

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CHINESE  
VERNACULAR NOVEL SUI YANGDI YANSHI (THE  
SENSATIONAL HISTORY OF SUI EMPEROR YANG)

by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this is my own work and that all sources have been duly acknowledged.

David Ellis

## ABSTRACT

*Sui Yangdi Yanshi* 隋煬帝艷史 (The Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang) is a historical novel published in China towards the end of the Ming dynasty in 1631. It portrays, in sometimes graphic detail, the rise and decline of Emperor Yang (reigned 605 - 618) whose obsession with massive construction projects and pursuit of sensual pleasures resulted in the collapse of the dynasty. The novel sank into relative obscurity upon the accession of the more conservative Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911). The decline of the novel may be attributed in large part to its inclusion in a later novel *Sui Tang Yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties) which excised the more salacious elements of the earlier work and embraced a more conservative social vision.

This thesis utilises a critical methodology based on aspects of the work of the twentieth-century Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin - specifically the concepts of genre, polyphony and intertextuality - to argue that the emerging vernacular novel form in seventeenth-century China is an open-ended and complex form which is capable of accommodating a variety of discourses, and which provides an environment in which a multiplicity of views are revalorised. It is argued that the vernacular novel form was regarded by intellectuals of the period as the best means of conveying human truth within the context of historicity and was seen as a superior vehicle for examination of the human condition than institutionalised forms such as the Standard Imperial Histories.

The thesis demonstrates that vernacular fiction displays an awareness of its fictionality and analyses the relationship between the narrative body and appended critical commentary. The final chapter utilises the concept of intertextuality to argue that creative understanding of vernacular fiction allow the reader to extend the range of meaning and exploit the latent potential of the vernacular fiction form.

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## INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century was a fertile period in the development of vernacular fiction in China. The two most prominent forms - the *huaben* 話本 short story form and the *zhanghui xiaoshuo* (vernacular linked-chapter novel) - achieved unprecedented levels of maturity in form and content.<sup>1</sup> The period from the turn of the seventeenth century to the collapse of the Ming dynasty (circa 1644) saw the publication of many of what are now regarded as the classics of pre-modern fiction.<sup>2</sup> Novels such as *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the Golden Vase), *Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin), *Sanguo Yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) emerged from publishing houses concentrated, in the main, in the flourishing cultural and commercial centres of the lower Yangtse valley area of Southern China. Vernacular novels, often extended literati versions of earlier tales, were produced in a plethora of recensions and variety of editions; the late Ming and early Qing period also saw major advances in literary criticism, as manifested in the ever more sophisticated commentary editions of novels<sup>3</sup>. A ready market existed for fiction and publishers

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “vernacular linked-chapter novel” to designate the literary entity encompassed under the rubric *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說 “full-length vernacular narrative in chapters”. The term *xiaoshuo* historically includes such diverse elements as dramatic writings, historical writings etc. For the purpose of this paper, I shall follow the suggestion of Robert E. Hegel who notes, “the field is delineated neither by the term *xiaoshuo* nor through any exclusive interest in purely fictional materials; it generally addresses writings in the broad area suggested by the modern term “fiction” within the wider world of *xiaoshuo*.” See Robert E. Hegel, “Traditional Chinese Fiction- The State of the Field”. *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 53. No. 2, May 1994: 394 - 395.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent overview of late Ming society and the development of what he terms literati fiction, see Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel: Ssu Ta Ch'i Shu*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. See also Zhou Mingchu 周明初, *Wan Ming shiren xintai ji wenxue ge'an* 晚明士人心態及文學個案 (Late Ming literati mental attitudes and literary examples). Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> An excellent source of Ming-Qing contemporary critical analysis and critical commentary editions can be found in David L. Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. See also Yuan Zhenyu 袁震宇

catered for readers of all levels of literacy<sup>4</sup>. The bulk of pre-modern linked chapter fiction was ostensibly concerned with historical subjects - what the Chinese term *jiangshi* 講史. Novels were written on every historical period with particular attention given to certain historical figures, such as the heroic deeds of dynasty-founding emperors and the debauchery and excesses of bad last emperors. One such work - *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* 隋煬帝艷史 (The Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang) - is the subject of this thesis.

The study of pre-modern Chinese fiction in the West has witnessed significant advances in recent years.<sup>5</sup> Attention has also shifted from the “masterworks” to other previously less well-known works, many of which were precursors of better known novels. My initial research interest focused on the early Qing novel *Sui Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties) which was published in 1695, though it seems to have been compiled around 1675.<sup>6</sup> It consists of 100 chapters relating the period of history from the accession of Sui through to the Tang restoration after the An Lushan Rebellion. In his doctoral thesis Robert E. Hegel demonstrates that *Sui Tang Yanyi* was in fact composed largely of two earlier novels: *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* (published in 1631) and Yuan Yuling’s 袁于令 *Sui Shi Yiwen* 隋史遺文

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and Liu Minjin 劉明今, *Mingdai juan* 明代卷 (Ming dynasty volume). In (editors) Wang Yunxi 王運熙, Gu Yisheng 顧易生, *Zhongguo wenxue piping tongshi* 中國文學批評通史 (History of Chinese Literary Criticism). Volume 5. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996; Jian Jinsong 簡錦松, *Mingdai wenxue piping yanjiu* 明代文學批評研究 (Research on Ming period Literary Criticism). Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> See Ellen Widmer, “The Huanduzhai of Hangzhou and Suzhou: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Publishing”. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Volume 56. 1996: 77 - 122. See also, Robert E. Hegel, “Distinguishing Levels of Audience for Ming-Ch’ing Vernacular Literature”. In (editors) Johnson, Nathan, Rawski, *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; reprint Taibei: Southern Materials Center, 1987: 112 - 142.

<sup>5</sup> For a relatively recent overview of both Western and Chinese advances in the field of pre-modern fiction studies see Hegel (1994).

<sup>6</sup> During my research I consulted the following edition: Chu Renhuo 褚人獲, *Sui Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties). 3 vols. Taibei: Shijie shuju, 1982.

(Omitted Tales of Sui History; published in 1633).<sup>7</sup> The former deals with the dissolute reign of Sui Emperor Yang whose rule led to the collapse of the Sui dynasty; the latter describes the travails of the Tang dynasty hero Qin Shubao from his rustic roots, through his adventurous career, and finally his loyal service to the Tang Court. *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* describes the main events in the life of Sui Emperor Yang (reigned 605 - 617), from his birth amidst omens and portents, through his patricide and seizure of the throne, to the financial and sensual extravagance which leads to the collapse of his regime and the accession of the Tang Dynasty. *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is a ground-breaking novel for a number of reasons: it concentrates largely on one character rather than a large cast of heroes (as in *Shuihu Zhuan* and *Sanguo Yanyi*); it eschews the sweeping vistas of previous historical novels, in favour of closely observed narrative centred on the interaction of characters within the palace complex; it depicts in some detail taboo activities such as rape, homosexuality and drug-taking; it emphasises quotidian details of Emperor Yang's palace life; it also depicts a high level of inner thought and psychological understanding of Emperor Yang as a fully rounded character.

Hegel's thesis clearly demonstrates the extent to which Chu Renhuo, the author of *Sui Tang Yanyi*, incorporated the earlier two novels into his own work—many sections are copied verbatim. In later work Hegel has also dealt with the characterisation of Emperor Yang and investigated the political and social aspects of the novel.<sup>8</sup> He was also instrumental in producing a reprint edition of *Sui Shi Yiwen*.<sup>9</sup> Hegel's research pointed to the importance of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* both as an

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, Robert E., *SUI T'ANG YEN-I: The Sources and Narrative Techniques of a Traditional Chinese Novel*. Ph.D. thesis. Columbia University, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Most notably in Hegel's excellent, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Yuan Yuling 袁于令, *Suishi yiwen 隋史遺文* (Omitted Tales from Sui History). Taipei: Youshi yuekan, 1975. This edition is a reprint of the original 1633 edition, and includes reproductions of woodcuts, and introductory essays by Hegel and C.T. Hsia. Another excellent edition has been published in Beijing by Zhonghua shuju, 1996.

antecedent to the popular *Sui Tang Yanyi*, and as a novel in its own right. Further investigation revealed growing appreciation of the novel's value amongst Western and Chinese critics, but, as yet, no thesis-length study.<sup>10</sup> I decided, therefore, to examine the literary structures of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and have utilised both Chinese critical work and Western modern literary criticism. I investigate the textual strategies utilised by the author and critical commentator, from the selection of pseudonyms, through prefatory material, the relationship between text and appended commentaries, and the centres of significance extrapolated from the actions of characters and interaction of elements within the textual body.

The aim of the thesis is to apply concepts introduced by the Russian cultural critic Mikhail Bakhtin to the analysis of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* with reference to contemporary seventeenth-century vernacular fiction. The fundamental relationship between fiction and historiography is examined in Bakhtinian terms. The thesis concentrates on the elements of the novel which demonstrate the most open capacity to evidence the fundamental importance of dialogism. These elements include the prefatory material; the pseudonymous identities adopted by the author and interlinear commentator and their relationship; the tensions between interlinear and general commentaries and the textual body; and the reconstruction of centres of significance from intertextual reference.

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<sup>10</sup> For example *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* has been mentioned in Wilt L. Idema, "Time and Space in Traditional Chinese Historical Fiction". In (editors) Huang Chun-chieh, Eric Zürcher, *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995; and Katherine Carlitz, *The Rhetoric of Chin p'ing mei*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. In China extended discussion of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Sui Shi Yiwen* is included in Qi Yukun 齊裕焜, *Mingdai xiaoshuo shi 明代小說史* (A history of Ming dynasty fiction). Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1997: 326 - 352. See also, Li Mengsheng 李夢生, *Zhongguo jinhui xiaoshou baihua 中國禁毀小說百話* (A catalogue of China's prohibited novels). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994: 134 - 141.

Chapter One establishes key global concepts, derived from Bakhtinian theory, which lay the foundation of the thesis and will demonstrate the applicability of key Bakhtinian global concepts to pre-modern Chinese fiction. It introduces key concepts underpinning my analysis of the late Ming novel in general and *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* in particular. The chapter ends with an examination of the production of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and its relationship with *Sui Tang Yanyi*.

Chapter Two discusses the relationship between historiography and fictionality and applies Bakhtin's concept of genre to highlight the different dynamics underlying the two forms. It demonstrates that distinctions between the two forms are most clearly evident on the level of generic tendencies. This conclusion is illustrated by the primacy of narrator and plot in vernacular historical fiction, based on an emphasis on causality, in contrast to the lack of plotted narrative in the Standard Imperial Histories. The distinction is reinforced by the manner in which historical fiction challenges the authority of Standard Imperial Histories through the depiction of the specific contingencies of human existence.

Chapter Three utilises Bakhtin's concept of polyphony to address the special role of the author. The chapter examines the role of the interlinear commentator and the relationship between author and interlinear commentator. Like many novels of the period, the importance of the pseudonyms adopted by the author and commentator of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is unclear: the author and interlinear commentator both adopted pseudonyms. This chapter demonstrates a discernible link in the choice of pseudonym made by the two identities and shows that the choice of pseudonyms is an integral element in the dialogue between author and commentator - a dialogue which continues throughout the body of the text. The complex relationship between the identities of the author and the interlinear commentator is analysed and I discuss the implications this holds for a reading of the novel.

Chapter Four examines the role of critical commentary within the textual body of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. It examines both the general commentaries appended to the end of each roll of the novel and the interlinear commentaries interspersed throughout the body of the narrative text. It applies the findings of Chapter Two and demonstrates that interlinear commentary presents the most visible arena in which dialogue between author, commentator and reader may occur.

Chapter Five discusses centres of significance, wider potentiality of meaning and reconstructed significance through the application of methods of intertextual reading. It extracts a discrete passage from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and analyses the interaction between the narrative text and critical commentary. Two centres of significance are extracted to demonstrate the expansion of reader-based understanding.

Chapter six presents the conclusion, mulls over questions which have arisen in the thesis and offers some possible future directions.

#### A note on editions of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

The main edition of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* I have consulted is: *Xinjuan quanxiang tongsu yanyi Sui Yangdi yanshi* 新鐫全像通俗演義隋煬帝艷史 (Newly engraved fully illustrated popular style historical elucidation of the *Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang*), published by Tianyi Chubanshe 一出版社, in Taipei, Taiwan in 1985. This is a reprint of the original 1631 edition. The authorship of the novel (*bianyan* 編演) is attributed to *Qidong yeren* 齊東野人 (Uncultivated man of Eastern Qi) and the critical annotation (*piping* 批評) credited to

*Bujing xiansheng* 不經先生. (Mr Free Thinker) <sup>11</sup>. I have also consulted two modern editions. The first, a heavily expurgated edition also published by Tianyi Chubanshe in 1974, contains neither general commentaries nor interlinear commentaries, nor does it reproduce the prefatory material.<sup>12</sup> The second is a relatively uncensored edition published in 1993 in Zhengzhou, People's Republic of China, by Zhongzhou chubanshe 中州古籍出版社. This edition, printed in simplified characters, contains the most important prefatory material and most of the interlinear commentaries.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately a great deal of inconsistency exists in the production of these two editions, an example being that the final 'general commentary' appears in neither Taipei (1974) nor Zhengzhou (1993). I have also seen a copy of the novel published in Taipei, as part of a series of banned pre-modern vernacular novels, but I have not used this edition which is published under the title *Sui Yang Yanshi*.<sup>14</sup> All references shall be to Taipei (1985) and Zhengzhou (1993) unless otherwise stated.

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<sup>11</sup> Qidong yeren 齊東野人, *Xinjuan quanxiang tongsu yanyi Sui Yangdi yanshi* 新鐫全像通俗演義隋煬帝艷史 (Newly Engraved Fully Illustrated Popular Style Historical Elucidation of the Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang). 5 vols. Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1985: 1. I hereafter refer to this edition as Taipei (1985).

<sup>12</sup> Qidong yeren 齊東野人, *Sui Yangdi yanshi* 隋煬帝艷史 (Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang). Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1974.

<sup>13</sup> Qidong yeren 齊東野人, *Sui Yangdi yanshi* 隋煬帝艷史 (Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang). 2nd edition. Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> *Sui Yang Yanshi* 隋煬艷史 (The Sensational History of [Emperor] Yang of Sui). This edition is part of the series *Zhongguo lidai jin hui xiaoshuo jicui* 中國歷代小說禁毀小說集粹 (Collection of banned Chinese novels down the ages). Taipei: Shuangdi chubanshe 雙笛出版社, 1996.

also ensured that the thesis survived the tortuous route from disc to paper and made arrangements for the viva. Dr Tommy McClellan offered incisive comments. Professor Bonnie McDougall provided good advice on the process of writing a thesis. Frances Weightman kindly helped proof-read the final draft of this thesis. Dr Xu Yinong provided valuable insights into Chinese philosophical concepts. Thanks are due to Dai Show-fen and Dr Yeh Ch'ing-long whose home-made beer and speculative discussions were mutually informing. Dr Jim Hoare of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office deserves special thanks for his constant encouragement and for allowing me time to complete this thesis despite work commitments.

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Finally I wish to thank my wife Chang Chia-hui 張嘉蕙 for her patience and encouragement. This thesis is dedicated to our two daughters, Roísín Kathleen and Níamh Josephine.

CHAPTER ONE: METHODOLOGY AND A BAKHTINIAN DEFINITION OF THE  
PRE-MODERN CHINESE NOVEL

Western critical appreciation of the pre-modern Chinese novel has moved on a great deal since the pioneering work of C.T. Hsia<sup>1</sup>. The work of Patrick Hanan<sup>2</sup>, Andrew Plaks<sup>3</sup>, Wilt Idema<sup>4</sup> and others has demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the complexity of *zhanghui xiaoshuo*. In the field of pre-modern Chinese fiction two major trends have advanced critical methodology: first, extensive research on Ming society, literature and philosophy. This trend has encompassed annotated translations of major works<sup>5</sup>, and critical examination of commentary editions.<sup>6</sup> The second trend is the application of Western literary theory to Chinese fiction.<sup>7</sup> This thesis applies aspects of the work of the twentieth-century

<sup>1</sup> C.T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968; reprint Taipei: Caves Books, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Hanan has made invaluable contributions to the study of vernacular short stories, particularly the stories of Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu. See Patrick D. Hanan, *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973; Patrick D. Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981; reprint, Taipei: Shuang Yeh, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Plaks has focused largely on the the major novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Andrew H. Plaks, "Towards a critical theory of Chinese narrative". In (editor) A.H. Plaks, *Chinese Narrative: Critical and theoretical essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977: 309 - 352; Andrew H Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel: Ssu Ta Ch'i Shu*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987; Andrew H. Plaks, *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> W.L. Idema, *Chinese Vernacular Fiction: The Formative Period*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Three of the finest examples are: Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone*. David Hawkes, John Minford, (translators). 5 Vols. London: Penguin, 1973 - 1986; Anthony C Yu, (translator), *The Journey to the West*. 4 vols. Chicago: Chicago University Press. 1977 - 1983; Xiaoxiaosheng, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. David T. Roy, (translator). Vol. 1. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> The most comprehensive collection of translations into English of vernacular fiction critical commentaries can be found in Rolston (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Among the more interesting examples are: Indira Satyendra, *Toward a poetics of the Chinese novel: A study of the prefatory poems in the "Chin Ping Mei tz'u-hua"*. Ph.D. thesis. University of Chicago, 1989; Jing Wang, *The Story of Stone: Intertextuality, Ancient Chinese Stone Lore and the Stone Symbolism in Dream of the Red Chamber, Water Margin, and The Journey to the West*. Durham, North

Russian critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. My interpretation of Bakhtinian theory is based on the work of, amongst others, Michael Holquist<sup>8</sup>, Gary Emerson and Caryl Morson<sup>9</sup>, Pam Morris<sup>10</sup>, and Tzvetan Todorov<sup>11</sup>.

This chapter first establishes the key global concepts, derived from Bakhtinian theory, which underpin the thesis and will demonstrate the applicability of key Bakhtinian global concepts to pre-modern Chinese fiction. I then discuss a definition of the Chinese pre-modern vernacular novel on principles distilled from Bakhtin. The chapter goes on to examine background information on *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*: the production of the novel, its contents, and history are described. The known literary antecedents and sources of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* are examined. Finally I discuss the reasons behind the disappearance of the novel from the public consciousness from the early Qing until the twentieth century and its relationship with the more commercially successful Qing novel *Sui Tang Yanyi*.

### Global concepts

The global concepts derived from Bakhtinian theory which are utilised by this thesis are genre, heteroglossia, polyphony, and intertextuality. The following sections outline the theoretical content of the terms and their applicability. Underlying Bakhtin's enterprise is the concept of dialogism in which, at the most basic level, each

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Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992; and Sheldon Lu Hsiao-peng, *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. London: Routledge, 1990; Michael Holquist (editor), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Gary Saul Morson, Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Pam Morris (editor), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. London: Edward Arnold, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. (Translator) Wlad Godzich. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

statement is recognised as part of a dialogue between the utterer and the addressee. Each word, statement or work of literature is part of a greater dialogue constantly engaging contemporary society, but at the same time informed by past history and oriented towards an as yet undefined future. No part of the dialogue can be taken in isolation. While connections may fall into disuse, or links go unrecognised, it is possible for reconstruction to take place, for creative interpretation to increase the confluence of meaning over space and time. As Satyendra has noted, in her dialogic study of prefatory poetry in *Jin Ping Mei*, dialogism values all utterances in a novel and implies mutual relations and responses in many directions. It also obviates the need to reduce the generation of meaning to a search for the author's controlling voice. The notion of dialogism denies there can be any absolute, single voice, since when any two voices are present the absolute authority of any single voice becomes relativized.<sup>12</sup>

#### Bakhtin's concept of genre

According to Bakhtin, genre is a specific way of visualising a given aspect of reality. In this respect, it encompasses all forms of human communication, from daily speech to literary forms such as the novel. The ability to command a wide range of genres would, therefore, enhance one's capacity to conceptualise the world. The choice of genre is a conscious decision which influences the manner in which a statement is shaped. That is to say, the choice of genre compels the author in the visualisation of expression, influences the editing of material, and can govern the ability of the author to mine the potential of authorial vision.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Satyendra (1989): 14 - 15.

<sup>13</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 275 - 276.

Bakhtin rejects a mechanistic view of the development of genres, preferring instead the idea of an organic growth and evolution of genres, closely reflecting social change and personal experience which in turn give rise to new genres of speech, social organisations, and, for our purposes, literary genres. Conversely, new literary genres propagate new ideas and original views of reality. As Bakhtin stated: “genre appraises reality and reality clarifies genre”<sup>14</sup> The mutually-informing growth of wider generic forces in society and their expression in literary genres is particularly evident in rapidly changing societies when social institutions are under pressure. Bakhtin, from his perspective of Soviet Russia in the mid-twentieth century, focused exclusively on European literature, picking out the fiction of Goethe and Dostoevsky for particular praise. For Bakhtin the contribution of Goethe was his understanding of time and its presence in the natural environment and human landscape. Dostoevsky was singled out for his appreciation of the human psyche. Bakhtin particularly admired Dostoevsky’s portrayal of indecisiveness and appreciation of the constant choices facing individuals: both states of mind which characterise the human condition.

Bakhtin was more comfortable with the idea of long-term and continuous change over what he termed “great time”.<sup>15</sup> He insisted that knowledge was transmitted over long periods of time through literature and that far from chronological distance or cultural differences being a barrier to understanding, the fact that the reader may be removed from the period of production of the text can be utilised to mine the text for potential unforeseen at the moment of its creation. This is not to say Bakhtin devalues the environment in which the text is produced - he notes the importance of gaining as much historical knowledge of the author and historical period as possible -

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Morson and Emerson (1990): 276.

<sup>15</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 280.

rather, he understands that great novels accrue added layers of meaning over time which were never considered by the original author.

### Heteroglossia

Heteroglossia is the term Bakhtin uses to describe linguistic centrifugal forces which, through the minute alterations of daily life and through the passing of time, alter language. Bakhtinian critics note that language is made up of tiny and largely unsystematic alterations and that therefore the wholeness of any cultural artifact is never given but posited - its definition is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia or other centrifugal forces.<sup>16</sup> Given that culture is never a unitary system of norms, then order as such is never complete. This incompleteness is reflected in the diversity and messiness of language which is a direct result of the complexities of daily life, personal experience and shifting social values - none of which is reducible to a system.

The diversity of society and philosophy is manifested in the range of languages available to people. Different regions, ethnic groups, generations utilise languages in differing ways and to differing effect. Even superficially artificial divisions such as professional language (eg medicine, law) are not simply technical manifestations; rather they represent a specific way of conceptualising and evaluating the world. In Bakhtinian terms the formation of a language results from the knitting together of a complex of shared experiences, common evaluations, current attitudes and global ideas. As Morson and Emerson note, each language reflects in its unsystematic clustering and clumping the contingent historical and social forces that have made it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 30.

<sup>17</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 141.

Our everyday language is made up of several languages of heteroglossia, depending on whom we are addressing, the context of the exchange, and our understanding of the conventions of the language employed. Because we participate in several languages, we expose and are exposed to their attendant sets of views and evaluations. To the extent that one seeks to create interaction between languages of heteroglossia, the more difficult it is for the value system of any one language to be maintained. A complex understanding of this diversity of heteroglossia is what Bakhtin terms dialogised heteroglossia.<sup>18</sup> As values are challenged and new syntheses are created, language is reaccented and disputed. The complex interaction of dialogised heteroglossia serves as a driving force in the history of any language; for Bakhtin, linguistic change is produced by the unforeseeable events of quotidian life and people's actions, not by abstract forces or overarching laws which explain inconsistency by postulating ever higher orders of systems.<sup>19</sup>

### Polyphony

One should first distinguish between the concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony. The former describes the diversity of styles in a language. The latter describes the position of the author in a text. It does not posit the absence of an authorial point of view, nor does polyphony allow either for all-encompassing explanation or total relativism: polyphony asserts the value of meaningful dialogue.

Two elements constitute polyphony: a dialogic sense of truth and the special position of the author in visualising and conveying that sense of truth. The dialogic sense of truth exists on the threshold of several interacting consciousnesses whose

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<sup>18</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 142 - 145 passim.

<sup>19</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 144.

voices are not artificially unified into a higher system. The real unity of truth exists in the very interaction of voices, not the unity of a single proposition or viewpoint. The polyphonic author plays two roles in a work: one creates a world in which many disparate points of view enter into dialogue; and one participates as author in that dialogue. Characters in a polyphonic novel, though created by the author, partially escape authorial control and develop in ways not foreseen by the author.<sup>20</sup> At the root of Bakhtin's conception of writing is the notion that novels are not planned but emerge from the moments of writing, that is, the characters unfold before the author in the process of writing. Plot is not conceived of as a fixed sequence of events but is instead the establishment of favourable situations for creating dialogues with unforeseen outcomes. Plot exists so that it may be transcended by characters achieving extra-plot connections.<sup>21</sup>

### Intertextuality

Intertextuality encompasses extra-textual reference found within the construct of the pre-modern vernacular-language novel, principally through an examination of the interplay of references raised in the discourse between the narrative body and the accompanying embedded interlinear critical annotations. As noted above, a central aspect of Bakhtinian thought is the transmission of knowledge over large periods of time and the ability of language to encompass past meaning which can be revived by the reader (and given further meaning by the reader's act of reconstruction). Intertextuality allows for the creation of centres of significance; that is to say, certain key images or incidents within the text which resonate beyond the confines of the specific situation and contain within them links to earlier works which can be traced by the reader and which enrich the reader's experience of the novel.

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<sup>20</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 239 - 240 passim.

<sup>21</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 247.

To utilise intertextuality effectively, one must examine how a judgement must be made as to the function of interlinear commentary within the narrative body; how that function operates within a wider narrative environment; how the operation of that function differs from that of other textual elements; and the means whereby the interplay between the function and the textual environment may be reconstructed by the reader in order to generate meaning. The clearest example of intertextuality in the pre-modern vernacular is the placement of an identifiable historical or semi-mythical reference amidst the body of a defined narrative event. The application of embedded extra-narrative reference creates a potential textual opening through which the reader may enter a realm of significance beyond the immediate narrative body, and from which the reader generates meaning on the basis of a non-enclosed and pluri-signified literary-historical reconstruction.<sup>22</sup>

Intertextuality reveals the potential divergence (or convergence) of fictional expositions presented by the text-bound narrative event, as composed by the author, and the embedded interlinear historical reference, as appended by the critical commentator. The reader may utilise this divergence as a critical tool to expand centres of significance and press back the boundaries of the novels' potential for meaning.

#### A Bakhtinian definition of the pre-modern Chinese novel

The following section posits three criteria which constitute a Bakhtinian definition of the Chinese pre-modern novel. It also illustrates the generic tendencies of

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<sup>22</sup> By the term pluri-signified is meant multiple possibilities of interpretation and manifold levels of meaning, generally applied to the complex and deep structures of classical poetry. For example see J.D. Frodsham, *Goddesses, Ghosts and Demons: The Collected Poems of Li He (790 - 816)*. London: Anvil Press, 1983: LI.

critical commentary editions of seventeenth-century Chinese novels, as evidenced in their structural framework.<sup>23</sup>

First the pre-modern vernacular novel is a complex form which is capable of accommodating a plurality of social and literary discourses. The narrative framework of *zhanghui xiaoshuo* encompasses genres as diverse as poetry, song lyrics, jokes and word puzzles, historical documents, excerpts from drama etc. The monologic novel includes these elements without revalorising them or attempting to draw potential from their interaction in the narrative text. The dialogic novel does not simply include these elements, it transforms them so that they not only retain their independence from the surrounding narrative but also become narrative elements capable of either harmonizing with or clashing against other textual elements.

Second, the dialogic vernacular novel form does not easily accommodate philosophical or religious absolutes, that is, the novel does not allow absolute principles to rest unchallenged but subjects them to re-evaluation and relativization by the very dialogic interplay of verbal events. As Satyendra notes:

the presence of ambiguity and unresolved tension among competing cultural ideals is a distinguishing characteristic of the novel.<sup>24</sup>

In challenging literary conventions the vernacular novel also questions the values of institutional ideologies. It embraces social comment, philosophical discussion, and evaluation of historical assessments.

Third the vernacular novel constantly displays an awareness of its own fictionality. This is achieved through various means and by various contributing

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<sup>23</sup> The following section draws on the work of Satyendra (1989), Rolston (1990), Plaks (1987), and Morson and Emerson (1990).

<sup>24</sup> Satyendra (1989): 18.

parties to the creation of the product. The novelist necessarily, but also deliberately, refracts experience through the artificial language and conventions of his literary tradition.<sup>25</sup> Awareness of fictionality is evidence in the manipulation of literary elements. Many seventeenth-century vernacular novels make active use of literary forms such as poetry and song lyrics to comment on plot developments or characters' actions. Novels such as *Jin Ping Mei* and *Honglou Meng* utilise excerpts from drama and even draw on religious texts. Historical documents are often imported (but not always acknowledged specifically) to provide an institutional judgement on the reputation of historical figures. For example in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, the author quotes the first half of the summed judgement on Emperor Yang from the Standard Imperial History of the Sui Dynasty, attributing it to "the judgement of a historian".<sup>26</sup> Vernacular fiction also retains elements from oral tradition, though highly stylised, principally in the form of authorial asides to the reader.

The above parameters encompass what Lodge describes as metafiction.<sup>27</sup> The pre-modern Chinese novel form, while retaining features of earlier literary forms and customs, lends itself to the complexities of metafiction. A template for a vernacular novel of the late Ming and early Qing contains the following features:

- A number of prefatory pieces, often describing the stated purpose of the author in creating the novel; critical analysis of the best way to read the novel; an outside view of the work (usually written by a friend of the author); and brief description of the main characters in the novel. Woodcut engravings were often included, depicting key scenes from the novel. In some novels, appendices appear which offer comment on the novel.

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<sup>25</sup> Satyendra (1989): 18.

<sup>26</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6, chapter 40. pages 13 - 15; Zhengzhou (1993): 452 - 453.

<sup>27</sup> David Lodge, "The Novel Now". In (editor) Mark Currie, *Metafiction*. London: Longman, 1995: 145 - 159.

- Interlinear commentary threaded through the text by a commentator who offers views not simply on the merit of the work but also on the actions of individual characters and the philosophy of the author. The commentator may also compile general commentaries placed at the end of each roll to comment on the events depicted in that roll.<sup>28</sup>

- Forms of literature other than vernacular prose, such as poetry and songs, and occasionally drama, are utilised throughout the text to provide contrast with the actions of characters in the novel and provide a wider resonance for the range of meaning in the novel. As noted above, imported elements extended to historical documents, religious works and works of philosophy. Chapter titles are usually a matching couplet and chapters often begin and end with poetic comment and an authorial aside to the reader along the lines of "dear reader if you want to know what happened next, please read the next chapter".

