the purposes for which crossing in Republican fiction is employed. Is a supernatural narrative in primary sources concerned with exploring the transcendent unknown? Do the primary sources deviate from or defy a rationalist worldview? Underlying these questions is my hypothesis that supernatural narratives and the crossing embody the authors’ reflections on Republican social reality and individuals’ lives.

2 Review of literature

Previous studies have primarily approached the supernatural narratives in Republican fiction from two perspectives: the zhiguai 志怪 / chuanqi 傳奇 traditions and ghostly motif. The terms of “zhiguai/chuanqi” and “ghost” suggest that the researchers employ different criteria to select and organise primary sources. The first perspective is to identify Republican fictional works that can be deemed to descend from the zhiguai/chuanqi narrative tradition. Studies of the ghost motif demonstrate less interest in situating their fictional works within a sustaining tradition. Rather, they select fictional works by subject matter and discuss those that feature ghosts or ghostly characters, regardless of the writers’ various narrative styles.

2.1 The zhiguai/chuanqi tradition in Republican fiction

Zhiguai or anomalous accounts is a genre of writing that emerged in the Han dynasty (202 BC–220 AD) and was popularised in the Six Dynasties (222–589 AD). Zhiguai accounts were typically short and concise narratives that recorded what their writers deemed strange or abnormal (Pang 79). The genre covers a wide range of supernatural or fantastical subject matter, such as divinities, ghosts, demons, traveling to remote regions, and magical treasures. Even so, zhiguai was not a genre that celebrated writers’ imagination because most believed they were faithfully narrating real phenomena (ibid.). Chuanqi (tales of the marvellous/transmission of the marvellous) is a genre of fiction that emerged and grew popular in the Tang
dynasty (618–907 AD). Although its subject matter largely overlapped with that of zhiguai, the fantastical and supernatural became part of conscious literary creation (ibid., 79–80). Chuanqi was abundant in twisting and engaging plots, sophisticated and embellished narratives, multiple spatio-temporal structures, and romantic atmospheres (ibid.).

Two articles highlight the lingering zhiguai / chuanqi tradition in Republican fiction. In the first of these, Pang Zengyu (2002) lists works that inherited the tradition, including Lu Xun’s 鲁迅 (1881–1936) Gushi Xinbian 故事新编 (Old Stories Retold, 1936); Shen Congwen’s 沈从文 (1902–1988) Yuexia Xiaojing 月下小景 (Scenes in the Moonlight, 1933); New Sensationalist fiction; Xu Xu 徐訏 (1908-1980) and Wumingshi’s 无名氏 (or Bu Naifu 卜乃夫, 1907-2002) romantic fantasies; and Eileen Chang’s (Zhang Ailing 张爱玲, 1920–1995) fictional portrayal of the uncommon in quotidian life (82–4). Moreover, the chuanqi tradition can also be found in leftist literature describing wars and sacrifices (85). Pang organises the literary primary sources as a means of identifying familiar traditional styles of zhiguai / chuanqi narratives. He recognises the spatial-temporal characteristics of zhiguai / chuanqi but does not elaborate on them based on his primary sources. The supernatural is not Pang’s focus, nor is it equivalent to zhiguai or chuanqi. Some of his primary sources feature impossible things judged by a modern, rationalist mind, but Pang selects these for their shared dramatic and fanciful quality.

In the second article, Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg (2005) argues that twentieth-century Chinese fiction utilised zhiguai writing for both modern and postmodern purposes (22). The literary entities she discusses include “ghosts, fox-spirits, forebodings, dreams of premonition, metamorphoses, fortune-tellers, magical objects”, all of which pose a threat to the boundaries between fantasy and reality, life and death, and the unity of time and space (ibid.). Activated by fictional strategies such as metaphor and personification, the mode of the supernatural takes on a new aesthetic and cultural meaning. Wedell-Wedellsborg primarily focuses on 1980s–90s fiction with only one paragraph discussing the supernatural in Republican literature. Her
focus tilts more towards the way in which Republican supernatural narratives respond to their contemporary social reality. I include Wedell-Wedellsborg’s article in this review of literature because it lists a multitude of potential writers and works for me to consider. This will enable me to ensure my selection of primary sources does not overlook important works.

These works are followed by two Chinese monographs on the adoption and appropriation of the zhiguai / chuanqi narrative in Republican fiction. First, Zhang Zhengu (2011) presents a systematic, philological study of late-Qing and Republican zhiguai / chuanqi collections. His primary sources are written in the classical Chinese language and thus cannot be considered to be part of the field of the vernacular Republican fiction. Zhang treats his primary sources as a genre, the development of which he delineates across regions through the late Qing and Republican period. The final two chapters comprise a list of writers and their zhiguai / chuanqi fiction from 1901 to 1949. According to Zhang, late-Qing and Republican zhiguai / chuanqi collections lack cultural and social reflection (8).

In the second monograph, Yu Jing (2015) compares Republican fiction with Victorian gothic fiction (1850s–1910s). Overall, the book focuses on the uncanny rather than the supernatural, thus offering psychoanalytical interpretations. Victorian gothic fiction enables Yu to identify the gothic and uncanny features in fictional works of the 1920s and 1930s. Furthermore, while reading the primary sources written by writers such as Yu Dafu, Shi Zhecun, and Ye Lingfeng, Yu discusses the formal and thematic novelty of Republican fiction compared with traditional zhiguai writings. In addition to transformations in narrative perspectives and styles, Republican uncanny fiction demonstrates the spiritual aporias of individuals through three motifs: the body–soul separation, encounters with one’s real desires in dreamy states, and insane delusions (115–28).

Studies that deal with the Republican application of traditional zhiguai / chuanqi narratives tend to demonstrate the unsevered connection of their primary sources
with literary tradition and their creation based on that tradition. Few attempts have been made to read primary sources in their contemporary milieu.

2.2 The ghost motif in Republican fiction

Outside the popular genre of martial arts fiction (wuxia xiaoshuo 武俠小説), Republican fiction rarely presents actual or scary ghosts in the manner of folk beliefs or legends; instead, it transforms them into allegorical imagery and the aesthetic of darkness and tragedy. In one chapter of The Monster that is History (2004), David Der-wei Wang argues that “the ghostly narrative has introduced a phantasmagoric dimension to the Chinese fin-de-siecle discourse of the real” (278). “Ghosts” or exorcising ghosts serve the purposes of realist writing. Compared with the last two decades of the twentieth century (267), the Republican era was short of literary phantasm, and so Wang’s textual analyses of ghostly aesthetics were primarily performed on late twentieth-century Chinese fiction. For the first half of the century, he highlights the following:

1) Late Imperial satire and allegorical exposé fiction;
2) Debunking of superstitious folk beliefs and customs in May Fourth fiction;
3) Lu Xun’s obsession with an aesthetic darkness and irrationality “haunted by funeral rites, graves, executions, ghosts, demons, and death wishes” (275);
4) Eileen Chang’s gothic stories of moral aberration (272–278).

In the doctoral thesis “Huanmei de xiandai xiangxiang: lun zhongguo xiandai zuojia bi xia de ‘gui’” 幻魅的現代想象: 論中國現代作家筆下的「鬼」 (The Enchanted Modern Imagination: On ‘Gui’ in Modern Chinese Literature”, 2006), Xiao Xiangming explores the notion of ghosts (gui) in Republican-era fiction and the role it plays in shaping traditional folk culture, modern values, and philosophical thought (III). Considerably more comprehensive, this thesis covers the writers mentioned by David Der-wei Wang. The focus of Xiao’s study is on the aesthetic development of “ghost”, which became an implication lurking behind the morbid superstition and customs of countryside folks (59–64). Xiao identified the traces of “ghost” in
numerous works featuring common Chinese people that target generic national inferiorities and secular tragedies (64–75). Engaging historical milieu, Xiao demonstrates how “ghost” symbolised the dark reality and served as a political allegory (75–86). In essence, “ghost” facilitates realist criticism by serving as a discourse with strong emotional colour and symbolic potential.

Furthermore, Xiao argues that “ghost” underwent a transformation from concrete artistic images to a vehicle for writers to express themselves (49). For example, it reflects Lu Xun’s and Zhou Zuoren’s spiritual worlds, personalities, and life philosophy (87–127). Shen Congwen’s “ghost” writing expresses his nostalgic longing for his homeland, west Hunan, and its indigenous culture (128–154). Xiao then exposes the philosophical struggle behind the spectral aesthetic in works by Eileen Chang, Xu Xu, Wumingshi, and Qian Zhongshu (1910–1998) (164). Overall, “ghost” functioned as a poetic language divorced from superstition.

Haiyan Lee’s *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (2014) has partial relevance to the supernatural in her discussion of Lu Xun’s “Zhufu” (The New Year’s Sacrifice”, 1924) and *Baimaonü* (The White-Haired Girl, ballet in the 1970s). Lee situates the works within the context of cultural “strangers”, as religions, superstition, and their worshippers are strangers to the secular world (38). As stated in Carlos Rojas’s review of the book, the spectral figures in Lee’s discussion “function not so much as figures of alterity in their own right [namely embodying the implication of the returning of the dead] but rather as symbols of traditional belief systems positioned in opposition to a process of modernization and enlightenment” (255). Lee’s arguments illuminate the complexity of supernatural-related discourses—ghosts, for example, are not always branded a hindrance to modernity or an equivalent to evil. Rather, they may only be a camouflage, an indicator, or a victim of the real evilness lurking behind.

In her 2017 doctoral dissertation entitled “Not Afraid of Ghosts: Stories of the Spectral in Modern Chinese Fiction”, Jessica Elizabeth Imbach performs an elaborate
study of ghost accounts in Mainland Chinese fiction from 1912 to the present. She holds that the spectral potentially evokes different perceptions, outlooks, and values regarding reality while interrupting the sense of continuity (1). Imbach’s research is built upon a close relationship with Jacques Derrida’s concept of spectrality and modern Chinese intellectuals’ symbolic discourse of ghost (10). Adopting Rosemary Jackson’s perspective, Imbach asserts that “[ghosts in literature] can reveal what is hidden, repressed and marginalized by hegemonic paradigms and discourses, especially in times when criticism of ghost beliefs and attacks on aesthetics of the fantastic are a central pillar of mainstream ideology” (ibid.). Imbach notes that interpretation of the ghost literature requires an understanding of the specific socio-historical conditions under which the modern versions of “ghost” were generated (6).

Imbach situates the ghost fiction within the “politicization of Chinese ghost culture and literature” in which individuals in fiction are portrayed as being subject to specific aesthetic or political power (8). Imbach argues that “ghost” functions both as a “metaphor and script” (ii). Focusing on Republican ghost fiction, Chapters 1 and 2 examine how ghost fiction challenges the “past-present, and China-the West” hierarchies; Chapter 3 examines the “phantom romance plot” related to gender issues and modernity (ii). Imbach pinpoints the following branches of “ghost fiction” in the Republican period: 1) escapist leisure ghost stories not contributing to the creation of new national literature (Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiying, and Xu Xu) (16); 2) social satirical allegories featuring ghosts as (agents of) social ugliness (17); 3) leftist literature borrowing the notion of the ghost to denote tragedies occurring under Japanese invasion or domestic political struggles (ibid.).

For Imbach, the ghostly representations in modern fiction make sense even when interpreted without the conventional notion of “the returning ghosts embodying the bounce back of something under repression” (28). Ghostly figures make symbolic reference to contemporary historical and social situations (6; 10). Confirmed by other individual articles written by Imbach, “ghost” is a “trespassing” character and cuts through “high-brow and low-brow fiction” and challenges the distinction between
“vernacular and classical idioms” (“Variations” 867). The ghost narrative blends the real and the unreal, which invites the reading perspective of “phantasmagoric realism” (ibid., 866).

In summary, studies have fully acknowledged the realist aims in Republican “ghost” narratives, while establishing “ghost” as a twentieth-century aesthetic detached from genuine beliefs in ghosts. In multiple primary sources, “ghosts” refer to the dark atmosphere and narrative tone, while the characters are ordinary-looking people who lead heart-breaking lives that chill the reader.

Although I have categorised the research into these two sections (the zhiguai/chuanqi and the ghost motif) for separate discussion, this does not mean that these sections are mutually exclusive; indeed, the primary sources characterised by the ghost motif probably contain as much zhiguai/chuanqi narrative tradition as those works regarded as the “modern zhiguai/chuanqi”. The major difference between the two sections lies in the directions in which the researchers are looking; while researchers of the modern zhiguai/chuanqi face the past and try to recognise the old tradition in Republican fiction, researchers of modern “ghosts” are grounded in the Republican present and seek to secure convincing explanations for these “ghosts” in their contemporary social context. Consequently, some fictional works may have appeared in both sections but received interpretations from different perspectives.

These previous studies inspired my thinking with regard to the selection of primary sources. Viewing studies on the zhiguai/chuanqi tradition and on the ghost motif together, I saw that their primary sources are substantially overlapped. Moreover, the zhiguai/chuanqi tradition or the ghostly motif alone paint a narrow picture of supernatural narratives in Republican fiction. Exploring the connection of primary sources with the zhiguai/chuanqi tradition yields little information on realist themes other than an understanding of the narrative characteristics of these sources. Using ghostly imagery as a criterion for selecting primary sources may omit supernatural narratives that feature non-ghostly characters. A new entry point was required to
collate diverse primary sources while fusing the two existing perspectives under one primary research aim. If I use a term other than “zhiguai/chuanqi” or “ghost” as the touchstone to identify and select suitable fictional works, I can juxtapose works that have never been put together or compared. I also noticed that some works mentioned in previous studies lack extensive analysis, such as Zhang Henshui’s 張恨水 (1895-1967) Xin zhanguizhuan 新斬鬼傳 (A New Tale of Killing Ghosts, 1926) and Zhang Tianyi’s 張天翼 (1906-1985) Guitu riji 鬼土日記 (Ghostland Diary, 1930) which appear in Imbach’s (2017) study but not in much detail. Imbach also dismisses Shi Zhecun’s and Xu Xu’s ghostly fiction as escapist, which is worthy of re-evaluation.

Observing the research perspectives of previous studies, I saw interpreting supernatural narratives in terms of their realist implications as a promising approach to adopt, as most of the fictional works discussed previously did not receive satisfying interpretations. However, I will avoid narrowing down my interpretations to simply finding symbolic meanings for “ghosts” or any other supernatural characters represented in primary sources. Instead, I scrutinise more dynamic process or activities where human characters encounter the supernatural or believe they do. This perspective will ensure that the entire text of a fictional work receives full and equal attention rather than allowing supernatural characters only to stand out in the spotlight of research. For the above reasons, I came up with “crossing” as a diversion from the previous research.

The reason for employing the term “crossing” rather than “encounter” is that the former emphasises the dramatic transformation in characters’ experiences and the contradiction that exists before and after the crossing. Crossing enables me to identify marginalised fictional works, to discover connections among seemingly unrelated works, and to generate new dialogues and insights. The criterion of crossing brings together fictional works by writers from various ideological backgrounds. Compared with the criterion of the ghost, crossing denotes a much bigger subject matter that involves not only ghosts but also numerous other potential types of supernatural beings within the story. Crossing presents supernatural
transitions in the mental status or the physical location but poses no restrictions on what kind of supernatural happenings await the crossing character on the other side. It can be employed and located in fictional works of all types of narrative styles and genres, such as detective fiction, social satire, and ghost stories. Moreover, crossing indicates how characters start to break from their previous conditions. Presumably, crossing will entail the disturbance of accustomed, mundane situations, the release of hidden tensions, or the disclosure of new truths. Therefore, the notion of crossing will always direct me to the primary concerns of the fictional works.

3 Primary sources and research methods

The approach I adopted comprised two steps. First, I selected primary sources with identifiable crossing plots and then develop a theoretical framework of crossing to divide the primary sources into categories. The categorisation of crossing served as an overarching framework to demonstrate the commonalities and thus coherence in the primary sources. In this step, chapters of the thesis come into being. Second, I aimed to explore the purposes for which the primary sources present various kinds of crossing. I applied theories of narrative techniques to the primary sources as part of a comprehensive textual analyses while observing traditional supernatural motifs in the fictional works. This led to detailed interpretations of the works in order to demonstrate the distinctive narrative features situated within each.

3.1 The primary sources

Because the research is concerned with the realist implications of supernatural narratives, the primary sources needed to contain either supernatural plot components that characters truly experienced or, alternatively, something characters thought was supernatural but was eventually revealed not to be. Tzvetan Todorov’s framework of the fantastic and its subgenres justify my acceptance of those fictional works that eventually debunk the supernatural in the plot. In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973), Todorov explains his definition of the
fantastic and its two neighbouring genres, the fantastic-uncanny and the fantastic-marvellous. “The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (Todorov 25). As a genre, the fantastic has two subgenres, the fantastic-uncanny and the fantastic-marvellous. The key to differentiating the genres is to see whether the story ends with an explanatory closure (ibid., 44). In the fantastic-uncanny, the characters first wonder about the nature of the “spectral” and then eventually find a rational explanation (ibid.). By comparison, the fantastic-marvellous concludes with a supernatural explanation of its events (ibid., 51–52). Todorov’s framework also has two far but relevant genres, the marvellous and the uncanny. The uncanny provokes disturbing and shocking sentiments in its characters and readers, but its events eventually receive natural, rational explanations and thus generate no supernatural mystery (ibid., 46). Finally, the marvellous presents all kinds of supernatural elements, but none of its characters or readers feel surprising as they readily accept and expect the supernatural as part of the storytelling from the beginning (ibid., 51–52).

The primary sources of this thesis belong to the fantastic, the fantastic-uncanny, the fantastic-marvellous, or the marvellous, as explained in Chapters 2–6. The first three (sub)genres all describe their characters’ entanglement in the confusion about something potentially supernatural, even though this may later be dispelled as the “supernatural” is debunked. Meanwhile, the marvellous only represents something undoubtedly supernatural.¹

¹ To avoid disturbing the narrative flow of the main text, I need to spell out an important point about the relationship between Todorov’s concept of hesitation and my concept of crossing. Crossing refers to the acts or processes of trespassing the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. Hesitation is a character’s feeling of doubt when s/he cannot decide whether s/he has encountered something supernatural. When characters feel hesitation, they may have already crossed into the supernatural, have not yet crossed over, or be in the process of crossing back and forth. During a crossing, the character may not be troubled by any hesitation. Accordingly, the concept of hesitation does not seem to be an indicator of any particular type of crossing.
The primary sources also needed to utilise a contemporary setting, not a fantastical or completely otherworldly one. This study thus excludes works such as Lu Xun’s *Old Stories Retold* and martial arts fiction like Huanzhulouzhu’s 蜀山劍俠傳 (Legends of Swordsmen from Mount Shu, 1932–1948). These works have fantastical settings constructing unreal or ancient-looking worlds. The period examined is from the mid-1920s to the 1940s, which was after the May Fourth period (1915–1925) when iconoclastic writers endorsed fictional realism and did not take supernatural narratives seriously.

The primary sources are:

Zhang Henshui’s 張恨水 (1895-1967) *Xin zhuangzhuan* 新斬鬼傳 (A New Tale of Killing Ghosts, 1926);

Ye Lingfeng’s 葉靈鳳 (1905-1975) “Zuodao” 左道 (“The Deviant Path”, 1928) and “Luoyan” 落雁 (1929);

Yu Dafu’s 郁達夫 (1896-1945) “Shisan ye” 十三夜 (“The Thirteenth Night”, 1930);

Shi Zhecun’s 施蟄存 (1905-2003) “Modao” 魔道 (“Sorcery”, 1931), “Yecha” 夜叉 (“Yaksha”, 1933), and “Xiongzhai” 凶宅 (“The Haunted House”, 1933);

Wu Zuxiang’s 吳組緗 (1908-1994) “Lüzhu shanfang” 蒿竹山房 (“The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage”, 1933);

What a character comes across after crossing into a new status or realm will be the primary focus of the thesis. As stated before, crossing foreshadows the discovery or unfolding of a new or overlooked situation. Hence, there will be new concerns that occupy the character’s mind once s/he experiences or completes the crossing, while hesitation is probably not the dominant sentiment in crossing.


This is not a complete collection of all relevant Republican fictional works with supernatural narratives. Nevertheless, this represents an assemblage of works written by writers with diverse literary styles and political persuasions. The primary sources were sufficient to present an informative picture of the supernatural in Republican fiction.

3.2 The framework of crossing

Because the focus of this thesis is on crossing, I searched theories on supernatural or fantastical crossing. The most relevant theory I found was not about crossing but Patricia Garcia’s (2015) thresholds, namely “borders between the realistic domain and the supernatural” (26). These can be “holes, doors, doorsteps, courtyards, and mirror and stairs” (ibid.). Thresholds typically serve as the entrance for characters to cross into a supernatural realm; however, in this study the direction of crossing can be reversed from the supernatural to the realistic domain.

Farah Mendlesohn’s (2008) theories on the rhetoric of fantasy fiction contain several cases of crossing. Portal-quest fantasy makes characters leave their familiar environments through a portal and embark on a quest in an unknown world (1). Conversely, intrusion fantasy features fantastical, strange intruders crossing the boundary between their original world and the human world, thus disturbing the existing mundanity (115). Both fantasy types are concerned with crossing. However, fantasy literature theories are not the focus of my study. According to Varnardo, in fantasy literature, “the reader is asked for imaginative sympathy rather than intellectual assent. The mental reaction is: ‘How delightful if such things could happen, but I know they can’t’” (Varnado 4). I agree with Varnado that fantasy literature depicts a strong fascination with imaginary fantastical happenings and creatures. In
my primary sources, I do not see this drive of fascination. Instead, these works are of the “intellect”, whose attempts to impel readers to understand something new about reality come before their interest in taking time to build a fantastical world.

Inspired by Garcia’s notion of thresholds, I built my framework of supernatural crossing. An act of crossing is performed by an agent, who can be a human or a supernatural character. The starting point of crossing can be an ordinary setting that resembles the external world or a strange realm. The most crucial element is the destination of the crossing, for which there at least three possibilities:

1) An agent crosses into another place that is occupied by supernatural beings. This place is part of the ordinary physical world. Therefore, Shi Zhecun’s “The Haunted House”, Wu Zuxiang’s “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage”, and Cheng Xiaoqing’s The Ghost in White feature humans crossing into enclosed spaces occupied by supernatural beings. All three works feature pseudo ghosts. Meanwhile, Ye Lingfeng’s “Luoyan” and Yu Dafu’s “The Thirteen Night” feature humans crossing into or about to cross into real ghosts’ residences.

2) An agent experiences crossing in terms of perception. They suddenly have or obtain the ability to perceive supernatural manifestations in their surroundings. The character remains in the ordinary world but cognitively crosses into a rarely perceived dimension. Shi Zhecun’s “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” and Xu Xu’s “Hallucination” exemplify humans crossing into the ordinary world’s supernatural dimension as a result of abnormal perception.

3) An agent crosses into an alternative world detached from the ordinary world while functioning according to its distinctive principles. Zhang Tianyi’s Ghostland Diary portrays a human crossing into the netherworld. Conversely, Zhang Henshui’s A New Tale of Killing Ghosts and Ye Lingfeng’s “The Deviant Path” feature supernatural characters crossing into the human world.
3.3 Theories exploring the purposes of crossing

Following Patricia Garcia’s (2015) notion of threshold is her discussion of the purposes of thresholds, which she defines as follows: 1) announcing the start of a journey or quest; 2) triggering the physical displacement of characters from an ordinary environment to an unknown one; 3) marking characters crossing over an impenetrable boundary; 4) admitting characters into an enclosed space; 5) highlighting the tension that exists before and after the crossing; 6) “facilitating” supernatural happenings (Garcia 27–8). Garcia’s observations assisted me in analysing the purposes of crossing in the primary sources.

My observations of the primary sources indicated that theories on narrative modes of the gothic, the grotesque, and the satirical are the most useful for textual analysis. Analysing the narrative styles and techniques of primary sources will demonstrate the uniqueness of each work. It will also show how their supernatural narratives reveal messages that ultimately pertain to the authors’ contemporary reality. However, using terms such as the gothic, the grotesque, and the satirical do not mean the primary sources are identified as these genres.

3.3.1 The gothic

“Gothic fiction” originally referred to a group of novels written from the 1760s to the 1820s in England, characterised by “the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves” (Punter 1). Fowler notes that although the gothic began as a “fixed genre”, it soon “yielded a gothic mode that outlasted it” (109).

Fear is the essential emotion in the gothic (Bayer-Berenbaum 44). It “thematizes the phenomenon of fear and evil in extreme situations” or in extreme states of mind that “intensify and distort perception, thought, and hence, ‘reality’” (Howard 37, 36). Gothic fiction induces feelings of terror or horror. Fred Botting (1996) draws on Ann
Radcliffe’s ideas to distinguish the two terms. As Botting points out, terror is the feeling experienced in the face of “immediate and temporary” threats to one’s safety (124, 125). For example, David Punter states that political abjection engenders terror because people can run away from it and obtain a sense of safety (235). Horror derives from a greater degree of confusion, chaos of the mind, and disorientation as a result of facing the instability and dissolution of one’s identity, which is not threatened by close danger but by some lurking disturbance (Botting 124).

Gothic fiction tends to represent the horror-inducing object metaphorically through absolute darkness, death, and disorienting spaces (“labyrinths, dungeons, or burial vaults”) (ibid.). An encounter with a dead body may elicit horror, especially when the individual realises his/her mortality and the ensuing process of rotting away (ibid., 126). Boundaries undermined between animality and humanity may also cause horror (ibid., 128–29). “Horror constitutes the limit of reason, sense, consciousness and speech”, and conveys the anxiety associated with losing or the disintegration of the limits between humanity and its reverse (ibid., 131). Gothic horror echoes Kristeva’s “abject”, for it presents all kinds of human bodily waste during a person’s urge to draw a boundary between the protected self/“I” and the “improper/unclean” (A. Williams 76).

The gothic style contains a set of typical plot components. Firstly, stereotypical characters endowed with “either somber, diabolic villainy or pure, angelic virtue” are

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3 In Powers of Horror (1980), Kristeva elaborates the notion of “abject” as referring to one’s preconscious impulse at primordial levels of existence, which is to separate oneself from disturbances of “identity, system, and order…borders, position, [and] rules”, where the rejected becomes the alien and abject Other (Hogle 108, qtd. from Kristeva 4). What underlies abjection is the individual’s “chaos of un-differentiation” (Hogle 109). Abject is excluded from the subject’s system of meaning and self-identity, but nevertheless continues to challenge the subject (Kristeva 2). The subject defines its abject as meaningless and insignificant but still feels some kind of pressure and anxiety emanating from the inannihilable existence of the abject (ibid.). Hostility towards any form of foreigner is also derived from the abject (Hogle 111).

presented as contrasting embodiments of certain qualities: idealised femininity and sentimentality versus brutality, nobility versus savagery, hate versus love (Bayer-Berenbaum 23; 24). There is usually a “vulnerable and curious heroine” (A. Williams 38) whose virtue, liberty, or safety is under threat (Tracy 103–4). The heroine is sensitive to apparitions because of her fragile and irrational mind (A. Williams 52). There is also a Byronic, “wealthy, arbitrary, and enigmatic” hero/villain with the impulse to “test and transgress human social and ethical constraints” (A. Williams 38; Stoddart 113). The strong imagination or sensitivity of characters indicates self-indulgence and paranoia (Martin 132). Intense emotion generally leads to fainting, death, or illnesses (A. Williams 70).

Secondly, the setting or landscapes exhibit extreme qualities, opposites, and intensified contrasts to sustain “unmitigated sensitivity”, such as the contrasts between light and darkness or between indications of romance and violence (Bayer-Berenbaum 22–3). The typical depiction is a setting that is isolated, melancholy, menacing, and mysteriously hiding secrets (Tracy 104; A. Williams 38). The setting may take on a sense of spatial disorientation and lack formal simplicity (Bayer-Berenbaum 24). Ruins are a popular setting, the gothic fascination with which might be attributable to “the limitless power of nature over human creation” (ibid., 26). Gothic settings often imbue characters with a sense of strangeness, displacement, or distance, sometimes through their location in foreign lands and sometimes by suggesting a former age/temporal displacement or anachronism (Carter 17). In a peculiar, enclosed spatio-temporal realm, characters display an awareness of being “not contemporary with themselves and perform actions that only make sense beyond the frame of the present where they find themselves ungrounded” (Berthin 67).

Thirdly, the gothic is obsessed with “an expansion of consciousness” (Bayer-Berenbaum 21). It may take the form of dreams, drug states, the intoxication of mind, “hypnotic trances, telepathic communications, visionary experiences, and extrasensory perceptions” (ibid., 25). When the gothic involves the supernatural, the
incidents are usually based closely on reality, where the supernaturalness betrays an immediate and permeating sense rather than an otherworldly nature remote from daily life (ibid., 32). For this reason, the gothic supernatural may be termed “transnatural” as it appears to be the natural extension of nature rather than the imaginary construction of another universe (ibid., 33). However, supernatural incidents are not a prerequisite for a gothic narrative. Some phenomena are only believed to be supernatural or ghostly by characters (A. Williams 14).

Finally, the gothic enjoys challenging orders, rationality, and its classification with death, decay, irregularity, the barbaric, weakness, the unhealthy, deformity, taboo, and grotesqueness (Bayer-Berenbaum 27, 28). The burgeoning life force under the lethal threats posed by gruesome pain and torture evokes excitement (ibid., 31). The dark interest involves the “eruptions of unbridled sexuality”, such as necrophilia, incest, and rape (ibid., 40). Mental disorder also occurs frequently, matched by the instability of the individual’s surroundings (ibid., 39). Moreover, the reader may find “rational happiness” denied in the story, with the vicious left unpunished or order unrestored in open endings (Berthin 65).

We should read the gothic as being about the unspoken and the melancholy (Berthin 58). The gothic configures outburst from suppression, reminding the reader to pay attention to the “discontinuities, ambiguities, unreliabilities, [and] silences” (A. Williams 67). What accomplishes the cultural task can either be “literal, embodied spirits” or metaphorical “ghosts” (physically absent but troubling the present) (Freed 4). For instance, spectrality and haunting often embody traumatic pasts in a personal or public history that continues to disturb the present (Blanco and Peeren 11).

What guides my interpretation of the primary sources is the “inward” turn in the gothic literary configuration. The origin of horror, terror, and strangeness in gothic fiction lies less in nonhuman, unknown creatures than in society and everyday life: “the history of the survival of gothic horror is one of the progressive internalization
and cognition of fears as generated by the self (Jackson 24). The gothic comes close to hauntology, which “is motivated by an interest in illuminating a past we do not know, as well as preventing us from forgetting a history we would sometimes rather not know” (Shaw 19). It enhances readers’ awareness of their surroundings by directing their attention not to ontologically unknown realms but to the neglected corners in an unsatisfying reality.

On occasion I use the term “uncanny”, not in Freud’s psychoanalytical sense but to describe the aesthetic effect of spookiness and the cultural effect of “fundamentally disturb[ing] familiar values by… producing a disquieting… uncertainty” (Brooke-Rose 310).

3.3.2 The grotesque

As a literary and artistic form, the grotesque evokes shock and bewilderment in the disharmonious combinations of “vile and comic, disgust and irony” (Edwards and Garulund 2) and the “fearsome with the ludicrous” (McElroy 12). According to Harpham, “most grotesques are marked by such an affinity/antagonism, by the co-presence of the normative, fully formed, ‘high’ or ideal, and the abnormal, unformal, degenerate, ‘low’ or material” (9). The conflicting nature of the grotesque remains unresolved (Thomson 21). It thus relies heavily on the visual presentation of anti-scientism/rationalism/empiricism (McElroy 6).

There are several grotesque types relevant to the primary sources of the research. The most well-known is the “physically abnormal” (Thomson 9), such as deformed,

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5 In A Specter Is Haunting Europe (1990), José B. Monleón offers an elaborate illustration of the “internalization” over a longer historical period. Anchoring his observation in the years of 1789, 1848, and 1917, Monleón explicates the “location” of the “otherness” and “unreason” in culture and its transformative impact on the configuration of the literary fantastic. As society evolved and science developed, reason glided into a stage of crisis as its fragility and inherent unreason were revealed. While social norms maintained their power, unreason was portrayed as either defending the dominant order or threatening it through fantasy literature.
dismembered, and distorted bodies (Edwards and Garulund 2), imaginary monstrous chimera-style creatures (ibid., 65), and human–inhuman (such as animal) hybrids (McElroy 4). Inelegant physical activities also induce a grotesque sense, such as excretion, sex, addiction, and other types of indulgence in vulgar desires (Edwards and Garulund 101–102). Likewise, depictions of humans experiencing a more severe degradation of dignity are undoubtedly grotesque; these include decomposed corpses, skeletons, cannibalism, and insanity (McElroy 12).

The second type is grotesque mentality. “Deeply aware of the rift between the external, objective world and the internal, subjective interpretation of it, the source of the grotesque has moved inward and is found in the fears, guilts, fantasies, and aberrations of individual psychic life” (McElroy 21). The grotesque thus takes place at the level of the mind, disclosing mental distortion and abnormality. Grotesque visuality may represent hallucinations, delusions, and fantasies triggered by an individual’s physical experiences in the world (ibid., 22).

The third type is carnivalesque grotesque where the literary representation is likely to display a “carnival sense of the world” (Bakhtin and Emerson 152). First, individual participants live out the carnivalesque, while ordinary life is suspended along with the “hierarchical structure and all forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it” (ibid., 167–68). People practice new, free relationships and interactions, shattering restrictive positions and hierarchies (ibid., 168). Second, eccentricity displaces familiarity in society (ibid.). Third, the carnivalesque juxtaposes those that are usually separate, such as “the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (ibid.). Finally, the carnivalesque expresses profanation towards the once superior (ibid.). Overall, there is a permeating obsession with freedom and equality among the comic chaos and blasphemy. The carnivalesque grotesque displays unique polarity by embodying both “the bright light of human potential and the accomplished evil present at the times in man’s treatment of man” (Danow 44).
As well as serving as a descriptive term for literature, the grotesque has a subversive potential in thematic interpretation. For instance, it contains an overt and unapologetic exposure of what the viewers feel repulsive or cultural taboos, during which the delineation of the normal and the abnormal requires revision (Edwards and Garulund 8). Also, liminality comes into being in the grotesque, and boundaries between Self and Other, internal and external dissolve (ibid., 9). For example, a prominent theme centres around how the grotesque raises questions about human identity in the face of all kinds of deviations from norms (ibid., 3).

The grotesque appears for various purposes: 1) to defamiliarise, create alienation, and introduce natural or magical aggression (Thomson 59; McElroy 4); 2) to expose the repulsive aspects in existence and yet ease anxiety through comic effects (McElroy 4); 3) to produce tension in the tragic and comic extremes (ibid., 61); 4) to add playfulness (ibid., 64); 5) and to satirise (Thomson 4). The grotesque has a historical dimension as it always has a cultural backdrop to challenge and “prejudice, assumptions, and expectations” of the time to break (Harpham 14). Moreover, modern literature engenders the grotesque to overcome an individual’s sense of insecurity and anxiety when facing an apathetic, mundane, and even hostile society (McElroy 17). The grotesque embodies the mundane vices (such as “greed and stupidity”) that are ultimately exposed under rationalisation and institutions (ibid., 18).

3.3.3 The satirical

In The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron (2001), Bogel delineates the transformation of Western satirical criticism and summarises three approaches to literary satire. The first stage is characteristic of historicism, where critics seek to unearth the corresponding historical facts from the literary presentation (Bogel 5). For example, in Gulliver’s Travels, the Emperor of Lilliput is based on George I of Great Britain.
The second stage, by contrast, exhibits a formalist trend. This style of reading derives “universal” or “ahistorical” messages from satire while setting aside the historical context (ibid., 6). This approach involves studying how the satirised functions within a satirical situation. Formalist reading focuses on reference rather than referentiality. While “reference” refers to a relation between the satirical text and the external object, “referentiality” refers to textual strategies or gestures directed “outward, whether to a historical object or not” (ibid., 9).

The third stage of reading is a combination of the first two, or an interest in both reference and referentiality. The task is to interpret the function of satirical figures in the story structure to ascertain how they direct the reader to the extra-linguistic world (ibid., 11). I primarily rely on this approach when treating my primary sources. The method involves examining the strategies employed by the author to achieve referentiality while resorting to historical backgrounds when necessary. I refer to “satire” as a literary mode in fiction rather than a genre. The reason is the same as that articulated by Greenberg: “To appreciate the full range of satiric literature, we need to consider satire not as a genre but as a mode. A mode, according to Alastair Fowler, is a looser sort of category than a genre, lacking the strong structural and formal markers of a genre but still sending “distinct signals” to a reader” (ibid., 10).

Satire demonstrates three features. Firstly, it artistically represents weaknesses in humanity and society for edifying and punitive purposes (Greenberg 13). The satirised objects may be either severe problematic issues or lighter follies, such as “ugliness, clumsiness, foolishness, bad taste, or stupidity” (Knight 5). The satirist does not necessarily occupy a high moral position and can be merely blaming and criticising what s/he dislikes (Greenberg 18). Although the satirist makes identifiable referentiality to reality, satire often stylistically maintains a sense of detachment from reality. Secondly, satire achieves comic or playful effects and evokes pleasure. In contrast to comedy, satire evokes mirthless laughter and usually does not move

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6 Feinberg terms the detachment “externality” (93).
towards a happy ending (ibid., 29). Thirdly, satire can contain fantasy factors and styles beyond realist mimesis (ibid., 18).

I divide satiric techniques into two groups. The first group manipulates language (narrative, dialogues, quotation) while the second group deals with the imagery of characters, events, and scenes. This division echoes Wan Shuyuan’s (1998) distinction between xiucixing fengci 修辞性諷刺 (“rhetorical satire”) and gouzaoxing fengci 構造性諷刺 (“structural satire”) (238).

Linguistic and stylistic techniques include verbal irony, epigram, self-exposure, invective, stylistic dissonance, witty linguistic tricks, and authorial commentary. The higher a technique is situated in the list, the more noticeable it is in the primary sources.

A. Verbal irony deliberately describes its objects in contrast to the way they are (Greenberg 32). It can take the form of “sham praise”, where what the satirist implies are the present and unpleasant features of the object (Feinberg 178). When a verbal irony is easy to recognise, it is sarcasm (ibid., 180). Verbal irony may come from the satirist, the satirist’s “persona”, or the “mask” of a fictitious figure (Bullitt 56; Feinberg 194).

I have consulted studies on traditional Chinese or Western satire in literature to summarise useful terms. Books on Western satire theories include Jonathan Greenberg’s The Cambridge Introduction to Satire (2018), David Worcester’s The Art of Satire (2013), Emil A. Draitser’s Techniques of Satire: The Case of Saltykov-Ščedrin (1994), Leonard Feinberg’s Introduction to Satire (1967), and Gilbert Highet’s Anatomy of Satire (1962). Chinese resources include Jin Xinrong’s 金鑫容 Mingqing fengci xiaoshuo yanjiu 明清諷刺小說研究 (Studies of Ming–Qing Satiric Novels, 2007), Liu Yanping’s 劉燕萍 Guaidan yu fengci: Ming Qing tongsu xiaoshuo quanshi 怪誕與諷刺明清通俗小說诠释 (Grotesqueness and Satire: Interpretations of Ming–Qing Vernacular Satiric Novels, 2003), Wan Shuyuan’s 萬書元 Di shi wei mius: Zhongguo xiandai fengci xiaoshuo lun, 1917–1949 第十位繆斯 中國現代諷刺小說論 1917–1949 (The Tenth Muse: On Modern Chinese Satiric Fiction, 1998), Wu Chunbang’s 吳淳邦 Wanqing fengci xiaoshuo de fengci yishu 晚清諷刺小說的諷刺藝術 (The Art of Satire in the Late-Qing Satiric Novels, 1994), and Qi Yukun 齊裕焜 and Chen Huiqin’s 陳惠琴 Zhongguo fengci xiaoshuo shi 中國諷刺小說史 (History of Chinese Satiric Novels, 1993).
B. Stylistic dissonance is a technique of understatement (Draitser 122). Satirists may magnify nonchalance and casualness when describing “eccentric or outrageous behavior” and pretending “to regard the activity as perfectly normal” (Feinberg 122). Wan Shuyuan identifies two other cases of stylistic dissonance. Overly trivial descriptions dramatically magnify unimportant details (245) while beautiful descriptions heighten the ugliness of satirised objects (ibid., 247).

C. Authorial commentary offers the satirist’s opinions on incidents in the story, but the subjective commentary is not necessarily derision or invective (Qi and Chen 43, 45–6; Wu C. 106). Wan Shuyuan highlights the logical “violence” in narrations, where a common situation or condition receives illogical and nonsensical interpretations (261). In fiction, it is more appropriate to call it “narratorial commentary” when referring to a characterless voice describing or commenting on what is happening in the plot. What is assumed to be the author’s voice is technically that of the invisible narrator.


E. Witty and wise epigrams may serve a satiric function. The satirist 1) paradoxically twists a cliché to mean something else; 2) makes a cynical definition; 3) directly states a widely held but rarely expressed idea; 4) creates a paradox that appears self-contradictory but is in fact true (Feinberg 133; 139).

F. Satirised objects boastfully and theatrically expose their vices through language (Highet 52).
G. Invective is a relatively open attack in satire, expressing fervour and hatred.\(^8\)

H. Satirists use mimicry and travesty for authorial narration while imitating the speech of satirised characters (Wan 251).

I. Other witty linguistic tricks include grammatical rupture and macarronics, repetition (into senseless semantic anesthesia) (Draitser 101–134); use of homophones (Qi and Chen 8); pet phrases (customary language of satirised characters) (Wan 254); personification (ibid., 262); synonymy (ibid., 264). Moreover, the verbal irony techniques listed by George Test in a broad sense are actually linguistic tricks, such as anticlimactic\(^9\) sentences and the juxtaposition of incongruous things (Test 153–54).

The second group of satirical techniques are concerned with how satirists present characters and design plots.

Denigration falls on characters through the ways they are shaped. 1) “Primitivizing” or “infantilization” presents characters as childish (Draitser 48). 2) “Physiologization” reduces characters’ activities to the satisfaction of physiological needs or overstates the significance of physical appearance in explaining the essence of characters (ibid., 51). In this case, satirists may heighten physical appearance, gluttony/gastronomic pleasure, scatological effects, intoxication, and sexual pleasure (ibid., 64–78). 3) Stupefication underlies characters’ intellectual limitations, with specific cases such as “disruption in the logic of thought, speech, and behaviour” (ibid., 51, 53–63). 4) Bestial or non-human mockeries reduce humans to fauna, half-human half-animal, flora, dolls or marionettes, objects, or ghosts (Draitser 47; Liu Y. 27; Jin X. 277). 5)

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\(^8\) Invective stirred some discussion on the outlining of satiric fiction in China. As the first critic to apply the term “satire” to Chinese fiction, Lu Xun regards satiric novels as exposing social ugliness and human follies in a “warm and humorous, gentle and ironical” style (Lu 273). He understood invective as the reason why Chinese reprimand novels 譴責小說 (or exposure novels) should be excluded from satire (ibid.). Nevertheless, Qi and Chen (1993) agree with Sun Kaidi 孫楷第 (1982) and Hu Shi in that invective can serve as a satiric feature in a broad sense (2).

\(^9\) Anticlimax “produces irony by setting off in one direction and arousing an expectation in the reader that is going to be disappointed. There is a letdown following a buildup, or at least an unfulfilled expectation” (Test 153).
Contradiction in a character or group’s behaviours also creates satire (Wu C. 133, 137).

The plot can appear satiric when it takes unexpected turns. For instance, there may be an “unexpected let-down” that brings readers’ accumulated expectations to an anti-climax (Feinberg 156). This kind of unexpected turn belongs to “situational irony”, where the situation ultimately turns out to be different from what the characters expected (Lucariello 467). In the “dramatic irony” and “cosmic irony” that Greenberg identifies, unexpectedness happens in readers’ cognition rather than characters.’ In dramatic irony, “a character’s words or actions are more meaningful to the audience than to herself” (Greenberg 32). This seems to suggest that readers know the potential consequences and significance of deeds better than the characters. Moreover, cosmic irony witnesses how “a character’s efforts to avoid a certain outcome unintentionally bring it about” (ibid.).

Parody is a device that straddles both groups. Satirists may parody both the style and contents of the satirised object. It uses incongruous forms to make satirised objects appear foolish (Highet 13). Parody can be divided into two types: mock-heroic parody (high burlesque) and low burlesque. Low burlesque is usually just called “burlesque” (also travesty). Worcester describes it as creating “a standard below its victim and makes the reader measure him against that standard” (44). It is a typical practice of denigration and takes the following forms. Low burlesque may employ low, colloquial, or vulgar words to appropriate quotations from serious literature and transform them into coarser forms or diminish past works through style (Highet 104, 106). Via exaggeration, distortion, and grotesque, satirists produce caricatured figures and assign them ridiculous and comical behaviours (with unique catchphrases, speech patterns, and physical mannerisms) (Greenberg 42). Those burlesque characters usually display a sense of inferiority to ordinary people, as their disagreeable characteristics stand out dramatically against their overly simplified character (Feinberg 117). There are also cases in which satirists parody biography or natural history (ibid., 186).
By contrast, Worcester describes high burlesque/mock-heroic parody as “holding him [the satirized object] up against a standard obviously too elevated for him [the satirized object] will make his shortcomings stand out sharply” (44).

4 Dissertation structure

Chapter 1 introduces the cultural and literary background to the primary sources, covering the Republican trend of scientism, iconoclastic intellectuals’ allegorical discourse of the supernatural, and Republican literary realism.

Chapters 2 to 6 present a close analysis of the primary sources. Each deals with one form of crossing. The narrative strategies introduced in the previous section serve as the theoretical tool to illustrate what type of supernatural narrative is constructed in each fictional work in terms of the writing style, the atmosphere, the character, and the event. The gothic, the grotesque, and the satirical are not mutually exclusive as narrative features. Rather, in many of the primary sources, more than one strategy can be seen to achieve a particular effect. Both gothic and satirical narratives can be combined with the grotesque, because the grotesque is typically useful for exposing problems and ugliness, thus widely observable.

Chapter 2 focuses on The Ghost in White, “The Haunted House”, and “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage”. In each case, the characters cross into “haunted” houses. At first, characters experienced a supernatural atmosphere in these spaces, but the works all end with their construction of haunting explained in rationalistic terms. The three works in this chapter deliver a strong anti-superstition message and utilise the crossing into enclosed houses as a chance to expose domestic secrets.

Chapter 3 interprets “Luoyan” and “The Thirteenth Night”, where the male protagonists did not realise they had encountered female ghosts and were motivated to cross into their apparitional residences. Why do the short stories feature ghosts? Are
they romances? Both works touch upon painful memories about political and historical incidents close or contemporary to the authors. How decisive are those political and historical references in interpreting the works?

Chapter 4 analyses “Sorcery”, “Yaksha”, and “Hallucination”. These are variants of the previously described crossing prototype—crossing in mentality where characters substitute their normal perception with psychical perception and can see supernatural manifestations beyond the perception of common people. The primary sources differ slightly from the prototype with respect to their ambiguity in the supernatural representations. “Yaksha” was confirmed as non-supernatural at the end of the story. “Sorcery” displayed an inclination towards a rationalist account. “Hallucination” remained obscure. Characters in these works crossed into a delirious mental state of delusions or hallucinations. Demonic or divine beings appeared in the characters’ subjective, conjured realities, and they felt confused about the actuality of these supernatural beings. What were the characters’ delusions/hallucinations about? What were the reasons for their strange perceptions?

Chapter 5 focuses on Ghostland Diary, a novel about a mortal crossing into the netherworld for a tour. What is the crossing protagonist’s role in this social criticism? This chapter explores the intense satirical quality in the layered narrative of the novel and the social problems the author targets.

Finally, Chapter 6 focuses on A New Tale of Killing Ghosts and “The Deviant Path”, where nonhuman supernatural figures (a god in the former and undead in the latter) cross into and intervene in the human world. Although the works direct satire to different targets, both deal with a large number of people. What were the supernatural characters’ reasons for crossing?

Finally, there will be a short conclusion chapter for the thesis. In general, the chapters on the primary sources seek to reveal the deeper causes underlying the shared crossing plot function. The crossing of the characters raises questions not
concerned with supernatural mechanism or principles in imagination; instead, assisted by a supernatural narrative, the crossing sheds light on the fate of ordinary individuals and their lived reality in the Republican period.
Chapter 1 The Cultural Background

In this chapter, I introduce Republican intellectuals’ promotion of scientism, their iconoclastic propositions attacking traditional supernatural beliefs, the consolidation of the allegorical discourse of ghosts, and the endorsement of literary realism, all constitutive of the cultural background of the primary sources.

1 Republican scientism

I locate my research in the cultural context of the New Culture movement. Arising after the 1911 revolution and marked by *New Youth* (1915), this movement launched a harsh attack on Chinese cultural heritage. It was “directed not simply against the conventional Confucian socio-political order but against the entire tradition with all its ‘three teachings of the Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism’ (not to speak of the superstitious culture of the masses)” (Schwartz 111). These old value systems either promoted the patriarchal hierarchy or encouraged an escapist fantasy of a transcendent life unbridled by the contemporary world, which opposed the ideals of the New Culture pioneers. As the chaotic and demanding social conditions persisted through the late Qing and the early Republican period, requests to solve specific social problems became increasingly urgent. The formula of “democracy and science” explains the new worldview and mindset in which “science” relates to my research topic.

“Science” refers not only to the importation of Western technology but also to the cultivation of rational thinking and a “value orientation” (Kwok 15). The enthusiasm of intellectuals is termed “scientism”, meaning that “the limiting principles of science itself have found general application and have become the cultural assumptions and
axioms of [Republican Chinese] culture” (ibid., 21). The rising respect for the power of science, and even the unavering belief in its omnipotence, was a prevailing value of the New Culture movement. From a pragmatic perspective, science was meant to perform a crucial role in social progression. Intellectuals urged the application of science to national education, social organisation, and industrialisation with the help of modern technology and machinery (ibid., 37).

From a cognitive perspective, science represented a new mindset, leading to more rational approaches to understanding reality and what lies beyond the domain of temporary observation. Intellectuals emphasised the importance of acquiring a “realistic conception of life” or “scientific monism” (ibid., 66, 67). Reasoning, experimentation, and an attitude of doubt mattered (ibid., 91). Through its belief that every phenomenon, including activities in mind and consciousness, would receive scientific explanations, scientism solidified a materialist worldview in which there is nothing transcendent beyond the material existence (ibid., 78).

Intellectuals blamed superstitious beliefs for the stagnation of Chinese society and culture (H. Lee 38). Their urgent desire was to emancipate Chinese people from the “mental intoxication” and ignorance imposed by traditional values (ibid., 45). Having witnessed the post-revolutionary retention of the rotten tradition, New Culture iconoclasts realised the importance of transforming people’s consciousness to initiate profound social changes (Schwartz 112). Scientism celebrated humanity. It enabled people to get to know their surroundings and even the universe through

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10 While Chinese intellectuals embraced scientism, the technological inhumanities of World War I put science under attack. Although the worship of science was briefly disturbed, the mechanistic worldview remained unchallenged. Science remained a positive term throughout the next several decades (Kwok 17). Scientism was not the full picture of Republican reaction to spirituality, religion, or superstition. Liang Qichao (1873–1929), Yan Fu (1854–1921), and Jiang Shaoyuan (1898–1983) expressed alternative views on the efficacy of religion, such as the mobilising power and moral impacts on the masses (Shen J., “Anti-Superstition” 35–7). For this branch of thought, see also Ko-wu Huang’s “The Origin and Evolution of the Concept ofMixin (Superstition)” (2016, pp. 66–70).
independent learning and judgment and allowed them to take control of their knowledge. Scientific methods of problem-solving would come to replace people’s traditional reliance upon “all spiritual authority and all pre-established dogma—whether religious, political or metaphysical” (ibid., 115-6). It was a process in which people became disenchanted with traditional mysticism and acquired equal access to truths. Science made humans become more down-to-earth to solve their life problems (Kwok 99). For scientism supporters, becoming independent of spirituality was a path towards exercising creative intelligence and willpower for freedom (Kwok 107; Schwartz 116). People might even find their activities unrestrained by existing “natural, social, or economic laws”, thus broadening their comprehension of the world (Kwok 108). However, discarding traditional spirituality did not indicate moral hollowness. On the contrary, intellectuals expected to establish a new morality to replace the old-fashioned karmic causality. They believed that science facilitated moral improvement because, unmoved by sentiments or prejudices, it would guarantee sobriety and truths over deceit, prejudices, misunderstandings, and injustice (ibid., 124–127).  

Chinese followers of scientism banished the spiritualist worldview consisting of folk superstition and religions, as it did not belong to the empirical, materialist reality that could be measured and verified by scientific methods. “Superstition” in the Republican era referred to “parapsychology, spiritualism, or supernatural abilities,

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11 In Chapters 2 to 4, Kwok elaborates the scientism in three representative thinkers, Wu Zhihui 吳稚暉 (1865–1953), Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), and Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), including their conception of science, critique of traditional civilisation, and philosophy of life.

12 Ko-wu Huang (2016) clarifies the transformation of the historical connotations of “superstition” in Chinese culture. He studies “superstition” not as an isolated concept but with other relevant terms, ideological trends, or social events.

13 See Danny Wynn Ye Kwok’s Scientism in Chinese Thought: 1900–1950 (1965, pp. 21–2) for the fundamental principles of scientific methods.
along with many other occult phenomena or religious practices” (K. Huang 56). Religion and superstition shared a porous boundary, as neither could withstand scientific examination (ibid., 54). Anti-spiritualists wrote articles to refute the spectral order and the existence of ghosts, usually by revealing the logical insufficiency in their accounts. For example, in “Youguilun zhiyi” 有鬼論質疑 (“Questions on Ghost Theory”, 1918), Chen Duxiu discloses the logical faults inherent in believing in ghosts (in terms of visibility, spatial occupation, resemblance to the material world, and animal ghosts) (1-2). In “Pi Lingxue congzhi” 闢《靈學叢志} (“Refuting Spectrology Repository”, 1919), Liu Bannong 劉半農 (1891–1934) undermines the credibility of spectral belief by highlighting the rhetorical weaknesses of spiritualists’ accounts and their purpose of gaining profits (3-6). In “Cong baishen dao wushen” 從拜神到無神 (“From God Worshiping to Atheism”, 1933), Hu Shi writes about the logical contradiction in the common belief of netherworld punishments (15).

The scientific turn in the social value system generated the trend towards studying superstition as part of folk culture. This trend developed across the Republican period. Numerous intellectuals recorded old superstitious practices, not to promote the customs but for an anthropological study of regional folk belief and, ultimately, to better understand the mentality and character of Chinese people. Examples include Lu Xun’s “Songzaori manbi” 送灶日漫筆 (“Jottings about the Kitchen God’s Day”, 1926), Tang Tao's 唐弢 (1913–1992) “Tudi he zaojun” 土地和灶君 (“Earth God and Kitchen God”, 1933), Wang Liaoyi’s 王了一 (Wang Li 王力, 1900–1986) “Mixin”

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14 During 1915–1921, “superstition” not only connoted the false beliefs of supernatural phenomena but also covered several other concepts “tied to Confucianism and ‘feudal society’” and dismissed by New Culture intellectuals, including “filial obedience, ancestral worship, chastity, etc” (K. Huang 65).


迷信（“Superstition”, 1942). More academic than these essays, “superstition studies” also became established.\(^{17}\)

2 The allegorical discourse of the supernatural: the example of ghosts

Republican intellectuals did not discard supernatural notions altogether but used them allegorically for critical or satirical purposes. These representations complied with Republican anti-superstition trends.\(^{18}\) In the following section, I draw upon the example of “ghosts”.

2.1 The allegorical discourse

The ghost beliefs of late imperial Chinese people were based on their belief in a world for the deceased. People who passed away were still part of the family, as “the normal postmortem destination for a spirit was inclusion in the ancestral cult” (Meu-\(\ldots\)lenbeld 129). The deceased would be remembered reverently by their descendants, but, according to the belief, their spiritual energies would eventually dissolve naturally and peacefully into the “cosmic cycle of life and death” (ibid.). The unfortunate case is that spirits having no familial position would not be entitled to enjoy descendants’ offerings or a stable shelter and would become restless “orphan spirits” (ibid., 129–30). Bad deaths led to the fate of being forgotten, such as “death on the

\(^{17}\) Jiang Shaoyuan (1898–1983) established Superstition Studies at Sun Yat-sen University in 1927. For the emergence of superstition studies, as well as a list of Republican publications on superstition, see Ko-wu Huang’s 2016 article.

\(^{18}\) Anti-superstition was part of the picture. Occultism and mysticism were also discussed. A number of May Fourth intellectuals enthusiastically imported and emulated late nineteenth-century Western mysticism, believing that mystical experiences offered people a more authentic perception of the world (Fang X. 16). In an article published in 1930, the philosopher Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀 (1886–1973) openly discussed his ideas about ghosts. He acknowledged the possibility of paranormal occurrences rather than immediately denying witnesses any credibility (59). Zhang’s theory was that a person who died with a strong spirit was more likely to leave his/her “mental residue” in the form of a ghost that might be perceptible by the living (ibid., 62).
battlefield... [death] of a serious illness... [and] committing suicide" (ibid., 129). The ghost (gui 鬼) primarily refers to the malicious wandering spirits that fed on people’s blood or life energy and searched for shelter (ibid., 130). Some ghosts were demons derived from inanimate objects or animals that stood the test of time and took on a demonic nature (ibid.). The ghost beliefs discussed here (based on the custom of ancestral cult) belong to sections of folk religion or popular religion outside of institutionalised Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism (Clart 220).

In the Republican era, the “ghost” was more commonly used as a metaphor, decoupled from the traditional supernatural context (Imbach, “Not Afraid” 2-3). The notion of ghosts was therefore assigned several new meanings. In “Zhengli guogu yu ‘dagui’” 整理國故與「打鬼」 (“Organizing National Heritage and ‘Exorcizing Ghosts’”, 1921), Hu Shi referred to the detrimental and bewitching elements in traditional culture as “ghosts and demons” (92). “Ghost” sometimes represents people in desperate conditions of physical anguish and spiritual struggles due to the bleak status quo. In “Women zou na tiao lu” 我們走那條路 (“Which Path Should We Take?”, 1930), Hu Shi used “ghost” to attack social maladies such as poverty, corruption, and chaos, all of which were considered obstacles to China’s modernisation (325, 327). Maruo Tsuneki (1995) notes that both Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren treated “ghost” as an equivalent to “national inferiority” (216). For example, in “Lishi” 歷史 (“The History”, 1928), Zhou Zuoren saw history as a “ghost” because it continually haunted Chinese people, as people and society seemed to have fallen into a cycle of repeating their vices (371).

A more dramatic usage refers to the entire country or society as a ghostly panorama. In “Guixue congtan” 鬼學叢談 (“Thoughts on Spectrology”, 1936), Zhongyin 種因 wrote: “Nowadays, the world has been chaotic, and our nation has been trapped in

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19 For the human–ghost dialectics in Lu Xun’s fiction, see Maruo Tsuneki’s 丸尾常喜 魯迅: “人”“鬼”の葛藤 (The Entanglement between “Humans” and “Ghosts” in Lu Xun’s Fiction, 1995). Its Chinese translation is entitled “Ren” yu “gui” de jiuge: Lu Xun xiaoshuo lunxi 「人」與「鬼」的糾葛: 魯迅小說論析.
turmoil. What I have been witnessing and hearing is nothing but ghosts” (95). Similarly, in “Tanguizhe de aibei 談鬼者的哀悲 (“The Sorrow of a Person Talking about Ghosts”, 1936), Chen Zizhan 陳子展 (1898–1990) wrote: “The dark sky and the gloomy ground are shrouded in a ghostly atmosphere. We are almost turning into a ghostland. Even I nearly become a numb walking dead…”. (111). In “Women de diren 我們的敵人 (“Our Enemies”, 1924), Zhou Zuoren compared his contemporary world to that of Journey to the West, where constant battles take place against multiple “demons and monsters” (60).