Pre-modern Chinese vernacular fiction is an open-ended multi-layered form of literature. This may be seen in borrowing, repetition, intertextual allusions, manipulation of formulaic conventions. Carlitz has noted, with reference to *Jin Ping Mei*, that the metafictional text often draws attention, not only to its nature as a work of fiction, but also to the way in which it should be read; this is a feature can be seen in the self-referential remarks of the narrator as well as, for example, in remarks made by characters on whether or not a particular song, dramatic allusion, joke, or quotation is appropriate to the occasion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This subject is examined in detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>29</sup> Katherine Carlitz, *The Rhetoric of Chin P'ing Mei*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986: 2 - 5 passim.

The production of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

The first edition of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* appears to have been published in 1631 by the Renruitang 人瑞堂 (Longevity Hall) publishing house. The authorship is attributed to Qidong Yeren 齊東野人 (Uncultivated Man of Eastern Qi) while the critical annotation is attributed to Bujing Xiansheng 不經先生 (Mister Free Thinker). The novel consists of 40 chapters (*hui* 回) arranged into 8 rolls (*juan* 卷). At the end of each roll is a general critical commentary (*zongping* 總評) and interlinear commentary (*pangping* 旁評) intersperses the body of the text. The novel is preceded by a number of prefatory pieces, written by the author and other commentators.<sup>30</sup> These prefaces consist of:

- *Sui Yangdi Yanshi xu* 隋煬帝艷史敘 (Preface to *Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang*). This preface consists of 288 ideographs and is signed and sealed by Xiaochizi 笑癡子 (Master Giggling Fool) at Duoduoju 咄咄居 (Wailing Lodge), and is undated.

- *Yanshi xu* 艷史序 (Preface to *Sensational History*). This preface consists of 450 ideographs and is signed by Yeshe zhuren 野史主人 (Heretical History Manager) at Xubaitang 虛白堂 (Void and Purity Hall), and dated the fourth lunar month (May) 1631 (Chongzhen [reign period] xinweisui qingheyue 崇貞辛未歲清和月)<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Prefatory material can be found in Taipei (1985): Volume 1; Zhengzhou (1993): 460 - 468.

<sup>31</sup> Sun Kaidi identifies Yeshe zhuren as the author of the novel and labels this preface as an author's preface. See Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu* 中國通俗小說書目 (A Catalogue of Chinese Vernacular Fiction). Hong Kong: Shiyong, 1967: 43.

- *Yanshi tici* 艷史題辭 (Summary of *Sensational History*). This summary consists of 246 ideographs and is signed by Zuili youren weiyi jushi 橋李友人委蛇居士 (friend from Zuili, layman-at-ease) at Taotaoguan 陶陶館 (Happy Hall) and is dated the sixteenth day of the fifth lunar month (June) 1631 (Chongzhen [reign period] xinwei zhuming jiwang 崇貞辛未朱明既望).

- *Yanshi fanli* 艷史凡例 (General Principles of *Sensational History*). This statement consists of twelve items describing aspects of the editorial planning and visual design of the novel. It is unsigned and undated. The *fanli* is a common feature of critical commentary editions and provides the editor with a platform from which to explain features of the novel and establish his view on editorial issues raised in the production of the novel.

- *Sui yanshi jue li xingshi* 隋艷史爵里姓氏 (Honours and titles, family names and native places of characters appearing in *Sensational History of Sui*). This list consists of thirteen half pages. It is unsigned and undated. It lists the characters in the novel and, modelled on the Standard Imperial Histories, places them in the following categories: emperors (*diwang* 帝王), empresses (*hou* 后), concubines (*feiying* 妃嬪), biographies of officials (*liezhuan* 列傳), eunuchs (*chenguan* 宦官), disloyal ministers (*zeichen* 賊臣), disloyal subjects (*zeimin* 賊民), immortals and gods (*xianshen* 仙神), and additional biographies (*fuzhuan* 附傳). Accompanying the names of the major characters are short biographies.

- 70 half-page engravings depicting scenes from the novel and facing half-page quotes from famed poetic lines which comment on the picture on the opposite page. Most of the engravings depict scenes from Emperor Yang's palace life and include a number of pictures showing sexual activity. Ten half pages are left blank and marked with the phrase "originally omitted" (*yuanque* 原闕). The poetry is printed in a variety

of calligraphic styles and the authorship of the majority of phrases is indicated. The borders of the page are engraved with patterns which add to the significance of the poetry. The *Yanshi fanli* 艷史凡例 (General Principles of *Sensational History*) remarks on the meaning of the engravings.

Little is known of the Renruitang publishing house, which may have been based in or around Hangzhou.<sup>32</sup> What is clear, however, is that the first edition of the novel is a high quality product aimed at an affluent and educated market of literati readers.<sup>33</sup> No extant historical evidence remains regarding the commercial success of the work or the scope of its circulation, though one may make the supposition that the quality of the original edition shows confidence that high sales were expected by the publishers.<sup>34</sup> *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* was among many novels banned by the Qing authorities.<sup>35</sup> While implementation of the prohibition appears to have been less than complete, circulation of the novel seems to have tightened for some time: for example there are no recorded editions of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* produced from the early Qing until the turn of the twentieth century, when an edition was produced in Shanghai in 1899. Later editions were, in the main, expurgated and poorly reproduced versions of

<sup>32</sup> This assumption is based on the possibility that Feng Menglong may have been associated with the publication of the novel, an issue which is discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>33</sup> The most commonly-cited article on printing in the Ming remains K.T. Wu, "Ming Printing and Printers." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Volume 7. March 1943: 203 - 260. The scope of educated readership is difficult to ascertain. Kai-wing Chow notes the existence of three reading publics - general urban readers, civil service examinees, and women- and that books were affordable for the educated elite. Dorothy Ko maintains that the price of books remained beyond the purchasing power of most families. See Kai-wing Chow, "Writing for Success: Printing, Examinations, and Intellectual Change". *Late Imperial China*. Volume 17. No. 1, June 1996: 121 - 157; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. See pages 35 - 37.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Wright quotes Li Hua-ch'ing who claims that the novel circulated widely to the extent that Emperor Yang became the most familiar example of a bad last ruler. See Arthur Wright, "Sui Yang-ti: Personality and Stereotype". In (editor) A.F. Wright, *Confucianism and Chinese Civilisation*, New York: Atheneum, 1964: 158 - 187. See page 343, note 60. I have been unable to find a copy of Li's work and cannot comment on the assertion. Wright cites Li's work as *Sung-jen Hsiao-shuo* (Fiction of the Sung). Taipei, 1956.

<sup>35</sup> Li Mengsheng (1994): 136.

the original edition and it was only in 1985 that an unexpurgated reproduction copy of the original edition was reproduced in Taiwan.<sup>36</sup> The decline in the circulation of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* appears to have been exacerbated by the commercial success of Chu Renhuo's *Sui Tang Yanyi* which also contributed to the relative demise of *Sui Shi Yiwu*. Chu's later novel incorporated large parts of both earlier works - with important revisions. As I demonstrate later in this chapter, many of the more salacious and contentious passages were excised and characterisation was altered to adhere to the more repressive morality imposed by the Qing regime (most notably in the portrayal of female suicide).

While expurgated copies of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* were published during the Late Qing dynasty, the novel remained in obscurity until relatively recently.<sup>37</sup> Only with the advent of modern Chinese critics such as Zheng Zhenduo did a revival of interest in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* take place. Zheng noted that:

it is composed from *Haishan ji* (海山記), *Milou ji* (迷樓記), and *Kaihe ji* (開河記), and through the addition of minute and exquisite, extremely delicate and charming description, it really is a masterpiece. It had a great influence on later novels...really it is a 'watertight' great work of literature".<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For a list of major editions see Hegel (1981): Appendix II: 241-244. See also Liu Ts'un-yan, *Chinese Popular Fiction in Two London Libraries*. Hong Kong: Lungmen Bookstore, 1967: 259 - 260.

<sup>37</sup> The obscurity into which *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* had sunk is typified by the number of Chinese critics who were ignorant of the fact that large parts had been virtually transcribed into *Sui Tang Yanyi*. For example see: Chen Ruheng 陳汝衡, *Shuoshu xiao shi* 說書小史 (A short history of fiction) Taipei: Wannian qing shulang, no date of publication; Xiao Qi 校訖, *Xiaoshuo jiuwen chao* 小說舊聞鈔 (Jottings on Novels one has heard of old), Taipei: Wannian qingshulang, no date of publication; Meng Yao 孟瑤, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi*, 中國小說史 (History of Chinese Fiction) Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 2 vols., 1986; Qian Jingfang 錢靜方, *Xiaoshuo zongkao* 小說叢考 (Collected examination of fiction), Taipei: Chang'an chubanshe, 1980.

<sup>38</sup> Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxueshi* 插圖本中國文學史 (Illustrated History of Chinese Fiction) 4 Vols. Hong Kong: Shangwu, 1961: 923.

Zheng recognised the importance of the novel and was among the first to note the relationship between the ever-popular *Sui Tang Yanyi* and its precursor novels.<sup>39</sup>

### Sources of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

In the following section I present a brief overview of the historical and fictional precursors of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. These are the *Sui Shu* 隋書 (Standard Imperial History of the Sui Dynasty) and *chuanqi* 傳奇 classical language tales. The section also looks briefly at treatments of Emperor Yang's life in other literary forms.

The main official source for the life of Sui Emperor Yang is the Standard Imperial History - *Sui Shu*, the official dynastic record compiled by the Tang prime minister Wei Zheng during the reign of Tang Emperor Taizong.<sup>40</sup> In 636 A.D. Wei presented an indictment of the iniquities of Emperor Yang in order to present a contrast with the peaceful reign of Taizong. Within the indictment one observes the obvious tension between depicting the last ruler of the former ruling house in the darkest hue in order to sanction the new dynasty, while at the same time not distorting history and destroying its didactic value.<sup>41</sup> Tang historians laid particular stress on Emperor Yang's tyranny and self-indulgence as the major factors in the collapse of the Sui regime, in an attempt to place aspects of Emperor Yang's behaviour into the classical tradition of 'bad last rulers'.<sup>42</sup> The cliché of the bad last ruler seems, however, to have outlasted other more sober analysis in the *Sui Shu*. As the popular

<sup>39</sup> Zheng Zhenduo (1961): 923.

<sup>40</sup> *Sui Shu* 隋書 (Standard Imperial History of the Sui Dynasty). (Compiler) Wei Zheng 魏徵. 3 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973.

<sup>41</sup> The most useful historical studies of Emperor Yang's reign can be found in: Arthur F. Wright, *The Sui Dynasty: The Unification of China, AD 581 - 617*. New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc., 1978; Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉, *Sui Tang Shi* 隋唐史 (History of the Sui and Tang Dynasties). Shanghai: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1957.

<sup>42</sup> See table of attributes for 'bad last ruler' in Wright (1964): 173.

imagination constructed an ever more colourful picture of Emperor Yang, new elements were added to heighten his wickedness - such as his alleged patricide and fratricide - despite the lack of any evidence of such crimes in the Standard Imperial History. To explain the establishment of the popular image of Emperor Yang one must turn instead to non-official sources, principally *chuanqi* classical language tales.

The earliest literary descriptions and main anecdotal sources for later novels concerning Yangdi are to be found in *chuanqi* tales from the Tang and Song dynasties. The characteristics of the classical language short tale have been summarised by Judith Zeitlin as: economy and intensity of form, abrupt shifts in perspective, gaps in the narrative, minimal explanations and transitions, concentration on a single detail, and the authority of the historian's voice.<sup>43</sup> These tales acted as an unofficial record of events considered outside the scope of the Standard Imperial Histories, either by virtue of their dubious moral content or their treatment of sensational subjects (see Chapter Two for an analysis of Standard Imperial Histories). Four tales appear to be the prime literary sources of the tales of Emperor Yang's rule which fired the popular imagination<sup>44</sup>;

- *Kaihe ji* 開河記 (A Record of the Construction of Canals) relates the endemic corruption in Emperor Yang's reign and links the fall of the dynasty to the emperor's own behaviour. The intervention of immortals and spirits and the strong element of retribution reflect the influence of Buddhism. Emperor Yang is revealed as

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<sup>43</sup> Judith T. Zeitlin, *Pu Songling's (1640-1715) "Liaozhai zhiyi" and the Chinese Discourse on the Strange*. Ph.D. thesis. Harvard University, 1988: 5.

<sup>44</sup> Hegel provides a table of sources listed in relation to chapters of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. See Hegel (1981): 237. Despite being labelled tales from the Tang dynasty, there is no evidence that these particular *chuanqi* were composed at that time and may have been composed during the Southern Song. Dating of these tales lies outwith the scope of this thesis; it is clear, however, that the tales were widely published before the appearance of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.

the incarnation of a giant rat spirit and a strong deterministic bent is revealed in the declaration that Emperor Yang is destined to reign for only thirteen years.<sup>45</sup>

- *Milou ji* 迷樓記 (A Record of the Maze Palace) portrays the lascivious behaviour and extravagant waste associated with Emperor Yang which form the core of his popular image. Moral corruption leads to death, and exhortation to goodness comes to nought. Mysterious figures act as catalysts and the narrator insists that dynastic change does not come about by accident, suggesting a deterministic philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

- *Haishan ji* 海山記 (A Record of Seas and Mountains) is one of the longest *chuanqi* tales dealing with Emperor Yang and describes his reign from portent-filled birth to his death by hanging. It relates the omens, dream encounters, supernatural phenomena, and mysterious happenings which occur throughout the reign, all of which point to ultimate disaster. It includes Emperor Yang's meeting with the ghost of the Last Ruler of Chen whose kingdom fell to Sui, according to this tale, due to his obsession with poetry and a desire to please his favourite concubine, Zhang Lihua. The tale differs from the other *chuanqi* sources in its inclusion of a wider range of characters and its use of Emperor Yang's own poetry.<sup>47</sup>

- *Sui Yi lu* 隋遺錄 (Omitted Tales of the Sui) describes the famed 'brocade sails' barge trip to Jiangdu and Emperor Yang's infatuations with various women,

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<sup>45</sup> Han Wo 韓偓, "Yangdi kaihe ji" 煬帝開河記 (A record of Emperor Yang's construction of canals). In (compiler) Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, *Shuo Fu* 說郛 (The Apogee of Ephemera) Taipei: Xinxing, 1963: 722 - 726.

<sup>46</sup> Han Wo 韓偓, "Milou ji" 迷樓記 (A record of the Mansion of Enchantments). In (compiler) Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, *Shuo Fu* 說郛 (The Apogee of Ephemera). Taipei: Xinxing, 1963: 557 - 558.

<sup>47</sup> Han Wo 韓偓, "Haishan ji" 海山記 (A record of seas and mountains). In (compiler) Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, *Shuo Fu* 說郛 (The Apogee of Ephemera). Taipei: Xinxing, 1963: 558 - 561.

many of whom incur the jealousy of Empress Xiao. Emperor Yang has a second ghostly encounter with the Last Ruler of Chen and Zhang Lihua. The tale depicts the doomed atmosphere of his final days in the palace.<sup>48</sup>

Other extant *chuanqi* describe aspects of Sui dynastic rule. These include *Da Ye zaji* (Miscellaneous Records of the 'Great Enterprise' reign period), which essentially presents a detailed list of buildings and layouts of streets constructed in Luoyang and palaces built throughout China during the Sui regime<sup>49</sup>; and *Da Ye shiyi* (Lost tales of the 'Great Enterprise' reign period), which is a record of the mechanical devices invented for the pleasure of Emperor Yang, authored by a former Sui Academician (*xueshi* 學士), Du Bao 杜寶, who wrote it some time during the years 627 - 649.<sup>50</sup>

These *chuanqi* tales fulfil the criteria posited by Zeitlin. Most consist of a few pages of terse classical Chinese. Little narrative continuity is discernible: rather, the tales concentrate on a few of the more famed incidents in Emperor Yang's eventful reign. The narrative voices shift without warning from narrator to character and the leaps from one incident to the other are achieved by means of simple narrative devices such as announcing a different date or season. The tales do, however, present a detailed picture of some aspects of Emperor Yang's excesses, in particular his extravagant construction projects. All the tales affect to draw moral conclusions from the narrative: in this respect they aspire to the authority of the historian's voice. A.F.

<sup>48</sup> Yan Shigu 顏師古, "Sui yilu" 隋遺錄 (An Omitted record of Sui). In Tao Zongyi (compiler) 陶宗儀, *Shuo Fu* 說郛 (The Apogee of Ephemera). Taipei: Xinxing, 1963: 1119 - 1121.

<sup>49</sup> Du Bao 杜寶, "Da Ye zaji" 大業雜記 (A miscellaneous record of the Great Enterprise reign period). In (compiler) Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, *Shuo Fu* 說郛 (The Apogee of Ephemera). Taipei: Xinxing, 1963: 873 - 877.

<sup>50</sup> A partial translation of this tale may be found in; William Dolby, "The Origins of Chinese Puppetry". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. Vol. XLI. Part 1, 1978: 97 - 120.

Wright maintains that it is with the *chuanqi* that the stereotyped image of Emperor Yang first took shape and that this was reinforced by lost tales of the oral tradition. He also asserts that the storytellers weren't concerned with moral dynamics in the historical process as had been laboured in the official accounts, but were simply saying that coming events cast their shadows before them. Thus the moral dynamic was underplayed in favour of entertaining stories.<sup>51</sup> This judgement, very much a reflection of Wright's view as a historian, is perhaps harsh. The tales certainly deal in the sensational and supernatural, though this is a basic function of *chuanqi*'s role in recording unofficial history. The fact that they aspire to the authority of the historian's voice is, however, as important as the content of the tales: the desire for historical validation is a key concern as much for authors of fiction as for historians. The key difference, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 2, is whether fiction authors wish to maintain the monopoly of interpretation valued by the composers of the Standard Imperial Histories. Nevertheless the *chuanqi* tales contributed greatly to the development of the myth of Emperor Yang which is reconfigured in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.

Poets were naturally attracted to the romance surrounding Emperor Yang. Not only did Emperor Yang have a fine appreciation of literature, he himself was a poet of some talent.<sup>52</sup> Poetry on Emperor Yang's reign tends to use the sumptuous images of brocade sails and extravagant pleasure palaces to illustrate the transitory nature of material wealth when measured against the great flow of time and history. Notable

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<sup>51</sup> Wright (1964): 183.

<sup>52</sup> For examples of Emperor Yang's poems see "Sui Yangdi Ji" 隋煬帝集 (Collection of Sui Emperor Yang). In *Han Wei Liu Chao sanbai mingjia ji* 漢魏六朝三百名家集 (Collection of Three Hundred Famous Authors of the Han, Wei and Six Dynasties Periods). Volume Six. Taizhong: Songbo chubanshe, no date of publication: 4955 - 5034. Wright quotes a number of Emperor Yang's poems translated by Stephen Owen. See Wright (1978): 160 - 161, 165, 194. The text of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* contains a number of poems written by, or attributed to Emperor Yang.

examples of such poetry are the two ‘Sui Palace’ (*Sui Gong* 隋宮) poems by Li Shangyin 李商隱 (circa 812 - 858).<sup>53</sup> In the Yuan dynasty, playwrights were attracted to the dramatic possibilities offered by Emperor Yang’s life. A number of *zaju* (雜劇) dramas were composed on Emperor Yang’s reign though unfortunately none of these remain extant. The few surviving titles suggest that the most popular theme was again that of the lavish flotilla of pleasure barges wending its way down to the luxurious palaces of Jiangdu and onto the collapse of the dynasty.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of the obvious interest in his life, it was not until the development of the linked-chapter vernacular novel in the Ming dynasty that an extended fictional treatment of Emperor Yang’s life was produced. Published in 1631, the forty chapter novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* took the four *chuanqi* mentioned above as the bare bones of the narrative. The narrative is divided into four sections by authorial references to crucial events in Emperor Yang’s career; his rise to the throne, consolidation of power, decline into material and sensual excess, and dynastic fall.<sup>55</sup> These thresholds are indicated by examination of Emperor Yang’s inner thoughts on his role and self-image, and echoed by the appearance of omens regarding the ongoing fate of the dynasty. In reworking the sources, the putative author, the anonymous Qidong yeren, substantially altered both the chronology, content and tone of the four *chuanqi*. The reader perceives a conscious effort on the part of the author to forge a tight narrative which presents a coherent vision of moral decline and illustrates the cost of excess. As the *Yanshi fanli* 艷史凡例 (General Principles to Sensational History) states:

<sup>53</sup> *Tangshi sanbai shou jijie*, 唐詩三百首集解 (Annotated collection of three hundred Tang shi poetry). Taipei: Xiangyuan, 1988: 415 and 527.

<sup>54</sup> For example the title “Sui Yangdi youxing jinfanzhou” 隋煬帝遊幸錦帆舟 (Sui Emperor Yang makes an imperial progress on brocade-sail boats). This work is attributed to the noted Yuan playwright Geng Tianxi 庚天錫 who flourished circa 1251 AD. See *Gudian xiqu cunmu huikao* 古典戲曲存目彙考 (Classification and Investigation of Extant Catalogues of Traditional Dramas). Volume 1. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982: 218.

<sup>55</sup> Hegel (1981): 88.

when one writes a book and sets down one's views, no matter whether they are great or small, the most highly esteemed beliefs are those unfailingly bound up with the human mind and ways of society. Although *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* plumbs to the uttermost matters of drunkenness, lust and lavish extravagance, the subtle counsel, sardonic phrasing and such features as the *shi* poems and *ci* lyrics in it, all embody a sense of mocking cajolery and corrective moral advice, enabling the reader at a glance to realise how wine is the ruination of lives and great construction projects the destruction of states...this compilation is a 'mirror to Yin' - a salutary warning - bolstering the improvement of social customs."<sup>56</sup>

### The decline of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

The following section discusses the underlying reasons for the prohibition of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. Three reasons emerge for the decline in circulation of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*: its political significance; its salacious content; and its incorporation into the later novel *Sui Tang Yanyi*.<sup>57</sup> Robert Hegel notes the political significance of the novel: by portraying the stereotype of Emperor Yang as a classic villain, Hegel believes that the author of the novel was making a statement about contemporary Ming China. Chang notes that:

in the long imperial period since the Ch'in and Han dynasties, the most notorious example of an extravagant and corrupt monarch in the world of popular fiction is the Emperor Yang of the Sui...the force of traditional models in the stereotyping of Emperor Yang is obvious if we compare Emperor Yang to King Chieh and King Chou, the two earliest representatives of that type. All the behavioral attributes of Chou and Chieh can serve as a basis for the analysis of Emperor Yang.<sup>58</sup>

Carlitz views the publication of a novel concerning Emperor Yang as a reflection on the abuses of the reign of the Wanli emperor who died in 1620:

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<sup>56</sup> Taipei (1985). Vol 1. Roll 1.

<sup>57</sup> A useful work on censorship in Ming China is Ma Ta-loi, *Censorship of fiction in Ming and Ching China*. Taipei: Chinese Materials Center, 1986.

<sup>58</sup> Shelley Hsueh lun Chang, *History and Legend: Ideas and Images in the Ming Historical Novels*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990: 151.

during the disastrous Wan-li reign, anonymous satires portrayed the emperor as a prisoner of lust, and a full-length novel, *Sui Yang-ti yen-shih* (The Merry Adventures of Emperor Yang), appeared in 1631 to satirize him once again in this fashion.<sup>59</sup>

Hegel suggests that through this satire of the imperial system the author was issuing an earnest warning for his age.<sup>60</sup> There are a number of observable similarities between the two rulers: both spent excessive amounts on pleasure boats and palaces; while in both reigns unsuccessful campaigns were waged against the Korean Peninsula which led to corruption by eunuch tax collectors and charges of excesses by imperial henchmen; finally both emperors ordered projects to build major canals: Emperor Yang built the great Imperial Canal, while Wanli ordered the construction of a waterway from Huang He to Huai He and into Shandong between the years 1593 and 1604.

Equally important in the suppression of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, is the occasionally salacious depiction of palace life: the novel includes scenes of heterosexual and homosexual love-making, attempted rape, and drug-taking. *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*'s frank depiction of palace life, despite its ostensible disapproval of Emperor Yang's behaviour, represents a trend towards a more liberal choice of subjects common towards the end of the Ming dynasty. As Chang has noted:

throughout [*Sui Yangdi Yanshi*] the vices of evil last emperors are elaborated, with particular emphasis on sexual license.<sup>61</sup>

At the forefront of the debate were novels such as *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Jin Ping Mei*. The function of literature and the utility of sexual description in Late Ming fiction is currently the subject of heated critical discussion. The discussion centres on

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<sup>59</sup> Carlitz (1986): 27.

<sup>60</sup> Hegel (1981): 91.

<sup>61</sup> Chang (1990): 151.

whether, on the one hand, sexually explicit material seeks to negate the concept of the fundamental goodness of human nature and thus is a didactic exposition of the need for strict moral self-cultivation, or on the other hand whether it seeks to subvert Neo-Confucian conservatism and thus expand the limits of narrative fiction. After presenting these two cases I propose a viable alternative position.

### The case for conservatism

In addition to their relatively close dates of publication and their shared reputation, one may see certain narrative characteristics which are held in common between *Jin Ping Mei* and *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.<sup>62</sup> These may be characterised as: detailed description of sexual acts, some of which are degrading and oppressive; an obsession with social status and material wealth; an excess of negative emotions such as jealousy leading to struggles for status which usually result in expulsion or death; consistent use of bounded space - most often gardens or courtyards - as the arena for social intercourse and illicit relationships; concentration on the relationships among an intimate group whose common fate is bound up with the cumulative effect of their individual moral excess; and an ultimately negative view of human behaviour when loosed from the social restraints of duty and ritual. The overwhelming commonality in themes allows us to apply to *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* many of the critical analyses that have been applied to *Jin Ping Mei*.

Katherine Carlitz has posited the thesis that the sensual language and explicit descriptions in *Jin Ping Mei* serve to draw the reader in and make the reader susceptible to the ultimate lessons of the book; that is, the profound emptiness at the heart of the characters' actions. The surfeit of grotesque sexuality is intended to sicken

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<sup>62</sup> *Jin Ping Mei* appears to have been published circa 1618, while *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* was published in 1631.

the reader and make one aware of the true nature of the events described. The constant juxtaposition of illicit sex and official corruption deepens *Jin Ping Mei's* social critique and suggests that the loss or diversion of these entities connotes a moral exhaustion from which no-one can recover. Sexual description is used to probe the sensibility of the characters to self-awareness upon which true enlightenment depends. The brilliant descriptions and verbal extravagance undermine themselves when the reader is finally enlightened as to the illusion of false attachment.<sup>63</sup>

In the introduction to his translation of *Jin Ping Mei*, David Roy presents the argument that the frank sexual activities represented in the novel:

express in the most powerful metaphor available to him the author's contempt for the sort of persons who indulge in them. The spheres of sexual, economic, and political aggrandizement are symbolically correlated in the novel in such a way that the calculated shock value of the sexual descriptions spills over into the other realms and colors the reader's response to them.<sup>64</sup>

The purpose of the author's rhetorical strategy is to awaken the latent sensuality of his readers by inducing them to empathize with the sensual experiences of his characters before shifting mode to the ridiculous or fantastic. The author thereby brings up the reader short and reminds one that one too is capable of such acts. Roy argues that far from exemplifying the syncretism, free thinking, and hedonism of the late Ming period, *Jin Ping Mei* was written as a reaction against these liberalising trends.<sup>65</sup> Roy believes that the author of *Jin Ping Mei* was deeply influenced by the teachings of the conservative philosopher Xunzi 荀子 (313 - 238 BC) who promoted the belief that human nature was fundamentally negative in orientation. Thus, in essence, Roy believes that the author intended to:

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<sup>63</sup> Carlitz (1986): 28.

<sup>64</sup> David T. Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, CHIN P'ING MEI: Volume one: THE GATHERING*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993: XXXVII.

<sup>65</sup> Roy (1993): XXXVII.

reassert by negative example the need for unremitting conscious, rational, and hence, necessarily, artificial activity, molded and restrained by ritual, and directed toward the goals of self-cultivation, on the one hand, and social amelioration, on the other.<sup>66</sup>

### The case for subversion

Keith McMahon takes a different view.<sup>67</sup> He prefers to stress the very waywardness of the depicted behaviour as an attempt to subvert orthodoxy and raise otherwise taboo issues. As he notes:

these stories and novels carry a didacticism that promotes temperance and moral behaviour, and chastises those who exceed their lot. [But] th[e] attention to detail contrasts sharply with the very non-detailed conformism of the didactic theme. This capacity to be on two sides at once-almost a sleight of hand- is the sign of a polemic that is basic to Late Ming fiction.<sup>68</sup>

In effect writers of fiction are seen as both moralist and trickster, using obscenity and intricate detail to make the story as wayward as possible before returning to the norms of accepted morality. McMahon maintains that the role of the author is:

to embarrass orthodox morality by proving that states of morality and equilibrium must be continually tested by the vicissitudes of waywardness.<sup>69</sup>

Erotic literature takes a polemical stance in making sexuality public. McMahon proposes that the form of this stance is not didactic but explicated through the depiction of experimental situations which test accepted standards against wayward

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<sup>66</sup> Roy (1993): XLI.

<sup>67</sup> Keith McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988. See also McMahon's article, "Eroticism in Late Ming, Early Qing Fiction: The Beauteous Realm and the Sexual Battlefield". *T'oung Pao*. Vol. 73. 1987: 221 - 264.

<sup>68</sup> McMahon (1988): 1.

<sup>69</sup> McMahon (1988): 2.

contingencies.<sup>70</sup> McMahon uses the term “containment” to define the ideology of the control of desire and, more concretely, for the containing aspects of physical things such as walls which are omnipresent in fiction. He identifies the antinomy between containment and abandon as a problematic that is central to vernacular fiction. That is to say:

there are ideological values of normalcy and conformity which can be characterised by their promotion of self-containment. The *xiaoshuo* negates these values when it is non-conformist and when it tells of abnormal acts. In the *xiaoshuo* of the [Late Ming] period, there is a continuously elaborated experimentation with the vicissitudes of the self, which is portrayed in numerous aspects of containment and abandon. In a sense the very narration of such stories embodies a perpetual questioning of the values of self-containment".<sup>71</sup>

Having established the function of vernacular fiction as promoting values which test the boundaries of social convention, McMahon characterises vernacular fiction as follows:

the general pretense is one of telling about some chain of events, some interesting story. For technical convenience as well as stylistic benefit, various methods are used to codify the act of storytelling. In addition, the story takes a didactic stance which usually speaks for moderation and containment. However, the stance is somewhat pro forma because the story's content also implies the impossibility of moderation; the portrayal of the causality of excess and abandon tends to undermine the position of containment. The compelling piece is the one that portrays the double necessity of fate and desire, of continence and indulgence.<sup>72</sup>

This definition appears to indicate at least that the choice of genre does not necessarily influence the governing ideology of a narrative, and, if taken to its logical limits, McMahon's view implies a separation of form and content - in essence that the function of vernacular fiction is as a vehicle for expressing social experimentation but

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<sup>70</sup> McMahon (1988): 103.

<sup>71</sup> McMahon (1988): 11.

<sup>72</sup> McMahon (1988): 28.

that the form itself is simply a technical convenience. As this thesis will demonstrate, this position is untenable.

### An alternative view

While both of the above positions are well debated, crucial questions remain unanswered. With regard to the case for conservatism, were one to follow the line that these novels are puritan in intent, it is difficult to understand why the author would have gone to such lengths of intricate plotting and created such beautiful language simply to present a negative argument. The difficulty of sustaining such a massive literary effort and the almost certain disapproval of conservative-minded peers leave such an explanation open to serious doubt. Carlitz maintains that the surfeit of cruelty and abuse is intended to shock the reader but surely when faced with such a surfeit the reader would simply put the book down, thus defeating its didactic purpose.<sup>73</sup> Critics have pointed to the common device of retribution which marks Chinese novels of manners such as *Jin Ping Mei* in those who have transgressed the boundaries of what society regards as acceptable behaviour, are punished with ruin or death. Hanan is surely correct to note, in the case of *Rouputuan*, that the retribution plot allowed authors to:

work human experience into newer and more meaningful shapes. He did not need to believe in the actual possibility of metaphysical retribution, for both he and his readers accepted it as part of the machinery of causation in fiction.<sup>74</sup>

The concept of beautiful and sophisticated language utilised simply as a tool designed to attract the reader then bludgeon him or her into nausea is rather simplistic. Evil may be portrayed in fine literature with elegance and erudition without the need to

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<sup>73</sup> Carlitz (1986): 25.

<sup>74</sup> Li Yu, *The Carnal Prayer Mat*. Patrick D. Hanan (translator). New York: Ballantine Books, 1990: ix.

hammer home the immorality inherent in its subject.<sup>75</sup> It is undeniable though that both *Jin Ping Mei* and *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* are fundamentally pessimistic in their presentation of human nature.

The case for subversion attempts to prove authorial support for subversion yet admits that in the end the author is forced to return to a conventional moral stance. In arguing that the presentation of abnormal acts implies some level of sympathy for such acts, and that the argument for moderation is merely pro forma because of the portrayal of an abnormal act, McMahon may be queried on two counts: first, the author may indeed be sincere in a belief in moderation, and in the moral intent of his work. Most protagonists do pay some form of penalty for their acts and moderate characters often escape retribution. In both *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Jin Ping Mei* the main players clearly suffer for their wayward behaviour and self-containment is thereby implicitly presented as the preferred option. Second, while the spiritual emptiness and often predatory nature of the sexual act portrayed are abnormal examples of human behaviour, this no more implies acceptance of this abnormal behaviour than the idea that the author of a murder mystery wishes us to commit murder! The abandonment of self-containment as portrayed in novels, while a fictionalised natural process, cannot be seen as merely pro forma. The elaborate plot structures are too complex simply to act as a pro forma cloak of respectability for tales of subversion. The choice of genre, as this thesis will demonstrate, brings with it a way of viewing the world which shapes and is shaped by the author's world-view - form and content cannot easily be separated. This does not invalidate McMahon's point that these stories do convey a subversive subtext but indicates rather that the moral environment in which a work is created is often ambiguous and does bear a significantly more important role than that of a monolithic standard destined to be assailed by adversity.

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<sup>75</sup> One thinks of the portrayal of the Devil in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

The moral message contained within seventeenth century fiction is not contradicted by the sensuality of the language and explicit nature of the subject matter. One should not underestimate the maturity of the literate audience, and its ability to appreciate the fine literary craft of the text, savour the wayward contingencies of the plot and understand the fundamental moral stance of vernacular fiction. As Hanan has noted, the dire moral warnings which punctuate erotic novels cannot be taken at face value.<sup>76</sup> In the various prefaces and throughout *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* it is repeatedly emphasised that lasciviousness is not the aim of the narrative and obsession with sensual excess is condemned. In the *Yanshi Tici*, it is stated that the novel:

is certainly no fabrication and false telling by an unofficial history or spurious classic, nor indeed is it a stoking of lust and inducement of lewdness by titillating lyrics of passionate adventures.<sup>77</sup>

The purpose of the novel is presented as being two-fold: first to act as moral warning, a “mirror shining forth the truth to contemporary people”.<sup>78</sup> The proclaimed aim of acting to transform the morals of the age was a common rallying slogan for late Ming authors (see Chapter Three for examples<sup>79</sup>) and in the General Guide to *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, the author pointedly argues that such novels as *San Guo Yanyi*, *Shuihu Zhuan* and *Xiyou Ji* are as valid, in this respect, as the *Twenty One Standard Imperial Histories*. Thus the author’s high regard for fiction’s powerful influence, ostensibly in strengthening conventional morality, is evident. This view tallies to some extent with the case for conservatism as described earlier. It is clear, however, that the

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<sup>76</sup> Hanan (1990): viii.

<sup>77</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 1. 艷史題辭. This may also be a fine advertisement meant to entice prospective readers.

<sup>78</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 1. 艷史題辭.

<sup>79</sup> An excellent source of prefatory materials to works of vernacular fiction can be found in Ding Xigen 丁錫根 (editor), *Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo xubaji* 中國歷代小說序跋集 (A collection of prefatory material in Chinese novels through the ages). Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1996.

innate tension between desire and moral propriety is recognised and explored to the full, without the overwhelming need to resolve what is regarded as an ongoing part of the human condition.

Second, while accepting, or at least appearing to acknowledge, the need for a moral framework, the novel seeks a broadening of the accepted bounds of the genre by pressing the case for greater freedom in pursuit of truth and artistic expression. As the *Yanshi Tici* states:

with [such] descriptions of situations and settings of scenes, there are inevitably points of extravagant unrestraint, libertine looseness, and lapses in ideals. But one should acknowledge that it unfolds to the full extent Emperor Yang's administrative excesses and how the ritual sacrifices of Sui were terminated by dark destruction."<sup>80</sup>

The author thus clarifies the function of his work. The aim of the novel is to describe the reasons underlying the failure of the Sui state - a task which inevitably impinges upon the bounds of propriety and will certainly depict behaviour which may shock. The author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* furnishes a strong case for a broader function for literature than stereotyped moralising, saying in the *Yanshi Xu*:

what romantic novels shun most is wordings of libidinous lubricity and the like, because they do damage to morality and elegant decorum, but plain and unadorned narration also fails to convey the circumstances of intimacy of those times past."<sup>81</sup>

Thus moral purpose and the need for broad-ranging and sophisticated descriptive language need not be irreconcilable. It is here, in the concept that the need to convey the "circumstances of intimacy" is as important as "morality and elegant decorum", that the answer is to be found. Certainly excess is to be condemned, yet a

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<sup>80</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 1. 艷史題辭.

<sup>81</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 1. 艷史凡例.

wider scope for self-expression must be allowed. In doing so one may encompass both the desired foundation of genuine morality sought by the case for conservatism, and the testing of this genuine morality by the contingencies of human experience as asserted in the case for subversion. Tolerability of finesse, the notion that the cultured author treads a fine line between high artistic expression and excess, may add to the debate.

*Sui Tang Yanyi* and its relationship with *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

As noted earlier the historical novel *Sui Tang Yanyi* was compiled by Chu Renhuo (c.1630- c.1695), and borrows extensively from other works, most notably *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Suishi Yiwen*. The dominant intellectual trends of the early Qing have been described as objectivity and sobriety. Love was defined as spiritual, sentiment replaced libido, and internal feelings replaced external sensations.<sup>82</sup> A sense of restored balance, a drawing away from the extremes of the late Ming, and its fictional exemplars, *Jin Ping Mei* and *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, is clear from such works as *Sui Tang Yanyi*. The structure and underlying ideology were reconfigured by Chu to impart a new vision of cosmic balance and also to function as a mirror for the times, reflecting upon the morals of a society still reeling from the collapse of the Ming and the brutality of the Qing accession. The new vision is most discernible in the change in the characterisation of Emperor Yang.

*Sui Tang Yanyi* is something of an anthology of fiction regarding the Sui and Tang. Each of the 100 chapters, with one exception, begins with a generalised moral preamble to establish a moral standard, in a manner similar to that of the short stories of Ling Mengchu and Feng Menglong. Furthermore Chu introduced an overarching

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<sup>82</sup> McMahon (1988): 131.

framework of reincarnation to tie the novel together.<sup>83</sup> By ending mid-dynasty, he also abandoned the conventional format of historical novels of the time. The novel embraces a diverse mix of story types which are kept in equilibrium with the aims of the work, e.g. romanticised histories, moral tales based on Buddhist sutras, tales of illicit love, knight errantry, crimes and marvels. Also included are less common categories such as poetry contests and exemplary acts. Despite such a catholic selection Fan Yanqiao has described it as “the most faithfully accurate of the 'historical' novels”,<sup>84</sup> though Qian Jingfang (perhaps pedantically) lists a number of historical discrepancies.<sup>85</sup>

#### Portrayal of Emperor Yang in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

Although large sections of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* were copied verbatim by Chu Renhuo, substantial changes of emphasis and plot detail were made. Within its scenes and characters, *Sui Tang Yanyi* repeatedly balances virtue with vice to achieve a moral equilibrium. Villians serve as foils for heroes and vice-versa.<sup>86</sup> This moral equilibrium refers not only to different character types but also to a more balanced approach to the portrayal of the main players such as Emperor Yang.

As Hegel has noted with regard to the difference in characterisation evident in *Sui Tang Yanyi* from that he perceives in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*:

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<sup>83</sup> The souls of Emperor Yang and his favoured concubine Zhu Gui'er are linked: Zhu curses the rebels who commit regicide and loses her life, while Emperor Yang is moved by her loyalty. Their souls appear in the bodies of Tang Xuanzong and Yang Guifei whose tragic romance is depicted as a working out of their karmic debt.

<sup>84</sup> Fan Yanqiao 范煙橋, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi*, 中國小說史 (A History of Chinese Fiction). Suzhou: Qiuye she, 1927: 112.

<sup>85</sup> Qian Jingfang (1980): 35.

<sup>86</sup> Hegel (1981): 194 - 195 passim.

morally contrasting scenes serve most significantly as [Chu Renhuo's] means of making his principal characters more complex.<sup>87</sup>

The manic drive of the character in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is toned down as Chu alters Emperor Yang's character to present a more humane figure, i.e. his vow of eternal love for Zhu Gui'er and the entrusting of his son to Lady Sha after her miscarriage. Thus Emperor Yang appears as a kinder figure, more aware of the wishes and hopes of others. Chu also excised most of the explicit scenes of violent and debauched sex, i.e. Emperor Yang's homosexual encounter with a young eunuch and his rape of a young palace girl, and interpolated more innocent pursuits such as a game of hide and seek.<sup>88</sup> Hegel makes the following judgement:

[Chu's] purpose is not by any means to make Yang into a positive character; many selfish and destructive deeds are attributed to him here. However, by illustrating more than one side of Yang's personality, [Chu Renhuo] imparts a degree of realistic moral complexity to this character that was lacking in the earlier [*Sui Yangdi Yanshi*], deliberately disregarding the verdict of history thereby.<sup>89</sup>

In *Sui Tang Yanyi* Emperor Yang's sense of duty, while still woefully derelict in life, does surface in death as his ghost returns to ask the former Sui general Yang Yichen to protect the heir to the throne, a scene unimaginable in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. Emperor Yang is also given a more feminine sensibility, being surrounded by concubines who are more fully characterised than in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. Emperor Yang constantly seeks to please them and indeed often confides in them rather than in his ministers. He praises their ingenuity and aesthetic tastes and it is a group of concubines, with the aid of Wang Yi, who smuggle the crown prince out of the hands of the rebels and lead him to safety. The addition of this aspect of Emperor Yang's

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<sup>87</sup> Hegel (1981): 197.

<sup>88</sup> Chu Renhuo (1982): 226.

<sup>89</sup> Hegel, (1981): 197.

character may be due to the reincarnation framework in which the spirit of Emperor Yang returns reincarnated as the spirit of Yang Guifei.<sup>90</sup>

#### Transformation of minor characters

An example of this is the transformation of the dwarf servant Wang Yi into a paragon of pure loyalty. In the earlier novel Wang castrates himself in order to serve Emperor Yang in the Imperial Harems and later, when the country sinks into rebellion, Wang Yi commits suicide. In the later novel the castration scene is altered as Wang Yi is prevented from carrying out the act of castration, and as the Sui collapses, Wang survives to lead the crown prince away to safety. The conscious decision of the author deliberately to alter the plot of the earlier novel shows the profound difference between the two. *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* concentrates almost exclusively on the inner thought processes of Emperor Yang. *Sui Tang Yanyi* allows its minor characters to retain a greater sense of individuality and to act on their own moral impulses as well as to mirror Emperor Yang's excesses; whereas in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* all minor characters are subordinate to the portrayal of Emperor Yang. Zhu Gui'er and Yuan Bao'er are more clearly delineated in order to point out both Emperor Yang's infatuation and his excesses and demonstrate by their actions what was considered by the author to be a purer morality, e.g. Yuan Bao'er attempts suicide after Yangdi's joke regarding her supposed infatuation with Yu Shinan, and Zhu Gui'er slices off a strip of flesh to make medicinal broth to cure Emperor Yang's headache. Both incidents are flanked by acts of extreme cruelty on Emperor Yang's part, in the first case by his disastrous declaration of war against Korea, and in the second case by his command to rebuild the Great Wall. Empress Xiao again outlives Emperor Yang and

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<sup>90</sup> It also brings to mind the behaviour of Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 in *Honglou Meng* 紅樓夢, who was also besotted by the charms and abilities of women. Despite Zheng Zhenduo's comment, there is no direct evidence of influence from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* or *Sui Tang Yanyi* upon the composition of *Honglou Meng*. See Zheng Zhenduo (1961): 923.

ironically survives to charm Tang Taizong before meeting her nemesis in the future Empress Wu.

Glorification of female virtue in *Sui Tang Yanyi*

One of the more striking differences between the novels is the increased incidence in *Sui Tang Yanyi* of displays of female virtue favoured by a conservative interpretation Neo-Confucianism which are not to be found in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. Underlying this difference of emphasis is the repressive cult of female virtue which prevailed in the final years of the Ming and more prominently in the early Qing. The reasons for this are manifold and puzzling but have been attributed to two general factors: first, extreme male anxiety induced by severe competition in the official exams; and second superstitious beliefs derived from folk Buddhism often closely connected to forms of ritualised female suicide in specific regions.<sup>91</sup> The former incorporates the general frustration felt by the high number of successful candidates who were unable to obtain official posts and who sought refuge in an embittered narrow application of ultra-conservative principles, and those literati who traditionally expressed frustration with failure through means of fantasizing about women in distress, for example a beauty in disgrace, a neglected Court lady, or a grieving widow.

Political authority in the late Ming and Early Qing was particularly restrictive, hence direct expression of political dissent was often so fraught with danger that the theme of tragic female suicide or martyrdom of heroines was a favoured method of indirect criticism of government actions. Unable to cope with his own damaging emotional conflicts, the literary creator sympathised with his female protagonist,

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<sup>91</sup> T'ien Ju-kang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1988: 147.

identified with her, and ultimately upheld the moral importance of her actions by depicting her unflinching courage. In the case of the latter argument, the increased belief in ghosts and growing interest shown by authors in the concept of ghostly revenge may account for the acceptance by many wronged women to view suicide as the preferred option in the face of overwhelming social pressure.<sup>92</sup> In *Sui Tang Yanyi*, the attempted suicide by Yuan Bao'er and the flesh-cutting (*gegu* 割股) of Zhu Gui'er may be seen within this context of increased social pressure upon women. Neither episode, nor anything resembling them, occur in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. Such omissions reveal a conscious decision by Chu Renhuo to present simple self-sacrificing models of female chastity. Whether they are meant merely to balance what Chu termed "the account book of past and present"<sup>93</sup>, or whether they are an attempt to capitalise on the then popularity of 'Scholar and Beauty' (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) romances or whether in fact they manifest a profound change in attitude to women is difficult to gauge. There is the addition, for no apparent reason, of the story of the female warrior Mu Lan and her contrived suicide in the face of pressure to marry the Khan, resulting in her sister falling in love with Mu Lan's fiancé and stern refusal, recognised and rewarded by the Empress, to allow intimate relations before marriage.<sup>94</sup> These and the acts of various other virtuous women throughout the novel, especially when contrasted with such figures of female cruelty and sexual insatiability as Empress Xiao and Empress Wu, seem designed to lay emphasis on a narrow conception of female chastity and may be seen as an indication of the moral conservatism with which *Sui Tang Yanyi* treats its female protagonists. Even the bold and decisive female characters such as the wife and daughter of the contender for the throne, Dou Jiande, berate Empress Xiao on her lack of sexual propriety.

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<sup>92</sup> T'ien (1988): 90 - 93 passim.

<sup>93</sup> Hegel (1981): 204.

<sup>94</sup> Hegel reads a political motive, i.e. even a half-Chinese woman would rather die than serve a foreign ruler, thus an intimation of his feelings towards the Qing and his disappointment with Chinese leaders, see Hegel (1981): 205 - 206.

## Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, like *Jin Ping Mei*, represents a bold experiment to depict the extremes of human nature and the wayward contingencies which may arise in human society, in a structurally complex and artistically expansive form. The insistence on vividly and truthfully describing human failings and excesses marks *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* out as a great achievement of Ming literature. While the success of the gentle humanistic style of *Sui Tang Yanyi* since its publication has somewhat obscured both *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Suishi Yiwen*, *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* had a lasting influence on the development of vernacular fiction, which is increasingly coming to be recognised. As Zheng Zhenduo pointed out:

*Sui Yangdi Yanshi* followed on closely behind *Jin Ping Mei*. With its minutely exquisite, extremely delicate and charming description, it really is a masterpiece....It had a great influence on later novels. The first half of Chu Renhuo's *Sui Tang Yanyi* was lifted in toto from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. The descriptions in *Honglou Meng* were clearly inspired by *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.<sup>95</sup>

Having laid out the basic methodological framework and examined the relationship between *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Sui Tang Yanyi*, we will turn to the vexed question of the relationship between fiction and historiography in the next chapter.

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<sup>95</sup> Zheng Zhenduo (1961): 923. Zheng does not elucidate further on the relationship between *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Honglou Meng*, but may be referring to the episode in *Honglou Meng* (chapters 17-18) where the empty branches of Dagan Garden are filled with cut-out silk flowers to welcome the visit of the Imperial concubine Yuan chun (as Emperor Yang's concubines do to please him). Other possibilities include the extensive description of gardens, or the devotion of Jia Baoyu to women (similar to Emperor Yang's devotion to certain concubines).

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND FICTIONALITY IN LATE MING  
VERNACULAR FICTION

This chapter examines the relationship between pre-modern Chinese historiography and historical fiction and demonstrates that distinctions between the two forms are most clearly evident on the level of generic tendencies. This conclusion is illustrated by the primacy of narrator and plot in vernacular historical fiction, based on an emphasis on causality, in contrast to the lack of plotted narrative in the Standard Imperial Histories. The distinction is reinforced by the manner in which historical fiction challenges the authority of Standard Imperial Histories through the depiction of the specific contingencies of human existence.

Ascertaining the nature of the relationship between historiography and fiction has long been recognised as the key to understanding the development of vernacular fiction in pre-modern China. As Plaks has noted:

any theoretical inquiry into the nature of Chinese narrative must take its starting point in the acknowledgement of the immense importance of historiography and...“historicism” in the total aggregate of the culture. In fact, the question of how to define the narrative category in Chinese literature eventually boils down to whether or not there did exist...a sense of the inherent commensurability of its two major forms: historiography and fiction.<sup>1</sup>

Most work on historical fiction and historiography has focused on the relationship between fact and fantasy, often reaching contradictory conclusions, given the lack of immediately recognisable delineation between the two forms. Certain difficulties can be identified in any attempts to formulate distinct generic boundaries between fiction and historiography.<sup>2</sup> Ming-Qing critics singled out both works of

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<sup>1</sup> Plaks, A.H., “Towards a critical theory of Chinese narrative” In (editor) A.H. Plaks, *Chinese Narrative: Critical and theoretical essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977: 309 - 352; See especially pages 311 - 312.

<sup>2</sup> The following section draws on Plaks (1977): 310 - 323 passim.

fiction and history as models of literary excellence.<sup>3</sup> Traditional bibliographical systems cut across lines of fiction and history, and even generic titles are common to both forms.<sup>4</sup> In nearly all the novels the Chinese term “classic”, one observes a willingness on the part of the authors to move in and out of vernacular and classical styles in accordance with the demands of the specific subject material being treated.<sup>5</sup> Given that formal features such as the distinction between truth and fabrication do not coincide neatly with generic categories of content, the general opinion has been that the difference between historical and fictional narrative devolves upon the fact that it is more often content categories than formal genres that actually inform the process of narrative composition.<sup>6</sup> Therefore Plaks declares that the major observable difference that conspicuously separates the two branches of Chinese narrative is the simple fact that historiography deals primarily with affairs of state and public life, while fiction covers the more individualised and intimate details of the private lives of figures of varying roles or status.<sup>7</sup>

While broadly agreeing with Plaks’ assessment of the formal features of the relationship between historiography and fiction, I have adapted aspects of Bakhtin’s theories of genre and historicity, to demonstrate that historiography and fiction occupy opposing poles of the narrative continuum. In this chapter I will first discuss Bakhtin’s concept of genre, then generic tendencies of official historiography, as evidenced in the Standard Imperial Histories, are defined and contrasted with the generic tendencies of vernacular fiction. Finally examples taken from prefaces written

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<sup>3</sup> Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1607-1661) included both the historical work *Shi Ji* (Records of the Historian) and the vernacular novel *Shuihu zhuan* among the *caizi shu* 才子書 (books of genius).

<sup>4</sup> For example Zhuan 傳; Zhi 志; Ji 記.

<sup>5</sup> Plaks (1977): 323.

<sup>6</sup> An interesting study of Mid-Ming attitudes to generic categorisation can be found in Laura Hua Wu, “From *Xiaoshuo* to Fiction: Hu Yinglin’s Genre Study of *Xiaoshuo*”, in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Volume 55. Number 2, December 1995: 339 - 351.

<sup>7</sup> Plaks (1977): 316 - 318 passim.

for Late Ming vernacular fiction are presented to demonstrate that the evolving sense of the possibilities of vernacular fiction as a generic form expanded understanding of the confluence of historical and human contingencies.

### Bakhtin's concept of genre

As discussed in Chapter One, genre is a specific way of visualising a given part of reality. Genres range from inner speech through to literary forms such as the novel. The selection of a specific genre is a conscious decision which shapes the expression of the statement the author wishes to convey. In other words, the choice of genre compels the author in the visualisation of expression, fashions the placement and editing of material, and often governs the ability of the author to exploit the potential of that vision.<sup>8</sup> The creation of new genres closely reflects changes in real social life, and literary genres, once they arise, may teach people to see aspects of reality in a new way. Genre can never be a fixed entity since, although language can provide the foundation for giving the appearance of stability to the world we perceive around us, the forms by which it chooses to do so are themselves unstable and mutable. The very forms by which we seek to fix in meaning the contingencies of life and slow the quickness of experience, are themselves in constant flux.<sup>9</sup> The forces of time, space and society interact most powerfully in the kind of space we call texts. Texts give structure to their simultaneity. Space of this kind is available most usefully at the level where a given discourse coalesces into recognisable genres. The collective aspect of genre, as such, ensures that the rise or fall of a specific genre will be an accurate measure of social and historical forces at work over long spans of time.<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin thus identified genre as a key vehicle of historicity, characterising it as the "organ of memory". Genre contains the potential of the past to shape the present and

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<sup>8</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 275 - 276 passim.

<sup>9</sup> Holquist (1990): 148.

<sup>10</sup> Holquist (1990): 70.

the future while not determining the new visions of the world.<sup>11</sup> In Bakhtin's view, the most successful form of genre - that best suited to the function of describing human experience - is the novel. This chapter will demonstrate that the authors of late Ming vernacular fiction understood the potential of vernacular fiction to shape historical consciousness; believed that the novel was indeed the medium best suited to portraying the contingencies of human experience; and proposed that the vernacular novel could supplement or supplant Standard Imperial Histories as a true record of human experience. The following section outlines the privileged status of Standard Imperial Histories, and their generic tendencies.

#### Generic analysis of pre-modern state-sponsored historiography

It is a truism to state that historiography held a privileged position in the orthodox Confucian canon. The reverential status of history in traditional China has been described as maintaining a "quasi-religious pre-eminence within that culture."<sup>12</sup> The apogee of historiography was considered to be the Standard Imperial Histories which chronicled the key events and personalities of dynastic periods. Standard Imperial Histories were usually composed soon after the establishment of the successor regime and based on a variety of records from the previous courts, unofficial writings and often interviews with surviving officials from the previous regime.<sup>13</sup> The Standard Imperial Histories were generally divided into three parts:

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<sup>11</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 279 - 280 passim.

<sup>12</sup> Plaks (1977): 312.

<sup>13</sup> I exclude discussion of the Buddhist Histories from the Sui and Tang dynasties as well as popular Buddhist historical texts which were much in vogue in the late Ming. While Wright notes that they provide a valuable supplement to secular histories of the Sui (Wright (1978): 19), there is no evidence in the prefatory material of the historical novels within the scope of this thesis that they were the focus of authorial attention. Those religious figures which appear in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* provide little enlightenment and are associated with alchemy. For further information on Ming Buddhism see Yü Chün-fang, "Ming Buddhism". In (editors) D. Twitchett, F.W. Mote, *Cambridge History of China. Volume 8. The Ming Dynasty: 1368 - 1644. Part 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 893 - 952; See also, Richard

basic annals (*benji* 本紀) which were chronological records of main events; biographies (*liezhuan* 列傳) which recorded the official careers of leading figures of the period; and monographs (*zhi* 志) which covered specific and often specialised subjects such as political economy, law, administrative boundaries etc.

The following section defines the basic generic tendencies of the Standard Imperial Histories in Bakhtinian terms. These tendencies may be delineated as follows: Ideal of Objectivity; Authoritative Discourse; Embodiment of a Homogenising Centre; Reduction of Eventness.

### Ideal of objectivity

Gardner has identified objectivity as a defining feature of historiography, seeing in it an attitude underlying pre-modern Chinese concepts of historiography.<sup>14</sup> One may define three main areas of relevance concerning the objectives of this thesis:

First, the primacy of verifiable documentary sources. In this sense objectivity was regarded as equivalent to impartiality, as the Chinese historian attempted to provide reliable and untainted records of events. Historians aspired to be recognised as “good historians” (*liangshi* 良史) who would not yield to partisan pressures, which they termed the “crooked brush” (*qubi* 曲筆).<sup>15</sup> Primary-source materials were selected on the basis of their portrayal of human conduct. Ideally historical records

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Hon-chun Shek, *Religion and Society in Late Ming China: Sectarianism and Popular Thought in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China*. Ph.D thesis. University of California at Berkeley, 1980.

<sup>14</sup> Charles S. Gardner, *Chinese Traditional Historiography*. 3rd edition. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970. Gardner traces the adherence to objective detachment back to the *Zuozhuan*.

<sup>15</sup> Wright (1978): 16.



would provide a mirror on human events that was polished, clear and objective.<sup>16</sup> It was the function of the Chinese historian to collect facts and to subject them to a discrete process of ideological filtering, which could suppress those regarded by the historian as insignificant or unreliable, and present those judged as morally acceptable, in order for them to speak for themselves without overt interference.<sup>17</sup> The process of filtering was sanctioned by the Confucian concept of “appropriate concealment” (*hui 諱*), that is, the deliberate suppression of an incident which does not fit well with the moral consistency desired by the historian (for example the compilers of the *Sui Shu* omitted the popular belief that Emperor Yang had plotted the death of his father, Emperor Wen, to gain the throne).<sup>18</sup>

Second, the voice of the historian. Standard Imperial Histories tend to be written in an impersonal style, seeking to transcribe documented events rather than interpret the multiple contingencies of historicity. In dealing with official historiography, one immediately observes a unique situation in which the narrator of the text is in most cases a committee rather than an individual.<sup>19</sup> From the Tang onwards, the institutionalisation of historiography and collective bureaucratic authorship gave rise to a conscious historical style. This style is marked by impersonality of authorial voice, and identifiable by a large body of conventional diction and discrete vocabulary. In other words, there developed a distinctive historical genre, which embodied the evaluative norms of the central bureaucracy and was concerned with the administrative and moral state of the empire. Uniformity of subject matter led logically to uniformity of expression, with variety neither expected nor

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<sup>16</sup> Han Yushan, *Elements of Chinese Historiography*. Hollywood Ca: W.M. Hawley, 1955: 55.

<sup>17</sup> Gardner (1970): 69.

<sup>18</sup> Wright (1978): 16 - 17. The author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, however, showed no such qualms and elaborated on popular tales to depict that Emperor Yang's motivation to patricide as a result of his failed attempt to seduce his father's favourite concubine.

<sup>19</sup> The most notable exceptions to this pattern are Sima Qian 司馬遷, Ban Gu 班固 and Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修.

desired.<sup>20</sup> Laudatory phrases became formulaic and biographies in particular became a means of honouring for posterity exemplary figures. Single biographies became submerged into large moral categories which encouraged the practice of placing less flattering aspects of an individual's life elsewhere.