Literati compared negative facets of humanity to “ghosts”. An equivalence was drawn between the “ghost” and an individual’s degradation. “Ghost” suggests a lack of proper self-consciousness and the ability of people to stay true to their hearts. In “Shuogui 說鬼 (“Talking about Ghosts”, 1922), Li Boyuan 李伯元 criticised several contemporary bad habits, such as the “lecherous ghost”, “gambling ghost”, “alcohol ghost”, and “opium ghost” (56). Likewise, Zhou Zuoren wrote about the inner conflicts of his personality in “Liangge gui 兩個鬼 (“Two Ghosts”, 1926). One of his “ghosts” was “liumang gui 流氓鬼 (“scoundrel ghost”) who indulged in alcohol abuse and brawls, while the other was “shenshi gui 紳士鬼 (“gentleman ghost”) who assumed a pretentious and hypocritical air (393–94). Zhou felt that people could not help wavering between the two extremes (ibid.). He expressed his concern that the two “ghosts” took control of people’s souls and manipulated them in awful ways (ibid., 393). In “Our Enemies”, Zhou Zuoren argued that contemporary enemies were not people but the “beasts and ghosts” that possessed them (59). Optimistically, he differentiated the ghostly shadows in human nature from human essence, and introduced a parodied discourse of exorcism into his allegorical narrative:

We collect peach branches, willow branches, and stems of bramble and bulrush. Then, we whip hard those people with sinister and evil appearances, hoping to force beasts to manifest their true forms and chase ghosts out of the possessed. The hollow bodies finally freed from the demons would wait for the owners to come and claim them... the skill of trapping a demon inside a spell-sealed bottle... is already lost... therefore, if there is a celestial will that allows
demons to exist in this world, we choose to respect it. We shall not insist on the elimination, as long as beasts hunt only in the wilderness, and ghosts hide in their caves... (60)

“Ghost” could also refer to holders of power who blatantly abused the powerless. Chinese oppressors, who were ferocious “ghosts”, invented ethical aphorisms to silence and weaken the oppressed, as Lu Xun observed in “Nüdiao”女吊 (“Ghosts of Hanged Women”, 1936) (136). Yet, “no matter how powerful or wealthy [the domestic ghosts] are... they still fear ‘foreign ghosts’ [yanggui 洋鬼] the most... in the face of ‘foreign ghosts,’ [some privileged Chinese] would immediately recoil like a plucked-out seedling” (Laoxiang 93-94). In “Beiguo guan gui ji”北國觀鬼記 (“Observing Ghosts in Northern China”, 1936), Lin Nai 林乃 captured urban street sights allegorically, referring to soldiers, police, officials, and higher-class women as ghosts while common people were their servants (965–966). Compared with ghosts in ancient imagination, some people (“ghosts in daylight”) became more dreadful and dangerous, as Lao She 老舍 (1899–1966) commented in “Gui yu hu”鬼與狐 (“Ghosts and Foxes”, 1936, 56–7). “Ghosts” were ubiquitous and identifiable, possessing an ugliness that required “direct” and loyal representation (see Tang Tao’s “Guiqu tu”鬼趣圖 [“Delightful Pictures of Ghosts”, 1933] and Feng Zikai’s豐子愷 “Huagui”[“Drawing Ghosts” 畫鬼, 1936]).

Essays discussing the new “ghosts” identified in the Republican era are extremely easy to find. There may have been writings that applied an allegorical narrative to other traditional supernatural notions. For example, in “Tan huxian” 談狐仙 (“About Fox Spirits”, 1933), Tang Tao turned “fox spirits”, which were believed to be transformers who take on human shapes, into a metaphor for seductive pleasure seekers to satirise:

Foxes seldom rise into the level of spirit through assiduous self-cultivation. Most adopt the method of mining others’ sexual energy for self-nourishment: They transform into glib and fanciable men, wear foreign perfume to cover the fox odour, and powder their faces heavily with cosmetics. With tails tucked
inside their trousers, the foxes put on all kinds of coquetry, waiting to prey on inexperienced and energetic male and female virgins. (24-25)

Under the rationalistic world view of the Republican era, iconoclastic intellectuals used an allegorical discourse of ghosts to identify real-life targets. The allegorical narrative trained people to react to the notion of “ghost” practically rather than superstitiously. The “ghost”, as a symbol and a public task to deal with, is indicative of shared sentiments among people. In the new society, “ghost” no longer signifies an apparition left by a dead person or refers to supernatural experiences but rather “living ghosts” wandering among people representing dark sides of society (moral, political, epistemological, and more).

2.2 An example of fiction: Shi Jimei’s “The Month of Ghosts”

Shi Jimei’s 施濟美 (1920–1968) short story “Guiyue” 鬼月 (“The Month of Ghosts”, 1947) serves as a good example of the reimagined “ghost” in Republican fiction.20 The story takes place in the seventh month in the Chinese lunar calendar, traditionally the “month of ghosts”. That date is the Zhongyuan 中元 Festival, or the “Ghost Festival”, when ghosts were believed to visit from the underworld and wander among the living. The heroine, You Haitang 尤海棠, was the daughter of an innkeeper. Her father and stepmother planned to marry her off as a concubine to Laosong 老宋, a man one year older than Haitang’s father. However, Haitang was in love with a young man working for her father, Changlin 長林, and desperately resisted the arranged marriage. She planned to elope with him, but he ultimately refused just as they were about to set off, out of a weakness rooted in his character. Feeling hopeless and angry at Changlin’s cowardice, Haitang persuaded him to go with her.

20 For the research discussing this short story, see Jessica Elizabeth Imbach’s “Not Afraid of Ghosts” (2017); Wang Qiong’s 王瓊 “Dongwu nüzuojia’ xiaoshuo yanjiu” 「東吳系女作家」小說研究 (“On ‘Dongwu’ Women Writers’ Fiction”, 2014); and Zuo Huaijian’s 左懷建 “Lun Shi Jimei de xiaoshuo chuangzuo” 論施濟美的小說創作 (“On Shi Jimei’s Fiction Writing”, 2002).
to see the beautiful moon on the riverbank. She then pushed him into the water and drowned herself on the night of the “Ghost Festival.”

This short story structures the “human-ghost” relationship in a unique manner. First, there are no actual ghosts or supernatural characters in the plot, only the folk belief of the underworld and the “month of ghosts”. The underworld and ghosts only appear as old notions in dialogues between “old grandpa Zhang” and village children. Second, there is no indication that Haitang believed in the underworld. The “month of ghosts” does not suggest real ghosts but creates a suppressive, ominous atmosphere analogous to the tragedy.

Moreover, Haitang’s suicide radically challenges the stereotypical pattern of “ghost”. Ghosts used to be seen as the apparitions of people who died with regret and unfulfilled wishes. However, in the case of Haitang, she minimised her regret by trying every possible way she could to seize happiness and, realising the inevitable failure, took Changlin’s life with her, partly as revenge. After Changlin abandoned the idea of eloping with her, she was prepared to give him her virginity but was rejected once again. She felt abandoned and despaired: “her heart... is simply going empty, dumb, and senseless, with a death-like calmness” (Shi J. 96).21 This frustration led her to the idea of ending their lives together. Haitang did not die for the romantic ideal of staying with her lover forever. Rather, she protested against the patriarchal exploitation and expressed her sorrow at having dedicated her love to the wrong man. Haitang is a strong character who is honest with herself. She took what she wanted decisively, unlike the traditional image of a wandering ghost mourning over its loss and unfulfilled wishes.

The story ends with a village boy’s question after the entire village heard about Haitang and Changlin’s shocking deaths: “Is the underworld better than this world?” No matter how strong-minded a woman is, she is vulnerable when facing alone the

21 I am using my translation unless noted otherwise.
cruelty of her family and even her lover, which drives her into a deadly corner. Haitang was “forced” to give up her human identity and (allegorically) ended up as a “ghost”. This short story is not openly promoting the idea that Haitang became a ghost. Cleverly setting the plot in the “month of ghosts” and drawing on folk beliefs, it carries the allegory that Haitang was a tragic “ghost” whose will as an instrumental person mattered to nobody.

The story adds Haitang’s tragedy as a new “footnote” to the long-held folk beliefs about ghosts. In this case, “ghost” is not simply a personal experience but contributes to the modern formation of the village people’s collective memory. Shi Jimei interweaves the notion of ghosts into her heroine’s tragedy not to strengthen ghost beliefs but to take advantage of the notion for an allegorical purpose. Initially, the village people’s traditional belief in the month of ghosts evokes an ominous atmosphere. However, ghost beliefs pale in light of Haitang’s dramatic and appalling suicide, as the former involves ghostly imaginings and assumptions while the latter strikes those who hear it with tangible sorrow and hatred. The short story demonstrates that the author finds it useful to employ the notion of ghosts as an allegorical reference to Haitang’s gloomy fate.

3 Literary realism

In the Republican period, supernatural beliefs and aesthetics declined along with the trend of debunking superstition and religion (Imbach, “Not Afraid” 1). At the same time, literary realism gained widespread acknowledgment among New Culture Movement intellectuals because it was in keeping with assertions on scientific intelligence and human capability.

Marston Anderson states in *The Limits of Realism* (1990) that “all realist fiction gives itself authority by asserting a privileged relationship with reality”, which is discernible from a series of textual operations and features (7). Confidence in representing the
real world derives partially from its embedded worldview: “[a] change in the interpretation of nature which shifts from the deistic, purposeful, even though mechanistic world of the eighteenth century to the far more unhuman, inhuman order of deterministic nineteenth-century science” (Anderson 16, qtd. from Wellek 254). The Enlightenment put faith in people’s capacity to liberate themselves from superstition and prejudice through the application of reason (Anderson 11). It is a world where everyday experience, observation, and even a philosophical contemplation on “cruel” contingency become more helpful than destiny or other forms of sublimated will in enabling people to make meaning out of their lives and surroundings. Occurrences can be explained through the application of scientific, political, and psychological logic. In this sense, the artistic presentation of realism is about the known and the knowable in the empirical world.

The rationalistic worldview of Western realism suited the needs of the Chinese intellectuals, who were seeking to reform literature to achieve social and cultural transformation (Anderson 37). Chinese people needed to make judgments and act based on the “present”. Encouraged by the May Fourth enlightenment, “autonomy” or “self-consciousness” (zijue 自覺) was crucial (ibid., 32). It suggests people achieve “intellectual and spiritual independence” through their efforts rather than remain enslaved by traditional values (ibid.). Moreover, “autonomy” repudiates the grip of some form of transcendental order on people, which functions mysteriously beyond the empirical world.

In parallel with the above practical purpose is the rejection of literary subject matters trumpeting superstition. In “Ren de wenxue” 人的文學 (“The Literature of People”, 1918), Zhou Zuoren rejected superstition, divinities, ghosts, and monsters as literary topics because they eclipsed the realist representation of real personalities and ordinary or miserable lives (579–80). Likewise, in “Lun Fengshen Bang” 論「封神榜」 (“On The Investiture of Gods”, 1934), the essayist Nie Gannu 聶紺弩 (1903–1986) criticised the sixteenth-century novel for its misleading impact on people. The novel nourishes folk superstition; it convinces people of the advent of a “predestined
emperor” (zhenming tianzi 真命天子) who will save them from anguish; it also entices people to dream of fantasy worlds far away from real life troubles (Nie 139).

As noted above, the general aim of fictional realism was to bring readers closer to their contemporary world and social lives (Laughlin 221). Specifically, Chinese realism required “revolutionary literature” or “literature with revolutionary consciousness” in Charles Laughlin’s sense, namely literature that demonstrates sensitivity to conflicts and suffering in social classes and demands social changes (ibid.). Hence, such literature exerts “social effects, affect[s] readers’ consciousness, prompt[s] controversy and debate, and promote[s] social engagement and activism” (ibid., 220). The examples that Laughlin gives include Lao She’s Luotuo xiangzi 駱駝祥子 (Rickshaw, 1937) and Ba Jin’s 巴金 Jia 家 (Family, 1931) (ibid.). The establishment of Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng 中國左翼作家聯盟 (League of Left-Wing Writers) in 1930 promoted literature about the working class in the contents and authorial perspectives of writing (ibid., 225–6).

As realism remained as the predominant ideology throughout the Republican era, anti-traditionalism eased its grip on fiction. Christopher Rosenmeier (2018) argues that literature of the 1930s and 40s drew on traditional resources more than the post-May Fourth (48). The reason might be intellectuals’ shifted attention from anti-traditionalism to the increasingly grave party conflicts and national victimhood since the late 1920s. The break-up of the KMT–CCP cooperation and KMT’s purge of communists in 1927 aggravated class struggle. The 1930s and 1940s saw the nation and its people become more deeply involved in the Anti-Japanese War until 1945. Literature responded to the crisis, as “Tradition became more acceptable, particularly when used in support of patriotism” (Rosenmeier 47). Since the mid-1930s, tradition served as a positive asset when inspiring writers with popular folk literary practices, such as local theatre, drum singing, oral storytelling, and other “National Forms” (minzu xingshi 民族形式) revived for political or national purposes and appreciated by the masses (ibid., 48; Hockx 227). In the communist “liberated area”, Mao Zedong (1893–1976) promoted the ideology of having literature and art serve the masses
while drawing inspiration from traditional literary representations of peasants and rebels (McDougall and Louie 195).

4 Conclusion

The Republican era promoted literature that related directly to the authors’ contemporary reality, as illustrated by the endorsement of scientism and literary realism. At the same time, the allegorical discourse of ghosts illustrated the New Culture intellectuals’ general attitude and usage of the traditional supernatural notion. In a cultural atmosphere critical of supernatural imaginings, New Culture Movement intellectuals situated supernatural notions within a discourse that divorced them from their literal meanings referencing supernatural beings. The allegorical discourse disavowed extensive or detailed imaginings of spectral creatures, unearthly occurrences, and sentiments evoked by the unknown.

The primary sources in this thesis are exceptions to the allegorical discourse in that they present detailed and vivid descriptions of supernatural manifestations or at least lead characters to believe they have encountered something supernatural. However, one cannot yet tell if the supernatural narratives deviate from scientism and realism in ideology. They might not be directly sensitive or responsive to class struggles or national crisis in the way Laughlin’s revolutionary literature was. If the authors of the primary sources employed flexible literary approaches to discuss reality, which aspects of reality were they writing about?
Chapter 2 The Crossing into “Haunted” Houses

This chapter examines a variant of the category of crossing into an enclosed space inhabited by supernatural beings. The supernatural turns out to be some characters’ misunderstanding. This category is helpful for understanding reality because it describes outsiders penetrating the secrets held by the “haunted” houses in a gloomy or eerie atmosphere. As the crossing characters penetrates the house’s ghost rumour and mystery, the works dismiss the initial supernatural belief and enlighten the reader with additional realist messages about what happened in the grim houses before the characters’ crossing.

This chapter analyses one novella, Cheng Xiaoqing’s 程小青 Baiyiguai 白衣怪 (The Ghost in White, 1941), and two short stories: Shi Zhecun’s 施蛰存 “Xiongzhai” 凶宅 (“The Haunted House”, 1933), and Wu Zuxiang’s 吳組緗 “Lüzhu shanfang” 萊竹山房 (“The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage”, 1933).


All three works feature “haunted” houses. In The Ghost in White, Huo Sang and his assistant Bao Lang 包朗 receive a guest who claims to have had ghostly experiences in his house. After this guest’s accidental death a short time later, Huo Sang and Bao Lang conducted their own investigation in the house and eventually solved its mystery with a scientific explanation. In “The Haunted House”, an alleged haunted house located in a quiet district of Shanghai saw the deaths of three women over a period of approximately ten years between the late 1910s to 1930. The
narrator pieces together newspaper excerpts, diary paragraphs, and the recorded confession of a criminal to allow the reader to complete the coherent history of the house. No detective characters are involved in solving the death mysteries. Finally, “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage” tells of a young couple’s visit to an old female relative who leads a solitary life with her maid in a remote countryside residence. While the work shows every sign of being a traditional Chinese ghost story, the ending suddenly clarifies that the “ghosts” that startled the couple in the middle of the night are simply the old woman and her maid. The three works constitute one of the categories of Todorov’s “fantastic” genre: the fantastic-uncanny, where the characters first wonder about the nature of the seemingly spectral events and eventually find a rational explanation for them (44).

Powerless people and suppression were a theme of traditional Chinese tales about haunted houses. Inns, or places accommodating temporary dwellers, were home to numerous haunting legends (Li and Zhang 198). Inns might have witnessed a large number of blood-chilling, surreptitious crimes where the lower class or women fell victim to power abusers (ibid., 199). The victims were neglected and forgotten among the frequent flow of lodgers seeking accommodation. Hatred, pursuit of justice, or a desire to achieve other unfulfilled wishes turned them into vengeful or melancholy ghosts.22 Residences were another category of conventional haunted houses. Restricted access to these private properties, many belonging to wealthy families, bred domestic darkness. Ghostly harassment and ghost-incurred diseases suggested the moral imperfection of the residents, such as their abuse of servants

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22 For instance, in the Tang countryside, women victims of past surreptitious crimes haunted the inns to seek justice for themselves (Li and Zhang 199). This mode of haunting deeply influenced the Tang and Song gongan xiaoshuo 公案小說 (court case fiction/criminal case fiction) where haunting took place in official accommodations, old residences, and postal inns (ibid., 200). The mode also continued to exist in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing crime case literature (ibid., 201). Conversely, some ghosts troubled human residents simply for a favour, because they could not rest in peace until people helped them transfer their graves or give them a proper burial. Li Chenhui (2019) provides a list of such stories and anecdotes in his thesis on Taiping guangji 太平廣記 (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era, 978 AD), pp. 31–2.
Domestic scandals had little chance of reaching a legal intervention and remained buried within a residence for years as private issues (ibid., 146). Ancient, haunted houses in fiction often exhibit pronounced physical or mental boundaries as enclosed sites (Dodd 163).

Reading about ancient, haunted houses provided me with the inspiration to ask questions about more modern works. Previously, literary haunting had been grounded in a supernatural cosmology where both spirits/ghosts and humans were assigned positions. By contrast, modern works debunk supernatural and ghost beliefs. The three sections in this chapter each focus on one fictional work. In each section, I begin by using gothic narrative theories to demonstrate the kind of enclosed domestic space the fictional work describes and the construction of the domestic “haunting”. I then determine how the crossing debunks superstition and uncovers secrets and reality from the enclosed “haunted” houses.

1 The Ghost in White: the “haunted” house under a detective’s investigation

Cheng Xiaoqing was one of the most prominent detective fiction writers of the Republican era. The protagonists in The Ghost in White are the central characters of Cheng’s detective fiction series: Huo Sang and Bao Lang. Their characterisation was inspired by Conan Doyle’s short stories. Cheng translated Fu’ermosi zhentan’an quanjì福爾摩斯偵探案全集 (The Complete Cases of Sherlock Holmes, 1916, originally published by Zhonghua shuju (Zhonghua Book Company 中華書局) into classical Chinese with Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵑 (1895–1968). He later became the organiser and lead translator of Fu’ermosi tan’an da quanjì福爾摩斯探案大全集 (The Great Complete Cases of Sherlock Holmes, 1927, published by Shijie Book Company) in vernacular Chinese. The “oriental” Sherlock Holmes, Huo Sang’s “debut” in detection took place in the short story “Dengguang renying” 燈光人影
(“The Figure under the Light”, 1914)\textsuperscript{23} and he continued to reappear with his assistant Bao Lang in around 60 stories (Y. Wei 95). Cheng’s works were compiled into \textit{Huo Sang tan’an xiuzhen congkan} 霍桑探案袖珍叢刊 (The Pocket-Sized Series of Huo Sang’s Cases, 1941) published by Shijie Book Company.\textsuperscript{24}

“The history of detective fiction is deeply intertwined with the progress of science” (Y. Wei 115). Cheng was aware that supernatural imaginings served as a rival for detective fiction’s rational thinking and disenchanted outlook on reality. In his article “Lun zhentan xiaoshuo” 論偵探小說 (“On Detective Fiction”, 1946), Cheng asserted that traditional \textit{gong’an xiaoshuo} or court case fiction,\textsuperscript{25} such as \textit{Penggong an} 彭公案 (Cases Solved by Master Peng, c. 1892, by Tanmengdaoren 貪夢道人) and \textit{Shigong an} 施公案 (Cases Solved by Master Shi, c. 1798, by an anonymous writer), were embryonic forms of detective fiction replete with martial heroes and supernatural components (159–160).\textsuperscript{26} Cheng disapproved of supernatural descriptions as they represented the existence of superstitious shackles, which kept poorly educated readers uncritically accustomed to ossified and detrimental ideas (ibid., 166–167).

Insisting on securing scientific explanations for unusual and criminal cases in detective fiction, Cheng aimed to rekindle readers’ healthy curiosity for their surroundings (Y. Wei 116). He even sought to pave the way towards the greater goal of achieving national rejuvenation under the guidance of scientific values (ibid.). Cheng expected that, armed with a curious mind and scientific knowledge cultivated by detective

\textsuperscript{23} Initially, Cheng Xiaoqing named the detective Huo Sen 霍森. However, the character became popular under the name Huo Sang due to a printing mistake (Ren X. 164).

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Sherlock in Shanghai: Stories of Crime and Detection by Cheng Xiaoqing} (2006) provides the translations of several fictional works by Cheng Xiaoqing.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Gong’an xiaoshuo} or court case fiction took shape as a genre in the Song dynasty (Feng L. 19). This genre described how wise officials and righteous swordsmen solved civilian or political conflicts and brought perpetrators to justice (ibid., 40).

\textsuperscript{26} For example, ghosts of victims complained about their misfortune in official judges’ dreams; underworld ghost officials helped human officials solve cases by providing clues; and animals acted abnormally and denoted unsolved injustice to official judges (Wang X. 79–80).
fiction, people would no longer rely on underdeveloped legal systems or unprofessional officials, let alone superstitious practices, to solve criminal or civil cases (Cheng, “zhentan” 167).

*The Ghost in White* tells a story echoing Cheng’s didactic, anti-superstitious purpose. Temporarily leaving Huo Sang’s arduous investigation aside, the focus of the novella is on identifying the direct cause of a murder in a big family through Bao Lang’s first-person narrative. One summer, a fur trader named Qiu Risheng 裘日升 (later as “Qiu”) came to the detective studio, hoping to entrust Huo Sang with an investigation of his “haunted” house (Cheng, *Baiyiguai 7*). Qiu had a big family, including his mother-in-law, Mrs. Wu; an eighteen-year-old adopted daughter, Lingfeng 玲鳳; his late brother’s son, Haifeng 海峰; and his paralysed brother-in-law, Wu Zishan 吳紫珊. In addition, Qiu also had two servants, Linsheng 林生 and Zhaoma 趙媽, living in the house. Qiu had been suffering from a series of unaccountable sounds and signs in the house, many of which targeted only him. He sent for religious professionals to eradicate the “spirit”, but the results were unsatisfactory. Even before he saw the house and learnt more about the family, Huo Sang was certain that someone in the house was feigning the “haunting”. He also pointed out that the “haunting” could not take place if Qiu had nothing to fear: “the ghost can only be in our mind” (32). Soon after, Qiu was found dead from a heart attack. Signs of fighting around him indicated that his death was not natural but caused by another person. Huo Sang, his assistant, and the police searched for clues around the house and suspected several family members, each holding secrets relevant to the dead man. Huo Sang’s investigation deviated from the police in insight and approach. While the police often hastened to incorrect conclusions about the person responsible for Qiu’s death, Huo Sang and Bao Lang took time to delve into the history of the family.

They interrogated the family members one by one until Qiu’s nephew, Haifeng, became the leading suspect. Near the end of the story, Haifeng admitted everything to the family and the detective. He dressed himself as the “ghost in white” but had never meant to scare Qiu to death; it had happened accidentally. Rather, Haifeng
sensed that his father’s (Qiu Rihui 裘日辉, Qiu’s elder brother, hereafter “Elder Qiu”) death not long before had been secretly bothering Qiu, and he suspected Qiu had something to do with the death. On the night of Qiu’s heart attack, Haifeng showed up like a ghost once again and asked questions, but Qiu could not take the horror and died having given no answers. After Haifeng’s admission, Qiu’s paralysed brother-in-law, Wu Zishan, confessed in a written letter. Wu was the accomplice in Qiu’s fraud and murder of Elder Qiu. When Elder Qiu was recovering from a serious disease, Wu and Qiu made him believe that his invested gold-stock had plummeted and led to bankruptcy. Elder Qiu was plunged into despair and died the next day. The two murderers successfully took control of the victim’s wealth, including the house, as they planned. Finishing his confession, Wu died soon after. Thus, the two murders received their punishment, and Huo Sang successfully solved the case.

Although The Ghost in White has received only occasional mentions in general discussions of Cheng Xiaoqing’s fiction, researchers acknowledge its didactic quality. Yan Wei (2020) comments that Cheng writes about a clumsily man-made “ghost” to disperse the terrifying ghostly atmosphere (148–149). The novella satirises Shanghai consumerism and the worship of a luxurious Western lifestyle (ibid., 214). Jin Liu (2016) compares the novella with Cheng Xiaoqing’s “Cuiming fu” 催命符 (“The Death-Hastening Spells”, 1942) and “Heilian gui” 黑臉鬼 (“The Black-Faced Ghost”, 1945) and argues that The Ghost in White sticks to a plot pattern whereby scientific investigation reveals that a “ghost” was played by a human (209). Liu argues that the novella also testifies to the conventional theme that “a suspicious heart will see imaginary ghosts” (ibid., 208).

Some researchers call attention to Huo Sang’s occasional deviation from legal approaches in detection. Dong Yan (2014) notes Huo Sang’s application of double standards to his cases, where moral justice sometimes superseded legal justice (281). Ren Xiang (2001) also points out that Huo Sang mistrusted laws and would instead rely on sympathy and conscience when treating suspects or criminals (175). Fan Boqun (1999) comments that Huo Sang is a lenient detective because he
showed favour to a killer in *The Ghost in White* who directly caused the death of another character (787). However, Fan bases his observation on an erroneous understanding of the story’s plot—he wrongly believes that the victim died of intentional threatening, but his death was accidental, as the upcoming analysis will demonstrate.  

Why was someone in the novella dressed like a ghost? What happened in the house and attracted “haunting”? These questions were not answered. The following section will show that there is much more to be gleaned from the “haunted” house.

1.1 The gothic “ghost” story

*The Ghost in White* highlights the gothic atmosphere of Qiu’s house to make it stand out as an enclosed space containing troubles of which the outside is unaware. The series of mysteries started half a year ago, when Qiu was woken up by a “ghost’s cry” and unidentifiable footsteps in the house late at night. As a superstitious person, Qiu sent for a Daoist master to “purify” the house. But the restored peace did not last long. One night after Qingming Festival, Qiu was bothered by mysterious sounds in the corridor outside his room. Soon after, another round of “purification” seemed to have had an effect. However, sometime later, Qiu was disturbed from his sleep once again and saw his doorknob turn slowly from the outside. The whole family was startled and checked the house thoroughly but in vain. The next morning, they found an indistinct half-footprint in the corridor.

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27 Mei Xu’s “Re-imagining Republican Era Shanghai and Emerging Legal Discourse through Cheng Xiaoqing’s Detective Novel Series *Huo Sang Tan’an*” (2019), Ruijuan Hao’s “Transnational Negotiations and the Interplay between Chinese and Western Detective Fiction at the Turn of the Twentieth Century” (2012), Jeffrey C. Kinkley’s *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China* (2000), and King-Fai Tam’s “The Detective Fiction of Cheng Hsiao-ching” (1992) provide remarkable analysis of Cheng Xiaoqing’s fiction, except that they discuss little about *The Ghost in White*. 
Three days before his visit to Huo Sang, Qiu finally caught sight of the “monster”, white from head to toe, standing silently at his bedside. In horror, he recognised that it had the face of his dead brother. The “ghost” disappeared quickly. When the family came upstairs and put on the lights, they found Qiu’s door had remained locked and no one could break into his room through the windows, which stood 3 metres above the ground. When Qiu told Huo Sang about his midnight experiences, his voice betrayed his difficulty in getting over the initial terror. Qiu had concealed his true fear from Huo Sang. The fear for his dead brother’s ghost coming back for revenge had tortured him.

The most eerie shock affecting Qiu was the “ghost’s” mask. According to Huo Sang, the mask made by Haifeng was shoddy and not even close to resembling an ordinary man’s face, let alone Elder Qiu. Even though Haifeng tried replicating his late father’s facial features on the mask, such as a short beard, the mask turned out to be uncanny. Because of its lack of verisimilitude, the mask perhaps provoked greater terror in Qiu through its hideous and spooky appearance. Its highlighting of Elder Qiu’s facial features made it easier for Qiu to identify it as Elder Qiu’s ghost in panic. It brought its target, Qiu, back to the family relation he had poisoned, piercing through his dark memory. Qiu cried out Elder Qiu’s name the first time he spotted the “ghost”, not because of the mask’s similarity to Elder Qiu but more out of psychological “anticipation” and automatically filling in the missing information—who else could the ghost be if it was not the ghost of Elder Qiu? The mask did not need to resemble Elder Qiu, whose ghost already existed in Qiu’s mind and haunted him. Qiu thus surrendered to his inner fear of providential punishment at the sight of the “ghost”.

The story’s gothic ambiance also comes from Qiu’s nephew Liang Shoukang’s recollection of witnessing the white “ghost” and the “ghost’s” midnight visit to Wu Zishan’s room in the house. Both were stricken by overwhelming terror in an intensely spooky atmosphere. In Liang’s later confession, he admitted he had seen the “ghost:”
“At the moment, I was gripped by unknown terror. Although I had not seen anything yet, I suddenly felt a chill all over my body as I stepped down the stairs.... I turned and looked at the top of the stairs. Gosh! I, I saw the horrifying monster! He paused again. His face was ghastly pale, his thighs pressed against the edge of the desk, and his bloodless lips were trembling”. (165)

Near the end of the story, the “ghost” went to Wu’s room, where Bao Lang was hiding in order to figure out whether Wu had something to do with the murder. Bao Lang witnessed how the “ghost” showed up:

The clear footsteps came again from the corridor. Wu cried: “Who’s there?” His cry was low and filled with terror. My muscles suddenly tightened, and my hair stood on end. After a while, I heard Wu crying and panting: “Who?... Who... is at the door?”
I, too, noticed the knob of the Western-style door [...] turning slowly. In a moment, the door swung open a little. (189)

The scene culminated with the manifestation of the “ghost” at the door. Wu and Bao Lang were caught in fear and shock because neither could tell in that brief instant whether it was faked.

Apart from terrifying recollections of the “ghost”, the gothic style derives from several other conventional elements. For instance, Wu was a bedridden, vulnerable character, similar to those delicate or unhealthy figures featured in gothic fiction. The murder shrouded the house with deathly gloominess. The ghost was in pale white, in contrast to the surrounding darkness. Moreover, white is an ominous colour for funerals as it is worn by dead people and mourners in Chinese culture. The gothic atmosphere ironically changed the characters’ position in the house. Although humans were the rightful inhabitants, fear left them at the “ghost’s” disposal as if the entire house had become its territory.

Despite the strong gothic atmosphere, none of the supernatural-like elements in the characters’ descriptions afford rational and calm observation. Apart from Qiu, his mother-in-law (Mrs. Wu), and his bedridden brother-in-law (Wu Zishan), no one in
the family accepted supernatural explanations. Qiu's emotional recollection evokes doubts. The footsteps, the cries, and the turning of the doorknob are not evidence of ghosts, but common signs frequently employed in stories to announce or suggest a ghost's appearance. On the other hand, a ghostly shadow was cast on the house because Qiu claimed that the mysterious white figure had shown up and disappeared in his locked room. Therefore, the “supernatural” is constructed by the character’s telling and the likely impossibility of spatial access. The novella sets up the “ghost” as a puzzle to be solved. The same applies to Liang’s and Wu's accounts of the “supernatural”. Cheng Xiaoqing recycles supernatural superstition and transforms it into one of the most significant features of detective fiction—suspense. However, the suspense is not about whether the event is truly supernatural but about who is behind the trick.

Huo Sang and Bao Lang’s reasoning demonstrates their disbelief of the “supernatural”. Huo Sang’s gradual unravelling of the case complies with the classic narrative structure of detective fiction: “beginning with the story of the crime, or as in this case, mystery; then the investigation, in which the investigator attempts to solve the clues to the mystery and, finally, the resolution where the investigator attempts to solve the mystery with the information gained from the investigation” (Cook 24). The process of reasoning is based on the characters’ information, their experience of the physical world, and the analysis of physical clues. In Huo Sang’s studio, Qiu meticulously introduced the layout of his house. This piece of information and Huo Sang’s tour of the house facilitated his judgments on the testimony of family members and helped him figure out the exact scenario of the case. At the same time, to determine the motive for the crime, a profound understanding of humanity and a simulation of how the crime occurred were necessary.

1.2 Disentangling the disgraceful family relations
The gothic ambiance implies domestic darkness. As Huo Sang and Bao Lang gained access to the inner space of the residence and deeper secrets, they gradually unearthed all kinds of family taboos beneath the initial strangeness. Typical of gothic fiction, the novella is about “an expansion of consciousness” (Bayer-Berenbaum 21). The expansion does not imply any discovery of reality in spiritual realms but transcendence of the collective fear of the “supernatural” to reach hidden, decaying facts about ethical abnormality.

The Qius seemed to be a loving and harmonious family at first. Qiu and his late wife adopted Lingfeng approximately ten years ago from a destitute family; Qiu’s paralysed brother-in-law, Wu Zishan, lived with the family for years; the nephew, Haifeng, turned to Qiu for financial support for his education after his father died. However, according to Huo Sang’s observations, Qiu was a lecherous and stingy man whose complexion showed signs of sexual indulgence. Huo Sang did not exclude the speculation that a hater outside the family might be the cause of Qiu’s death, but he began by narrowing down the search to Qiu’s family and close relatives. The situation became increasingly complex as more lies emerged during Huo Sang’s separate interviews with each of the family members. The adopted daughter and the two nephews were especially suspicious. Their testimonies were responsible for a large share of the critical exposure of hideous family secrets.

During the interview with Lingfeng, Huo Sang noticed her dishonesty regarding her activity on the murder night. To prove herself innocent, Lingfeng had no choice but to admit to seeing Liang Shoukang coming out of Qiu’s room prior to Qiu’s body being found. Before the incident, Liang had a long history of enticing young girls in society and regularly sending them to Qiu so he could satisfy his desires. Even Lingfeng had been harassed by Qiu.

Exposing Qiu’s insatiable desire would hurt his and the family’s reputation, which troubled Lingfeng and prevented her from initially telling the truth. Before Qiu’s abrupt death, no one in his household, including the servants, dared to gossip about
Qiu’s hobby because they did not want to upset Mrs. Wu, Qiu’s mother-in-law and the eldest member of the family. Identified as the biggest suspect in the murder, Liang had to disclose his awkward position in the case. He once agreed to help Qiu surreptitiously withdraw a large sum of money from the latter’s bank account so that Qiu could lie to his other nephew, Haifeng, that the family could not afford to pay for him to study abroad.

The novella employs a complicated structure consisting of multiple clues and more than one suspect (Sun and Gao 771). It was the process of deduction rather than the crime that was tortuous. The novella takes the entire investigation to demonstrate why the case was so hard to solve: the characters told lies, not to cover up the truth of Qiu’s death, but for other private and embarrassing reasons. Eliciting these unspeakable reasons exposed the intricate and indecent relationships among the family members. If it were not for Qiu’s abrupt death (the removal of the patriarchal power) and the forensic investigations, it would have been difficult to bring to light the ugliness hidden under the harmonious domestic picture.

1.3 Moral rectification in detection and playing “ghost”

The discovery of the real cause of Qiu’s death was attributed to the appearance of the “ghost” for the last time. As stated previously, Bao Lang suspected Wu Zishan was feigning illness and so hid in his room at midnight. To Bao’s surprise, the “ghost” revisited the house that same night. Eventually, Bao lost sight of the ghost after a brief chase down the stairs but did find a set of “props”, namely a mask and a white bedsheets, and realised that the “ghost” was indeed fake. Huo Sang picked up on these clues and worked out that Haifeng had faked the “ghost” as he was an art student and the only one with access to the tools needed to make the ghost mask.
The Ghost in White values the order of justice as much as truth. Firstly, the story conveys a subtle relationship between the ghostly trick and the outcome of investigations. Rather than posing as an antithesis to Huo Sang’s scientific reasoning, the “ghost” serves as the key to grasping the buried truths. Haifeng’s ghostly trick demonstrates his sophisticated manipulation of the suspect’s mentality, which indistinctly resonates with Huo Sang’s clever strategies for squeezing the truth out of Liang Shoukang. Huo Sang and Haifeng exchanged compliments when the case was solved. Haifeng admitted that he had always known that Huo Sang would eventually see through his ghostly trick (210). Huo Sang expressed his critical admiration for Haifeng’s smartness:

He [Haifeng] paused slightly [after telling everyone how he faked the “ghost” and found out the truth of his father’s death], turned back, and looked at Huo Sang. Huo Sang smiled at him.

Huo Sang began: “You couldn’t have made this trick better. Even I remained bewildered for sixteen hours”. (213)

Huo Sang appreciated Haifeng’s intelligence in extracting the truth, because Huo himself excelled at achieving investigative goals flexibly by neglecting a degree of procedural justice. To collect material proof, Huo Sang stole into Liang’s room and found evidence that confirmed his supposition that Liang had something to do with the murder. To elicit the truth from Liang, Huo Sang pretended to be sure of Liang’s guilt and had the police arrest him. These audacious moves put Huo Sang’s credibility at risk and harmed Liang’s reputation. Huo Sang was aware of the unfairness of throwing Liang into incarceration by imposing on him an unwarranted murder charge. Nevertheless, as long as this served the purpose of ensuring ultimate justice, these legally problematic strategies were tolerated.

The Ghost in White was written in an era with immature legal systems, which may explain why the detective felt free to resort to means that would now be perceived as controversial. The late Qing New Policies Reform (Gengzi xinzheng 庚子新政, 1901-
1911) sought to establish a modern legal system by combining Confucian laws with Western legal practices (J. Liu 147). The deepening of legal reform was hindered by the lack of social maturity and wartime turbulence (ibid., 149). Consequently, weaknesses remained in the juridical institutions and people’s distrust of the law. These imperfections led to people’s reliance upon powerful figures of moral uprightness such as Judge Bao Gong 包公, who could always uphold justice (ibid., 160).

Huo Sang is a figure similar to Judge Bao (ibid.). He is not a disciplinary figure like the police, and his investigative approaches and style proved more insightful. While the police were busy identifying and capturing the murderer, Huo Sang drew everyone’s attention to the complexity of the case. He was sensitive to deeds that did not count as crimes but appeared suspicious. For example, Huo Sang found that Qiu was lecherous and had attempted to seduce his adopted daughter. Likewise, during his investigation of Liang, Huo Sang sensed that Liang might be innocent but remained far from being morally decent (159–160). Huo Sang disclosed the grey area beyond the clear-cut legal judgment of innocence and guilt. He criticised the immorality and inefficiency of legal practitioners, standing with justice but not the law (ibid., 159, 164). The novella is an exemplar of moral integrity valued above the law (ibid., 141). With power derived from his proficiency in science, Huo Sang took on the mission of restoring morality rather than merely disclosing truths regarding the one case. Huo Sang’s investigation exposed facts about domestic darkness that were not directly associated with the crime yet unfolded a fuller picture of the brooding evilness lurking within the seemingly peaceful family life.

Without the disturbing “ghost”, the reason for Elder Qiu’s death would have remained buried in the enclosed space of the family beyond the police’s knowledge and juridical reach. Qiu and Wu Zishan’s conspiracy, their concealment of the truth, and Qiu’s lecherous gazes on his adopted daughter all imply that violence can be conducted discreetly and persistently in domestic life. Under the circumstances, the “ghost” represents an internal force of disruption within the family. At the court, through Huo Sang’s testimony, Haifeng received lenient probation despite his
responsibility for Qiu’s death. He was going to study art in Paris, taking Lingfeng with him, which means that the younger generation had finally stepped away from the suffocating family. Accordingly, the “ghost” invented by Haifeng is forgivable and standing on the side of justice Huo Sang seeks to restore. Huo Sang saw Haifeng not as a murderer but a rival in intelligence and the “ghost” a rectifier of moral justice, whose appearance “[guides] the deviant towards the norm” (M. Fu 209). Neither did Haifeng consider himself guilty. Although he directly caused his uncle’s death, he only acted in search of the truth regarding his father’s death and intended Qiu no harm.

In Haifeng’s words, Qiu died of tianzhu 天誅 (heavenly execution). His death implies a modern account of “duo xing buyi bi zibi” 多行不義必自斃 (one who does many bad things will eventually be ruined), a Chinese idiom meaning that evildoers can never get away without punishment. Huo Sang explained that he still believed in this idiom but refused to explain it from a supernatural or religious perspective (219). Rather, what evildoers could not escape from was their fear and guilt, which is what happened to Qiu. Therefore, even though Qiu became a victim, he did not receive any compassion in the story. Qiu is depicted as one of the “modern villains”, who was obsessed with Western commercial culture while ignoring the progressive scientific worldview and social responsibility (J. Liu 222). Huo Sang’s findings seem to morally “justify” Qiu’s death, which was triggered by the latter’s evildoing and his acute sense of guilt. There forms a loop of retribution governed by no supernatural orders but secular causes and effects. The Ghost in White has nothing to do with providence; instead, it reflects Cheng Xiaoqing’s attempt to educate readers about morality and retribution in light of humanity and the empirical world.

However, the novella also illustrates Cheng Xiaoqing’s disappointment with the law and social institutions of justice. The two perpetrators received punishments but not from legal institutions. Qiu died of a heart attack out of terror in an accident and Wu of a chronic disease. Their deaths imply that this was a world “where social control was inefficient and criminals had a good chance of getting away with their misdeeds”
(Ascari 18). What Cheng hastened to make sure of was that, even though the criminals might get away with their misdeeds in the eyes of the police and the law, they would not get away from an omnipresent order of cause and effect hardwired into everyone’s lives.

2 “The Haunted House”: gleaning fragments of truths by chance

Shi Zhecun had an explicit appetite for strange tales and fantasy. For Shuimo Bookstore’s periodical La nouvelle littérature, Shi translated English and French copies of Austrian novelist Arthur Schnitzler’s (1862–1931) fiction since 1927. Schnitzler’s literature introduced Shi to psychoanalysis, and he soon became familiar with Freud’s theories and Henry Havelock Ellis’s Psychology of Sex (1933) (Yang Yingping 36). Shi’s reading list included French novelist Jules-Amédée Barbey-d’Aurevilly’s (1808–1889) mystery tales about unexposed dark minds; Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809–1849) horror stories; Irish novelist Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s (1814–1873) gothic tales; Scottish poet Andrew Lang’s (1844–1912) collections of fairy tales; anthropologist James Frazer’s (1854–1941) research into folklore, mythology, magical beliefs, and religion; and Scottish poet, novelist, and mystic William Sharp’s (1855–1905) works, some written under the pseudonym Fiona MacLeod. Shi’s selection of books centred around the theme of “sorcery, witchcraft, necromancy, and black magic” (Lee, Shanghai 180).

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28 Shi Zhecun was born in 1905 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. At Aurora University, he launched a literary journal, Yingluo 璞珞 (Necklace), with Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905–1950) and Du Heng 杜衡 (Dai Kechong 戴克崇, 1907–1964). In 1928, Shi edited Wugui lieche 無軌列車 (Trolley Bus) and Xin wenyi 新文藝 (La nouvelle littérature) for Shuimo Bookstore 水沫書店. From 1932 to 1935, he was the editor in chief of a non-partisan journal, Xiandai 現代 (Les Contemporains). In 1935, Shanghai Magazine Company hired Shi to compile and edit Zhongguo wenxue zhenben congshu 中國文學珍本叢書 (Rare Copies of Chinese Literature) with Aying 阿英 (Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨, 1900–1977). Inspired by French surrealism, Freudian theories, and Austrian novelist Arthur Schnitzler, Shi incorporated psychoanalysis and Western modernist techniques (such as montage and stream of consciousness) into his fiction.
Shi paid attention to how fiction writers employ supernatural subject matter to explore and convey characters’ psychological worlds. In the works of Allan Poe, Schnitzler, and Le Fanu, Shi saw the infinite creativity in using fantastical and supernatural imagery to concretise an atmosphere, a personality, or a character’s nuanced sentiments and emotions, which constituted a dimension of private and intangible reality (Zhang F. 153; Yang Yingping 42). Shi also sensed the way in which urban environments stimulated mental instability and distortion. He portrayed how individuals’ mentality was impacted by the drastic changes of urban life by drawing on pseudo-supernatural imaginings (Yang Yingping 41–42).

“The Haunted House” blends the motif of haunted houses with Shi’s imagination of criminal minds. The short story consists of four sections (Shi Z. 187–226). Section one has a nameless narrator who recollects the “haunted house” using a first-person narrative. The narrator was not involved in any of the incidents taking place in the house. Instead, he/she quoted from a newspaper article about the suspicious house. The rumour was thus established and circulated via the article “The Haunted House on Gordon Road” published in The Shanghai Gazette, 1919/1920, which was an English newsletter. In the quotation from the article, it is claimed that Arthur Conan Doyle’s spiritualism was proven to be true by a “haunted house”, 309 Gordon Road, in the Shanghai International Settlement (1843-1943). Three foreign couples moved into the house consecutively, and all three wives committed suicide for no apparent reason.

Section two tells the story of the Russian jewellery merchant Vladinski and his wife, Katherine, who were the first couple to live in the “haunted” house. Around ten years after the ghost rumour became widespread, Vladinski was arrested in Harbin for fake jewellery transactions. The investigators seized all of his property; one officer in charge of the files then found Vladinski’s diary by chance. The diary recorded Katherine’s severe lung disease, Vladinski’s worries about his wife, and his impenitence with respect to fraud. Vladinski wrote that a ghost in the house had cast a deathly shadow over the house and finally “lured” Katherine into
suicide. After his wife’s death, a couple, Mr. Mohalini 莫哈里尼 and his wife Massalyn 瑪莎琳, became his tenants. In section two, Vladinski’s diary ends with Massalyn’s suicide.

Section three picks up the story in 1928, the year when Mr. Mohalini visited a law firm in Harbin. This was around ten years after the death of Massalyn and five months after Vladinski was sentenced to imprisonment for fraud. Mohalini came to consult the lawyer about suing Vladinski for the murder of Massalyn. Mohalini had read Vladinski’s diary when it was published in a Paris newspaper. Although Vladinski had changed all the people’s names in his diary, Mohalini still recognised the events and learned of his wife’s love affair. He told the lawyer what happened to Massalyn based on his memories of his time in the house and what he had read from the diary.

In Massalyn’s secret affair, Vladinski gave her jewellery as presents. Massalyn later found that the jewellery was fake. With no knowledge of Massalyn’s affair or the source of the jewellery, Mohalini at first tried selling it to pay off his gambling debts but failed. He humiliated Massalyn for inheriting fake artefacts from her royal family unworthy of their nobility, while Massalyn had to swallow her husband’s humiliation as she could not tell him the jewellery was from her lover, Vladinski. Her secret affair, the financial dilemma caused by her gambler husband, and her lover’s betrayal drove Massalyn to despair. She hanged herself in humiliation and heartbreak.

Section four focuses on the last tenant of the house, James 詹姆士, who moved into the empty house with his new wife, Mary 瑪麗. This section is presented as James’s first-person confession as a serial killer. Including Mary, he successively married five women for their dowries and then killed them. He strangled Mary to death in the house and took advantage of the “haunting” rumour to disguise the crime as her suicide. “The Haunted House” ends with the last line in the serial killer’s confession and without any narratorial concluding remark.
Yan Wei (2020) discusses the short story’s narrative and provides a convincing explanation of the plot which Shi Zhecun left as a mystery. The constructed intertextuality between “The Haunted House” and Western detective or crime stories assists in reading the short story as gothic and full of darkness (Y. Wei 204). Wei argues that Vladinski’s diary presents a subjective perspective rather than the true story. Although Vladinski claimed to love Katherine and mourned her death, Wei believes he murdered his wife because she knew he sold fake jewellery (ibid., 203). In his diary, Vladinski repeatedly mentioned that he saw ropes and a spooky female-like silhouette in the house, which was an illusory “psychological foreshadowing of the murder he is about to commit” (ibid., 202). In Wei’s reading, “The Haunted House” presents criminal instincts and mentality from the criminal’s perspective and “imitates the minds of Western colonizers” (ibid., 204, 205). In addition to this, setting the story in the International Settlement and among a few Shanghai Westerners provides Shi Zhecun with a space in which to explore the theme of eroticism (202).

Yan Wei’s understanding of Vladinski’s diary is questionable because it renders the diary contents incoherent. Vladinski prayed frequently in his diary for Katherine to recover from what seemed to be tuberculosis. Yan took Vladinski’s exclamations of sorrow and pity for Katherine as fake and a deliberate performance to cover up his murderous mind and plan. However, if Vladinski forged his diary contents to prevent someone from figuring out what crime he committed, why would he write openly about his sense of achievement in forging jewellery and selling it for a good price (192)? Why would he confess in the diary that he raped his Chinese maid after Katherine’s death (201)? Yan Wei’s understanding of the story makes it hard to explain why Vladinski would selectively hide his murder while leaving other crimes in the diary. If Vladinski was afraid his diary would someday enter the public domain, he would probably embellish all the contents with beautiful lies. Therefore, it is unlikely that he hanged Katherine and led potential diary readers to misunderstand her as a terrible victim of domestic haunting.
Other researchers have paid more attention to the striking narrative features. Yan Yuchen (2019) summarises the story as being constructed by miscellaneous public and private texts in a non-linear order (52). The textual materials complete the story by each providing a limited perspective on approaching the truth (ibid., 53). The reader gradually acquires an “actual omniscient perspective” when restoring the chronological order of events and understanding the coherent story (53). Yan also discusses how the ghost rumour was formed in the short story, which was deemed the male characters’ subconscious irrational fantasy projected onto their surroundings (55). Another mechanism that contributed to the rumour was foreigners’ biased and selected reception of Chinese culture based on their interest in the Oriental (56).

Also from a narrative perspective, Christopher Rosenmeier (2018) reads “The Haunted House” as containing ingredients and clichés taken from multiple popular genres, including gothic fiction, detective fiction, and romantic melodrama, and these references to popular genres determine the story’s deviation from realism (32). The short story is structured within a complex narrative format, as if there were a researcher collecting all mystery-solving documents (32). Wang Xiaolin (2016) points out the similarity between “The Haunted House” and Edgar Allan Poe’s work of detective fiction “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) in terms of their haunted settings and the collection of first-hand materials to unravel the truth (155–156). Zhang Ruifeng (2013) criticises “The Haunted House” as an uncanny story whose uncanniness becomes disappointingly dissolved by the lengthy materials inserted into the story (203). The short story discloses domestic tragedies and violence behind the ghost rumour instead of supernatural forces (ibid.).

Finally, a negative judgment is made when Yan Jiayan (2009) dismisses “The Haunted House” as a work about hollow fantasy, drawing on Shi Zhecun’s comment that “From ‘Sorcery’ to ‘The Haunted House’, I have indeed stepped onto a demonic path” (330).
Based on previous research, I now deepen the existing discussion on the making of the ghost rumour and the short story’s loose narrative structure from the perspective of crossing. What blind spot in people’s minds is revealed by the formation of the ghost rumour? What does it mean for “The Haunted House” to have no truth-seeking characters crossing into the house?

2.1 The construction and external misconception of the “haunting”

In “The Haunted House”, the characters living in the house constructed the “haunting” and took advantage of the blind spot in the thought patterns of the public. In the case of Vladinski and Katherine, the short story provides no definitive answer as to what happened to Katherine. There are two possibilities. One is that the house was haunted, and this ghost was eclipsing Katherine’s reason and was responsible for her suicide.

However, the other possibility is that Katherine sacrificed herself to scare reason and conscience back into Vladinski. In his diary, Vladinski wrote that Katherine stayed in a hospital for five months but did not get any better (193). She also received treatment at home, but her condition never improved (194). Vladinski conveyed his horror at Katherine’s ominous, pessimistic words: “She said she would rather die” (193); “Her words all sounded like death will” (193); “She said she would never get well” (195); “She added: ‘I would rather die in this house!’” (197).

During these days, Vladinski repeatedly noticed inexplicable, weird signs in the house. One afternoon, he was taking a walk in front of the house and saw Katherine sitting in the balcony alone and sluggish. To his horror, a suspicious female figure was looming behind Katherine. With a rope-like shadow attached to its neck, the figure looked as if it were being hanged (194–95). When he called out his wife’s name, the figure vanished (195). Since then, ropes frequently appeared in the house, almost every day (195; 197). Vladinski was not sure about the strange
phenomena but started to believe a ghost in the house had deprived Katherine of her sense (195, 197).

Vladinski’s reaction might have been just what Katherine wanted. It is possible that she deliberately left the ropes in the house, hanging her dress on the wall to make a silhouette of a hanged woman in the evening glow (196) and behaving pessimistically, all to remind Vladinski of the (non-existing) haunting. Katherine tried to dissuade her husband from committing fraud in business, but Vladinski never took her advice seriously and felt no regret at all (198). Diminished slowly by her lung disease, Katherine probably decided to play out a “haunting” tragedy to scare him off the fraud business using “supernatural” power—even though he could hide his nasty business from the police, he would not escape the eyes of a dreadful ghost in the house. While enacting her plan, Katherine told Vladinski once again that jewellery forgery was a sinful business, but still he did not listen (198). Hanging herself to death was the last crucial step of Katherine’s plan. With Vladinski’s suspicion about haunting increasing, Katherine’s suicide would have completed the narrative that the ghost of a hanged woman had sealed Katherine’s fate as her victim. Unfortunately, Vladinski was undeterred by her abrupt, abnormal death and continued his fraud until arrested.

The second death, Massalyn Mohalini’s suicide, involved no conspiracy, just the woman’s genuine despair. She had no desire to tell Mohalini about her adultery and preferred to die silently. Taking secrets to her grave happened to boost the formation of the ghost rumour.

The final crime case was the most sophisticated in its design. After killing his wife, Mary, James remained at large for ten years until he was finally caught in Los Angeles and accused of murder. After describing how he planned and conducted his murders, James self-commented in a witty tone: “This is my confession about Mary’s death. Of the five murders, this was my most ingenious one” (226). He was proud of
his successful manipulation of people’s impression of the house and perfect camouflage for the murder of Mary.

The rumours surrounding the ominous house of two “suicides” inspired in James a perfect “script” of an Oriental mystery. Before conducting the murder, he spread more details about the “haunting”, stating that he saw strange shadows of a hanged woman and ropes. He also left a rope on a tree branch near the window and placed a piece of paper cut into the shape of a woman behind the curtain, so that passersby would be terrified by the weird shadows of the rope or a “dangling woman”. In this way, James sustained the public’s belief in haunting and was later able to conveniently pretend he was a victim of a supernatural accident.

Moreover, the rumour took advantage of the public’s ignorance. The newspaper article reporting on the “haunted” house excited an irresponsible fantasy to entertain its readers. This represents the boundary between the external world and the house’s domestic space and private affairs, implying little accessibility to the inside. The article sympathised with the three widowed husbands and made several assumptions about them and the deceased: “Since his wife died, the poor jewellery merchant had never gone upstairs” (189); “We have not figured out why a lady [Massalyn] leading such a happy life would take her own life” (189); “the terrifying ghost violated his wife, and the beautiful Mrs. James suddenly hanged herself for no reason the night before yesterday” (190). People’s ignorance of the three women’s true situations helped the supernatural guessing become dominant in the public imagination. As a result, the “haunted house” eclipsed the dark truths in the marriages, notably regarding the silent women who lost opportunities to express themselves. The tragedies surrounding the unspoken shrouded the short story in gothic gloominess.

The public’s reaction towards the ghost rumour in the fiction reveals a distinct pattern of thinking. People pay attention to recurring incidents in reality because of their desire to reveal a distinct principle from the unknown and the irregular world. In the
story, the media and the public thought they had grasped a supernatural pattern—married women who move into the suburban house would be possessed by a “ghost” and die for no reason. This overly simplified “pattern” distributed by the media and fed to satiate the public’s curiosity was responsible for the eclipse of the truths. The short story mentions that after the serial killer murdered his wife, he found it easy to make his Chinese maid believe it was a *tisigui* (a ghost seeking substitute) that took Mary’s life. A substitute-seeking ghost in Chinese superstition refers to a ghost that takes an innocent person’s life so that they can be reincarnated and receive another life chance (Huntington, “Ghosts” 1). These ghosts usually die from “hanging (as suicide), drowning (sometimes a suicide), and... childbirth” (ibid., 2). Substitute-seeking ghosts came into being from women who harboured grievances against close family members or who suffered vulnerability or powerlessness within the family (ibid.).

In “The Haunted House”, a closed cause-and-effect explanation is formed regarding the three deaths in the house, where a supernatural force is accepted as the single reason for the tragic recurrence. In the logic of “ghosts seeking substitute”, Katherine died because a ghost haunting the house darkened her mind and made her insane. Similarly, Massalyn died because Katherine took her as a substitute, and she then became the ghost preying on the next hostess, Mary. In this way, people feeling satisfied with such a supernatural explanation were likely to simplify the deaths and think no more about their potential complexity. This conventional superstitious pattern of thinking erased a multitude of details and truths and generated a crude understanding of three different situations.

The “substitute-seeking ghost” pattern places the relevant people of the mysterious house into the fixed grid of a regulated power relation: the “ghost” or the house is regarded as the source of misfortune; the married women were sacrificed to the “evil ghost”; the husbands are innocent victims mourning over their loved ones. The grid provides a surface logic that evades the real causes of the crimes. It is therefore
ironic to realise that the husbands were the (in)direct cause of the deaths and by no means victims of the “haunted” house.

2.2 The coincidental revelation

The narrative structure of “The Haunted House” delivers a pessimistic implication about the revelation of truths. Because it is a supernatural-debunking and truth-excavating narrative, it is worthwhile comparing the short story with detective fiction in terms of how they discover truths.

In detective fiction, detectives discover facts to which other characters are blind. For example, Sherlock Holmes embodies the idea of “knowing comes before seeing” (Smajić 123). Holmes is portrayed by Arthur Conan Doyle as a detective who persistently absorbs detailed, exact knowledge of an extremely broad scope and cultivates skills in information utilisation (ibid.). Holmes is capable of seeing what less knowledgeable observers overlook. For him, knowing leads to seeing. Another example is Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin, a flâneur detective and a passionate observer of his surroundings. Dupin enjoys deciphering people in a state of “familiarity and semantic immutability” (Smajić 95). Each person is a collection of signifieds hidden underneath body language and a series of speech acts for Dupin to interpret based on his rich experience (ibid.). As one can see, both Dupin’s and Holmes’s stories emphasise an individual’s capability to grasp truths by employing knowledge, experience, and scientific reasoning.

By contrast, “The Haunted House” unfolds through multiple limited-perspective narratives based on quoted documents (except for section three, as mentioned previously). Each section of the story offers one facet of the ghost rumour. The excavation of truths is carried out in a relatively “negative” fashion, rather than as a coherent report presented by some inspired character who had found out the entire story of the “haunted” house. “The Haunted House” has no protagonists who carry
investigations in a state of disorientation until they reach a deeper understanding of the full picture. Rather, it showcases separate documents and pieces of information, without any lengthy process of meticulous observation and reasoning by a detective.

“The Haunted House” exemplifies the “mediate narrative” whereby the primary narrator does not tell the story “from his own direct experience but transmits someone else’s story” (Carter 1). Using a collection of mutually complementary written materials to tell the full story implies that the discovery of truths registers no inevitability. The short story is full of coincidences. Firstly, the ghost rumour was eventually dispelled not because people doubted its credibility, but because Vladinski and James were captured. In this sense, the ghost rumour was debunked indirectly. Secondly, the filing officer discovered Vladinski’s diary from his confiscated properties by chance. Thirdly, it was only when Mohalini happened to read Vladinski’s diary excerpts in the newspaper that he finally realised the reason for his wife’s death. Cherishing Massalyn Mohalini’s reputation, Mohalini decided to abandon his prosecution of Vladinski and keep the truths to himself.