Within the framework of the Standard Imperial Histories, Chinese bureaucratic historians conceived of the past as a series of concrete events and overt acts; and of history as a registration of them which should be exact and dispassionate, with minimal explication of the sequence of causation. The historian, through the wielding of his impartial brush, left a reliable record for future generations. The right of the historian to tell the truth about men in power became a fiercely guarded tradition with the result that many historians suffered death rather than submit to the interference of tyrannical rulers.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, rulers were aware that historians were the guardians of future reputation, and emperors bore this in mind when adopting policies which aroused strong bureaucratic opposition. The ideal of the autonomy of the historian is linked, in part, to the importance attached to serving the state and Confucian morality in which moral character, public service and the setting down of one's ideas were the means by which one could achieve lasting worth. On the death of Wei Zheng, the imperial historian and author of the *Sui Shu*, the Tang emperor Taizong spoke of him in the following terms:

one may use bronze as a mirror to straighten one's clothes and cap; antiquity as a mirror to understand the rise and fall of states; a man as a mirror to correct one's judgement. We have always maintained these three mirrors...Now that Wei Zheng is gone, one of the mirrors has disappeared.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gardner (1970): Chapter 6 passim.

<sup>21</sup> Han Yushan (1955): 4 - 5.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Howard J. Weschler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the Court of T'ang T'ai-tsung*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

The third area of relevance in a discussion of objectivity in Chinese pre-modern historiography is continuity of historical experience. Imperial historians were steeped in classical Confucian culture and would as such expect the reader to draw his own, most probably similar conclusions from the presented material. One facet of this culture was a deep-seated belief in the moral value of history which, when recounted in the Standard Imperial Histories, should show the workings of the moral universe in human affairs. Another facet of this culture is the aesthetic of minimal explication. Causal explanation was seen as both unnecessary and undesirable. Readers of history were to draw their own conclusions and the moral should be allowed to speak for itself. Interpretation of history was regarded as too subjective; it should be as little in evidence as possible. For the most part, Standard Imperial Histories were written for and read by historians who shared a cultural heritage and common interest in maintaining both the traditions of Standard Imperial Histories and the prestigious status of historians. Underpinning the concepts of continuity and impartiality was a need to harmonise with cosmic principles and the workings of the Moral Universe (*tiandao* 天道). Moreover, while there may have been political factionalism and differing interpretations of the Classics, Confucian historians jealously maintained their stewardship of the official version of the past from competing value-systems such as Daoism and Buddhism. Though some historians were themselves Buddhist, they viewed organised Buddhism as a threat to their hegemony, and religious figures who were seen to gain too much political power, tend to receive a scathing posthumous assessment in the Standard Imperial Histories (a fate often shared by eunuchs, whom Wright describes as the “natural enemies of the official classes”).<sup>23</sup> In order to maintain effective control of the past, Standard Imperial Histories display the second generic tendency - authoritative discourse.

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<sup>23</sup> Wright (1978): 18.

Authoritative discourse

Standard Imperial Histories present a world view in what Bakhtin would describe as authoritative discourse. This section demonstrates that the discourse presented in Standard Imperial Histories dominates its sources, subsumes them within an all-encompassing value-system and asserts its unique and unquestioned interpretation of the past. Traditional Chinese historiography aimed always to attain categorical affirmation, in as much as the traditional Chinese historian assumed that every previously validated documentary source was entitled to respect as a sincere attempt at truthful record, which did not venture beyond reliable information.<sup>24</sup> In accordance with this premise, every statement which was not contradicted was entitled to acceptance. However, in the event of conflict, reconciliation was attempted; or if this proved impossible, an arbitrary choice was made between competing versions and the selected one became the "authentic" record.<sup>25</sup> It is true that rejected sources were occasionally taken up by a new group or school having enough force to challenge the selection. These schools, however, equally asserted their views in the language of authoritative discourse, and sought to establish their own particular orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> One may also note that, as described above, the implied narrators of official historiography convey a quality of omniscience. This is discernible in the quality of moral and intellectual infallibility evident in the work of historians, reinforced by the inaccessibility of much of their source materials to the public, and by the quasi-

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<sup>24</sup> Franke does note evidence of a more critical attitude towards source material in the Late Ming. See Wolfgang Franke, "Historical Writing during the Ming". In (editors) D. Twitchett, J.F. Fairbank, *Cambridge History of China, Volume 7*. 1988: 726 - 782. Franke notes the collapse in 1590 of a government-sponsored project to compose a history of the dynasty. See Franke (1988): 746.

<sup>25</sup> Gardner (1970): 64 - 65.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson notes just such a fierce struggle between Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng who favoured the doctrine of Zhu Xi, and the advocates of the teachings of Wang Yangming. See Willard Peterson "Confucian Learning in Late Ming Thought". In (editors) D. Twitchett, F.W. Mote, *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 8, Part 2*. 1998: 708 - 788.(1998): 738 - 742.

religious weightiness of historical truth in pre-modern Chinese civilisation. The sense of an essentially impersonal, unmediated setting forth of the facts as they actually happened, is an aesthetic illusion that remained at the heart of official historiography. The illusion of authority brings us to the third generic tendency - embodiment of a homogenising centre.

#### Embodiment of a homogenising centre

Corollary to the concept of authoritative discourse is the idea of centripetal and centrifugal forces in culture. Bakhtin's thought focuses on the constant tension between the unique and the general, the unrepeatable and repeatable.<sup>27</sup> He recognises that a distinction exists in the nature of official and unofficial forces, or, as he terms them, centripetal and centrifugal forces. Institutionalised and officially-sanctioned forces seek to impose order on an essentially heterogeneous and untidy world, while unofficial and non-sanctioned impulses continually disrupt that contrived order. The fixative power of centripetal forces is precisely what enables sense to be made out of the flux of experience. Equally, the authority that enables such fixity is not real, that is to say, not real in the way that variety, change and those heteronomous effects which Bakhtin labels centrifugal forces, are real. Centrifugal forces are given, whereas systematic claims to stability never exist, but must always be made up, conceived and imposed by some assumed authority. The apparent unity imposed by centripetal forces is constantly undermined and altered by their relationships with centrifugal forces. These centrifugal forces share relations of various orders, the most basic being their innate tension with the centripetal. Because the divergence of the unofficial from the official is varied in both degree and kind, it is difficult to draw any firm formal distinction between the two. Moreover, the constant interplay and mutual development of the two interacting forces mitigates against the build-up of any impermeable barrier.

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<sup>27</sup> Holquist (1990): 145 - 146.

As a created, centripetal force, Standard Imperial Histories draw in diverse sources and attempt to assimilate them into a homogenising centre; principally utilising the dominant authority of state Confucianism. Centrifugal forces or alternative models of historical explication, such as Buddhist or Daoist histories, were circumscribed or suppressed. Other unsanctioned forms of historical expression, such as prose literature or unofficial histories (*waishi* 外史) were denigrated. As noted previously, the historiographical genre is expressed in a large body of conventional diction and distinctive generic vocabulary: uniformity of subject matter leading logically to uniformity of expression, without casting doubt on its authority. Standard Imperial Histories established archetypes of experience which tended to form repeatable circumstances, categories of human typologies, and generalised analysis of social forces. The idiosyncracies and illogicalities of human behaviour were ignored in favour of a demonstrable model of social harmony which was underpinned by the principles of the moral universe. Individuality was suppressed by the need to present model careers, and the unique specificity of time and environment which forms events was drained of singularity as abstract lessons were drawn into a systemic whole. In other words, Standard Imperial Histories present a universal and atemporal sense of historical experience in which time and space are levelled out, and individuality and contingency of experience are drained of specificity.

This phenomenon is most clearly discernible in the biographies sections of the Standard Imperial Histories. As Wright notes, the heavy emphasis biographies place on official careers makes it hard to discern the personality behind the laudatory phrases: the biographies display a high degree of interchangeable experience.<sup>28</sup> Biographies are stuffed with stock phrases praising childhood precociousness,

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<sup>28</sup> Wright (1978): 17.

examination success, filial piety, and devotion to State service.<sup>29</sup> While chronological detail is valued, minimum regard is paid to the socio-political environment in which an individual lived and served. The careful dating of events and obsession with chronological accuracy belie the fact that the traditional court historian does not see the significance of history in progression, development or change; rather atemporal significance is sought in each concrete event.<sup>30</sup> Atemporality leads us to the final generic tendency - reduction of eventness.

### Reduction of eventness

Bakhtin uses the term “eventness” to describe the confluence of historical time, social environment and self awareness which form the individual consciousness at any given moment. Eventness emphasises both the accumulated aggregate of historical experience and the importance of the prosaic contingencies of human existence. As such, eventness is the ground on which centrifugal and centripetal forces form individual experience. The written word is a method of transcribing human experience which describes to varying degrees, the social situations which individuals face, the decisions they make and the consequences these decisions have. While inadequate for the purpose of relating the totality of a specific situation, written records have traditionally been the only method for the transmission of human knowledge over long periods of time. A sense of eventness exerts influence both upon the author in the production of text, and the reader in the consumption of text. Literary texts depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and when the text is consumed. Likewise the relationship a reader establishes with a text is largely governed by the

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<sup>29</sup> For examples see Wright (1978): 17.

<sup>30</sup> Idema, Wilt L., “Time and Space in Traditional Chinese Historical Fiction”. In (editors) Huang Chun-chieh, Erik Zürcher, *Time and Space in Chinese Culture*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995: 364.

environment in which the reader exists, and to some extent, the willingness of the reader fully to realise the potential inherent within the text, and the creative understanding required to add to the potentiality of the text.

Given its commitment to depicting universal, atemporal and impersonal values, traditional historiography has a strong tendency to reduce human experience to a set of abstractions and simple ideological centres. This reductive element is evident in the biographies and chronicles of the Standard Imperial Histories. Pre-modern historiography is concerned with public events and public characters that have an exemplary function in the public realm, and is thus characterised by the normative evaluation of events and personalities, and the primacy of source documents.<sup>31</sup> Chinese court historians seldom expose themselves to the charge of recording matters beyond the scope of their documents and observations. Traditional Chinese biographies do not provide a full survey of a person's life, they rather try to sketch the defining virtues of a person in his public role - the element of temporal development is usually restricted to a brief summary of the bureaucratic career of the subject of the biography. Twitchett has pointed out that traditional biography focuses its attention on people as they fall into specific functional roles defined by society.<sup>32</sup> That is, the individual takes on a sense of integrity as a unit when set in the integral context of other individuals. Since such "functional" roles fall inevitably into types of humanity: emperor, minister, general, assassin, etc., the individuality of characters becomes less important than the interplay and overlapping of types that actually define the individual's existence in the first place.<sup>33</sup> By reducing the eventness of human experience and knowledge, the act of historiographical transcription has a levelling

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<sup>31</sup> Idema (1995): 364.

<sup>32</sup> Denis Twitchett, "Chinese Biographical Writing". In (editors) Beasley and Pulleyblank, *Historians of China and Japan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961: 95 - 114.

<sup>33</sup> Plaks (1977): 364.

effect on the complexity of time and history; dealing in abstraction reduces the power of particularity of incidents in favour of generalities or universalities. The lack of a developmental specificity in time and history engenders a sense that the individual is repeatable and replaceable, thus the historical and temporal conditions which generate particularity lose their vitality and human existence is reduced to a series of repeatable abstractions.<sup>34</sup> It is only when social order is sufficiently complex that the overlapping of roles makes for actual conflicts in role-fulfilment and we arrive at gripping narrative situations. Such contradictions and conflicts arise most visibly in the realm of the vernacular fiction.

In the following section I will discuss vernacular fiction in Bakhtinian terms and provide some examples from prefatory material to Late Ming vernacular fiction.

#### Fictionality: dialogism and the voicing of suppressed truths

First, a brief aside on the intended audiences for vernacular fiction. As described above, Standard Imperial Histories represent official culture as defined, composed and transmitted by the imperial bureaucracy. Despite the fact that the production of pre-modern vernacular fiction, as a form of written communication, was generally dominated by the literati classes, one must also acknowledge the wide variety within the body of vernacular fiction in terms of literary sophistication and the demands that consequently are made of the reader. If, on the one hand, we have works written by and for the most demanding members of the literary establishment, we also have, on the other hand, many works that catered to the expectations of a wider, less-educated reading public.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 282.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of this point see Hegel (1987): 112 - 142. See also Anne McLaren, "Ming Audiences and Vernacular Hermeneutics: The Uses of The Romance of the Three Kingdoms". *T'oung Pao*, Volume LXXXI. 1995: 51 - 80.

A key Bakhtinian global concept is dialogism. Dialogism conceives of language as a two-sided act in which the words we use are imprinted with meanings, intentions and accents retained from previous use, and that any utterance we make is directed towards some real or hypothetical other.<sup>36</sup> The dialogic novel includes, but is not restricted to, the quoted verbal speech of characters. It also includes the relationship between the characters' discourses and the author's discourse, and the relationship between all these discourses and other discourses outside the text, which are imitated or evoked by means of doubly-oriented speech. In the case of the pre-modern Chinese novel, this notion extends to the relationship between the author and interlinear commentator. It is fundamental to the notion of the dialogic novel that the variety of discourse in the novel prevents the novelist from imposing a single world-view upon the reader. As soon as one allows a variety of discourses into a textual space, a resistance is established to the dominance of any one discourse.<sup>37</sup> Thus the dialogic novel is committed to the complex treatment of social experience, time and character, and encompasses a rich sense of the variety of historical experience and temporal perception.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike Standard Imperial Histories, the dialogic novel conveys its vision of the world not by reducing human experience to a series of generalisations and abstractions, but by describing and developing contextual examples which encompass the eventness of human existence. Rather than specifying a group of rules by which it is possible to gain an understanding of the world, the dialogic novel allows the reader to view the world in an experiential manner, filtered through, but not dominated by, the beliefs of the author. The particular experience of the author is never formalised, though inevitably it both informs and guides the author's project of creative writing.

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<sup>36</sup> Lodge (1995): 145 - 159.

<sup>37</sup> Lodge (1995): 157.

<sup>38</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 282.

Each personal creative project adds to the wider sum of knowledge at the disposal of the genre, thereby enriching both the author's specific vision of the world and the capacity of the genre for future development and expanded visualisation. The expanding and open-ended nature of the dialogic novel presents the author with the opportunity to test authorial viewpoints and encounter new methods of composition. The clash between personal convictions and non-authorial discourse leads the author to express truths which he or she may not have previously considered. Likewise the reader, exposed to historically or culturally distant discourse, may gain unforeseen insights. Creativity is fuelled by the adoption of a partially alien vision by the author, who, in doing so, imposes on the creative project a set of constraints which alter the method and content of creativity.<sup>39</sup>

One of the central questions which the pre-modern vernacular novel confronts is the clash between the official view of history as presented in the Standard Imperial Histories, and the unofficial or fictional histories, such as *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* - a clash which could be described in Bakhtinian terms as one between the concept of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Late Ming novelists recognised that, despite the hegemonic claims of court historians, the authority of the sanctioned view of history was far from unimpeachable and that the fictive power of the historians' claim could be undermined by the power of the literary imagination: the struggle between the sanctioned and unsanctioned lies at the heart of their endeavour. Fiction, and particularly that in the vernacular, had traditionally occupied a low position in Confucian culture, being regarded as "street talk and alley chatter" (*jietan xiangyu* 街談巷語). Many prefaces to Late Ming vernacular novels deal with the relationship of fiction to both Standard Imperial Histories and the classics of the Confucian canon. While a range of arguments is presented to justify the writing of vernacular fiction, many prefaces are centrally concerned with the commensurability and inherent unease

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<sup>39</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 282 - 283.

between the generic outlooks presented by vernacular fiction and Standard Imperial Histories.

Whereas the tendency of Standard Imperial Histories as a centripetal force, is to assimilate, homogenise and dominate its sources, vernacular fiction embodies a complexity of view and inherent structural tension which undermines any claims to a monopoly of authority. Structural tension is evidenced in a number of ways: the variety of antecedent sources which inform the novel; the incorporation of different literary forms within the body of the text; the functions of the interlinear commentary and the influence of prefatory material; and most importantly, the degree to which the author allows these elements to participate in the ongoing dialogue of the novel. Vernacular fiction appears to wish to take on the mantle of Standard Imperial Histories, and ostensibly seeks to supplement official accounts of history, in order to provide an alternative or enhanced version of events which thereby challenges previous accounts. The vernacular novel, however, as a developing generic form, cannot and does not lay claim to hermeneutic absolutism. The structure of vernacular fiction precludes centripetal fixity since it is unable to establish a dominant voice which can suppress the collection of manifold voices and diverse modes of expression. In this respect the pre-modern vernacular novel creates a multi-levelled challenge to the authoritative orthodoxy of Standard Imperial Histories.

While the prefaces rarely present a direct challenge to Standard Imperial Histories, the range of sources and placement of textual elements in vernacular novels, implicitly offer an alternative explanation of history. Moreover in its preference for vernacular language and concomitant drive to broaden the readership for literature, vernacular fiction propounds a new perception of human existence. In this final section I will present three specific aspects of fictional generic tendencies delineated in late Ming prefaces to vernacular fiction: vernacular fiction as a vehicle for wider truth;

the depiction of the multiple contingencies of human experience; the development of plotted narrative as a mechanism to depict human choices.

Fiction: a vehicle for human truth

Plaks argues that in both the historical and fictional branches of the Chinese tradition, the final justification for the enterprise of narrative may be said to lie in the transmission of known facts.<sup>40</sup> One may trace this back to a saying attributed to Confucius: “I transmit rather than create, I am faithful to and love antiquity.”<sup>41</sup> Narrative presents a faithful representation of human experience, in that experience recorded should be ultimately true regardless of the presence of hyperbole, supernatural detail etc. The vernacular novel goes beyond the recording of factual events to capture the essential truth of human experience. While critics of fiction railed against its deviation from verifiable fact, practitioners and supporters of fiction defended the form, arguing that the Official Histories also chose moral truth over factual truth. Zeitlin notes that Gao Heng 高衡, author of the first preface of *Liaozhai zhiyi* argued since we since we tolerate fictitious places in histories, we ought to tolerate fictitious places in other works.<sup>42</sup>

It is precisely through the depiction of human experience and the contextual delineation of human actions that fiction can describe the specificity of existence, and thus move beyond the factual approach of the Official Histories. In China truth is

<sup>40</sup> Plaks (1977): 312.

<sup>41</sup> *Lun Yu* 論語 (Analects). Book 7 (述而第七). No. 1. In *Zhuxi dingben Si Shu* 朱熹定本四書 (The Four Books edited and annotated by Zhu Xi). Tainan: Fuhan chubanshe, 1981: 106. Chinese text reads: 述而不作信而好古.

<sup>42</sup> Judith T Zeitlin, *Pu Songling's (1640 - 1715) "Liaozhai zhiyi" and the Chinese Discourse on the Strange*. PhD thesis. Harvard University, 1988: 19. Gao asks: “And is every record in the Twenty Four Standard Imperial Histories solid?”. I am indebted to Frances Weightman for her insights into *Liaozhai Zhiyi*.

taken as directly linked to “specific human context.”<sup>43</sup> Truth as such need not extend to an exact reduplication of the past. As Idema notes, though the overwhelming majority of Chinese traditional fiction is explicitly set in the past, no attempt is made to recreate the specific manners and customs of the age in which the story is set.<sup>44</sup> David Der-wei Wang sees this as an attempt to create an atemporal significance similar to that produced in the Standard Imperial Histories.<sup>45</sup> It is more likely, however, that the authors were interested in the complexities of social interaction and the vagaries of human nature as portrayed in their characterisation, rather than an obsessively detailed mimetic portrayal of every aspect of material life.

In the preface to the 1633 novel *Sui Shi Yiwén*, the author of the preface, Good-Fortune-Robe Master 吉衣主人, deals with the fundamental difference between the Official Histories and vernacular fiction in the following terms:

in what way do the histories termed “omitted” assist Standard Imperial Histories? The function of Standard Imperial Histories is the recording of factual events. How can the recording of factual events convey convincing truths? The function of omitted histories is the gathering of what has been missed out. How can the gathering of what’s been missed out transmit the excitingly wonderful? The most highly regarded thing in conveying convincing truth is authenticity.<sup>46</sup>

That is to say, Standard Imperial Histories record and convey factual truth, while vernacular fiction collects and describes that which is convincing, exciting and authentic. Good-Fortune-Robe Master, in a manner common to many writers of the Late Ming then elucidates his conception of this basic relationship in an audacious

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<sup>43</sup> Plaks (1977): 313.

<sup>44</sup> Idema (1995): 377.

<sup>45</sup> David Der-wei Wang, “Fictional History/Historical Fiction”. *Studies in Language and Literature*. Number 1. 1985: 64 - 74; see especially: 70.

<sup>46</sup> Yuan Yuling (1975): *Suishu yiwén xu* (Preface to Omitted Tales of Sui History): no page number.

manner appearing to pay respect to Standard Imperial Histories, while in fact subtly undermining them for his own purposes:

in the beginning my basic intent was to remedy the omissions of the Histories, not necessarily to run counter to them. I humbly sought to add to the Histories by adorning them, and to fill in the gaps of the Histories by expunging and trimming, while also preserving the original concepts of the authors of the Histories - By perfecting something, one surely is not faulting it!<sup>47</sup>

The key point is that fiction transmits a truth which either has been overlooked by Standard Imperial Histories, or lies beyond the scope of historiography. Moreover, truth is regarded as the most important criterion, though, in the above preface, it is not clearly defined. The relationship between truth and fabrication in fiction is discussed in a more sophisticated manner by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646), who addresses the question in the preface to *Jingshi Tongyan* 警世通言 (Common Words to Warn the World):

are all unofficial histories completely true? One would say that is not necessarily so. Are they totally spurious? One would say that is not necessarily so. Therefore ought one to do away with their spuriousness and preserve their truthfulness? One would say that is not necessarily so.<sup>48</sup>

What then, is the relationship between truth-telling and fabrication in vernacular historical fiction? Feng Menglong goes on to elucidate his understanding of the basis of truth in fiction, and its relation with Standard Imperial Histories and other works of the Confucian canon:

the Classics deal with the principle of reason, the [Standard Imperial] histories and chronicles describe events, their standards being the same. As for the principle of reason, the world doesn't always have a polished and beautifully cultivated appearance, and as for the description of events, the world does not always follow the high and refined way of Confucian scholars.

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<sup>47</sup> Yuan Yuling (1975): *Suishi Yiwen xu*..

<sup>48</sup> Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Xu* 序 (Preface). In *Jingshi Tongyan* 警世通言 (Common Words to Warn the World). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1983.

... This present kind of vernacular historical elucidation is sufficient to support the shortcomings of Classics, [Standard Imperial] Histories and Chronicles...If the events portrayed are true and the principle of reason is not spurious, or even if the events portrayed are spurious but the principle of reason is still true ... What is attained in the end is an intimacy not with the spurious but with the truthful.<sup>49</sup>

Underlying truth then is the principle of reason. How is the principle of reason cultivated? It appears an approach valued by Late Ming critics was to cultivate one's innate moral sense, developing 'aptitude at reading' *shandu* 善讀 to apprehend the purpose of the work. This concept may be traced back to Mencius who stated:

in expounding *Classic of Poetry* one does not interpret a word in such a way as to distort a phrase, nor interpret a phrase in such a way as to distort its purpose. We are successful in our interpretation when we let our thoughts conform to the purpose of the work.<sup>50</sup>

This approach is validated by Zhang Zhupo, commentator on *Jin Ping Mei*, who responded to attacks on the salacious content of the novel, by arguing that it is people themselves who are at fault:

how is it that people delude themselves? When I speak to people of cunning, it is meant as a warning, should the listener turn round and as a result learn the arts of cunning, then this is not the fault of the person who first spoke of cunning. The person who heeded cunning, was already cunning by nature. Thus *Jin Ping Mei* cannot be faulted.<sup>51</sup>

Another facet of the function of fiction was the depiction of characters and experience beyond those portrayed in the Official Histories. One of the major figures

<sup>49</sup> Feng Menglong (1983): Xu.

<sup>50</sup> *Mengzi duben* 孟子讀本 (A Mencius Reader). in *Zhuxi dingben Si Shu* 朱熹定本四書 (The Four Books edited and annotated by Zhu Xi). Tainan: Fuhon chubanshe, 1981: 229.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Tian Lai 田來, "Ming Qing xiaoshuo lilunjia lun xiaoshuo jianshang" 明清小說理論家論小說鑒賞 (Fiction theorists of the Ming and Qing on the critical appreciation of fiction). *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu* 明清小說研究 (Research on Ming-Qing Fiction). Number 6. Nanjing: Zhongguo Wenlian chuban gongsi, 1987; quote can be found on 317.

of seventeenth century literature, Li Yu, identified one of the parameters distinguishing fictional approaches to history and the tendencies of Standard Imperial Histories. In one of the stories in the collection, *Wusheng Xi* (Silent Operas), he states that there are things:

that Standard Imperial Histories perhaps best not record, but that unofficial histories in fact must record.<sup>52</sup>

The vernacular novel is a forum for the depiction of characters who would ordinarily either fall outside the scope of Standard Imperial Histories or perhaps had fallen victim to political processes in the compilation of Standard Imperial Histories. In particular, the *yanyi* 演義 (historical elucidation) category straddles the borderline between fiction and history, and can deal with both the private lives of public figures and the lives of those otherwise denied entry to the Official Histories<sup>53</sup> Good-Fortune-Robe Master, dealing with those characters overlooked in the Standard Imperial Histories states:

if amongst all things in Creation there were only Standard Imperial Histories, and no Omitted Histories, then to be sure those who obtain great repute for fine deeds and patriotic enterprises, and who blazon their celebrity through Heaven and Earth, would be granted imperishable fame. However, those of remarkable emotions and bold knightly spirit, unrestrained expression and heroic flamboyance, whom Standard Imperial Histories judge unworthy to record, would for the most part end up submerged in oblivion, heard of no more.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Li Yu, "Nan Meng Mu jiaohe sanqian" 男孟母教合三遷 (A male Mother of Mengzi moves home thrice for the sake of his son's education). In *Wusheng xi* 無聲戲 (Silent Operas), story 6. The context is the portrayal of a homosexual relationship in which the couple adhere to traditional Confucian values. See *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Collected Works of Li Yu), vol. 8. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992: 107 - 131. See especially: 109. The same quote appears in abbreviated form in McMahon (1988): 13.

<sup>53</sup> Plaks (1977): 321.

<sup>54</sup> Yuan Yuling (1975): *Suishi Yiwén xù* .

The vernacular novel deals with those overlooked in Standard Imperial Histories because they lived outside the confines of the imperial court or lacked recognition by the authorities, as Good-Fortune-Robe Master states:

alas! There are gentlemen of great integrity with valiant hearts but who are not connected with the court. There are bold men of character, who are fiercely true to their friends. Even though their casual discourses have the power to astound ... because they are unemployed by high government their mighty plans will become as sunk in obscurity as plants in the mist; and even though their talents cap the epoch...their great enterprises will be extinguished like clouds and dawn vapours.<sup>55</sup>

The novel is also a vehicle for redressing the errors of previous historical assessment, moreover, the novel also grants the subject a textual space to delineate a full and specific life. As Good-Fortune-Robe Master states:

even those [figures] great in conscientiousness and sense of moral justice, but who are at odds with their resplendent dynasty, will be dealt with briefly and with endless lacunae and one will hardly ever see them in their fullness.<sup>56</sup>

Thus it is clear that the function of the vernacular novel is not only to rescue these figures from obscurity, but to portray in full the lives of those figures maltreated by Standard Imperial Histories. As well as dealing with obscure characters, the vernacular novel also deals with some of the most famed figures in Chinese history. *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* deals with one of China's most reviled bad last emperors, whose debauched life had not previously been the subject of extended fictional treatment. The Manager of History Hall states in the *Yanshi Fanli* 艷史凡例 (General Notes on Sensational History) states:

there are minor histories about each historical generation of enlightened scholar-rulers and virtuous ministers, as well as deluded rulers and treacherous ministers, which raise their fragrant repute or make known their moral turpitude, in order to exhort and warn later generations. For example, *Lie*

<sup>55</sup> Yuan Yuling (1975): *Suishi Yiwen xu* .

<sup>56</sup> Yuan Yuling (1975): *Suishi Yiwen xu* .

*Guo, Three Kingdoms, Western and Eastern Jin, Water Margin, Journey to the West*, all these books and the *Twenty One Official Histories* moreover shall pass on unfailingly and may be called complete and perfect. Only the splendour of the era of Emperor Yang of Sui and the shocking and delightful acts [he] carried out, on the contrary, have yet to be described in a chronicle: truly this is an omission. Thus the details have been collected, classified and chronicled in a book, allowing those who wistfully remember the ancients to view contentedly the whole story.<sup>57</sup>

In this sense, the novel is able to create a textual space in which not only a variety of characters are displayed, but a space in which a variety of experiences can be described and events causally explicated. Therefore the vernacular novel has the capacity to become an active force in shaping cultural history. Moreover it is worth noting how in the previous quote, the inclusion of contemporary works of vernacular fiction alongside the collected Standard Imperial Histories. It is clear that the author of this preface considered vernacular fiction to be as capable of chronicling human experience as Standard Imperial Histories.

The third aspect of fictionality we should consider is the development of plotted narrative and the emphasis on causality: The vernacular novel by its evident interest in causality develops a plotted narrative unknown in historiography. Plotted narrative in traditional Chinese vernacular fiction presupposes a beginning, a middle and an end, a causal temporal sequence, as a result of which, some events and some characters acquire a primary importance, whereas other events and characters become peripheral and secondary - not to mention the events and characters that cannot be fitted into the plot at all.<sup>58</sup> As the Manager of History Hall states:

there are many known accounts of events in the Sui dynasty, but here one only records the wonderfully colourful events of emperor Yang ... There are many stories of emperor Yang's sumptuous splendours and dalliances with beautiful women. Only those I consider of profound sentiments and elevated charms have been culled and included: for instance, such events as his three

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<sup>57</sup> Taipei (1985) Volume 1: *Yanshi fanli* .

<sup>58</sup> Idema (1995): 364 - 365 passim.

military expeditions to Liaodong and his vacation avoiding the summer-heat in Fenyang are ordinary and unremarkable, and so I have dispensed with them and left them out of my publication.<sup>59</sup>

While traditional Chinese historiography is characterised by its deliberate avoidance of the plotted narrative, traditional Chinese historical fiction is precisely characterised by its adoption of the model of the plotted narrative and the resulting primacy of plot and narrator. As Idema has pointed out, rather than the dichotomy of fact versus fiction, the opposition between discontinuous presentation and plotted narrative sets off traditional historiography from historical fiction. Idema characterises fiction of the period 1550 - 1650 as embodying the “inverse proportionality” of virtue and its rewards, vice and its desserts. By inverse proportionality Idema asserts that in fiction of this type, the focus switches from one on conflicts between parties and persons, to one on the single person and his or her moral actions.<sup>60</sup> The moral choices (and their consequences) of each and every human being, including common contemporaries, have an exemplary function. In novels structured by inverse proportionality, the narrators see to it that the actions are described in their correct chronological sequence. The desire to date the narrated events may be due not so much to a desire to authenticate fictional elements as to the desire to render less ambiguous the chronology of the narrative, as a clear temporal sequence of suffering and reward, virtue and recompense, vice and its punishment, sin and its just deserts, which is essential to the meaning of the story.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, novelists were often split between, on the one hand, the desire to claim an imaginative and representative truth for their stories, and on the other the wish to guarantee and defend that truth-claim by reference to empirical facts.<sup>62</sup> This is evidenced in the testimony to authenticity

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<sup>59</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 1. *Yanshi Xu*.

<sup>60</sup> Idema (1995): 369.

<sup>61</sup> Idema (1995): 370.

<sup>62</sup> Lodge (1995): 153.

claimed in the prefaces of many late Ming works, a pertinent example described by the Manager of History Hall:

although this *Yanshi* may be called fiction, its quotes are authentic and it entirely respects the Standard Imperial Histories. Moreover it certainly does not artfully borrow a single event, or recklessly set down a single phrase to excite the delusions of worldly folk. Therefore there is a beginning and an end, there is proof and evidence. It not only pleases a passing fancy, but is sufficient to be selected for all time.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from this chapter. By adopting a Bakhtinian critical framework and acknowledging that genre is not just a rhetorical form of expression, but more importantly a new and specific view of the world in which form and vision are mutually informing, the differences between the Standard Imperial Histories and fictional representation of historicity become evident on the level of generic tendencies. Standard Imperial Histories represent a centripetal authority challenged by vernacular fiction through the creation of a textual space in which reinterpretation of history is achieved through the depiction of the specific contingencies of human existence. The vernacular novel's emphasis on causality develops a plotted narrative alien to historiography. While traditional Chinese historiography is characterised by its deliberate avoidance of the plotted narrative, traditional Chinese historical fiction is characterised by its adoption of the model of the plotted narrative and the resulting primacy of plot and narrator.

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<sup>63</sup> Taipei (1985): Vol. 1. *Yanshi Xu*.

CHAPTER THREE: THE IDENTITIES AND ROLES OF THE AUTHOR AND CRITICAL COMMENTATOR IN *SUI YANGDI YANSHI*

This chapter utilises Bakhtin's concept of polyphony to address the special roles of the author and the interlinear commentator and the implications of their relationship for the reader's understanding of the novel. Like many novels of the period, the identity of the contributors to the production of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is unclear: both the author and critical commentator adopted pseudonyms. This chapter demonstrates a discernible link in the choices of pseudonym made by the two contributors and shows that the choice of pseudonyms is an integral element in the dialogue between author and annotator - a dialogue which runs throughout the body of the text. The complex relationship between the identities of the author and the critical commentator is analysed and there is discussion of the implications this holds for a Bakhtinian reading of the novel.

As noted in Chapter One, the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony describes the special position of the author in a text. To enhance understanding of a work it is important to learn as much as one can of the author (and critical commentator) and the environment in which he lived. Polyphony asserts the value of meaningful dialogue and, within the boundaries of a textual space, and encourages the interaction of several voices - what is described in Bakhtinian terms as heteroglossia. An author committed to polyphony creates a fictional world in which many disparate points of view enter into dialogue. The resulting work encompasses several viewpoints and engages in a dialogue both the author, during the process of textual production, and the critical commentator during the addition of commentary. The absence of a unified, homogenous view allows the development of a dialogue both within the boundaries of the text and with the reader who, by reading the text, is drawn into a larger dialogue.

Problems of documentary evidence

The task of establishing viable identities for the author and critical annotator of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is problematic and presents an immediate obstacle to establishing a meaningful relationship between Qidong yeren and Bujing xiansheng. The absence of firm evidence as to the identities of the two parties, and the problem of gathering reliable information on the publication of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, prevent any definitive statements regarding the historical actuality of their relationship. Little personal data can be gleaned from extant records. I have examined places and dates of publication, however this process has provided fragmentary and vague information and led to no firm conclusion. One must therefore attempt to reconstruct the relationship on the basis of the choice of pseudonyms adopted by the two identities.

The purpose of the following section is twofold; first, a brief discussion of possible candidates for the authorship of *Sui Yangdi yanshi*; and second, a demonstration of the significance of the choice of pseudonym by the author and critical commentator.

Candidates for the authorship of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

Though the question of the identity of the anonymous author is not immediately obvious from historical data, attempts have been made to impute authorship from contemporary textual production. The eminent early twentieth-century author and critic Lu Xun put forward the proposition that the author was Feng Menglong (1574 - 1646).<sup>1</sup> Though Lu Xun provides no evidence to support this

<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun 魯迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略 (A Concise History of Chinese Fiction). Taipei: Gufeng, no date of publication: 172.

assertion, it has been repeated by a number of Chinese critics.<sup>2</sup> What is evident is that around the time that *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* was being written, a *huaben* short story, *Sui Yangdi yiyou zhaoqian* 隋煬帝逸遊召譴 (Sui emperor Yang's reckless pursuit of pleasure provokes a divine reprimand), was published in Feng's collection *Xingshi Hengyan* 醒世恆言 (Constant Words to Awaken the World).<sup>3</sup> This collection has a preface dated 1627, some five years before the preface and supposed date of publication of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. Lu Xun and others no doubt took into consideration Feng's reputation for recycling old materials and incorporating them into his own work, for example his revision of the vernacular novel *Pingyao zhuan* 平妖傳 (Suppressing The Demons' Revolt).<sup>4</sup> It seems reasonable also to take incorporation of the *huaben* tale into *Xingshi Hengyan* as evidence, at the very least, that literary interest about Emperor Yang's life and times was current; one might make the supposition, without firm evidence it must be added, that someone may have been compiling material in preparation for publishing a full-length novel.

In his ground-breaking work on Ming *huaben*, Patrick Hanan identifies a stronger candidate for the authorship of this particular *huaben*, and possibly the later novel.<sup>5</sup> Hanan proposes that the author is the person he identifies by the pseudonym Langxian 浪仙 (Free Spirited Immortal) and also known as Tianran Chisou 天然癡叟 (Foolish Old Man of Nature).<sup>6</sup> Hanan believes that Langxian was responsible for many of the tales in *Xingshi Hengyan* and probably also wrote the fourteen story

<sup>2</sup> Lu Xun's opinion is quoted in Sun Kaidi (1967): 43. The assertion is repeated, again without substantiation, in Meng Yao (1986): 126.

<sup>3</sup> Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, "Sui Yangdi yiyou zhaoqian" 隋煬帝逸遊召譴. In Feng Menglong, *Xingshi Hengyan* 醒世恆言. Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1988: 468 - 481.

<sup>4</sup> Feng Menglong, *Pingyao zhuan* 平妖傳 (Suppressing Demons' Revolt). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Hanan (1981). For an exhaustive study of the San Yan stories attributed to Feng Menglong see Hanan (1973).

<sup>6</sup> Hanan (1981): 120.

collection *Shi Diantou* 石點頭 (Rocks That Nod Their Heads).<sup>7</sup> Though circumstantial evidence suggests that Langxian was associated with Feng for several years from around 1627, Hanan was unable to track down the actual identity of Langxian.<sup>8</sup> Hanan's research provides some tantalising, if far from conclusive, clues which point to Langxian's involvement in the production of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. There are stylistic indications that Langxian may have composed the *huaben* tale concerning Emperor Yang on the model of its companion story in the *Hengyan* collection, "Jin Hailing zongyu wangshen" 金海陵縱欲亡身 (Jin Emperor Hailing throws away his life in pursuit of desire)<sup>9</sup>, though this latter and rather crudely constructed story may be the work of another author.<sup>10</sup> Hanan further notes that Langxian's tales tend to favour description of inner thought and emphasise psychology<sup>11</sup> and that Langxian's view of human beings represents them as being motivated by greed, lust and cruelty.<sup>12</sup> That these themes lie at the core of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is of interest but this does not in itself constitute evidence.

*Sui Yangdi Yanshi* has been recognised, however, as one of the first full-length vernacular novels to concentrate for almost its total length on an individual character. Idema has noted:

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<sup>7</sup> Expurgated copies of this collection are widely available though in most editions two tales are omitted. The first omission, made on political grounds during the Qing dynasty, concerns the gruesome tale of a massacre following a siege at Jiangdu (present-day Yangzhou) in which the heroine sacrifices herself to provide meat for the besieged inhabitants; the second tale, which also offended Qing official sensibilities, concerns an idealised homosexual love story. See Tianran Chisou 天然癡叟, *Shi Diantou* 石點頭 (Rocks That Nod Their Heads). 5th edition. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Hanan (1981): 121.

<sup>9</sup> Feng Menglong, 馮夢龍, "Jin Hailing zongyu wangshen" 金海陵縱欲亡身 (Jin Emperor Hailang throws away his life in pursuit of desire). in Feng Menglong (1988): 435 - 467.

<sup>10</sup> Hanan (1981): 138.

<sup>11</sup> Hanan (1981): 126.

<sup>12</sup> Hanan (1981): 132.

a comparable tendency to focus on a single central character in historical fiction from this period. Perhaps the finest example in this respect is the *Sui Yang-ti yenshih* 隋煬帝艷史, which narrates the story of Emperor Yang-ti's unbridled pursuit of satisfaction, resulting in his unavoidable eventual downfall. The focusing of the narrative on a single character is often accompanied by a comparable narrowing down of the space in which the action of the narrative takes place. Even if Emperor Yang-ti moves his court from Loyang to Yangchow, most of the action of the novel still takes place within the walls of the imperial palace.<sup>13</sup>

Idema further notes that the demands of creating a full-length novel depicting the life of a single character draw the two forms - *huaben* tale and vernacular novel - closer than one might expect:

if the narrator focuses on a single character, he rarely will have enough materials to fill out a hundred chapter novel...The anonymous author of the *Sui Yang-ti yen-shih*, who could draw on a large store of classical language *hsiao-shuo*, only managed forty chapters. During the final decades of the Ming dynasty the preferred genre of vernacular fiction, not surprisingly, became the *hua-pen* 話本 or novella.<sup>14</sup>

To investigate further the possibility that Langxian may also have authored *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, I examined textually distinct sections of narrative common to all renditions of the tale. This involved utilising those sections of the narrative which may be drawn out of the text in a more or less complete form, due to their structure or function; the most common examples being letters, proclamations, memorials or occasional poems. To this end I gathered three texts which fulfilled this criterion; one of the original literary sources concerning Emperor Yang, the *chuanqi* tale *Haishan ji* 海山記 (A record of seas and mountains)<sup>15</sup>, the *huaben* tale from *Xingshi Hengyan*, and the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. The piece selected was a memorial written by the

<sup>13</sup> Idema (1995): 368 - 369.

<sup>14</sup> Idema (1995): 370.

<sup>15</sup> Han Wo 韓偓, 'Haishan ji' 海山記. In Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, compiler, *Shuo Fu* 說郛 (The Apogee of Ephemera). Taipei: Xinxing, 1963: 558 - 561.

dwarf Wang Yi urging Emperor Yang to improve his moral behaviour.<sup>16</sup> A detailed comparison of lexical elements was carried out on the body of the extracted text in a search for textual discrepancies to discern the possibility of a closer textual conformity between the *huaben* and the linked chapter novel. I hoped to prove, at the very least, a common Ming lexical background, and, if possible, evidence pointing towards a single authorship. The *chuanqi* tale was adopted as the base text. The results, displayed in Appendix 2, reveal that of the eighteen lexical discrepancies between the base text and the other texts, five discrepancies conform directly to the base text and one appears very closely related to the *huaben*. However two of the discrepancies conforming directly to *Haishan ji* do not appear in the *huaben* tale at all. Eight discrepancies conform directly and another two are very close to the *huaben* tale, while the remaining two appear to be unrelated to either of the earlier texts. It became clear during this analysis that a number of sentences included in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* do not appear in either of the other two sources: this may be explained, in part, by the process of expansion required to construct a full-length structure of a novel. This evidence, while pointing to a certain lexical consistency between the *huaben* tale and *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, proved inconclusive: such consistency as exists may be attributed to geographical and chronological proximity.

A second approach was utilised in which the contents and internal chronology of the events depicted in the various texts was analysed. This raised a different set of problems; for example the *chuanqi* text was rendered ineffective for adequate comparison due to its historical distance from the other texts and its own limited narrative. Analysis of the *huaben* tale and the novel identified consistencies in chronology and relative agreement on key elements and events within the story. The differences between the two forms, however, meant major differences in the stylistics

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<sup>16</sup> Page references for the memorial are as follows, *Haishan ji* in *Shuo Fu* : 561; *Huaben* tale in Feng Menglong (1988): 479 - 480; *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* in Zhengzhou (1993): 429 - 431.

of the two renditions. The *huaben* tale is written in a language closer to classical Chinese, and due to its relative brevity, concentrates on a narrower range of events and lacks the psychological insight of the novel. Again, while there is circumstantial evidence suggesting a connection between the two works, no definite proof can be established.

Could Langxian be Qidong yeren, the author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*? One may tentatively conclude that the possibility of a link between Langxian and the literary group associated with Feng Menglong and his contemporaries and the production of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* may exist. As a final word on this subject, and by way of introduction to the next section, let us consider the words of the Unhindered Hermit who uses the phrase Qidong in the defence of new fiction in the preface to Feng Menglong's collection *Jingshi tongyan* (Common Words to Warn the World):

this present kind of popular elucidation of history in vernacular language is sufficient to support the shortcomings of Classic documents, [Standard Imperial] Histories and chronicles. Moreover, if someone were to say such 'village lees and market scraps' are not fit to serve to guests at a banquet, of what use are the chatterboxes of Eastern Qi [Qidong]? What twittering!<sup>17</sup>

#### Qidong Yeren and *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

The following section investigates the significance of the choice of pseudonym made by the author, Qidong yeren. I shall demonstrate three possible interpretations for the significance of meaning generated by the selection of the pseudonym Qidong yeren; first, a political theme as argued by Robert Hegel; second, a putative connection between the pen-name Qidong yeren and the Yuan dynasty statesman Zhang Yanghao;

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<sup>17</sup> See the preface written by Keyi Jushi 可一居士 (Unhindered Hermit) in 12th lunar month of the *jiazi* year of the *Tianqi* reign period (1624]). In Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, *Jingshi tongyan* 驚世通言 (Common Words to warn the world). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1983: 10.

third, a reading of the pseudonym which traces it back to the works of the Confucian philosopher Mengzi. I demonstrate that the latter is the most likely source; an assertion further supported by analysis, later in this chapter, of the pseudonym of the internlinear annotator of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* - Bujing xiansheng.

A political reading: Qidong yeren and Zhou Mi

The pseudonym of the author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, Qidong yeren 齊東野人, may be translated as ‘the uncultivated man of eastern Qi’,<sup>18</sup> or as Hegel styles him ‘the rustic from the sticks’.<sup>19</sup> Hegel justifies his translation on the basis that the four character phrase, “has been used as Americans might use ‘boondocks’<sup>20</sup> to indicate a place noted for its backwardness, the home of fools.”<sup>21</sup> He goes on to speculate that the pseudonym may refer to the thirteenth-century collection of personal notes on history, *Qidong yeyu* 齊東野語 (*Rustic Talk from Eastern Qi*) by Zhou Mi 周密 (c.1232-1298) which discusses the underlying reasons behind the dynastic cycle.<sup>22</sup> Zhou Mi hailed from Jinan in Shandong, site of the ancient state of Qi 齊, and as a child travelled extensively with his father. He served in various official positions during the Southern Song. As the dynasty shrank under external pressure, he moved with his family to Hangzhou, where he indulged in literary entertainments with other Song loyalists and wrote profusely on subjects ranging from poetry to historical musings. Zhou Mi’s *Rustic Talk from Eastern Qi* is a record of his personal thoughts on the historical dynastic cycle and appears founded in Zhou’s personal

<sup>18</sup> An ancient state roughly corresponding to modern-day Shandong.

<sup>19</sup> Hegel (1981): 241, Appendix 2.

<sup>20</sup> According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, boondocks indicates rough or isolated country, from the Tagalog term *bundok*, meaning mountain.

<sup>21</sup> Hegel (1981): 285, note 30.

<sup>22</sup> Zhou Mi’s *zi* was Gongjin 公謹 and his *hao* Caochuang 草窗. He adopted the pen names, Yangxiaoweng 陽嘯翁, Xiaoqi 蕭齋 and Sishui Qianfu 四水潛夫. For a short biography of Zhou, see Tan Jiading (compiler) 譚佳定, *中國文學家大辭典* (Dictionary of Chinese Literary Figures). Vol. 1. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1985: 843.

disillusionment with the collapse of civil government of Southern Song society and its military collapse in the face of attack from the North.<sup>23</sup>

While not making a definitive judgement on whether the putative relationship between Zhou Mi and Qidong yeren, Hegel makes the following conclusion on the choice of pseudonym:

our novelist likewise may have come ultimately from Shantung or, more likely, used this name to allude to his seriousness in writing about dynastic fall, albeit in novel form.<sup>24</sup>

Hegel's argument is reasonable and, as discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, a reading of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* as political satire is entirely possible, if limited in terms of literary criticism. This type of reading of the novel would be credible in light of the large number of disaffected literati in the late Ming who vented their frustrations through literary works: the work of Timothy Brook and Ray Huang, among others, has demonstrated the ideological confusion felt by many literati and government officials during the declining years of the Ming dynasty.<sup>25</sup> Peterson notes that leading government historians of the Late Ming bemoaned the fact that literati preferred cultural pursuits and were uninterested in what was termed substantive historical learning: clearly dissent vented through unofficial history was a more attractive channel for disaffected literati.<sup>26</sup> Although he does not further develop this argument, this discussion raises two vital points in respect to the significance of the authorial choice of pseudonym: the importance of the Shandong area in the adoption

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<sup>23</sup> A copy of Zhou Mi's work can be found in *Lidai Xiaoshi* 歷代小史 (Minor histories from every epoch). In (editor) Wang Yunwu 王雲五, *Lidai xiaoshuo* 歷代小史 (Minor histories from every epoch). Vol. 12. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu, 1969: roll 59.

<sup>24</sup> Hegel (1981): 285, note 30.

<sup>25</sup> See Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson (1998): 776 - 779.

of a pseudonym; and the seriousness of intent in consciously selecting the relatively new literary form of the linked chapter vernacular novel.

A historical interpretation- Qidong yeren and Zhang Yanghao

The pseudonym Qidong yeren was also adopted by the Yuan dynasty statesman and literatus Zhang Yanghao 張養浩 (styled Ximeng 希孟) who lived 1270 - 1329.<sup>27</sup> Given that the author of the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* also utilised the same pseudonym, the issue of the date of the authorship of the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* comes into question. When subjected to analysis this source may be seen to offer two possibilities: first, that Zhang Yanghao was the author of the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*; second, that the anonymous author of the novel deliberately adopted the pseudonym in the knowledge of its prior association with Zhang Yanghao. It is also possible that the author knew of the previous usage of the pseudonym yet chose to ignore this fact, or indeed that the author had no knowledge of its previous usage: this requires no further explication.

It would seem, *prima facie*, quite unlikely that Zhang Yanghao was the author of the novel. This can be demonstrated most obviously in the literary evidence provided in the prefaces of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. In the *Yanshi tici* 艷史題辭 dated June 1631, the writer refers to the author of the work as a friend:

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<sup>27</sup> See Chen Deyun 陳德芸, *Gujin bieming suoyin* 古今別名索引 (An index to alternative names of ancient times and modern). Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965: 586. For an overview of Zhang's career see chapter 65 (the biographies section) of *Yuan Shi* 元史 (History of Yuan). (Compiler) Song Lian 宋濂. Vol. 8. Beijing: Zhonghua 1976: 4090 - 92. For a list of his works see Wang Deyi, Li Rongcun (editors), *Yuanren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* 元人傳記資料索引 (An index to biographical material to Yuan dynasty figures). Vol. 2. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987: 1168 - 9; and for a selection and assessment of his literary works see Xue Xiangsheng 薛祥生, Kong Fanxin 孔繁信 (editors), *Zhang Yanghao zuopin xuan* 張養浩作品選 (Selected works of Zhang Yanghao). Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1987.

my friend is a descendant of Dongfang [Shuo] and has always had an abundance of gallant boldness and moral ardour, as well as being rich in talent and artistry, and, taking another name, he has constructed this compilation *Yanshi*, which concerns the affairs of Sui emperor Yang, setting them forth in detail.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that Zhang Yanghao had been dead for 300 years would appear to preclude a friendship with the author of the above piece. The writer of the preface, moreover, clearly highlights the fact that the pseudonym has been deliberately selected by this friend. Another preface, dated at around the same period, the 'Preface to *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.' has been identified by Sun Kaidi as the work of the author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.<sup>29</sup> Although it was not uncommon for works of vernacular fiction to be attributed to earlier figures (viz. the apparently ubiquitous talents of Luo Guanzhong) it would be difficult to credit such an advanced work of literature to such an early date of possible publication. One may feel confident in dismissing this possibility.

The second possibility is that the anonymous author deliberately utilised the pseudonym in the knowledge that a literate audience would be aware of its past usage by Zhang Yanghao and draw significance from this link. This would raise two important considerations: first, the motivation for such a conscious utilisation; and second what message it would be expected to convey. Were the novel to be read simply in political terms, the answers are not difficult to find. Zhang was seen as a paragon of moral rectitude, following in the traditional mould of upright scholar-

<sup>28</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 1. *Yanshi tici* 艷史題辭. Chinese text reads: 余友東方裔也, 素饒俠烈, 復富才藝. 托姓借字, 構艷史一編, 蓋即隋代煬帝事, 而詳譜之云. Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154-93 BC) was a literatus of Western Han who served the government during the reign of Han Wudi 漢武帝. He was famed for his wit and fondness for jokes to the extent that many legends grew up around him. He was a noted poet, especially known for *fu* poetry. For fuller details of his exploits see *Dongfang Shuo zhuan* 東方朔傳 (Biography of Dongfang Shuo). In *Han Shu* 漢書 (Standard Imperial History of the Han Dynasty). Chapter 65. (Compiler) Ban Gu 班固. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975: 2841 - 76.

<sup>29</sup> See Sun (1967): 43.

officials. His recorded behaviour fulfilled three criteria of the morally correct Confucian scholar, that is; sympathy for the material and spiritual plight of the people; great courage in remonstrating against what were perceived as unfair policies at the heart of government; and a profound belief in the moral nature of the universe as evidenced in the close relationship between human society and natural phenomena.<sup>30</sup> Zhang's biography in the *Yuan Shi* 元史 (Standard Imperial History of the Yuan dynasty) is an exemplar of the upright official. That many literati and officials felt that a lack of such virtues existed at court is clear. Zhang did not shy from brave remonstrations against unjust or incompetent policies and displayed an understanding of the effects of government policies on the people:

when appointed to the Department of State Affairs (*shangshusheng* 尚書省) Yanghao's manner of speaking did not change, when in office he continued to speak out on how [capricious] change in the law caused chaos in government and would cause disaster throughout all under heaven.<sup>31</sup>

Court intrigues and imperial extravagance were major targets for Zhang's criticism though his fearlessness was matched by a personal pragmatism in the face of immediate danger:

[Zhang] sent in a memorial of over ten thousand words on the present state of the government: 1) the dispensing of gifts is too lavish, 2) punishment and prohibition are too lax, 3) titles and enoblements are granted too lightly, 4) the government civil service is too weak, 5) natural resources are being used too excessively, 6) orders are too frivolous, 7) court favourites are too numerous, 8) customs and personal habits are too wasteful, 9) heterodox doctrines are too prevalent, 10) the arts of governance are too broad. His words were entirely morally upright. However the rulers of the nation could not accept

<sup>30</sup> The conception of a symbiotic relationship between human behaviour and natural phenomena may be traced back to the Han dynasty and found expression in the works of such philosophers as Dong Zhongshu. An example of Han syncretic thought system is his piece, "The Threefold Obligations of the Ruler". In (editor) T. De Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960: 178 - 181.

<sup>31</sup> *Yuan Shi*: 4091. The translation of *shangshusheng* comes from Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985: 412.

them...Yanghao, fearing a disaster, changed his name and withdrew from public life.<sup>32</sup>

[hearing that] the emperor wished to construct a mountain of lamps, [Zhang] passed on a memorial to Minister of the Left, Bai Zhu. Bai Zhu took his memorial and presented it for remonstrance saying, "The dynastic founder was on the throne for more than thirty years, and on every New Year's Eve it was forbidden to light lamps within the gates and walls of the imperial palace, to say nothing of a ban [on the lighting of lamps] in the inner palaces....Now with the construction of the mountain of lamps, this minister believes its playfulness to be small while its harm is great, its entertainment is shallow while its dangers are deep, and submissively begs that the way of upholding frugality and far-thinking be maintained and that a fondness for extravagant lavishness be prohibited." The emperor was greatly angered but on reading [the memorial] he was delighted and said, "Only Zhang Ximeng would dare to say this." He then dropped the plans and granted [Zhang] a bolt of gold threaded silk, and a bolt of brocade as a mark of his moral rectitude.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of a moral basis for behaviour in human society was extended to the relationship between government and the moral principles underlying the cosmos, principally embodied in the person of the emperor:

at this time [Emperor] Wuzong personally went to the Southern suburbs to carry out a sacrifice. Unfortunately, as he sent the ministers to carry out the sacrifice, a great wind suddenly arose and many people froze to death. Yanghao was present at the sacrifice site and declared, "Those responsible for the sacrifices are not humane, this is a manifestation of Heaven's changing."<sup>34</sup>

Zhang's strong sense of an organic relationship between the forces of nature and the moral behaviour of human society is evidenced by his approach to relieving a drought and famine which had ravaged Shaanxi province in the second year of the Tianli reign period (1330 AD):

[Zhang] dispersed his family holdings amongst the poor of the villages, as he rode his carriage along the roads; whenever he came across the starving, he aided them; when he came across the dead, he gave them a proper burial. The road passed Mount Hua, where he offered a sacrifice pleading for rain, he prayed and wept and could not get up, the sky suddenly grew dark and

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<sup>32</sup> *Yuan Shi*: 4091.

<sup>33</sup> *Yuan Shi*: 4091 - 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Yuan Shi*: 4091.

overshadowed, it rained for two days non-stop. When he reached his office he again offered sacrifice for rain at the state altar: great rain poured down, and the water level rose to three *chi* (ten feet) before stopping, the millet grew itself and the people of Qin were greatly delighted.<sup>35</sup>

The concerns seen above to be at the heart of Zhang's beliefs are also portrayed at length in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and would support the political reading of the work favoured by Robert Hegel. However, it is equally clear that Zhang represents another link with the region associated with the ancient state of Qi. Zhang Yanghao, like Zhou Mi, was born in Jinan 濟南 which in ancient times was part of the Warring States Period state of Qi 齊. As I will now demonstrate, the state of Qi appears to play an integral role in the selection of the pseudonym.

#### The locus classicus - Qidong yeren and Mengzi

Hegel observes the source of the phrase Qidong yeren in the works of the Confucian philosopher Mengzi 孟子 and speculates on its significance:

as a reference to Mencius [Mengzi], the name is ironically self-deprecatory; the novelist may not be a sagely 'gentleman,' and yet he has something worthy to present here.<sup>36</sup>

The locus classicus of the phrase Qidong yeren is the *Wan Zhang* 萬章 section of *Mengzi* 孟子 in which the philosopher replies to his student Xian Qiumeng 咸丘蒙 of Qi who has asked about ancient matters. Mengzi responds, "these are not the words of the moral scholar-gentleman, this is a tale from the uncultivated people of Eastern Qi." Later generations used the phrase to describe hearsay and so ridiculous or absurd talk is called 'uncivilised talk from Eastern Qi'.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Yuan Shi*: 4093.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel (1981): 285, note 30.

<sup>37</sup> See *Cihai* : 2152, under the phrase *qi dong ye yu* 齊東野語.

This particular section of *Mengzi* deals with the question of how the moral gentleman-scholar (*junzi*) maintains the balance between one's ethical obligation to obey the sovereign and one's observance of the norms of filial piety.<sup>38</sup> Xian Qiumeng, using a heterodox story about the accession of the legendary emperor Shun 舜, posits a view which supports the hypothesis that the moral scholar-gentleman is beyond subordination to the sovereign nor should he be treated as a mere son by his father. Mengzi refutes this line of argument saying:

these are not the words of the moral scholar-gentleman. These are tales told by the uncultivated folk in eastern Qi [Qidong yeran].<sup>39</sup>

Mengzi then goes on to demonstrate that Shun acted as an assistant to Yao 堯, rather than, as Xian had heard, acting as a joint ruler. Mengzi quotes Confucius:

just as there are not two suns in the sky, so there cannot not be two legitimate kings for the people.<sup>40</sup>

Xian then presses Mengzi on the question of filial duty saying that Gu Sou 瞽瞍, father of Shun, should have become his servant, quoting from the *Classic of Poetry* as proof:

*Classic of Poetry* states, "Of that which lies under the broad expanse of All under Heaven, there is no land which does not belong to the legitimate king; of all the tribute states there is not one which is not a subject of the legitimate king." So when Shun became Son of Heaven, may one dare ask how is it that Gu Sou didn't become his subject?<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Quotes taken from, *Mengzi duben* 孟子讀本 (A Mencius Reader). In *Zhuxi dingben Si Shu*, 朱熹定本四書 (The Four Books edited and annotated by Zhu Xi). Tainan: Fuhua chubanshe, 1981: 228 - 230.

<sup>39</sup> *Mengzi*. : 228. Chinese text reads 此非君子之言, 齊東野人之語.

<sup>40</sup> *Mengzi*. : 228. Chinese text reads 天無二日, 民無二王.

<sup>41</sup> *Mengzi*. : 229. Chinese text reads: 詩云“普天下, 莫非王土, 率土之濱, 莫非王臣”, 而舜既為天子矣, 敢問瞽瞍之非臣如何.

Mengzi treats this as a problem of misinterpretation and warns against the dangers of distorting what he reads as the original intention of the poem:

this is why in expounding *Classic of Poetry* one does not interpret a word in such a way as to distort a phrase, nor interpret a phrase in such a way as to distort the purpose [of the poem.]<sup>42</sup>

How does one avoid such distortion, adhere to the purpose and reach the truth as contained within the poem? Mengzi offers his own solution to the problem of interpretation:

we are successful in our interpretation when we let our thoughts conform to the purpose of the poem.<sup>43</sup>

To illustrate his point further by means of a concrete example from the same source, Mengzi quotes from *Classic of Poetry* regarding the collapse of the Zhou hegemony:

if one restricts oneself solely to a literal interpretation of a phrase then when *Classic of Poetry* says, “Of the remaining mass of Zhou subjects, not a single one has survived,” were we to believe these words in a literal sense, it would mean that Zhou had no subjects left at all!<sup>44</sup>

Finally Mengzi states that to become the highest type of filial son then one must honour one’s parents above all:

if one aims to be a filial son, nothing is of greater importance than honouring one’s parents with respect. If one would aim to honour one’s parents with respect nothing is of greater importance than supporting them by means of all under Heaven. To be the father of a Son of Heaven is the highest

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<sup>42</sup> Mengzi. : 229. Chinese text reads: 故說詩者不以文害辭, 不以辭害志.