Moreover, no first-person reference appears in the last three sections, and one cannot tell who the narrator(s) is/are. Therefore, only the reader can see the whole picture, and thus ends up knowing much more than each character did. The reader derives pleasure from the narrative. Reading the short story feels like playing a puzzle that involves piecing together materials collected from irrelevant sources. The reader realises the connection among the three couples’ stories.

The situation is different for characters in “The Haunted House”, who remain blind to the house’s complete story, knowing only their own part. In the later scenes of The Ghost in White, informative characters explained everything to everyone else in the house. By contrast, characters in “The Haunted House” generated no proactive, coherent, and convincing detection that dispelled the mist of mystery. Furthermore, no one explicitly demystified the ghost rumour for the public. Vladinski’s diary appeared in a French newspaper, revealing something about the first two deaths.
However, it still left Katherine’s suicide a mystery. The third death had its record in James’s English confession in the US, but the document might not have been available for the public to read. In conclusion, with no absolute access guaranteed, debunking the haunting was not certain in the story. The ghost rumour probably continued to exert its influence on many people living in the district, such as Vladinski’s Chinese maid who was obsessed with superstition. “The Haunted House” thus registers a sense of pessimism with regard to seeing the reality.

3 Wu Zuxiang’s29 “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage”: confronts a traditional woman’s regrettable life trapped in the house

“The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage” (hereafter “Bamboo”) is a supernatural-debunking story set in a remote and culturally secluded countryside. The narrator takes his new wife, Ah Yuan 阿園, back home to visit relatives. His Second Aunt (Er gugu 二姑姑), long living in widowhood with her maid, Lanhua 蘭花, urged the young couple to visit her at the Verdant Bamboo Hermitage. The couple were from an urban background; thus, they were outsiders crossing into Second Aunt’s reclusive countryside residence (Wu Z. 180–2).

The narrator told his Second Aunt’s life story to his wife. Second Aunt fell in love with a young man studying at her father’s private school (sishu 私塾). One day, the impetuous young people were caught in the middle of an affair in the back garden, whereupon the life of Second Aunt was forced into a dead end. The young man’s

29 Wu Zuxiang was a “left-wing” writer. He showed no particular interest in ghost tales or the supernatural in fiction. He valued piquancy (quwei 趣味) as a counter to blandness, boredom, and the solemnity that may be found in literary didacticism and instruction (P. Williams 10). Wu Zuxiang’s fiction is characterised by the realism of Turgenev, derived from Wu’s strong conscience as a social critic (ibid., 3). He was not a “critical realist” but a “melioristic realist”. Moreover, the realism he pursued was not for aesthetic progression, as represented by Flaubert, but motivated by Wu’s intention to initiate moral improvement in readers, as found in Turgenev, Shaw, and Tolstoy (ibid., 9).
family initially rejected their engagement. A few years later, the young man accidentally drowned on his way to Nanjing for the imperial examination, and the young Second Aunt made an unsuccessful attempt to hang herself in the garden. This resolute suicide attempt earned her some respect from the young man’s family and, at the age of 19, Second Aunt was married to the dead man and started her widowhood.

Situated in the Golden Swallow Village (Jinyan cun 金燕村), the abode was surrounded by a shady grove, reminding the visitors of traditional landscape drawings. The couple settled in a room that used to be left idle. The residence’s enveloping atmosphere of atemporal solitude troubled Ah Yuan with its ghostly references. Terror struck the couple at night when they were lying wide awake and suddenly spotted a “ghost face” appearing outside the window. The husband’s straightforward confrontation with the “ghost” demystified the spookiness. He dashed out of the room to “capture” the “ghost” but only found Second Aunt squatting on the ground in embarrassment and a back view of her fleeing maid. The plot stopped here. A probable guess is that Second Aunt had unchanneled sexual urges from her life-long widowhood. She had been curious about what life could be like for newly-weds and had peeped into the young couple’s chamber through the window.

The apparent gothic quality in “Bamboo” has attracted notable discussion. David Der-wei Wang (2016) connects Second Aunt’s lifelong suffering with the mood of agoraphobia as well as claustrophobia in Western gothic romance and the experiences of certain Chinese females (214). He argues that the deep, secluded mansions are the “final destination of the reclusive women’s life resources and imagination” (ibid.). Philip F. Williams (1993) has written about the alignment between the female characters’ personalities and their secluded residence and the story’s mood of suspense (62–64). Yuan Liangjun (1982) asserts that the qualities of poetic and spooky remoteness from mainstream society render “Bamboo” an anachronistic story (60).
Lu Lin (2009), Xiao Xiangming (2006), Philip F. Williams (1993), and Tang Yuan (1990) also read “Bamboo” as a story depicting Wu Zuxiang’s sympathy towards Second Aunt, a sacrifice to patriarchal ideology and authority (Lu 170–172; Xiao 178; Williams 170; Tang 60). Chen Yuangang (2008) and Han Leng (2004) analyse the signifiers of reproduction in “Bamboo” that connote the sexual imbalance.

The narrative strategies of “Bamboo” have also been a focus of research. According to Philip F. Williams (1993), “Bamboo” is testing its power to engage readers by employing an outsider’s first-person narrative as he/she steps into the uncanny environment; however, the narrative displays its conscious storytelling process by referring to old fiction genres and modes (65; 173). Williams also notes the technique of foreshadowing that provides the story with coherence and inner resonance (165).

As shown in this section, worthy points of view about the short story have appeared in the researchers’ various interpretations. One critical lacuna is that researchers have made no attempts to use the short story’s narrative features to demonstrate its standpoint in debunking the supernatural misconception. The couple’s crossing is also meaningful because they happened to scrutinise the Second Aunt’s tranquil life and expose her profound tragedy. The following sections explore the social criticism inherent in the couple’s drama of crossing.

3.1 The enclosed space

“Bamboo” features no overarching, concrete supernatural order. Its ghostly sense is suggested by descriptions of the environment and characters’ speech. The environment betrayed the enclosed loneliness of Second Aunt’s home. The households in the Golden Swallow Village were dispersed among hills densely covered by plants. A gurgling creek cut the village in half, and Second Aunt’s residence sat on the west shore. The full crowns of tall and old trees on both sides of the creek met in the sky, shielding the houses from the sun. The house was hidden away from a new culture
and society where the young couple grew up among electric lighting, foreign clothes, books, asphalt roads, and factory chimneys (Wu Z. 182).

In addition to the location, the uncanny appearance also made Second Aunt’s house an enclave. It bore a resemblance to ghost stories in *Liaozhai Zhiyi* 聊齋志異 (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*). In “Hu jia nü” 狐嫁女 (“A Fox Spirit Marries off a Daughter”), “Qingfeng” 青鳳, and “Zhang Arui” 章阿瑞, the main site was a deserted huge mansion that used to belong to a big family but had been overgrown with wild grass (Pu 53, 112, 627); in “Nie Xiaojian” 聶小倩, romance took place in a magnificent and empty temple buried within the grass, but the environment was delightful and poetic with tall bamboos, a big pond, and lotuses in full blossom (Pu 160). These stories established a connection between spacious, weather-worn residences, and supernatural experiences.

“Bamboo” imitates old ghost tales by orchestrating an isolated, gothic atmosphere:

The house was massive and grim, also in conformity with Second Aunt’s character ["Her pale wrinkled face was devoid of expression and her slow gait, her dull tone of voice all matched the sombre melancholy of her face," Yu F. 17]. The stone steps, brick pavement, pillar foundations, even the wooden walls were mottled with moss in varying shades of green. A musty smell mingled with the odour of mouldering earth and wood filled our nostrils. (ibid., 17–8)

... The large room remained as silent as an old tomb, with no sound but the twittering of swallows in the hall. (ibid., 20)

The quaint internal decorations cohere with the overall atmosphere, presenting the house as an anachronistic space. The exquisite room had a vase-shaped door, a bed made of sanderswood, a plate of enamel peaches, folding screens embroidered with colourful butterflies and a poem, a cinnabar vase, a horsetail whisk, and a poetic couplet composed by a scholar from the Qianlong 乾隆 reign in the Qing dynasty.
There are a number of symbolic images in “Bamboo” that imply the unhealthy and unhappy state of its owner. From the newcomer couple’s perspective, they and Second Aunt were not from the same world. The old lady and her maid shared a spiritual bond with the objects and animals in the house through communications inexplicable to the modern materialistic culture. For example, Second Aunt and Lanhua treated small animals in the house with such closeness that it appeared weird. They patiently requested that the lizard and the bat temporarily leave the empty room to the couple while addressing the animals as “Grandpa Fu” (Fu gonggong 福公公) and “Grandpa Hu” (Hu yeye 虎爺爺) (Wu Z. 183); at dinner, Lanhua expressed her concern for a swallow, “Miss Blue” (Qing guniang 青姑娘), and greeted it when it returned (ibid., 184). Second Aunt told the couple that she knew somebody would visit her shortly, because she noticed that her charred candlewick had curled into three large “flowers” and had heard three chirps from a magpie the day before (ibid., 182). The normal things and natural phenomena became symbolic and decipherable in this special space.

The young man told his wife Second Aunt’s story as a distant “legend” from the old era, “as interesting as those taken out of ancient Chinese romances” (16). He felt lucky to have this dramatic “modern chuanqi” and “comedy of beauty and talent” so close to his life, which implies he viewed Second Aunt’s past as something irrelevant (Wu Z. 180; Yu F. 14).

Second Aunt’s early experience is similar to the classical “scholar/talent-beauty (caizi jiaren 才子佳人) romance” motif, following an ideal trajectory where the man and the beauty (from a gentry family) fall in love easily, the man passes the imperial examination, and returns to happily marry the beauty (Matsuda 271). “Quest” is typical to the “scholar-beauty” motif, for the man or and the woman usually pursue love passionately and are not impeded by political and ideological obstacles (Zuyan Zhou 96).
However, “Bamboo” is not a tale of the marvellous about admirable romance, nor does it feature determined and free characters acting in the name of love. Rather, it tells how Second Aunt sent herself to tragedy in a confused state and remained stuck in her perennial, morbid daydreaming with insatiable desire.

Second Aunt and Lanhua’s belief in the supernatural activated their imagination of a visiting spirit. As they led the young couple to their chamber, the hostess repeatedly emphasised the room’s satisfying condition, which brought to the couple further confusion and anxiety rather than comfort:

[Second Aunt:] “Don’t worry…. There rooms are swept and cleaned every year when your uncle, my husband, returns home. I’ll tell Orchid [Lanhua] to tidy this room up properly for you”… “Your uncle likes this “Awaiting the Moon Studio” best of all. He asked me to have it repaired when he came home last year. Have a look inside. It has been newly furnished”. (Yu F. 18)

Second Aunt said this because she believed that the dead would return to resume their love. Lanhua also claimed that she once saw Second Aunt’s late husband sauntering alone in the moon lit garden and that he still looked young as he did when he died (ibid., 19).

Second Aunt seemed to believe that she and her late husband’s apparition shared a more substantial marital relationship than was normal. In her world, the man who drowned at a young age regularly came back to her. Second Aunt and Lanhua’s convinced tone when talking about the late man raises the protagonist’s eyebrows. “Bamboo” shares the pattern of a liminal fantasy, where the protagonist steps into a world with fantastical events happening to his/her surprise, whereas other characters native to the world accept their surroundings as the ordinary reality (Mendlesohn xxiii). However, unlike the liminal fantasy, the “reality” in “Bamboo” was a product of Second Aunt’s mind. As the story goes, Second Aunt and Lanhua’s matter-of-factness revealed how bored they had been. Their indulgence within their fantasy
about death-transcending love and their reclusive lifestyle reinforces their psychological remoteness from society.

3.2 Social message in the breaking of reclusive stability

The short story debunks the supernatural on two levels: the plot and narrative strategies. This section deals with the plot.

What sustained Second Aunt’s life in bucolic isolation is the kind of “uncanny and fragile purity” susceptible to normal and healthy people from the outside (P. Williams 154). Second Aunt’s seemingly peaceful life of chanting Buddhist scriptures and embroidering butterflies was but the still surface covering up a sexual impulse not yet extinguished. Peeping through the window of the newlyweds tore away Second Aunt’s previous decency and her polite aloofness, and the act betrayed her curiosity about an ordinary couple’s chamber life. Her curiosity seemed incongruous with her senior age, thus appearing distorted and grotesque.

There is a strong sense of sacrifice in Second Aunt, to both patriarchal orthodox and ghost superstitions. Her experience exemplified an untypical netherworld marriage (minghun 冥婚) (Gu and Xu 96).30 Because folks believed in the afterlife in a netherworld, they regarded marital ceremonies and marriage between/with dead people as meaningful. Netherworld marriage was never acknowledged by Confucian ideology for its inhumanity or for other reasons (ibid., 85–7). However, history saw the gradual intertwining of the Confucian worship of familial clan with netherworld superstition, which resulted in Second Aunt’s netherworld marriage.

30 The sense of sacrifice in Second Aunt’s life has its cultural origin in the custom of netherworld marriages, which transformed from ancient human sacrifice. See Chunjun Gu and Keqian Xu’s article “Netherworld Marriage in Ancient China: Its Historical Evolution and Ideological Background” (2014, pp. 82–5).
“Bamboo” targets the strict patriarchal principles governing women’s chastity. According to Jiali 家禮 (Family Rituals, Southern Song), which was compiled by the Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), women should comply with the “three obediences and four virtues” (sancong side 三從四德). One principle underpinning the “three obediences” is that a married woman should obey her husband (Rainey 169). Second Aunt’s story reflects a degree of contemplation on chastity, referring to virginity before marriage, faithfulness to her husband during marriage, and living in chaste widowhood after his death (ibid., 170). Second Aunt broke the taboo when she was young by attempting pre-marital sex, but she sacrificed the rest of her life to harsh fidelity in the prison-like house. The enclosure of the environment is in keeping with the customary practice of confining women, especially those of higher social status, within domestic inner quarters.

Second Aunt’s fantasy about the returning ghost of her husband informs the reader of the ongoing conflicts within her. The netherworld marriage embodies people’s belief in an afterlife, but Second Aunt’s ghost fantasy denotes her wish and desire for the present life. Unfortunately, her life passion was not strong enough to disentangle her from the enclosed environment and mentality. Although “Bamboo” makes no commitment to telling a real ghost story, the protagonist couple’s misunderstanding leaves the impression that Second Aunt is, allegorically, more or less a “ghost” judged by her withered state. The short story not only criticises the cruelty of Confucian ethical fetters imposed on women but also questions Second Aunt’s initiative as an able individual. With Lanhua as her only company, Second Aunt stuck to the fixed routine of chanting Buddhist classics, embroidering butterflies, looking forward to remote family members coming to visit her, and indulging herself in the daydream of her dead husband’s ghost back in the house. She lacked the strength to change, even when her parents-in-law passed away and fidelity principles were no longer imposed on her. Hence, Second Aunt was stuck with the culture and conventions that were “dead, powerless, censored acting on the living as ghosts” (Duchamp 849). The tragedy is that Second Aunt had been internalised into the
ghostly atmosphere and was completely unenlightened and unaware of her pathetic condition.

3.3 The purpose of the narrative forms

“Bamboo” exposes fictionality in its construction of a supernatural atmosphere by integrating traditional components into the narrative. There is no direct appearance of ghosts but numerous references are made to them. For example, a coloured drawing of Zhong Kui capturing ghosts decorated the wall; the gloomy sound of Second Aunt chanting Buddhist scriptures reminded the protagonist of “ghosts in graves singing Bao Zhao’s 鮑照 (407–466) poems in an autumn night” (qiu fen gui chang bao jia shi 秋墳鬼唱鮑家詩); the sounds of the rain, the wind, insects, and the rustling bamboos “increased the ghostly atmosphere”; and the protagonist told his wife Ah Yuan Pu Songling’s ghost stories at night (184). Unlike their influence on Ah Yuan, they may not intensify the ghostly atmosphere for the reader. The deliberate compression of the ghostly references betrays rigidity and an obscure eagerness to sustain the ghostly atmosphere, as if the narrator feared that the plot was not terrifying enough.

Accumulating stock cultural elements about “ghosts” demonstrates what kind of conventional devices are useful for writing a ghost story. The narrative reflects on itself as a fictional product that seeks to lure the reader into the ghostly mood. Seymour Chatman (1978) writes that, “To naturalize a narrative convention means not only to understand it, but to ‘forget’ its conventional character” (49). By contrast, the narrative of “Bamboo” “denaturalises” conventions of Chinese supernatural accounts and impels readers to realise their artificial plasticity. Well aware of what a ghost story requires to create eeriness, suspense, and a terrifying atmosphere, Wu Zuxiang deliberately overuses the traditional imagery and narrative elements to mock the cliched narrative strategies of ghost stories.
The final remark from the implied author testifies to this idea. Some researchers think that the protagonist recognising Second Aunt outside the door is the end of the story, but it can be taken otherwise. There is a closing remark added after the plot but before the author’s signed date of writing: “One of my friends gave me the material for writing this short story, admitting that it sounded a bit boring but fun to develop. I knew I would ruin it. Now, it is ruined, exactly as I thought” (Wu Z. 185). The remark is either the author’s or the narrator’s, but the text gives no certain answer. Whichever is the case, it looks back to the plot and comments on it as a consciously created narrative, distinguishing the storytelling from the characters’ experiences. Hence, it brings the reader’s attention from the dramatic plot and mood to the effect of the storytelling. With this gesture of looking back, the short story exposes even more obviously its narrative plasticity as an ironic forgery of a traditional ghost story. The plasticity thus distinguishes “Bamboo” from the other primary sources that debunk or modify traditional motifs in this thesis. The others have no such conscious and obvious reflection on their prototypical and appropriated motifs or genres through meta-narratives or by overusing stock imagery.

Therefore, “Bamboo” provides another perspective on the debunking of ghosts. It reminds the reader to examine conventional cultural references employed to generate a ghostly atmosphere and terrifying fantasy. Any engaging ghost story can be dissected and re-examined as an artistic creation. To terrify people needs not a real ghost but simply convincing stock imagery.

4 Conclusion

*The Ghost in White* is a typical detective novella; “The Haunted House” is a mixture of detective and crime fiction, gothic fiction, and romantic melodrama; and “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage” is a parody of ghost fiction. They all resemble the traditional motif of haunted houses in that the houses are forced to disclose dark secrets as outsiders crossed in and broke the sinfully maintained silence. Even
though modern society has witnessed the emergence of more advanced public media and private detectives, private properties remain mysterious and difficult to penetrate, which may have left some disempowered individuals struggling with domestic abuse.

The fictional worlds are presented with verisimilitude, apart from the several disorienting moments suggesting the presence of “ghosts”. The works create apparitional gothic impressions, starting from their main characters’ experiences of “seeing is believing” and visual deception. “Ghost” and the emotion of horror are integrated into the plot, forming the spooky experiences of characters in a gothic style. *The Ghost in White* and “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage” both have protagonists who enter the suspicious houses to experience the inside and interact with the people living there. By contrast, “The Haunted House” features crossing as an ongoing accumulation of information on what the house had witnessed. This short story conducts its crossing in the same direction as the other two works, starting by presenting the outsiders’ misconception of the house and then seeking to excavate the non-supernatural truths hidden inside.

As a detective novella, *The Ghost in White* features Detective Huo Sang’s meticulous investigation of a death in the house where a “ghost” was seen. The narrative complies with that of European detective fiction and celebrates the scientific worldview as well as the approach of rationalist reasoning and deduction. As a determined atheist, Huo Sang investigated the house with the aim of debunking its haunting rumour right from the start. Nevertheless, the novella employs a gothic narrative, where characters report intense, terrifying ghostly experiences in the house. Truths surfaced in Huo Sang’s investigation to indicate that the “haunting” was fabricated by a member of the household, who used the ghostly trick to solve the mystery of his father’s death. Although the character directly caused his uncle’s death, he received lenient treatment and even appreciation from the detective, as he had a righteous motive and helped restore moral justice. Moreover, Huo Sang exposed rotten family relations that had relevance to the death he was investigating.
“The Haunted House” depicts domestic tragedies leading to three women’s unnatural deaths. Unlike The Ghost in White, this short story does not rely on a proactive and resourceful protagonist who undertakes an investigation and uncovers the truth. It also means that the crossing in this short story was not completed by any character but instead refers to the narrative process of getting ever closer to all the truths. The short story unfolds in a fragmented, incoherent, and mediated narrative that is divided into four sections, each revealing significant information about the “haunted” house and its six former residents. The reader gains a broader insight into the history of the house and the connection between the three deaths, while the characters and the public in the story remain ignorant of these truths due to their limited perspectives. People’s misunderstanding of the house as haunted was due to the lack of knowledge of the true situations within the three marriages. Shi Zhecun’s experimental arrangement of the sections gives the story a modern quality. Moreover, the loose narrative structure corresponds with the meagre chance of thoroughly demystifying the “haunted” house to the public.

Finally, “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage” disenchants an old widow’s romantic legend preserved in her lonely house. A young couple came to Second Aunt’s residence and life as modern “intruders”. The young couple experienced dramatic cultural “shock” and eventually confirmed the old lady’s abnormality caused by her long and silent tolerance of life. Her condition evokes criticism of the cruel patriarchal ideology. Moreover, the short story deploys literary and cultural stock imagery frequently used in supernatural imagination. It draws the reader’s attention to the making of ghost stories. Fear of ghosts becomes shaky and empty because fear may be projected not onto any real ghosts but “ghost” as a concept based on a series of conventional cultural signifiers.

The three works all direct the shallow fear of ghosts to chilling real-life secrets. Debunking ghost rumours was not the only task. Feigned haunting conceals toxic
family relations and evilness under a domestic cover. What haunted the houses are not strange intruders from the external world but the darkness residing inside.
Chapter 3 Female Ghosts and Fantasy-Debunking Crossing

This chapter echoes Chapter 2 as it discusses another type of crossing into enclosed places, with the supernatural nature of their events confirmed. This chapter focuses on two ghost stories, also the fantastic-marvellous: Yu Dafu’s “Shisan ye” 十三夜 (“The Thirteenth Night”) originally published in Beixin 北新 (4. 17 [1930]: 59–73) and Ye Lingfeng’s “Luoyan” 落雁 published in Xiandai xiaoshuo 現代小說 (Modern Fiction, 2. 4 [1929]: 1–16). These short stories feature modern men who accidentally found and even entered extended ghostly spaces apart from their ordinary, mundane world.1

In both short stories, the protagonists’ encounters with female ghosts indicate their crossing from the realm of yang 陽 towards that of yin 陰, as represented by the ghosts’ apparitional residences. Female ghosts feature in a large number of traditional Chinese supernatural tales and far more frequently than male ghosts. With both ghosts and women representing yin, and human and man as yang, the union of female ghost and man signifies the combination of the intensified yin and yang energies: “ghost is to human as female is to male” (Zeitlin, Heroine 16). In the primary sources, the female ghosts’ residences are typical places of the yin. I single out these two works because, unlike the “haunted” houses stories in Chapter 2, they feature real ghosts and focus more on the crossing humans’ relationships with the female ghosts than on the supernatural residences.

The two short stories experienced this crossing to different extents. In “The Thirteenth Night”, the poetic environment of Hangzhou initially seems ordinary, until it admitted a wandering loner into a midnight exploration. The protagonist, Chen, never knew that the mysterious woman he came across was the ghost of an ancient Chinese courtesan. During his pursuit of the woman, the once familiar environment unfolded into a strange, new space inhabited by the ghost, but Chen never truly entered the space, which makes his experience seem like an incomplete crossing.
However, there may be another interpretation of the crossing process. In “Luoyan”, a Manchu female ghost lured the protagonist, Feng Ruowei, into her residence from the familiar everyday mundanity of 1920s Shanghai. Feng made a clear spatial crossing as he accepted the female ghost’s invitation to her residence.

I have demonstrated that the primary sources in Chapter 2 brought what was hidden in the “haunted” houses into the light, thus criticising domestic darkness and superstition. Unlike Chapter 2, I will analyse the crossing in this chapter not from the perspective of the enclosed places/houses. Rather, I interpret the human characters’ relationships with the supernatural characters that were luring humans towards or into their remote and well-hidden residences. I will examine the deviation of the fictional works from their shared traditional motif of the romance between a man and a female ghost, that is, neither of the two works features a fully developed romance. This deviation denotes that these modern situations of crossing no longer have romantic relationships or love as their primary concern, but instead highlight historical and social discontent.

1 Yu Dafu’s “The Thirteenth Night”: a midnight encounter in modern Hangzhou

A useful starting point is searching for traces of Yu Dafu’ preference for supernatural imaginings in fiction. Yu is commonly known for the solitary nature of his protagonists and his melancholy style of writing. Indeed, Leo Ou-fan Lee (1973) commemorates him as a writer of a solitary temperament (81). Childhood malnutrition and poverty shaped his supposedly unconfident and sentimental character. What underlay Yu’s literary creation had been a taste for traditional literature, cultivating within him an interest in classical poetry and fiction in high school (ibid., 87). He first stepped on Japanese land as a student in 1913. His years in Japanese schools kindled his passion for reading and learning from Western and Japanese modern literature. Throughout his stay in Japan, Yu harboured humiliation and melancholy as a student from a weak country and a young man troubled by sexual impulses. The climax of
Yu’s modern fiction writing came during his days in Japan and before the Sino-Japanese war. The resemblance between Yu’s fiction plots and his life experiences adds a strong autobiographical and individualistic quality to his work. Back in Shanghai in 1922, Yu remained active as a member of the Creation Society along with his old friend Guo Moruo and several others. Yu concretised his leftist thoughts in Lu Xun’s literary journal *Benliu* (Running Currents) and his own journal *Dazhong wenyi* Art and Literature for the Masses. Yu joined the League of Left-Wing Writers in 1930 but left the same year (Ni M. 164).

The rebellious nature of Western aestheticism and the melancholy of romanticism might together have sparked Yu’s unusual supernatural imagination in “The Thirteenth Night”. According to Leo Ou-fan Lee’s division of romanticists, Yu represented the “Wertherian” (“passive sentimental”) type, who easily fell into pessimism and melancholy, contrasting with the “Promethean” romanticists who were driven by an optimistic, heroic, and idealistic passion for the future (*Romantic* 280). Yu’s romanticism contained a strong inclination for elegiac devotion to the past, which Yu termed *xunqingzhuyi* 殉情主義 or “sentimentalism” (Yu D., *Wenlun* 110).31

In Europe in the late 19th century, aestheticism propounded the idea that art needed no moral justification or practical values. Decadence derived from aestheticism and shocked society with its bizarre and grotesque aesthetics that went against the natural and elegant. The literature and art of aestheticism and decadence reflected the movement’s pursuit of enhanced sensory pleasure and novelty through sex,

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31 Chinese romanticism challenged traditional virtue and creed and revived individual rights in the pursuit of an ideal future, to which goal it also added an aesthetic dimension of the admiration of beauty (Rabut 205–6). For many Chinese literati, it was hard to come to terms with the almost irresistible nostalgic, melancholy, and occasionally pessimistic impulse (ibid., 216). For example, Tian Han advocated applying the romantic spirit of freedom to literary creation and even social movements while rejecting pessimism in his article “Shiren yu laodong wenti” 詩人與勞動問題 (“The Issue of Poets and Labour”, 1919). It was not only Yu’s contemporaries who doubted his qualification as a romanticist due to his *fin-de-siècle* pessimism and self-abasement, Yu himself differentiated his “sentimentalism” from the revolutionary Chinese romanticism (ibid., 211–2).
drugs, alcohol, and other debauched behaviour. During his stay in Japan, Yu came under the influence of Japanese aestheticism through novelists Sato Haruo 佐藤春夫 (1892–1964) and Tanizaki Junichiro 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965). Back in China, he published introductory articles on Chuangzao zhoubao 創造周報 (Creation Weekly, 1923–1924) about decadence, including The Yellow Book (British literary periodical, 1894–1897), Ernest Dowson (English poet and novelist of the Decadent movement, 1867–1900), and Aubrey Beardsley (English illustrator and author active in the Decadent movement, 1872–1898). Although aestheticism did not directly lead to a supernatural literary configuration, it was likely that aestheticism and decadence lifted Yu’s imagination from a grounding in reality to an intimate and fanciful realm where he could indulge in his imagination of the female ghost. It also meant that “The Thirteenth Night” was unlikely to express any interest in the supernatural, especially when Yu seems to have no other supernatural writings.

Moreover, “The Thirteenth Night” was probably an outlet for Yu’s emotional commemoration of Yang Yunyou 楊雲友, a Ming dynasty courtesan whose other name was Yang Huilin 楊慧林. In his essay “Lixihu de yi jiaoluo” 裏西湖的一角落 (“A Corner of the Inner West Lake”, 1937), Yu writes about how he searched for Yang Yunyou’s memorial pavilion along with her gravestone epitaph among rampant brambles and grass (Yu D., Sanwen 93–5). The essay expresses how Yu was struck by the pathetic condition of Yang’s pavilion tomb:

The pavilion sat at the foot of Mount Geling, right in the wild grass to the east of the upward path. Some domineering residents have occupied almost every available inch of the land around the pavilion, which was left alone in a shabby state.... I groped my way to the pavilion, spent some time cutting the wild grass... swept away the rubbish and cow poo with my nose covered. I walked to the back of the gravestone, knelt down, fumbled on its surface, and finally found the epitaph of the lady from the Ming dynasty, Yang Yunyou... Kneeling on the odious muddy ground, I read the entire epitaph from the beginning to the end, feeling that I had lost all my strength to stand up; an unidentifiable melancholy emerged in my stomach and surged up within me, reaching my heart and my head. (94)
After his visit, “The Thirteenth Night” was published as a spontaneous piece added to Yu’s *Weijue ji* 薇蕨集 (*Wild Potherb Collection*, 1930) along with eight other short stories or essays. The female ghost in “The Thirteenth Night” was therefore Yang’s ghost.

The following is a synopsis of the short story. Using a first-person narrative, the narrator recollects how he met a young painter years ago in Hangzhou. The narrator was sauntering and boating on the West Lake on a bright afternoon in July. An uninhibited-looking man was painting in the surrounding circle of watchers. Two weeks later, the narrator and the painter, Chen, were introduced to each other by a mutual friend who told the narrator Chen’s story.

Chen was born in Taiwan after his grandparents moved there from the mainland. He grew up under the Japanese colonialist reign. After graduating from a Japanese art university, Chen moved to the mainland at the age of 28. On the 13th of July (lunar calendar), Chen took a walk and spotted an elegant woman admiring the moon alone in the quiet Mount Geling 葛嶺山 close to the West Lake. Her only feature at odds with the contemporary time was her attire, which, according to Chen’s descriptions, was a *shashan* 紗衫 (gauze dress) commonly worn by Ming women in summer. From the moment Chen first saw the woman, his complexion darkened, and his health deteriorated dramatically in the following month. On the 13th of August, Chen saw the woman again and followed her into a classical, quaint but unfamiliar garden. He noticed the garden’s name was “Cloud Shrine”. While hesitating outside the gate, a sudden howling in the mountains interrupted the atmosphere and overwhelmed him. He had to give up the idea of entering the residence to look for the woman and went directly to the narrator to tell him what just happened. A few days later, Chen died. After attending Chen’s funeral on the 13th of October, the narrator happened to

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32 Japan’s 1868 Meiji Restoration promoted the country’s rise to power in international relations. Japan and China fought over Korea, the Chinese empire’s leading tributary state since the Ming and Qing dynasties. China lost the 1894 war against Japan and had to cede Taiwan (Formosa) as part of the peace settlement in 1895.
find an ancient grave near the site where Chen came across the mysterious woman. On the gravestone was an epitaph inscribed in 1930 by Zhang Chaotang 张朝墉, a friend of the narrator’s relative. The epitaph showed that the grave was named “Cloud Shrine” and belonged to a Ming courtesan named Yang Yunyou (hereafter Yang). Therefore, the woman whom Chen came across twice was Yang’s ghost, whose grave transformed into the garden in front of Chen. Several major events surrounding Chen all happened on the 13th night of a month on the lunar calendar, the repetition of which casts an uncanny sense over the events, as if Chen was destined to experience them all, including his death and funeral.

Most studies examining Yu Dafu’s literature say little about “The Thirteenth Night”. However, there are a few exceptions. One direction of interpretation is to excavate traces of other literary works in “The Thirteenth Night” to account for its supernatural plot. Ma Weiye (1997) points out the Japanese fiction writer Sato Haruo’s influence on Yu Dafu’s writing. In particular, the way in which reality and fantasy were blurred in Sato’s “Spain ken no inu” 西班牙犬の家 (“The Home of a Spanish Dog”, 1917) inspired “The Thirteenth Night” (78). While Sato’s fantasy focuses on configuring a dreamy ambiance for aesthetic appreciation, “The Thirteenth Night” mildly distorts reality as the outlet of an individual’s complaints under Japanese colonial rule (Ma W. 79). In keeping with Yang Yi’s interpretation in Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo shi (History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1991), Ma Weiye claims that the unreachable woman symbolises Chen’s fallen motherland and his desperate search for a protective nation (79). In addition, Anna Doležalová (1971) highlights Chen’s narrative significance in comparison with Yu’s other fictional works in a quasi-autobiographical style (60). She interprets Chen’s death as part of the narrator’s self-communication (98).

Despite the explicit or implicit historical references made in “The Thirteenth Night”, the above research is insufficient to explain why the protagonist was attracted to the female ghost until coming to the brink of crossing into another apparitional dimension of space.
1.1 The accidental but inevitable crossing

Chen’s encounter with the mysterious woman was unexpected, and she was a complete stranger to him. Nevertheless, there was a reason why he persistently pursued the woman and unknowingly gave himself to the *yin* dimension ever more deeply until his death. The short story sophisticatedly demonstrates double interpretations of Chen’s unaccountable encounters by providing the three male characters with different access to information. That is, Chen’s encounters were a ghost story only for the narrator, they were not supernatural for Chen and his other friend. The friend’s introduction to the narrator (pp. 63–66) provided part of Chen’s information in the story, mainly about Chen’s early life and his first encounter with the woman. Coming back from his second unexpected encounter with the woman, Chen himself told the narrator about it, put in a direct quotation by the narrator (69–71). Finally, because the narrator was the only one among the three who found Yang Yunyou’s grave, he alone obtained the truth about the true, supernatural nature of Chen’s encounters.

Chen was a perplexed yet eager pursuer, preoccupied with the woman’s charm while thinking less about the possible results of his action. Initially, Chen hid behind rocks and stalked her for a while, keeping her within his sight. When she happened to turn around and notice his presence, he was stricken by her beauty, which was rarely seen among modern Japanese women:

> He felt numb, losing his sense of where he was. Forgetting that exposing himself would probably frighten the demure and delicate lady, he almost stood up straight from behind the rocks, his neck stretched and eyes wide open, trying to capture everything about her with his eyes. (66)

Chen was the one taking control of the situation as a proactive stalker, while the woman seemed always passive. While the first encounter was clouded with a theatrical and poetic atmosphere, the second betrayed Chen’s unscrupulousness...
and thirst. Upon seeing Chen, the woman seemed to be surprised or shocked at his presence and then put on a lovely smile. Because he thought she was a local nun, the wilful “adventure” quickly lost any enjoyability for him. He began a moral self-questioning as he overcame the physical obstacles of the twisting paths, locks, walls, and a labyrinthian garden while still feeling helplessly drawn to her.

The female ghost’s demure and passive appearance renders Chen’s obsessive eagerness more outstanding by contrast. Yang’s ghost takes after traditional female ghosts regarding their later stage of transformation in literary representation. Zeitlin observes that female ghost imagery opened up a space for men to project their “purely aestheticized female ideal” or to imagine “hyperfemininity” (Zeitlin, Heroine 17). The imagery transformed “from frightening, malignant, sexually predatory agents of disease and death to timid, vulnerable, fragile creatures in need of male sympathy, protection, and live-giving powers”, or “from frightening to frightened” (ibid., 24; 28). An extension of ideal femininity in ghost imagery includes “elusiveness” (ibid., 26), “slenderness, sickliness, and melancholy, often in conjunction with literary or artistic talent and untimely death” (ibid., 25). Similarly, Yang’s ghost did not seem to aggressively haunt anyone or crave men. However, because the short story is not told from her perspective, her purposes or thoughts remained a mystery.

Chen’s crossing did not take the form of a dramatic moment involving stepping over some clear-cut boundary. Rather, the crossing happened gradually as he pursued the woman. Not knowing her ghostly identity did not hinder his state of being from gliding to the world of death. Chen displayed an increasingly strong inclination towards the energy of yin in his complexion and action. Since he was young, he had lacked masculine power and character. He always appeared gloomy, and the nocturnal wanderings on the hills deepened his sombreness into deathliness. What was now even more unfortunate was that Chen had been dispirited by his inability to lead an idealised life. During the time when Chen had the eerie encounters, the narrator noticed Chen’s gradual resemblance to ghosts in people’s usual imagination. A series of consistent narratives call attention to Chen’s gloomy, awful
disposition: “Even when Chen was wearing a smile, his bright, black eyes still shined with frightening and cold gloominess. Also, there seemed to be an unknowable sense of dreariness in his smile” (63). In his overall complexion and disposition, Chen resonated with traditional female ghosts in his “slenderness, sickliness, and melancholy... artistic talent and untimely death” (Zeitlin, Heroine 25). The above qualities constitute the beauty of female ghosts but stress Chen’s incompetence and chronically curtailed masculinity.

His pursuit of the strange woman in the moonlit night was not portrayed as something lyrical or romantic. Instead, it seemed to be a taxing activity that fatigued Chen at a disturbing rate. Chen admitted that after he gave up looking for the woman in the early morning, he returned to his lodge, “dragging an exhausted, dying body as if having just survived a severe disease” (67). Since the moment when Chen first saw her, his condition had substantially deteriorated: “the blue-grey complexion grew darker and deathlier. His hair grew very long. The pair of spooky eyes appeared increasingly harsh and scary, probably because he had lost much weight” (67). After the second failed pursuit, Chen appeared at the narrator’s place, “hair messy, lips purple-black, and extremely dishevelled: a ‘ghostly, blue-faced man’” (68), and the narrator felt Chen’s “icy hands as cold as iron” (69). The protagonist’s complexion and disposition in the traditional ghostly sense may symbolically bespeak Chen’s spiritual fragility as a “living ghost”. Finally, Chen’s abrupt death soon after his ghostly encounters seems to mark the completion of his crossing from the yang into the yin.

Having started from Chen’s accidental encounter with the female stranger, the entire experience of the crossing seemed to be driven by Chen’s spontaneous fantasy or wishful thinking about unexpected romance. However, Chen’s friend, who had known him for years, had different opinions about Chen’s pursuit of the woman, whose words uncovered the inevitability of the crossing. While Chen had been wondering about the woman’s identity, the question appeared unimportant for the friend because he believed she was merely one of Chen’s series of delusional figures. He
knew Chen’s obsession with the woman in Hangzhou was not an occasional incident and explained it with reference to Chen’s helpless resentment towards Japanese colonialists in Taiwan. When the friend told the narrator Chen’s early life story, Chen remained silent most of the time in agreement. Although the introductory account was not a direct quotation from the friend, it still discloses his distinctive wording and sufficiently explains his understanding of Chen’s mysterious encounters:

His [Chen’s] family originally came from Fujian Province. His grandfather moved the entire family, which was quite well-off, to Taiwan. However, the Japanese imperialistic occupation in Taiwan deprived Chen of opportunities to study abroad. Although the Chen family’s real estate was worth tens of thousands, their financial power was nevertheless held firmly by the Japanese. A person with an annual income of twenty or thirty thousand was not allowed to spend even half of it outside Japanese territories. Chen took great pains to get himself into a national art school in Tokyo. He graduated with his work not only being admitted to an exhibition but also earning wide admiration among Japanese art lovers. Even so, he still succumbed to the colonialist restrictions imposed on common Taiwan people and felt despondency as one of the conquered. He had no choice but to flee to China, his motherland before the Japanese occupation. Despite staying in the country of freedom, Chen’s spirit and his soul, accustomed to oppression since childhood, had cultivated introversion, timidity, and paranoia. Hence, there was always a sense of suspiciousness and hesitance within him. At the age of 28, he still dared not get married, while chasing after illusions had become his second nature. (63–4)

The patriotic friend attributed Chen’s strange behaviours to his troubled mentality, and he seemed to have grown tired of hearing Chen talk about such things:

Hey, Chen, when indeed are you going to wake up from your dreams?... Have you found your dream woman? [You’ve been after her] From Taiwan to Tokyo and now from Tokyo to China. Are you still continuing dreaming the old dream dating back to your school time at such a beautiful and bright lake? (63)

His remark shows that he felt it was a waste of time for Chen to stay obsessed with the “unreal” woman while not enjoying Hangzhou’s natural scenery. The friend felt that Chen’s strange encounters bore no relevance to the unique cultural environment
of the West Lake. Rather, the unknown woman was a variant of Chen’s daydreams starting from his early years in Taiwan and Tokyo. The friend seemed to believe that Chen had been having a series of delusions because, growing up in the suppressed colonial environment, he had been too timid and introvert to seek happiness in a healthy manner, and his frustration in love and desire understandably drove him to stalk the mesmerising stranger.

After Chen died, the friend contacted the narrator. He asked if the narrator could attend the funeral and take part in a protest in front of the Japanese consulate in Hangzhou, as Chen was commemorated by his acquaintances as “a sacrifice of Japanese imperialist oppression” who died in frustration with life (72). This kind of phrasing marks the completion of the patriotic discourse: Chen once lived a humiliating life under the invasive imperialist regime and died a miserable death as its victim. The friend’s interpretation symbolises the patriotic discourse that summarises individuals’ lives as constituting political victimhood and advocates revolt against the colonialists.

Overall, the friend’s explanation provides a vital reason for Chen’s obsession with the strange woman. It turns out that the nocturnal encounters in Hangzhou were not exceptional in Chen’s personal history. The female ghost might just be the most recent figure that fitted into Chen’s long-held ideal model of the female and thus motivated him. Chen’s past experiences and the spiritual sorrow they imprinted in him render his passionate pursuit of the ghost an inevitable incident and a decision Chen would barely hesitate to make.

1.2 Another perspective: unaccomplished crossing and debunking fantasy

Chen’s pursuit of the woman ceased abruptly and even disappointingly. The relationship between mortal men and female ghosts was a traditional motif of anomalous accounts and has inspired numerous works. The most popular motif was a man and
a female ghost being united for love. Some ghostly romances occurred in established and yet interrupted relationships, such as a couple who resumed their love after one of them had died in the Six Dynasties tales and the Tang tales of the marvellous (Dong S. 163; Bao Z. 176). The Song–Yuan vernacular storytelling subject termed yanfen 煙粉 (an abbreviation of yanhua fendai 煙花粉黛, meaning “mist-like flowers and cosmetic powder”) added the plot of resurrection to the persistent love of couples after one died and described the story as a love miracle (Tang Y. 103–7). At the same time, romances were sparked between strangers. Female ghosts could find men as romantic partners out of spontaneous affection, for example by inviting a man into a roadside lodging for the night, and the man would not realise his hostess’s ghostly identity until next morning (Dong S. 161, 166). The prototype saw new forms based on late Ming and early Qing elite ghostlore (Li Hua 213).

Compared with the above cases, “The Thirteenth Night” does not fully exploit the ghostly romance motif. Its plot elements, such as a beautiful woman appearing on silent nights and smiling at a man, the man’s deteriorating health or sudden death, and a grave temporarily transforming into a splendid old-styled residence, all strongly resonate with ancient Chinese zhiguai accounts of mortal man–female ghost romance. Under the context of a conventional mode, a man’s first encounter with a female ghost can be seen as the start of his crossing process, which develops and is completed after he enters the ghost’s residence and even loses himself, mentally and physically, to her enchantment. However, Chen and the female ghost never interacted directly, let alone developed or consummated a romantic relationship. Even though Chen’s stalking was disturbing and morally questionable, the fact that he saw the female stranger as desirable set up the possibility of a romantic interaction early in the story. This raises the question as to why Chen’s pursuit of his ideal woman stopped at the ghost’s gateway, when he was about to cross spatially into the expanded apparitional space. Moreover, what does this unaccomplished spatial crossing signify?
1.2.1 The political connotation in the interrupted ghostly encounter

A sudden howl put an end to Chen’s pursuit of the woman, when he came to the gate under the inscribed board “Cloud Shrine” and hesitated to knock on the door. According to his retelling, he was unwilling to give up on the visit, but his mood altered abruptly:

Right at the critical moment of hesitation over going forward or letting go, a piercing howl penetrated my ears like a bullet and shook my soul. It sounded like it was bursting from the underground, unable to tell whether it was made by a wounded beast or a miserable person. My hair stood in end. The enduring howl shook the mountains and the valleys. After it died down, there was not a single sound anywhere. The moonlight seemed to be coloured with a layer of bleak whiteness, and chirping bugs fell silent as if stunned by the howl. I shivered violently, and immediately made my way out of the garden by the stone path I just took. (71)

Hearing the spooky howling, Chen lost motivation for the original pursuit. The narrator recalled hearing the same howl that night, which was from some insane prisoner jailed in a nearby temple expropriated by the local military prison (68).

Given the source of the howl, the story at this point takes on a political meaning in terms of China’s domestic situation. The Northern Expedition started in 1926 when the National Revolutionary Army marched northwards from Guangdong Province (Canton), taking provinces under Nationalist control. By 1927, Chiang Kai-shek conducted an intermittent exclusion of communists after taking over Shanghai. The culmination was the purge of communists known as the Shanghai Massacre on 12 April 1927. Arrests and executions took place not only in Shanghai but also in many cities of Sichuan, Guangxi, Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu under KMT’s control (Wilbur 638). An estimated 2,000 suspected communists were arrested or killed by 27 April 1927 (Wilbur 637).
In Hangzhou, the Zhejiang Military Prison (1912–1978) was one of the prisons where KMT jailed communists. During 1927–1937, 1505 political prisoners were incarcerated in that prison, 145 of whom were killed, including regional leaders of CCP such as Zhang Qiuren 張秋人 (1898–1928), Xu Ying 徐英 (1907–1930), Luo Xuezan 羅學瓊 (1894–1930), and Zhuo Lanfang 卓蘭芳 (1900–1930) (Xu and Chen 289). As shown by the years of execution, Xu, Luo, and Zhuo were sacrificed in the “27 August Tragedy” in 1930. However, there is no evidence indicating a solid connection between the fictional howl and what happened in the Zhejiang Military Prison. It is possible but not confirmed that the howl was let out by a jailed communist.

Moreover, Yu Dafu’s activities from the late 1920s to the early 1930s demonstrate his concern with the anti-KMT political struggle and the dangerous situation for communist revolutionaries. In “Suzhu Riben wuchanjieji wenyijie tongzhi” 訴諸日本無產階級文藝界同志 (“To Japanese Comrades of Proletarian Artistic and Literary Field”, 28 April 1927), Yu criticised Chiang Kai-shek as a new militarist who colluded with British imperialists, Japanese capitalists, and other militarists in China, and was thus undoubtedly a toxic enemy of the proletarian (35). In the same year, he articulated the significance of uniting peasants and workers to cultivate a revolutionary force in “Shui shi women de tongbanzhe” 誰是我們的同伴者 (“Who are Our Comrades”, 2 September 1927).

Yu joined Zhongguo jinanhui 中國濟難會 (Hardship Relief Society of China, 1925–1934) in August 1928 (Fang Z. 116). This was an organ of “revolutionized philanthropy” born in Shanghai to help victims of the May 30th movement (S. Ma 103; 112). It aimed to promote proletarian revolution and assist revolutionaries in danger under the guise of an ordinary social charity, although the purpose was not ideally fulfilled (ibid., 112–3). The Society adopted a new name, Zhongguo Geming hujihui 中國革命互濟會 (Revolutionary Mutual Aid Society of China), in 1929 (Yang M. 29). In the Society, Yu edited its literary journal, Baihua 白華 (16 October 1928–25 December 1928), with Qian Xingcun (Aying) (Aying 794–795). On 2 March 1930, Yu
attended the inaugural ceremony of the League of Left-Wing Writers (W. Wong 59).  

Publishing a joint statement in February 1930, Yu co-organised and launched Zhongguo ziyou yundong datongmeng 中國自由運動大同盟 (Freedom Movement League of China, 15 February 1930—February 1931) in Shanghai with Lu Xun, Tian Han 田漢 (1898–1968), Zheng Boqi 鄭伯奇 (1895–1979), and Roushi 柔石 (1902–1931) under the support of the CCP (Xia and Chen 477). The statement asserted that the League fought for the freedom of speech, press, association, and assembly under KMT's rule (Yu D. et al. 291). Yu remained politically active in 1933 and joined Zhongguo minquan baozhang tongmeng 中國民權保障同盟 (The China League of Civil Rights, 29 December 1932–June 1933), whose mission was to provide humanitarian assistance for KMT's political prisoners, rescue jailed communist revolutionaries, and fight for the freedom of speech, press, association, and assembly (Zheng X. 221).

Yu’s political activities substantiate his concern with the hardship and struggle of fellow left-wing revolutionaries’ during the time when he wrote “The Thirteenth Night”. Although it remains unclear whether the fictional howl came from one of KMT’s political prisoners, this interpretation received stronger justification from Yu’s political practices (enumerated above). The political reference cast a gloomy shadow on Chen’s pursuit of the female ghost. If it was not for the sudden disruption, Chen might have continued looking for the woman in the garden. The story delivers a fantasy-debunking message. Chen’s wilful pursuit of his dreamt beauty was interrupted and terminated by a most unexpected plot device, especially for readers who are familiar with traditional ghostly romances and expect to see Chen’s experience continuing on the old familiar path. The termination thus appears ironic, suggesting

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33 According to Yu’s own explanation, he was unsuitable for the League’s style of work, such as distributing flyers and airplane propaganda, which was why he withdrew from the League within one month after its establishment before the other members voted him out (Fang Z. 117; Yu D., Yi Lu Xun 37; Ni M. 163–64). Despite this, Yu continued to help rescue left-wing writers captured by KMT in Shanghai (Yu D., Yi Lu Xun 37).

34 In Yu’s recollection, he worked for the Freedom Movement League of China until Yang Xingfo’s 杨杏佛 murder in 1933 (Yi Lu Xun 39).
that the political and social conditions meant it was no longer appropriate to imitate conventional female ghost tales with a light-hearted and romantic ambiance.

1.2.2 The human-ghost resonance

The other reason why “The Thirteenth Night” did not follow the traditional plot of consummating the man–female ghost relationship is that it may have intended to establish another kind of relationship between Chen and the ghost. I argue that Yang Yunyou’s ghost was Chen’s parallel and mirrors him.

Even if the pursuit led to no concrete interaction between Chen and the woman, the mere presence of the ghost suggests an unarticulated, underlying resonance between the two characters in disposition and destiny, transcending space and time.

Only a few historical materials substantiate her existence. For instance, it is believed that she lived across the reigns of Emperor Wanli (1573–1620) and Emperor Tianqi (1621–1627). *Guoxi xiaozhi* (Brief Notes of Guoxi, 1644, by Yao Li 姚禮) contains information on Yang’s birthplace, alias, and the name of her grave, drawing on Anhui salt merchant Wang Ruqian’s (1577–1655) *Chunxingtang shiji* (The Collection from Chunxingtang, ca. 1773). Wang was a close friend and an important client of Yang’s (Wu and Fu 39–40). Other materials that offer scattered information about Yang and her paintings include Wang Duanshu’s (1621–ca.1680) *Mingyuan shi wei* (Classics of Poetry by Celebrated Ladies, 1667), and Chen Wenshu’s (1771–1843) *Xiling guiyong* (Women’s Poetry from Xiling, ca. 1827).

Her artistic sophistication elevated her as a high-class courtesan. It is claimed that Yang did not have a long life. She was referred to as “nüshi” 女史, which was a
classical and elegant way to refer to a knowledgeable woman. She also became a famous literary figure. Li Yu’s Yizhongyuan 意中緣 (Ideal Love-Matches, ca. 1644–1661) is a drama featuring Yang and her love life with her alleged frequent lover Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636, painter, calligrapher, art theorist, and politician) (“Yang Yunyou san jia Dong Qichang” 楊雲友三嫁董其昌, which translates as “Dong Qichang’s three rounds of courting Yang Yunyou”).

“The Thirteenth Night” fictionalises Yang Yunyou largely based on her limited legends. As well as serving as evidence of the ghost’s identity, “Ming Yang nüshi Yunyou muzhiming” 明楊女士雲友墓誌銘 (“The Epitaph to Ms. Yang Yunyou of the Ming Dynasty”), which the narrator quoted in its entirety, emphasises her character when she was alive.

Even though she lived as a courtesan, Yang had a subdued and demure character. She was famous around Hangzhou’s West Lake area for her excellent skills in poetry, painting, and calligraphy, not as a social butterfly. She harboured a deep filial piety for her widowed mother and seemed to have no other patrilineal family members to rely on. She held a reserved attitude towards clients, while her mother took care of her social affairs. It could be difficult to meet Yang, unless you were one of her celebrity clients such as Dong Qichang and Huang Ruheng 黃汝亨 (1558–1626, official, calligrapher, and literary writer) (Yu, “Shisan ye” 73).

In her huge and lavishly decorated pleasure boat named Untied Garden (buxi yuan 不繫園), artists, intellectuals, other elite courtesans, and high-rank monks entertained themselves with drinks and poetry all day long. Yang joined her guests in a moderate and refined manner, performing calligraphy, landscape drawing, or

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35 For example, Chen Wenshu’s 陳文述 (1771–1843) Xihu san nüshi zhuangji 西湖三女詩傳記 (Biographies of Three Intelligent Ladies of the West Lake, date of publication unknown) collects materials about Yang Yunyou. Another late Ming courtesan Wang Wei 王微 (ca. 1600–ca. 1647) was also called “nüshi” by her contemporaries (Ko 80).
36 See “Buxi yuan” in Lu Yitian’s 陸以湉 (1802–1865) Lenglu zashi 冷廬雜志 (Miscellaneous Ideas from Cold Cottage, date of publication unknown).
Chinese zither for them. In general, Yang surrounded herself with a constellation of people of sophisticated tastes and refused to live subserviently as ordinary courtesans did. Out of respect, her guests did not flirt with her. They empathised with her, for she occasionally betrayed melancholy and self-pitying sentiments. After Yang died, her friend and client Wang Ranming and others held her funeral beside the Zhiguo Temple 智果寺, which was at the foot of Mount Geling and close to the West Lake. They named her grave’s pavilion “Yunkan” 雲龕 (Cloud shrine). The final rhymed paragraph of Yang’s epitaph reflected mournfully on her personality and fate:

A fragrant flower does not choose a location in which to grow. People of similar dispositions always find and resonate with each other, and one’s body and heart should always remain in harmony. As our dainty yet unfortunate lady, Yunyou had to step into and tolerate filth. She blossomed like the ephemeral epiphyllum and faded away. Her death is as equally heart-breaking to us as jade being smashed or herbs being wasted as firewood. (73)

In “The Thirteenth Night”, the presence of Yang’s apparition must be interpreted along with the late Ming courtesan culture and images. For Ming dynasty literati, courtesans symbolised “freedom, self-creation, the possibility of heroic action, and the embodiment of elite cultural ideals” (Ropp 19). Following the Manchu conquest of Ming, the once light-hearted courtesan culture began to acquire a mournful hue, representing the lost time of elegant and carefree enjoyment (ibid.). Male literati from the late Ming to the mid-Qing era tended to identify themselves with the idealised courtesan image, especially when they felt politically vulnerable and hopeless in the face of Qing’s cultural control (ibid.). The literati’s identification with courtesans was based on their experiences sacrificing their treasured self-esteem and defiling their purity by living shamefully under a superior power (ibid., 27).

Chen’s milieu resembles that of the late Ming–early Qing Han literati, whose ethnic and individual identity and esteem were at stake. Hence, it is possible that Yang’s ghost in “The Thirteenth Night” was meant to echo Chen’s struggle. Chen resembled Yang (when living) in social position and spirit. As a young painter, Chen had
exhibited promising talents. His landscape painting left a remarkable impression on the narrator. It was characterised by a gentle yet robust touch, bright and elegant colours, and proficiency in harmoniously capturing nature’s beauty (61). In addition, despite being opposite sexes and living in different eras, Chen and Yang probably experienced a similar awkward separation from certain dependable social institutions, thus losing their sense of security or an acknowledged identity as a social member. Being a courtesan was rarely a vocation accepted by a Confucianism-dominated society or deemed suitable to qualify for ancestral blessings. It was commonly expected that an elite courtesan would aspire to secure a marriage with one of their most well-off and dependable clients, so that they could be “redeemed into respectability” (Ropp 19). Marrying into no family and dying alone, Yang was left outside the “patrilineal, patrilocal structure of the normative Chinese kinship system”, whose lack of family bonds or posthumous worship increased the possibility that she would not rest in peace (Zeitlin, *Heroine* 10-11). Likewise, Chen was a subject of colonialist Japan. Although he inherited Chinese ancestral roots, he never lived as an esteemed, free person in an independent country throughout his childhood and adolescence. His spirit had already been severely damaged as a result of living under suppression and his talents were probably underdeveloped (Chen intended to study art in Europe but had to compromise with the ruling colonialists and went to a Japanese university).

Therefore, the unbridged distance between Chen and Yang’s ghost connotes that their relationship was not about the pursuer and the pursued; rather, the female ghost was Chen’s double and hinted at Chen’s spiritual suffering. Chen’s supernatural encounters in Hangzhou resulted from his tragic and regrettable life. It is thus understandable that his crossing could not receive a traditional and satisfying closure in love and pleasure.
2 Ye Lingfeng’s “Luoyan”: a reverie-dispelling urban ghost story

Ye was exposed to Western aestheticism and decadence. His essays indicate the scale of his reading, which included Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde (Irish poet and playwright of aestheticism, 1854–1900), Robert Louis Stevenson (Scottish Neo-Romanticist, 1850–1894), and Tanizaki Junichiro (1886–1965)—in essence, a mixture of romanticism and aestheticism. Ye translated Théophile Gautier’s (1811–1872, French pioneer of aestheticism) novel *La novela de la momia* (*The Romance of a Mummy*, 1858) into *Munaiyi lianshi* 木乃伊戀史 under the penname Tanhua 曇華 (Xie Z. 11). In the 1920s, Ye’s illustrations and book cover designs earned him the nickname “China’s Beardsley” because of his imitation of the English illustrator’s grotesque and graceful style. This style embodies Beardsley’s aim of achieving an unsettling effect by summoning an illogical and heterogenous vision against the background of an ordinary, familiar setting (Higgins 67). Li Lei (2013) argues that Ye also drew inspiration from Beardsley’s art of eeriness for his fiction (121).

“Luoyan” is a disturbing ghost story presented under a romantic cover. In his foreword to *Lingfeng xiaoshuo ji* 靈鳳小說集 (*Collection of Ye Lingfeng’s Short Stories*, 1931), Ye wrote that “Luoyan”, “Jiulümei” 鳩綠媚 (1928), and “Mojia de shitan” 摩伽的試探 (“The Test for Mojia”, 1928) fused the abnormal and the unscientific with modern contexts, creating a sense of intricacy and dislocation in the psychological states of characters (Ye L., *Lingfeng* n.p.).

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37 Ye’s literary and artistic activities in Shanghai cultivated his taste for exquisite, traditional, and elegant imaginings. Ye Lingfeng (originally named Ye Yunpu 葉蘊璞) was born in Nanjing 南京 in 1904 and spent his childhood in Jiujiang 九江 (Jiangxi Province) and Zhenjiang 鎮江 (Jiangsu Province) (Liang Y. 4). Graduating from the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts (Shanghai meishu zhuankan xuexiao 上海美術專科學校) in 1925, Ye joined the Creation Society and worked as a major editor of its journal, *Hongshui* 洪水 (*Deluge*, 1925–1927). Devoted to reading and introducing European and American literature, Ye (co-)edited *Xiandai Xiaoshuo* 現代小說 (*Modern Fiction*, 1928–1930), a journal showcasing Western literary fields released by Xiandai Publishing Company.
The absorbing story is set in modern Shanghai, luring readers “to a world of make-believe constructed out of the real urban environment of Shanghai” (Lee, *Shanghai* 263). The setting conveys a sense of the loneliness of September: “The bright streetlamps cast their light on the wet, shiny asphalt roads. One or two speeding motorcycles passed by now and then. I watched the reflections of their red backlights wistfully” (Ye L., “Luoyan” 2).