<sup>43</sup> Mengzi. : 229. Chinese text reads: 以意逆志是為得之.

<sup>44</sup> Mengzi. : 229-230. Chinese text reads: 如以辭而已矣, 雲漢之詩曰“周餘黎民靡有子遺” 信斯言也, 是周無遺 民也!

degree of honour, to be supported by the whole world is the highest degree of support.<sup>45</sup>

It is my contention that this is the locus selected by the author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. The Mengzi section deals with three major problems: first the relations between the moral scholar-gentleman and the sovereign, that is whether loyalty and duty to one's supposed superior may conflict with personal morality; second, the filial relationship between the moral scholar-ruler and the patriarch; and finally, and perhaps most significantly, the question of interpretation not just of history itself but of the veracity and nature of literary interpretation of history. *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* incorporates all of these issues.

With respect to the problem of personal morality and duty to the state as embodied in the person of the emperor, the author makes clear his personal preference for the notion of individual responsibility and by cataloguing the excesses of Emperor Yang's desires and the compliance of ministers either too frightened to remonstrate or themselves actively engaged in scheming for power, he presents an extreme picture of the consequences of the denial of personal responsibility and the crossing of the boundaries of one's expected role in life.

The pertinence of the filial relationship between a ruler and a patriarch and its ironic role in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is relatively obvious. Emperor Yang certainly does not fulfil the Mencian ideal of the filial son, and far from supporting his father through all under Heaven, on the contrary kills him in order to gain all under Heaven.<sup>46</sup> A mania for construction projects and the collection of the material treasures and

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<sup>45</sup> *Mengzi*. : 230. Chinese text reads: 孝子之至, 莫大乎尊親, 尊親之至, 莫大乎以天下養, 為天子父, 尊之至也; 以天下養, 養之至也

<sup>46</sup> The spur for this act of patricide being the discovery by Emperor Wen of his son's desire to commence an incestuous relationship with his father's favourite concubine. He duly carries out the act on Emperor Wen's death.

resources of the empire may be seen as a part of Emperor Yang's expectation that, contrary to the norm, all under Heaven should support him.

The most relevant issue that can be derived from Mengzi to the author's conception of the function of novel is the third, that is, the interpretation of history and of literary interpretation of history. The orthodox Confucian view of the *Classic of Poetry* was to regard it as a document of veiled political commentary rather than as poetry for the sake of poetry: thus it had importance as a source of moral didactic judgement which presented a series of ethical guides to behaviour. Mengzi presents a dilemma to the reader, for if one seeks to know the true meaning of a poem (or, to extend the idea for our purposes, any work of literature) then one must be careful not to simply interpret it literally for fear of "distorting the purpose of the poem". We are instructed, instead, to let our thoughts conform to the "purpose of the poem". One should not restrict oneself to a literal interpretation but let our cultivated moral nature interpret the 'truth' and 'purpose' of the words. A radical reading of this viewpoint may imply a rejection of the notion of a sacred canonical text whose meaning is unambiguous and self-evident, in this example *Classic of Poetry*. Whether or not this is Mengzi's intention is impossible to ascertain, but, by dismissing literal readings and admitting to some degree the need for elucidation and explication, Mengzi places the burden of interpretation on the reader (or on a commentator such as Zhu Xi). Naturally he may have expected the reader to have been nurtured in Confucian moral precepts and reach a similar conclusion to his own, yet by undermining any standard of the absolute Mengzi has opened the debate to all-comers; the truth as one apprehends it being dependent on two factors: the generic form with which one is dealing, and the perception of the reader which, though one may be influenced by contemporary constraints, is nevertheless free from an absolute interpretation.

The assumption of the responsibility for interpretation by the reader may be understood both as an assumption of individual personal responsibility (as both author and commentator of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* constantly state), but also as a recognition that to reconstruct meaning from a literary work, the reader must enter into dialogue with the work. In raising the problem of interpretation the author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* thus implicitly leads the reader to question the explication offered not only by the standard sources of information on Emperor Yang (e.g. the Standard Imperial Histories) but is drawing attention to his own manipulation of sources and textual structuring. How, and on what basis, should one “adapt one’s thoughts” to the purpose of this novel? Such a desire for the reader actively to participate in the reconstruction of meaning within the bounds of a malleable fictional form may be seen as one of the keys to understanding the use of the apparently episodic structure and non-event based plots of Ming-Qing vernacular fiction as opposed to the tramelled linear plotting of the nineteenth-century Western novel. The function of plot, as demonstrated earlier, serves to establish favourable situations for creating dialogues with unforeseen outcomes. Plot exists so that it may be transcended by characters achieving extra-plot connections.<sup>47</sup> In the context of a historical novel such as *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, the development of plot is limited by basic historical facts: the author adheres to reign periods and historically verifiable date markers within the text. Even less is the author able to present an unforeseen ending to the novel since it is difficult to ignore the historical fact that the Emperor died at the hands of rebel ministers in 618. Indeed at the very start of the novel, the author and the critical commentator make clear the ultimate fate of the Emperor:

thinking of that “forest of flesh and sea of wine”, although the gratification verges on the crude, if one ponders however, the torch-light parade around Mount Li, then one sees that the enjoyment of such sensual pleasures is no vulgar matter. One must consider though, that this dashing romantic Son of Heaven lost his “rivers and mountains of brocades and silk”, all for the sake of two banks of willow trees; and that he saw the end of the rites at his ancestral

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<sup>47</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 247 passim.

altars for the sake of a few dragon barges. Thirteen years of riches and splendour, [*Bujing xiansheng states*] Emperor Yang's Spring and Autumn are defined by this, were gained at the price of an odious reputation for all eternity.<sup>48</sup>

Given that the readership of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* would inevitably know the outcome of the tale, the emphasis of plot development shifts from the need for linear development, towards the establishment of situations which test the boundaries of character typologies, and which challenge the assumptions of the readership. This is evidenced in two functions of plot development in seventeenth-century vernacular fiction: first, to elucidate the noteworthy events in the life of the Emperor; and second, by doing so, create plot situations in which the characters of the main protagonists emerge, in ways which both reflect inner psychology and the reactions of the fictional characters to the problems which face them. A pertinent example from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is how the Emperor, when faced with crucial decisions regarding imperial policy, often hesitates at important moments, and on several occasions, is distracted from policy by the arrival of concubines. The hesitation he displays, and the unwillingness to engage in duties of state, reflect the quotidian concerns and psychological realism which lie at the heart of the seventeenth-century novels such as *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and *Jin Ping Mei*.

Extra-textual elements such as critical commentaries and internal elements such as poetry, imported documents etc provide a historical and literary polyphony, which is a characteristic of Late Ming fiction.<sup>49</sup> The text inevitably leads the reader to search

<sup>48</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 1, chapter 1, page 5a; Zhengzhou (1992): 2. The phrase “the two banks of willows” refers to the construction of the Imperial Canal which was credited with ruining the Sui economy.

<sup>49</sup> The distinction between the two is often blurred by Chinese readers, viz. the massive influence of the pseudo-historical fiction of *San Guo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), as described in Winston L.Y. Yang, “The Literary Transformation of Historical Figures in the *San-kuo chih yen-i*: A Study of the Use of the *San-kuo chih* as a Source of the *San-kuo chih yen-i*”. In Yang and Adkins (1980): 47 - 84.

beyond the immediate events in the story and draw upon an array of linked themes and concepts with which to assess the novel; the interlinear commentator may question and harass the author and expound an alternative reading.

To conclude this section, it has been demonstrated that selecting the pseudonym Qidong yeren can be traced back to Mengzi. The purpose of the pseudonym is to undermine the centripetal authority of such texts as the Standard Imperial Histories and promote a literature which requires an active relationship between reader and text. The author sought to engender an awareness of literary manipulation and textual restructuring through a close reading of the novel and an acceptance of responsibility on the part of the reader, through his or her interpretation, to reconstruct the purpose and levels of meaning of the text.

Having demonstrated a locus for the choice of pseudonym for the author of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, the following section discusses the choice of pseudonym made by Bujing xiansheng, the critical commentator of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. I present two readings and demonstrate that a link exists between the pseudonyms selected by the commentator and author respectively.

#### Bujing xiansheng and *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*

The critical commentator of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is identified by the pseudonym Bujing xiansheng 不經先生 and is credited with the critical annotation (*piping* 批評) of the work, consisting of interlinear commentaries (*pangping* 旁評) found throughout the text and general commentaries (*zongping* 總評) placed at the end of each roll (*juan* 卷).<sup>50</sup> The inclusion of the pseudonym of the commentator on the title page of the first edition, next to that of the anonymous author, indicates the integral

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<sup>50</sup> I examine critical commentaries in Chapter Five.

role assigned to the interlinear commentator in the production and consumption of the work.<sup>51</sup>

I present two readings for the pseudonym Bujing xiansheng. The first is grounded in a political reading of the novel as presented by Robert Hegel.<sup>52</sup> The second interpretation shall be founded in a likely source for the term *bujing* and the possibilities offered by this definition for a linkage with the choice of pseudonym made by the anonymous author of the work and consequently for a discernible commonality of purpose on the part of the two influential identities concerned with the textual body.

#### A political reading: Emperor Yang and the Wanli Emperor

Robert Hegel sees in the novel a political criticism of the reign of the Wanli emperor (reigned 1563-1620), stating that the novel:

addresses the imperial institution directly, using historical events of the Sui dynasty....as a metaphor for contemporary Ming reality.<sup>53</sup>

Hegel goes on to note some of the “perfectly obvious” parallels between the novel and the political events of the reign.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Hegel insists that:

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<sup>51</sup> In this respect *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* differs from the later, primarily Qing dynasty, literati editions of the Four Masterworks, whose later critical annotators commented on works which already had attained a great degree of fame and popular recognition. In commenting upon and editing these earlier novels, late seventeenth-century figures such as Jin Shengtian, Zhang Chupo and Mao Zonggang were recasting the previous redactions into a form amenable to their own interests. This is a major theme examined by Satyendra (1989).

<sup>52</sup> Hegel (1981): see especially chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>53</sup> Hegel (1981): 85. Hegel gives a few examples of what he sees as parallels, though he does not gather detailed historical evidence. For examples see Hegel (1981): 91 - 94.

<sup>54</sup> Hegel (1981): 93.

neither the novelist nor the informed seventeenth-century reader could have failed to realise this similarity. Nor could they have failed to notice the danger of dynastic collapse so explicitly revealed in the novel, using the Sui as a metaphor for the crumbling Ming.<sup>55</sup>

The pseudonym Bujing xiansheng is suggestive of the role of a critic of orthodoxy, someone dedicated to exposing the shortcomings of both conventional historical accounts and accepted morality, and perhaps expressing alternative possibilities. By the late Ming period, the term *jing* had evolved into a generic nomenclature applied to all forms of established orthodox thought, whether it be the dominant Confucianism, increasingly influential Buddhism (heavily sponsored by the imperial family in the early Ming) or the established canon of Daoism (which was going through a revival in the late Ming).<sup>56</sup> Thus the breadth of criticism contained by the term *bujing* can be applied to all forms of orthodox and institutionalised thought, be it philosophical, political or religious.<sup>57</sup>

An ambiguous attitude towards common precepts of morality and commonly-held beliefs goes some way to defining the attitudes of Bujing xiansheng as displayed in his critical commentaries. One may also consider the deliberate choice not to follow the contemporary penchant for Daoist-inspired or geographically-based pseudonyms among his contemporaries.<sup>58</sup> The choice of a name denoting such a sceptical attitude

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<sup>55</sup> Hegel (1981): 103.

<sup>56</sup> For an general overview of religious developments in the Ming see Chan, Albert, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982: 108 - 128. Though he has a habit of making sweeping statements, Chan usefully points out the particular religious sympathies of the Ming emperors towards Buddhism and Daoism and the influx of foreign religions such as Islam and Christianity. See also Yü Chün-fang, "Ming Buddhism". *Cambridge History of China. Volume 8. The Ming Dynasty: 1368 - 1644. Part 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 893 - 952.

<sup>57</sup> Indeed established concepts in all three of these categories come under withering assault in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, e.g. cowardly Confucian pedants, avaricious ministers and mystic Daoist wanderers and alchemists all contribute in their own ways to the collapse of the dynasty.

<sup>58</sup> Consider the following examples; *Xiaoxiao sheng* 笑笑生 (Madly Giggling Scholar), the anonymous author of *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the Golden Vase)

towards orthodoxy perhaps illustrates the nature of his task. He delights in chastising senseless extravagance and rampant autocracy, yet denounces dull puritan narrowness and hypocritical Confucian pedantry, he revels in scathing attacks on immoral conduct and reckless incitement, yet praises rich aestheticism and colourful language. He reserves his fiercest criticism, however, for the perceived failure of political institutions, ranging from that of the imperial office, down through ministers to the failure of local officials to deal with bandits. Even the future rulers of the Tang dynasty, generally portrayed in Standard Imperial Histories as above criticism, are chastised for their disloyalty and underhand methods of revolt; for example when Li Yuan 李淵 tells his son Li Shimin 李世民 that rebellion is no small matter, since it results in eternal glory if successful and undying infamy if unsuccessful, Bujing xiansheng states:

not discussing moral obligation, instead discussing gains and losses, one may know the integrity of the minister of mean virtue cannot be maintained.<sup>59</sup>

Another example sees Li Shimin urging his father Li Yuan to rise up in righteous revolt, wipe out the other rebel forces and found his own dynasty, to which Bujing xiansheng states:

[by] first trapping [Li Yuan] with imperial concubines, then frightening him with the prospect of disaster, right from the start this establishment of one's claim is not morally correct.<sup>60</sup>

This censure of the moral laxity of venerated historical figures such as Li Yuan and Li Shimin is indicative of the commentator's freedom from the hypocrisy of

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published c.1618, Yuan Yuling's 袁于令 neutral *Jianxiaoge* 劍嘯閣 (Sword Whistle Studio) for his *Suishi yiwén* 隋史遺文 (Forgotten tales of Sui history) published c.1633.

<sup>59</sup> Taipei (1985): vol.6 chapter 36 page 1a. Chinese text reads: 不論義而論利害便知小臣節不能守矣.

<sup>60</sup> Taipei (1985): vol.6 chapter 36 page 3. Chinese text reads: 先以宮人劫之復以禍患恐之立議元自不正

official history written by the political victors and accurately portrays both the independence and general tenor of his views on the imperial institution, its occupants and those aspiring to the throne.

Given this presumed relationship between literature and politics, the use of the fictional form as a vehicle for veiled political comment and the use of history as a mirror for present reality, the reconstruction of meaning gained by a political interpretation of the pseudonym Bujing xiansheng, the outspoken critic of authority, seems reasonable. However this proposition is found lacking if one considers *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* as either more than a simple political allegory, or more importantly, as a work of literature both consciously and unconsciously seeking to transcend the boundaries of its historicity. The narrow limits placed on the reader's reconstruction of meaning engendered by a simplistic interpretation of the work as mere satire places some doubt on its validity as an adequate explanation for the total body of work,<sup>61</sup> moreover it fails to persuade the reader of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* who encounters a high degree of literary sophistication, in structural terms, breadth of reference and stylistic excellence, beyond the narrow confines of political allegory. This problem leads one to consider a possible alternative reading which may provide a clue as to the intentions and motives of the commentator in the choice of pseudonym.

#### An alternative interpretation: Bujing xiansheng and the ancient state of Qi

This alternative reading employs two approaches; first it considers the likely source of the pseudonym; and second it looks at the connections between the pseudonyms of the author and commentator.

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<sup>61</sup> This is not to deny the existence of satirical elements nor the possibility that the author intended it as a work of political invective. I simply wish to draw attention to those many aspects of the novel which lie outside the scope of previous studies such as that of Hegel.

### Bujing xiansheng and Zou Yan

The locus classicus for the phrase Bujing is a quotation taken from chapter 74 of the *Shi Ji* 史記 (Records of History) compiled by the great Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷. It relates to the life and thought of Zou Yan 騶衍 (c.305-240 BC), one of the founders of the *Yin Yang* and Five Elements (*yinyang wuxing* 陰陽五行) School of natural philosophy. On tracing the source to the appropriate section, “Mengzi Xunqing liezhuan di shisi” 孟子荀卿列傳第十四 (Biographies of Mengzi and Xun Qing #14),<sup>62</sup> one finds a biographical description of the life and times of Zou Yan and an elucidation of the basic tenets of his philosophy which I should like to quote at some length:

the state of Qi had three scholarly masters named Zou...the second was Zou Yan, who came after Mengzi. Zou Yan saw that rulers of the states were growing ever more debauched and profligate, and were incapable of placing value on moral virtue, through which they might embody in themselves [the principles in] the *Daya* Odes, and extend this benefit to the mass of common people. He therefore undertook a deep examination of the phenomena of the increase and decrease of *Yin* and *Yang*, and wrote of their strange and distant transformations in the essays entitled *Zhongshi* 終始 (Alpha and Omega) and *Dasheng* 大聖 (Great Sage) which totalled more than one hundred thousand words. His words were free-thinking (*bujing* 不經), maintaining the need first to examine small objects, and extend this to large ones until one has reached what is without limit. He spoke first about contemporary times and from this went up to the times of the Yellow Emperor, all of which has been recorded by scholars. Moreover, he followed the great events of rise and fall throughout the ages, and by recording their portents and social institutions, he could extend his survey backward into the far distant past, to the time when heaven and earth had not yet been born, to what was profound and abstruse and to the origin which could not be differentiated. First he classified the names of the noteworthy mountains and great rivers of China, its connecting valleys and birds and beasts, the produce of its waters and soils, and that which was rare and valuable among its manifold things. From this he extended his survey to what lies beyond the sea and that which people cannot see.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi Ji* 史記 (Records of History). Vol. 5. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973: 2343 - 50. For further information on Zou Yan's philosophy see Fung Yu-lan, Derk Bodde (translator), *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. Vol.1. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937: 159 - 61.

<sup>63</sup> *Shi Ji*: 2344.

The piece then goes on to describe Zou's theories on the geography of the world in which he radically altered the prevailing concept of China's centrality, reducing it to merely one of eighty-one continents. It then offers a Confucian appraisal of what Sima Qian viewed as the foundations of Zou's thought:

yet if we return to their fundamentals, they all rested on the moral virtues of humane kindness, moral rectitude, restraint and frugality, and on the proper practice of the relations between ruler and subject, those above and those below, and among the six familial relationships. It is only the beginning [of his theories] which were excessive. On first encountering the arts of his doctrines, kings, nobles and great officials were struck with fear and tried to transform themselves, but later were unable to put them into practice.<sup>64</sup>

The final section describes the high status Zou was accorded in his travels around the rival states and contrasts this with the treatment of Confucius and Mengzi:

it is for these reasons that Master Zou was held in high regard in the state of Qi. On visiting the state of Liang, King Hui came out to the suburbs of the city to greet him, according him the courtesy shown by a host to a greatly honoured guest. When he visited the state of Zhao, the Prince of Pingyuan walked by his side, personally brushing the dust off his mat. For example, in the state of Yan, King Zhao acted as a vanguard, carrying a broom to sweep the ground in front of him, and asked to assume the status of a disciple in order to receive [Zou's] teaching. Stone Tablet Palace (碣石宮) was constructed [for Zou's benefit], and the king came personally to receive his instruction. He wrote *Zhuyun* 主運 (Principal Motive Force of the Cosmos). On all of his travels, lords and dukes treated him with honours and respect of this kind. See how this compares with Confucius starving in Chen and Cai, or Mengzi arrested in Qi and Liang!<sup>65</sup>

The final assessment of Zou's thought is one of admiration for its undoubted genius, tempered by caution over its application:

one must first create harmony within oneself then lead others into the great moral cosmic law. Although Zou Yan's words were not conventional, in any

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<sup>64</sup> *Shi Ji*: 2344.

<sup>65</sup> *Shi Ji*: 2344 - 45.

event don't they have the meaning of the ox tripod? [i.e. great ideas must be applied appropriately and not to petty effect].<sup>66</sup>

While Sima Qian does not directly quote from the works of Zou Yan, now unfortunately non-extant, the power of his wide-ranging mind and his great influence on later philosophers are both clear from the above passage.<sup>67</sup> The biography of Zou Yan from *Shi Ji* pre-empts many of the concerns raised by the commentaries of Bujing xiansheng and indeed the novel as a whole seems to echo the radical beliefs laid out by Zou Yan (though of course few of these ideas were exclusive to his thought). A few examples of these subjects which inspire the greatest amount of critical annotation (beyond that concerned with the literary skills and techniques of the author) include;

- The extremes of debauchery and profligacy shown by emperors and imperial officials, and the resulting failure to spread moral virtue through personal example to the mass of common people. This is evidenced by the plethora of commentaries on the subject of the behaviour of Emperor Yang and the other main characters in the novel, the demands for a return to moral rectitude are, however, rather more pro forma than the numerous examples of ministers who are berated for corruption and disoyal plotting.

- An examination of history going back to the venerated past. Bujing xiansheng attacks the hypocritical use of models of the past and highlights the fragility of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Shi Ji*: 2345.

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of the philosophy of Zou Yan and its relation to other contemporary works and its lasting influence on cosmology see the following works; Fung (1937): 159-168; Fung Yu-lan 馮友蘭, Derk Bodde (translator and editor), *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, Toronto: Macmillan, 1966; reprint Taipei: Shuangye shudian, undated. See especially chapters 12 and 23.; Hsiao Kung-chuan 蕭公權, F.W. Mote (translator), *A History of Chinese Political Thought*. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979; reprint Taipei: Caves Books, 1980. See especially chapter 1: 62 - 65.

imperial institution in the face of the temptations presented by the illusion of unlimited power and the destructiveness of insatiable desire. While commentating critically on various historical figures such as The First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇帝, Han Emperor Wu 漢武帝 among others, this portrayal of moral corruptability is principally achieved by means of a study of one man, Emperor Yang, and the extension of this to an overview of the imperial institution, what may be seen as a literary realisation of maintaining the necessity first to examine small objects, and extend this to large ones until one has reached what is without limit.

- Such virtues as humane kindness, moral rectitude, restraint and frugality, and the proper practice of state and personal family relations. The commentator highlights various examples of Emperor Yang's transgressions, e.g. his patricide, incestuous liaison with his father's concubine, execution of ministers for disagreeing with him, reckless construction projects leading to massive casualties and hardship among the populace etc.

- A complex attitude to Confucian orthodoxy. This aspect of the commentaries is complicated by an uncertain attitude to Confucian precepts and is perhaps more concerned with attacking platitudes and homilies than seeking to present an alternative mode of philosophy. In particular Mencian philosophy appears to be a target for comment.

- *Yin Yang* and the pseudo-sciences. There are numerous comments on the placement of five elements thought and pseudo-scientific theories, and the influence on human affairs of supernatural phenomena such as ghosts and wandering mystics.

- A love of the fanciful and grandiose. There are many comments on the wondrous (*qi* 奇) and strange (*yi* 異, or *guai* 怪), and a great delight in pointing out the limits of human knowledge in the face of the immensity of the universe.

Given the lack of any direct documentary evidence regarding the identity of Bujing xiansheng and the reasons behind his choice of pseudonym, we can only offer circumstantial evidence, yet on the basis of the above comparison we may state that there appears to be a great possibility that the commentator did derive the comment “free-thinking” (*bujing*) regarding Zou Yan for his selection of the pseudonym Bujing xiansheng.

In order to further substantiate the proposition that the *Shi Ji* section quoted above is the source for the pseudonym, one may investigate whether the choice of pseudonym made by the commentator can be seen to have any connection to that of the author. In doing so we may approach an understanding of both their relationship and a possible philosophical basis for the assemblage of the work.

#### Connections between Qidong yeren and Bujing xiansheng

One may explore this proposal by considering the connections with the other pseudonym in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, that of Qidong yeren. An assessment of the philosophical tendencies of the two identities is achieved, a common ground of design is identified.

It can be demonstrated that the process of selection of pseudonym by both the author and the commentator was linked to a nexus of shared meaning on three levels; First, the common derivation of both pseudonyms from sources relating to the ancient

state of Qi; second, the shared link to unorthodox ideologies; and third, a clear link between Zou Yan and Mengzi.

First, the common derivation of both pseudonyms from sources relating to the state of Qi 齊 during the Warring States Period (c.480-221 BC). I have demonstrated that the author, Qidong yeren, selected a direct reference to the ancient state of Qi, while, as posited above, the pseudonym of the commentator may be traced back to the biography in *Shi Ji* of the philosopher Zou Yan who also hailed from Qi. The state of Qi was a great centre of learning in pre-imperial China.<sup>68</sup> In particular the state of Qi was famed for being the home of the *Yin Yang* and Five Element School, a fact which has been attributed by Fung Yulan to its position bordering the sea where one might hear strange stories.<sup>69</sup> During the Warring States Period, the telling of weird and wonderful tales was usually attributed to the people of Qi, who were famed well into the Han dynasty for their boastfulness and tendency to telling outrageous tales, as evidenced in this quote from *Han Shu* 漢書 (Standard Imperial History of the Han Dynasty):

from ancient times to the present the people of [Qi] have delighted in the arts of the classics, and overly-concerned with [the pursuit of] a reputation for merit, being unrestrained in expression and sufficiently knowledgeable. Their failings are extravagant boastfulness and a tendency to form cliques. Their words and conduct are inconsistent, they are empty and deceitful and do not accord with reality.<sup>70</sup>

Though in later times the views of some branches of Qi thought, especially those dabbling in magic and alchemy, were regarded as subversive and dangerous and

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<sup>68</sup> The great academy of Jixia 稷下 maintained by the Dukes of Qi produced such luminaries as Zou Yan and Xunzi 荀子. Moreover one should also note that Mengzi served in the government of Qi. See Hsiao (1980): 145 - 147.

<sup>69</sup> Fung (1937): 168.

<sup>70</sup> The quote is taken from chapter 28b of *Han Shu* 漢書 (1975): 1661. See also Fung (1937): 168-69. Chinese text reads: 故至今其土多好經術, 矜功名, 舒緩闊達而足智. 其失夸奢朋黨, 言與行繆, 虛詐不情.

condemned by historians, Zou Yan was exempted from this criticism by virtue of the belief that his ideas had been distorted by these misguided followers of the Five Element school.<sup>71</sup> In any case it is clear that Qi was regarded as a hotbed of original ideas, and what was subsequently regarded as heterodox thought. The conscious choice of association with the state of Qi is significant in its implications not only for detecting the intent of the author and commentator but also for the philosophical underpinning of the work.

Second, both commentator and author are linked to unorthodox ideologies, the commentator by virtue of his association with the free-thinking philosophy of Zou Yan and the author as evidenced in the quote from the works of Mengzi discussed above in which Mengzi castigates one of his students for spreading mistaken views and using spurious arguments, saying:

these are not the words of the moral scholar-gentleman. These are tales told by the uncultivated folk in eastern Qi.<sup>72</sup>

Third, expanding on the previous point, there is the clear link between Zou Yan and Mengzi as stated in the *Shi Ji*. The biography of Zou Yan is placed in that section of *Shi Ji* coming under the title “Biographies of Mengzi and Xun Qing chapter fourteen” and, more specifically, Mengzi and Zou Yan are tied by being named as the second and third of the three Zou scholarly masters of Qi. Furthermore, within the text and commentary of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, there are many references to the philosophy of Mengzi and even an explicit (and in its context somewhat critical) reference to his person and ideas:

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<sup>71</sup> Fung (1937): 169, speaking of the judgement of Sima Qian in *Shi Ji* chapter 28b.

<sup>72</sup> *Mengzi* (1981): 228.

this further develops Mengzi's theory on weakness for sensual attraction.<sup>73</sup>

In light of the arguments presented here and the sourcing above of the phrase *bujing*, there is indeed a demonstrable connection between the pseudonyms selected by author and commentator. This connection is intimately associated with radical ideas current in the state of Qi during the Warring States Period and can be seen to criticise or refute the philosophy of Mengzi. This does not necessarily mean that either party intended to compose the work on the philosophical basis of the writings of Zou Yan but certainly that the free-thinking and unconventional ideas he represented were attractive to them, and perhaps that they would prove useful in attacking Confucian orthodoxy as represented by Mengzi.

Before concluding this section, one might briefly pause to consider two implications arising from the above discussion. First, there appears to be a common ground of interest between the author and commentator based on the radical philosophy of ancient Qi. In the novel, orthodox thought (principally Confucian) and irrationality (Daoist mysticism is also vigorously attacked) are exposed to withering criticism both through direct comments and implicitly through the depiction of its representatives, that is the emperor, noblemen, ministers and wandering Daoists. Second, an underlying narrative device which, though outside the scope of this present thesis, could prove useful as an analytical tool in reconstructing the textual meaning of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, is the literary implication of the Five Elements philosophy of Zou Yan. Within the narrative structure of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, one can discern a pattern of Five Elements activity. This is most apparent in the names of the main protagonists, though these names are in the main simply historical fact (this very

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<sup>73</sup> Taibei (1985): vol. 3 chapter 15 page 7a; Zhengzhou (1993): 165. The comment refers to Lady Sha criticising selfish love saying that imperial favour should be spread as widely as possible, as a public duty and act of imperial benevolence. Chinese text reads: 再進一步孟夫子好色論矣

historical fact may have drawn the narrative shapers to the subject) but also in the symbolism and ordering of events, and within the poetry of the novel. Further study of the novel may lead one on to discovering a narrative strand within the novel which is governed by Five Elements philosophy.<sup>74</sup>

This section of Chapter Three has achieved the following conclusions; First, we may trace the origin for the choice of the pseudonym made by the commentator of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* back to the *Shi Ji* and more specifically to that section dealing with the teachings of the *Yin Yang* Five Elements School philosopher Zou Yan. Second, the choice of this pseudonym contains a demonstrable link to that of Qidong yeren. Third, the link described above would seem to indicate a common ground of cultural reference on the parts of the author and commentator in identifying themselves with heterodox concepts and criticism of orthodox Confucianism associated with Mengzi.