The male protagonist, Feng Ruowei 馮弱葦, was a vernacular “new poetry” writer in his 20s, “a pale green age with melancholy nature and a lonely heart” (ibid.). The story starts with Feng’s nocturnal loitering by a movie theatre for the film *La Dame aux Camélias*. He arrived early and waited outside the theatre in boredom. Suddenly, a quaint horse-drawn carriage appeared from the street corner and caught Feng’s attention. The carriage symbolised superior social class and an exquisite lifestyle:

> The yellow surface was covered in smooth paint, thus having a waxy gloss. Greyish green curtains were hung loosely in front of the stainless window-panes. There were sparse embellishments on the carriage. White bronze ornaments were carefully polished to a dazzling degree. The groom was wearing a solemn black uniform. Everything indicated that it was by no means a carriage picking up random customers on the street but an old family’s private vehicle. (3)

Amazed at the carriage, Feng watched a young lady step out of it. The situation revealed an immediate advantage to Feng—he picked up a handkerchief the lady dropped and seized the opportunity to start a conversation. She told him her name was Luoyan and that she had been raised in a Manchu family. She lost her mother at a very young age. Her father was once a military officer in Hangzhou and moved the family to Shanghai after the 1911 Revolution. Luoyan seemed surprised to learn that Feng was the poet she had long admired. Feng felt shy and honoured at hearing this compliment by a lady on first acquaintance. They shared an interest in *La Dame aux Camélias* and watched the film together.
During the film, Luoyan insisted on Feng coming to her home and meeting her father, whom she claimed to be a hospitable man favouring the company of young literati. Feng found it difficult to reject her persistent invitation yet could not help feeling somewhat strange. Sitting in expectation and timidity in the carriage with Luoyan, Feng felt like he was dreaming. As time passed, Feng had no idea of his whereabouts in Shanghai and eventually found himself within a large residence constructed in a half-traditional, half-Western architectural style. Luoyan led him to her father’s study. The host and the guest then exchanged ideas about traditional poetry. When Feng expressed his wish to leave, the old gentleman refused to let him go in a polite but weird manner.

In her father’s momentary absence, Luoyan wore an increasingly sad expression and seemed to have made up her mind. In tears, she hurried Feng out of the house and through the labyrinthian garden until they reached a low wall. Luoyan admitted to Feng that the old man was not her father but had been forcing her to bring him young men as prey. She thrust a banknote into his hands and hastened him to jump out and hire a rickshaw. Feng went alone and successfully made his way back home. To obtain some change to pay the rickshaw puller, he turned to a nearby cigarette store. However, the store owner rejected the note, because it was the kind of fake banknote that Chinese people offered dead people in burning rituals. There are two possible explanations for the money. Either Luo, in urgency, forgot her money was the underworld currency that would not work in Shanghai or she did not know she was dead. Whichever the case, the protagonist finally realised in horror that Luo was a ghost and that he himself had almost fallen victim to a probably fatal trap.

A few researchers have examined the historical and quaint plot components surrounding the ghosts. For instance, Jessica Imbach (2017) explores the implication of the Southern Song poet Lu You’s 陸游 (1125–1210) poem recited by the male ghost. The lines had a strong patriotic hue, and Imbach notes that these echo nationalist sentiments that were harboured by modern literati like Feng. She identified the
patriotic poem as indicating the semi-colonialist complexity in Feng’s modern life—he had ambivalent attitudes towards the Western culture that placed him into a semi-colonial society yet provided him with mesmerising cultural products such as movie-going (Imbach, “Not Afraid” 82). However, it may be a little far-fetched to conclude this, because Feng and the male ghost did not seem to share a political stance and it appears arbitrary to impose the ghost’s sentiment onto Feng. Yu Jing (2015) interprets Luoyan’s horse carriage and her home as symbolising the deserted dynastic culture of China (125). Zhang Juan (2013) holds that the carriage symbolises the old-fashioned temperament and taste of the gentry class (143). Sean Macdonald (2002) views the depictions of Luoyan’s horse-drawn carriage and her father’s residence as images alluding to “Old Shanghai” in the corner of modernity (109). He misunderstands 紙洋錢 (literally “paper Western money”) in the plot as a type of outdated banknote, although he somehow still realises that “Luoyan” is a ghost story.

To account for the ghosts’ disturbing and incongruous existence in modern Shanghai, researchers read “Luoyan” as an allegory of the discontent of moderners. Jessica Imbach (2017) notes the short story’s ambiguity towards traditional culture. On the one hand, traditional culture retained all its beauty; while on the other, it bred something unknown and threatening to the modern human (82). Yu Jing (2015) observes that the terrified protagonist might represent modern people’s ambiguous feelings for the traditional culture, which were an awkward mix of half longing and half resisting (125). The protagonist’s brief adventure serves as a metaphor for the spiritual homelessness of individuals caught between modernity and tradition (ibid., 126). Zhang Juan (2013) argues that the ghostly encounter symbolises the longing for the disappearing temperament of traditional literati (143). However, nostalgia was tinged by ambiguity and alertness. Zhu Shoutong (2002) reads “Luoyan” as an allegory of urban dwellers’ homelessness (182), contending that it writes about the frustration of a fatigued urban man’s dream for a spiritual shelter (ibid.). The female ghost and her residence represent an exquisite space of traditional culture and memory, where modern urban dwellers cast a wistful and nostalgic look backwards.
(ibid.). However, Luoyan and her “father’s” trap under the romantic camouflage implies that the beautiful tradition that exists in modern people’s fantasy has already been polluted by modern civilisation, leaving them with nowhere to retreat and nowhere to project their nostalgia (ibid.). Although the human-ghost encounter was not a genuine romance, Tan Weiyi (1998) thinks the encounter conveys a longing for fantasised romance and spiritual resonance (189–190).

A number of researchers address the connection between “Luoyan” and Western or traditional Chinese literature. Yang Yi (2013) and Liang Yong (1995) consider “Luoyan” a representative work that marks Ye as a Neo-romanticist and lyrical writer (Yang Yi 163; Liang Y. 9). Zheng Zhengheng (2010) recognises Edgar Allan Poe’s influence on Ye in “Luoyan” (225). Macdonald observes that “Luoyan” serves as an example of Ye’s “delight in borrowing from traditional narratives, producing polished short stories filled with lyrical motifs” (107). He thinks that Ye is probably satirising the Mandarin-Duck-and-Butterfly-style of vernacular fiction writing, commenting on Western sentimentality and targeting contemporary nationalist politics (Macdonald 111). However, his ideas appear confused due to a lack of elaboration.

“Luoyan” has also attracted thoughts on sexuality, even though the story describes a fake romance. Stefania Stafutti (2019) briefly discusses how “Luoyan” approaches the boundary between “acceptable sexual impulses” and the “unspeakable drives” of homosexuality (241). In Stafutti’s understanding, the “father” ghost exhibited a sexual appetite for his male prey.

Overall, researchers attribute the male protagonist’s crossing into the ghosts’ residence as an allegory of modern men’s dissatisfaction with the present and their unfulfilled desire to find comfort from the past. Their analyses refer to the past or tradition as a general, abstract notion represented by the anachronistic plot components. Also, tradition and modernity are in opposition to each other. While remaining aware of these existing readings, I sought to understand why the crossing in “Luoyan” turned out to be a terrifying experience for the protagonist. Instead of drawing
on the obscure and fuzzy notion “tradition”, I uncover the short story’s substantial traces of identifiable history rather close to Ye Lingfeng’s time.

2.1 Ghosts and the ironic breaking of romance and fantasy

“Luoyan” lures its protagonist and the reader into the expectation of a promising romantic adventure and wish fulfilment. The male protagonist’s identity and his surprising encounter with the young lady demonstrate the short story’s similarity to traditional “talent-beauty” romances.

Feng and Luo are typical “talent” and “beauty” characters. The “talent-beauty” mode consists of “physical beauty, literary talent, virtue [reflected in the girl’s refusal of pre-marital sex], and career success” (M. Li 4). In their dialogues, Feng revealed that he published New poetry in newspapers and had acquired a reputation. Luoyan came from a socially superior and wealthy background. She had undeniable beauty from head to toe—following Feng’s gaze, one saw “a fair hand”, then “a delicate foot” and a pair of captivating limpid eyes (Ye L., “Luoyan” 3).

Feng and Luoyan appear to have a good chance of falling in love, which would appear pleasantly dramatic because they had just become acquainted with each other in a public space. This plot reminds the reader of the equally dramatic general plot of “talent-beauty” romances: a scholar and a beauty, or several beauties, falling in love, usually through an informal acquaintance in private gardens or temples (M. Li 7). The “talent-beauty” mode usually ends with wish-fulfilment from a male perspective. A talented man’s encounter and love union with an elegant, sensitive, and virtuous woman of high class were widely celebrated as a perfect match with celestial support (tianzuozhihe 天作之合) (ibid., 17). However, marriage had to be under the condition of the young man’s ensured career success (ibid., 7). Marriage, in the end, is the prize for the talented male protagonist, sanctioned and blessed by the girl’s parents or the emperor hosting the examination (ibid., 21). Although the civil
service examination had passed into history in the time of “Luoyan”, Feng’s publication of poetry served as a new way for him to demonstrate his value to society.

Additionally, the two characters’ names are carefully designed as a perfect match. The name “Luoyan” literally means wild geese are falling from the sky. It is traditionally used to emphasise the supreme beauty of a woman. At the same time, the protagonist’s name, Ruowei, means “tender reeds”. The names thus create a poetic picture in harmony with the autumn. Wild geese in migration, reeds, and autumn construct a classical, lyrical scene together in both literature and art, such as Liu Yuxi’s (772–842) poem “Wan bo Niuzhu” 晚泊牛渚 (“Evening Mooring at Niuzhu”), Li Zhong’s 李中 (920–74) poem “Bo qiu pu” 泊秋浦 (“Autumn Mooring”), Qiu Jin’s 秋瑾 (1875–1907) poem “Qiu yan” 秋雁 (“Autumn Geese”), and traditional paintings such as “Lu yan tu” 蘆雁圖 (“Painting of Reeds and Wild Geese”) (Chai 365–67).

Feng and Luoyan’s congeniality quickly drew them closer together. Both adored reading Lin Shu’s 林紓 (1852–1924) (Lenghongsheng 冷紅生) translation of La Dame aux Camélias, entitled Bali chahuanü yishi 巴黎茶花女遺事 (Past Story of Camellia of Paris, 1899). “Luoyan’s” reference to La Dame aux Camélias boosts the sense of romance and sentimentality. The novel abandoned the traditional chapter-session style and was appreciated as a “true creator of the Chinese Revolution” (Guarde-Paz 77). More importantly, Lin’s translation promoted Western romantic sentiment. The novel was the harbinger of the modern transformations of Chinese literary romance (Chen Y. 1). La Dame aux Camélias concretised that which Chinese people at the turn of the 19th century were unfamiliar with, namely free love as a supreme pursuit of life and the expression of love freed from the shackles of

38 Its origin is the idiom “chen yu luoyan 沈魚落雁”, literally meaning that a woman is so mesmerisingly beautiful that fish sink to the bottom of the water and wild geese fall from the sky upon seeing her beauty.

39 Chen Yu makes a meticulous and comprehensive introduction to the Chinese translation, adaptation, and imitation of La Dame aux Camélias in Qing zhi shanbian 情之嬗變 (The Transformation of Emotion, 2015).
Confucian propriety (Chen Y. 9, 12). An anecdote attached to the translation was that Lin and his assistant translator, Wang Shouchang 王壽昌, were deeply moved and overcome by tears during their translation (Chow 121). La Dame aux Camélias was a novel that opposed the “emotional restraint and control that are central to classic Chinese aesthetics”, especially the rejection of men’s tears, as the novel centres around its male protagonist’s intense emotions (ibid.). Since Lin’s translation, La Dame aux Camélias also served as early twentieth-century youths’ “guide to romantic behaviours” (Chen Y. 3).40

The love story in Camélias was probably what Feng in “Luoyan” was expecting. In his translation, Lin Shu omits Dumas’s descriptions of Marguerite’s luxurious and obscene lifestyle but presents Marguerite as lovingly dedicated to Armand since their first meeting, which contradicts Dumas’s original portrayal of her (Chen Y. 60). Marguerite in Lin’s translation appears to be a poor girl subjected to the fate of a courtesan; yet she is still respectable and pure because she remains faithful to true love. The quality of faithfulness that Lin attached to Marguerite in translation is not in “sexual purity” (xingzhen 性貞) but in “emotional purity” (qingzhen 情貞) (ibid., 70). Marguerite’s sexual relationship with other clients did not prevent Lin Shu from applauding her purity and loyalty, because what Lin valued and upheld was the woman’s exclusive and sincere love for Armand (ibid.).

Presumably, Feng was touched by Marguerite’s devoted love for Armand and dreamt about something similar for himself. Feng and Luo had an extremely short conversation about Marguerite and Armand’s tragic love:

Luoyan: “The translation is good enough to depict what a devoted girl Marguerite was. I just don’t understand why she had such an awkward character and had to treat Armand like that”.

Feng: “It is understandable why she behaved that way. Marguerite had been a courtesan for years with a lecherous nature. So, her love was distorted. That is just her way of love; if it were a well-raised maiden from a noble family who fell in love with Armand, then it would surely…” (5)

Feng’s affection for Luoyan is obvious. He was clearly expecting romance from a lady with a devoted heart and a pure body, and there might never have been a moment when Feng came so close to his dream as now. Ideally, Luoyan would love him as passionately as Marguerite loved Armand but without the sad and destructive elements.

Apart from their common interest in Camélias, Feng gladly found that the lady enjoyed classical and modern literature and had been his devoted reader. Their resonance in literature satisfied Feng and kindled some hope within him for a deeper relationship. In Feng’s recollection of the encounter, he wrote, “As we chatted outside the theatre, more people arrived to see the film. I did not even get a moment to think back on our conversation” (6). This implies that Feng was enjoying his brief time with Luoyan before the film started, which might feel like a condensed, beautiful experience worthy of repeated savouring and contemplation. It also suggests that their interaction felt so engaging that Feng might be hoping time would pass not too fast, so that he could stretch out this rare, enjoyable moment. However, the encounter was too good to be true for Feng. He appeared at the beginning of the story as a lonely man wandering outside the empty theatre, picking a film about a tragic romance probably because the hero’s lovelorn mood resonated with his mundane life. In the next moment, he then made the most surprising and blissful acquaintance with a gorgeous lady, who not only had an admirable familial background but was also a big fan of his poetry.
Despite the romantic signs and development, the story betrays a gothic ambiance at the beginning as if foreshadowing the upcoming spookiness. Upon Feng’s early arrival at the theatre:

The lights in the ticket booth were not yet on; there were only a few coloured posters and portraits of film stars standing silently in the empty hall, casting pitch dark shadows; there was no liveliness at all, and the theatre resembled a modern sacrificial hall or a monastery. (1–2)

Later that night, Luoyan’s residence also had a gothic style. The woody garden and the spacious houses with verandahs disoriented Feng. All he could see was a lone light shining from a window in the expansive darkness and stillness of the middle of the night, which slightly disconcerted him. Despite his excitement, Feng was slightly dubious as to whether his unbelievable amazing encounter with Luoyan would lead him to anything but misfortune. Luoyan’s enthusiastic invitation and her father’s unnatural hospitality bothered him. Their attitudes struck a discordant note with the “talent–beauty” convention, where the lady should be demure and her parents difficult to please.

Near the end, as Luo explained the truth to Feng in fragments, it became clear that the dreamy encounter was a devised trap. The initially promising romance gave way to the real purpose, which is that the male ghost regularly craved young men on a sexual basis. The obscurity in Luoyan’s explanation makes Feng’s situation at the time more terrifying. Did the male ghost prefer any particular, sensitive parts of a male body? Would he eventually kill his prey? The unarticulated seems the most frightening because it always triggers the imagination.

Feng’s escape was a mixture of terror and horror. The end of the story creates an uncanny sense, as the protagonist was profoundly disoriented and bewildered. His ghostly experience had crossed the scientific outlook that most modern urban dwellers took for granted. Unlike ordinary criminals and outlaws, the “father” ghost could escape any police, forensic, and legal systems. His crime could barely be
detected as he preyed on the city. From the protagonist’s viewpoint, the urban landscape of Shanghai abruptly transformed from mundane materialistic modernity to an uncanny space. The sense of horror comes from modernisation’s failure to integrate these incongruous and unaccountable parts. Feng might be the only one who was vigilant against the ghost predator, while other people had difficulty even acknowledging the supernatural beings, let alone protecting themselves from the ghosts, unless they saw the situation with their own eyes. Meanwhile, the protagonist would have to reflect on his naivety at believing in sincere love between just-met strangers and his wilful admiration of superficial beauty and superiority. Feng probably learned the lesson that reality could not really comply with the old “talent–beauty” romances. Overall, the more deeply one becomes obsessed with the elegant romantic encounter at the beginning of the story, the crueller the final truth when it strikes. Unlike “The Thirteenth Night”, “Luoyan” describes a thorough crossing where the protagonist willingly entered the ghosts’ residence and was fortunate enough to escape after realising the true nature of his “romantic encounter”. The next section addresses the following question: is there any particular reason to imagine a dangerous and frightening crossing?

2.2 Ethnic trauma from the recent past

Ghost telling may reflect pasts that have been forgotten and come back to haunt, therefore requiring “due recognition and bidden recall” (Feuchtwang 130). In this section, I argue that “Luoyan” discloses a traumatic history that is incongruous with KMT’s ideology of ethnic harmony and unity.

The line of poetry recited by Luoyan’s “father” contains a strong patriotic sentiment. This is Lu You’s poem titled “Shi Er” (To My Descendants), who was a prominent poet of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), which was grounded in the Han culture and ethnicity. The Jurchen Jin 金 invaded the Northern Song (960–1127) capital, Bianjing 汴京 (today’s Kaifeng 開封), and established its dynasty in
Northern Song’s territory, which was historically termed the “Humiliation during the Jingkang period” (Jingkang chi 靖康恥). The Song preserved its power and settled down on the southern side of the Huai River 淮河.

Lu You is often considered a prominent advocate of Han Chinese patriotism. During his officialdom in the Southern Song army, Lu was eager to fight back and retrieve the lost territory but was only able to spend eight months as a military strategy planner at the Southern Song–Jin border in 1171. The government’s conciliatory approach towards Jin resulted in the abandonment of its plan to wage a revengeful war. It dealt a heavy blow to Lu You, who became overwhelmed with frustration and anger. Lu’s deathbed poem, “To My Descendants”, expressed his final wish:

In death I know well enough all things end in emptiness;  
still I grieve that I never saw the Nine Provinces made one [translator’s note: “The Nine Provinces are the divisions of China in ancient times”, B. Watson 68].  
On the day the king’s armies march north to take the heartland,  
at the family sacrifice don’t forget to let your father know. (ibid.)

死去元知萬事空,  
但悲不見九州同。  
王師北定中原日,  
家祭無忘告乃翁。

This poem expresses Lu You’s regret at not being able to restore the lost lands in his lifetime and his expectation for a reunited state. In “Luoyan”, the “father” ghost recited the last two lines of the poem to express a similar wish to revive his dynasty, Qing.

Moreover, there may be another explanation for the Manchu ghost being so vengeful. The ghost’s surreptitious purpose and entrapment of young men suggest not only the city’s unknown, hideous side but also the dark corners in China’s recent history. The 1911 Revolution largely took a Han-oriented perspective. Apart from the goal of democracy and national reinvigoration, it was also a “racial revolution”
(zhongzu geming 種族革命) launched against the Manchus, who massacred a massive number of Han civilians (Zarrow 96). The 1911 Revolution thus took on a sense of “revenge” (ibid., 94).

The bloody aspect of the 1911 Revolution “has been minimized in nearly all the retrospective accounts” (Rhoads 187). In Wuchang 武昌, revolutionaries were reported to have cried “Slay the Manchu officials and the banner people [qiren 旗人, equivalent to Manchus]” (shalu Manguan qiren 殺戮滿官旗人) on the night of October 10, and the bodies of Manchu civilians were spotted littering streets the next morning (ibid., 188). The Hubei Military Government declared its intention to “elevate the Han and exterminate the Manchus” (xing Han mie Man 興漢滅滿) and wipe out leading Manchu families, following which “a witch hunt for surviving Manchus” in Wuchang ensued (ibid., 188, 189). No less than four to five hundred Manchus were slaughtered from October 10 to 13, with some estimations far higher than this (ibid., 190). Following Wuchang, Xi’an, Taiyuan, Zhenjiang, and Nanjing witnessed the massacres of Manchu soldiers and civilians (ibid., 191–198). In the short story, Luoyan and her “father” were based in Hangzhou during the revolution. According to Shen Jie’s (2019) revisitation of the history of the 1911 Revolution, the Hangzhou “retrieval” (guangfu 光復) which “shed not a single drop of blood” might not be as peaceful as some claimed but rather strove to hide ethnic violence (Shen J., Minguo). Shen re-examines the reason for the death of Guilin 貴林, who was a Red Banner Manchu (zhenghongqi 正紅旗) and the Hangzhou zhufang qiying xieling 杭州駐防旗營協領 (the military official in charge of garrison). The Hangzhou Manchu army signed a peace agreement with the revolutionaries’ temporary government that had taken over the city. According to the official explanation given by the revolutionaries, Guilin broke the peace agreement and conspired to fight back using his secretly stocked ammunition. In the first section of Chapter 7 of Minguo de “shichuan” 民國的「失傳」 (The “Lost” of the Republican Era, 2019), Shen enumerates the elements that render invalid the accusation of Guilin. In the following sections of the chapter,
Shen analyses how Guilin’s execution reflects the way in which the revolutionaries saw the surrendering Manchus as potential perils and suspected them of plotting to revolt or poison revolutionaries. However, it was mere rumours rather than evidence that put the revolutionaries on edge. Meanwhile, ethnic conflicts deteriorated when the revolutionaries robbed the Hangzhou Manchus. It may be impossible to ascertain whether Luoyan’s “father” was the executed officer, but the example above demonstrates the degree of blind violence taking place in Hangzhou and thus supported the ethical, historical interpretation of “Luoyan.”

When “Luoyan” was written and published, the official strategy and ideology of Republican China was to establish a strong modern nation-state of ethnic unity. After the failed Hundred Days’ Reforms (1898), the gap between the Han and Manchus widened as Manchu rulers were blamed for incurring the downfall of the “nation” (Joniak-Lüthi 34). According to Peter Zarrow, anti-Manchuism “erupted in 1902–1903 and perhaps peaked in the 1905–1907 period, remaining strong through the 1911 Revolution” (Zarrow 94). Apart from a few intellectuals who excluded Manchus from the blueprint of a Chinese nation-state, many others, including Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Sun Yat-sen, sought to assimilate Manchus and other non-Han ethnicities into the nation (Schneider 9). In search of a solid national identity, Sun Yat-sen proposed the construction of a nationality uniting five major ethnic groups, namely the Han, the Manchu, the Tibetan, the Mongol, and the Muslim, together as Zhonghua minzu 中华民族 (the Chinese nation) (Joniak-Lüthi 33). The promoted unity of the five peoples can be recognised from the five-colour national flag of the Republic that was used from 1912 to 1928. In Sun’s proposal, the Han formed the “backbone” or core of the nation (ibid., 36). Nationalists were promulgating “one Chinese national sentiment” while consolidating the notion of one “homogenous, united” nation-state outlined by previous Qing borders (ibid., 49).

The challenge “Luoyan” makes to the mainstream ideology of ethnic harmony and nationalist sentiments is clearly identifiable. The family’s Manchurian identity represented the political rule over the Han, and the “father” ghost implicitly
expressed his determination to restore the Manchu dynasty. The ghost still clung to the polarity between the Han Chinese and the non-Han ethnicities and appeared aggressive because he was probably a returning spirit that embodied the Manchu’s trauma a decade earlier. The Republican China was heading towards a unified future and leaving behind a historical darkness that had not received sufficient and proper acknowledgment until the ghost emitted a marginal voice that reminded one of the silenced past. In “Luoyan”, the predator ghost represents Manchus’ painful memories of the revolution which resurfaced in the abnormal form of the supernatural and horror.

3 Conclusion

Yu Dafu’s “The Thirteenth Night” and Ye Lingfeng’s “Luoyan” exemplify the category of crossing into enclosed places inhabited by supernatural beings. They tell stories about the disillusionment of sexual or romantic fantasy through supernatural crossings involving female ghosts. The protagonists are attracted to female strangers and unknowingly approached their residences of yin. These residences belonged to real ghosts and thus undoubtedly supernatural.

They differ from the enclosed houses in Chapter 2, because they are occupied by ghosts, enshrouded by a ghostly atmosphere, and well hidden from ordinary perception. Houses in Chapter 2 resemble ghost houses, but they are more easily visible or locatable, while the protagonists in this chapter only got to the ghost residences when following or led by a ghost. The ghostly presence defies the consensus natural order of the fictional world. Both works explain nothing about the causes of their supernatural happenings, as their narrators are also characters in the plots and have no way to probe the unknown apart from acknowledging its existence. The major difference between the works in this chapter and those in Chapter 2 is that “The Thirteenth Night” and “Luoyan” do not follow their traditional motif of female ghosts. They both dismiss the clichéd plot of a man and a female ghost being
in love. “The Thirteenth Night” inserts historical disturbances into the male protagonist’s pursuit of the ghost, while “Luoyan” intends the initially dreamy encounter to end as a horrific trap. As the expectation for romance turns out to be unsuitable, the traceable historical references in both works lead to an insightful understanding of the social milieu and historical facts. Reading “The Thirteenth Night” and “Luoyan” as a critical reflection of reality and history prevents the works from being seen as inferior to realistic fiction by some intellectuals.

“The Thirteenth Night” features a modern man pursuing a female ghost without knowing that she was the ghost of a Ming courtesan. The supernatural nature of Chen’s encounters was not revealed until the bystanding narrator acquired additional information about the events, whereas Chen never realised that he was after a ghost. “The Thirteenth Night” does not seem to suggest any nostalgic sentiments towards a particular historical period (the Ming) through clarification of the female ghost’s identity. Rather, it attempts to make the reader understand a modern individual’s tragedy by borrowing ancient terms.

There are two coexisting interpretations of Chen’s crossing. First, he had always been embarking on an extended, gradual process of crossing since he first encountered and was mesmerised by the female ghost. Chen’s deteriorating health and increasing facial resemblance to ghosts suggests this. His death soon after signified the completion of his crossing from the yang to the yin. According to his old friend, Chen never escaped from the shadow of growing up and living as a victim of colonialist Japan. Chen’s lifelong timidity and dented self-esteem as a man undermined his ability to look for healthy love, relationships, and happiness and he incurred some kind of mental abnormality. In Hangzhou, Chen’s vision of a (perhaps imaginary) perfect woman found a new embodiment in Yang Yunyou’s ghost, which meant his crossing was destined to happen.

The other understanding is that Chen never completed his spatial crossing because he gave up forcing his way into the ghost’s residence when he was interrupted and
transfixed by an unknown howling echoing in the mountains. From this second perspective, one can see that the short story drew on political and historical references to provide the reason for Chen’s unaccomplished spatial crossing. First, the unknown howling led Chen to dismiss the idea of going into the ghost’s Cloud Shrine, which may imply Yu Dafu’s concern for the political conflicts and bloodshed between the KMT and the CCP. Second, Chen’s failure to come into direct interaction with Yang’s ghost suggests they were not meant to be engaged in romance but as parallels. In both a spiritual and social sense, the unfortunate courtesan Yang Yunyou can be seen as Chen’s double, mirroring the latter’s self-pitying mood and powerless to control his life and fate.

In “Luoyan”, Feng’s thrilling adventure with the beautiful lady he had just met turned out to be a fatal trap set up by the ghosts. The narrator protagonist took a central position in the supernatural experience and the later shock. Feng’s crossing started with his expectation for beautiful romance, as the narrative echoes the traditional mode of “talent-beauty” romance. The further development turned out to be ironic as Feng had a narrow escape and realised the modern city accommodated ghosts who were probably the sacrifices of the 1911 Revolution. “Luoyan” is more disturbing than “The Thirteenth Night”, because its ghosts were hostile, shrewd, targeted innocent urban individuals, and were beyond scientific or technological control and investigation. Feng’s disappointing crossing betrays more information than is provided by its suggested vigilance towards untrustworthy beauty and attraction in the city. The gothic quality and ghost haunting in “Luoyan” point to the repulsive, traumatic ethnic tragedies during the 1911 Revolution that received insufficient attention and acknowledgment.

To conclude, the supernatural crossings in “The Thirteenth Night” and “Luoyan” are dark and nuanced, with their protagonists’ sexual or romantic wishful thinking heavily thwarted and overshadowed by the grave (historical) reality.
Chapter 4 Mental Crossing from Reality to Misperception

As explained in the Introduction, psychic perception refers to a character miraculously obtaining the ability to perceive a supernatural dimension of his or her surroundings, one that usually escapes ordinary people’s perception. It has been difficult to find Republican fictional works that epitomise this category of crossing, except for works that base their plots on it.


What these works have in common is that the characters are probably taking delusions or hallucinations as real supernatural manifestations. They get caught between their current reality, sometimes known as “consensus reality”, and their subjective reality which deviates significantly from what it is actually there. Therefore, their crossing is not about entering an alternative space or world but rather a transition from ordinary perception to supra-normal perception. The supra-normal perception was also the protagonists’ lived experience, as real as the objective reality, even if the experiences were probably delusions or hallucinations. For ordinary people, the protagonists almost lived in another world with ground rules and logic of action changing accordingly. Men with a mental disorder often lost themselves to delusions without realising how it started, which makes their experiences a kind of crossing without any detectable acts. The Shanghai protagonists in “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” were taking a break in the countryside, but both were troubled by disturbing, exclusive visions about demonic women and thus
behaved strangely. Xu Xu’s “Hallucination” portrays a miraculous sunrise witnessed by the characters, whose perceptual ambiguity gave rise to philosophical musings regarding the notion of reality.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the characters’ delirious experiences resulted from their mental crossing should be interpreted seriously as indirect, meaningful messages about the characters’ attitudes towards their reality.

1 “Sorcery” and “Yaksha:” lost in delusions of demonic women

The purpose of this section is to derive a logical and realist explanation for why the male protagonists had their delirious experiences in particular forms. This requires some understanding of the traditional supernatural motif that underlies the short stories.

As representative works of Shi’s prime period of creation, “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” tell similar stories of a neurasthenic man searching for mental ease in the peaceful countryside, away from the pressures of urban life (Schaefer, “Relics” 312). “Sorcery” never clarifies whether the protagonist actually saw a metamorphic female demon or had a series of delusions. Because it keeps the character and the reader wondering if the manifestations were supernatural, “Sorcery” is a short story of the fantastic in Todorov’s terms. The protagonist sustained his narrative throughout his rural experience and after returning to Shanghai. On the train from Shanghai to the suburbs, an old woman sitting opposite him drew his attention by reminding him of a demonic figure in Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio and the conventional witch figure in European folklore. The protagonist conjured up a series of “facts” about the old woman: she had magic that would break if she drank water; she planned to cast a spell on him, put him to sleep, and steal his suitcase; she was eyeing him secretly, and her vile power had already reached him. Although the protagonist intended to take a relaxing rural break, he was now becoming increasingly paranoid. Even
worse, the books he had been reading on witchcraft, psychological distortion, supernatural stories, and foreign literature fuelled his imagination. He imagined the train running past an ancient royal tomb, where the enchanting mummy of a concubine was resurrected. He kept “recognising” the old woman in people, places, and things that were either imagined or real, such as his imaginary mummy, the pouring rain, beside a quiet deep pool in the bamboo grove, his friend’s wife, a cinema goer, a Shanghai barista, and a figure walking in the alley outside his city apartment. He took the persistent “witch” to be a carrier of evil omens. The horror culminated in the moment at which he received a telegram breaking the news that his little daughter had just died elsewhere.

One existing approach to research is to read “Sorcery” against Republican Shanghai’s cultural production. Read in temporal, symbolic logic, the countryside represents the lingering past and the city the ongoing present. This is why William Schaefer (2000) concludes that the anxiety of Shi Zhecun’s protagonist derives from the “uncanny persistence of the past concealed within the everyday life of the present in modern Shanghai” (“Relics” 298; “Kumarajiva” 25-6). The fragments of historical pastiche in “Sorcery” express the critical vision that a history of elsewhere helped construct Shanghai’s cosmopolitan present (349). Schaefer reads the beautiful mummy in “Sorcery” as the reflection of the “popular modernism” blending modern archaeological excavation in Egypt with the circulation of exotic images and motifs (358–360). Likewise, Guo Shiyyong (2006) argues that “Sorcery” describes the protagonist’s “inside reality” and subconscious reality from a perspective imitative of the camera’s changing focus (134–135). Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999) emphasises that the protagonist’s books were the cultural capital that helped create his delusions and did not signify modern sensibility (179).

Another focus of research concerns the subjective reason for the protagonist’s disorientation and ambiguous perception. Wei-Yi Lee (2014) makes sense of “Sorcery” as being about the “malfunction of the ego” and an individual’s “disconnection with reality” (30, 32). Lee argues that the protagonist’s uncanny perception
reflects the suppressed “animism, necrophilia, and misogyny” in his mindset (32). Han Leng (2008) reads “Sorcery” against foreign witch culture. The protagonist experienced an ambivalence: he felt irresistible sexual temptation in front of the women he met or visualised, and yet was haunted by the black horror from the old woman/witch and his desire was never satisfied. Han points out that the protagonist failed to become like the masculine heroes in foreign witch legends, who conquered the luring witches through intercourse (45). Instead, the protagonist exhibits fear at the witches’ sexual power and incompetence in front of women’s magic, implying his anxiety about castration (ibid.). Sean Charles Macdonald (2002) summarises “Sorcery” as being about a modern intellectual’s psycho-sexually troubled leisure time at his friend’s countrysidw residence, which is a site of “erotic desire” and “violent transgression” (184–185). According to Jason McGrath (2001), “Sorcery” exemplifies the protagonist’s loss of “his ability to affix stable symbolic identities to others” (11). He draws on Lacan’s and Žižek’s theory to argue that the protagonist’s ambiguous perception of the witch and the mummy reveals implications of obscenity and perversion (16). Throughout the story, the protagonist fills the reality with his fantasy and projects meaning onto his surroundings (including his daughter’s death). Lydia H. Liu (1995) asserts that Shi Zhecun appropriates the Freudian discourse to “psychologize the fantastic”, where psychoanalysis enables him to represent modern desire, fear, and fate as the internal reality, which functions like the “dream symbolic” (strange, inexplicable imagery in dreams obtaining symbolic meanings) (133, 136, 137). In “Sorcery”, the male protagonist’s sense of distortion and displacement discloses his suppressed desire (ibid., 138, 139).

From a narrative perspective, Shu-mei Shih (2001) remarks that the citing of Le Fanu’s fiction in “Sorcery” implies a resemblance between them. In “Sorcery”, the protagonist’s unconsciousness emerged in the form of the witch, the mummy, and other abnormal visions, as the barrier protecting his conscious, rational ego collapsed (356). Jingyuan Zhang (1992) acknowledges that “Sorcery” is a “self-analytical” text, where “each sentence negates or modifies the previous one, producing accumulations of uncertainty” (114). “Sorcery” can be read as a playful
practice of Todorov’s genre of the fantastic, as the story reaches no plot closure of equilibrium and thus invites nuanced interpretation (ibid., 115).

“Yaksha” relates Shanghai resident Bian Shiming’s encounter with a countryside woman whom he mistook for a yaksha. Yaksha, or yecha in Chinese, is believed to be a kind of ancient Indian demon with outstanding physical strength that feeds on humans’ vital essence, flesh, and blood (X. Li 276). Bian’s friend initially tells the story in a first-person narrative. Bian then takes over as a second-level narrator and tells of his experiences to the first narrator, also in a first-person narrative. Bian went to Hangzhou for his grandmother’s funeral and temporarily resided with a local family. He expected to relax in the pleasant countryside with brooks, bamboo groves, deep ponds, and mountains, reminding one of the classical and lyrical scenery in Chinese art and literature. On one occasion, Bian happened to see a woman dressed all in white sitting in a boat near a local priory he was visiting. From then on, Bian was unable to take his mind off her and kept seeing visions of her in classical paintings and in the local landscape. He felt it exciting and alluring to assume that the woman was a yaksha with the ability to metamorphose and disguise itself in a female shape. One night, Bian followed her into the woods, driven by his crave for a fatal yet romantic interaction. However, when Bian tracked down the woman, he was overcome by fear and strangled her, discovering in horror that the victim was simply a deaf-mute woman. The protagonist’s and the reader’s supernatural suspicion is discarded, which makes “Yaksha” a work of the fantastic-uncanny.

“Yaksha” has received less commentary than “Sorcery” but shares several common interpretive perspectives with the latter. Researchers attribute the protagonist’s delusional perception to the urban culture he was exposed to as a modern city man. Christopher Rosenmeier (2018) identifies it as a modern retelling of a traditional account of anomalies (zhiguai) relating to a man–female demon encounter (32). Guo Shiyong (2006) argues that film culture influenced “Yaksha”, as the narrator’s observation resembles the movements of a camera, and the story’s scenes unfold in close-ups (135–36). William Schaefer (2000) argues that the nostalgic and yet
haunting setting represents the Chinese past. He refers to the protagonist’s perception of the woman in white as “the alteration of light and shadow” and forges a dialogue between the story and modern photography and film (320). The protagonist’s delusional visions partially resulted from modern media’s representation of ghostly/demonic imagery (323). The photographic effect of fragmentation, estrangement, and reproduction inspired Shi Zhecun’s descriptions of obscure, delusional visions as well as the fetishisation of the past (324–31).

The protagonist’s restless and unhealthy inner state also came under the spotlight. Hongbing Zhang (2008) interprets Bian’s encounter with “yaksha” as his articulated pursuit of “a beyond of natural beauty and totalized harmony” while shaking off his “unhomely metropolitan experience” (172). His anxiety emerges from the difficulty or impossibility of realising an ideal state of self-accomplishment, as implied by the (un)intended murder of the country woman (ibid.). Sean Charles Macdonald (2002) contends that “Yaksha” exemplifies Shi Zhecun’s pattern of stories, which is to adopt traditional motifs of the strange/anomalous to ironise his protagonists’ mentality (183). Jason McGrath (2001) compares “Yaksha” with “Sorcery”. He points out that the narrator in “Yaksha” serves as the reader’s frame of reference to make sense of the story. The narrator stands outside the protagonist’s interior monologue and is thus capable of judging the actuality of the protagonist’s encounter with the “yaksha”, introducing a “symbolic order” to the protagonist’s accounts of misapprehensions (23).

Finally, remarks have been made on the commonalities of “Sorcery” and “Yaksha”. Christopher Rosenmeier (2018) suggests that the artistic features of both stories can be boiled down to genre “ambiguity”, as they are hardly identifiable as either psychological realism or ghost stories while navigating the materials of folkloric legends, reality, and fantasy (33). Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999) asserts that Shi Zhecun exhibits both the touch of Chinese accounts of anomalies and that of Edgar Allen Poe-style gothic (Lee, Shanghai 177-78). Leo Lee’s article (2015), a supplement to his original interpretation of Shi Zhecun in Shanghai Modern, identifies Freudian uncanny in
“Yaksha” and “Sorcery” (Lee, “Grotesque” 11). The “uncanny” in Freud has multiple meanings, and Shi’s uncanny style focuses on how traditional Chinese lyrical beauty is subjected to a grotesque atmosphere and ghostly imagery, despite the differences in their specific narrative style (stream of consciousness in “Sorcery” and lyrical prose in “Yaksha”) (ibid.). Lee regards Shi’s grotesqueness as the outburst of mental repression in fantastical or supernatural forms (“Grotesque” 9). William Schaefer (2000) explains why Shi portrays females in both works as demonic: those female figures that the protagonists believe they saw were “shadows” and images, sometimes with no solid objects behind, thus could not be possessed (313). Shi Zhecun satirises his protagonists’ desire for “the stillness of the true, or women fixed in place” by presenting the protagonists’ uncertainty towards their perceived realities (313–314).

Although researchers have given various explanations for the demonic females in “Sorcery” and “Yaksha”, a new perspective has emerged, which is that the demonic female imagery indicates the protagonists’ challenging time with difficult urban women.

1.1 The demonic women in male protagonists’ delusional paranoia

“Sorcery” and “Yaksha” can be defined as tales of terror in Noël Carroll’s terms, namely tales that evoke eerie and terrifying effects by exploring human psychological abnormalities (Carroll 15). In the two works, demonic women constitute the delusions of urban men during their short stay in the countryside.

1.1.1 The traumatic experiences with women in “Sorcery”

Although its narrative never specifies whether the protagonist’s perception is delusional, “Sorcery” tilts towards a non-supernatural reading. First, the entire short story is narrated by the protagonist from a first-person perspective. The narrative excludes other relevant characters’ opinions as to what the protagonist claims to
have experienced. Hence, it is reasonable to maintain a conservative attitude towards the narrative and not view it as representing actual reality. Second, other characters could not see what the protagonist believed to be real, which implies that his mind distorted the reality. For example, at his friend’s countryside home, the protagonist cried out loud about the “witch”, while his friend saw no suspicious figures but only carefully observed the protagonist.

The most significant reason in favour of reading the protagonist’s perception as delusional is the psychological discourse incorporated in “Sorcery”. The protagonist was familiar with “neurasthenia”. When he reflected on the rumour of how witches’ magical hands were able to separate from their limbs and seize people’s souls, he felt he must end his fantasy or he might get neurasthenia (59). He also made self-diagnoses when mentioning “palpitation” from Chinese medicine and “polymatin” (written in English), a Western drug (59). The protagonist persuaded himself to give up reading a book entitled The Romance of Sorcery to kill time on the train, because he wondered if his wild thoughts came from the books he had been reading. His books included several titles on criminal or general psychology: Le Fanu’s strange fiction, Bosi zongjiao shige 波斯宗教詩歌 (Persian Religious Verses), Xingyu fanzui dang’an 性慾犯罪檔案 (A Dossier of Sex Crimes), and Ying shi can zhen 英詩殘珍 (Gems of English Poetry). In the midst of his fantasy, the protagonist also wondered: “She just looks like a completely decrepit old woman now.... A gloomy cloud had descended on my mind just now, and that’s why I made that mistake [of mistaking her for a wicked witch]” (White 60). This reading list betrays the protagonist’s deep interest in religion and witchcraft. The witch-like old lady and the reviving mummy the protagonist perceived later in his exclusive “reality” were probably derived from his reading. He might not have had a serious belief in magic or sorcery, but what he had read about witches and black magic dominated his mind while he was mentally vulnerable. What was brushed aside as superstition and legend in daily life came to the fore for the protagonist and eclipsed his rationality, which generates uncanniness.
At the same time the protagonist knew that his friend had been quietly assessing his mental state. Walking outside with a clearer mind after a nap, the protagonist blamed himself for his previous startling overreaction: “Subconsciously I began to reproach myself. I had been day-dreaming, completely day-dreaming! This would only have happened to someone with weak nerves. I can’t go on suffering from this sort of debility much longer. I have to get treatment …” (ibid., 68). The protagonist’s description of his mental state foretells his unreliability. His subjective perception under the influence of a hyperactive paranoid fantasy creates a supernatural impression yet discourages the reader from understanding everything as he claimed.

The protagonist’s mental condition was unstable, as he switched frequently between normal perception and pathological fantasy. This means that he had been crossing back and forth between the consensus reality and his exclusive, conjured reality. Fantasies and delusions usually came to him as a result of certain triggers. The old woman on the train was the first of these. The protagonist regarded the old woman as the metamorphic “original being” (benti 本體) of a series of demonic women. Other upcoming triggers included the passing natural scenery outside the train window, his friend’s wife, a country girl doing her laundry, a person in black at a Shanghai cinema, a familiar barista, and an old woman disappearing in an alley. Under all these triggers, the protagonist constructed a consistent, complete narrative about being haunted by a demonic woman who magically transformed into seductive and yet poisonous variants that targeted him alone.

From the old woman or the “original being”, the protagonist only sensed danger and repulsion. In his perception, the old woman was in keeping with the grotesque and repulsive appearance of conventional witches: “A most peculiar creature she was too—a decrepit old crone with a hunched back and a face covered with repulsive wrinkles, a flat nose and a mouth permanently twisted and trembling” (ibid., 57). He thought he should confront the old woman by engaging in a “gaze battle” to break her spell: “No, I’m not going to read a book. I’m not going to stand up to reach for my
luggage. I’m just going to sit here and keep a careful eye on you. How about that? I’ve got my sharp, keen eye on you. Just you dare!” (ibid., 60).

In the midst of such agitation, his brief self-consciousness temporarily brought back rationality:

They say that there are some old women with magic powers and at night their hands become detached from their wrists and fly off to wrench the souls from people’s bodies. […] What book had I read that in? […] I’m afraid I may fall victim to a nervous breakdown, palpitations or something… It’s no good, you can’t take any medicine to prevent that kind of disease—just like my life. Polytamin’s no good either, I’ve taken three bottles of the stuff. No, if something is destined to happen, there’s no way it can be avoided. Ha, ha! I seemed to have become a fatalist. […] That’s right, just like when a person is pursued by witchcraft, if fate is out to get you, then no matter what you do it will get you. Witchcraft? Why do I make an analogy with witchcraft? […] I wonder if it’s because I’ve been reading a bit too much about occultism these past few days that it’s beginning to affect my imagination? (ibid., 59)

Having restored a clear logic, the protagonist immediately realised the absurdity in his overreaction: “I nearly made a fool of myself. If I had yelled curses at her or hauled her off to the conductor there would have been an awful scene that I would have had difficulty in explaining” (ibid., 60). The protagonist wavered between his wild fantasy and occasional self-reflection, intermittently realising the absurdity and probable causes of his fantasy without being able to control them.

Following this brief moment of reason, the protagonist continuously fell into fantasies of alluring yet dangerous females. He turned away from the old woman to look at the natural views outside the window. The train passed a green field, and the protagonist felt it looked like a mid-China plain with an unexcavated ancient catacomb underneath. He imagined a concubine mummy awakened by archaeologists:

If this were in the Central Plains, somebody would be excavating it, saying that it was the tomb of the wife of King So-and-so of the Such-and-such dynasty. […] They will find a great stone room with a great stone altar in the middle. And
on the altar will be burning lamps fuelled with human fat... Behind it there will be a huge coffin painted vermilion, and, of course, festooned with gold chains. What else? They will prise open the coffin. Yes, the opening of the coffin will be a dramatic moment. Inside will be lying a mummy tightly wrapped in white silk. The mummy of a beautiful queen of ancient times, with her white silk shroud trailing. Wouldn’t she create a sensation if she walked into the city? [...] People would fall in love with her—more deeply than with a real, live woman. And what if they could only kiss those parted lips with their ghastly coldness and musky odour? I believe they would not wish to touch another living creature again. Oh, I can see it already: a body in white, lying amid the vermillion boards with a golden-yellow chain around it—this is definitely a glittering magical sight. (ibid., 61)

But why such hopeful fantasies? Perhaps the tomb chamber would be pitch dark. Perhaps they would have to chisel through seven heavy stone doors. And from the interior would appear a hideous old hag. [...] But what if the mummy of the beautiful queen was the metamorphosis of this witch? That would be dangerous. Anyone who kissed her would be caught in this magic spell and turned into a chicken, duck or pure-white swan. Well, I don’t suppose it would be too bad being turned into a swan. That reminds me of a sculpture. Isn’t there a swan with its wings wrapped around Leida’s [Leda] knees and its neck stretched out and lying on her thighs? What a surreal bit of titillation! (ibid., 61–2)

By now, desire had emerged in fantasy in the space where death and passion intertwined, represented by the shapeshifting from the old witch to the revived beauty. The textual reference to Leda subject to Zeus in the shape of a swan indicates the protagonist’s desire for an adventure regardless of consequence and beyond ordinary logic. He craved a brief moment of pleasure and satiation even if the pursuit would turn him into something non-human.

The contrast in the colours reflects the conflicting sentiments in the fantasised metamorphosis—while the seductive mummy was surrounded by lively white, red, and golden yellow, the witch lurked beneath the gorgeous surface in deathly black. These colours would reappear later, with white, red, and yellow representing desire and black signifying bad omens. Accordingly, women in white were deemed more attractive than women in black (ibid., 69).
Apart from the women, black became another powerful trigger of the protagonist's paranoid delusion. He rarely missed anything black appearing within his sight which reminded him of the horrendous witch-like old woman ("It's a puff of black cloud.... can an old witch appear in the sky?" ibid.). For example, sitting in Mr. Chen’s living room, the protagonist claimed to see the same old woman standing in the pouring rain outside a bamboo grove. When Mrs. Chen pointed out that he had mistaken a black spot on the windowpane for an old woman, his horror at the “witch” was not extinguished but deepened. Realising that no one else could see the old woman like he did, the protagonist blamed this exclusiveness on the witch's magical conspiracy. According to his distorted analysis, the old woman only manifested to him and then immediately transformed into the black spot of dirt to fool other people, thus ensuring he remained misunderstood by others and segregated.

The inauspicious sign of black sustained its power on the protagonist back in Shanghai. For example, he went to see a film and noticed a paper written in black characters stating that the cinema had no spare seats. He peeped inside the cinema from the doorway and saw that the customer who bought the last ticket was dressed in black. Whoever that customer was, the protagonist believed he saw an old woman: “All old women dressed in black are bad omens! Chacune, chacune! [sic.]” (ibid., 76). Paranoia made the protagonist feel the street was populated by people who were the transformed double of the old witch.

While staying at his friend’s countryside house, the protagonist saw once again a blend of desirable beauty and chilling threat in his friend’s wife, although it is hard to tell whether she was aware of her appeal to him. Ignoble fantasy trapped him again:

I had just got down to eat a tomato that Chen had grown in his garden when I felt a sort of desire for Chen’s wife. There seemed to be no reason for this; it just happened. Now, she could be considered a very attractive woman, with fine, red lips and eyes that seemed to be always smiling. But anyway, I’m not the philandering type. I would never dare ... no, absolutely never ... but today I
couldn’t help looking at her svelte figure clad in that clinging thin silk, her bare arms and low-cut neckline; her lips, to which she had applied lipstick, had a sickly, withered hue in the yellow light. I don’t know if she dressed like this deliberately to allure me. I’ll say it again: I suspect she deliberately dressed like this — of course, I don’t say deliberately to allure me. that’s because there are many women who have tempted men without realising themselves that they are doing so. I felt that the lush, red tomato that I was chewing was actually her crimson lips. I have discovered the sour taste of a secret love. I half-closed my eyes: through the open parts I could see her true smile and movements, while behind the closed parts I abandoned myself to the enjoyment of [fantasizing] the person. (ibid., 72)

The yellow dining room light tinged Mrs. Chen, giving her a withering touch; the imaginary kiss she imprinted on his lips gave him a chill. These sentiments subconsciously deepened the protagonist’s fantasy of the addictive mummy. The sight of Mrs. Chen and the mummy image overlapped, as the protagonist’s sensation was activated by the familiar, mingled red, yellow, and white.

However, the protagonist saw the co-existing “darkness” in her. Mrs. Chen lowered her head and stepped downstairs, abruptly ending their conversation to the protagonist’s dissatisfaction:

At that, all the loathing that I had been suppressing all along bubbled up inside me. Avoiding me like this was, after all, quite rude. That wasn’t a proper way to part after meeting like that. What an ill-mannered woman! [...] I was descending the staircase as I searched for ways to denigrate Chen’s wife even more, when I caught sight of her vanishing into the drawing room holding a big black cat with emerald eyes …. Aha! So she was a witch too! (ibid., 74)

Hence, Mrs. Chen suddenly took on an evil sense and became a poisonous beauty trap. Now, the protagonist’s challenge was not as simple as restraining himself from flirting with a married woman but had “upgraded” to resisting the demonic female charm: “The fear which I had forgotten all about crept back into my heart. How could I have fantasized about us kissing yesterday evening? She is a witch, and probably a transformation of that old woman I saw yesterday” (ibid., 74–5).
What is coherent in the protagonist’s perception is that the women tended to be as subtle as female demons41 in traditional imagination. Chinese demons excelled at bewitching people and making people ill. Mei 魅 (“beguile”) is a common word for animal demons (Berry 66). Likewise, mei 媚 (“enchanting”) overlaps with mei 魅 in that both suggest demons bewilder and deceive humans, but the former contains a sense of sexual seduction (ibid., 67). Another pair of concepts connected with human bewitching are gu 蠱 (“demonic affliction”) and huo 惑 (“delude/beguile”). Gu implies witchcraft practices and poisonous effects on the human body, while huo connotes the state of being disoriented and losing one’s reason or control, thus incurring disasters (ibid., 75).

Both male demons and female demons existed, but they expressed different anxieties.42 Studying the Six Dynasties demon–human sexual relationship, Dong Shuxin (2018) observes that while male demons posed threats to domestic and social order, female demons largely impacted individual men’s health, sense of identity, and masculinity (216–27). Unlike male demons, female demons seduced men not only in domestic space but also in inns, fields, and watersides (ibid., 227). Female demons were only a mischievous addition to men’s pleasure as long as men kept themselves safely away from excessive sex that eventually led to an imbalance of life or even danger (ibid.). If a man loses himself in lust and demonic bewilderment, he will fall victim to female demons’ sexual parasitism, namely “exhaustible men dealing with inexhaustible women” or cai yang bu yin 揿陽補陰 (“to harvest yang in order to replenish yin”) (Huntington, Alien 179; 178). The weakness in mind and will is therefore critical.

41 By “demon”, I am referring to the harmful and metamorphosising yao 妖 or jingguai 精怪 that differ from ghosts in Chinese culture. Karl S. Y. Kao (1985) writes that Yao, guai 怪, and jing 精 all refer to supernatural creatures coming through the transformation of animals or inanimate objects as part of a natural wilderness remote from human civilisation and occasionally beguiling humans, mostly in female form (8).
42 Animal demons shapeshifting into sexual or non-sexual men were far fewer than female demon in Chinese anecdotes (Berry 87–96).
In “Sorcery”, the protagonist seemed to have subjected himself to the “female demon test”. On the one hand, he could not resist the women’s appeal in his vivid fantasy and visions. On the other, he struggled to prevent himself from falling too deeply for their charms. His conflicting attitude towards women created his version of a female demon which was the ugly “witch” who possessed the magical ability to transform herself into beautiful women, including the mummy and Mrs. Chen.

The protagonist’s teasing thoughts about a random young woman also reflect his inner conflict. Sauntering in the countryside, he came to a deep pool in the bamboo grove and spotted a country girl doing her laundry. Her white and red clothing reminded him of a line of poetry: “Do not wash your red clothes, the more you rub it, the paler it becomes” (Xiu xi hong, xi duo hongse qian 休洗紅，洗多紅色淺). This line can be traced to the Jin 晉 dynasty, where it is documented in zaqu geci 雜曲歌辭 (Lyrics of Miscellaneous Songs) of Jinshi 晉詩 (Poetry of the Jin Dynasty).43 Literati in later dynasties, including Li He 李賀 (790–816), Wu Qiuyan 吾邱衍 (1272-1311), Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), and Wang Shizhen 王士貞 (1526-1590) composed poems starting with the above line to express lovelorn sentiments (Cheng Z. 262). For example, Li He’s “Xiu xi hong” reads: “Do not wash your red clothes, the

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43 As a yuefu 楽府 title, “Xiu xi hong” nevertheless does not appear in Guo Maoqian’s 郭茂倩 (1041-1099) Yuefu shiji 楽府詩集 (Collected Songs of the Music Bureau Style, Song) (Wang F. 40). The two “Xiu xi hong” poems, written by the anonymous in the Jin dynasty, sigh over the passing time and the evanescence of life: “Do not wash your red clothes, the more you rub it, the paler it becomes. This piece of treasured clothes has been sewn many times, but its owner still remembers the day on which it was first dyed with red. How long a person’s life span can be? Who was once a young wife is now an old woman” (Xiu xi hong, xi duo hongse dan. Buxi gufengyi, jide chu an qian. Renshou bainian nen jihe, houlai xinfu jin wei po.休洗紅，洗多紅色淡。不惜故縫衣，記得初按茜。人寿百年能几何？后来新妇今为婆。); “Do not wash your red clothes, the more you rub it, the redder the water becomes. The red cloth that was newly dyed has been made into a dress, while the well-worn red cloth has been tucked inside. The colour changing between green and yellow in plants is unpredictable, just as the complicated and transforming secular affairs as you know” (Xiu xi hong, xi duo hongzai shui. Xin hong cai zuo yi, jiu hong fan zuo li. Hui huang zhuang lüwu dingqi, shishi fanfu jun suo zhi.休洗紅，洗多紅在水。新紅裁作衣，舊紅翻作裏。回黃轉綠無定期，世事反復君所知。) (Shen D. 144).
more you rub it, the paler it becomes. We seize the sweet time to stay in love, and we met yesterday at Yin Bridge. When you earn yourself an official title, do come back to me as early as possible. Do not be like a shooting arrow that never comes back” (Xiu xi hong, xi duo hongse qian. Qingqing cheng shaonian, zuori yinqiao jian. Fenghou zao guilai, mozuo xianshang jian休洗紅，洗多紅色淺。卿卿騁少年，昨日殷橋見。封侯早歸來，莫作弦上箭) (Li He 52). Washing red clothes in the first line of the poem exemplifies a conventional poetic technique, xing 興, from Shijing 詩經 (Classic of Poetry, 11–6th century BC), which means to introduce the main topic of the poem with related imagery. In Li He’s poem, the fading red symbolises the loss of a woman’s youth and beauty.

In “Sorcery”, the protagonist enjoyed the scene of the country girl washing her red clothes and thought flippantly:

What would she do if I were to sing it [“Do not wash your red clothes, the more you rub it, the paler it becomes”] to her? No, that would be a bit pedantic; she wouldn’t understand a word. And besides, she wouldn’t realise that I was poking fun at her. (White 71)

Echoing its previous use in the catacomb, the colour red highlights the romantic sense. Presumably, the protagonist was thinking about the line, “Do not wash your red clothes, the more you rub it, the paler it becomes”, because he had a teasing idea that the washing girl had no time to waste and needed to find herself a beau or suitor before her charm faded away. However, the least flippant thought was scared out of him by his sudden vision of the same “witch” disappearing into the grove. The figure in back actually belonged to the laundry girl’s mother.

Throughout the story, the protagonist’s primary fear was that he might succumb to the witch’s conjured charm and be led astray by her in various forms to do something terribly wrong and be cruelly punished. Believing that he had kissed Mrs. Chen as the witch’s disguise, he felt suffocated by this irreversible “wrongdoing” and deserving of “Heaven’s punishment” and even death (ibid., 73). Back in Shanghai, he
shivered at the thought that he was tightly entangled in an “evil fate” and could no longer shake off the haunting witch from the train (ibid., 77). When the waitress served him black bear, he overreacted again as if seeing expansive black silk waving before his eyes, which transformed into numerous old women in black, all stretching their withered hands to strangle him (ibid., 78). The barista’s figure morphed into the imaginary mummy. The protagonist felt a strong desire to kiss her on the lips but sensed the mummy’s coldness. As before, he suddenly became extremely terrified of “falling into the witch’s trap:” “Then she must be a metamorphosis of that witch.... Heavens! Everything’s gone wrong—I’ve fallen into her trap. Why is she smiling so coldly? A sinister smile of triumph! What evil fate has she got in store for me? Am I about to die?” (ibid., 79).

His paranoid delusion demonstrates his severe insecurity around women. He seemed to believe that beautiful women spelled disaster because they all originated from the same metamorphic evil witch. Coincidentally, the final scene of “Sorcery” “sealed” his fear: he received the news from afar about his daughter’s sudden death and simultaneously saw the back view of a black figure resembling the old woman disappearing into an alley. It seems like an abrupt ending but strongly implies that the protagonist finally experienced what he feared: a punishment and curse from the witch he came across on the train and who had haunted him ever since.

1.1.2 Conquering the demonic woman in “Yaksha”

Like “Sorcery”, “Yaksha” initiates a poetical uncanny atmosphere through the protagonist’s insane and paranoid state of mind. The protagonist (Bian) repeatedly saw a suspicious woman, sometimes in reality and sometimes in his mind, which was an experience exclusive to him. The trigger of his delusions was a female stranger whom Bian later identified as a “yaksha”.

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Bian’s crossing from rational thinking to a delusional state of mind began soon after he brushed shoulders with the female stranger. At first, he saw nothing special in her—after all, they had no conversation or interaction at all:

And at that time my mind was as sound as my body so I concluded that she was also just a traveller from elsewhere, most likely a prostitute or some other such tawdry woman. In Shanghai I see countless women like that every day without ever taking the slightest notice. (Rosenmeier, “Yaksha” 90)

To his surprise, on that same day he started to have abnormal visions, the most likely explanation for which was that he craved the stranger so much that the desire undermined his reason: “It defies belief, but this time, from that moment on, a shimmering bright white glimmer danced constantly before my eyes, like a speck of dandruff on my glasses” (ibid.). This quotation foreshadows the fact that Bian’s visual abnormality would build into more concrete imagery regarding his obsession with the woman. Therefore, when Bian recollected that he was “seeing” the woman everywhere, it meant that he was having delusions rather than describing his obsession in metaphorical, sentimental language:

I have seen Tang Yin’s paintings. Behind the trees with falling leaves, one glimpses the corner of a temple, and within it stands that woman in glimmering white. I’ve seen Ni Zan’s paintings where one sees that woman in glimmering white reclining among the bamboo stalks on a hill at dusk. And I’ve seen several paintings in succession, and that beguiling woman can be found in every single one. In the straw huts of the old fishermen, in the pistils of flowers, on high mountains, and even in waterfalls this woman intrudes. I was a bit startled but I blamed this on my own immoral thoughts. I confess that lustful ideas did come to mind with that brief glimpse, for the posture of a woman so languidly leaning against the reed awning of a little boat was more seductive than anything I had ever seen before. Consciously laughing at my folly and reprimanding myself, I made an effort to dispel my wicked thoughts. But as the young servant boy steeped my tea and led me to the water pavilion to admire the reeds from the railing, every reed catkin in view mystically transformed into that woman, swaying gently before me. I despaired at my inability to resist. (ibid., 90–1)
Bian’s memory of the woman must have been embellished. To begin with, she was a commonplace woman. Now, Bian felt that “In Shanghai there had never been a woman who could attract me like this, but here I could barely control myself” (ibid., 91).

Like the women in “Sorcery”, the female stranger in “Yaksha” was believed to have a demonic side. He had read about a fatally seductive demon from a local record:

It said that there was a high mountain covered with trees and that a yaksha had appeared there a century ago. It often appeared at dusk in the guise of a beautiful woman. She would sob or sit alone by the gates of tombs at the foot of the mountain in order to lure in peasants and woodcutters passing by. When this was at its worst, a person would disappear from the nearby village almost every night, and every morning a pile of white bones would be discovered.... nobody dared to say that the yaksha had actually been killed.... (ibid., 92)

For a while, Bian wondered what a yaksha would look like but then became quite sure that what he saw last time was not just a woman in white but the transformed yaksha. Here, Bian seemed to change his memory of the woman again to match his fantasy: “Her face had a sinful air and her eyes had mystic powers. She was surely a yaksha in another form” (ibid., 93). The entire “yaksha” delusional fantasy began with just one spark of inspiration from the written local legend, but quickly grew into the paranoia that made Bian believe he had a high risk of falling prey to the yaksha. Moreover, he became paranoid about other white things, such as the soaring cooking smoke that implied a woman’s profile.

The climax is the nocturnal chase of an ambiguous white figure. The initial white shadow was a hare, but Bian’s curiosity was aroused, for he insisted that what dashed above his head was something else. Soon, he spotted a woman in white standing in the moonlight alone and instantly told himself:

This was the unvanquished yaksha of a century before. It could turn into a woman in a little boat outside Jiaolu priory or a flying bird or a little hare. And
now it had tempted me out here and turned into a woman in white once again.... Where was she going? I would not mind examining the den of a yaksha”. (ibid., 94)

The “yaksha” appealed to Bian with her dramatic blend of love (sex) and death. Bian later admitted that he hoped to see neither a beautiful nor hideous face on the woman, for he was unsure whether he could restrain himself against her seduction or defeat her. He faced a choice between life and death, to flee or to make love, willingly and also forcefully. In his expectation, the pleasure of making love with the “Yaksha” in the present atmosphere was equivalent to the danger of losing his life soon after.

Despite the imaginary risk, Bian continued to fantasise about an unconventional taste:

Even though I was fully aware that just minutes or hours after making love to a yaksha, I would lie with broken limbs as the cruel price for this unnatural love, I wondered what wondrous pleasures I would experience before suffering the brutal punishment. Therefore an absurd desire suddenly burned within me. I wanted to experience the things described in the classical fiction of the supernatural. I wanted to extend the boundaries of human love, to find a natural beauty in an unnatural act. I had truly cast aside all reason. I had fallen in love with this yaksha who seduced me with her graceful steps, always out of reach. (ibid., 95)

Bian pursued the “yaksha” out of abnormal curiosity until he came to a hut where she disappeared. Terror arose in him, and he mustered up his courage. Casting romantic thoughts to the back of his mind, Bian was determined to wield his adventurous and heroic spirit and extinguish the century-old demon (ibid., 96).

Bian’s impulsive murder of the woman was the only highlight of his courage. He even felt a brief sense of achievement: “Was she dead? Has she died? I had apparently strangled a yaksha with the greatest of ease!” (ibid., 97). His assault on the “yaksha” reflects traditional beliefs about female demons. Men should have the will and power
of self-control and decision making. They should take responsibility for their actions. Shu-li Chang (1993) argues that the female monstrosity is men’s creation, for only when men fail to control themselves and lose self-control in sexual seduction emanating from no proper social background could female demons exert evil influences upon them (86). Men’s sexual misconduct was deemed a loss of masculinity and a violation of social decorum (ibid., 88). Nevertheless, men could still fight back and reclaim their sense, even when falling victim to female demons. J. Colleen Berry observes that humans can sometimes tell a camouflaged demon’s true nature through close observation or by killing her (103–4). Bian’s action followed the traditional expectation for men who confront female demons. He appeared more determined and masculine than the protagonist of “Sorcery”.

Unfortunately, Bian soon found out that the “yaksha” was a countrywoman. His realisation of the murder only restored his sense for a short while. While he did feel guilty about it, Bian failed to realise that his awful mental condition had altered his perception and worldview during this time. He was soon overwhelmed by another succession of delusions. Terror and guilt from committing the murder bred further “apparitions”. The dead woman’s “ghost” formed his new nightmare, “manifesting” itself to him as a train conductor, a train passenger, and a shop assistant. The final woman triggering Bian’s mental breakdown was his friend’s cousin who was waiting to meet him in accordance with their previous plan. Bian had never observed his reality as it was.

In “Sorcery” and “Yaksha”, men exhibited similar anxiety while having delusions of demonic women. Their delusions reflect the “affinity/antagonism” of the grotesque, namely the “co-presence of the normative, fully formed, ‘high’ or ideal, and the abnormal, unformed, degenerate, ‘low’ or material” (Harpham 9). Both protagonists were compelled by their fantasies to try some form of taboo romance, easing their controlling reason and even their self-protecting instinct. Their desires emerged on unsuitable occasions, thus remaining unrequited and displaced. Meanwhile, misogyny took effect, and the men were waiting to see whether the enchanting
women’s “true identity and shape” was as ugly and evil as they expected. The men felt like victims, simultaneously exposed to the demonic women’s charms and threatening power. They struggled between resisting female seduction and giving themselves to the “demons”. The protagonist in “Sorcery” spent all his time worrying about some potential punishment looming over his head for the beguiling pleasure he hesitated to take, whereas Bian in “Yaksha” rejected the “demon’s beauty spell” and exterminated her. However, the psychological discourse suggests that Shi Zhecun no longer adheres to the traditional implication that demonic women were to blame for men’s loss of self-control and incurring misfortune. Female demons were internalised in men’s minds.

1.2 Urban male anxiety in Shanghai fiction

This section strives to explain why “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” demonised women. Although the two stories were set in the countryside, the protagonists’ abnormal experiences could not be attributed solely to their short rural stay. Both protagonists came from Shanghai, with traces of the urban lifestyle and mindset left upon them. As stated previously, the protagonist in “Sorcery” was a man of broad reading; Bian in “Yaksha” deployed his experiences in Shanghai to try to understand the female stranger he met in the countryside. Hence, it is reasonable to presume that the men’s delusional paranoia had explanations rooted in their urban lifestyle.

A new relationship between urban men and women explains the status of Shi’s protagonists. Because “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” provide limited clues to their protagonists’ urban lives I turned to Shi Zhecun’s other fictional works and other Shanghai writers’ fiction to grasp the phenomenon. At the end of the 19th-century Europe, the image of fanatic, lecherous, and alluring women targeting men dominated their imagination (Li J. 107). Some portrayals of women as cultivated, gentle creatures gave way to viewing them as embodiments of unbridled innate sexual drive (ibid., 108). Li Jin (2000) observes that Shanghai Neo-Sensationists came
under the influence of European decadence (ibid., 110). For example, Liu Na’ou was a misogynist and Mu Shiying featured misogynists in his fiction, where he compared women to animal predators (cats and snakes) with men as their prey (ibid., 110; 111; 113). Liu’s and Mu’s fiction feature men’s craving for sadomasochist enjoyment (ibid., 125). At the same time, urban women in some of their fiction became femmes fatales embodying materialistic desire, pursuing sex and transient pleasure, and refusing to live up to men’s old-fashioned poetic expectations of women as devoted lovers (Zhu S., Zhongguo 377). There emerged a new female “public persona” or confident subjectivity in making fun of men in public places (Lee, Shanghai 28–29). Men had to get used to new urban women’s vanity, snobbishness, coquetry, and pursuit of fashion (Zhu S., Zhongguo 381).

Male anxiety featured prominently in Mu Shiying’s “Hei xuanfeng” 黑旋風 (“Black Tornado”, 1929) and “Bei dangzuo xiaoqianpin de nanzi” 被當作消遣品的男子 (“The Man Kept as a Plaything”, 1930),44 and Hei Ying’s 黑嬰 “Huilixian” 回力線 (“Hai Alai Scenes”, 1935).45 In “Black Tornado”, a working girl cheated on her worker boyfriend and left him for a richer modern student. In “The Man Kept as a Plaything”, the protagonist took his relationship seriously but later realised that he was the girl’s temporary “plaything” before she got married. In “Hai Alai Scenes”, the protagonist took an interest in a woman while watching the ball match called “hai alai” in a Shanghai stadium. He successfully took her home for the night but felt hurt the next morning—his lover never intended to love him back but slept with him only for money.

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45 See “Huilixian” 回力線 Hai Alai Scenes by Hei Ying,” from Paul Bevan’s “Intoxicating Shanghai”: An Urban Montage Art and Literature in Pictorial Magazines During Shanghai’s Jazz Age (2020, pp. 82–94).
These stories express male anxiety regarding untrustworthy women in the modern city. While men hoped for an innocent relationship and pure romance, the women they fell for placed money, materialist pleasure, and fast food-like entertainment ahead of sincere and lasting love. Men became women's stepping-stones to a more colourful and exciting material life and thus men felt betrayed and belittled. Women's unserious attitude towards relationships and men reflects Georg Simmel's metropolitan cultural tendency to reduce “qualitative values to quantitative terms” (Simmel 104).

Moreover, male anxiety originated from the breakdown of traditional family order. Shanghai gave birth to a large number of free-spirited supposedly "bad" women who refused to submit to stable relationships:

The good woman’s sexuality is defined according to her role in continuing the family line [as daughters, wives, and mothers], with all of its implications for submission to the patriarchy; the evil woman is defined by her sexuality, according to her ability to give, to withhold, and to manipulate the male’s sexual gratification. The good woman preserves the family order, the bad woman disrupts it. (Berry 105)

Sex free from domestic discipline and a familial hierarchy provoked men’s sense of insecurity. For example, in “The Man Kept as a Plaything”, the betrayed and frustrated male protagonist binge read numerous sarcastic articles criticizing modern women’s lifestyles and started to radically assert patriarchy (Mu S. 167).

Shi Zhecun also depicted male anxiety that was fuelled by the consumption culture. In “Ou” 鷗 (“Seagull”, 1936), Lu recognised his long-lost childhood sweetheart Wu in Shanghai, but he also saw her platinum wristwatch and the man accompanying her, who was Lu’s bank colleague. Lu had always felt inferior to his colleague because of his meagre income: “Lu felt himself clumsy and paltry, because he had

never been inside a theatre or watched a movie” (Shi Z., Meiyu 184). Only when he received his monthly paycheque did he feel in the mood to look for some affordable entertainment. However, while dreaming about marrying Wu and taking care of her family store, Lu watched the girl become attached to a man much wealthier than himself. Lu’s dream was shattered at the realisation that money earnt a man advantage in urban romance. Luxurious gifts and frequenting places of recreation spoke more loudly about one’s masculinity than a genuine heart.

Likewise, in Shi Zhecun’s “Zai Bali da xiyuan” 在巴黎大戲院 (“At the Grand Paris Theatre”, 1931), the protagonist felt insecure and worried because it was the woman he dated, rather than him, who paid for their movie tickets to obtain a pair of privileged seats. The protagonist demonstrates the kind of anxiety Slavoj Žižek noted: “The original question of desire is not directly ‘What do I want?’, but ‘What do others want from me? What do they see in me? What am I to others?’” (McGrath 3, qtd. from Žižek 9). He felt uneasy with other moviegoers noticing that his female companion paid for their tickets.

Fiction by Shi Zhecun and other Shanghai writers portray the male anxiety that was likely to underlie “Sorcery” and “Yaksha”. In their delusional fantasies, the demonic women were extraordinarily attractive but would have the men take risks and even pay a price to engage with them. This mode of interaction reflects the deep anxiety of the two urban protagonists. The female demons in their delusion were both the idealisation and demonisation of urban women.

“Sorcery” and “Yaksha” describe the results of men’s anxiety in a different pattern from previous works. As Christopher Rosenmeier (2011) argues, the women in these short stories do not possess typical features of Shanghai femme fatale but were imagined to be so by the male protagonists (“Women”, 54–55). The female figures were the outcome of an irrational male projection that testifies to male anxiety. The protagonists were extremely sensitive and susceptible to any potential manipulation from women, and it appeared vital for them to retrieve a sense of power.

Retreating into the countryside, the two protagonists exhibited different symptoms. The protagonist of “Sorcery” conjured up ancient, exotic females, which probably indicates his urge to break away from the customary urban environment and culture. However, he failed to enjoy his romantic fantasy with anxiety re-emerging. The undermined masculinity of urban men discussed in previous paragraphs is evident in “Sorcery” when the protagonist is sensitive to his disempowerment in front of Mrs. Chen. He does not tolerate the woman making fun of him, even if it was as trivial as teasing him for being a late riser in the morning (74). Then, he noticed Mrs. Chen growing somehow uneasy and felt satisfied with seeing her diminish to a less confident, more feminine, and more taciturn state:

I like seeing women feeling awkward. Their eyes would be moist and they would be red from ears to temples. Their lips moved but for a long time not a sound came out. When at last they did speak they said something quite inappropriate. (ibid.)

The protagonist’s confident, savouring, and downward gaze at the woman implies that the sense of having everything under control and taking a dominant role during his interaction with women was important to his self-esteem.

In “Yaksha”, Bian’s anxiety was harder to detect than the first narrator thought. In the eyes of his friend, Bian used to be a healthy, rational middle-aged man in life and relationships with absolutely no signs of mental disorder (87). However, this is questionable. It is possible that Bian had not been genuinely healthy before he went
to the countryside. In other words, it is not sufficient to assert that his countryside experiences were the only cause of his mental breakdown. First, Bian found the natural scenery extremely pleasant from the beginning, which made the local area a soothing and refreshing place for seclusion (89). Second, Bian was not entangled in his “yaksha” fantasy because the female stranger said or did something to him; rather, his rampant imagination made up all the details about her dress and looks being similar to those of a yaksha (92–93). Also, it is rather dramatic to imply that reading about the ancient yaksha legend from a book would strike him with terror (92). The triggers that Bian believed to be fully responsible for his delusions do not appear overwhelming in themselves. It was Bian who overly dramatised that natural environment and his encounter with the countryside woman; and the book constructed a coherent narrative about how he struggled to resist a yaksha’s seduction and faced the danger of becoming her victim.

Bian’s passionate imagining of demonic female attraction and his extreme aggressiveness in the murder scene indicate that he probably had some weak spot or a complex that was horribly stimulated by the yaksha legend. A complex buried so deep in his heart that not even Bian himself and his friend could notice. Because Bian’s obsession, paranoia, and insanity burst surrounding the female “demon”, his complex could be about traumatic relationships with women. Bian believed that his abnormal vision ignited his sudden passion (90). However, it might be the other way around: it was Bian’s passion, unchannelled rather than spontaneous, that ignited his abnormal vision.

A reasonable assessment to make is that the natural environment exerted an impact on Bian, but probably served a catalytic rather than a decisive function. The environment released the accumulated pressure in Bian’s urban life, set his mind free from ordinary routines, and provided him with a different context that encouraged or tolerated unusual behaviours misaligned with ordinary codes. Therefore, the interaction between Bian and the woman complies not with the game rules of monetary competence but with a more primitive impulse to chase and conquer. In other words,
the “Yaksha-capture” adventure spoke to Bian’s naturally expressed masculinity through the exciting, determined physical pursuit in the woods.

However, it is insufficient to interpret “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” as simply criticising women. The motif of female demons conveyed the implication of “yao you ren xing” 妖由人興 (literally “anomalies arise from people” Huntington, Alien 309). This means that demons were by-products incurred by the human mind (ibid., 290). The ancient logic held that demonic portents were “not independent phenomena” and “occur in nature only when humans abandon their own norms”: human minds and actions were therefore central concerns (ibid., 309).

In “Sorcery” and “Yaksha”, the delusional “demons” caused no less terror and bewilderment than real demons in ancient tales. The diseased men existed in the same space as other people but had already crossed into another reality they unconsciously summoned for themselves. In term of their mental deformation, the protagonists are grotesque figures. In their perception, “the deterministic world, empirically constructed by the rational intellect, disintegrates to be replaced by a magical one shaped by the emotions” (Mc Elroy 4). “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” balance well the protagonists’ ludicrous behaviours and the fearsome, disturbing sense frequently detected in numerous other grotesque practices. While the protagonists caused serious troubles and confusion for other people and society, their melodramatic romantic delusions made them look like wilful fools indulging in fantasies. Their mental crossing was derived from urban life and might also be a radical demonstration of “determin[ing] the form of life from within” (Simmel 105).

The two short stories cast doubt on the rationality of the protagonists. Both men were aware of their poor mental stability and attempted to dismiss their delusions of women using their psychological common sense. However, their rationalist approach did not spare them the struggle against delusions. Some part of their mind lay beyond their control, which is an uneasy division because there is a strange Other lurking in the familiar Self.
Xu Xu's preference for mystical and paranormal subject matters gave his 1940s literature a distinctive style that differed from his previous works (Chen X. 72). Already in the 1930s, Xu's literary orientation was influenced by Zhou Zuoren's idea of impractical literature and Zhu Guangqian's idea of keeping literature at an aesthetic distance from reality (ibid., 71–84). These views might have laid the foundation for Xu to expand his imagination beyond mimesis and realistic concerns.

Xu’s educational experience in Paris gave him an interest in French romanticism, which engaged with the sentiments of loneliness, nihilism, and melancholy that were dismissed by the modern indulgence in materialist advancement and the expansion of human will and capacity through technology (Guo Y. 4). The Romanticists’ wild imagination disrupted conventional perceptions and the impression of organised, ordered, and logical reality (ibid., 26). Guo Ying (2016) argues that Xu admired the romantic state of being and indulged in their subjective, creative, and exclusive world of aesthetic ideals (21). Thus, Xu assimilated the romantic style into his fiction to reflect the individual’s spiritual truths and reality by configuring dramatic, unrealistic, oneiric, or mystic worlds (ibid., 23). Prosper Mérimée’s (1803–1870) exotic and

48 Xu Xu was born in 1908 in Cixi 慈溪, Zhejiang Province. He was given the name Xu Chuancong 傳琮 and the courtesy name Boxu 伯訏. In the penname “Xu Xu”, the second “Xu” 許 is sometimes pronounced and marked as “yu”. He obtained a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from Peking University in 1931. Xu Xu undertook the editing work for two journals during his stay in Shanghai (1933–1936), namely Renjian shi 人間世 (This Human World, 1934–1935) and Yuzhou feng 宇宙風 (Cosmic Wind, 1935–1947). He also wrote poetry, essays, and short stories for these journals. Both journals’ “elegant and light-hearted touch” and their entertaining purpose inspired Xu’s writing (Rosenmeier, Margins 63). Xu launched his journal, Tiandi ren 天地人 (Heaven, Earth, and People, 1936), but it only lasted for five months. In 1936, Xu resumed his studies in philosophy at the Université de Paris (1936-1938) but did not complete them.
mystical fiction exerted the deepest influence on Xu’s 1940s fiction in works such as “Hallucination” (Yan J. 305).

In “Hallucination”, the crossing is about how the characters temporarily blend themselves into an ephemeral and magical spectacle of the sunrise. The story begins with the narrator (“I”) climbing a mountain before sunrise. Having reached the top, he met a young monk, Dakong 大空 (literally meaning “great void”) (whose secular name was Molong 墨龍, literally “ink-black dragon”), who was waiting for the sunrise. Later, Dakong’s reaction towards the sunrise impressed him. The narrator saw how Dakong’s complexion underwent subtle and enigmatic changes that were normally impossible to observe from a human face:

Small bumps emerged from his flat forehead, and his cheeks blushed. His cheeks sank a great deal, as if he suddenly aged many years. Suddenly, his eyes shined brightly, moistened, and teared up.... At that moment, he seemed to have glided back to placidity from the excitement, sitting relaxedly. The small bumps on his forehead vanished, and his cheeks plumped up again. (Xu X. 75)

Driven by curiosity, the narrator became desperate to know more about the monk’s experience and mystery. The whole backstory regarding Dakong’s past surfaced in the second and third sections of the short story, switching from the character/narrator’s first-person narrative to a recollecting third-person narrative.

Dakong’s past seemingly falls into the ubiquitous pattern of a privileged man leaving behind his lover who sank into tragedy, alone in her grief. Two decades earlier, Molong had been a student of fine arts. He spent a summer at his aunt’s countryside home and met a young woman named Dimei 地美. Dimei’s companionship brought pleasure and artistic inspiration to Molong, until he found himself perplexed by an obscure desire for her. Originally, Molong thought that if Dimei agreed to pose naked as his model, his artistic blockage would dissolve. However, when he saw her naked, he craved more for her flesh than for the ideal artistic representation he had previously expected. Their sexual relationship ignited Dimei’s hope for a conjugal
bond, but Molong fled from the idea and, eventually, from the countryside in guilt. When he returned to attend his aunt’s funeral some time later, he was told that Dimei had suffered from insanity since his secret departure, and she eventually left with a travelling nun. Allegedly, Dimei set fire to the nunnery and killed herself one night. Hearing about Dimei’s death with deep repentance, Molong gave up his secular life and started to lead a Buddhist life under the name Dakong in the mountain not far from the nunnery Dimei set fire to before committing suicide. In the final section, the narrator does the telling from his subjective perspective, as in section one, and the reader is taken back to the “present” time-space from Dakong’s past. The narrator and Dakong admire the sunrise together. This presents a likely supernatural scene where both characters witness Dimei gradually and divinely come into shape in the sky in serene beauty as part of the rising sun, as if manifesting herself to the men. Dakong said he had always seen her appearing to him in the sky and even communicating with him exclusively. However, after that sunrise, the narrator never had another similar experience.

Researchers have provided an ahistorical interpretation of the short story (He H. 63). Frederik H. Green (2020) suggests that “Hallucination” reflects Bergson’s idea of transforming reality artistically. Green argues that “Xu grapples with Bergson’s concepts of intuition through the use of epiphanies, which evoke spontaneous memories and allow complete immersion in Bergsonian duration” ("Making" 90). The story also suggests a transformation in Xu’s interest: he was no longer obsessed with only configuring exotic space and experiences but put more effort into describing his protagonists’ nostalgic “quests to recapture irretrievably lost love and beauty they had known in bygone days” (Green, Bird Talk n.p.). Christopher Rosenmeier (2018) identifies the piece as one of Xu’s many works written between the end of the Sino-Japanese war and his moving to Hong Kong, the purpose being to discuss ontological human nature rather than ideological propaganda (86). Yuan Jian (2008) argues that “Hallucination” demonstrates Xu’s contemplation of the intrinsic incompleteness of life and its likely remedy, which is religious transcendence as embodied in the divine nature (11). Wu Yiqin (1993) regards “Hallucination” as
giving expression to despairing and nihilist sentiments, reflecting the conflict between Xu's idealism and pessimism (8). The story mourns the vanishing of beautiful humanity, namely the countryside girl’s purity, loyalty, and unsophistication (Wu Y. 21).

Despite these published insights, I feel there is much left to discuss about the crossing. I argue that the crossing in the form of hallucinatory perception epitomises the protagonist’s philosophy of art and wisdom of life.

2.1 The philosophical allegory on the notion of beauty

“Hallucination” might leave the reader with the impression that it is a Buddhist miraculous tale—the country girl, Dimei, was abandoned by her artist lover and took her own life due to insanity; when Molong found out about her tragedy, he gave up all secular life to lead a meditative one in the mountains and found redemption and peace. However, the short story takes on no Buddhist didacticism.

Dakong deviated from ordinary monks. Upon their initial encounter, the narrator noticed that there was always a smile in the monk’s eyes, and he looked like a person adept at having fun while lacking the touch of indifference or transcendence (73). The monk gave the narrator an impression of being light-hearted, dashing charming, and even flippant (“fengliu xiaosa” 風流瀟灑) (ibid.).

Moreover, “Hallucination” delivers no doctrines of self-devotion to the Buddha or karmic retribution. Also, it ends with an unsolved question regarding the (supernatural) nature of Dimei’s manifestation. The narrator left the mountain and Dakong, wondering whether he had really witnessed a supernatural miracle or whether it was only a hallucination that he shared with Dakong. Such uncertainty cannot convince the reader of Buddhist world principles or miracles but leads to a philosophical musing that is discussed in the following section.
“Hallucination” is a philosophical allegory about the perception of beauty. It reflects Molong/Dakong’s transforming interpretation of absolute beauty as he experienced life and death. Before converting to Buddhism, Molong pursued beauty in the form of fine arts. His time spent with Dimei epitomises his earlier aesthetic pursuit.

Molong initially practiced painting in front of natural views. The remote countryside and the damsel constituted a perfect, static bucolic scenery:

The second morning, Molong unfolded his paper on the bridge. The waterwheels were rolling loudly. The golden rippling river was like a shiny brocade. Within his view were four to five waterwheels on the riverside. On the nearest waterwheel, the thicket possessed enigmatic tranquillity. Seen through the waterwheel, a ploughing ox was turning, sometimes disappearing behind the spokes. From within the midst of this enigmatic tranquillity, he [Molong] spotted a girl sitting in the shade of trees. (81)

This depiction is narrated as if describing a painting. In this example, the scenery presents a neat delicacy. Throughout the story, the characters’ interaction is distant from realistic social relations, the political conditions of the post-Sino-Japanese-war, and contemporary economic structures. The intentional erasure of historical milieu brings a sense of atemporality. This characteristic resonates with the abstract concept of eternal and universal beauty, untouched by national or cultural boundaries: “The mysterious and peaceful atmosphere reminds him of the watermills in Dutch paintings” (81).

At this stage in his life, young Molong was fixated on the idea of capturing the empirical world’s beauty with a paintbrush, and Dimei became the primary object of his paintings. Her charm derived more from her sense of naturalness in the rural context than from her adorable face. The narrative repeatedly mentions her natural temperament. The first time Molong saw her, she was lost in relaxed contemplation and unaware of his observation. Agreeing to be Molong’s model, Dimei dressed up a
little, but her sense of a “village girl coming to a photo studio in town for the first time” quickly gave way to her usual sense of belonging to nature: “she sat there, just as if she had grown out of the ground like trees and grass. She was inseparable from nature, as if without Dimei, the lake, the woods, and the grass would not exist in this world” (50). However, the balance in Dimei’s life was shattered by Molong’s bursting desire to possess her beauty.

Molong took a detour before satisfying his desire. At first, he did not realise that his anxiety was caused by sexual desire and was obsessed only with figuring out the perfect representation of Dimei in paintings. Because Molong was unable to maintain an observer’s aesthetic and mental distance from the object (Dimei), he could not concentrate. More importantly, his urge had shifted from admiring beauty to possessing it (Yuan J. 224). Yuan makes negative remarks about Molong’s art that his unfulfilled desire turned painting into an act of fantasy, possession, and restricted natural beauty to artforms (ibid.). Despite Yuan’s comments, the narrative presents a certain positivity in Molong’s passion:

Whenever he went home carrying the painting tools, fatigued and with the setting sun briefly perching on his back; the quacking crow, the croaking frog, the floating cloud, and the brushing breeze all seemed to be coming from Dimei’s body. He used to feel that Dimei was part of nature; now he suddenly felt nature as part of Dimei (51).

[...]
He felt that the deep green woods, the bright blue lake, and the azure sky with floating clouds were in utmost harmony with Dimei’s perfect, strong body. Dimei was like a tree, emerging from the soil, stretching towards the sky, and shading the meadow and the lake (52).

Therefore, one cannot say that Molong’s desire hindered his artistic inspiration. Desire tinged his perception with a poetic, deeper sense of “oneness” between the girl and her surroundings, which could have led to exquisite artwork.
However, Molong did not channel his desire through artistic creation but listened to its cruder, more straightforward side. He raped her. While painting maintained a distance between the painter and his model, desire demanded the physical gap be closed through sex. Only then did Molong realise that sex was not the gate to peaceful harmony; sex exposed how spiritually incomplete and underdeveloped he was:

Compared with the idea that his body had prevented the liberation of his heart, it was truer to say that his heart assisted the liberation of his body. Every beam of light and every image suggested the agitation of life rather than the peacefulness of life. The curving of every line implied impatient seeking rather than serene being. Each vibrating muscle was less a harmonious, self-satisfying organisation than an incomplete, extending agent. (54)

It became clear to Molong that he had wasted his unfulfilled desire on coarse pleasure instead of letting it generate artistic inspiration. His fantasy was extinguished while realistic issues took over. Grounded in a traditional mindset, Dimei dedicated herself to the man who had taken her virginity. Clearly, there was no true love between the two but a cultural bond tying the couple together from the point at which they had sex. Molong’s interest in Dimei diminished rapidly as she displayed an increasingly garrulous and earthly temperament in contrast to her previous composed naivety. Molong’s feeling echoes a recurring theme in Xu Xu’s many love stories, which is a suffering character continuously searching for supplementary comfort from outside (Yuan J. 30-42). The character’s sense of incompleteness impels him to dream about perfect experiences unlikely to exist in reality, whose passion often ends with self-transcendence in mind (ibid.). In “Hallucination”, Molong’s conversion to Buddhism indicates his determination to find spiritual transcendence after his relationship with Dimei terminated in a dead end marked by her suicide.

Living as a monk, Molong, now Dakong, embarked on a meditative exploration of ideal beauty. The culminating scene of Dakong and the narrator’s admiration of the
sunrise represent the former’s philosophical enlightenment. Unlike his younger self, Dakong now felt “Everything that is most beautiful remains in the great void” (67). A possible explanation is that Dimei’s soul had been part of the infinite, a form of existence transcending space and time. The narrator’s description of what he saw in the sunrise was what Dakong had experienced all along in numerous sunrises:

Under the floating verdant shade, mist dissipated layer by layer. There, I saw a meditating figure, whose outline became clearer and bigger. I saw her standing up, toes revealed from beneath the lower hem of the long grey robe. Her hair was like a piece of veil. She started to ascend. Face like a full moon. Black eyes gazing at the ground. Mouth curving with a smile and about to utter some words. Mysterious wisdom perched at the end of her eyebrows. She ascended slowly, finally fading away in the golden glow, as if vanishing behind a golden screen. (69)

In her otherworldly appearance, Dimei was clad in her nunnery robe and with long hair. In other words, Dimei’s early life (signified by the long hair) and her later tragic years (signified by the grey robe) were mingled in the present sublimated form. This detail suggests a temporal heterogeneity or transcendence. The fusion of several periods of Dimei’s life did not exclude her sorrowful years but embraced all of her elegance, pain, and insanity. Therefore, the glorious sunrise represents Dimei’s soothing salvation liberated from hatred or any secular restraints. She became an encompassing, free spirit.

Unlike the secular Dimei, her spirit and beauty were no longer tangible or possessable but a momentary and elusive manifestation. Dakong found his blissful salvation in Dimei’s sunrise because he had adapted to a new, more profound way of interacting with her than their regrettable past. As an art student, Molong focused on translating perceived beauty into paintings; specifically, from live beauty to static two-dimensional imitation and from appreciation to possession.

However, Dakong’s admiration of Dimei was no longer about fixating her image on canvas or possessing her beauty selfishly. He appreciated her beauty in what Henri
Bergson termed a “duration (la durée)”\(^\text{1}\), a concept based on “qualitative multiplicity”. This heightens the succession of heterogeneous states in an observed object, which involves the temporal dimension. (By contrast, quantitative multiplicity can be found in the physical or conceptual juxtaposition of accountable objects.) Duration is about the mobile and undisrupted progress of states of consciousness (Bergson, *Time* 122). Hence, it does not deal with the demarcation between past and present or the fixation of a specific, solitary image: “we express duration in terms of extensity, and succession thus takes the form of a continuous line or a chain” (ibid., 100, 101).

“Hallucination” foregrounds the sense of mobility in Dimei’s sunrise scene. The narrative’s impressive lyrical touch conveys the natural beauty in its flow:

That morning, in the ever-changing sky, crimson glow pushed white clouds, and white clouds shoved grey clouds. The blue sky turned white. Starlight grew fainter. Red ripples and golden waves were splashing into myriad rays. The sun emerged out of the red tide [...].

Suddenly, I felt as if I were struck by a spell, and all my compassion and depression died down. Gazing at the verdant mountain peak in front of me, without knowing I sat down in the meditation posture.

At that moment, the sun was rising from behind the peak. Gossamers of golden light were flaring along with the green crowns of mountain-top trees, where reflected light was gathering, spreading, and bursting. The light blended with mist that changed into unpredictable shapes, hovering above the trees. (68–69)

Dakong mentioned to the narrator that he always exchanged a few words with Dimei’s apparition in that brief period. The sunrise was more than a mesmerising visual experience. It was a condensed and mindful moment that was intense enough to initiate Dakong’s facial changes. Although his reunion with Dimei in the sunrise was always short, it was a more comprehensive and powerful way of admiring beauty than paintings. It was a flowing, elusive moment as flexible and dynamic as Bergson’s “duration”, whereas paintings only capture one side of the metamorphosing process.
The other significant factor in the miraculous perception is becoming immersed in the beautiful moment. Absolute beauty should be approached in a fashion that is already answered by Bergson’s “absolute” knowledge (Bergson, Introduction 1). This refers to getting to know something by entering it rather than by symbols or external points of view (ibid.). Even in their time past, Molong felt the urge to “enter” Dimei, but he only knew the physical way of doing this (sex). Now, as a monk, he united with Dimei spiritually and completely. The narrator’s experience explains the state as he was suddenly able to perceive what Dakong had perceived all that time as if being admitted into the miraculous dimension of perception. At that moment, his hallucinatory vision of Dimei occupied his mind, temporarily depriving him of any sense of time and space. When the vision vanished, the narrator returned to his normal perception:

Suddenly, I saw the sun, and my eyes could not open in its brightness. I came to realise my original world as if just awakening from a dream [...]. Just then, I noticed the monk beside me [...]. He seemed to have been next to me by coincidence, as if we had just met on the mountain top rather than spent last night together. (69)

This feeling demonstrates that the narrator was so absorbed into the miraculous vision that he felt disoriented.

Like before, Dakong underwent a subtle facial transformation during the sunrise, which indicates that he was concentrating on this intimate and intense moment. Plunging himself into the ungraspable changing beauty embodied by the apparitional Dimei was his new way of appreciating the greatest beauty. Even if only for a brief moment, Dakong made the crossing from calmed, ordinary perception to the intense, overwhelmingly mesmerising vision. Dakong had acquired an elevated aesthetic outlook and probably realised the immaturity of his old-time obsession with capturing beauty via painting. Painting is an attempt to immobilise an object from the perspective of an outside observer. A painting is like a “slice” of fixed images taken out of a
duration of experience; in Bergson’s phrase, “frozen memory of the duration” (Introduction 22). By contrast, Dakong gave up the “slices” of beauty and had immersed himself in the live, ineffable beauty in its becoming. He never told the narrator what he had been seeing in the sunrise because the experience could not be represented or orally described in retrospect.

2.2 The narrator’s ambiguous crossing: another philosophical musing

The narrator usually perceived things like most people, but after hearing Molong and Dimei’s past, he finally saw what Dakong had always seen. The narrator’s momentary crossing into the hallucinatory vision shook his worldview. Because he only had the vision once, he became obsessed with determining whether it was a hallucination or a genuine supernatural phenomenon.

At first, the narrator felt sure he had witnessed something marvellous and would love to have believed what he had seen: “Perhaps this is just a hallucination. But why can’t one have it, since it is such a mesmerising one?” (70). If Dimei’s manifestation was real, then he had just been one of the privileged to witness utmost beauty instead of a hallucination serving as mental compensation for the tragic story. The narrator was passionate about the idea that utmost beauty had always existed in the sky/void as the origin of love, belief, genius, and inspiration, despite the difficulty in perceiving this (70).

Therefore, he grew immensely disappointed when he failed to re-experience the vision despite meditating intensely every morning. He started to negate the amazing experience as merely a hallucination because “I cannot believe that it was a miracle [something that truly happened] if I cannot make it happen again” (70). Before he left the mountain, Dakong gave him a scroll of painting and related the anecdote behind it. The painting portrayed an inky-black Chinese dragon. The anecdote was that Dakong’s father had accidentally witnessed a black dragon flying in a thunderstorm
and painted it (70). Dakong added wittily that the dragon might only be his father’s hallucination and that having such hallucinations as an inspiration for painting had been an insignificant skill that ran in the family genes (70). The narrator was upset by Dakong’s explanation.

Concluding the short story, the narrator found a sophisticated answer to his question as to whether his vision of Dimei was real. He realised he had to acknowledge the relativity of reality. Hallucination or not, the sunrise provided him with a real, intense, and touching experience. His feeling of being lifted out of Dimei’s tragic story was real. Therefore, identifying an experience as reality or hallucination depends not on scientific examination but the individual’s subjective perception. The closing paragraph of the story illustrates this:

After I finish the story in this mediocre and coarse language, I almost succumb to the suspicion that my trip to the southern mountain was a hallucination. If someone asserts that this story is nothing but my hallucination, I will acknowledge that this judgment is just as true as the statement that Dakong’s old-day lover and his father’s long are both hallucinations cultivated by their emotions. (70)

In Xu Xu’s collection of stories Huanjue (Hallucination, 1948) published by Yechuang shuwu 夜窗書屋 (Night Window Bookstore), a new sentence was added as the closing remark after the previous paragraph: “Yet, perhaps, reality is a group of people’s shared hallucination, and hallucination is an individual’s reality” (177). This is also true for Dakong, who generated ecstasy and aesthetic wisdom from his daily vision of Dimei. His vision can be nothing other than his exclusive, meaningful, and undeniable reality, regardless of how little sense the occurrence made to other people and the scientific worldview.

3 Conclusion
This chapter discussed delusional or hallucinatory perceptions and mental crossing in “Sorcery”, “Yaksha”, and “Hallucination”. The protagonists crossed from the consensus, objective reality to their new perceived world with scientifically unexplainable components, such as a witch, a demon, a walking mummy, and a divinity. The protagonists experienced a strong sense of displacement and disorientation as they perceived strange or spectacular phenomena. The crossing into abnormal perception testifies to the primacy of an individual’s inner reality over the outside world.

The protagonists in “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” sought a temporary break in the countryside from their urban routines. Their delusional reality had demonic females at the centre. The females reflected both the men’s attraction to women and their misogyny. In fiction, Shi Zhecun and several other Shanghai writers straightforwardly describe men’s sense of insecurity and lack of self-esteem in front of women who were changed by consumerist culture. Those fictional works contemporary to “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” provide a psychological and cultural background to these stories. They also demonstrate that demonic females in “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” correspond with modern men’s impression of women as desirable, uncontrollable, and thorny. I attribute the delusional crossing in “Sorcery” and “Yaksha” to the protagonists’ profound anxiety about masculinity under threat. In other words, male anxiety gave rise to irrationality. “Female demons” concretised the protagonists’ feelings towards women.

In Xu Xu’s “Hallucination”, the crossing played a significant role in demonstrating the protagonist’s transformed idea on the nature of utmost, ideal beauty. When Dakong was studying art, he observed and captured beauty through paintings. However, he did not feel fully connected to beauty as he failed to fixate and preserve what he perceived. As a monk, he meditated on the mountain top and repeatedly had divine visions to immerse his spirit within beauty. Dakong became an “insider” of beauty as he made the most of his perception to appreciate its elusive and intangible nature.
Spiritually, he crossed into it. Moreover, the narrator had the same vision and questioned its nature. He soon realised that even though the vision received no scientific substantiation, it would still constitute a special, concrete reality for those who experienced it.

The three short stories resonate in one theme, namely the relationship between objective reality and delusions/hallucinations. From a scientific perspective, a boundary exists between the two. A scientifically confirmed reality serves as the touchstone to dispel an individual’s “false perception” of their surroundings. However, objective reality cannot shield individuals from terrifying delusions, nor can they deprive an individual of blissful happiness from hallucinations. An individual’s subjective reality may eclipse and matter more than objective reality. Therefore, the protagonists’ mental states remained impervious to outside judgments or criticism and transcended the concern of modernising and rectifying an erroneous supernatural worldview.

In Shi’s short stories, the “demons” are not easy to exorcise through rationality and reason. They are the “side products” of the protagonists’ experiences in modern capitalist culture and construct the protagonists’ undeniable visual reality. Driven by the distorted realities, the protagonists exerted solid and irreversible impacts on their surroundings. Only when the protagonists’ minds altered could their “demons” fade away. As for “Hallucination”, it is pointless to identify whether his sunrise vision was supernatural or hallucinatory. Neither would affect the fact that the monk experienced his meaningful sunrise in an enjoyable way. All three short stories foreground individuals’ internal reality: everyone chooses to live in his/her unique subjective reality, which needs no logical judgments or sanction.
Chapter 5 Crossing to the Netherworld and Social Satire

This chapter pays attention to the third category of crossing, crossing into an alternative world that is remote from the character’s immediate reality. This chapter deals with Zhang Tianyi’s novella Guitu riji 鬼土日記 (Ghostland Diary). *Ghostland Diary* was initially serialized in Youzhi zhoukan 幼稚週刊 (Naïve Weekly) in 1930 and published in 1931 by Shanghai Zhengwu shuju 正午書局 (Midday Book Company).\(^4\) The crossing in this novella is about a person temporarily leaving his body to visit the netherworld and later returning to resume his life as normal. The novella makes it clear from the beginning that a person’s soul leaving its body and descending into the netherworld is achievable in this fictional world. Therefore, *Ghostland Diary* belongs to Todorov’s genre of the marvellous.

*Ghostland Diary* is presented as the protagonist Han Shiqian's 韓世謙 diary written during his stay in the netherworld (Zhang T. 1). Han had learnt the practice of netherworld crossing for some time and finally decided to have a try. There is no detailed information about how Han conducted the crossing other than mentioning that his soul successfully left his body which was kept by a trustworthy friend. Han, in the form of a spirit, then found himself walking in a dark tunnel where his late friend Xiao Zhongne 蕭仲訥 came to welcome him and serve as his temporary guide. Even though it was a world populated by dead people, there were no death-related sentiments or events in the plot. Ghostland was an alternative world evoking Han’s curiosity and worthy of exploration. What happened there would still make sense if the author had claimed the world to be an overseas or extraterrestrial land. The notion of “ghost” in the title and the setting simply adds a satirical tone.

Ghostland is a cultural fantasy. The ghosts look just the same as living people. They have no terrifying or magical features. Ghostland does not contain any particularly otherworldly components, such as supernatural creatures or scenes. It challenges

\(^{4}\) For the purposes of this thesis, I rely on the 1931 copy.
Han’s and the reader’s knowledge with its abnormal social principles and the absurd mindset or behaviours of its residents. Han experienced a strong sense of incompatibility with this exotic environment; for example, every Ghostlander covered up their nose. The Ghostland space was strictly divided into the upper level and the lower level.

Because Xiao, the narrator’s friend, lived on the upper level of Ghostland, Han toured the upper society throughout his visit, sometimes hearing people talking about the Ghostlanders and events of the other level below. Han wrote his experiences down in 45 diary entries, each presenting one or a few aspects of Ghostland society, covering economy, customs, science, education, entertainment, politics, and more. Han did not mention how long he stayed in Ghostland. In the latter half of the diary, Han wrote that the upper society was coming under increasing threat from the revolting lower society while at the same time, the two political parties of Ghostland engaged in fierce conflicts. When the opposition party overthrew the ruling party, Xiao became at risk and had to lead a more low-profile life. Thus, Han came back to the living world.

*Ghostland Diary* has not received much in the way of critical attention, nor has there been any substantive discussion of its crossing. Published studies on Zhang Tianyi and his fiction often overlook this novel or only mention it cursorily. There have been fragmented comments on *Ghostland Diary’s* connection with novels such as Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Li Ruzhen’s 李汝珍 (1763–1830) *Jing-huayuan 鏡花緣 (Flowers in the Mirror, 1828)* and Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s 芥川龍之介 (1892–1927) *Kappa 河童 (1927)* in social satire and fantastical travels (Wan 181-82; Chen. 254). As for satirical realism, Zhang Daming (1981), Nikolai Trofimovich Fedorenko (1985), Chen Shuangyang (1999), Yifeng Sun (2002), and Ren Dongmei

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50 Monographs on Zhang Tianyi’s fiction have no relevant criticism—Takako Kleinert’s *Der eitgenössische Schriftsteller Zhang Tianyi* (1990); C. T. Hsia’s *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (2015); and Shu-ying Tsau’s *Zhang Tianyi’s Fiction* (1976).
(2016) agree that Ghostland Diary depicts a myriad of preposterous social phenomena (Zhang 169; Fedorenko 309-24; Chen 42-9; Sun 138; Ren 91). The novel’s realism consists of a series of impressionistic and fragmented imitations of moments in reality (Sun 106). It appears unsuitable for a strict historical reading due to its jaunty and unbridled imagination and exposure (Sun 108,138). The social issues satirised in Ghostland Diary include cultural struggles sandwiched between the traditional Chinese and the Western bureaucratic capitalism, and internal and international capitalist conflicts. Marston Anderson (1990) states that Ghostland Diary exemplifies Zhang Tianyi’s literary defamiliarisation through its “aborted closure, the comic-book expletives, [and] the caricatures” (159; 163).

The novella does not rely on supernatural narratives as heavily as the previous fictional works in this thesis. It is a good example of how the notions of ghosts and the netherworld serve as the outward form of an intrinsically non-supernatural theme. The protagonist was a proactive explorer who made thematic discoveries during his netherworld stay rather being a passive recipient of shocks. In the following sections, I first examine the crossing protagonist’s role in social criticism. Then, I enumerate the satirised objects in the Ghostland. Lastly, I summarise the general principle in which the novella balances supernatural imagination with realistic concerns.

1 A purposeful imagining of netherworld crossing

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51 Yang Yi (2009) makes the concise comment that Ghostland Diary excels at disclosing Chinese people’s inherent weaknesses glossed over with popular Western cultural forms (371).

52 Ma Bing (2010) observes that Ghostland Diary made more progress in addressing real social situations than proletarian revolutionary romanticism marked by bubble-like passion (164).

53 Since the late 1920s, imperialist powers in China accelerated their exploitation, while domestic industries sought to survive under the harsh economic climate. Inevitably, more pressure fell on lower-class labourers and conflicts between social classes were aggravated. Huang Houxing (1987) argues that Ghostland Diary conveys the characteristics of its social context, as it incorporates both internal and international bourgeois conflicts (250).
*Ghostland Diary* is a novel that establishes a determined connection with its contemporary reality. Despite writing about an alternative world that the New Culture literati dismissed as superstition, Zhang Tianyi was not passionate about escapist or supernatural imaginings *per se*. He was admitted to Peking University in 1926. Having then converted to communist beliefs, Zhang started writing works in a realistic style and secured his position as a professional writer under the revolutionary banner. Zhang is remembered as a fiction writer who made a massive contribution to the maturity of the “left-wing” literature ever since he published the short story, “Ershiyi ge” 二十一個 (“Twenty One”, 1931) (Liu Z. 27). His fiction set an example of realism for “left-wing” writers when proletarian literature was in its infancy and suppressed by the Nationalist Party (Zhang D. 167). In literary practices, Zhang paid equal attention to artistic perfection and the ideological core (ibid., 28). Satire is the hallmark of Zhang’s fiction, which functions as the comic dissection of cultural mentality and moral complexity (Zhang D. 29; Yang Yi “Cong xiandai” 44).

*Ghostland Diary* displays striking differences from the primary sources explored in the previous three chapters. The previous works set their stories in fictional worlds that closely resemble the real world where the topic of the supernatural or ghosts *per se* was not a natural, ordinary subject of discussion. Those primary sources thus enjoin readers to apply their ordinary worldview to the plots and view “ghosts” as an obscure and questionable concept, asking whether the works are challenging consensus norms of cognition.

However, *Ghostland Diary* starts with a fictional world that defies the ordinary worldview and thus cancels suspense. The novel thus raises the question as to how the reader could pick up the realistic sense in Ghostland citizens and social issues from their apparent absurdity. Therefore, for *Ghostland Diary*, it is necessary to initially acknowledge its distance from reality and then gradually recognise its prototype in reality.
Several starting sections in the novel articulate the above perspective. The author utilises a free-verse poem to address his readers, where he takes on the critical role of a jester:

Dedication
These miscellaneous and discursive thoughts are presented respectfully to our smart and vigilant rich in authority and wealth today's masters of society, to our diligent, enthusiastic, and red-eyed loyal servants of the masters of society, to our peace-loving and sympathetic ladies and gentlemen who are leading serene lives, and to those living on the upper level men in cosiness. Dedicate to these men, dedicate to these men, But our respectable men find not even a tiny pinch of pleasure from here: No writings about nuomansi [romance] or love no women or alcohol no dreamy illusions. Only one as stupid as a flatbread uttered some annoying sounds: An-an, my men, as stupid as a flatbread uttered some annoying sounds.

December 1930, I, the writer, prostrate before you and dedicate this novel to you (1–2)

The wordings—“dedication” (xiānci 献辞), “respectfully” (gōng ěr yóu jīng 恭而又敬), and “I, the writer, prostrate before you and dedicate this novel to you” (zuozhe dingli jīngxian 作者頂禮敬獻)—suggest that the writer humorously adopts a subservient position to please his readers in a witty manner, calling his novel a collection of “miscellaneous and discursive thoughts” and disagreeable noises made by a guy.
who is “as stupid as a flatbread”. This is a poem in an ironic tone. The author states that *Ghostland Diary* was written for people leading a carefree, cosy life in “upper society”, and could not meet their expectation for light-hearted, entertaining love stories and all kinds of pleasure. Although the poem makes no explicit accusation, “upper level” already implies that the author accuses his target readers, privileged citizens, of being irresponsibly satisfied with their present lives while remaining selectively blind to what was going on in “lower society”.

The word *nuomansi* betrays the author’s sarcastic attitude towards the target readers and their literary taste. *Nuomansi* is not a meaningful word in Chinese and is thus a misnomer. In the Republican era, “romance” was frequently translated as *langman* 浪漫 or *luomansi* 羅曼司, but Zhang deliberately adopts a distorted, ridiculous translation. *Nuomansi* makes no sense apart from the literal meanings of the three characters: *nueo* 糯 for “sticky”, *man* 蛮 for “peremptory”, and *si* for “death” 死, which together have no coherent meaning. The semantic richness in the juxtaposition of the triple characters creates a contradictory semantic hollowness, leaving the reader to wonder at the author’s intention and sentiment behind the weird mixture. Because the reader has no choice but to understand the term by its inherent literal meanings, the translation casts an incongruous series of shadows of concomitant pain, struggling, and suffering over the original meaning of “romance”. This is apparently a teasing from the author, indicating that he is adept at making fun of things. The overall flippant tone of the poem thus prepares the reader, not for a mild, boring entertainment as the author ultimately claims, but for a novel that continues the sense of satire. This poem only hints at the author’s discontent with certain people instead of making a blunt, straightforward criticism, which foreshadows that the novel will take on a similar narrative style.

What follows Zhang Tianyi’s opening poem is the narrator/protagonist’s (Han Shiqian) letter to anyone who reads his “diary”. Han claims to have maintained an “objective” viewpoint and documented his Ghostland experiences. This letter serves
to remind the reader of his honest representation of how Ghostland society functions:

> There is nothing exaggerated or untrue about my diary—why do I need to specify this particularly? Sir, it is because I am not a man of letters. I have no intention of writing fiction or joking with you. Like a journalist, I am just putting down everything I saw, smelled, and touched the way it was. (1)

The letter also advises reading the fictional Ghostland against the external reality. The absurdity of Ghostland points to Republican social problems:

> The Ghostland society and the living world look different, but their differences only exist on the surface and in the form; everything in the two societies, whether people or things, are grounded on the same principles. The two societies are pretty much the same. Therefore, Sir, please do not criticize Ghostland as ridiculous, contradictory, abnormal, or unreasonable. If you have the feeling above about Ghostland, why don’t you feel the same in the living world? (2)

Han asserts that he intends no jocularity or fun with the diary, and therefore the reader should read it seriously (2). Unlike the author’s poem, the protagonist’s letter exhibits no signs of mischief. Together, the poem and the letter underline the novel’s purpose, which is to read between funny sentences and ridiculous Ghostland happenings and excavate the author’s true meaning from the strange appearance.

### 2 The naïve outsider’s crossing

Han serves as a “naïve outsider” in Ghostland, observing the society from a fresh, stranger’s perspective. The “naïve outsider” is a classical figure chosen by Western satirists as their persona/mask in the mode of satiric journeys to foreign lands (Price 16; Test 188; Dalnekoff 121). The outsider engages actively in foreign society with an objectivity and curiosity for the institutions and inner workings of society (Dalnekoff
122). He is a character developed to poke foreign society’s pretentiousness through his deadly and innocent questions (ibid., 126 123):

The outsider in particular, who has not been disillusioned and hardened by intimate knowledge of the artificial and perhaps hypocritical and corrupt workings of the society to which he has come, has a natural tendency to make assumptions that appearance reflects reality, words reflect thoughts, and the letter conveys the spirit. (ibid., 123)

The tour of a foreign land triggers cultural shock, and the traveller frequently questions the conventions in the exotic society.

When Han tried to understand the Ghostland lifestyle and society based on his homeland experiences, he felt disoriented. Because he only accessed the upper society, his experiences functioned to expose social vices as the “superior” citizens carried on their natural ways. Satiric journeys sometimes feature the protagonist’s voyages in a foreign country that exists in reality. As the journey proceeds, the home country and the foreign country form a comparison, where the satirist either criticises either the home country’s weaknesses or those of the foreign country (Quintero 155). In *Ghostland Diary*, Ghostland is a fictional world whose sole purpose, in Quintero’s words, involves “challenging one’s own received ideas and assumptions” through “exploring the Other” (ibid., 154).

A typical example is Han’s reaction towards Ghostlanders’ nose covers upon his arrival, which was a conventional and compulsory rule followed by everyone. They regarded this custom as a guarantee that one was a civilized, ethical, and decent citizen. When Han asked how nose covering started, his friend Xiao only replied vaguely:

“I can’t explain... It’s been this way for a very long time. Only newcomers like you would feel strange about covering up upper parts. For us, though, it has been a moral standard. In our eyes, those who do not cover up their upperparts
are not well-developed humans, because it is said that covering up our bodies is a moral instinct”. (5)

Xiao added: “It is never strange for you to cover up private parts in the living world. Then why is it any strange to cover up ‘upperparts’? Both the upper and the lower are part of the human body after all, aren’t they?” (6). It was widely believed in Ghostland that nose covering marked some intrinsic qualities in social members and could effectively differentiate them, classifying Ghostlanders into the “superior” and the “inferior” (social stratification is a primary satirical point in the novella and will be closely examined later). Those who obeyed the rule and covered up their nose were recognised as the “superior” while those who felt it strange and unnecessary fell into the “interior” category. As an insider of Ghostland who grew completely accustomed to nose covering, Xiao could not surmount his customary compliance with the custom, nor had he ever thought about its absurdity. However, the outsider Han observed the custom from afresh as a pure act instead of a culturally coded tradition and was thus able to question whether nose covering was reasonable.

Han’s questions and Xiao’s vague, perfunctory answers about nose coverings bring the reader’s attention to real-life conventions. The novella seems to hint that people who take things for granted without second thoughts and questions are similar to the Ghostlanders who blindly complied with their strange custom. One may be so accustomed to customs and rules that one rarely realises their cultural artificiality, just like the counterexample, Xiao.

Nose covering was not the only questionable phenomenon for Han, whose confusion led to a series of persuasive discourses. A persuasive discourse in Bakhtin’s terms serves as a crucial tool for the author to establish the connection between this fictional world and the reader’s perceived reality. Persuasive discourse appeared most often in the novella when Xiao refuted Han’s sense of strangeness and disapproval about certain Ghostland practices. Xiao persuaded Han to see the living
world’s resemblance to Ghostland, so that Han could develop a sense of familiarity and not worry about everything.

For example, introducing Ghostland’s politics to Han, Xiao said there were two major parties, the Sitting Party 坐社 and the Squatting Party 蹲社 (30). People claimed to have the same political principles but differed with respect to an important lifestyle practice, namely which kind of toilet was the most hygienic, so they “had to” divide into two parties to propagandise their approach (ibid.). When the Sitting Party held power, the entire Ghostland adopted sitting toilets, and vice versa (31). After the introduction, Xiao added: “Don’t be surprised, Han, because the politics here are no different from the mortal world” (31). Several days later, Han visited the matchmaking agency. He found that Ghostland unmarried women consulted the agency for a good deal more than a happy marriage and were ready to exchange themselves for their future husband’s (more like a buyer) material wealth. Han blurted out that the marital agreement was equivalent to “an insulting diminution of women to commercial goods” and totally irrelevant to love (53). However, Xiao thought Han had over-reacted. Xiao pointed out that the living world had seen nothing better, where the married life of only a few couples was built on financial interdependence. In this sense, a Ghostland marriage was similar to that in the living world (ibid.). On hearing this, Han felt more curious and calmed, as if a Ghostland marriage suddenly did not appear as appalling and unacceptable as it had before.

Similarly, there was a notable occasion when Han felt uncomfortable with what he saw. This was when a privileged citizen’s pet dogs were attended by the citizen’s “domestic slaves” (jianu 家奴) to a disturbing degree (69):

They [domestic slaves] helped the dogs onto their deckchairs. Six tuxedoed servants were standing nearby in two rows. At bath time, they ordered specialised people to come and scrub the dogs’ backs. However, its wild nature got the better of one of the dogs, which craved a good roll-over on the ground after its bath. The domestic slaves politely helped it back to its deckchair and bowed: “Please lie on your deckchair”.

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While the dogs were lying there, the slaves ordered oxtail soup, steaks, and hamburgers for them.