#### The relationship between author and critical commentator

The following section examines the parameters of the literary relationship between Qidong yeren and Bujing xiansheng. Having the perspective of a distant observer, the modern reader may apply the concept of polyphony to achieve a creative understanding of two related spheres of literary interaction: the reconstruction of a connection between the projected identities of author and annotator; and a sense of the complex relationship between the narrative body and critical annotation. To achieve creative understanding close textual analysis is combined with an appreciation of the multiple-voiced dialogue inherent in the author-annotator-reader affiliation. This section specifically addresses the following problems: the issues raised by adopting the author/subject or the text/reader as the centre of signification; the possibilities

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<sup>74</sup> The use of Five Elements imagery is by no means unique to *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. For an example of its use in the pre-modern novel, *Honglou Meng*, see chapter 4 of Plaks (1976). This potentiality remains, however, a subject to be pursued elsewhere.

offered by considering the author and annotator as maintaining separate or joint identities, and a brief discussion of the significance of the authorial narrative text and its relation to interlinear critical annotation.

The author/commentator as a centre of signification

Given the lack of clearly identifiable parties and reliable historical data - in effect the failure of a factually verifiable author-subject axis along which to work - one must make clear it that in discussing the relationship between author and critical annotator one is actually considering a connection discernible primarily, and for the purposes of this chapter, solely, through a close surface reading of text, in this case between the narrative construct of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* as devised by Qidong yeren, and the critical commentaries threaded through the narrative body by Bujing xiansheng. One could perhaps extend this notion to assert that one is considering the relationship between a certain narrative text and a certain related critical annotation in isolation, and that the identities of the two presumed writers are irrelevant.<sup>75</sup> This view may, under certain circumstances, merit consideration, especially when one also takes into account the lack of concrete data about the author and annotator. Yet the decision to utilise pseudonyms and the process of selection intentionally undertaken by the two parties, compel the reader to adopt some consideration of the potential significance of these ideology-projecting devices, thus reminding the reader of the presence, albeit potentially obscure and problematic, of the author and annotator. To achieve the necessary degree of reconstruction of meaning relevant to an understanding of the literary construct, one must comprehend that the conscious decision to select pseudonyms must be considered as an explicit and significant literary act. In doing so, the author and interlinear commentator create new identities which have been selected with the purpose of expressing their authorial and

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<sup>75</sup> See Chapter Five for an extended discussion of this point.

commentarial intent. Therefore the pseudonyms must be considered integral elements to an understanding of the totality of the narrative body. Analysis of the pseudonyms exposes the basic intentions of the author and annotator in designing the work and may indeed give some clue as to the philosophical or ideological basis for the novel. The fact that, as demonstrated earlier, the pseudonyms of the author and annotator were never linked to any other work of fiction, would indicate that they were selected for a definite purpose, rather than as simple noms-de-plume as was common to many literati authors.<sup>76</sup> Thus, by viewing the pseudonyms as important elements of the work, which are subject to textual criticism as any other element of the narrative, one may acknowledge and utilise the authorial presence, while at the same time not losing sight of the importance of reader-based reconstruction of meaning from the text.

One begins with the recognition that the major burden of reconstructing the signification of the link between the two identities is placed upon the reader. In the case of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, because of the shortage of direct historical information, the reader is at some disadvantage over the degree to which the text is based on the personal experiences of the author.<sup>77</sup> By accepting the task of reconstructing this relationship, it is the reader who activates the text and who interprets the process of literary interaction taking place between the two stated identities.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the primary centre of signification must move from the historical author-commentator/subject axis to that of the text/reader. This form of internal analysis will enable one to assess whether or not one may distinguish the unique contributions of

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<sup>76</sup> Examples of use of commonly used pen-names by contemporary authors which were instantly recognisable to late Ming readers include Feng Menglong's *Jiwu longzi* 吉吳龍子, Ling Mengchu's *Jikong guanren* 即空觀人 Li Yu's *Li Liweng* 李笠翁.

<sup>77</sup> While it is likely that Qidong yeren was an educated member of the literati, as noted in Chapter One, there is no evidence as to his circumstances unlike for example the reams of work on the life of Cao Xueqin, author of *Honglou Meng*.

<sup>78</sup> This argument has been elucidated in Wang (1992): 2 - 13 passim. Wang devotes the first chapter to a discussion of intertextuality and interpretation, and indeed bases her entire book on a broad notion of intertextuality. See Chapter Five for criticism of some aspects of Wang's position.

the author and the annotator to the whole entity of the work, and through this assessment discern the nature of their relationship.

### Concepts of identity

Having established the necessity of considering the text because of a lack of extra-textual (that is historical or documentary) considerations, one must first set out some basic assumptions. First, irrespective of whether or not the two parties were acquainted, or perhaps were even one and the same person, the critical commentator, by virtue of the very act of critical annotation, has shown a commitment to the novel, and regards it a suitable vehicle for political, social and philosophical comment. The act of embedding the interlinear commentaries within the body of the narrative indicates both a close attention to those internal literary structures generating meaning within the text and a desire to explore the ideological values underpinning the novel. Second, in commenting critically on the events, characterisations and moral standpoints within the novel, the critical commentator may be seeking to impose an external, seemingly independent interpretation on the author's work. Not only is this an expression of the annotator's own opinions on these matters, but also through this critical annotation, the commentator can be seen to be evaluating the literary merit and moral judgement of the author.

To investigate further the nature of the relationship between author and critical commentator, I examine two theoretical potentialities; first, the author and critical commentator as separate identities; and second, the author and critical commentator as one and the same person. By doing so one may answer questions raised by the relationship between the body of text, itself a subtle and open-ended narrative, and the ostensibly separate apparatus of the critical commentary.

Author and critical commentator as separate identities

Should one adopt the assumption that the author and critical commentator were separate identities, two potentialities are open to investigation: First, that the putative author, Qidong yeren, assembled and presented a completed work which was then subjected to critical commentary by an autonomous annotator, Bujing xiansheng. Second, that there was an ongoing process of textual assembly and critical commentary between two participants which formed a mutual influence on the evolution of the total entity of the work. The former situation is relatively clear-cut, while the second presents a relationship so intermeshed that it would be extremely difficult to unravel the threads of authorial narrative from the twine of critical commentary, moreover, it raises the question of the whole purpose of including commentary in the work. The second assumption also presents a complicated possibility that in working in a partnership or with a large degree of awareness of the other partner, the author and annotator may have reached a consensus on the ideological stance of the work. This situation would preclude the possibility of a dialogic work, since the inherent potentiality within the novel would be suppressed as author and commentator circumscribed meaning and dominated both text and textual interpretation. A reading of the novel and its critical commentary reveals, however, an open-endedness within the work. That is to say, it appears that each contributing party was content to allow the other to work within the limitations of his own form and express his literary ideas in such a way as to both enclose the work in a novelistic form and leave it open to multiple interpretation. I discuss this point in more detail in the next chapter.

This joint accord would in practice resemble the potentiality described in the section below on common identity, while retaining the polyphony of a coming together of individual outlooks. However, one shall pass over this issue for the

moment and state that in both of the above scenarios, one is dealing in essence with the world-views of two separate individuals regardless of the degree to which they may choose to exhibit a similar outlook, with the author presenting his world-view in the form of an extended and structurally complex narrative, while the commentator adopts a critical mode of pithy comment, commonplace moral pronouncements, conscious deployment of historical intertextuality, and a rudimentary analysis of literary structures.<sup>79</sup> The critical commentator adopts many rhetorical devices to persuade the reader of the validity of his interpretation and actively seeks to draw the reader into reaching the same conclusions as his own, creating an independent literary space within the boundaries of the text. This commentary encompasses a range of roles, whether in a potentially adversarial role in relation to the text as assembled by the author, or in expressing sympathy for the views of the author. It is undeniable, however, that the critical commentary affords the reader the opportunity to reinterpret the potential relations within the text and guide one towards an understanding of the construct of the text established by the author and the critical commentator, thus maintaining the effectiveness of the polyphony of competing voices found in the text.

The adoption of this proposition, emphasising as it does the independence of outlook and purpose of the two parties, and presumed desire of the commentator to dominate both the author and the reader, would lead one to conclude that the role of the commentator is essentially to comment upon, highlight, conform to or contradict the views of the author. The commentator would then be filling two roles: one concerned with highlighting the technical structure of the novel while the other could be seen as a more ironic role, acting as an annotator on human behaviour as depicted within the novel and thus as judge of the philosophy of the author.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> I argue below that these active elements may be altered by and in turn themselves alter the context in which they are placed.

<sup>80</sup> By irony I simply mean a divergence between surface appearance and textual intention, not irony as defined by Plaks in his *Plaks* (1987) in his preface, p 32. I have reservations about Plaks all-encompassing definition of irony since the incessant need

Author and critical commentator as a common identity

The implications of the author and critical commentator sharing the same identity must be treated with circumspection. Were the author and commentator the same person, this would give the disingenuous appearance of independent world-views and the reader, led to believe that there are two identities - as implied by separate pseudonyms shaping the production of the text - may feel betrayed by the apparent duplicity of the author in presenting an illusion of polyphony. One cannot deny, however, that the text, as assembled by the author, is certainly capable of containing a polyphony of conflicting voices. Indeed the very inclusion of historical sources (e.g. contemporary documents, quotes from historians, references to historical figures), the literary works of previous authors (from the original *chuanqi* sources through to borrowed Tang *shi* and Song *ci*) and commonly held maxims and proverbs necessitates such a polyphony. Yet the nature of this apparent polyphony must be viewed with caution, and its effect on the critic/reader judged according to its offer of a true polyphony leading to a dynamic text created by a diverse mass of competing voices<sup>81</sup> or simply the appearance of false polyphony which masks an attempt by the author/commentator to lead the reader to a fixed point of view (what Bakhtin would term monologism). The potential confusion created by such a mass of competing voices would offer the author/commentator the role of guide, leading the reader through to the moral purpose of the tale, if such a moral purpose actually exists in the mind of the author. On the other hand, the polyphony could allow the text to display an underlying principle which governs the text without imposing the rigid framework of a fixed moral purpose. On a pragmatic level, the adoption of an alter-

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to strip away surface meaning in search of deeper meaning may lead to the discarding of useful surface elements; it also presupposes a unified, controlling perspective which may not actually exist.

<sup>81</sup> The following discussion draws on views expressed by Satyendra (1989): 14 - 18.

ego would also afford the author the opportunity to comment on his own work and perhaps to air opinions too subversive to include in the body of the text. Such cross-reflection of opinion can be seen as another facet of dialogism.

Monological devices may be utilised by the author/commentator within a dialogical text, for example by assuming the mantle of the ordinary reader, that is a seemingly neutral observer at some distance from the text, the author/commentator may in fact be guiding the reader towards anticipated and desired reactions in certain circumstances. This is often achieved by the employment of such rhetorical techniques as short exclamatory remarks which have the appearance of spontaneous cries of delight or horror added to the text by the commentator in the guise of a simple reader. Yet the breadth of historical reference and its complexity, the frequent seemingly contradictory statements made by the author/commentator, and the subtle placing of statements prefiguring and reflecting events within the novel, seem to indicate an awareness of the manifest possibilities to be drawn from a reconstructed reading of the text.

By accepting this proposition, the annotator could be perceived as intermeshed within the construct of the text and not, unlike the previous proposition, seeking actively to create a space within the body of the work. Furthermore by drawing a seemingly independent line of responses and intertextual borrowings, the author/commentator, both consciously and unconsciously, adds another layer of depth to the body of text, without seeking to impose a template of knowledge which foists its values on the text and the reader.

The narrative text and its relation to critical commentary

Underlying the above argument is the conception of the narrative text and its relation to critical annotation. A short investigation of these subjects may lead to some resolution of the problems raised in the preceding sections.

The narrative text is essentially a multi-layered construction based on the foundation of the author's knowledge of cultural tradition, imagination, personal prejudices and wish to make a creative statement on the world. It is both a conscious statement and an unconscious revelation of cultural tradition. One must be cognizant that implicit within these elements is the notion that the text, with or without the author's awareness, contains referents based elsewhere. Often these may be placed unconsciously into the body of the text and transformed, or placed consciously and purposely reactivated. Moreover one can state with a high degree of confidence that while the author may indeed place a reference into the text with a deliberate and fixed intent, there exists the probability that the reader may in fact perceive a revalorisation of that reference beyond that intended by the author,<sup>82</sup> or in fact there may occur a non-perception of the reference by the reader resulting in a repression and loss of meaning.<sup>83</sup>

The text enjoys an open-ended relationship with its historical and literary sources as well as a constantly evolving relationship with the constraints of cultural tradition, in turn borrowing (again consciously or unconsciously) from these sources and commenting on them, selecting and discarding, making oblique judgements on the

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<sup>82</sup> Wang Jing (1992): 15 - 16.

<sup>83</sup> Wang gives an excellent example in discussing the problems surrounding the term allusion, which is placed into a text as a self-conscious act by the author but may be overlooked by the reader, thus repressing its historicity and potential of meaning. See Wang Jing (1992): 9. This subject is further developed in Chapter Five.

relationship between literature and society. One must also take into account that not only was the narrative text concerned with a direct statement of the author's beliefs and indirect expression of his cultural milieu, but that the author was also aware to some degree of the audience to whom he was addressing his work.<sup>84</sup> Within what may be termed the narrative flow the author often diverts the reader by elevating the function of what may be described as 'sub-genres' such as poetry, documents, rich descriptive lists etc.<sup>85</sup> The frequent use of allusion, jokes and puns, and a delight in language are an exhibition of learning and wide-reading but may also be seen as an indication that the author expected a readership of high literary awareness and moreover that the author was aware of the manifold possibilities of interpretation opened up by these sub-genres.

One must also bear in mind the subtle altering of meanings rendered in the placement of commonplace sayings and moral pronouncements. In a dialogic interpretation of the novel, the maxim or proverb becomes responsive to everything else in the narrative, beginning with the author's awareness of it in his own mind, its place in popular consciousness, continuing to the maxim or proverb's immediate context within the novel, and ultimately in relation to the novel as a whole. Once its authority is challenged by the specific events contained within the narrative text, the maxim/proverb can become defamiliarised and conspicuous and the author places it before the reader for re-evaluation as one moves through the narrative, especially when the same statement is repeated in different contexts. These issues will be discussed in further depth in Chapter Five. It is clear that from the standpoint of a text-based criticism, it is imperative to regard the surface text as an entity made up of multifarious elements, each generating meaning and contributing to the open-ended

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<sup>84</sup> Work on defining audience levels is difficult by its nature. For some idea of the techniques of defining this problem see; Hegel (1987): 112 - 142. Hegel also commends the work of Henry Y. H. Zhao in this area. See Hegel (1994): 409.

<sup>85</sup> Satyendra (1989): 8 - 10, and 117 - 134.

significance of the novel. Given that the commentaries are an integral part of the structure of the novel as first published, and until such time as an original manuscript containing only narrative text is found, or an earlier printed edition without commentaries is discovered, we must consider the work as a unified, though structurally complex, entity. As such it falls within the same bounds of literary assessment as all other elements of the narrative - though recognition must be made of its distinctive forms and functions within the body of the text.

### Conclusion

Chapter Three has demonstrated that the pseudonyms adopted by the author and the interlinear commentator have significant meaning for our reading of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. This significance is rooted in the heterodox ideologies of the ancient state of Qi, from the Warring States period. A confluence of significance was demonstrated between the two pseudonyms which indicates that a link exists in the choices made by the author and interlinear commentator. Textual analysis must include examination of the projected identities of the author and the critical commentator since the decision to utilise a pseudonym is a literary act which falls within the realm of textual criticism. Second, with regard to the relationship between the author and annotator, it is important to view the consequences of the interaction between text and annotation, i.e. whether it is dialogic or monologic in nature. It is entirely possible that an external annotator may, while apparently adding another layer of meaning to the text, in fact work to limit the potentiality of the novel, whereas a common author/commentator identity, or a mutual partnership in the assembly of the work, may be for the purpose of creating a dialogical approach by means of a conscious interplay of competing voices. Third, a reader constructing meaning generated from the work as a total entity must assess the critical commentaries as an integral element

in the work as a whole, rather than try to separate them from the narrative body and assign degrees of original contribution to unknowable parties.

CHAPTER FOUR: VOICES FROM WITHIN THE TEXT: BUJING  
XIANSHENG'S CRITICAL COMMENTARY IN *SUI YANGDI YANSHI*

Having examined the theoretical underpinnings of the relationship between the author and critical commentator in the previous chapter, I will now examine the application of critical commentary within the body of a narrative text. This chapter analyses the functions and contents of the general commentaries (*zongping* 總評) and interlinear commentaries (*pangping* 旁評) within vernacular fiction and draws examples from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.

The development and functions of critical commentary

One of the most prominent structural developments of seventeenth-century Chinese fiction was the increasingly sophisticated use of critical commentary. This literary mode has its origins in commentaries appended to ancient works of philosophy. Daniel Gardner, in his study of commentaries appended to Confucian classics, notes that commentary was a critical genre for Confucian literati, and, by extension, literati culture in general.<sup>1</sup> Writing commentary served as an authorial insignia and became irrevocably enmeshed in Confucian culture.<sup>2</sup> The roots of commentary lay in the explication of ancient texts and commentary served to remove obstructions to understanding: primarily, problems of lexicology, paraphrasing of passages into digestible contemporary language, pointers to supplementary material, interpretation of disputed passages, identification of allusion, and literary analysis and

<sup>1</sup> Daniel K Gardner, "Confucian Commentary and Chinese Intellectual History". *Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 57. No.2, (May 1998): 397-422.

<sup>2</sup> Gardner (1998): 404. Two excellent studies on the development of commentary practices are: Stephen Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis and Hermeneutics in Ancient China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991; and John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

stylistics.<sup>3</sup> The practice was subsequently applied not only to philosophical works but to poetry and works of history. As commentaries were written on commentaries, a huge body of literature built up, often around relatively slim texts, and in many cases the commentaries became as valued as the texts themselves. Philosophical schools formed around differing commentarial traditions, and debate between differing traditions were often subsumed by wider social or political debate, whereby political factions promoted policies in terms defined by commentarial schools.<sup>4</sup>

The late Ming period saw an increasing interest in the production of commentary editions of classic works of philosophy.<sup>5</sup> It has also been noted that the “eight legged essay” (*baguwen* 八股文) form of civil service examination paper appears to have had an influence on the development of vernacular fiction commentary.<sup>6</sup> Further impetus for the development of critical commentary came from two iconoclastic figures - Li Zhi 李贄 (1527 - 1602) and Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆. (1610

<sup>3</sup> Rolston (1990): 5.

<sup>4</sup> A fine example is the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (Spring and Autumn Annals) which spawned three commentarial traditions: the *Gongyang* 公羊, *Guliang* 穀梁 and *Zuozhuan* 佐傳. See Wai-Yee Li, “The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi* (Records of the Historian)”. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Vol. 54. No. 2, 1994: 345 - 405. The late Ming was a period of extreme political factionalism, a fact reflected in intellectual struggle over the interpretation of classic texts. See Franke (1988) and Peterson (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Guo Shaoyu (1990): 446 - 452. Guo also notes that some scholars in the late Ming viewed classic texts primarily as works of literature. See Guo Shaoyu (1990): 389. Kai-wing Chow notes the ideological arguments over the new commentary editions, many of which were influenced by Buddhist thought. Kai-wing Chow, “Writing for Success: Printing, Examinations, and Intellectual Change”. *Late Imperial China*. Vol. 17. No. 1, June 1996: 120 - 157. See especially pages 130 - 138. An excellent source on these debates and the way they shaped intellectual trends in the late Ming and Qing periods can be found in Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Change in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> One of the first proponents of this idea was Hu Shi (1891 - 1962). See Hu Shi 胡適, *Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo yanjiu* 中國古典小說研究 (Research on Chinese Traditional Fiction). Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1988. More recently Andrew Plaks has noted the structural similarities between critical commentary and *bagu* theory. See the introduction to Plaks (1987).

- 1661).<sup>7</sup> The commentary on *Shuihu Zhuan* attributed to Li Zhi lays the ground for important concepts, such as the idea that literature can be written to express resentment.<sup>8</sup> Jin Shengtan took up Li's example and wrote highly influential commentaries on *Shuihu Zhuan* amongst other works of literature.<sup>9</sup> Hegel has noted the increasing importance of the role of editors and commentators in seventeenth-century fiction as their commentary editions of popular novels dominated markets and came to be accepted as the most influential examples of the genre.<sup>10</sup>

A variety of reasons may exist to persuade a commentator to write commentary: to assert his literary credentials as a literary critic, social commentator and cultural connoisseur; to privilege a particular text; to attempt to circumscribe a fixed meaning for the text; to comment upon historical and contemporary events (as was often the case with historical novels such as *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*); to argue for a particular vision of culture and certain forms of cultural expression such as the developing *zhanghui xiaoshuo* form.

Regardless of the commentator's intention, however, the starting point remains constant - in writing commentary one acknowledges that the text has intrinsic value and importance and the act of engagement demonstrates the value of text as a vehicle for the expression of the commentator's own thoughts. The commentator commits himself to a dialogue with the narrative body and tests his assumptions against those of the novel's author. As Gardner notes:

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<sup>7</sup> An interesting source on the life of Li Zhi can be found in Cheang En-chew, *Li Chih as a Critic: A Chapter of the Ming Intellectual History*. Ph.D thesis. University of Washington: 1973. See also chapter 7 of Huang (1981): 189 - 221.

<sup>8</sup> Rolston (1990): 37.

<sup>9</sup> For translations and evaluations of Jin's work see Rolston (1990): 124 - 145. Also see William Dolby, John Scott, Brian Holton, (translators), *China's Leading Critic and Most Famous Bandits: Prefaces by Chin Sheng-T'an (1608-1661) to the novel SHUIHU CHUAN*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Library, 1988; John C.Y. Wang, *Chin Sheng-t'an*. New York: Twayne, 1972.

<sup>10</sup> Hegel (1981): 227.

the choice the commentator makes evolves out of a complex dialectic, where the words of the text, pregnant with possible meanings, interact with the intellectual concerns and assumptions of the commentator, which themselves develop out of the contemporary zeitgeist.<sup>11</sup>

In bringing out meaning from the text, commentary may attempt to fix the range of meanings the text can have and may seek to influence the reader in reaching a certain conclusion; that is to say that, should the commentator attempt to fix meaning in the text, the commentator may persuade the reader of the validity of the commentarial viewpoint over that of the author (assuming that commentarial and authorial positions clash). The fixity of commentarial boundaries is, however, illusory. Commentary does, to some extent, echo earlier commentarial voices (which in the case of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* includes earlier versions of both the literary and historical sources). The commentary, like the narrative text itself, is open to reconstruction by the reader, distanced from the novel by space and time. The relationship between text and commentary is dialogic. The voice of the text influences the possible responses of the commentary just as the commentary seeks to explore the range of meaning within the text; thus the reader is faced with two voices whose utterances are mutually dependent and mutually limiting.

One must also consider that critical commentary does not simply engage the text, it also addresses the community of readers who receive the text. At the most basic level a double-dialogue exists as the critical commentary simultaneously addresses the text and the contemporary readership. As a reader, removed from the novel and commentary by time and space, one adds another level of dialogue as one engages the text, the narrative and one's cultural distance. In Bakhtinian criticism the modern reader may utilise one's distance to reveal potential unforeseen by the author and commentator. If one views a work as rich in potential then it may grow over time.

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<sup>11</sup> Gardner (1998): 417.

Bakhtin maintains that great authors intuitively have a sense of cultural wealth accumulated over history. They do not encode messages as semiotic models tend to imply, but rather construct works with semantic depths that existed in concealed form, exploit potentiality, and construct works out of forms that are already heavily laden with meaning<sup>12</sup>.

The role of the reader or critic is to disclose potential, through creative understanding. Morson and Emerson describe the process of creative understanding in the following terms:

a meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning; they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures...The exchange creates new and valuable meanings possessed by neither at the outset. The text contains the potentials for the new meanings, but the specific meanings revealed also require the special contribution of the interpreter and his or her unrepeatable experience. Both sides of the dialogue are active.<sup>13</sup>

Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture. Thus, great works in any culture require the perspective of other cultures to develop their potential. This argument does not downplay the need to understand as much as one can the circumstances in which the novel was produced. Clearly the benefits of standing outside the subject are considerably diminished if one has no knowledge of the culture, language or history relating to the novel under study. Rather, at the heart of Bakhtin's idea lies the idea that great novels inherently contain potential which can be activated, transformed and recontextualised by readers, chronologically and culturally removed from the time and space in which the novel

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<sup>12</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 288.

<sup>13</sup> Morson and Emerson (1990): 289.

was produced. I would venture the notion that the very notion of critical commentary appended to novels brings with it a latent potentiality for growth of meaning. The means for a dialogic exchange already exist within the broad structure of the pre-modern vernacular Chinese novel. As we have seen throughout this thesis, pre-modern Chinese vernacular fiction includes prefatory materials, illustrations, narrative text, punctuation marking and commentaries whose perspectives all contribute to the polyphony which characterises the dialogic novel. This is not to argue that this dialogic exchange always succeeds; rather that the basic conditions for such an exchange are inherent in the generic model of seventeenth-century Chinese vernacular fiction.

Critical commentary serves as a nexus of intratextual connections to the past. Reading commentaries (particularly in historical novels) one notes a large number of references - historical, philosophical and literary - to past events which often offer implied commentary on contemporary society. This linkage to history and cultural commentary gives further authority to the text and may indeed be utilised as a means to validate the larger form of the genre - especially an emerging genre such as the *zhanghui xiaoshuo*. By establishing a historical foundation, while at the same time promoting the new values of the vernacular novel form, critical commentary reinforces the readership's sense of community. Commentary also arises at times of cultural discontinuity; that is, when the previous *weltanschauung* is challenged and new voices and viewpoints struggle to be heard.<sup>14</sup> The act of commentary also gives shape to the tradition of commentary and outlines its boundaries. In common with many critical commentaries and prefaces from other works, Bujing xiansheng's commentaries emphasise the importance of fiction and implicitly acknowledge that fictional works are complex pieces of literature and therefore require appended critical commentary to explicate hidden meaning.

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Two for the arguments posed by late Ming authors to challenge the authority of historians.

The critical commentaries of Bujing xiansheng

Critical commentary editions of works of prose fiction utilise a number of terms to describe critical commentary: the most common are *pi* 批 (to add a comment), *ping* 評 (to offer a critical evaluation), *yue* 閱 (to read), and *dian* 點 (to add punctuation marks; usually a dot). While the most common combination is *pingdian* (critical evaluation and punctuation), Bujing xiansheng, the critical commentator on *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is attributed with *piping* 批評 (commentary and critical evaluation). Critical commentary takes two forms. First “textual markings” (*quandian* 圈點) which consist of punctuation markings on the text and discrete editing. The critical commentator also utilised *quandian* to highlight passages of literary value: these passages were often linked to the editorial principles laid out in the *fanli* 凡例 (general principles) which preface novels of the late Ming onwards. The *quandian* in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* consist of open-centred circles and dots which highlight important sections of text, and are also applied to the interlinear and general commentaries. The second form, on which we shall concentrate, is “critical commentary and evaluation” (*piping* 批評) which consists of two elements: general commentaries (*zongping* 總評) and interlinear commentaries (*pangpi* 旁批; this phrase is interchangeable with *pangping* 旁評). The former are placed at the end of each roll and are both longer and more concerned with the overall structural integrity of the novel. The latter are generally short phrases that provide comment on the immediately surrounding text. The majority of critical commentary in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* belongs more properly to the field of textual commentary rather than literary criticism. Subjective remarks apart, however, one can discern the commentator’s concept of the aesthetic norms underlying the novel. The following section looks in more detail at the functions of general commentaries.

### General commentaries: structure

The text of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* comprises a total of eight rolls (*juan* 卷) each of which consists of 5 chapters (*hui* 回) making a total of 40 chapters. General commentaries are placed at equal intervals at the end of every roll, that is chapters 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40. The formal rhetorical feature of general commentary is common to many popular vernacular fiction works of the late Ming. In *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, the separation of the general commentaries from the narrative text is facilitated by a blank page. The commentaries are printed in a different calligraphic style from the narrative text. Discussion of separate topics in the general commentaries is indicated by the use of paragraphs.

Unlike critical commentary editions produced in the early Qing, the general commentaries of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* do not display a tightly-structured thesis on literary criticism but highlight the moral concerns of the novel and its key events, and in a somewhat piecemeal fashion, some of the structural features of the novel.<sup>15</sup> The general commentaries tend to be somewhat more discursive than interlinear commentaries. This is a function both of the greater amount of space afforded the general commentaries and of the more considered opinions expressed therein. Placed at the end of each roll, the events of the narrative text are fresh in the mind of the reader, and the summed judgement expressed by the general commentaries is likely to be more influential than the scattered interlinear commentaries. One might also add that the impact of general commentaries placed at the end of chapters (or rolls) is perhaps

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<sup>15</sup> The critical commentaries later appended to the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 and *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 by Jin Shengtān 金聖嘆 and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 respectively, come under the *dufa* 讀法 (how to read) form of critical commentary. For translations and explication see Rolston (1990). See also Jin Shengtān 金聖嘆, *Shuihu Zhuan de zhengzhi yu molüe guan* 水滸傳的政治與謀略觀 (*Shuihu Zhuan's* Political and Strategic Observation). 3rd edition. Taipei: Laogu, 1990.

less pronounced than in the case of those general commentaries which are placed at the beginning of chapters - such as those in Jin Shengtan's critical commentary edition of *Shuihu Zhuan*.

The general commentaries in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* perform a number of functions. The primary function is to recap the crucial events in the narrative in the preceding roll. These comments often take the form of evaluative judgements on the actions of various characters and present general assessments of the literary merits of the composition of certain sections of prose or poetry. In the following section I examine three subjects which lie at the heart of the general commentaries in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*: the literary qualities of the novel and a defence of the vernacular fiction form; the actions of Emperor Yang and the dichotomy between personal responsibility and overarching fate; and an analysis of Bujing xiansheng's moral critique, utilising the framework of the Four Vices (*sitan* 四貪).

#### General commentaries: a defence of vernacular fiction

Bujing xiansheng devotes many comments to the literary qualities of the novel and a defence of the vernacular fiction form. As described in Chapter One, late Ming authors of vernacular fiction were keen to avoid charges of sensationalism and indecency which might arise from their choice of subject matter. The human condition as depicted in the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is complex, as the author and commentator attempt to find the role of personal responsibility vis-à-vis human society and within the overarching framework of the moral cosmos. Despite the tendency of the commentary mode to favour value judgements and, on occasion, didacticism, the general commentaries reflect this complexity.