I [Han] was very uncomfortable seeing this. (70)

However, Xiao immediately explained: “What happens in Ghostland is just straightforward, and you just haven’t gotten used to our way. If you think about it again when you calm down, you will feel that Ghostland is not that strange to you and it is unreasonable for you to get upset about it” (70). Throughout Han’s entire Ghostland visit, he “balanced” his doubts with Xiao’s persuasion as to how natural Ghostland was. Eventually, Han was persuaded. After returning to the living world, he put down a conclusion in sophisticated retrospect: “Looking back at the time when I first got there [Ghostland] and saw everything as weird, I now feel that I was really naïve... Xiao was right in saying that ‘Ghostland is exactly the same as the living world in their social principles” (212–3).

Han’s closing comment is his self-persuasive discourse indicating that he has assimilated Xiao’s words and agreed with him. Seemingly, Han ends the diary with his sincere justification of Ghostland, but the point is to wrap the novella up with a thematic implication: everything strange and preposterous in Ghostland has its prototypes in reality. Ghostland’s superficial strangeness veils no otherworldly mysteries of the alternative society but the very rules and issues that troubled the real world when the novella was written.

Xi Tian (2014) explores four types of satire in modern Chinese fiction and drama (1930–1949). These are based on the “unprecedented uncertainty and fluidity in the relations among satirist, reader and satirised object” (Tian iv). Assessed against Tian’s framework, Ghostland Diary resembles self-satire, such as Wu Jingzi’s 吳敬梓 (1701–1754) Rulin waishi 儒林外史 (The Scholars, 1750), where the protagonist travels in a corrupt world based on reality; he has to adapt to his surroundings for
survival, thus drawing closer to the satirised objects (ibid., 54). In self-satire, none of its characters are immune to the satirised absurdity (ibid., 37). Likewise, in Ghostland Diary, the persuasive discourse demonstrates that Han initially sensed the social distortion but was finally brainwashed by his friend to naturalise Ghostland. The persuasive discourse strengthens the satiric referentiality and makes it clear that the external reality serves as the benchmark for reading the novella. Reading Han’s diary is a process of disenchanting the established, mirage-like fantasy of Ghostland. The sense of strangeness is but an illusion and camouflages that which should have been familiar to Republican readers.

3 The content of satire

With the novella’s satirical purpose confirmed in the previous analysis, I now explain the main satirical aspects in Ghostland Diary, including its social structure, political landscape, bureaucracy, the intelligentsia of humanities and arts, and marriage style.

3.1 Satire of the social structure

One of the primary forms of satirical imagining is the social system of stratification Ghostland upper classes imposed on the entire society. This social landscape contradicts the principle of the so-called “populist” politics (pingmin zhengzhi 平民政) In the satire of the Ghostland upper classes, self-contradiction serves as a powerful tool to mark each satirical point.

54 Xi Tian’s three other types of satire are “empathetic satire”, “self-counteractive satire”, and “ambiguous satire”. The characters in “empathetic satire” are both “a victim of and participant in a moribund society”, as seen in Xiao Hong and Lao She (12–13). Tian generated the notion of “self-counteractive satire” from Qian Zhongshu’s fiction and “ambiguous satire” from Yang Jiang’s fiction, both of which blur the satirist’s intentions and attitudes towards satirised objects (ibid., 13–4).
Ghostland’s history sounds similar to what Chinese people had witnessed over several decades by 1930. Ghostland underwent a massive transformation. It used to be an imperial society, until its suppressed people launched a revolution and replaced the existing powerholders. The revolutionaries’ descendants then secured their dominant position as new privileged classes and occupied the upper level in the polarised Ghostland; thus they were called the “superior”. The upper and lower levels refer to the spatial height and symbolic status of their inhabitants. The “superior” included bureaucrats, capitalists, merchants, landlords, gentlemen, scholars, artists, and their families and friends, all of whom were satirised objects; the “inferior” consisted of laborers, peasants, and other impoverished people. The Ghostland revolution changed nothing about the hierarchical social structure apart from replacing old “superior” classes with new ones; it achieved no true democracy and retained the tradition of enslaving the unprivileged masses. The “superior” deemed the “inferior” to be filthy and unbearable to look at, the inferior’s proper occupations being either workers in construction or transportation industries or the “superior” people’s servants (10). The government represented “superior” people’s interests. It published scientific reports to instil into all Ghostlanders the idea that “inferior” people were born so due to their disposition and thus deserved to be confined to the lower level in living space and identity (11). The “inferior” were thus believed to have inherent weaknesses (liegenxing 劣根性). Throughout the novella, there is no direct depiction of the “inferior”, only “superior” people’s subjective and partial views.

Ghostland imposed a strict system of stratification on everyone according to their financial condition. For example, in the upper society, getting hungry before noon was likely to incur the suspicion that the person was “inferior”. This is because a proper “superior” citizen was always well-fed and would not get hungry before the usual lunchtime (45–6). When inviting guests to his house, the host would postpone lunchtime, because he assumed that his guests could afford a substantial breakfast before coming to visit and should not yet be hungry. Thus, postponing lunch was not impolite neglect but respectful of guests (88–9). Guests would also be satisfied with the postponement, knowing that nobody looked down upon them as poor people.
who could not afford a proper breakfast. When a “superior” resident suddenly fell into poverty, they would be expelled from the upper level and identified as an “inferior” person. According to the laws, an individual’s educational level was proportional to the worth of their family property. Only those who were wealthy enough had the right to enjoy full access to a complete spectrum of education from the fundamental to the advanced. A family earning 3,000 yuan could afford to send their child to a primary school, 50,000 to a junior high school, 100,000 to a senior high school, 600,000 to a university, and 3,000,000 to a research institution (76). Ghostland did not select or cultivate people based on their talents or capabilities. “Inferior” people had no right to access higher education. What was guaranteed for them was fundamental education (a low literacy level of being able to read and write a thousand Chinese characters) that would qualify them to complete daily work for capitalists (ibid.).

The novella satirises “superior” people’s sense of superiority and hypocrisy through irony, especially the appalling self-contradiction in their speech and behaviours. The upper society was kept neat, comfortable, and modern, where men wore tuxedoes and women jewellery and exquisite clothes (4). It was even written in the laws that the upper people must maintain grace and politeness to self-distinguish from the “inferior” (12). The “superior” were obsessed with exaggeratedly meticulous mannerisms. At a state banquet, all the guests followed the dining etiquette for solemnity:

Courses were served. The master of the ceremony gave an instruction, and we did as he said. “Drink soup…. take the first spoon. Take the second spoon. Take the third spoon. Pause. …” And everybody put down their spoons. “Now sip your wine. Eat crisp fried tripe…. Eat slippery loin slices, the first bite, the second bite, and the third bite. Pause…. Music on….”. And when the music died down, it was the time for bread. “Take a bite of your bread. Chew it once. Chew it again…. Now swallow…. Eat green onions….”. (112–3)

The more absurd the process, the greater the effect of the satire. This scene magnifies etiquette details to such a degree that the dinner acquires a comic sense out of the pretentious solemnity.
However, feigned and superficial grace cannot conceal “superior” people’s inherent vulgarity and even cruelty. When exasperated, some could not help calling the “inferiors” “mentally deficient savages and fucking beasts” (64). In order to force a suspect’s confession about a rebellion, the secret police of the “superior’s” administration applied inhuman torture and was instructed to “slice his flesh as people do with pigs” (117).

The upper society protected itself as a pure, “germfree” “utopia” that required meticulous maintenance to prevent “inferior” infiltration. For example, when a university student could no longer afford the tuition, the issue was not as simple as terminating his or her study. The university declared that this student must be one of the impoverished “inferior” sneaking into upper society, who would pollute other students with his or her “inferiority” (34). The declaration shows that the paranoid upper society felt unstable while remaining alert to the boundary they had been guarding against the other half of Ghostland. At an official banquet, propaganda leaflets were surreptitiously distributed among the “superior”. The propositions urged people to awaken from slavery and “superior” people’s suppression and smash the bureaucratic banquets (113–114). The upper society’s reaction towards the rebellion was to conduct inquisitions that betrayed their ridiculous, illogical mindset under crisis:

That suspect from the upper level claimed that Civilian Lu [a supreme political icon] was his belief, and he would never leave the civilian’s photograph on the floor. It was a total accident that the photo got blown off from the wall by wind.... “You are saying that the framed photo was hung up on the wall at first and then somehow was blown off?” Clergyman Zhu asked.

“It was not framed.”

“Wasn’t framed?” The clergyman repeated in anger. “If you truly believe in Civilian Lu, you will surely frame his photo. Since the photo in your house was not framed, you must be a fake believer. You are lying to the ‘pillar of the country and society’ [Civilian Lu’s title]!”

[...]

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“Hold on”, Civilian Lu stopped them. “What did you say? Why didn’t you frame my photo?”
“I was going to, but I had no money for it at the time, so...”
“No money?” exclaimed several people, simultaneously aghast at the suspect.
“An inferior person, an inferior person for sure...”. (118–9)

This excerpt is a typical illustration of the investigative and ruling style in the upper Ghostland. Anyone at odds with the socially assumed mannerism must be a saboteur from lower society, hiding among the “superior” people to shatter the stratification.

Ghostland encompassed more than one country. Like the unknown Ghostland area, other countries distinguished their “superior” people from the “inferior”, and multi-lateral communication always split into two channels for the upper and the lower, respectively (9). It turns out that the author also writes about international interaction for satire. The upper society betrayed its self-contradiction in the advocacy of patriotism. Sometimes the “superior” people claimed that they were more inherently patriotic, thus more advanced and developed in nature than the “inferior”; at other times patriotism did not seem that important and could even be temporarily ignored, especially when “superior” people’s interests were shaken. This country’s upper society would not hesitate to turn to foreign armies to maintain its domestic class structure and suppress its people, as demonstrated when Xiao introduced Ghostland’s history to Han:

“That year our country was at war with the neighbouring country in the south. While everybody was motivated by patriotism, our inferior soldiers suddenly withdrew from the front line and took control of our capital city. This situation showed that inferior people have no patriotism... Later, although the southern country was our enemy, its superior citizens remained superior. When our superior citizens faced the danger of inferior people’s subversion, their neighbouring superior citizens could not tolerate it. The war between us terminated immediately, and they sent six columns over to help us deal with the inferior rebels”. (57)
For the “superior”, patriotism was an ideological instrument for the upper society to stabilise their ruling power and manipulate the lower society more conveniently. They chose to maintain the present social dichotomy at the expense of national independence. Where possible, the “superior” used patriotism to motivate their “inferior” subjects to fight other Ghostland countries, but all the countries would unite when the prevailing “superior–inferior” social stratification became fragile.

Xiao’s recollection of their recent history reminds the reader of foreign imperialists’ intervention in Republican China. It was a notorious fact that the Beiyang government and several local militarists (junfa) had been making compromises with foreign countries and relied heavily on them for private interests. It was not only the Peking government that was carrying huge, accumulating debts to foreign imperialists; numerous provincial militarists had their foreign back-ups, such as Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 (1865–1936) and his Japanese funder (Ch’i 156–157).55 The degree of infiltration by foreign powers into Republican China was, however, much more appalling than indicated by the novel for Ghostland. The Peking government gave up the right of customs duties disposal to foreign powers (Ch’i 153). Local militarists also mortgaged the right to build, manage, and use domestic railways and other public properties to foreign countries to give themselves the credit needed to obtain loans (“Disizhang” 93–94). In Ghostland, the neighbouring country sent soldiers to help oppress the “inferior” uprisers. Likewise, foreign imperialists served as accomplices against the Chinese proletariat in Republican class struggles, such as in the May Thirtieth Movement where Japan and Britain resorted to violence to put down striking workers and protesting crowds. Ghostland’s “superior” people’s alliance across countries to oppress the “inferior” class sends out a warning that Chinese people should beware of domestic traitors who collaborated with or surrendered to foreign imperialists to pursue their own interests and ambitions at the expense of the masses.

55 For Japan’s manipulative role in China’s domestic affairs and its support of the militarists, see Zhang Bofeng’s “Wanxi junfa yu Riben diguozhuyi de guanxi” 皖系軍閥與日本帝國主義的關係 (“The Relationship between Anhui Militarists and Japanese Imperialism”, 1982).
The next series of examples satirizes the poorly established ideology of social stratification by exposing its underlying authoritative discourses. To begin with, it is important to clarify the meaning of “authoritative discourse”. An authoritative discourse conveys all kinds of values and propositions held by authorities, including tradition, widely acknowledged truths, and official accounts (Bakhtin 344). It derives from institutions, power, or even special people, and its vicissitude goes along with them (ibid., 343). Any interference or disturbance of the context, border, semantics, and style of authoritative discourse is not tolerated by authority (ibid.). Moreover, other supporting discourses gather around the authoritative discourse to interpret, praise, or apply it, provided the original authoritative discourse remains unchallenged or undistorted (ibid.). Specific embodiments of authoritative discourse can be instructive words of religion, science, political power, morality, certain individuals (father, adult, teacher, etc.), and even fashion (ibid., 342-43). One feature of authoritative discourse is that it sits on a high level in the hierarchy of discourses, and “is a prior [Bakhtin’s italic] discourse” (ibid. 342). For example, the ideology of “superior–inferior” stratification is an overarching authoritative discourse.

In the satire of spatial stratification and social discrimination, the novella presents the following examples of scientific and evangelical discourses. These parodic authoritative discourses underpinned the municipal regulations of social division, established in The Updated Complete Collection of City Laws (zuixin shifa daquan 最新市法大全). The ultimate aim is to protect the interests of the “superior” society.

One is the pseudo-scientific discourse of the scientist Yi Zhengxin’s 易正心, who provided biological “proofs” of “rationality” to distinguish the “superior” from the “inferior”. For instance, his research found that the “inferior” was born with two fewer thyroid cells than the “superior”, and therefore “inferior” people remained inherently and irreversibly inferior (23). Several Ghostland entrepreneurs, who were the most powerful and influential “superior” citizens, had 25% more thyroid cells than normal Ghostlanders (ibid.). Moreover, the degree of one’s patriotic sentiment was directly
proportional to the number of one’s thyroid cells, which “testified” that “inferior” people were less likely to be naturally patriotic (ibid.). In addition to this, Yi Zhengxin was working on a brain reflector that was expected to calculate the number of thyroid cells in the brain and determine an individual’s talents, political inclination, and instincts (37).

Yi Zhengxin’s scientific research supported the “superior-inferior” stratification by striving to substantiate that the distinction was congenital, not acquired. Clearly, the scientist’s statement was intended to erase the historical cause of the “superior-inferior” policy. He was creating an authoritative discourse in pseudo-science to lure Ghostlanders into believing that the social stratification was natural and reasonable because it was solidly grounded in every citizen’s genes. Consequently, Ghostlanders might neglect how social stratification was initially imposed on them as an artificial invention and took the ill policy for granted. The manipulation of authoritative discourse accelerated the conventionalisation of the biased policy and shielded it from public reassessment or challenge. This example enjoins readers to rethink the accustomed policies and not to fall silent in the face of discriminatory power.

At the same time, a clergyman named Zhu Shen’en 朱神恩 fabricated religious authoritative discourse to consolidate the “superior” power:

“Men, I ask for your attention in the name of a devoted Christian to inform you that someone sneezed at this place and ejected dirt from his upper part. This is profanation. This is the root of all evil. This is the omen of the superior’s extinction, … this is the break-in of the inferior […] Even though an inferior person broke in, God made him fail in hiding. The sneeze was a miracle from God”. (81)

From the standpoint of the “superior”, Zhu applied evangelical discourse to interpret the sneeze and reached a conclusion in favour of discrimination. Like the scientist, this clergyman was revered as the representative figure of his field, which bestowed authority on his words. However, the self-contradiction in his discourse—the sneeze
being interpreted as the “root of all evil” and then as a “miracle”—subjects the clergyman to satiric stupefaction to undermine his authority and also demonstrates that authoritative discourse can be a useful tool to serve an opinion leader’s changing purposes rather than embody disinterested truths. The logical collision between divinity and profanity ends with a hilarious authorial tease that weakens the authority of the discourse. The scientist and the clergyman’s tilt towards the regime policy triggers questions concerning the real-life power structure, such as whether science and religion in some cases become political tools and lies.

Overall, the novella renders authoritative discourses and their authority unstable. The adoption of authoritative discourse disturbs people’s potential reverence for authority by uncovering its artificiality and reliance on contexts. Although exaggerated, the examples mock authoritative discourses that may be rather vulnerable and not as stable as they appear in reality.

### 3.2 Satire of politics

To enslave the “inferior” masses and justify power, the beneficiaries of privileged power developed and advocated the doctrine of *pingmin sixiang* 平民思想, literally “civilian politics”, declaring that they have achieved “equality, liberty, and light” in Ghostland (10). *Pingmin sixiang* or *pingmin zhengzhi* (civilian politics) was widespread in Republican China around the 1911 Revolution. *Pingmin zhengzhi* was widely accepted as the translation of “democracy” (Gu X. 545). When intellectuals engaged in discussion on democracy, they took interest in the cancellation of party politics, federalism, socialism (“economic democracy”), and anarchism (ibid., 549). Around 1918, Chinese intellectuals radicalised the idea of democracy to create populism, or *mincuizhuyi* 民粹主義 (ibid., 542). This means the endorsement of social equity in human rights and wealth distribution (Zuo Y. 35). The essence of populist democracy was the worship of the “people” (Gu X. 545). “Min” (people) refers to “lower-class people”, such as the poor, labourers, peasants, and the ruled,
all of whom are opposed to monarchs, presidents, officials, capitalists, aristocrats, and even intellectuals (ibid., 545).

However, Ghostland is an exact ironic reverse of democracy or populism. The “superior” self-identified as populists, and one of the criteria for living on the upper level was having “correct populist views” (8). Upon his arrival in Ghostland, Han was required by the authority to fill in a population registration form to collect the “Superior Inhabitancy licence” that would constitute his ID (7). However, the “populism” the “superior” claimed to have advocated was not populist in its core. Mainstream ideologies in Ghostland upper society existed for social stratification, and populism was no exception. The “superior” changed the meaning of pingmin from “common people/civilian” to “magnate” to ensure that the circulation of populist discourse was in favour of influential entrepreneurs (17). Hence, the political principle was still heard as populism but already referred to something quite the opposite, where the lower society remained despised and the upper society reaped benefits from “civilian politics”. The strategy was to borrow a more impressive new package to preserve the ossified, repugnant idea of social stratification.

The novella exposes the self-contradiction of “civilians” whose behaviours were not as decent and impressive as they appeared to be. For example, the capitalist Lu Lelao 陸樂勞 was a hypocrite, detected by an irony between his mannerisms and his genuine behaviours. On the one hand, Lu feigned modesty and claimed that he was far from the privilege of deserving the advanced governmental security service he already possessed (40). However, he almost lost himself in public admiration conducted in a monarchical style, such as taking the short walk from his vehicle to his residence on an extended red carpet printed with huge characters “Long live Civilian Lu”陸平民萬歲 (39). Also, he enjoyed being attended to like a monarch. Lu would avoid doing even the most trivial things for himself yet pinched a button repeatedly to summon a servant. When he drank tea, a servant held the teacup to his lips; noticing cigarette ashes on his sleeve, he demanded a servant dust it off (41). The protagonist marvelled at Lu’s “civilian spirit” (pingmin jingshen 平民精神)
the diary: “He had such an amicable manner, very civilian indeed” (39). Although it sounds like genuine admiration, the words serve the satiric purpose as a form of verbal irony behind the “protagonist mask”. The ironic disapproval of Lu is especially apparent when Lu’s stream of cars was compared to a crawling centipede (41).

Another exaggerated illustration of the shocking privilege of “civilians” is the grand goodbye ceremony of a capitalist’s infant boy, named Pan Chuanping (56). Biographers dedicated a thick memorial to the boy who died of infant paralysis at eleven-months old. The title, Pan Chuanping xiansheng airong lu (The Record of Mr. Pan Chuanping’s Ceremonious Funeral), is a grandiose parody of the memorials of significant historical figures (122–123). The upper society admired the infant as a promising heir to his father’s immense power, and now he received a state funeral akin to that for a prince.

On the funeral day, schools, governmental departments, and social institutions all suspended their work. All entertaining activities were cancelled. Numerous residents came to the capital to send their condolences to the deceased and admired the unprecedented spectacle of the lighted city, the mournfully decorated streets, the funeral car streams, and the elegiac music (123). The whole ceremony took nearly ten thousand civil servants to organise (124). The official explanation for the extravagance was that the authorities wanted to encourage people to become “civilians” by showing them how honourable a “civilian” and his family could be. Yet at the same time, the ceremony strikes the viewer as a preposterous, black-humoured contradiction of the ordinary notion of populism in reality. Given the colossal waste of human labour and public wealth for the privileged deceased, any endorsement of “populism” stands as a joke.

56 Zhang Tianyi did not establish a complete worldview in the novel. Therefore, it is impossible to know where a Ghostlander ends up after they perish.
Ghostland politics was also subjected to an indirect attack from the distasteful scene of a “sage” commemoration. Han participated in the century memorial of “Sage Long” (Long shengzhe 龍聖哲), a poet who was remembered not because of his classic poetry, but because the upper society needed to set him up as a representative cultural figure for the “superior” people. The “superior” selected a few lines from Long’s poetry for over interpretation: “My love, I dedicate my soul, my life, and everything of me all to you, all to you.” “The sun sets on the plain” (176). The “superior” interpreted the first quoted line as expressing the poet’s patriotism for the country where Bian and his friends were staying, and the second line as referring to their bright civilian politics (ibid.). Both interpretations were far-fetched. The “superior” took advantage of the flexible interpretation of poetry and directed the understanding in favour of their ideology. The only reason why “plain” symbolised “civilian politics” is that the Chinese word for “plain”, pingyuan 平原, shares its first character with the word for “civilian politics”, pingmin zhengzhi.

The ceremony's disastrous and mournful ritual added a sense of comic absurdity to the supposed-to-be solemn ambiance. There was a mourning choir on stage, crying in a singing fashion:

Baton [written in English with the capitalisation of the first letter] waved. Around thirty people suddenly burst out crying: “Ah, ah, ah, ah! Ah! Ah, ah, ah, ah…” They were howling extremely sadly with tears streaming down, several with snot hanging a half-foot long. Dr. Gao beat time. They looked like a band with soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and strict beats.... Sometimes, they cried in words: “Ah, ah, ah, ah... Great Sage Long... Ah, ah, boohoo, eh, eh, humans have lost a bright star, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah...” A few people cried so hard that they almost passed out. They seemed to stick to a music score: sometimes, all thirty people cried together; sometimes, only three or four cried first, and then the rest joined in the chorus; there were also times when three women cried in turn. “Ah, ah, ah, lost a star... eh, eh, humans fall into hesitation... eh, eh, eh...” A man’s bass inserted into the singing line, uttering an “ah” at every beat. “Ah, ah, ah...”. Everybody joined in, their shoulders all shaking.
Finally, they articulated a conclusive “ah” sound, like a knife cutting off the wailing—the end.
Thirty people finished crying, wiped off their tears, snot, and sweat, and sat down, wearing quiet smiles. (174–5)

Although the singing Ghostlanders were expressing their desperate admiration for the poet, this scene appears utterly ridiculous and repellent, even more so under Ghostland standards. Ghostland forbade any form of nose exposure in public for hygiene and politeness. Everybody was therefore expected to wear a nose cover all the time. Specific rules included: 1) The word “nose” was extremely sensitive. It was forbidden to say “nose” directly; instead, saying “the upper part” was acceptable; 2) usually, other than doctors, nobody touched upon the topic of “nose”; 3) one must not expose his or her “upper part” to the opposite sex; 4) children must be taught that this “upper part” is taboo and must wear a cover from a very young age (5). The nose seems to be the counterpart of private parts in Ghostland. Therefore, the grotesque in the singing-crying scene differs from our commonly understood notion of grotesqueness as repellent ugliness or distortion. Rather, the ceremony scene is grotesque because it blurs the boundary between solemnity and disgust and overthrows the sense of authority, especially when Ghostland viewed a running nose as loathsome excretion. It is hard to say whether the crying ceremony displayed enough passion for honouring the “sage” or created a blasphemous scene. Because “Sage Long” served as a cultural hallmark of Ghostland civilian politics, the preposterous activity cast doubt on the authority of Ghostland politics and made it more like a farce.

Corruption and extensive cheating encroached on Ghostland’s elective politics. The presidential election was literally a game between the capitalist leaders of two rival parties, the Sitting Party and the Squatting Party (100–8). The novella applies the technique of low burlesque to describe how the parties put the correction of excretion postures onto their agenda, using denigratory and disrespectful words to ensure the target characters left an inferior impression on readers. On the election day, the two parties started with a debate on the strengths and weaknesses of sitting or squatting
toilets. However, only the presidential election could finally settle the issue. The party heads, namely two capitalists from the Squatting Party and the Sitting Party, played poker in the council hall. It was not a fair game but a competition of financial power. The capitalists initially received some cards by random distribution but then started to sign cheques to exchange these for better cards. The competition was to see who could afford a greater amount of money in the game, which directly decided which party seized power. All the voters would then complete their ballots with the name of the winning party’s capitalist. Therefore, democracy was hollow, nominal, and a joke.

3.3 Satire of the government and bureaucracy

Teasing the government’s authority and solemnity, the novella plays with a social regulation in low burlesque. Walking on the urban streets of the upper society, Han spotted a brass board that read “No Peeing” (禁止小便) to prevent citizens from urinating in the alley. It was not a random or ignorable sign but authoritatively coded and designed by a revered calligrapher. The four characters were written in seal script, an official font used widely before the Tang Dynasty. Moreover, at the bottom of the brass board was the signature: “Solemnly written and scribed under the bureau’s order by Li Yangbing, Professor of Grammatology of the Capital University” (13).

The classic font and the professor’s signature were meant to add more weight to the “No Peeing” sign. However, the sign could not avoid losing some of its authority and seriousness due to its abuse of misplaced cultural credit. It was excessively dramatic to invest that much design and authority in a sign simply reminding passersby to be civil. Also, the creator of the sign intensified authority in the wrong direction. The classic font and the calligrapher’s impressive title represented elite culture, which could not strengthen the impact of the “No Peeing” on public morality. The context of
arts and grammatology does not align with the slogan at all, thus creating a ridiculous effect. The sign implies Ghostland’s blind admiration, misuse, and consequent undermining of cultural credit.

Another satirised object is that of redundant officials. The novella describes a preposterous miniature government in the capitalist Lu’s residence:

We came to a house with a board reading “Concierge Office”. There were many officers inside. One of them took [Xiao] Zhongne’s business card into a room and reported: “Chuzhang 處長 [director], Mr. Xiao is here to see the civilian”. That smaller office was in good taste and condition. A man in a tuxedo sat there; he was the director. He heard the officer calling, put down the files, and stood up to greet us. He showed us to a meeting room and called: “Huang Tingzhang 廳長 ["the head of a department"], Mr. Xiao is here, please come to meet him”.

A young man showed up, asked us to take a seat, and had others serve us tea. He said: “Mr. Xiao, as the Tingzhang, I still have many things to attend to, would you please spare me for a moment....”

“Which department is that Chuzhang in charge of?” I asked.

“That is the ‘Director of the Concierge Office’.... as for the Tingzhang, he is the ‘Head of the Meeting Room’.”

Soon after, the Director of the Concierge Office came back and drove us to the inner meeting room. We got in his car and arrived at the destination in less than three seconds. (59–60)

Both the “Director of the Department of Concierge” and the “Head of the Meeting Room” embody the technique of high burlesque and irony. High burlesque differs from low burlesque in that it imposes a sense of superiority and excessive decency on the satirised objects. Because the satirised objects do not deserve exaltation, mockery emerges from the embarrassing and ridiculous effect created. In Chinese, chuzhang and tingzhang are official titles representing substantial governmental power and responsibility. In the novella, the two titles were abused by applying them to the watchmen. The official titles added a sense of hyperbolic and sneering humour to the position holders, whose actual jobs were sending in messages or guests and thus appeared trivial against the bluffing titles. The novella satirises the redundancy...
of official positions and the snobbishness and vanity of people who are obsessed with titles.

3.4 Satire of intelligentsia

Humanities and art were the next field criticised, where professional titles were gained easily. To be a “literary expert”, one only needed to register at the Ghostland Department of Education, as it was a job anyone could do if they pretended to have the expertise (17). Only registered “experts” had the right of publication as an authorised author (ibid.). The registration required a university degree and passing the government's qualification test (ibid.).

The protagonist’s friend, Xiao, was a registered “literary expert”. He represented the literati who shy away from social responsibilities and hide in the “ivory tower” of arts. His full name, Xiao Zhongne 蕭仲訥, is a comic name inspired by the playwright and social activist George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950). The Chinese translation of “Bernard Shaw” is usually “Xiaobona” 蕭伯納. When juxtaposed, Bona 伯納 and Zhongne 仲訥 remind one of the idiom bufenbozhong 不分伯仲, meaning two individuals are almost equally good and it is impossible to rank them. Although both were literati, the Ghostlander Xiao Zhongne appeared funny and despicable compared with his “counterpart” Bernard Shaw. Bernard Shaw has been revered for his social responsibility and influence on literature, culture, and politics, whereas Xiao repeatedly said that he did not care much about social issues because, after all, he was a literary expert, implying that social responsibility was irrelevant to his literature (if he produced any) (11, 26, 57–8, 191, 206). It also becomes clear why Xiao had the character ne 訥 [inarticulate] in his name: the novella suggests he was a stupid and selfish man; no matter how hard he flaunted his title of “literary expert”, his career was trivial because he avoided his responsibility as an intellectual and refused to remark on reality in literature.
The “Decadent literary expert” 頹廢派文學專家, Sima Xidu 司馬吸毒, was no better (15). The following excerpt is Sima’s recollection of how he became a “real literary expert”, written by Han in an indirect style:

As he said, he had a talent for decadence... However, he was too strong to become a modern man, which was a little bit sad. He hoped he could be neurasthenic... He used to be enthusiastic about sports, but he decided to quit. What’s more, he kept awake at night... Having tried for almost a year, he thought he was making progress and finally started to be neurasthenic. Morbidity! —This was one of the most modern things. Then, he learnt to drink.... He started with the sweeter kind... nowadays, he had gotten quite used to even firewater.... There was another most crucial thing: opium.... Wasn’t it common in Allan Poe’s and Baudelaire’s poems? He thought opium eating was imperative, but at the beginning, he always threw up. However, he acquired great perseverance. He smoked and vomited, and he continued to smoke more. After nine years of hard work, he achieved great things... (18–9)

The description of Sima’s “self-improvement” combines the satiric techniques of high burlesque and low burlesque.

Regarding the high burlesque, Sima’s anomalous behaviours generate immense comic and disorienting effects through the diarist’s wholehearted admiration and compliments. Viewed under common values (held by the reader), excessive drinking and opium eating are appalling, but this lifestyle is narrated in a eulogising style with positive words such as “talent”, “perseverance”, and “achievements”. Sima is a shallow imitator of the Western artists of the Decadence movement, which was ironically the only reason why he registered as a “Decadent literary expert”. Having created no literary works, he only captured the exterior forms and symbols of Decadence based on a superficial comprehension of the culture.

Conversely, the low burlesque in Sima’s case refers to the ridiculous pronunciation or misnomers. Sima greeted Han thus when they first met: “I, Sima Xidu, want to make friends with Mr. Han hysterically” 我司馬吸毒是黑死脫痢底想和你韓爺做個朋友 (15–16). What heisituolidi 黑死脫痢底 meant in Sima’s words was “extremely”. It is
not just an adverb but contains defamiliarising grotesqueness. The first four characters in *heisituolidi* 黑死脫痢底 respectively mean “black”, “death”, “taking off/loosen”, and “dysentery”. The more common way of translating “hysterical” or “hysteria” was *xiesidili* 歇斯的里. Therefore, the reason why the diarist put Sima’s spoken words down as *heisituolidi* 黑死脫痢底 was probably because Han simply made an honest, phonetic record of Sima’s pronunciation of the English word rather than its common Chinese translation. Sima was expressing his eagerness to become acquainted with the protagonist and probably considered it fashionable to insert an English word into his speech. He chose the word “hysterically” probably because he also intended to use this trendy word to demonstrate his identity as a “Decadent literary expert”, as “hysterical” (not the translation) already suggests an unhealthy state of being that is congruous with Sima’s unhealthy, extreme lifestyle.

The names of Allan Poe and Baudelaire received similar treatment in the narrative. “Allan Poe” and “Baudelaire” were translated as *ailengpo* 矮冷破 (literally “short, cold and ragged”) and *budelaier* 不得癩兒 (literally “not getting a scabies-infected child”) (18). Their written forms were probably also derived from Sima’s pronunciation of the original English names. As stated in Han’s opening letter, he kept this diary as objective as possible for its authenticity. In this sense, Han was unlikely to incorporate personal sentiments into written forms. Also, the novella shows no indication of Han’s dislike of or mischievous malevolence towards Allan Poe and Baudelaire. Why, therefore, does the narrative present such uncommon and vilifying translations of names and the adverb “hysterically”? The answer is that the narrative is layered. It was the diarist who selected the disagreeable Chinese characters to use the foreign words and names, but the translations can be read as the author Zhang Tianyi’s outright articulation of mockery. First, the comic translations target Sima who pronounced them poorly. Although the lame translations look defensive to Allan Poe and Baudelaire, the author is not satirising them. The author deliberately selected repugnant characters to ridicule Sima’s accented English pronunciation. To the reader, Sima is making a
fool of himself without realising that his rigid “Chinglish” rendered his professionality and language ability questionable.

Hei Lingling 黑灵灵, “Extreme Symbolist Literary Expert” 极度象征派文学专家, was another satirised intellectual, who emulated symbolists based on his impression of their abstractness and poetics. His words made no sense semantically, such as “Just then the soul of my pencil was dipped in the pile of elegant cow poo;” “Mr. Han’s attractive ears dance better than savoury ducks, nevertheless by no means squarer than hen feathers” (19, 20). These sentences illustrate Wim Tigges’s (1988) nonsensical “simultaneity”, which accumulates incoherent images and signifiers whose meanings overflow and nevertheless lead the reader to an absence of meaning (Tigges 59). Like Sima Xidu, Hei was a “literary expert” who contributed no valuable works to the literary scene but merely lived in his bubble of poetic nonsense. His seemingly profound words were actually confusing and pointless, which probably serves to satirise those literati who clumsily imitated Western literary forms to appear fashionable, tasteful, or distinctive.

The novella goes on to give readers a glimpse into Ghostland’s artistic scene. The National Art University encouraged “irregular life” and artists’ romantic life as a modern hallmark (32). The novella displays the students’ and teachers’ awkward and superficial interpretation of modern art. Han noticed that several portfolios of foreign artists were scattered on the floor. These textbook artists are Laodan 老蛋, Piyazili 皮啞子痢, and Laoshidi 老蝨底, which are, again, ill-translated names of real artistic figures (32).

Judged by homophone, Piyazili 皮啞子痢 (literally “a dumb skin person with dysentery”) should be Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898), the English illustrator famous for his decadent, grotesque, and erotic style. Beardsley appeared on the Chinese horizon after the New Culture movement, where he was referred to as Piyacilü 琵雅詞侶 or Bierdesilai 璧爾德斯萊 (Chen Z. 237, 239). Compared to these two names, Piyazili 皮啞子痢 is truly grotesque. Likewise, the novella assigns ugly and ridiculous name
translations to the other two artists. Laodan 老蛋 (literally “old egg”) may be the
French impressionist and realist sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), usually known
as Luodan 羅丹 in Mandarin. Laoshidi 老蝨底 (literally “old flee”) sounds like the last
name of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), later
pronounced Luosaidi 羅塞蒂 in Mandarin.

Han might have picked up the translated names from the front covers of the scat-
tered portfolios. Identifying those portfolio artists served to identify the university’s
superficial understanding of art and its misleading atmosphere. The university was
obsessed with the notion of “romantic and irregular life”, which might have been
inspired by the artists. Rossetti’s romanticism reflects his passion for artistically
appropriating the legendary past and his dwelling on strong emotions behind bright
colours. David G. Riede (1983) interprets Rossetti’s lavish representation of inten-
sely emotional and sensuous beauty with mythical, medieval, and melancholy
symbols, such as fatal yet seductive women (240–63). These features echo general
romanticism—“opposition of rules, a dislike of restraint, a disregard of rationalism...
a coloring of individual emotion” and beauty with a sense of strangeness added to it
(Blee 1, 2). As for Beardsley, Kristin Mahoney (2018) notes that decadence “pushes
back against order, restraint, and categorization” and was “a movement that
welcomed confusion and thus forces us to work within the realm of confusion, with
challenging, intricate, and excessive forms, outside the limits of our period and of
any one national tradition” (637).

However, the university’s inner state and atmosphere indicated that nobody seemed
to really know what romantic art was. With a basic understanding of the artistic
orientation of the textbook artists, the reader would realise that the university was
bluffing and approaching art in disorientation. The teachers and students took chaos
as symbolising romanticism. Far from the essence of Rossetti’s romanticism and
Beardsley’s decadence, the university was simply a mess. All kinds of chairs, sofas,
and beds were scattered in the auditorium. The principal’s studio was also in terrible
disarray. A character declared that the interior disorganisation was the outcome of
the principal’s three-hour attentive daily arrangement (33). Stressing how meticulously the principal “designed” the mess in his studio is a typical example of high burlesque: the mess was a self-satisfying, pretentious performance without identifiable artistic thoughts and only sufficed to dazzle amateurs who had no understanding of art. Perhaps Han was an amateur, who marvelled at the illogical numbering of dormitory rooms as another product of the university’s “romanticism”. He noticed a room numbered “Z996740021”, but it did not suggest that the university had so many rooms it required a coding system from A000000001 to Z996740020 to label every one of the rooms consecutively. Rather, the labels exhibited no coherence at all. The principal felt that chaotic and random numbering was beauty and devised the uninformative codes (34). In general, the university’s organisation of things shows pretentious but hollow attentiveness from a group of people who believed they were artists. Their “romantic life” was equivalent to disturbing order and physical untidiness.

The novella briefly features a historian and an archaeologist as equally ridiculous intellectuals. Wei Sanshan 魏三山, Doctor of History, professor, and the head of the History Department at Ghostland’s Capital University, published an article on a country in the living world which had la as the starting syllable in its name and was called yangshi laguo 陽世拉國 (72). Wei claimed that the country had been famous for its mature culture of cannibalism, where people ate not only babies but also dead bodies. Women in this country loved to engage in promiscuity with men, and afterwards cut off their partners’ genitals to hang on their lapels. Han dismissed the article as rubbish because he had never heard about such a country. However, Xiao believed every word the historian wrote, convinced that the writer’s socially acknowledged authority gave him absolute academic credibility, even when the content of his writings seemed absurd. Later in the diary, Han mentioned that fu 夫 and ji 基 are frequently used characters in people’s names in the la country. This is evidence to indicate that the la country was probably Russia, because the first syllable of “Russia” sounds like la in Chinese, and fu and ji are both characteristic endings of male Russian names translated into Chinese. Through references to
reality provided in the novella, the reader can read Wei’s article against the real
world and confirm its absurdity.

Likewise, during a meeting at a capitalist’s residence, a group of cultural celebrities
were marvelling at the antique collection. Among the collection was an axe inscribed
with the words: “Pangu’s ax in his creation of the heaven and the earth” (Pangushi
kaitianpidi zhi fu 盤古氏開天闢地之斧) (62). This object excited some ridiculous
discussion about its authenticity. An archaeologist argued that the axe could not
belong to Pangu because it smelled fake (61–62). As far as he knew, Pangu’s axe
should smell like tobacco, while this one smelled like xuejia 雪茄 (152). First, the
archaeologist made a dead-end argument. Xuejia and “tobacco” are different words
that refer to the same thing. Second, Pangu was a pre-historical and mythical figure
with no substantial evidence he existed, let alone some axe he once used or any
clues as to what this axe could smell like. The archaeologist and the historian above
were vehicles to satirise scholars who registered as professionals but lacked
academic qualities and knowledge.

3.5 Satire of women’s social position and the marriage custom

The Ghostland women of the upper society were subsidiary to men. Women had no
education, financial condition, or social position equal to men. The women were
girlfriends or wives but never independent individuals; however, they were no longer
called “wife” or “girlfriend” but guaiguai 乖乖, which means “docile”. Accordingly,
Ghostland prostitutes were called “fake guaiguai” (132). Guaiguai indicates Ghost-
land’s expectation for submissive women and thus satirises the lowly position of
females. In order to train women to become proper wives, universities set up the
subject of “virtuous wives”. In marriage, women maintained a subservient character,
receiving material support from their husband and caring about nothing else. While
wives must be loyal to their husbands, men did not have to practice the same
devotion as long as they kept providing for their wives (93).
At first, Han noticed Xiao and his *guaiguai* engaging in a charmingly intimate relationship. They claimed to have understood each other deeply and had been spiritually bounded like gum shoes with their soles stuck together in gasoline (14). Because the couple were satisfied with their relationship, the coarse simile could not be conveying satire. Rather, the simile betrays authorial mockery and disagreement, suggesting something more to the observed closeness. The reason is not just that they only met for a few days before settling down in the relationship.

The novella describes a typical Ghostland marriage “trade” in an exaggerated style. Exaggeration often places essential aspects and details in the spotlight. Ghostlanders wishing to acquire a spouse turned to the matrimonial agency. Each man or woman wrote an advertisement about him/herself for others to read and choose. Xiao’s friend Rao San was a marriage seeker, whose advertisement went into tedious detail about his financial condition and social status. Apart from a monthly income of one thousand nine hundred and twenty yuan, Rao San earnt an extra six hundred and thirteen yuan plus four jiao and six fen (六百十三元四角六分) per month; he was also willing to pay twenty-three thousand six hundred and twenty-three yuan plus four jiao (二萬三千六百二十三元四角) as the engagement deposit and sixty thousand yuan as the marriage fee (48). Rao San self-claimed to be the relative of a prestigious entrepreneur; technically, his same-clan sister in law’s brother in law’s nominal mother’s non-bloodline sister (本家嫂嫂的妹夫的乾娘的結拜妹妹) married as a concubine to the entrepreneur’s uncle’s paternal cousin (姨夫的姑表兄弟) (ibid.). As is evident, the narrative zooms in on the salary and familial details in the matrimonial advertisement. The narrative of stylistic dissonance devotes excessive specificity to (the commonly viewed) unnecessary aspects while leaving out the important issue of feelings and love. However, these exaggerated details imply the distorted and decayed core of Ghostland marriage, which had shifted from love to sheer utilitarianism and vanity.
The novella represents the superficiality in romantic relationships and women’s material greed in a well-devised irony based on melodramatic love expressions and the matrimonial trade. Before Rao San and a Miss Li got engaged, they bargained hard with each other over monetary issues. Miss Li made a list of requirements for her material gain, including the expected frequency of movie-going and dining out, a diamond engagement ring, and an expensive dancing costume. Rao proposed a ten percent discount on the fee, hoping that he could spend less on the marriage. They finally agreed on five percent of the marriage fee and signed the contract. While Rao and Li appeared cold and shrewd throughout the bargaining, they suddenly behaved as if they were madly in love with each other once agreeing to become a lawful couple:

“My Darling”, uttered the man desperately, “I love you, with my whole life, my entire soul, and everything I have got. I fell in love with you at first sight: my passion is erupting like a volcano.”

Miss Li cried in equal tenderness: “Me too. I felt the intensity of love when I first met you. Oh, San. How handsome, how gorgeous you are. You must be the only prince in the world. You are a Romeo…”. (Y. Sun 139)

Their abrupt enthusiasm stands in stark contrast to the monetary rationality beforehand, thus appearing especially exaggerated and ingenuine. The stylised language loaded with exclamatory love allusions and metaphors were by no means genuine emotional exclamations. The ritualisation of this romantic style of language can satirise any rituals that are characteristic of a striking disjunction between participants’ emotions and their performative practice. Although the newly-weds’ declaration of love was passionate, this dashing form had been deprived of matching genuine sentiments and fell blank. The contrast between the formulaic eulogy of the greatness of “love” and the business essence satirises the distorted relationship of spiritual hollowness and pure vanity.
4 The satirical realism of *Ghostland Diary*

As the satirical contents have indicated, the novella features the crossing not only from the protagonist’s lived world to the netherworld but also from the mimetic representation of reality to an artistic deviation of it. The novella’s break from the commonplace realistic depictions evoked some criticism. Left-wing critics such as Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899–1935) and Feng Naichao 馮乃超 (1901–1983) criticised *Ghostland Diary* as non-realistic. In “Hua gou ba” 畫狗罷 (“Draw Dogs”, 1931), Qu commented that “When he [Zhang Tianyi] draws dogs, anybody can see that whether the figures were true to life. However, now it is ghosts under his pen, and so only ghosts themselves can judge the similitude”; “[Zhang Tianyi’s] fantasy is very much fuzzy and limitless” (173). Qu also considered the novella to be overly abundant with subject matters through which it cannot provide a profound disclosure of the complex, nuanced reality (ibid., 172). As Han navigated in Ghostland, his perspective and experiences placed various phenomena in front of the reader, which creates a digressive and inadequate social portrayal (ibid.). The over-abundance makes the novella appear a superficial and simplified “schema” (ibid.). Qu regards it as unspecific about the external reality and thus somewhat irrelevant to the social criticism he expected, especially when the fantastical setting hinders the reader’s understanding of what Zhang Tianyi satirises about Republican China (ibid.).

Likewise, in “Xinren Zhang Tianyi de zuopin” 新人張天翼的作品 (“The New Writer Zhang Tianyi’s Works”, 1931), Feng Naichao, under the pseudonym of Li Yishui 李易水, concludes that *Ghostland Diary* features a caricatured, escapist society of a kind

57 “Drawing dogs” is an ancient trope derived from *Han Fei Zì* 韓非子 (by Han Fei [ca. 280–233 BC]):

[Tradition has it that,] in former times, a painter was once at the court of the King of Qi. The king asked him: “What is the most difficult thing to paint, and what the easiest?” The painter replied: “Dogs and horses are hardest, ghosts and demons easiest. Dogs and horses are before people gazes every day, so if a painting does not resemble them it fails; whereas ghosts and demons are without form, and what is without form is invisible, hence easy to paint”. (Campany, *Strange* 141)
of pure capitalism that never existed rather than recognisable figures, events, or organisational structures of society in the Republican reality (884–9). Therefore, Ghostland society is technically not a representation of the real, external world, which makes the satiric techniques employed in the novel worthless (888-9). Qu’s and Feng’s similar opinions clearly indicate that they searched in vain for concrete and accurate references in Ghostland to actual events and critical figures in the Republican era. For example, Qu and Feng were probably disappointed that the novella does not specify who in reality is the prototype of the notorious Ghostland capitalists.

However, the realist strain in *Ghostland Diary* is enacted in a more flexible fashion. To begin with, using Ghostland as a framework to write about social vices is Zhang Tianyi’s creative experiment with the traditional motif of the netherworld. The traditional Chinese netherworld imagination was a mixture of indigenous accounts of a world after death and Indian Buddhism. Representing the universe’s *yin* energy, the netherworld constitutes a significant realm in the traditional Chinese worldview. Netherworld depictions in ancient Chinese literature were associated with the contemporary belief in a mystical space juxtaposed with human society. Netherworld accounts were acknowledged by ancient readers as completing the worldview and the cosmological picture through the “narrative device of invoking evidence in this world to confirm the returner’s impressions of the other world” and informing readers of the netherworld bureaucracy’s manners of operation (Campany, “Return-from-Death” 109). The netherworld had a fully developed system of bureaucracy (Schmid 247). Along with the importation of the Buddhist notion of karma, the netherworld bureaucracy engaged more in recording each individual’s deeds in life and deciding upon their retribution (Teiser 460).

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58 Chinese accounts of the netherworld in the Warring States period and the Spring and Autumn period regarded *Huangquan* 黃泉, *Taishan* 泰山, *Heicheng* 黑城, and *Fengdu* 酆都 as the places populated by dead people (Schmid 246–7). Apart from those terms, pre-Qin accounts also referred to the netherworld as *youdu* 幽都, *youming* 幽冥, *mingjie* 冥界, or *mingjian* 冥間 (Shao Y. 12–4).
There were three likely styles of crossing: 1) one’s body and soul entered the netherworld (Shao Y. 174); 2) one’s soul leaves the body in dreams for the netherworld (ibid., 177); 3) one (temporarily) died, and their soul may or may not return to the body (ibid., 180). The purpose for netherworld crossing was often didactic. Sometimes, the protagonist died and went through a court trial and physical tortures as punishments if he had sinned or was immoral; if innocent and mistakenly admitted into the netherworld, the protagonist usually had a chance to witness other peoples’ trials and punishment (Shao Y. 167). Sometimes, one’s netherworld entry took place for an unknown reason or in an unknown fashion (ibid., 174). These kinds of stories were usually told through the protagonist’s first-person flashback or “direct authorial depiction”, providing extensive narration of the netherworld scenes (Z. Zhang 108). The recollection of netherworld visitors showed readers the punishments one could receive if they failed to abide by certain religious or moral rules (Grant and Idema 3; Campany, “Return” 119). In this sense, netherworld tours must often be terrifying and disturbing. Sometimes, it could be “the living taking office in the underworld” (sheng she ming zhi 生攝冥職), where the netherworld summoned a person to take a bureaucratic position and serve as a messenger between the netherworld and the living world (Y. Sun 383).

The motif of netherworld entry was employed more flexibly in Ming-Qing literature. Ming-Qing zhiguai accounts drew on the stock plot of netherworld visits and the narrative style of subjective flashback; more individuals proactively chose to visit the netherworld and generate stronger moral judgments than in the Tang tales (Shao Y. 295–303). Another purpose of extensive netherworld depictions in Ming-Qing fiction was to satirise reality by drawing readers’ attention to the stark contrast between the netherworld and the disappointing reality, where righteousness was rewarded and evil was punished (Zheng H. 43). To some people’s comfort, the underworld bureaucracy could be an extension and the final guarantee of justice as well as the means for restoring order when governors in the living world failed them (H. Liao 99–
There were also netherworld scenarios invented as the allegorical, thought-provoking reflection of the contemporary bleak reality (Zheng H. 45).

The destination of the crossing in *Ghostland Diary* differs from the traditional, but the purpose changes only slightly. Despite being set as the netherworld, Ghostland activities and events do not exhibit connections with the living world, other than Han and his late friend Xiao recognising each other. There was no karma exchanged between the two worlds as held by the traditional netherworld belief. Ghostland was not a place for moral or religious judgment of the deceased but an alternative world independent from the living world. It was a place evoking laughter and a light atmosphere rather than frightening or warning the reader. The novella displays several dystopian features but differs from the strict genre of dystopian fiction, which is largely themed with a totalitarian society and scientific/technological immoderation (Baker 22; Claeys 17). Classical dystopian scenes include divinely triggered apocalypses (natural disasters), the collapse of civilisation, death of humanity, decay, terror, “war, lawlessness, disorder, pain, and suffering” (Claeys 4). Ghostland is only “dystopian” in a general sense because of its negative political situations, social ethos, humanity, and prospects. It is almost a land without any positive vision, public awareness of the bleakness, or hope.

Although the protagonist initially decided upon his crossing without special intentions, his brief but colourful tour in Ghostland triggers questions and freshens the reader’s mind. With the freedom of imagination provided by the netherworld motif, the novella plucks the reader out of the mundane to facilitate an alternative perspective on reality. By appropriating some familiar elements in a fantasy social context, Zhang Tianyi created a site for the reader to re-observe social principles in laughter and wonder. The hyperbolic awful social landscape of Ghostland “enables the participants—or contemporary readers—to see what they cannot normally see in the ordinary process of day-to-day living; and it enables the observers—the subsequent generations of readers—to grasp a reality that was never their own” (Iser 74).
Ghostland Diary employs “indirection satire”, where the allegorical world makes it a challenge to identify the specific objects the satirist targets (Hile 13). The reader and the satirist need to share knowledge and views of social standards, so that the reader can realise the satirist’s intended meaning (ibid., 28). In the Chinese context of satire, Ghostland Diary bears resemblances to allegorical satire such as Dong Yue’s 董說 (1620–1686) Xiyou bu 西游补 (Supplement to Journey to the West, ca. 1650), Li Ruzhen’s 李汝珍 (ca. 1763–1830) Jinghua yuan 鏡花緣 (Flowers in the Mirror, 1828), and Nanzhuang’s 張南莊 (?–1861) Hedian 何典 (Which Allusion Is That, 1878). Ghostland Diary inspires insightfulness into reality and evokes the reader’s sensitivity to critical ruling principles instead of minute facts. According to Yifeng Sun (2002), Zhang Tianyi seeks to bring out the essential quality of reality underneath the daily observable surface: “reality must be redefined and transformed artistically in order to allow him to make sense of it hoping that its improvement may be made possible” (Y. Sun 153). Thanks to the satirical techniques employed, including (high/low) burlesque, self-contradiction in irony, exaggeration, and authorial ridicule, the novella exposes Ghostland’s problems within its social system and landscape. Yet its exposure does not require an external reality in the background, meaning that its satire does not rely on establishing particular references to any specific incidents and people in reality. Confirming Ghostland’s resemblance to the Republican reality, the novella then brings the reader’s attention to how problematic the reality might be. The rotten principles in Ghostland beg questions regarding certain basic assumptions unconfined to the republican society or any historical period, such as the truths of democracy, the meaning of marriage, and the purposes of social institutions. Ghostland Diary evokes the reader’s realistic concerns about their surroundings and general issues worthy of consideration at all times.

5 Conclusion
*Ghostland Diary* applies the traditional motif of the netherworld visit to its social satire. In the story, the protagonist temporarily crossed into Ghostland (netherworld) from the living world and embarked on a tour meant to enlighten him with new ideas. The netherworld was not as different from the real world as it first seemed. In thematic terms, he did not cross into anywhere else because Ghostland artistically mirrors the novel’s contemporary social reality. Here, Zhang Tianyi does not comply with the traditional netherworld motif. The novel has no stock netherworld components, such as a ghost judge, ghost soldiers and jailors, or torturing hells extending eighteen levels underground. Moreover, Zhang does not develop the idea of karmic or causal retribution, nor does he fit Ghostland into the Chinese *yin–yang* worldview as a cosmological supplement to the living world. In fact, even if the protagonist’s crossing destination were other kinds and not the netherworld, it would not impact the satiric intention and theme of the novella. The point of using the netherworld motif is to gain great freedom and space in imagination, not to develop the idea or belief in the netherworld.

The abnormality of Ghostland is embodied in a variety of social practices and ideas rather than any supernatural creatures or transformations. The scale of this social fantasy distinguishes the novel from the primary sources discussed in previous chapters. Zhang Tianyi’s protagonist stepped into an entirely strange world rather than coming across supernatural figures or incidents while grounded in his accustomed reality. In most of the previous primary sources, an eerie and spooky shadow is cast over their stories, where ghostly figures are inserted into a realist context. By contrast, *Ghostland Diary* evokes less of a disturbing atmosphere than other primary sources, because it begins by establishing its abnormal world at a distance from readers’ experienced reality within an explicit satiric framework. *Ghostland Diary* also differs from previous (quasi-)ghost stories in that although it claims to be about the netherworld and dead people, it shows scarce interest in deathly or morbid happenings or details that may produce intimidating or even threatening effects on characters; most of the Ghostland events take place in a hilarious atmosphere.
However, the commonality among all these works is that they solidly engage their (quasi-)supernatural fantasies with realist concerns about society or individuals. One effect of the netherworld crossing is to activate a naïve outsider’s observational perspective. Another significant effect of the crossing is to unfold a repugnant society for satirical exposure. Problems and vices in social structure, politics, bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, and marriage were exposed through a dazzling range of satiric techniques, including (verbal) irony, high burlesque, mispronunciation/mistranslation in low burlesque, and exaggeration. The novella was dismissed as too abstract because it does not clarify who or what events are in the Republican era that is satirised in Ghostland. Nevertheless, the novella may have achieved more than its critics expected. On the one hand, it fully exposes the social problems of Ghostland. On the other, it establishes a solid referentiality between Ghostland and the real world via narratives, including the diarist’s letter and the recurring persuasive discourse throughout the story. In so doing, the novella attempts to bury a seed of doubt in readers, encouraging them to find anything similar in reality to Ghostland and what they have deemed normal and natural.
Chapter 6 Supernatural Figures Crossing into the Human World

This chapter also discusses crossing into an alternative, remote world. To enrich the diversity in primary sources, I select fictional works in which crossing took place in an opposite direction, namely supernatural characters entered the human world. The chapter presents analyses of Zhang Henshui’s (1895–1967) novel *Xin Zhangui zhuang* 新斬鬼傳 (*A New Tale of Killing Ghosts*, 1926, henceforth *New Tale*) and Ye Lingfeng’s (1905–1975) short story “Zuodao” 左道 (“The Deviant Path”, 1928). *New Tale* was first serialized between February 19 and September 4, 1926, in *Shijie ribao* 世界日報 (World Daily) entitled *Xin zhuogui zhuang* 新捉鬼傳 (*A New Tale of Catching Ghosts*) (Xie 711). The novel was later published by Xinzhiyou shuju 新自由書局 (New Freedom Book Company) in 1931 and Zhengfeng shuju 正風書局 (Zhengfeng Book Company) in 1936 (Gan 82; Wei 988). “The Deviant Path” first appeared in the literary journal *Gebi* 戈壁 (*Gobi*, 1. 3 [1928] pp. 143–152). *New Tale* features the secular adventures of Chinese ghost-catching divinity Zhong Kui 鐘馗, while “The Deviant Path” depicts the social chaos triggered by Shilu, a dead man rising from his grave. The two supernatural figures have little in common apart from being foreign to the human world. The direction of their crossing differs from that more often seen in fantasy literature, where a human protagonist crosses into another world. Here, supernatural characters adopted a proactive position, while their destination of crossing—the human society—was the observed object.

The two primary sources establish evidently fantastical worlds from the very start of their plots, thus making them works of the marvellous in Todorov’s term. They echo Zhang Tianyi’s *Ghostland Diary* in the “distance” between reading experiences and the reader’s reality. In the first three chapters of this thesis, the daily life scenes and settings of the primary sources faithfully imitate contemporary reality; by contrast, *New Tale* and “The Deviant Path” do not feign realistic authenticity.
Like Chapter 5, the interpretative focus of this chapter is not on the characters who cross over, interact with the strange world, or even exert a substantial impact on it. Rather, it is the characters and happenings indigenous to the strange world that reflect the purposes of writing. The key to understanding the works is to recognise the satirical techniques employed in the narratives and pinpoint the objects satirised.

1 A New Tale of Killing Ghosts: new wine in an old bottle

Zhang Henshui’s New Tale is a pastiche of Liu Zhang’s 劉璋 (1667-?)59 Zhangui zhuan60 斬鬼傳 (A Tale of Killing Ghosts, 1688) and the literary motif of Zhong Kui. Zhang Henshui was a novelist with no special interest in supernatural narratives; he simply drew inspiration from traditional fiction.61

New Tale starts with Zhong Kui in his celestial temple. The celestial realm had recently undergone tremendous changes in parallel to the mortal world, where the Monkey King toppled the old empire and established a Republican regime. One day, Zhong Kui happened to find that the inscribed board in his temple had been mysteriously replaced, and the new board read “Such things are indeed happening”

59 Liu is also known as Yanxiasanren 煙霞散人. Zhuangui zhuan was collected into the Caizi shu 才子書 (Books Written by the Talented) series in the Republican era and published under the title of Zhong Kui zhuan 鐘馗傳 (Biography of Zhong Kui, 1934) as the “ninth book written by the talented”. According to the introduction to various versions of the novel in an appendix of Zhangui zhuan (1989), the 1934 version might be the earliest letterpress print version (282).
61 His classical education planted in him the seed of leading a traditional poetical life. However, before becoming able to earn a living with fiction, Zhang took a detour, gaining experiences as he travelled with an opera troupe and later edited newspapers. He excelled at writing session-chapter novels and has often been dismissively classified as a “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” novelist. Chunming waishi 春明外史 (An Unofficial History of Peking, 1930), Tixiao yinyuan 啼笑因緣 (Fate in Tears and Laughter, 1930), and Jinfen shijia 金粉世家 (The Story of a Noble Family, 1932) were among his most well-received novels, while New Tale is one of his least famous.
Realising that the old inscription had been changed without his permission, Zhong Kui was furious about his authority being challenged. Strangely, he nevertheless took the new inscription as a serious, meaningful message to be deciphered. Zhong Kui and his two helpers, Hanyuan 含冤 (literally “being wronged”) and Fuqu 負屈 (literally “suffering from unjust treatment”), compared the new inscription with the old one. Hanyuan felt the board was changed by a well-meaning person: “I think the inscribed board ‘How can such things be possible?’ awarded by the Tang emperor Dezong meant us—‘How is it possible for the world to have professional ghost catchers’. Now, the new board refers to ghosts” (1). Zhong Kui thus sent Fuqu to investigate whether there were new ghosts disturbing the secular world. Leading a group of celestial soldiers, Zhong Kui set off on a journey of exorcism. As an immortal, he transferred himself and others directly from the celestial empire to the mortals’ world instead of through incarnation.

*New Tale* features many ghosts with magical power. The world Zhong Kui and his men crossed into from the celestial realm was populated with ghosts with unique, informative nicknames all ending with the character “gui” (“ghost”), some with magical capabilities. Inheriting the traditional novelistic form of *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說 (the session-chapter novel), namely a chain of relatively independent events taking place in separate individual chapters, the novel showcases a limited number of ghosts who are characterised by different weaknesses and follies. The main plot involves Zhong Kui encountering all kinds of

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62 Session-chapter novels had barely created anything original since the late Qing, compared with their literary prototypes in the Ming and Qing dynasties (Xu W. 138). Republican session-chapter novels inherited the old popular subgenres, including romances, court case fiction, satire and sarcasm fiction, and martial arts fiction. More than 2,000 session-chapter novels were published from 1912 to 1949, but these are often eclipsed by the canonised “new literature” in historiography. See Zhang Ying and Chen Su’s *Zhongguo zhanghui xiaoshuo xinkao* 中國章回小說新考 (*A New Research in Chinese Session-Chapter Novels*, 1991). For synopses of novels written either in classical or vernacular Chinese, see *Minguo zhanghui xiaoshuo daguan* 民國章回小說大觀 (*An encyclopedia of the Republican session-chapter novels*, 1997).
ghosts he had never previously seen and leading his army to track them down, because many ghosts were cunning and cost Zhong Kui some effort and time to exorcise. A list of the encountered ghosts includes *Yapiangui* (Opium Ghost), *Kongxingui* (Hollow-Hearted Ghost), *Shiligui* (Snobbish Ghost), *Fengliugui* (Dissolute Ghost), *Maoshigui* (Reckless Ghost), *Selingui* (Stingy Ghost), *Xialiugui* (Nasty Ghost), *Dahuagui* (Bragging Ghost), *Hutugui* (Stupid Ghost), *Meiliangui* (Faceless Ghost), and *Xuhuagui* (Bogus Ghost).

The episodic narrative makes the plot appear loose and delineated in broad strokes. The entire story is told from an omnipresent third-person perspective. Among the fourteen chapters, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 primarily depict how the ghosts conduct magic in their direct confrontation with Zhong Kui’s soldiers. Chapters 4 to 9 have few fantastical elements and present the ghosts as ordinary people in the earthly world. Zhong Kui and his army exorcised most of the ghosts along the way and finally found several ghost headquarters but lost the opportunity to eradicate them all. When Zhong Kui was a few steps away from a group of surviving ghosts, Faceless Ghost took down the bridge on the river running between the ghosts and Zhong Kui and put swarms of crabs, fish, and shrimps in the river to stir waves. Zhong Kui had no choice but to wait till the river calmed down, while the ghosts were still at large.

Previous studies of the novel have been rather scarce and less than entirely satisfactory in terms of perspective and depth. There have been no significant studies in English. Chinese researchers compared *New Tale* with Liu Zhang’s *A Tale of Killing Ghosts*, the “prequel”. Siu Fan Lau and Man Shan Chung (2009) have produced the most comprehensive analysis of *New Tale*’s content so far. They listed the satirised objects reflected from the ghosts (172–76). They argue that parallel to Liu Zhang’s *Tale*, *New Tale* represents Zhong Kui as less cold-hearted to ghosts than previously but closer to an ordinary person who might be taken advantage of by rivals. He gave some ghosts a second chance and employed approaches to
exorcism more novel and flexible than his original cannibalistic acts in the early versions of the legend (ibid., 170). Also, Zhong Kui’s stance as a ghost catcher wavered when his commitment to their eradication diminished upon hearing the ghosts’ (feigned) adulation (ibid., 171). Wen Fengqiao and Li Mengyu (2007) argue that, following the lead of Liu Zhang’s novel in artistic traits and contents, New Tale does not exemplify the modern literary features manifest in Zhang Henshui’s reformed session-chapter fiction, other than shaking off the classical couplet form in New Tale’s chapter titles, which has partially led scholars to overlook the novel (131).


There are several other satirical strategies in New Tale that existing research has overlooked, which will be my focus in the upcoming sections. I also explore how the novel build on Liu Zhang’s A Tale of Killing Ghosts. How do the fantastical configurations of ghost characters and their magical manipulations serve this satirical purpose?

1.1 Zhong Kui’s secondary role in the ghost allegory

Taking after Liu Zhang’s novel, New Tale keeps Zhong Kui and his exorcising army in a secondary position in the plot. In the early 1920s, Zhang Henshui found a copy of A Tale of Killing Ghost and decided to write a sequel to it (Zhang H., “Zixu” 2). New Tale...
Tale’s connection with Liu Zhang’s novel explains why Zhong Kui was not the protagonist.

*A Tale of Killing Ghost* is a satirical novel that develops the legend of Zhong Kui exorcising ghosts. Zhong Kui has been a widely worshipped exorcist deity in folk beliefs. He can be identified as one of those deities that cross over from the celestial realm (bureaucracy) to the mortal world to benefit people (*jishi* 濟世). The origin of the cult can be traced back as early as the Western Jin dynasty or the late Eastern Jin. According to Henry Doré’s investigation (1933), Zhong Kui holds a position on the Board of Exorcisms of the celestial government in Taoism (171). His image “always remains the Devil-killer, grotesque, ragged, and grimacing” (ibid.).

Zhong Kui was depicted and dramatised in various ways in ancient China, which can be summarised in the following categories: legends recording the devil killer Zhong Kui, folkloric accounts describing Zhong Kui as an exorcist (*fangxiang* 方相) taking part in exorcising rituals (such as the *nuo* 儺 parades), and various adaptations of the motif of Zhong Kui in literature. In Ming and Qing fiction, Zhong Kui became the protagonist in three novels: *Zhong Kui quanzhuan* 鐘馗全傳 (*Full Tales of Zhong Kui*, anonymous, Ming); Liu Zhang’s *A Tale of Killing Ghosts*; and Yunzhongdaoren’s *Tang Zhong Kui pinggui zhuan* 唐鐘馗平鬼傳 (*A Tale of Zhong Kui Quelling Ghosts in the Tang Dynasty*, Qing). Their commonality lies in the

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64 There has been abundant research into how the cult of Zhong Kui originated. See Liu Xicheng (2018, 299–301); Siu Fan Lau and Man Shan Chung (2009, 162–7).
66 Liu Xicheng (1998) provides a thorough introduction to the enrichment of Zhong Kui’s figure in exorcist occult culture recorded by Dunhuang scripture and scholarly historical essays (302–6). Liu also outlines the secularisation of Zhong Kui’s figure as it grew prevalent in folk exorcist rituals and its transformation from Song to the People’s Republic of China (310–7).
67 During the Ming dynasty, *zaju* drama (雜劇) adopted the legend of Zhong Kui (Liu X., *Minjian* 319–24). There have been dramas such as the anonymous *Qing fengnian wugui nao Zhong Kui* 慶新年五鬼鬧鐘馗 (*Five Ghosts Making Fun of Zhong Kui in the Celebration of a Fruitful Year*) and the *kun* opera *Zhong Kui jia mei* 鐘馗嫁妹 (*Zhong Kui Marrying off His Sister*) (Tao E. 82–108).
fact that the authors elaborated the processes underpinning Zhong Kui’s elimination of demons, and the satirical, exorcised objects were based on the authors’ social observations (Liu X., Minjian 327). The two Zhong Kui novels from the Qing dynasty, however, were more secular than Full Tales of Zhong Kui. Full Tales depicts how Zhong Kui inspected multi underworlds (hells) while maintaining his wondrous and magical characteristics; A Tale of Killing Ghosts and A Tale of Tang Zhong Kui Quelling Ghosts betray a decline in Zhong Kui’s divinity (Hu S. 134–36). Nevertheless, as the image of Zhong Kui developed across time and genres, he has always been characterised as a righteous and auspicious figure with the power and authority to conduct exorcisms and purify the secular world (Liu Y., “Zhong Kui” 38).

Liu Zhang’s A Tale of Killing Ghosts starts with Zhong Kui taking the Imperial Examination in the capital city (6). He ranked first as a result of his performance in writing. However, his champion title was rescinded due to his disagreeable appearance. Zhong Kui took his own life in protest against this gross injustice. Deeply moved, Emperor Dezong of Tang 唐德宗 restored Zhong Kui’s title, held a grand funeral for him, and appointed him as the Qumo dashen 驅魔大神 (“The Great God of Exorcism”). Yama, the king of the Underworld, sent Xianyuan 鹹淵 (a name with a similar pronunciation to hanyuan 含冤) and Fuqu 富曲 (a homophone of fuqu 負屈) to assist Zhong Kui in leading a group of underworld soldiers. Their mission was to track down and punish ghosts wandering among humans. The ghosts were all satirised objects, each representing one of the commonly seen immoralities beyond the reach of law, such as conceitedness, brazenness, dishonesty, greed, lecherousness, and alcoholism (Liu Z. 1). During his journey, Zhong Kui dealt with all the ghosts on Yama’s list one by one. In the end, Zhong Kui, Xianyuan, and Fuqu reported to the Jade Emperor in the Celestial Empire. Zhong Kui was rewarded with a divine temple and started enjoying extended worship from the living world as a new divinity. Emperor Dezong dedicated an inscribed board to Zhong Kui’s temple as an acknowledgment of the latter’s expertise in exorcism and heroic achievements. All the characters gathered around the board and read out loud its inscription: “How can such things be possible?” (Nayou zheyang shi 那「哪」有這樣事) (191). The story
ended at this climactic moment, ensued by a closing poem about how the story was only the novelist’s dream (the first two lines read, “Flowers were brushing against the bamboo screen/while I was having a long midday dream”, 184). Overall, except for the first and the last chapter telling of Zhong Kui’s tragedy and his final sublimation, respectively, all other chapters numerate a variety of ghosts, whose ugliness and endings unfold in a plethora of coarse expressions and disturbing scenes.

*New Tale* depicts Zhang Henshui’s familiarity with Liu Zhang’s *A Tale of Killing Ghosts* and his intention to pick up the latter’s ending and extend Zhong Kui’s legend. Even so, *New Tale* can be read as an independent novel, because most readers might already be familiar with Zhong Kui’s exorcising mission after centuries of fictional appropriations of the legend. Imitating Liu Zhang’s novel structure, *New Tale* focuses not on Zhong Kui but on a range of new ghosts targeting human vices. Little information is given about Zhong Kui’s personal development, as Liu Zhang’s novel already constructed a complete narrative of how Zhong Kui came to this phase of life as a professional ghost hunter and finally how he was deified. In *New Tale*, Zhong Kui served as a symbol of righteousness and instrument of rectifying the wrong. Nevertheless, anyone who reads *New Tale* against Liu Zhang’s *A Tale of Killing Ghosts* will recognise a familiar flavour in the former and realise that Zhang Henshui is paying a humorous homage to Liu Zhang. The inscribed board in *A Tale of Killing Ghosts* inspired Zhang Tianyi to find a reason to re-motivate Zhong Kui for a new ghost-hunting expedition, who had been settling down in the celestial realm for centuries after completing the final mission and being formally deified.

*New Tale* provides no clues as to who changed the inscribed board into the one that stated, “Such things are indeed happening”, nor is it especially important. “Such things are indeed happening” is clearly replying to the previous inscription, “How can such things be possible?”. The two phrases are intrusive narratorial fragments. On

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68 An “intrusive narrator” is omniscient and, now and then, interrupts the story to impart (moral) commentary (Baldick).
the one hand, the inscription serves as a crucial story component to drive forward
the plot. On the other, it is a vehicle for the narrator to make a witty comment
echoing “How can such things be possible?” The narrator of New Tale is not readily
noticeable, as s/he narrates the entire story without showing him/herself. The
narrator can be seen as similar to traditional Chinese storytellers who recite stories
(shuoshu 說書) for townspeople. The reminiscent style of storytelling in New Tale is
conspicuous in two clear ways: queshuo 却說 (“let us resume the story”) that starts
the chapters; and the one-line preview of the next chapter, usually yuzhi 欲知...
quekan xiahui fenjie 却看下回分解 (“if you would like to know... wait to see the next
chapter”). These “metanarrative” transition phrases have been identified as a set of
long-used textual markers vernacular novelists deliberately employ to imitate the
traditional storytelling manner and style (Børđahl 125). Such formulas create
the impression of a storyteller presenting the story to the audience (ibid.).

Ultimately, the narrator/storyteller is intervening in his/her own story. While “Such
things are indeed happening” was added to the plot and is perceived by characters,
it also conveys the narrator’s overall sentiment about the upcoming rampant ghosts
as an inner-plot commentary. The phrase engenders not only a sense of playfulness
but also a different tone concerning reality. In Liu Zhang’s A Tale of Killing Ghosts,
the phrase “How can such things be possible?” emerged as all the surrounding
characters were taking a look at the inscribed board. Moreover, it was also a remark
on the boundary between the narrator’s dream and the waking reality. Thematically,
the inscription is an exclamation of amazement at Zhong Kui’s legendary and
admirable exorcist divinity and his achievements. As a teasing acknowledgement of
Zhong Kui’s novelistic fictionality, “How can such things be possible?” creates a
distance between the reader and the fictional world of the story.

By contrast, in New Tale, “Such things are indeed happening” gives rise to the idea
that ghosts should not be dismissed as oneiric imaginings but are in fact real in some
sense. It serves as both a “warning” and the “eye of the novel” (wenyan 文眼

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, literally the “eye of a piece of writing”). What does “ghost” mean here? In *A Tale of Killing Ghosts*, King Yama explained that disposition made a difference in distinguishing ghosts from humans—integrity can raise a ghost to the level of divinity, while an immoral man is almost a ghost 大凡「人鬼」之分，只在方寸。方寸正時，鬼可為神。方寸不正時，人即為鬼 (Liu Z. 12). *New Tale* shares the allegorical theme of exposing and ridiculing ghosts among humankind in *A Tale of Killing Ghosts* (Zhang H., “Zixu” 1). In his preface to *New Tale*, the popular Republican fiction writer Xu Qinfu 許廑父 (1891-1953) argues that one should not ignore the horrible deeds people perform, which renders some of them unworthy of being regarded as human (247). Hence, the ghost characters were not returning spirits or remnants of dead people; their despicable nature earned them ghost nicknames and identity, and, in an allegorical sense, the characters were unqualified as humans. Calling the characters “[XX] Ghost” is a satirical technique of abuse. It is easy to see which ill quality a ghost represents by his name. Amusing and blunt, the ghosts’ names also dispel any sense of mystery that might be derived from the supernatural notion.

1.2 Ghosts with revealing qualities and abilities

Zhong Kui’s exorcist expedition in the ghost-populated world lies at the centre of representation. Along the way, Zhong Kui discovered ghosts he had never seen before, which creates a parade of ghosts for the reader to recognise their represented vices and follies. Zhong Kui’s presence secures the fundamental theme of the novel. Without him as the “antidote” anchored in the background, the story would appear as a picture portraying the ugliness of humanity at its most stark.

Some ghosts displayed characteristics of the Republican time. For example, Opium Ghost targets the Chinese opium eaters. Zhong Kui’s soldiers, who were the first to

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69 Liu Xizai 刘熙载 (1813-1881) notes in the Qing-era Chinese theoretical work on verse and prose *Yigai·wengai* 藝概·文概 (*Artistic Outlines: An Outline on Prose*, 1873) that the “eye” is designed to imply the theme of the entire piece of writing, a figure that can be placed at the beginning, middle, or end of the text (Cao Y. 50).
come down, almost succumbed to the ghost’s opium smoke which smelled good but blurred their judgment (4). The novel gives Opium Ghost a grotesque close-up based on the typical complexion of opium eaters:

His face which was like a sheet of wax wrapping up a skull and had little flesh. A thin-lipped mouth protruded out of the sunken cheeks. Two jade pillars [yellow nasal mucus] were hanging from his nostrils like a pair of mechanical components—sometimes, one mucus pillar retreated up into the nostril; sometimes, the other withdrew above the lips, up and down, flexible indeed. His hands seemed gilded, long, dark, and quite scary, especially with the ten sharp, blackened fingernails. (6)

Opium Ghost used his smoking gun as a dramatically effective weapon against Zhong Kui’s soldiers, and his fatal skill was to insert the smoking gun into his rival’s mouth to deprive the latter of their strength (8). Overwhelmed by a sudden wave of opium desire, Opium Ghost lost the strength to fight and quickly surrendered to Zhong Kui. Although he received a second chance from Zhong Kui to quit opium, the ghost failed and lapsed deeper into addiction. His final punishment was to have his intestines washed in the netherworld’s water jail for twelve years (30).

The next group of Republican ghosts are Xuanxuegui 玄學鬼 (Obscure Ghost), Hollow-Hearted Ghost, and Butonggui 不通鬼 (Nonsensical Ghost), targeting old and new literati. Nonsensical Ghost wrote 70,000–80,000 “serene and mysterious” poems (34). His formal name, Hu Yan 胡言 (literally “nonsense”), shows the author’s contempt for obscure modern poetry, which was prolifically produced. His love poem collection became a weapon that could severely hinder Zhong Kui’s soldiers by disseminating stench (52). To boost their men’s morale against Zhong Kui’s army, Hollow-Hearted Ghost wrote a war announcement. The ghost’s article betrayed his feigned eruditeness as a product of plagiarism replete with sentences picked out from classics (60–6).
Obscure Ghost (formally named Wu Jiaoba 巫焦巴) claimed to be a philosopher, who rambled about the autobiographies of foreign philosophers to parade his knowledge. With philosophical meticulousness, he exhibited a condescending obsession with correcting other people’s normal way of speaking:

His house servant interrupted his speech, seizing his clothes: “Sir, stop lecturing and go back with me. Madam fell on the ground, and she is probably still lying there!” Wu Jiaoba asked: “Don’t fuss. Which Madam are you talking about?” The house servant answered: “Who else can it be except for our Madam?” Wu said: “Then you mean Madam Wu”. The servant replied: “Yes”. Wu uttered a prolonged sigh: “Alas! You can’t tell the difference because you studied no philosophy.... Mrs. Wu is a madam, but ‘a madam fells down’ does not necessarily mean that Mrs. Wu fell down. If you said Mrs. Wu had fallen down, I would have been on my way back. You only said Madam fell down, and how was I supposed to know which Madam?” (38–9)

These ghosts were described as highly abstract and stereotypical symbols of the Republican interest in foreign culture, without much depth in personality.

Most ghosts embodied universal shortcomings of humanity not confined to the Republican era. The novel employs caricature, irony, and the exaggeration of low burlesque to expose the ghosts’ comical ugliness. For example, Diaozuangui 刁鑽鬼 (Cunning Ghost) went to Snobbish Ghost’s restaurant to escape Zhong Kui’s search (88). At first, he received a cold reception because of his shabby appearance. Out of anger, Cunning Ghost left and then returned in a dashing outfit, including a suit, expensive leather shoes, a fine hat, round glasses, and a walking stick. As he arrived at the restaurant in a friend’s car, Snobbish Ghost was deceived by Cunning Ghost’s appearance and dramatically changed into a fawning toady. Having no money with him, Cunning Ghost pretended to be the head of the mint office and paid for his meal with a piece of paper on which 5 yuan was written as its face value. Snobbish Ghost accepted the fake money happily, holding the copper plate with the “five yuan note” on it high and with pride (96).
The novel exposes the deception of several other ghosts. For instance, Zhuang-qianggui 装腔鬼 (Hypocritical Ghost) made a living with his polished ethicality as a knowledgeable scholar of Confucian classics and codes of conduct (117). He criticised Dissolute Ghost’s unrestrained pleasure-seeking but later revealed his obscene side while horsing around with a prostitute. Hypocritical Ghost even took advantage of his role as a teacher to harass a female student (127–8). Faceless Ghost was also a double-dealer. The ghost dared not challenge anyone stronger than him but would curse the worst behind their backs (288–9). In the case of Yaominggui 要命鬼 (Life-Seizing Ghost), the novel describes how a magical spring water served as the ghost’s face changer (279). The ghosts washed his amiable-looking mask in the water and then used it to cover his genuinely scary face. The water would keep the mask on his face securely until he took it off. Employing the same trick, Bogus Ghost pursued a random woman in public and collected personal wealth in the name of charity, which would not have been possible with his original monstrous face (321).

Many behaviours of the ghosts were vulgar, which is why some researchers have criticised the novel as lacking subtlety. Hypocritical Ghost pretended to be a man of self-control and decency; in fact, he contracted syphilis, probably from prostitutes (132). Stingy Ghost made a bet with a melon peddler and even dared to take a bite of dog excrement for a trolley of free melons (180). True to his name, Nasty Ghost’s wife and home were filthy and disgusting (215–6). The ghost conspired to revive the imperial dynasty. To display his imperial piety, Nasty Ghost used the chamber pot to make tea, which he believed belonged to the Jade Emperor (227). Nasty Ghost’s wife led a female army to fight Zhong Kui with smelly toilet buckets and toilet brushes as weapons (245). Dissolute Ghost planned to write and sell a “sex guide” to various perverse sexual activities. He believed that such a book could justifiably go into meticulous detail about sex when covered by a scientific camouflage (266).
Moral weaknesses not only exposed the ghosts to Zhong Kui but also inspired him to tailor his strategies to capture and punish them. Corresponding to the ghosts' vulgarity, the exorcising measures could also be vulgar. For instance, Zhong Kui threw Hypocritical Ghost into a cesspool, on which the narrator comments: “It is funny how the ghost put on stinky airs [bai choujiazi 搖臭架子] before and how he ends up in excrement” (added italic) (132). Stingy Ghost was sent to a mountain of copper, although initially excited he soon died of hunger (184–85). As for Snobbish Ghost, Zhong Kui realised that he was blind to deeper truths and only believed what he saw on the surface. Therefore, Zhong Kui removed his eyeballs (146). The capture of Reckless Ghost was a success because the exorcists took advantage of the ghost’s biggest shortcomings. They put out a fake notice looking for the owner of 1,200 yuan, and as expected Reckless Ghost took the bait (173).

1.3 The literalisation of idioms: the crossing from metaphor to scene

The most significant satiric technique in New Tale is the authorial commentaries in the extended scenes based on idiom literalisation. It is possible that New Tale borrowed the technique from Liu Zhang’s A Tale of Killing Ghosts. Liu Zhang’s novel materialises an idiom’s literal meaning as an event or scene in the story. In Chapter 2, Daodagui 搞大鬼 (Rowdy Ghost), Guchagui 打喳鬼 (Cracking Ghost), and Hanchengui 寒殢鬼 (Scrubby Ghost) weakened their enemies’ fighting skills by shouting degrading words at them. While Zhong Kui and his soldiers were facing the ghosts’ “linguistic” attack, a fat monk came to their rescue: “The monk smiled, opened his mouth wide, and swallowed the three ghosts in a mouthful” (31). The monk explained to the awestruck crowd: “You don’t need to teach the ghosts lessons or debate with them. Just accommodate them with a big belly. Why do you have to fight with them?” (ibid.).

Behind the scene of the big monk swallowing ghosts is the idiom du da neng rong 肚大能容 (literally “belly-big-able to-accommodate”). This means that one should be
tolerant. Customarily, in the Chinese context the figurative meaning prevails, and the imagery of the idiom is not taken seriously; that is, in the case of *du da neng rong*, one can still be tolerant even without a capacious stomach. However, Liu Zhang brought the idiom’s literal meaning to the semantic surface of the story and made the moral verdict more vivid. A similar example is the literalisation of *suotou wugui* (縮頭烏龜, literally “a turtle withdrawing its head into the shell”). When *Jilaigui* (Deadbeat Ghost) turned himself into a turtle and withdrew his head, the narrator criticised him thus: “He has no way to avoid debts by talking nonsense, but he is able to avoid people by shying away like a turtle” (72). While the narrative highlights the metaphorical allusion to cowardice, the literal imagery of the turtle occupies the fictional space of the story by actually having the ghost character turn into a turtle.

Liu Zhang’s literalisation echoes Tzvetan Todorov’s (1975) ideas on the figurative discourse in fantasy as expressions in the narration leading to a “veritable metamorphosis” (77). Supernatural incidents in the story take place as the “literal sense of the figurative expression getting realised by the fantastic” (79). Expressions characterised by exaggeration or metaphors may still convey didactic messages through specific fantastical scenes, even when the expressions are not articulated in their exact words. Literalisation also appeared in Pu Songling’s *Liaozhai*. Pu realised the literal meaning of metaphorical language to generate fantastical events, evoking strangeness and comic effects (Zeitlin 145). Zeitlin comments that the literalisation “blurs the boundary between literal and figurative language” and renews our understanding of the “infinite possibilities of language enclosed in the miniature space of a text” (ibid., 199).

Emulating Liu Zhang’s style of exposure and criticism, Zhang Henshui had in mind people’s moral weaknesses as he had witnessed these in society and gave literary representations to these abstract targets. *New Tale* takes the literalisation of idioms to a much more mature level than in Liu Zhang’s novel. Not only is this strategy used more frequently, but there is also better integration of the literal meanings of the idioms into the story. The novel extends the literal meanings into supernatural
imaginings while satirising vices. For example, Dissolute Ghost was so taken over by his lascivious obsession with a stranger that his soul drifted out of his body:

[Dissolute Ghost] stood in the middle of the street, not responding to any calls. Reckless Ghost walked closer to him and noticed that Dissolute Ghost was gazing at something inside a gate. He was cold from head to toe except for the slight warmth near his heart. Reckless Ghost had always known that Dissolute Ghost often became soulless when he came upon beauties, so there must be one inside that gate who had accidentally captured his soul. (146)

The critical sentence in this excerpt is “Dissolute Ghost often became soulless when he came upon beauties”, suggesting that the whole scene is based on the idiom *hun bu shou she* 魂不守舍. Literally, *hun bu shou she* means “one’s soul/spirit failing to stay in the body”. This image leads to the figurative meaning of “being unable to concentrate on what one is supposed to do because of some powerful distraction”.

Literalisation becomes complete when the novel transforms the imagery components of *hun bu shou she* into an actual literary event. In this sense, Dissolute Ghost’s soul left his body and transported itself into the beautiful woman’s dead pet dog so that the ghost’s mind could enjoy her company. This shows that the novel takes the idiom as the inspiring prototype for imagining the supernatural plot, which ultimately aims to express contempt towards the ghost instead of fantasising supernatural happenings. The ghost’s body–soul separation parodies the idiom by presenting a low burlesque situation where the characters are reduced to an inferior level of being (a dog) for satiric effect.

Likewise, to criticise avarice, the novel describes a greedy ghost’s behaviour in an “impossible” situation based on the literalised idiom *jian qian yan kai* 見錢眼開, literally meaning “once seeing money, one’s eyes are wide open”. The literalisation took shape in the Blind Ghost’s episode in a slightly altered form. When Blind Ghost smelled a large sum of money:

He knew the sum was by no means small and craved to touch it. However, he had no sight, and the guy carrying the money would see his reaching hand
before he even touched it. Burning with avarice, Blind Ghost felt his inner
greediness turning into a hot flow soaring straight to the top of his head. The
flow found no way out and eventually rushed out from Blind Ghost's eye
sockets, ending his blindness. (355)

That the mere scent of money brought vision back to Blind Ghost's eyes, driven by
his irrepressible craving, mocks the ghost's monetary urge. The novel translates *jian
qian yan kai* into a vivid scene and guides the reader to recognise the idiom as the
answer to a puzzle, which creates more fun in reading as well as making the criti-
cism more euphemistic. Similar to the Dissolute Ghost scene, Blind Ghost's literali-
sation of idiom furnishes dramatic scenes where ghosts personify human weak-
nesses. The human follies are not represented mimetically in daily situations.
What is satisfying about these practices of literalisation is that not only have the
literal meanings visually enhanced the story, but also that the figurative meanings
remain in the story and create a humorous effect.

Idiom literalisation enriches the ghosts' sense of fantasy and frames the style of
interaction between Zhong Kui and the ghosts. The confrontation between Zhong Kui
and Hollow-Hearted Ghost in Chapter 3 comprehensively epitomises this literali-
sation strategy. Hollow-Hearted Ghost had another widely recognised name: Yan
Zhihou 顏之厚. “Hollow-hearted” ridicules those complacent literati who were far less
academically sophisticated or knowledgeable than they pretended to be. The name
“Yan Zhihou” echoes this satirical implication. It is deliberately invented in reference
to the idiom *hou lianpi* 厚臉皮 (“thick-faced”), commonly employed to blame some-
one for being shameless. Giving two names to one ghost arises not from a need to
enrich the character but to delineate the satirical target: literati who are shameless
about feigning erudition.

The novel goes to great lengths to present the battle between Hollow-Hearted Ghost
and Zhong Kui by literalising the idiom to refer to the ghost’s magical ability and the
weapon. The novel takes *hou lianpi* (“thick-faced”) at face value, which means the
ghost’s face was solid enough to survive hard blows and even artillery fire: “[Han-yuan] fired two cannons at the face of Hollow-Hearted Ghost. The ghost was equipped with a thick face... he advanced; the artillery fire struck his face and disappeared, leaving no scars at all” (74).

To fight back, Hollow-Hearted Ghost used book bags as a weapon: “[Hollow-Hearted Ghost] shook his bag only once, and Hanyuan looked as if he had been struck by thunder. The ghost’s servants all carried large or small book bags and kept shaking them. All the underworld soldiers started to feel numb and feeble” (74–5). Inside the book bags were fragments of writings rather than complete books (76). Dangling the book bags is the literalisation of the idiom *diao shudai* 掉書袋 (“drop book bags”). Figuratively, *diao shudai* satirises writers who fill their writings with too many quotations to show off their rich knowledge. The contents of Hollow-Hearted Ghost’s bookbags break this illusion by implying that a substantial number of quotations in writing or speaking does not equate to genuine erudition.

In their counterattack, Zhong Kui’s soldiers were equipped with huge knives, broad axes, and wastepaper baskets. They successfully defeated Hollow-Hearted Ghost:

The ghost’s servants had several of their book bags slashed open by axes, from which piles of paper fell out with fragmented bits of text.... The book bags were magically absorbed by the wastepaper baskets. (77–8)

This scene literalises the idiom *dadao kuofu* 大刀闊斧. To indicate that the soldiers were taking actions decisively and quickly, *dadao kuofu* is also divided character by character into images such as “huge knives and broad axes”. With the ghost’s book bags slashed open by the blades, the novel suggests that the excessive use of quotations in writings should be excised without hesitation, and wastepaper baskets are rather more suitable for rubbish articles. Thus, the fighting scene in the plot was clearly not driven by a realistic, causal logic. Instead, the ghost’s and Zhong Kui’s activities are pictured according to the imagery of the
idioms. The chaotic fighting scenes add a sense of performativity to the story in an extended invective where the author criticises hollow and insincere writings as rubbish.

To conclude, *New Tale* defamiliarises the conventional idioms. It creates a distance of understanding between the reader and the idioms’ usual figurative meaning by placing literalisation within the reading process. If Zhang Tianyi had inserted the idioms into the narrative as written remarks without the literalisation, the novel would have felt like a dry lecture that criticised the shortcomings represented by the ghosts. With the literalisation, the novel turned idioms into memorable events in which both literal and figurative meanings are fully perceived. In this sense, the literalisation is a kind of pun. Also, the novel is spared from making sharp criticism or direct judgments by evoking a good deal of humour.70

2 Ye Lingfeng’s “The Deviant Path”: a disturbing warning about the masses

“The Deviant Path” is a whimsical yet disturbing short story set in a 1920s Shanghai suburb. The story starts with the resurrection of the dead man, Shilu 師魯, from his grave. His background remains a mystery. Ye Lingfeng’s short story “The Deviant Path” differs from *A New Tale of Killing Ghosts* in that it does not divide the fictional space into the human world and another clear realm. Although he simply walked out of his grave, Shilu made a significant crossing from the realm of death into that of life, and from an absolutely still, silent state to a state of dramatic impact. Society and life changed to some degree in a surfacing crisis because of him.

Shilu’s mission was to gather the submissive and dumb proletarians and instigate subversion against the urban system of production and social convention. At first, he promised to entertain people with pornography, and the gathered people started to

70 In his preface to the novel, Zhang Henshui states his reluctance to curse in the narration (Zhang H., “Zixu” 203).
have visions of intercourse, a demonic baby being born, and the baby attacking its shivering parents. Shilu not only urged people to disobey and fight against their parents but also summoned for his audience another vision of a perfect society yet to be achieved. This would be one that allows greater sexual freedom for everyone regardless of morality and legality. In the climax of the story, the street was plunged into chaos as people were encouraged by Shilu to form mobs and grab whatever or whoever they desired. When the police arrived and arrested Shilu as a madman, Shilu struggled and betrayed the local sheriff’s secret homosexual harassment of a subordinate. Taking Shilu back to the police station, the policemen bumped into their sheriff in the midst of his secret affair. Finally, Shilu slipped from the police’s control as they were busy settling with the sheriff. He felt satisfied that he had completed the task of “enlightening” the masses for another twenty-year cycle.


However, there have been very few comments on the short story’s departures from revolutionary literature. Wang Ye (2008) notes that “The Deviant Path” differs from revolutionary literature in its abnormal plots and romanticised the revolutionary process (190). Here, “romanticised” does not mean love or romance but over-
optimism, a tendency to underestimate the hardship and complexity of revolution. However, Wang also acknowledges its parodic property. As the aesthetics of revolutionary literature became trendy and lucrative and a hallmark of modernity for literature at the end of the 1920s, Ye parodied revolutionary literature by retaining the commercial appeal and integrating the aesthetics into “The Deviant Path” and other short stories (Wang 193, 189). Wang Ye makes insightful observations about “The Deviant Path”, but this idea has not yet come to the attention of English researchers and requires elaboration through textual analysis. To fill this research gap, I show how a dead man’s sudden crossing provides a hyperbolic illustration of opportunistic perversities and mindless destruction in the name of revolutions.

2.1 Shilu’s role: initiating changes in the background

Shilu, the walking dead, is crucial in the plot but secondary in the representation and theme. “The Deviant Path” provides scarce information about him, other than that he stepped out of his grave and walked among the living to provoke changes. Without particular reasons, Shilu somehow committed himself to the task of “saving” the society. When Shilu first came out of his grave, the wind sighed: “What an unprogressive world! Who would have thought that it needs a dead man to rise from silence and tell the living what to do!” (143).

In terms of nature, Shilu is not an apparition but belongs to feigui zhi gui 非鬼之鬼 (“ghosts that are not technically ghosts”) in anomalous accounts (Luan B. 55). The crossing of these “ghosts” refers to the state in which an individual’s body remains active after death, which is a violation of the boundary between life and natural termination. Those creatures catch people’s attention with dead bodies in a range of disturbing shapes and conditions. Examples from dynastic literature include a

71 A variant of the walking dead is the talking skeleton. The Resurrected Skeleton (2014) collected the translated religious or literary writings surrounding the motif of talking skeletons or skulls. The motif passes on from the legend of Zhuangzi 莊子 (Master Zhuang) encountering the talking skeleton on the roadside.
decomposing body temporarily transmuting into the form of a woman to attract strangers to sleep with it;\textsuperscript{72} a baby’s skeleton haunting the living due to its unsatisfied desire for breast milk;\textsuperscript{73} skeletons in sparsely populated regions enjoying the living’s company\textsuperscript{74} (ibid., 55–9). The deformed bodies later transformed into the demonic walking dead, known as \textit{jiangshi} 殭屍. Literally “stiff corpse”, this refers to hopping or walking undecomposed bodies animated without human consciousness and devoid of a soul, preying on people.

In “The Deviant Path”, Shilu is a walking dead who strongly resembles an ordinary person, with thoughts, language, and a purpose. Shilu is distinct from the walking dead represented in previous literature in that what he spoke and showed to the living constitutes a major part of the plot rather than his appearance or movements. The short story focuses on Shilu’s speech and the effects his motivation evoked. He functions as an initiator of social change by dismantling social order, but the outcome is not meant to enrich his personality or experiences in any personally meaningful way. He retreated to his tomb until the start of another twenty-year cycle.

Shilu’s first purpose was to destroy people’s submissiveness by attacking conventional family relationships and social production. Before Shilu begins his actions, the narrator presents a satirical sketch of some suburban children, who were playing with mud and dressed in filthy and shabby clothes. The narrative applies verbal irony with high burlesque for the satire, deliberately imposing a series of dramatised and overwhelmingly complimentary expressions onto ordinary or even trivial objects. A comic contrast comes into shape: “[the children were] moulding mud into westernised houses and vehicles, using artistic skills to express their urban impressions. Such worshippers of the materialist culture! Such artists of the new era!” (Ye,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} From Niu Su’s 牛肅 (birth and death years unknown) \textit{Jiwen} 紀聞 (Recorded Events, Tang).
\item \textsuperscript{73} From Dai Fu’s 戴孚 (birth and death years unknown) \textit{Guangyi ji} 廣異記 (Records of Numerous Anomalies, Tang).
\item \textsuperscript{74} From Xue Yongruo’s 薛用弱 (birth and death years unknown) \textit{Jiyi ji} 集異記 (Records of a Collection of Anomalies, Tang).
\end{itemize}
“Deviant” 143). The exclamations are too grand for uneducated children living and playing in a filthy environment. The exaggerated exclamations satirise the young generation’s blind yearning for the dazzling urban culture represented by Shanghai without casting doubts upon it. What comes after this scene continues to highlight the pressing necessity for the proletariat to rise against the dehumanising mastery over them.

Shilu attracted the attention of inhabitants and passersby with pornographic “scenes”. Here, the narrative employs a quasi-fantastical and quasi-illusory description. Adults and children all gazed at the nearby river surface in the direction in which Shilu was pointing, where an erotic scene of heterosexual intercourse was taking place in the water. Adults recognised the movement of the naked bodies and the twisting legs, while children unbridled their imagination to try to piece together the entire scene—“all see what they crave in the river” (144). The scene in the river continued to reveal a grotesque birth:

Next appeared a swelling belly, a widening mouth; no, not some mouth, but the other exit [on the female body]. Amidst the hot flowing blood, a tiny monster broke free. He was an extremely peculiar thing, as he started to grow taller and taller the moment he got out of the womb. He kicked away the wooden basin where he had been lying just a moment ago, rose a blood-stained palm, and pounced on his parents who lay shivering in one corner of the bed. (144–5)

This dramatic scene features a demonic baby who represents a new-born strength of revolt. The baby and its parents symbolise the anticipated subversion of the hierarchical power structure. The baby attacking its parents and the destruction of filial piety was just the beginning of the subversion, followed by the reshuffle of social power and classes.

While the sex and the baby held the audience’s curiosity, Shilu instantly directed their attention to the looming factories around them in Shanghai. He revealed to the awe-struck crowd a metaphor behind the demonic baby: the factories were “parents”
who exploited their “children” to provide for themselves (145). Shilu claimed that some “newborns” in the factories had already struck fatal blows at their “parents”: “factory owners have been stuffed in sewers, whose eyeballs were snatched out of their sockets and hung in toilets by foremen” (145–6). The patricidal baby signifies labourers who broke free from capitalist exploitation. Shilu urged his audience to topple vampiric selfish parents and burn their life-sucking employers. By now, Shilu’s call for popular revolt marks the completion of his first theme, which is to shatter the conventional and hierarchical vicious cycle of life among the powerful and the suppressed.

The second part of Shilu’s rousing call for action seemed to propose an egalitarian society but actually released the darkness and weakness in humanity. Shilu expressed his sympathetic understanding of people suffering in suppression and deficiency and then pictured a carefree merry land for them. It would be a society without ethical principles. As long as one worked during the day, one could pick anyone s/he liked as a temporary sexual partner regardless of marital/familial restrictions. Shilu encouraged people to practice absolute sexual freedom and jokingly suggested that he would take the lead by giving out his daughters for other men to enjoy, if he had any. The crowd soon grew out of control as a result of Shilu’s crazy proposals and lapsed into a chaotic group fight.

As more people became involved in the fighting and cursing, the entanglement glided into a farce bereft of social rules and disciplines. Shilu continued playing the role of an initiator of social destruction, shouting in the chaos that it was a chance for everyone to help themselves for free in any given shops. By now, people had unleashed wild desires under his brainwashing, believing that it really was the time to “murder their fathers, possess other people’s wives, and pay nothing for goods” (149). When the police had Shilu under control, he insisted that the officers were working in vain, while their sheriff must have been engaging in nasty private enjoyment behind his subordinates’ backs. Shilu’s assumption proved correct when the police caught the sheriff harassing a lower-ranking employer in the office. This
scandal represented the collapse of principles and order in the bureaucratic and justice system.

Shilu’s motivation in “The Deviant Path” displays a close connection to anarchism and hooliganism. The Creation Society demonstrated a strong inclination towards anarchism since its establishment and before leaning definitively to Marxism. Ye Lingfeng joined the society in 1925 where he probably absorbed anarchism, which may be why Shilu’s social blueprint in “The Deviant Path” reveals an anarchist nature. Chinese anarchist-communist Liu Shifu 劉師復 (1884–1915) “viewed anarchism (or more precisely, anarcho-communism) as the most comprehensive strategy and highest goal of socialism because it targeted not only social inequalities but also the part played by authority relations—not just by the state but also by the family—in inequality and oppression” (Dirlik 135). Anarchism called for social revolution, namely “the revolution of the people (pingmin 平民)”, and targets government and capitalism (ibid., 131, 133). In “Wuzhengfu gongchandang zhi mudi yu shouduan” 无政府共产党之目的与手段 (“The Goals and Methods of the Anarchist-Communist Party”, 1914), Liu Shifu enumerates his ideas of a new society, including but not confined to:

1) public ownership of the means of production and the abolition of private property and currency;
2) the abolition of classes and social members’ absolute freedom in choosing their occupation;
3) freedom in taking whatever one needs for life from public goods;
4) abolition of all governments and ruling institutions, including the army, police, prison, and laws;
5) abolition of marriage, no limits on men and women’s union, and establishing a public system of care for all children (46–47).

The strain of anarchism in the Creation Society can be detected from its loose organisation and functioning mechanism, its repugnance for social and political authorities, its promotion of artistic autonomy, its placement of individuals above the nation state, and its worship of the creativity in destructive power (Zhu H. 54–61).
In “The Deviant Path”, the patricidal baby embodies the ideal of eradicating familial authority and hierarchical relations. Exposing the sheriff’s sexual scandal in front of the public mocks bureaucratic authority. Shilu’s call for the masses to destroy factory owners and production represents an attack on capitalism. Encouraging people to sleep with whoever they desired echoes marital liberty. The open plunder of shops defies private property rights and reflects freer distribution of goods. According to Arif Dirlik (2012), “anarchism” was almost the equivalent term for “communism” in the 1910s (135). Therefore, “The Deviant Path” visualises an archaic version of the communist ideal prior to popular Marxism at the end of the 1920s. Furthermore, the destructive replacement of current social and ethical orders displays hooliganism, a strain of thought emerging around 1926–1927 in China that encouraged the destruction of anything with which one felt unsatisfied (Yang Yi, “Ye Lingfeng” 160).

Sauntering back to his grave, Shilu sang a song: “All the smart people around the world, unite!/Kill those conscienceless parents./Distribute their private properties in cellars./You can lose nothing/except for the useless old world./But what you are going to obtain/will be a bright red, new paradise!” (152). The slogans ended the story on a hopeful and positive note. I consider this ending the main reason why some researchers read “The Deviant Path” as a piece of revolutionary literature. However, the frustrating and confusing chaos that ensued is incongruous with the positive revolutionary mobilisation and the promise of a bright future. “The Deviant Path” was thus enshrouded by an ideological ambiguity. The song seems to heighten a satirical sense with which the short story sheds a negative light on the idea of revolutions.

2.2 Satirical reflection on the masses’ power

“The Deviant Path” is unlikely to be a satire of revolution. I argue that the short story directs its satirical insight to the blind power of the masses rather than dismiss revolution altogether. Firstly, Ye Lingfeng’s other contemporary short stories and the
journal Gobi, where “The Deviant Path” was published, may offer some clues to Ye’s attitude towards the revolutionary surge in the late 1920s. Secondly, I analyse and compare the narrative of “The Deviant Path” with typical revolutionary narratives. Finally, I analyse how “The Deviant Path” parodies revolutionary poetry of the late 1920s. The short story constructs a complete satire through its depiction of the masses and the parodic closing slogan.

2.2.1 Ye Lingfeng’s revolutionary inclination in Gobi

In Ye Lingfeng’s other stories from his supposedly more proletarian phase, including “Guochou” ("National Hatred", 1929), “Miracle”, “Red Angel”, and “Weiwan de beiju” ("Unfinished Tragedy", 1931), only the first two stories are revolution-concerned. In “National Hatred”, the sexually frustrated male protagonist did not truly harbour resentment towards his Japanese landlord as he claimed. He simply used “national hatred” as a handy excuse to rid himself of an embarrassing situation, which was to move out of the Japanese boarding house where he found himself accidentally involved in a triangular affair with his host and a maid. “Miracle” compared its heroine’s accomplishment of a revolutionary mission to a Christian miracle. The heroine took advantage of her admirer’s military position to distribute propaganda fliers from his plane whilst in the air. Exposing thousands of citizens to the revolutionary information marks the heroine’s success. This story suggests a light-hearted merriment, a naïve fantasy of revolution, and the ignorance of indispensable arduousness in real revolutions. “National Hatred” and “Miracle” employ the discourse of revolutions probably because of its popularity at that time. Revolutions did not receive serious reflection or representation in the short stories. Ye Lingfeng published two other short stories in Gobi in 1928, which I now discuss along with his other writings in the periodical.

Gobi was launched in Shanghai on 1 May 1928 with Ye Lingfeng as its chief editor. It only released four issues until 16 June 1928 when it was banned. Several individualistic, sentimental short stories about romance, lyrical and decorated poems, and
pieces of humorous and amusing ridicule were published in Gobi. Nevertheless, the journal displayed an inclination towards revolutionary propaganda. In the first issue, Ye Lingfeng presented an opening illustration entitled “Weilai de shengli” 未來的勝利 (“Future Victory”), which consisted of the abstract but recognisable shapes of a hammer, a hand holding a flag with a sickle-like top, factory chimneys, and steel structures. While all these elements were black and white, a huge red “5” was situated in the centre, overlapping with the rest as if printed onto them. On the top left corner was “Wei jinian er zuo” 為紀念而作 (“For Commemoration”), suggesting that Ye drew this illustration for International Labour Day and to express his hope for the future victory of the proletarians. Gobi was one of the periodicals that inherited the radical revolutionary stance from Pan Hannian’s 潘漢年 (1906–1977) Huanzhou 幻洲 (Mirage, October 1926–January 1928) (Ni M. 97–8).76

The majority of Gobi’s revolutionary pieces were translations or introductions to Russian or European (non)literary materials. They covered writings such as Vera Figners’s (1852–1942) autobiography, Memoir of A Revolutionist (1927, which Ye translated from C. C. Hapin and G. A. Davidson’s English translation); Engels’s commemorative article after Marx’s death; Upton Sinclair’s (1878–1968) Money Writes (1927) (about the financial condition of American writers); French anti-capitalist writer Anatole France’s (1844–1924) play Crainquebille (1903) and “La Mort accordée” (1892) (about how a man seeks to die together with his imprisoned revolutionary lover); Soviet Russian poems; and Leon Trotsky’s (1879–1940) memoir. Among these, Memoir of A Revolutionist and Money Writes were introduced to readers by Ye Lingfeng. He translated the second volume of Memoir of A Revolutionist and published it in all four issues of Gobi, intending to depict Figner’s touching memory of her dark life in prison after twenty years of revolutionary work (Ye, “Guan-yu” 31). Ye expresses his admiration for Figner, for he saw from her memoir that

76 Ye and Pan Hannian 潘漢年 (1906–1977) worked together for Mirage, a literary journal publishing not only aesthetic articles concerning few social issues (in the section “Xiangya zhi ta” 象牙之塔, “Ivory Tower”) but also left-leaning discussions on social realism (in the section “Shizi jietou” 十字街頭, “Crossroads”) (Lee, Shanghai 256).
prison life had not extinguished her perseverance and passion as a revolutionary leader (ibid., 30–1).

Apart from the translations, literature galvanised by the revolutionary ethos also appeared in Gobi, albeit on a smaller scale than translations. Lin Feng’s short story entitled “Zuoye de meng” 昨夜的夢 (“Last Night’s Dream”, 1928) takes the reader into the narrator’s illogical dreams. The story discloses a vague and abstract message of revolting against conventional restraints while making no specific political proposals. Shibo’s 逝波 poem “Zhanshi yu shiren” 戰士與詩人 (“The Warrior and the Poet”, 1928) contemplates a young revolutionary’s solitude, determination to self-sacrifice, and death. The latter half of the poem conveys the revolutionary’s commemoration of his late comrade and his inheritance of his comrade’s tenacity, aspiration, and hope. Along with “The Deviant Path”, Ye also wrote two other stories tinged with a revolutionary hue. “E’meng” 噩夢 (“Nightmare”, 1928) presents an imaginary communist utopia, where the narrator ends up as the only unassimilated, doubting individual. “Konghe xinji” 控鶴新記 (“A new Story of Konghe”, 1928) tells a humorous and light-hearted story about how young revolutionaries disguised themselves as ladies for the convenience of disseminating fliers but were stalked by men.

As demonstrated above, Gobi served as an active platform for revolutionary ideology. Ye’s literary activities of editing Gobi and publishing revolutionary works within it testify that, despite his occasional uses of the revolutionary discourse as an amusing and frivolous factor in stories, he paid serious attention to the idea of revolution.

His short story “Nightmare” is suitable for reading alongside “The Deviant Path” due to their apparent resonance in imagining a communist utopia. In “Nightmare”, the narrator has a dream about the inequivalent social relations between proletarians and propertied classes. Wealthy leisure classes were inspecting labourers in factories, and money was monstrous and grotesque-looking, swallowing the destitute.
Soon after, the dream scene switched to a new world that had evolved out of the old one, where a “labourer-like weird guy” showed the dreaming narrator around (73). In the dream, the society had achieved an absolute equivalence in work distribution, and social class distinctions no longer existed. This utopia seemed to be similar to what Shilu described to the masses in “The Deviant Path”. A hallmark scene is that the sunrise showered the entire world in a glorious red glow, implying communists’ success in taking over the world. However, the story ends in horror. As the narrator tours the communist utopia, he remains an outsider from the crowd. The final scene in this dream is one in which the crowds approach the narrator in a threatening manner and keep shouting “Drive out this strange man” aggressively at the narrator. In my opinion, the ending scene resonates strongly with the orgy in “The Deviant Path”, presenting the masses as (potential) assailants and a destructive power on the brink of losing control. The intertextuality of “Nightmare” and “The Deviant Path” inspired me to read the latter with a focus on the “terrifying masses”.

2.2.2 Mainstream revolutionary literature and narratives in the late 1920s

Revolutionary literature was highly inflammatory and political, representing the life and struggles of the working class, and paying more attention to the masses instead of individuals. Revolutionary writers were mostly petty-bourgeois intellectuals from
the late Creation Society\textsuperscript{77} and the Sun Society,\textsuperscript{78} who propagated proletarian ideology in the service of a proletarian social transformation. Under the guidance of Marxism and the influence of foreign leftist trends, revolutionary literature appeared around 1923 as Chinese people’s enthusiasm and the pressing need for revolution arose (Wang Z. 1). The May 30\textsuperscript{th} incident in 1925 impelled more intellectuals to engage with politics and the revolutionary agenda, and revolutionary literature continued to form between 1925–1927, along with the advancement of KMT and CCP’s United Front against the Peking militarist government. The nationalist purge of communists in 1927 had a considerable influence on revolutionary literature. Later, the League of Left-Wing Writers stressed more political propaganda in revolutionary literature.

Marston Anderson traces the transformation in the modern literary representation of the masses. He argues that the 1920s fiction often portrayed the masses as “irrational and easily manipulated” from the perspective of intellectuals who were alienated from them (182). Such portrayals are found in the works by Lu Xun, Ye

\textsuperscript{77} The Creation Society members underwent a transformation from the pre-1925 “cosmopolitan idealism” to rebellious literature; they eventually reached an awareness of the need to increase their “ideological education and political legitimacy” through literature after the broken United Front of the Great Revolution (Z. Yin 91, 113). “It was the Revolutionary Literature Debate starting in 1927 that pushed the intellectuals to explore the political possibilities and theoretical potential of Marxism, particularly its class analysis and class transformation discourses, in the Chinese modern socio-political revolution” (Z. Yin. 99).

\textsuperscript{78} In 1927, Pan Hannian, a later member of the Creation Society, founded the Sun Society in Shanghai with his communist comrades Qian Xingcun, Meng Chao 孟超 (1902–1976) and Yang Cunren 楊邨人. Their journals include Taiyang yuekan 太陽月刊 (Sun Monthly), Shidai wenyi 時代文藝 (Literature and Art of the Time), Haifeng zhoubao 海風週報 (Sea Wind Weekly), and Xinliu yuekan 新流月刊 (New Stream Monthly) (Zhu S., Hanyu 160). The Sun Society was more like a politically organised group of professional revolutionaries than the Creation Society (Li and Wu 4). “Class nature” and anti-individualism gained significance. The Sun Society asserted that literature should write about the working class, express collective class sentiments, and undertake the political role of serving the proletariat. Because of their repeated emphasis on literature’s function in the sacrifice of artistic sophistication, the Sun Society literature was well-known for its simplified flat characters, plot formulations, and being slogan-loaded (ibid., 9–10). For the debate launched by the Creation Society and the Sun Society on revolutionary literature, see Chen Jianhua’s “The Discursive Turn of ‘Revolution’ and the Revolutionary Turn of ‘Discourse’: From the Late Qing to the 1920s” (2012).
Shaojun 葉紹鈞, and Mao Dun (ibid., 182–3). In the early 1930s, there were still works where intellectuals were observers of the masses (ibid., 183). However, answering the call for “literary massification”, revolutionary writers turned their central representation from individualistic struggles to the “overwhelming physical immediacy” of the “abstractly conceived” crowd, thus “creating the masses” (ibid., 182). Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–1986), Zhang Tianyi, Ye Zi 葉紫 (1910–1939), and Sha Ting 沙汀 (1904–1992) all undertook relevant experiments (ibid., 184). “The Deviant Path” was situated in the transitory stage between the two distinctive styles of writing. It is akin to 1920s fiction in its emphasis on the masses’ ill-manipulated violence. However, it does not focus on how intellectuals lacked a sense of belonging in the masses or felt untouched by their enthusiasm. “The Deviant Path” has the masses’ behaviour as its main focus rather than use them as the background for an individual protagonist.

Wang Ye (2009) summarises four narrative modes from 1920s revolutionary fiction: rebellion narratives, maturation narratives, anxiety narratives, and heroic narratives. Rebellion narratives are more suitable as a frame of reference to discuss the masses-oriented revolutionary narrative in “The Deviant Path”.

“The Deviant Path” configures a hyperbolic scene of the “rebellion narrative” in 1920s revolutionary literature. These narrative features propertied classes (evil)—underclasses (good) conflicts in fiction, “using the hard life of the underclasses to reflect the historical legitimacy of the class revolution” (Wang Y. 179). Late 1920s revolutionary fiction often described various forms of oppression imposed by propertied classes on peasants and factory labourers, such as the exploitation of injured workers, extended work hours and little payment, sexual assault, high land rents, and physical and linguistic abuse.

However, “The Deviant Path” features a hasty and unrealistic process of mass revolution. It dramatises the semantic structure of class oppression by having the
walking dead encourage the foolish marginal dwellers to rise against the oppressing system.

Shilu treated the masses as ignorant rather than people who deserve cognitive enlightenment and education. As mentioned previously, he used pornography as bait to attract the audience’s attention to the upcoming vociferous argument he was about to make. During his “teaching”, he showed no decency, patience, or respect for the people who were unaware of their situation. That is why Shilu appeared to the audience as “a madman playing tricks” and only resorted to arousing people’s crudest physical desires to galvanise them into rebellion (144). To disrupt social rules, Shilu lured people into promiscuity and persuaded them to give in to carnal desires:

Who doesn’t want delight? Who doesn’t want pleasure back home at night? But some don’t have a partner, and some have been stuck with the same one all this time. So boring!... You idiots! You stupid pigs don’t even dare to enjoy what’s right in front of you. (146–7)

From Shilu’s perspective, the masses were no more than creatures governed by biological needs. Ironically, it is usually the propertied classes that were presented in revolutionary literature as the target representing the “evil of carnal desire” and inhumanity, while the uprising classes signified the remaining humanism of hope (Wang Y. 182). “The Deviant Path” destroys the aforementioned semantic structure of revolutionary fiction by configuring a scene driven by the underclasses’ equally destructive desires.

“The Deviant Path” resembles Wang Ye’s observed subject matter in revolutionary literature, namely lower classes’ fight for wealth and women and the masses’ chaotic, blind strike on the capitalist system (Wang Y. 181). People’s passion for discarding all rules and releasing their strength to make real changes echoes the “tough and forceful” style in revolutionary literature but is carried away in an evil direction (ibid., 182).
The masses’ activities in “The Deviant Path” lack the sentimental collectiveness and solidarity that characterises revolutionary literature. Andrew Justin Rodekohr (2012) demonstrates that their collective memory of massacre and mass death creates shared suffering, resentment, and vengeful desire (86). The masses’ sentiments unite them into a revolutionary unity (ibid.). The 1930s fiction often employed natural metaphors to refer to the masses, such as “fire, water (‘tide’ ‘tempest’ ‘torrent’), animal and insect packs (‘frenzied tigers’ ’swarms’), and the wind” (Anderson 185). These imply that the assembling people share mutual understanding and intimacy as their assembly exerts increasing impacts on society (ibid., 186).

What distinguishes “The Deviant Path” from the revolutionary literature is that it depicts “unconscious” crowds. Under Shilu’s instructions and incitement, the crowd acted on a disoriented impulse. The crowd had not experienced deep enmity towards their oppressors but merely took the uprising as a carnival for personal pleasure and gains. They were not motivated by the immediate needs of survival but were encouraged to destroy the boundaries protecting other people’s private properties. The masses attacked one another rather than taking revenge on the propertied classes. In this sense, they had not shaken the capitalist system at all but instead mainly damaged social security and ordinary people’s rights. There lacks a sense of solemnity in the masses’ action: “Standing nearby, [Shilu] watched the entangled bodies of hundreds of people with heads and limbs squiggling. Everybody was cursing and fighting for no particular reason, which was an immensely amusing drama” (148). The masses had lost control of themselves “as if being possessed by demons” (149). Therefore, the crowd’s fighting was farcical instead of constructive, as if playing a pseudo-communist game. In the name of revolution, greed and indecency took over the masses and resulted in the bankruptcy of morality and justice.

Shilu’s appearance suggests that the underclasses were not prepared for rebellion and lacked mature political awareness. If it were not for Shilu’s instigation, people
might have carried out ordinary routines. The reason why mass revolution was a hasty and unrealistic process is that people in “The Deviant Path” were ignorant about their oppressed lives and lacked the motive to fight for themselves, yet they were incited to undertake a nominal “revolution” for noble causes. Even though Shilu adopted a revolutionary posture under the banner of liberty and equality, the chaotic event exposed people’s coarse desires for minor profits rather than aspirations for a meaningful future in the long term for humanity’s sake.

In his monograph on the revolutionary literature published in 1928, Kuang Xinnian (1998) makes the criticism that in the direct portrayals of the peasants and laborers’ uprisings, revolutionary actions were idealised while cruelty, hardships, and the masses’ weaknesses exposed in uprisings remained unnoticed (106). From this perspective, “The Deviant Path” proves to be sophisticated, because it directs readers’ attention to the masses’ terrifying destructive potential as well as a range of human flaws.

2.2.3 The parodic ending of “The Deviant Path”

“The Deviant Path” offers a reconsideration of revolution, or geming. Geming retains its implication of having had to tackle injustice through violent replacement since the time of Yijing (Book of Changes) (B. Wang 10). Over the century that passed since the late Qing, geming could refer to either moderate or radical social transformations (Ng 207). When denoting radicalised movements, geming aroused complicated sentiments. The chaos surrounding the concept of “revolution”

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79 May Fourth fiction already touches upon negative occurrences during “revolutions”. For example, Kenny Ng points out that Lu Xun depicts the haunting threats and chaotic forces brought to people by rebellions in several epic-mocking stories, including “Huaijiu” 懷舊 (“Recollecting the Past”, 1911), “Chabei li de fengbo” 茶杯裏的風波 (“Storm in a Teacup", 1920), and “Ah Q zhengzhuan” 阿 Q 正傳 (“The True Story of Ah Q", 1921) (207). Li Jieren’s 李劫人 (1891–1962) novel Dabo 大波 (“The Great Wave”, 1937) also notes the impulse of blind destruction in people’s “carnivalesque mass behaviour”, when they had not yet been cultivated from “an unorganized mob to a congregation of active participants” (208).
followed the 1911 Revolution. “Revolution” became a handy camouflage for local tyrants, oppressive gentry, corruptive bureaucrats, and rascals (Wang Xianming 716). At the same time, Mao Zedong observed from unorganised rural revolts and uprisings that “revolutions” were gatherings and a public festival in the countryside (Fitzgerald 205). In the 1920s, “revolution” retained its “natural” nobility, legitimacy, and authority (Zhang Z., et al., 59). Groups and parties fought to seize the authority and right to interpret “revolution” in favour of their ideals and interests (ibid., 60). Opportunists took advantage of revolutionary enthusiasm to defend their interests and attack groups holding different ideas (Z. Yin 109). Lu Xun wrote in “Xiao zagan” 小雜感 (“Random Thoughts”, 1927) that:

the revolutionists are killed by the counter-revolutionists. The counter-revolutionists are killed by the revolutionists. The non-revolutionists are regarded either as revolutionists and killed by counter-revolutionists or as counter-revolutionists and killed by revolutionists. (Z. Yin 109)

The notion of “revolution” ran the risk of losing accountable belief systems or ideological foundations and had been seized as a tool for self-justification.”80 In the essay, “Women zou natiao lu?” (“Which Path Should We Take”, 1930), Hu Shi expresses his annoyance: “Today how many evils have been perpetrated in the name of ‘revolution’?” (J. Chen, “North” 176).

In previous sections, I have shown how Ye presented an alarming picture of the unorganised power dominating the masses. On this basis, the ending song of “The Deviant Path” completes and highlights Ye’s satiric disapproval of the dark side in the masses.

The song echoes the Communist Manifesto in several lines — “All the smart people around the world, unite!... You can lose nothing/except for the useless old world. /But

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80 See Wang Xianming’s description of the confusing identification of “revolutionary” and “counter-revolutionary” in military forces and politics in the 1920s in his “Cong fengchao dao chuantong” 從風潮到傳統 (“From Trend to Tradition”, 2014) (725–6).
what you are going to obtain/will be a bright red, new paradise!” (Ye 152). The lines sound similar to the ending of the *Communist Manifesto*: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!” (Marx and Engels 42, with original capitalisation).

In addition, the song imitates proletarian poetry in its passionate mobilising tone. Such poetry is characterised by thrilling slogan-like exclamations expressing the aspiration for a better future. For example in “Wo shi yige wuchanzhe” 我是一個無產者 (“I am a Proletarian”, 1924), Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈 enjoins people to “Destroy—destroy it all to the core!/ I want to build a world where ‘everybody does not have’,/which is also one where ‘everybody has’” (389); Feng Naichao’s “Yu jieshang ren” 與街上人 (“With People on the Streets”, 1928): “Despite the darkness of the night,/there are still bright stars;/despite the pressing oppression,/there are calls from our comrades/—Tomorrow belongs to us!/Tomorrow belongs to us!!” (Wenji 74–5); Feng Naichao’s “Shiren men—songgei shidai de shiren” 詩人們—送給時代的詩人 (“Poets—For Poets of the Time”, 1928): “Our slogan:/Abolish the system of human exploitation!/Destroy the Bourgeois Paradise!/Build a free nation!” (ibid., 85); Qian Xingcun’s “Yeyu—Cheng Shiyu” 夜雨—呈時雨 (“Night Rain—For Shiyu”, 1928): “The sky is getting brighter,/our world shall fall in our incessant battles” (X. Qian 94); and Guo Moruo’s “Zhanqu” 戰取 (“Seize by Battles”, 1928) “Make bloody wind and rain in this night/Seize the new-born sun and universe” (409).

Moreover, “red (light)” frequently appeared in the poetry as an allegorical image, such as in Jiang Guangci’s “Xin meng” 新夢 (“New Dream”, 1922): “What makes me feel most hopeful is the red light illuminating our front road” (32) and “Xilaiyi” 西來意 (1922): “I escaped out of depression and headed to this nation of red light” (40).

In “The Deviant Path”, the last line which reads “What you are going to obtain is a bright red new Heaven!” resonates with the recurring “red” in previous examples. Apart from the colour’s conventional reference to the communist ideal, the level of extremity in the short story suggests that red refers to violence and the bloody phase
in revolutions. Shilu’s song also echoes the metaphorical comparison of communist society to Heaven in proletarian literature. Jiang Guangci’s poem “Zuoye li meng ru tianguo” (昨夜裏夢入天國, “Last Night I Dreamt about Heaven”, 1923) refers to communism as a heavenly future (69–70). A more vivid illustration is Hua Han’s 華漢 (Yang Hansheng 阳翰笙, 1902–1933) short story “Ma Linying” (1928). This story is about a charismatic and distinguished female revolutionary leader called Ma Linying. She motivated her military comrades and mobilised proletarians to realise their dire situation and pressing need for class struggle. Privileged classes were afraid of Ma’s public appeal to proletarians. In the scene depicting the local government’s execution of Ma, Hua Han applies Christian discourse to the propaganda of revolutionary ideology. The government’s soldiers kept a cautious eye on Ma before the execution but dramatically converted into her followers upon hearing her final speech: [The soldiers’] “souls were captured by her... They felt like a group of devout Christians who were listening to Ma, their preacher, enlighten them with holy instructions on ascending to Heaven” (122).

Even though the song in “The Deviant Path” sounds enthralling, it adds no persuasion to the idea of achieving a bright future through proletarian rebellion. Read in conjunction with the previously presented mob conducts, the song appears even more satirical. The lack of pertinent cultivation and organisation in the masses’ power will be as destructive as floods that submerge everything in their way rather than destroying the key targets. Shilu is hardly a good revolutionary mentor or leader, because he simply initiated the revolt and then irresponsibly disappeared into his grave once again. “The Deviant Path” is a story that warns readers of the blind power derived from uneducated masses under an unreliable guide. The masses need proper guidance in the social revolution instead of having their collective power set loose.

3 Conclusion
A New Tale of Killing Ghosts and “The Deviant Path” both feature supernatural characters who crossed into the human world. In nature, this chapter’s primary sources bear more resemblance to Ghostland Diary than to the other works. New Tale is satire fiction and “The Deviant Path” a parody of revolutionary fiction, but they both open up with a fictional world that is clearly unreal and invite readers to observe the happenings from a critical distance while following the non-human crossing characters who profoundly interfere with the human world. New Tale features Zhong Kui the demon/ghost quelling deity who embarks on a ghost hunting journey and “The Deviant Path”, a walking dead regularly rising from his grave. Although the two figures initiated key events in the plot, it is not the characters who made the crossing that carry thematic weight but their destinations.

New Tale is an allegorical novel that described people as satirical ghosts, drawing much inspiration from Liu Zhang’s A Tale of Killing Ghosts in character design and theme. The satirised characters were all nicknamed “ghosts”, many of whom were no different from ordinary people. In this sense, New Tale is a more obvious large-scale low burlesque than Ghostland Diary, because addressing humans as “ghosts” is degrading the former through ridicule, which Ghostland Diary does not do. Furthermore, several characters in New Tale were not humans but creatures with abnormal appearances or capabilities. Some ghosts employed magical skills or weapons to prevent Zhong Kui and his army from exorcising them. The ghosts were rather one-dimensional characters and personify immorality for the purpose of exposing typical shortcomings in humanity. As the crossing protagonist and a symbol of virtue, Zhong Kui rectified and punished the ghosts. Unlike traditional writings, New Tale does not focus on Zhong Kui’s life, career, identity, or enriching his personality. His role in the novel was to allow the ghosts to show their ugly and ridiculous characteristics while provoking, confronting, and punishing them.

All the supra-normal events and entities, including Zhong Kui and the ghosts, are not likely to challenge readers’ scientific worldview, nor do they need to be situated into an ontological universe pattern that accommodates supernatural phenomena. The
beginning of the novel makes a witty reply, “Such things are indeed happening”, to Liu Zhang’s satire, confirming its inheritance of Liu’s allegorical style. *New Tale* also improves the technique of idiom literalisation and applies low burlesque, caricature, irony, and exaggeration to represent follies and vices the author observed in reality. With the literalisation of idioms, the novel dramatises the ghosts’ wickedness and delivers didactic moral messages. Overall, Zhong Kui and the ghosts constitute a working narrative framework in which to satirise human shortcomings. However, *New Tale* does not have a satisfying closure. Liu Zhang’s satire ends on a positive note, with Zhong Kui receiving imperial rewards and marking the successful eradication of evil in the world. By contrast, Zhong Kui in *New Tale* was not able to celebrate individual heroism as he was still in the midst of his exorcist journey. Many ghosts escaped his reach and leave the story open for imagination. The ending states that ghosts continued to wander among humans.

The other work, “The Deviant Path“, features a character, Shilu, awakening from dead to give society a sudden and purposeful stir. He cheerfully caused an impressive unleashing of chaos in suburban Shanghai by encouraging proletarians to unleash their desires and create a more equal society. The short story incorporates stock expressions and imagery of revolution into the plot but initiates a carnivalesque atmosphere to the point of repugnancy. Shilu initiated the disorderly subversion of conventions and then retreated to his grave; his brief and irresponsible crossing therefore left the masses in an unproductive state that could lead to no promising revolutionary social transformation. Shilu’s crossing and its outcome suggest that the masses were not prepared to launch revolutions nor were they equipped with constructive political awareness. Shilu’s proposed cause of revolting and re-creating an equal society may be generally in keeping with its contemporary revolutionary discourse but was far ahead of the masses’ revolutionary consciousness. Therefore, Shilu’s crossing elicited the detestable and menacing side of the masses.

The activities of its author Ye Lingfeng in the journal *Gobi* demonstrate that he was actively tapping into and contributing to the revolutionary discourse. It is thus
reasonable to read “The Deviant Path” not as a denial of revolutions but a story concerning the irrationality, blindness, and opportunistic inclinations of masses in the name of revolutions. Through the descriptions of their immoral and detrimental deeds, the short story’s adoption of revolutionary literary narratives seems ironic. The contradiction invests a touch of satiric superficiality in the story, undermines the justification for Shilu’s motivation, and renders ridiculous the promise of a better society. “The Deviant Path” is thus likely to warn the audience of the complexity of revolutions and the possibility that the masses’ power could be misled in an opportunist direction.

Overall, *A New Tale of Killing Ghosts* and “The Deviant Path” reflect on humanity’s negative sides. The supernatural characters crossed into the human world and initiated changes for some kind of rectification. Zhong Kui and Shilu brought positive and negative changes, respectively, to the human world and both facilitated a further exposure of pervasive immoralities and evilness in humanity. *A New Tale of Killing Ghosts* splits the target into individual ghosts and bestows each with a typical, outstanding shortcoming. “The Deviant Path” shows concern for people’s dark side in the form of masses and mobs.
Conclusion

Supernatural narratives were not welcome in the Republican period. Iconoclastic intellectuals remained alert to imagery that had traditional and superstitious roots, such as ghosts, spirits, and immortals. They employed supernatural imagery in allegorical narratives to satirise or criticise contemporary society. Hence, supernatural notions lost their relevance to any numinous or unknown realms. In this thesis, I have paid attention to the supernatural narratives, i.e. what appears supernatural from the perspectives and misunderstandings of the characters in the fictional works I have discussed.

With regard to the primary sources explored in this study, probing into another dimension was not the primary reason for the authors to employ supernatural narratives. They imagine various cases of characters’ crossing in their supernatural narratives who voice discontent with individuals’ fate or the social reality of the Republican era.

The primary sources demonstrate two ways of constructing fictional reality. One is to incorporate anomalous plot components into a fictional world that imitates the real world, as shown in the primary sources examined in Chapters 2 to 4. The other is to invent an alternative world with unreal, strange working principles.

*The Ghost in White*, “The Haunted House”, “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage”, and “Yaksha” are the fantastic-uncanny stories in which the seemingly supernatural events eventually receive a rational explanation. They describe phenomena that pose threats to their characters’ customary outlook on reality and then debunk the supernatural presumptions. “Sorcery” and “Hallucination” are short stories of the fantastic. They leave the question unsolved as to whether their protagonists’ unusual experiences were supernatural. “The Thirteenth Night” and “Luoyan” are the fantastic-marvellous, ultimately confirming their events as supernatural. They
configure modern worlds that accommodate actual ghosts, thus transcending the limits of the presumed scientific worldview.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the primary sources do not allow space for the characters to wonder whether their surroundings are supernatural. The supernatural setting is part of the story and must be accepted by the reader before reading further. *Ghostland Diary, A New Tale of Killing Ghosts*, and “The Deviant Path” are works of the marvellous that make readers aware of their fantastical backgrounds from the beginning.

After largely disappearing the early 1920s, there were multiple reasons why supernatural narratives resurfaced in an unfriendly environment. Some authors developed a marked interest in supernatural or fantastical subjects under the influences of traditional Chinese anomaly accounts and Western literary trends. Shi Zhecun’s reading of European fiction brought him to symbols of dark magic and mythical legends. His reading also inspired him to mine characters’ (highly distorted) mentality by depicting their supranormal visions instigated under urban cultural contexts. Xu Xu’s experience of studying abroad exposed him to French romanticism and bore fruit in “Hallucination”. Yu Dafu invested Western aestheticism and romanticist sentimentalism in “The Thirteenth Night”. Ye Lingfeng also came under the influence of Western aestheticism, romanticism, and decadence, inspiring the creation of the eerie, morbid, and quaint ghost story, “Luoyan”.

Some writers saw the potential in supernatural narratives to effectively deliver didactic messages. For instance, Cheng Xiaoqing and Wu Zuxiang used supernatural narratives to mock superstition while Zhang Tianyi and Zhang Henshui played with the notions of ghosts, celestial immortals, and the netherworld to make satirical imitations of their contemporary reality. The reader should take their supernatural worlds or scenes as allegories.
Furthermore, the writers probably considered readers’ pleasure in reading and forging an emotional connection with traditional Chinese culture. As the literary field turned to target domestic political or foreign enemies, the writers creatively tailored traditional literary resources to their purposes, which exemplifies a revival of Republican interest in China’s traditional cultural heritage. Supernatural narratives in the primary sources incorporate ancient imagery, figures, and motifs into modern settings or plots. Retaining the linkage with traditional literature gives the reader a sense of familiarity but surprises them with originality in plots and themes. However, the primary sources have demonstrated various attitudes towards the tradition that inspired them. “Hallucination”, Ghostland Diary, and “The Deviant Path” contain vague traces of traditional supernatural motifs. The Ghost in White, “The Haunted House”, and “The Verdant Bamboo Hermitage” rebel the traditional motif of haunted houses. “The Thirteenth Night” and “Luoyan” modify the motif of ghostly romance in modern settings. “Sorcery”, “Yaksha”, and A New Tale of Killing Ghosts comply with and develop the traditional motifs they choose.

The primary sources demonstrate five types of crossing in their supernatural narratives. The first four feature human characters: crossing into “haunted” houses; crossing from a consensus, objective reality into delusional/hallucinatory realities; crossing into female ghosts’ apparitional residences; and crossing into the netherworld. The fifth type involves immortal visitors crossing into the human world.

In the “haunted” house crossing, the truth emerged that characters designed, feigned, or took advantage of haunting to achieve various goals. In The Ghost in White, “The Haunted House”, and the “Verdant Bamboo Hermitage”, “haunting” draws inspiration from traditional tales and imagines what appalling secrets lie behind the “haunting” appearance. Sharing a gothic atmosphere and sentiments, the three houses reveal their inhabitants’ suffering when a concrete or intangible agency crosses into their domain. The initial “haunting” was not the focus but the lives led by some inhabitants in the houses. The crossing enables characters to find out what truly happened, to bring the evil to justice, and to make up for the wronged.
In the female ghost crossing, the male characters mistakenly believed they had a romantic opportunity and were lured towards the female ghosts’ residences. Differing from the crossing into “haunted” houses, this crossing focuses on the protagonists’ interaction with the female ghosts instead of their residences. These were heterogeneous spatial structures that did not belong to the human world. They manifested along with the female ghosts, such as being transformed from a grave. Inspired by traditional literary representations of female ghosts, Yu Dafu’s “The Thirteenth Night” and Ye Lingfeng’s “Luoyan” did not tread the old path of consummating a man-ghost romance. Instead, in keeping with the melancholic gothic atmosphere in both stories, the female ghosts embody heart-breaking, traumatic experiences and evoke sympathetic concern for suffering individuals.

In the delirious crossing, characters’ perceptions trapped or admitted them in an exclusive, subjective experience of reality. Supernatural beings constituted their experiences. The characters might be staying in the same physical world but they mentally transcended the tangible, consensus reality. The characters were interacting with what their perceptions had conjured up for them, which might or might not be real. Shi Zhecun’s “Sorcery” and “Yaksha”, and Xu Xu’s “Hallucination” demonstrate that what one perceives can create a significant, meaningful reality for the individual, even if it is a delusion or hallucination. Rational thinking or perception constitutes part of the reality, while the rest is left to the irrational.

In the netherworld crossing, the character crossed into an imaginary underworld as a satirical contortion of reality. Despite the spatial crossing, Zhang Tianyi’s Ghostland parallels the satirist’s reality. The crossing character’s role is to experience Ghostland’s absurdity and then direct the reader’s dislike of this back to the real world on which Ghostland was modelled.

In the supernatural figures’ crossing, a group of people became satirised objects, either separately or collectively. The supernatural crossing is not the central concern
or theme of the stories but an instrument to trigger fantastic plots in a speculative world, where the ugliness in humanity can be highlighted via wild, non-mimetic representation.

Some primary sources need no allegorical interpretations of their supernatural components. “Sorcery” and “Hallucination” allow their events to be read as delusion or hallucination, but they do not hasten to dispel the mystery of perception with scientific explanations. The otherworldly nature of the works does not make them any less profound or serious in meaning than realist literature. Ye Lingfeng’s “The Deviant Path” says nothing about the supposed nature of the walking dead, as Shilu is primarily an instrumental character whose role in the text is to make a political point. The lack of explanation does not impact the primary theme, namely the political impact and unruly nature of the masses. Conversely, “The Thirteenth Night”, “Luoyan”, Ghostland Diary, and A New Tale of Killing Ghosts welcome an allegorical reading to account for their supernatural narratives.

Despite the distinctions noted above, all the primary sources demonstrate a witty passion to expand supernatural notions (such as ghosts, demons, and immortals) into vivid, engaging scenes, using techniques such as the gothic, the grotesque, and the satirical to evoke rich sentiments like terror, horror, disgust, disorientation, or awe in service of the works’ insight into real issues. The supernatural narratives might amaze or disturb the reader at first, but what is much more shocking, unpleasantly nudging, or thought-provoking is contemporary social or personal reality. The crossings are vehicles that enable the authors to discuss reality from various perspectives, such as gender, abnormal mentality, unacknowledged history, and general humanity. The supernatural narratives present a more comprehensive treatment of reality than Republican mainstream literature characterised by the revolutionary consciousness surrounding class struggles.
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Appendix

This is the article published during my PhD study.

**Satirical Fantasy and Idiom Literalization in Zhang Henshui's *A New Tale of Killing Ghosts*¹**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes the understudied novel *Xin zhangui zhuan* (*A New Tale of Killing Ghosts*, 1926) by the renowned Republican Chinese novelist Zhang Henshui (1895-1967). The main concern is the novel’s fantastical portrayal of ghosts for a practical aim. In this ghostly allegory, Zhang Henshui employs narrative intrusion and personification to satirize society, notably human shortcomings. While the ghosts expose poor morality, Zhong Kui is the representative of a rectifying force, who tries to maintain the principal order in the story as the ghosts are finally punished. For didactic purposes, Zhang Henshui also develops a narrative technique that he picks up from Liu Zhang’s *Zhangui zhuan* (*A Tale of Killing Ghosts*, 1701), namely the literalization of critical idioms. Rather than educate the reader on ethical principles via straightforward verdicts, Zhang Henshui cares more about how his messages reach the reader than about embracing didacticism. In this sense, idiom literalization generates dramatic performativity and enhances the communicative effect.

**KEYWORDS**

*A New Tale of Killing Ghosts*, Zhang Henshui, ghost, fantasy, satire, literalization

**Introduction**

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Xin zhangui zhuan, or A New Tale of Killing Ghosts (hereafter referred to as New Tale) is one of the least famous novels written by traditionalist novelist Zhang Henshui. It was first serialized between February 19 and September 4 of 1926, in Shijie ribao (Beijing) titled Xin zhuogui zhuan (A New Tale of Catching Ghosts) (Xie 711). The novel was later published by Xinziyou Bookstore in 1931 and Shanghai’s Zhengfeng Bookstore in 1936 (Gan 82; Wei 988). In the early 1920s, Zhang Henshui found a copy of Zhangui zhuan (A Tale of Killing Ghosts, 1701, henceforth referred to as Tale) by an anonymous writer later proved to be Liu Zhang (1667-?) and decided to write a sequel to it (H. Zhang, New Tale 2). Both novels adapt the traditional motif of “Zhong Kui slaying ghosts” to expose and ridicule “ghosts among mankind” (1).

Zhong Kui was depicted and dramatized in various ways in ancient China, which can be generally summarized in the following categories: legends recording the ghost killer Zhong Kui; folkloric accounts describing Zhong Kui as an exorcist (fangxiang) in exorcizing rituals, and various adaptations of the motif of Zhong Kui in literature. During the Ming dynasty, there have been dramas such as the anonymous Qing fengnian wugui nao Zhong Kui (Five Ghosts Making Fun of Zhong Kui in Celebration of a Fruitful Year) and the Kun opera Zhong Kui jia mei (Zhong Kui Marrying Off His

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1 The known editions of Zhangui zhuan include five handwritten editions, three block-printed editions, and seven letterpress editions. See the detailed list in the appendix of A Tale of Killing Ghosts (pp. 278-82, 1989 edition). The editions display different titles. As observed so far, exceptions exist in the block-printed and letterpress editions. Wanben, namely a pocket-size edition block-printed by Wanertang, was titled Diji zuishaozhi: Zhangui zhuan (The Ninth Book Written by the Talented: A Tale of Killing Ghosts) or Shuo tang pinggui quanzhuan (A Tale of Quelling Ghosts in the Tang Dynasty) (Liu, Tale 281, 307). In Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe (A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, 1925), Lu Xun refers to the novel as Zhongkui zhuogui zhuan (A Tale of Zhong Kui Catching Ghosts), which results in a wide adoption of titles such as “Zhong Kui zhuang” (“The Legend of Zhong Kui”) and “Zhong Kui zhuogui zhuan” (Liu, Tale 307).

2 These include the allegedly earliest record in a Dunhuang Daoist document: Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing (The Divine Incantations Scripture [AD 664]), Shen Kuo’s (1031-95) “Bu bitan juan san” (“Volume Three of the Complement to Mengxi bitan”) of Mengxi bitan (Brush Talks from the Dream Brook [1086-1093]), the episode about Zhong Kui in Tang yishi (Remnants of the History of Tang) (allegedly from late Tang) as quoted in Tianzhong Ji (The Tianzhong Records) (Chen Yaowen, Ming dynasty), and Shiwu Jiyuan (On the Origins of Things) (Gao Cheng, Song dynasty) (Y. Liu 37).

3 Examples are Dunhuang manuscripts, such as Si 2055 “Chuxi Zhong Kui qunuo wen” (“A Writing on Zhong Kui’s Exorcizing on New Year’s Eve”), an attempted title by Wang Chongmin (X. Liu 51-53); “Meng wu Zhong Kui fu” (“Fu on Dreaming about Zhong Kui in Dance”) (Zhou Yao, late Tang) (X. Liu 52-54).
Sister) and fiction such as Zhong Kui quanzhuan (The Complete Tales of Zhong Kui) (Wang 197; Zhang and Zhang 128-31). As the image of Zhong Kui develops across time and genres, he has always been characterized as a righteous and auspicious figure with the power and the authority to conduct exorcisms and purify the secular world (Liu 38).

Liu Zhang’s Tale starts with Zhong Kui taking the Imperial Examination in the capital city. He ranks first with his performance in writing. However, his champion title is rescinded due to his disagreeable appearance. Zhong Kui takes his own life in protest against this gross injustice. Shortly after that, Emperor Dezong of Tang restores Zhong Kui’s title, holds a grand funeral for him, and appoints him as the Qumo dashen (“The Great God of Exorcism”). Yama, the king of the Underworld, sends Xianyuan (a name with a similar pronunciation to hanyuan, meaning “being wronged”) and Fuqu (a homophone of fuqu, meaning “suffering from unjust treatment”) to assist Zhong Kui in leading the underworld troops. Their mission is to track down and punish those ghosts who wander among humans. During his journey, Zhong Kui deals with all the ghosts in Yama’s name list one by one. In the end, Zhong Kui, Xianyuan, and Fuqu report to the Jade Emperor in the Celestial Empire. Zhong Kui is rewarded with a divine temple and enjoys extended worship from the living world. Emperor Dezong awards Zhong Kui an inscribed board for the temple as an acknowledgment of the latter’s expertise in exorcism and heroic achievements. When the characters approach the board to take a look, they are struck by the inscription: “How can such things be true” (Liu, Tale 191). It is at this climactic moment that the story ends. Resonating with the closing poem of the novel (whose first two lines read, “Flowers were brushing against the bamboo screen / while I was having a long midday dream”), the inscription “How can such things be

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1 The text of Liu Zhang’s Tale within the present article’s discussion is from the latest modern letterpress edition printed in 1998. This edition is based on two handwritten editions. The primary edition is kangben (the “kang” version), namely Liu Zhang’s initial version (before the 27th year of Kangxi’s reign or 1688, stored in the Capital Library, Beijing), and it is read against qianben (the “qian” version), namely Liu Zhang’s revised transcription of kangben (from the 1st to the 10th years of Qianlong’s reign, 1736-1745, stored in the Beijing Library) (Liu, Tale 279). The textual differences between the two editions are clarified in the form of footnotes. While the initial edition (kangben) lacks “How can such things be true,” Liu Zhang’s revised edition (qianben) shows the inscription clearly.
true” claims that the entire novel is nothing but the narrator’s dream and acknowledges the story’s fictionality with a sense of humour.

In Zhang Henshui’s *New Tale*, the story continues with a new ghost-hunting expedition. It takes place hundreds of years after Zhong Kui was deified. By that time, the Monkey King had launched a revolution, toppled the reign of the Jade Emperor, and established a republican government in the celestial domain. One day, Zhong Kui accidentally finds that the inscribed board of his temple has been mysteriously replaced by a new one that reads, “Such things are indeed happening.” Zhong Kui, Hanyuan (namely Xianyuan), and Fuqu immediately understand the new inscription as implying that ghosts have re-emerged in the secular world, and so they set off on a new journey of exorcisms.

*New Tale* takes on the traditional novelistic form *zhanghui xiaoshuo* (the session-chapter novel), namely a chain of relatively independent events taking place in separate individual chapters. Each chapter in this episodic narrative features a limited number of ghosts who are characterized by different weaknesses and follies. Their moral weaknesses not only expose the ghosts to Zhong Kui, but also inspire him to tailor his strategies to capture and punish them. Zhong Kui’s job is not to eliminate them but to rectify their poor morality; sometimes the ghosts find themselves cornered by their own moral weaknesses and perish before Zhong Kui has had time to intervene.

Previous studies of the novel have been rather few and unsatisfactory in perspective and depth. I believe there are several reasons for this. Zhang Henshui is usually identified as a “novelist transforming from the Mandarin Duck and Butter-fly style to the New Fiction” (Fan, “Excerpt” 279). Zhang eventually incorporated fresh techniques and ideas inspired by Western fiction into the indigenous session-chapter novel (Rupprecht xix, xxii). He tailored themes, subject matters, characters, and structures of the old-style fiction to contemporary public appetites (McClellan 4).

For the present study, I have consulted T. M. McClellan’s *Zhang Henshui and Popular Chinese Fiction, 1919-1949* (2005), King-fai Tam’s dissertation *Innovation and Convention in Zhang Henshui’s Novels* (1990), and Hsiao-wei Wang
Rupprecht’s *Departure and Return: Chang Hen-shui and the Chinese Narrative Tradition* (1987). These works are mostly devoted to explicating the novel’s combination of artistic innovation and conventional features. Based on these studies as well as research articles collected in *Zhang Henshui yanjiu ziliao (Research Material on Zhang Henshui)* (2009) and *Zhang Henshui pingzhuan (An Annotated Biography of Zhang Henshui)* (1988), I summarize Zhang Henshui’s novelistic transformative features as follows.

First, Zhang Henshui put more effort into scenery, psychological, and subtle gesture depictions (H. Zhang, “Comprehensive Note” 238). He employed imagery for its metaphoric function of symbolizing the characters’ psychological states (Tam 153). Secondly, although Zhang failed to transform thoroughly the general outlook embedded in the traditional session-chapter form, he broke free from the “scholar and beauty” mode (120). More characters are derived from the middle or lower social classes, equipped with a critical mind against hardship and suppression (Yuan 198-200). Thirdly, Zhang avoided overly detailed, chronological recordings of events typical of session-chapter fiction; instead, he concentrated on significant events or a character’s crucial life periods to boost the appeal (202). Lastly, in order to achieve a sense of unity while retaining the episodic structure, Zhang accentuated the protagonists’ experience as the main plot and surrounded it with branching plotlines reflecting social phenomena (Tam 116; H. Zhang, “Recollection” 26).

However, because of its intentional association with *A Tale of Killing Ghosts*, *New Tale* is not as radically innovative or experimental in form or theme as Zhang Henshui’s other novels. As stated in the preface he wrote for the novel, *New Tale* is a sequel to *A Tale of Killing Ghosts*. Following the lead of Liu Zhang’s novel in artistic traits and contents, *New Tale* does not exemplify the above-summarized modern features manifest in Zhang Henshui’s reformed session-chapter fiction except for shaking off the classical couplet form in *New Tale’s* chapter titles, which has partially led scholars to overlook the novel (Wen and Li 131). Also, *New Tale’s* usage of curses rather than sarcasm has been claimed to be an aspect of artistic immaturity (Zhang and Wei 162). As for the content, *New Tale* is dismissed as less-than-profound in its exposure of darkness, since it rarely focuses on political or cultural
events unique to its contemporary time but pays much critical attention to generic human vices (Huang 114).

Another reason for *New Tale*’s being neglected is that the assessment of Zhang Henshui in literary history influences the exposure of certain types of his works. Zhang Henshui’s preference for romances in theme and subject earned him the title of “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly novelist.” Accordingly, *New Tale* is customarily ignored since it does not deal with romance. In addition, *New Tale* does not fall into the conventional categories of many other Zhang’s novels, such as social romantic fiction (*shehui yanqing xiaoshuo*), national crisis fiction (*guonan xiaoshuo*), martial arts fiction (*wuxia xiaoshuo*), and historical fiction (*lishi xiaoshuo*). The reason might be that *New Tale* deals with humanity’s general weaknesses, an atypical gesture during the Republican period. Consequently, *New Tale* in itself is unlikely to attract as much attention as other novels, particularly when Zhang’s fiction is discussed in the context of these subgenres.

Moreover, the selection of Zhang Henshui’s works is pertinent to the approaches and perspectives that researchers prefer to hold. Under the biographical approach, researchers take more interest in Zhang’s life experience (for example, as a newspaper journalist) and his ideas on the novelistic representation of contemporary non-

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1 I temporarily sidestep the question of whether or not Zhang Henshui belongs to the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School. On this question, see Y. Zhang, “Master”; Fan, “On Several Representative Novels.” One possible touchstone to test against the MDB School or the Saturday School is to see whether a novel is mainly characterized by escapist playfulness (Y. Zhang, “Master” 115). Regarding Western criticism, Perry Link includes Zhang Henshui in his study of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fiction and discusses *Tixiao yinyuan (Fate in Tears and Laughter)* (Link 37, 169).

2 The most representative subgenre among Zhang Henshui’s ameliorated session-chapter fiction is social romance fiction, “with social matters as the longitude while romances as the latitude” (Yuan 193; H. Zhang, “Comprehensive Note” 237). In this form, interwoven with the plot of courtship and marital life we encounter the ugliness in bureaucracy, family life, and people’s morality and minds (Tam 137).
fictional events in reality (Tam 15-16).\(^1\) Novels such as *Chunming waishi* (*An Unofficial History of Peking*, 1930), *Si ren ji* (*This Person’s Notes*, 1944), and *Tixiao yinyuan* (*Fate in Tears and Laughter*, 1930) cater more to readers’ curiosity about what real events in China are represented in fiction (Hou 306). By contrast, *New Tale* primarily presents abstract characters who represent various moral weaknesses (Y. Zhang, “Master” 99). A close analysis of the novel will show some degree of historical referentiality in *New Tale*, but one should bear in mind that the fictional world is constructed not in a realistic but in an allegorical style. I will demonstrate later that *New Tale* is written for the reader to recognize and judge aspects of general ugliness in human nature rather than to experience an engrossing fictional world resembling the non-literary world.

*New Tale*’s linguistic tricks mocking communism explain why later researchers in Communist China rarely discuss the novel. Chapter 8 introduces a ghost family. Bragging Ghost asks his wife, Free Flower, and son, Red-Haired Ghost, for food. The names of the mother and the son imply their political standpoints. Red-Haired Ghost calls his father an “imperialist” and accuses him of practicing “domestic imperialism,” because he never distributes family property equally but always puts his interest ahead of the other family members (H. Zhang, *New Tale* 94). The dialogues in this family conflict are heavy with revolutionary terms: “Promoting communism is popular nowadays”; “suppressing us with imperialism”; “The ox outside the gate was one of the weaker peoples, and so you had to liberalize it”; and “to quell the domestic Communist party” (94-95). The word *chifa* (“red-haired”) has a similar pronunciation to *chihua* (“communist takeover”), contemptuously referring to

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\(^1\) In “*Xiezuo shengya huiyi*” (“Recollection on My Writing Career”), Zhang Henshui writes that his novels tell about people’s lives rather than fantasize about different lives, and he always draws inspiration from social events (26, 30, 31). In *Bashiyi meng* (*Eighty-One Dreams*), “*Di sanshiliu meng: tiantang zhi you*” (“The Thirty-Sixth Dream: A Tour in Heaven”) features Pan Jinlian in a car ride that implies authorial sarcasm towards the then-ruling party KMT (the Nationalists). The prototype is Kong Xiangxi’s daughter, who broke traffic laws and attacked the police (Y. Zhang, “*Our Big Brother*” 79). Likewise, *Jinfen shijia* (*The Story of a Noble Family*) incites gossiping among readers about Peking bureaucracy and celebrities’ private lives since the novel makes use of real events (Y. Zhang, “Master” 106).
the Communists. Political mockery is not unusual in Zhang Henshui, as he took the side of liberalism (Y. Zhang, “Master” 118).

So far I have explained the reasons for New Tale’s being ignored. In what follows, I seek to disclose the satirical strategies of New Tale. How does the novel build on its prequel Tale? How do the fantastical configurations of ghost characters and their magical manipulations serve this satirical purpose? How does Zhang Henshui achieve his didactic ends without utilizing a direct didactic narrative?

**Narrative Intrusion and Ghostly Allegory**

*New Tale* is an allegorical novel, as it configures a variety of ghosts for satirical and didactic exposure of the mortal world. Mimetic reading strategies are not suitable for *New Tale*. Its supra-normal events and entities, including Zhong Kui and the ghosts, are not likely to be featured as a severe challenge to readers’ rationalistic world view, nor do they serve to promote a new “pattern of the universe” that accommodates supernatural phenomena (Huntington 111). The focus is always on human follies and social ills, as suggested by the various ghosts’ meaningful names and actions. In his preface to *New Tale*, the popular Republican fiction writer Xu Qinfu (1891-1953) argues that one should not ignore the horrible deeds that people conduct, which renders some of them unworthy of being regarded as human (247).

An instance of narratorial intrusion instantly connects *New Tale* and *Tale*, namely the new inscription “Such things are indeed happening” that launches a new ghost-hunting journey. Realizing that the old inscription has been altered without his notice, Zhong Kui is furious at first about his authority being challenged. Eventually, he and his two assistants, Hanyuan and Fuqu, take “Such things are indeed happening” as a serious, meaningful message to be deciphered. They readily compare this message with the old inscription, “How can such things be true,” and arrive at the conclusion that a new group of ghosts are now active down in the secular world. Consequently, Zhong Kui decides to conduct a new round of investigations.

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1 An intrusive narrator is omniscient and, now and then, interrupts the story to impart (moral) commentary (Baldick).
Surprisingly, what motivates these characters is not an officially confirmed mission to slay ghosts but a strange incident with no apparent cause.

The inscription in *New Tale* is presented as a humorous comment, as an articulation from the narrator that intrudes on the fictional world which Zhong Kui and others inhabit. In *New Tale*, a narrator tells the whole story. The narrator resembles traditional Chinese storytellers who “recite stories” (*shuoshu*) for townspeople. The reminiscent style of storytelling is conspicuous in two clear ways: *queshuo* (“let us resume the story”) that starts the chapters; and the one-line preview of the next chapter, usually *yuzhi . . . quekan xiahui fenjie* (“if you would like to know . . . wait to see the next chapter”). These “metanarrative” transition phrases have been identified as a set of long-used textual markers that vernacular novelists deliberately employ to imitate the traditional storytelling manner and style (Børdahl 125).¹ Such formulas create an impression of a storyteller presenting the story to the audience (125).

Therefore, *New Tale* conveys an image of the narrator, who seems to be familiar with the novel *Tale* and echoes it with the exclamation “Such things are indeed happening.” On the one hand, the inscription, as an inner-plot commentary, conveys the narrator’s overall sentiment about the upcoming rampant ghosts. On the other hand, the inscription works as a component of the plot, as it takes up space and time in the story and pushes it forward by being perceived by the characters. Ultimately,

¹ Metanarrative phrases listed by Vibeke Børdahl include “pre-verse phrases” and “phrases of narrative transition” (86, 91-92). Pre-verse phrases appear before the descriptive inner-textual verse. One example is “*shi yue*” (“The poem says”) (86). Phrases of narrative transition serve as signs of progression or punctuation in the narrative (92). Based on her meticulous analysis of the “Wu Song fighting the tiger” story in many forms of literary representation, Børdahl finds that metanarrative phrases are consolidated as a set of the storyteller’s rhetorical conventions mostly appearing in the “full recension” (*fanben*) of vernacular novels (124-25). W. L. Idema also notes that the “storyteller’s manner” is a “deliberate artistic invention” instead of evidence of any direct connection between a traditional vernacular novel and its “commented tales” (*pinghua*) (105). The markers of the storyteller’s manner include the following: division of the novel into chapters (episodic structure); suspensive conclusion of each chapter; transitory jargon (e.g., *huashuo* [“the story says”], “*queshuo*” [“meanwhile, let’s tell”]); inclusion of descriptive verse and occasional authorial passages addressing the reader in order to deliver a moral verdict (70).
the narrator/storyteller is intervening in his story. A narratorial manipulation of the fictional world comes into effect.

One can notice that, inventing the new inscription as both a homage and a challenge to the prequel *A Tale of Killing Ghosts*, Zhang Henshui engenders not only a sense of playfulness but also a different tone concerning reality. In *Tale*, the closing inscription “How can such things be true” appears as a striking message inside the sleeping narrator’s mind and declares that the story is merely a dream. On the level of the story, the inscription indicates the absurdity of the phantasm and Zhong Kui being a living, tangible figure in the secular world. Moreover, “How can such things be true” allows the author to vent his incredulity and exasperation at the living ghosts in the mortal world and, most notably, the human vices and follies. Generally, the focus of “How can such things be true” is settled on novelistic fictionality and the discernible distance between the reader and the fictional world of the story. It does not take on any thematic weight.

By contrast, in *New Tale*, “Such things are indeed happening” implies the actuality of immorality in the external world before the core story unfolds. *New Tale* came into being in a cultural background hostile to descriptions of “unreal” subject matters in fiction. The New Literature rose in opposition to traditional world outlooks with the new intellectuals accusing tradition of oppressing humanity.\(^1\) Although Zhang Henshui’s re-imagination of ghosts in the human world went against the trend of the New Literature, his allegorical and satirical purpose in *New Tale* is clear. “Such things are indeed happening” serves as a “warning,” a thematic authorial statement, and the “eye of the novel” (*wenyan*, literally the “eye of a piece of writing”).\(^2\) The

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\(^1\) For example, as a leading figure of the “New Literature,” Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967) wrote the article “Ren de wenxue” (“The Literature of People,” 1918). Zhou argues that literature should depict either ideal, ordinary, or miserable lives (122). Whichever kind of life the writers write about, one substantial criterion is to respect humanity as it is, to insist on human dignity and the combination of body and soul, and to write about real personalities in individuals (121). At the same time, Zhou blacklisted several literary subjects once popular in ancient literature, including obscenity, superstition, divinities, ghosts, monsters, slavery, bandits, scholars, beauties, vulgar jokes, and scandals (123).

\(^2\) Liu Xizai (1813-1881) notes in the Qing-era Chinese theoretical work on verse and prose *Yigai · wengai* (*Artistic Outlines: An Outline on Prose*) that the “eye” is aimed to imply the theme of the entire piece of writing, a figure that can be placed at the beginning, middle, or end of the text (Cao 50).
question is not whether this round of ghost investigation is a dream; the point is to realize that the ghosts representing social ills are not pure fantasy. The ghosts are not just Zhong Kui’s task but may also be- long to the readers’ reality.

What counts as a ghost? In Liu Zhang’s preface to *Tale*, he delineates the nature of the satirized objects: immoralities beyond the reach of laws, such as conceited- ness, brazenness, dishonesty, greed, lecherousness, and alcoholism (Liu, *Tale* 1). In *New Tale*, Zhang Henshui concretizes several universal weaknesses in humanity by assigning a ghost to each one. The naming of the ghosts enables the reader to grasp without much effort the author’s attitude of ridicule. The names include Mean Ghost, Opium Ghost, Hypocritical Ghost, Toady Ghost, Silly Ghost, and Opportunistic Ghost, among others. The easily comprehensible names in these labels dispel any sense of mystery that might have derived from the notion of ghost.

Zhang Henshui employs caricature and exaggeration to stress targeted follies and vices. Ghosts act in a comical and sometimes dramatic style. For example, Hollow-Hearted Ghost struggles to squeeze out an article, making him an allegorical figure mocking people who pretend to be erudite but are actually ignorant; Dissolute Ghost abuses his power and position as a private teacher and flirts with a female student; Cunning Ghost pays for alcohol perfunctorily with a jokingly forged banknote; Stingy Ghost takes a bite of a dog poo in his bet with a melon peddler just to get a trolley of melons for free; Short-Lived Ghost dies from excessive flattery; Bragging Ghost is so obsessed with self-aggrandizement that he distributes oversized name cards with Chinese characters as large as bowls; Nasty Ghost uses the Jade Emperor’s chamber pot to make tea in order to show his submission and admiration to his superior.

Zhang Henshui also introduces other ghosts that display historical characteristics typical of the Republican era. The connection built between the novel and the extraliterary reality catches the reader’s eye. From the start the Celestial Empire undergoes an unprecedented change, from a monarchical regime to a republican government. This arrangement appears awkward and abrupt at first. In terms of the plot, there is no palpable reason for the Monkey King’s sudden and radical rebellion, nor does the story explain why it has to be a republican form of government that
replaces the reign of the Jade Emperor. Apart from the context, some ghosts show modern signs. For example, Zhang Henshui gives Nonsense Ghost romantic characteristics to ridicule those ambiguous poems that make no sense; Nonsense Ghost’s friend, Philosophical Ghost, is an aloof and dull scholar who cares for nothing but indulging in philosophical contemplation.

The Literalization of Idioms

In the preface, Zhang Henshui praises Liu Zhang’s novel A Tale of Killing Ghosts, arguing that it outvalues Zhang Nanzhuang’s Hedian (Which Allusion Is It?, 1878, hereafter referred to as Allusion) in its humorous, satirical touch (H. Zhang, “Self-Preface” 203). Tracing the three novels chronologically, one may find signs of coherence and commonality. Notably, they all tell stories about characters who are represented as ghosts but ultimately resemble humans in caricature. Moreover, the three novels adopt written idioms creatively, displaying differences in the scope of their employment and their degree of fantastical dramatization. These differences ultimately distinguish Zhang Henshui’s New Tale in style and literary effect from the other two novels.

In Tale, Liu Zhang takes the literal meaning of an idiom and materializes it as an event or scene in the story. In Chapter 2, Rowdy Ghost, Residue-Digging Ghost, and Scrubby Ghost acquire a peculiar ability: they can weaken their enemies’ fighting skills by shouting degrading words at them. When Zhong Kui and his soldiers suffer the ghosts’ “linguistic” attack, a fat monk comes to their rescue: “The monk smiled, opened his mouth widely, and swallowed the three ghost kings in a mouthful” (31). The monk explains to the awestruck crowd: “You don’t need to teach the ghosts lessons or debate with them. Just accommodate them with a big belly. Why do you have to fight with them?” (31).

Behind the scene of the big monk swallowing ghosts is the idiom dudanengrong (the four-character idiom du-da-neng-rong denotes “belly-big-able to-accommodate”). Its
figurative meaning is that one should try to be tolerant. Customarily, in the Chinese context, the figurative sense prevails, and the imagery of the idiom is not taken seriously (that is, in the case of dudanengrong, one can still be tolerant even without a capacious stomach). However, in Tale, Liu Zhang sees the potential for bringing the idiom’s literal meaning to the semantic surface of the story and making the moral verdict more vivid. A similar example is the literalization of the idiom suotouwugui (suo-tou-wugui, “withdraw-head-turtle,” meaning “a turtle with drawing its head into the shell”). When Deadbeat Ghost turns himself into a turtle and withdraws his head, the narrator criticizes him: “He has no way to welch on debts by talking nonsense, but he is able to avoid people by shying away like a turtle” (72). On the one hand, the metaphorical allusion to cowardice is highlighted; on the other hand, the literal imagery of the turtle occupies the fictional space of the story by actually having the ghost character turn into a turtle.

Liu Zhang’s literalization echoes Tzvetan Todorov’s ideas on the figurative discourse in fantasy. Todorov’s figurative discourse is about expressions in the narration leading to a “veritable metamorphosis” (77). Supernatural incidents in the story take place as the “literal sense of the figurative expression getting realized by the fantastic” (79). Expressions characterized by exaggeration or metaphors may still convey didactic messages through specific fantastical scenes, even when the expressions are not articulated in their exact words.

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1 The prototype of the fat monk figure is Milefo (Maitreya) in Buddhism. The most popular couplet description of Maitreya in Chinese religion is “with a belly big enough for everything, he tolerates the intolerable under the sky; wearing a big smile all the time, he laughs at the ridiculous in the world,” which can be spotted beside the Maitreya statue in many temples.
The late Qing novel *Which Allusion Is It?* by Zhang Nanzhuang also contains idiom usages, but generally in a more conventional and rigid way—the characters’ dialogues or the narrator’s accounts can be difficult to understand without relevant linguistic background on the Wu dialect or editorial annotations. The idioms do not occupy imagery space in form of plot components but only contribute their allegorical meanings. To cite one of many instances, in Chapter 1, *baduanti* (*ba* translates as “retract,” *duan* as “short,” and *ti* as “ladder”) literally means “remove the short ladder” while figuratively it is equivalent to “burning the bridge after crossing it.” This idiom appears in a dialogue between the ghosts. Living Ghost promises to dedicate a temple to Tianzun, the supreme god in the mythological system of Chinese Daoism, as long as the divinity sends him a boy. Living Ghost sees his wish fulfilled but has no intention to keep his promise. His friend Mourning Ghost tries to dissuade him from merely paying lip service to Tianzun: “Since you've already promised to dedicate a temple to Tianzun, you can no longer go back on your word. Are you the kind of person to *baduanti*?” (N. Zhang, *Allusion* 16). Evidently, the idiom *baduanti* only functions in an allegorical sense, while its literal meaning of removing a ladder is not involved in the story. This conventional way of using idioms lends the novel a vivid, provincial, and comedic style.

A similar example is *liangmiansandao*, where the idiom is grafted into the plot with only the literal meaning remaining. On the surface, *liangmian* means “double faced” and *sandao* “triple knives.” The figurative meaning is “double-crossing.” The novel presents a tighter and more coherent plot focusing on one particular protagonist. The various ghosts are secondary characters whose actions push forward the protagonist’s story. The fictional world does not have Zhong Kui or any other figures that inherently represent justice or moral rectification as opposed to the ghosts. The basic plot is as follows. Living Ghost and his wife Female Ghost make a wish in front of Tianzun (Lord of Heaven) and eventually give birth to a boy ghost named Living Dead. Showing gratitude, the couple build a temple for Tianzun and invite a band of ghosts to watch plays. One of the ghosts loses his life in a drunken fight, but the criminal flees. Going through a series of torments, including blackmail, imprisonment, monetary loss, disease, and a failed remarriage, Living Ghost and Female Ghost both die, leaving behind the youngster Living Dead for a relative to raise. Living Dead is ill-treated and later runs away to make a living by himself as a beggar. One day he saves the girl Stink Flower from a rapist. After becoming engaged to the girl, Living Dead devotes himself to studying with a wise master, Guigu, but is eventually reunited with Stink Flower in the war. The couple defeat the army led by two Big-Headed Ghosts, are rewarded by Yama the Ghost King, and get married in the end.
liangmiansandao loses its figurative meaning in the narrative and is taken as the name of a weapon wielded by Light-Bone Ghost: “Light-Bone Ghost heard it, grabbed a liangmiansandao, and jumped away” (N. Zhang, Allusion 127). The weapon reappears later: “Although Light-Bone Ghost survived, his liangmiansandao got stolen by some knife thief on the killing field” (151). The writer partially makes use of the element “knife” in this idiom, which results in semantic confusion, since “a double-faced triple knife,” as written in the original story, makes no sense for the reader. The other shortcoming of such usage of liangmiansandao is that the idiom’s figurative meaning is completely put aside, since neither the ghost character nor the plot indicates that the ghost is double-crossing others.

Having presented the overview of the idiom usage in A Tale of Killing Ghosts and Which Allusion Is It?, I would like to turn to New Tale. Literalization of idioms is taken to a much more mature level by Zhang Henshui. Not only is this strategy used more frequently, but there also displays a better integration of the idioms’ literal meanings in the story.

Following Liu Zhang’s style of exposure and criticism, Zhang Henshui had in mind people’s moral weaknesses as he witnessed these in society and gave literary representations to these abstract targets. His criticism is collectively reflected through the idioms that he chooses and whose meaning he extends into supernatural figurations. For example, in mocking some men’s improper desire of women, Zhang Henshui portrays Dissolute Ghost. This ghost is so taken over by his lascivious obsession with a stranger that his soul drifts out of his body:

[Dissolute Ghost] stood in the middle of the street, not responding to any calls. Careless Ghost walked closer to him and noticed that he was gazing at some-thing inside a gate. He was cold from head to toe except for the slight warmth near his heart. Careless Ghost had always known that Dissolute Ghost often became soulless when he came upon beauties, so there must be one inside that gate who had accidently hooked his soul. (New Tale 64)

The crucial sentence in this excerpt is “Dissolute Ghost often became soulless when he came upon beauties.” The whole scene is based on the idiom hunbushoushe in
the original Chinese text, which is translated as “soulless” in the above excerpt. Literally, *hunbushoushe* (“soul/spirit-not- stay/keep-house”) means “one’s soul/ spirit failing to stay in the body.” This image leads to the figurative meaning of “be- ing unable to concentrate on what one is supposed to do because of some powerful distraction.” Zhang Henshui’s strategy is to literalize the idiom *hunbushoushe* by transforming its imagery components into an actual literary event. Thus, Dissolute Ghost’s soul leaves his body and transports itself into the beautiful woman’s dead pet dog so that the ghost’s mind can enjoy her company. It shows that Zhang Henshui takes the idiom as the inspiring prototype for imagining the supernatural plot.

Likewise, to criticize avarice, Zhang Henshui presents a greedy ghost’s behaviour in an “impossible” occurrence. The occurrence is derived from the idiom jianqianyankai (“see-money-eyes-open”), literally meaning “once seeing money, one’s eyes are wide open.” The literalization takes shape in the Blind-Ghost episode in a slightly altered form. Blind Ghost smells a large sum of money:

He knew the sum was by no means small and thus craved to touch the money. But he had not sight, and the guy carrying the money would see his reaching hand before he even touched it. Burning with avarice, Blind Ghost felt his inner greediness turning into a hot flow soaring straight to the top of his head. The flow found no way out of his head and finally rushed out from Blind Ghost’s eye sockets and dispelled his blindness. (158)

That the mere scent of money brings vision back to Blind Ghost’s eyes, driven by his irrepressible craving, mocks monetary desire. In the previous examples of Dissolute Ghost and Blind Ghost, idiom literalization is used to furnish dramatic scenes in which ghosts personify human weaknesses. The human follies are not represented mimetically in daily situations. What is satisfying about these practices of literalization is that not only do the literal meanings bring visual effects to the story, but the figurative meanings also remain in the story and create a humorous effect.

The confrontation between Zhong Kui and Hollow-Hearted Ghost in Chapter 3 epitomizes this literalization strategy in the most comprehensive way. Hollow-
Hearted Ghost has another widely recognized name: Yan Zhihou. Both names carry vital information about the ghost. First of all, “Hollow-Hearted” was used to ridicule those complacent Republican Chinese literati who were far less academically sophisticated or knowledgeable than they pretended to be. For instance, the ghost intends to pull out a draft of a declaration of war against Zhong Kui, but the declaration ends up being no more than a mixture of sentences that Hollow-Hearted Ghost has stolen from a number of books.

The name Yan Zhihou echoes this satirical implication. Yan is equivalent to lian, denoting “face,” whereas hou means “thick” and zhi serves as a conjunction. “Yan Zhihou” is deliberately invented in reference to the idiom houlianpi ("thick-face“), a more common idiom used to blame someone for being shameless. The ghost’s two names delineate the satirical target: the literati who are shameless about feigning erudition. Giving two names to one ghost does not follow from a need to enrich the character; rather, it is intended to inform the reader of the satirized object more comprehensively.

Zhang Henshui goes into great length to present the battle between Hollow-Hearted Ghost and Zhong Kui. The satirized phenomena embedded in the name take dramatic forms as the ghost’s magical ability and the weapon. The writer takes houlianpi ("thick-faced") at face value, thus having the ghost’s face solid enough to survive hard blows and even artillery fire: “[Hanyuan] fired two cannons at the face of Hollow-Hearted Ghost. The ghost was equipped with a thick face . . . he advanced; the artillery fire struck his face and disappeared, leaving no scars at all” (32).

Hollow-Hearted Ghost uses book bags as his weapon: “[Hollow-Hearted Ghost] shook his bag only once, and Hanyuan was struck like thunder. The ghost’s servants all carried large or small book bags and kept shaking them. All the underworld soldiers started to feel numb and feeble” (32-33). As it turns out, Hollow-Hearted Ghost’s book bags have only word fragments instead of books: “He snitched books from many places and filled them in the bags” (33). Dangling the book bags is the literalization of the idiom diaoshudai (“drop-book-bag”). Figuratively, diaoshudai satirizes writers who fill their writings with too many quotations to show off their rich knowledge.
In the counterattack, the underworld soldiers are equipped with huge knives, broad axes, and wastepaper baskets. They successfully defeat Hollow-Hearted Ghost: “The servants of his had several of their book bags slashed open by axes, so piles of paper pieces fell out with fragmented bits of text. . . . [T]heir book bags were magically absorbed by the wastepaper baskets” (34). This scene literalizes the idiom *dadaokuofu* (“big-knife-wide-axe”). While indicating that the underworld soldiers are taking actions decisively and quickly, *dadaokuofu* has also been divided character by character into images, coming together as “huge knives and broad axes.” Picturing the ghost’s book bags slashed open by the blades, Zhang Henshui suggests that excessive, showing-off quotations in writings should be excised without hesitation, and wastebaskets are rather more suitable for rubbish articles. As one can see, the fighting scene in the plot is not driven by a realistic, causal logic. Instead, the ghost’s and Zhong Kui’s activities are pictured according to the authorial verdicts, conveyed through idioms about men of letters. The hectic fighting scenes add a sense of performativity to the story.

In the type of defamiliarisation I have explored, the reader should not take the conventional idioms for granted according to their naturalized, metaphorical meanings. As Robert-Alain De Beaugrande and Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler state in their chapter on “coherence” in text linguistics, usually there is only one intended sense of a linguistic expression, even though the given expression may have several virtual meanings (84). However, the idioms in Zhang Henshui’s *New Tale* are fully perceived in both the literal and the figurative dimensions. What distinguishes this literalization strategy is that, with its help, Zhang Henshui ridicules ugliness in the fantastical and funny fictional scenes instead of making sharp criticism or direct judgments, thus entailing a good deal of humour.¹

**Conclusion**

As I stated in the introduction, Zhang Henshui’s *A New Tale of Killing Ghosts* has been overlooked by many researchers for many reasons. On the surface, it follows

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¹ In his preface to the novel, Zhang Henshui states his reluctance to curse directly in the narration (H.Zhang, “Self-Preface” 203).
the lead of Liu Zhang’s *A Tale of Killing Ghosts* in the motif and setup; it is written in keeping with traditional session-chapter fiction and shows limited immediate modernity; it draws on almost no personal material from the author’s life; and it plays jokes on communism.

Zhang Henshui identifies the motif of Zhong Kui along with a variety of ghosts as a workable framework to satirize society, notably various human shortcomings. In “Such things are indeed happening,” Zhang Henshui makes a humorous reference to *A Tale of Killing Ghosts* and highlights the allegorical nature of his novel. Apart from the above thematic articulation, ghost characters communicate significant messages through satire. The ghosts are one-dimensional characters with highly indicative names pointing out satirized and immoral elements. In other words, the ghosts are more like personifications of immorality than actual characters. The novel is thus like a discursive parade of follies and vices while Zhong Kui represents the only rectifying force, trying to maintain the principal “law” in the story as the ghosts are finally punished.

In terms of carrying out a didactic task based on ghost fantasy, Zhang Henshui develops a minor narrative technique in *A Tale of Killing Ghosts*. *New Tale* outperforms *Tale* and even the better-known satirical novel *Which Allusion Is It?* in its creative usage of Chinese idioms. In the technique of literalization, Zhang Henshui revives the literal dimension of the idioms while keeping the figurative dimension active in the conveyance of satire. Most of the idioms selected here are intended for exposing the ugliness that occurs in broad daylight. Nonetheless, rather than educate the reader on ethical principles through straightforward verdicts, Zhang Henshui cares more about how his messages reach the reader while avoiding a moralistic didacticism. In this sense, idiom literalization generates dramatic performativity and enhances moral communication.

**WORKS CITED**


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