The primary message that Bujing xiansheng seeks to convey is that, despite the moral depravity displayed in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, the intention of the author is ethically sound. As noted earlier in this thesis, the moral message contained within seventeenth-century Chinese fiction is not contradicted by the sensuality of the language and explicit nature of the subject matter. Authors and critical commentators did not underestimate the maturity of the literate audience, and its ability to appreciate the fine literary craft of the text, savour the wayward contingencies of the plot and understand the fundamental moral stance of vernacular fiction. Commenting on the seventh roll which largely depicts Emperor Yang's sensual adventures in the Milou pleasure complex, Bujing xiansheng states:

it makes other people grasp their brushes to point out their evil vileness: this is not worth reading. This delicate description and subtle portrayal of a series of richly colourful scenes is written movingly with, moreover, literary expression as direct as penetrating snow; if it were not composed by a man of elegance and culture, how could this be achieved?<sup>16</sup>

The critical commentator shares common cause with the author in promoting the values of the ideology of newly-emerging *zhanghui xiaoshuo* form. Bujing xiansheng lays out the fundamental argument in favour of the form: the novel is capable of exploring difficult ethical issues without resorting either to didacticism or simple stereotypes. It maintains values of lucidity and aesthetically-pleasing language. It embraces human truth without sacrificing elegant expression. Didacticism is considered a crude tool and the actions of the Emperor should not be rebuked without due consideration both of the environment in which he lived, and the aesthetic qualities of his actions. Two commentaries highlight this view. The first comments on the famed "brocade-sailed barges" imperial tour to Jiangdu; the second describes a concubine's poetry contest spied upon by Emperor Yang:

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<sup>16</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 7, Volume 6; Zhengzhou (1993): 399.

although the extravagance of the manufacture of the brocade sails and the naming of the rope-pulling girls should not serve as moral examples, one should however, consider each case as it stands and ponder their dashing romanticism.<sup>17</sup>

the scene of the five beauties competing in a singing contest, while Emperor Yang secretly listens in, fully describes the delights of making merry in the palace. Reading it brings pleasure to one's eyes.<sup>18</sup>

Another function of the vernacular novel is to penetrate the confusions of quotidian experience (without devaluing such experience) to reveal motives and causes of human actions. It is precisely through the depiction of human experience and the contextual delineation of human actions that fiction can describe the specificity of existence, and thus move beyond the factual approach of the Official Histories. Commenting on Emperor Yang's subtle threats to his father's favourite concubine, Lady Xuanhua, *Bijing Xiansheng* notes:

Emperor Yang teases Lady Xuanhua. Each word cuts to the bone, it is a truly revealing depiction.<sup>19</sup>

The vernacular form recognises the need for a higher degree of verisimilitude, a move away from the stylisation and stereotyping which pervaded other forms of literary expression. Truth as such need not extend to an exact reduplication of the past. As Idema notes, though the overwhelming majority of Chinese traditional fiction is explicitly set in the past, no attempt is made to recreate the specific manners and customs of the age in which the story is set.<sup>20</sup> The key to verisimilitude is the creation of events and moments in which the characters must test their assumptions against their own truth and the truth of wider society. As Plaks has noted, in China truth is

<sup>17</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 4, Volume 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 280.

<sup>18</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 4, Volume 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 115.

<sup>19</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 1, Volume 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 59 - 60.

<sup>20</sup> Idema (1995): 377.

taken as directly linked to “specific human context.”<sup>21</sup> A key concern therefore for the critical commentator is whether the characters are depicted in a realistic psychological manner, whether they react in ways which convey the choices faced and the dilemmas considered, rather than simply following pre-ordained character traits. As Bujing xiansheng notes in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*’s depiction of the powerful minister Yang Su:

in the depiction of Yang Su, those features described as arrogant indeed are arrogant; those features described as boastful indeed are boastful; those features described as an abuse of power and relaxation of the standards of decorum, are indeed an abuse of power and relaxation of the standards of decorum. Not one thread of this is not entirely like the man himself.<sup>22</sup>

We are not dealing, however, with a proto-social realism. The vernacular novel is able to accommodate fantasy and the supernatural, which it does in a pragmatic and humorous fashion, as when Bujing xiansheng comments on the passage describing the beating of the rat spirit which is the true incarnation of Emperor Yang:

the section on beating the rat seems to involve wild fabricated tales, yet, Heaven and Earth are so large, what does not exist? Although one need not believe it deeply, one need not doubt it deeply.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, to further the cause of promoting the vernacular novel, the critical commentator takes a generally positive view of the author’s literary qualities. The function of the comments is to bolster the novels’ ideology of a broader depiction of human experience. I shall examine this theme again later when analysing Bujing xiansheng’s interlinear commentaries.

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<sup>21</sup> Plaks (1977): 313.

<sup>22</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 2, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 115.

<sup>23</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 4, Volume ; Zhengzhou (1993): 280.

In analysing the actions of Emperor Yang and the dichotomy between personal responsibility and overarching fate, Hegel identifies the following three questions which seem to have been asked by the main characters in late Ming novels:

first, are conventional social obligations really relevant to me? Second, how do I find my proper role in society- what models do I follow when no standard role seems appropriate? And finally, how responsible am I for my acts - does some higher force take a hand in human events?"<sup>24</sup>

*Sui Yangdi Yanshi* portrays a man freed from perceived obligation to his subjects and to the moral order - he is at liberty to indulge his whims and fancies. The general commentaries of *Bujing xiansheng* discuss these problems in terms of duty and fate. Emperor Yang is criticised for his failure to adhere to requisite standards of morality. In the first general commentary *Bujing xiansheng* identifies Emperor Yang's patricide, fratricide and incestuous relationship with his father's concubine as dereliction of filial duty and moral integrity, putting him beyond the bounds of social conventions and resulting in his ultimate demise.<sup>25</sup> The general commentaries ridicule Emperor Yang's boasts of historical greatness and the huge construction projects which he undertakes in order to outdo the achievements of imperial predecessors:

reading about the building of the Great Wall in the Standard Imperial Histories, [Emperor Yang] envies the reputation of the First Emperor [of Qin], yet still he fails to match up.<sup>26</sup>

Such evaluative judgements are particularly evident in the following two examples:

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<sup>24</sup> Hegel (1981): 106.

<sup>25</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 1, Volume 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 59 - 60.

<sup>26</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 3, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 171 - 172.

wishing to make an imperial progress to Jiangdu in itself is not a matter of wonder. Yet only by means of the forty nine leisure palaces, wasteful in labour and toil, and by insisting on building a canal and oppressing the people, can his wild desires be satisfied. Such extravagance is excessive.<sup>27</sup>

the emperor has wealth and status, which era hasn't been so? Yet the Three Mountains, the Four Seas, the Five Lakes and the Sixteen Harems, only the House of Sui was so extravagant, thus its reign did not endure and it perished.<sup>28</sup>

The imperial institution is portrayed in a very negative light in the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, and the commentaries of Bujing xiansheng highlight a second dereliction of duty on Emperor Yang's part - the failure to employ moral ministers:

Yang Su is a common subject yet he abruptly dares to ignore [Emperor Yang] whilst fishing, beats a palace servant whilst drunk, and abuses his power whilst making strong remonstrations. This offence against the dignity of the Son of Heaven ought to be punished by death! Moreover it is unbecoming for a king and nobleman to mix in such a manner, with a mere single bow in a side hall. If the initiator was not Emperor Yang who was it? Alas! How could this perversion of propriety be started by oneself?<sup>29</sup>

Here the critical commentary seeks to guide the reader to an evaluative judgement which differs slightly from the text. Where the narrative text presents both Yang Su's arrogance and his undoubted talents, the critical commentator prefers only to concentrate on his negative qualities. A running theme in both the general commentaries and the interlinear commentaries of Bujing xiansheng is condemnation of corrupt or disloyal ministers (variously described as "unscrupulous ministers" *jianchen* 奸臣, "unscrupulous heroes" *jianxiong* 奸雄, "men of mean virtue" *xiaoren* 小人 or "rebellious bandits" *nizei* 逆賊). Amidst the trenchant criticism of disloyal ministers Bujing xiansheng consistently points to the failure of the Emperor to attract virtuous ministers:

<sup>27</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 4, Volume 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 224 - 225.

<sup>28</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 3, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 171 172. In Chapter 5, I examine in more detail the construction of the pleasure complex described in this passage.

<sup>29</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 2, Volume 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 115.

as for Gao Jiong, He Ruobi or Wang Yi, whenever they opened their mouths they were loyal; whenever Pei Ju or Feng Deyi opened their mouths they were artful and insinuating; unless in one's breast one has a 'hand brazier and steel hammer', how could one permit this?<sup>30</sup>

the House of Sui does not lack ministers, yet come the disastrous time of the collapse of the dynasty, only Xu Shanxin, Dugu Sheng, Dugu Kaiyuan, Wang Yi, and Zhu Gui'er, persisted with heartfelt loyalty to the debauched. Those who may be called the most disgraceful and having the least sense of shame are Feng Deyi and Empress Xiao; next are Su Wei, Yuwen Huaji: that pack of traitorous bandits, who shall hold cursed names through the generations, are even less worthy of discussion.<sup>31</sup>

What is of interest in the second example above is that among the loyal minister cited by Bujing xiansheng are Wang Yi - an entirely fictional character - the dwarf servant who castrates himself to serve the emperor in the Rear Palace and commits suicide after delivering a damning indictment of his rule, and Zhu Gui'er, a favoured concubine who dies cursing the rebels who have overthrown Emperor Yang.<sup>32</sup> Within the narrative text, both of these characters, while generally portrayed attractively, are implicated in the collapse of the dynasty by failing to persuade Emperor Yang to return to governing the nation. While acknowledging the corruption of the Emperor, Bujing Xiansheng prefers the reader to focus on the bravery and willingness to sacrifice themselves. The contrast is heightened by the inclusion of Empress Xiao amongst the category of the most shameless. Rather than commit suicide as expected, she submits to the will of the regicide and survives by means of her feminine charms. This is not simple misogyny. As we shall see later, Bujing xiansheng display a high degree of affection and admiration for some of the imperial concubines. As he notes on the death of Lady Hou, a talented poet concubine who

<sup>30</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 2, Volume 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 115.

<sup>31</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 8, Volume 6; not included in Zhengzhou (1993).

<sup>32</sup> The role of Zhu Gui'er is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

commits suicide because she cannot bribe eunuchs to allow her to meet with the Emperor:

Lady Hou has talent and beauty, yet, not having the opportunity to meet the gentleman-ruler, she hangs herself - truly one feels saddened. Emperor Yang touches the corpse and is moved to weep, showing his heaven-granted nature. Alas! Alas! If only he had lavished this much concern on virtuous ministers, what worry would there have been in ruling All Under Heaven?<sup>33</sup>

What emerges from this examination is a personal prejudice of the critical commentator, whose attitudes in this respect are more polemical than those displayed in the text. *Bujing xiansheng* makes a consistent case against corrupt officials at all levels of government and vacillating leadership from the emperor. For example the critical commentator chooses to contrast the brutal actions of a corrupt official (who resorts to bribery, murder and cannibalism) and a simplistic supernatural tale from the narrative in which the father of a court musician persuades him, on the basis of a fateful tune, to avoid going on the imperial barge trip to Jiangdu:

one may only sigh at Ma Shumou, a great Court minister, whose insatiable desires ran amuck, and who remained oblivious and unenlightened, right up till after his head and body ended up in different places. How can this compare to Wang Lingyan who on hearing one melody from a lute knew that there would be no return from Jiangdu. Alas! Alas! How may one say that moral virtue or foolishness are rooted in a noble or humble background.<sup>34</sup>

The final comment *Bujing xiansheng* makes on the subject is an apt summation of his point of view:

brigands and bandits fill All Under Heaven, yet still Yu Shiji calls them 'nests of rats and dog thieves', thereby hiding the truth from Emperor Yang. Yet is such treachery and wronging of the nation so rare?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 3, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 171-172.

<sup>34</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 6, Volume 5; Zhengzhou (1993): 336-337.

<sup>35</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 7, Volume 6; Zhengzhou (1993): 399.

The last theme I examine in this section on Bujing xiansheng's analysis of Emperor Yang's dereliction of duty is the numerous references to his disregard for the higher forces of cosmic moral order. To late Ming readers this behaviour would represent a manifestation of Emperor Yang's inability to complete the triad of the moral cosmos, human society and the imperial institution - Emperor Yang's lack of respect for omens and immortal messengers is noted in the narrative on several occasions and the appearance of supernatural elements allows for the formation of important symbolic and structural markers within the text. Emperor Yang ignores a series of omens and supernatural encounters, including two encounters with the ghost of the Last Ruler of Chen, whose state Emperor Yang extinguished, and Zhang Lihua, the Last Ruler of Chen's concubine, whom Emperor Yang coveted in vain. Near the end of the novel Emperor Yang is abducted in a dream state by the ghost of Yang Su, and led to meet Emperor Wen who wants to kill him but is stopped by Empress Dugu, who says his time is almost up. Emperor Yang is attacked by the ghost of Yang Yong, his elder brother whom he deprived of the throne and murdered; the ghost splits open Emperor Yang's head from which a rat escapes - Emperor Yang then regains consciousness. Emperor Yang's encounters with ghosts always take place on the cusp of consciousness, usually when he has been stimulated by alcohol or drugs. The encounters contain formulaic elements: a description of the spirit which then speaks, and recognition by the mortal. The encounters end with a physical contact or violent interruption which shakes the mortal participant into consciousness. Each encounter reveals foreknowledge of the fate of the dynasty and the personal end destined for the Emperor. Two major characters, Yang Su and Lady Xuanhua, die soon after encounters with the ghost of Emperor Wen - the former is blamed for plotting the death of Emperor Wen, while the latter has committed adultery with her step-son-in-law, Emperor Yang.

The natural world reflects the will of the moral cosmos. Those animals and flora which symbolise the Yang family, such as the plum blossom, fade and wither as the dynasty sinks, and those associated with the Li family, who found the Tang dynasty, such as the magic carp, the pear tree etc., flourish. Supernatural elements are frequently invoked in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. In chapter 14 of the novel concubine Li Qing'er has a nightmare prefiguring the death of Emperor Yang and destruction of the Milou pleasure complex. In the same chapter Emperor Yang is visited by a fairy maid-servant of Moon goddess Chang E, who congratulates Emperor Yang on this auspicious dream and points out that he will reign for another ten years: the Emperor's reaction is to consider bedding the fairy maid-servant, and failing to satisfy his desires, entertains concubines with examples of visits to mortals by fairies throughout history. In chapter 16 concubine Yuan Ziyang tells how she was taught astronomy by a nun who revealed the destiny of the rise of the Li family - voices round the blooming jade pear tree predict the ascent of Li. In chapter 30 a Daoist monk and nun appear selling magic lychees are brought before Emperor Yang with whom they discuss the merits of wealth and materialism versus simplicity and eremitism. The monk reveals knowledge of the imminent collapse of the Sui and urges the emperor to head for the mountains with them. Emperor Yang's response is to challenge the Daoists to lead him round the Milou - should they lose he will sleep with the nun! The monk offers a final prophecy over Emperor Yang's death, then both Daoists hop on clouds and depart. Emperor Yang says he only need pills to achieve immortality. In chapter 32 a Daoist appears in the palace, offers Emperor Yang a set of pills to firm up his vitality, which engender an urgent insatiable sexual desire. The Daoist is allowed to live in the palace monastery, but when the pills are finished Emperor Yang sends for him, the messengers find only a painting on a wall, which fades to leave a poem of ridicule. Emperor Yang responds by summoning numerous fake alchemists and Daoists to

provide elixirs and pills, wrecking the Emperor's health. As the dynasty heads towards oblivion the signs and omens multiply and press around Emperor Yang.

Bujing xiansheng refers to these supernatural elements throughout the general commentaries. For example at the mid-way point in the novel the general commentaries note:

the *Ziwei* constellation is hazy and dim, 'Imperial vital material-force' is seen, portents have already appeared in the heavens. Son of wood [the Li family] shall prosper, among the people there are already prophecies: the *yang* plum blossom can't match the *li* jade pear, the *jiao* character 'horn' on the carp, there are already forms amongst the living beings...It is so crystal clear, yet still he is not enlightened.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to his enthusiastic condemnation of unscrupulous ministers and the political failings of Emperor Yang, Bujing xiansheng views the appearance of supernatural signs in a more measured fashion; specifically, he appears to establish two functions for omens and signs. First they highlight Emperor Yang's self-absorption and isolation from the world of responsibility around him. Second, they act as markers of the decline of the Sui dynasty. As Emperor Yang sinks ever deeper into sensual decline, he ignores the warnings of the spirits:

on a clear night there is a song of prophecy, and the warnings of the two immortals. The mind of the Moral Cosmos is set! What use is the deceptive flattery heard by such as Emperor Yang?<sup>37</sup>

In the final general commentary, Bujing xiansheng lists the supernatural events heralding the collapse of Emperor Yang's thirteen-year reign:

having crammed in days of splendour and riches, when the day of doom arrives, it is hard to garner sympathy - for example the Qiong jade tree sheds its leaves, the palace servant sings song [foretelling the end of the dynasty],

<sup>36</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 4, Volume 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 224 -225.

<sup>37</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 7, Volume 6; Zhengzhou (1993): 399.

the *yang* plum tree withers and dies, the carp transforms into a dragon and flies off, at the Duke of Wu's residence the Last Ruler [of Chen] offers a poem, Yuan Ke memorialises foreboding astrological signs, unfavourable scenes press in on each other.<sup>38</sup>

As we shall see in the next section on the interlinear commentaries, Bujing xiansheng displays a rather sceptical attitude towards the forces beyond the ken of human beings. For the moment, this example should suffice:

when the [aphrodisiac] elixir is finished, a pack of bogus Daoists receive the imperial summons. Reading this makes one discard all desires.<sup>39</sup>

To sum up this section on Bujing xiansheng's critique of Emperor Yang's sense of personal responsibility, it is evident Bujing xiansheng wishes the reader to be left with the understanding that the responsibility for dynastic decline lies with emperor himself. In *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* Emperor Yang fails to see himself as guilty of neglect and seeks justification for his actions in destiny or fate, the motive force of the very moral order which he has failed to uphold in his appointed role. The author depicts a character whose failures arise from personal weakness and, by means of Wang Yi's devastating analysis of the reign and the cumulative recording of Emperor Yang's profligacy, the author places responsibility for actions on the individual. As Hegel adduces:

Yang's appeal to destiny for self-justification is far from unique - even Confucius bewailed his fate as something quite undeserved....An insistence on freedom from traditional role limitations and on full personal individual responsibility for one's acts is the more innovative notion.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Taibei (1985): General Commentary 8, Volume 6; not included in Zhengzhou (1993).

<sup>39</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 7, Volume 6; Zhengzhou (1993): 399.

<sup>40</sup> Hegel (1981): 111.

This reflects the Wang Yangming trend in Ming thought that, on the popular level, found expression in morality texts of the time which emphasised the need for self-cultivation as a method for attaining moral purity.<sup>41</sup> The author appears to argue, however, that given the numerous omens, prophecies, explanations of karmic retribution, and editorial asides forecasting his downfall, whatever Emperor Yang's actions, the weight of fate was working against him and determinism is at the root of the novel. Bujing xiansheng in his role as critical commentator prefers rather to focus on the issue of personal responsibility - the supernatural is acknowledged but utilised as a marker of decline rather than as a motive force undermining the fate of the regime. Plaks sums up the issue in a neat fashion:

paradoxically, it is the very fact of pre-ordained causality that shifts weight onto the consequentiality of human action ....[that is, the use of karmic predestination and supernatural elements may be interpreted as] less fully deterministic than insistent on a far-reaching consequentiality in the realm of human action.<sup>42</sup>

#### General commentaries: The Four Vices as a critique of Emperor Yang

In this final section on the general commentaries I will utilise the model of the Four Vices (*si tan* 四貪): alcohol (*jiu* 酒), sensuality (*se* 色), material wealth (*cai* 財), wrath (*qi* 氣) to examine Bujing xiansheng's critique of personal morality. In *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* the root of disorder is planted in personal gratification and the pursuit of excess. From the general commentaries of Bujing xiansheng one can discern an

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<sup>41</sup> For a full discussion of Wang Yangming thought and its effect on late Ming society, see Julia Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976. See also Wm. Theodore De Bary (editor), *Self and Society in Ming Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970. See especially Wm. Theodore De Bary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in late Ming thought": 145 - 245. The section on Wang Yangming is found on pages 150 - 154.

<sup>42</sup> Plaks (1987): 509.

abiding interest in the effects of the Four Vices upon Emperor Yang and his decline into moral dissipation.

Alcohol (*jiu* 酒) may be more accurately described as reliance on artificial stimulants. As Emperor Yang withdraws from his role of governing the state, he turns to alcohol and aphrodisiac drugs to induce false states of euphoria. The results are a dulling of judgement and an ever-increasing addiction. By the end of the novel the Emperor relies entirely on artificial stimulants to function. According to the commentaries of Bujing xiansheng the root of this addiction springs from two sources: first, Emperor Yang's obsession with self-image; and second, his pursuit of sensual pleasure to the detriment of government. With regard to Emperor Yang's self-image, Bujing xiansheng notes that the Emperor sees himself not only as ruler, but also as historian, aesthete and poet:

Emperor Yang saw himself as dashing romantic and thus indulged himself deeply in wine and sensuality.<sup>43</sup>

While the critical commentaries continue the criticism of Emperor Yang's dilettantism, they are balanced by an appreciation of his literary qualities:

in the melody 'Gazing South of the River' and in the tune 'Clear Night Roaming', the ornate lyrics are elegantly beautiful and truly match the highest works of the masters. Yet in the end 'the rivers and mountains' were ruined beyond repair. How may composing doggerel be a weighty occupation for an emperor?<sup>44</sup>

Bujing xiansheng repeatedly criticises Emperor Yang, but balances this judgement with an acknowledgement of his talents (albeit not talents suited to the role he occupied):

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<sup>43</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 6, Volume Five; Zhengzhou (1993): 336 - 337.

<sup>44</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 2, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 115.

he talks over old times with the Last Ruler of Chen, truly they are a fine pair of soulmates.<sup>45</sup>

the section on the dashing romance of Twenty Four Bridge has already become the subject of a fine tale of a thousand autumns.<sup>46</sup>

Bujing xiansheng notes the contrast between the early public image of a scholar-king adopted by Emperor Yang with the reality of his actions behind the palace walls:

Emperor Yang studies and is fond of learning, yet he commits acts which wreck human relations. Where then is the man who values study? Where then is the man who values learning?<sup>47</sup>

While condemning Emperor Yang's excesses, Bujing xiansheng is aware of the environment in which the Emperor lives:

as the scholar-ruler sinks into profligacy, there are many poisonous seductions such as Zhu Gui'er's singing, Lady Wang's zither playing and Gao Deru's reports of the colourful *luan* bird of paradise, all of which are common ruses. As for Tuo Niang floating peach blossoms down a water channel to attract imperial affection in the flower shade, He An's gift of the [virgin deflowering] "Imperial Lady Carriage", and Lady Qin cutting coloured silks to make into flowers, these are things no ordinary person could think of. People are not wood or stone, how could one not sink in the midst of this?<sup>48</sup>

Sensuality (*se* 色) leads to a wasting of vital energies in search of unsustainable physical pleasure. The loss of vital energies results in sickness and

<sup>45</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 2, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 115.

<sup>46</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 7, Volume 6; Zhengzhou (1993): 399. The commentary refers to a night-time banquet held by Emperor Yang and his favoured concubines by a newly-constructed bridge, which is given its name to commemorate the number of participants at the banquet. The literary fame to which the commentary alludes is a reference to a poem on the same subject by the Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803 - 852) which is included - with the authorship acknowledged - in the text of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. See Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 29, page 13; Zhengzhou (1993): 324.

<sup>47</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 1, Volume 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 59 - 60.

<sup>48</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 3, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 171 - 172.

dependence on rejuvenating drugs which far from curing the illness merely aggravate the desire for sensual fulfilment. A spurious feeling of control is gained by Emperor Yang through mechanical devices which control young women and render them unable to resist his advances, what is coyly called 'stealing affection' (*touqing* 偷情). Bujing xiansheng ridicules Emperor Yang's immersion in sensual pleasure:

at this time he feels that living without wine and beauty would be like not living at all.<sup>49</sup>

The commentaries further highlight the ends to which the Emperor will go to seek pleasure. In the novel he is given gifts of various aphrodisiac potions, mechanical devices to trap young virgins, and other devices to stimulate his sexual appetite. The stimuli simply accelerate the decline of the Emperor and induce a state of melancholy rather than euphoria. As noted in the seventh general commentary:

the wish-fulfilling carriage and the raven-dark copper screens dispense spring amidst melancholy. These thousand profligacies and ten thousand debaucheries, may be termed extreme indecency.<sup>50</sup>

Bujing xiansheng emphasises the Emperor's moral degradation by highlighting the incident in the text in which he rapes a young eunuch:

on encountering this show of tender affection [by the young eunuch Liu Qing], Emperor Yang's crazed debauchery is like a wild steed pawing the dust, how could he hold himself back?

This is a bleak picture of excess which might support the thesis of the negative moral imperative underlying much vernacular fiction advanced by Carlitz and Roy, as discussed in Chapter One. Bujing xiansheng does, however, make a distinction between sensuality and over-indulgence: he condemns excess but is by no means

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<sup>49</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 3, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 171 - 172.

<sup>50</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 7, Volume 6; Zhengzhou (1993): 399.

puritan in his commentaries. The general commentaries display an appreciation for feminine beauty and Bijung xiansheng notes a number of aesthetically pleasing incidents which may fall under the rubric of sensuality. He is particularly fond of highlighting the acts of certain concubines, as in the examples below:

the scene of the five beauties competing in a singing contest, while Emperor Yang secretly listens in, fully describes the delights of making merry in the palace. Reading it brings pleasure to one's eyes. The 'Yang Willow' lyrics are dashing romantic and beautiful with first place going to Han Jun'e [after a poetry competition between the concubines]. The [efforts of the] three beauties are indeed delightful in themselves, but the line "the bounteous dew of the Imperial House" is deep in meaning and bests the efforts of the others. Later the change from the phrase "spring like sea" to "dare not boast" is certainly not something just anyone can do! With her quick wit and clever mouth, Bao'er really is to one's taste.<sup>51</sup>

Xue Ye'er performs the sword dance brilliantly, and rides the horse with graceful bearing, she is most certainly an extraordinary young lady.<sup>52</sup>

the 'Welcoming Carriage Flower' is granted to Bao'er alone. Emperor Yang's sense of aesthetic appreciation is not bad at all!<sup>53</sup>

Clearly Bujing xiansheng sees in the novel a vehicle for sensual expression, and the appreciation of beauty and talent. Where the commentator and author appear to agree is in the need to avoid excess, the need to maintain boundaries of propriety, albeit flexible ones.

Material Wealth (cai 財) leads to greed for material wealth and power, in Emperor Yang's case a massive series of construction projects which taxes the nation, resulting in millions of deaths and eventually proving the principal economic and political cause for the collapse of the dynasty. Emperor Yang strives to create ever greater monuments to his love of luxury, expanding his false world of sensuality

<sup>51</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 4, Volume 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 224 -225.

<sup>52</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 5, Volume 5; Zhengzhou (1993): 280.

<sup>53</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 5, Volume 5; Zhengzhou (1993): 280.

while simultaneously withdrawing from his duties of state. The ministers who serve Emperor Yang are equally avaricious. The discussion above on Emperor Yang and the dichotomy of Fate and Duty cites sufficient examples which need not be repeated here.

Wrath (qi 氣) is more properly an excess of negative emotions, a range which encompasses jealousy and greed for power. In the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* one witnesses regular executions of morally upright ministers, scheming by avaricious ministers, palace intrigues, fratricide and patricide. In his submission to Emperor Yang, the loyal dwarf servant Wang Yi states that had he reported the dynastic crisis earlier, he would long since be dead. As Bujing xiansheng notes with reference to the Emperor's failure to reward talented ministers:

does he love talent? Does he envy talent? It is only because he loves talent that he envies it.<sup>54</sup>

The main concern of Bujing xiansheng in the general commentaries is, however, the cost of moral excess on the individual and the corrosive effects of jealousy:

a lewd heart easily turns to improper acts, but a jealous heart is most poisonous.<sup>55</sup>

The general commentaries note that the transgression of boundaries within the palace leads to a corresponding breakdown in the relationships between the characters:

Truly! Jealousy is difficult to root out. Empress Xiao made fun of others in a hundred ways without provoking jealousy, yet seeing Emperor Yang's

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<sup>54</sup>Taibei (1985): General Commentary 6, Volume 5; Zhengzhou (1993): 336 - 337.

<sup>55</sup> Taibei (1985): General Commentary 1, Volume 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 59 - 60. The interlinear commentaries reveal a similar concern. When Empress Xiao praises the concubines for the concern for the well-being of the Emperor, Bujing xiansheng notes: "the beauty lies in not being jealous". See Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 11, page 16a; Zhengzhou (1993): 126.

doting affection for Wu Jiangxian has gone too far, she is filled with ill intentions. Truly! Jealousy is difficult to root out.<sup>56</sup>

while Luo Luo [a confidante of the Empress who spurns the Emperor's advances] maintains the rules of propriety and cannot be soaked in the bounteous dew, Han Jun'e attracts [the Emperor's] doting affection and again is subtly disposed of. Entering the palace one sees jealousy, people realise that not gaining the opportunity to meet the gentleman-ruler is bitter, but do not realise that gaining the opportunity to meet the gentleman-ruler may also turn bitter.<sup>57</sup>

Through his false attachment to the Four Vices, Emperor Yang creates an illusory world for himself in which his desires are limitless and his personal authority unquestioned. Only at the end of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, just before he is taken away to be hanged does he realise the fundamental emptiness at the heart of his achievements. The fundamental moral problem identified by Bujing xiansheng's general commentaries is that of excess. Whether it be the desire to gain material objects or the cravings for physical pleasures, whether in the overflow of emotion or in a distorted sense of one's role in relation to others, Emperor Yang exceeds the natural boundaries of the human and cosmic order. Whether it be his illusory image of historical greatness or his lust for sensual experience, he fails to match expectation with reality. Lying at the root of his collapse is Emperor Yang's failure to control the root of disorder, his desires for sensual experience, by means of self-cultivation. This Confucian ideal of self-cultivation may be traced back to the *Daxue* 大學 (Great Learning) and summarised thus: if one cannot cultivate oneself, then one cannot regulate one's household (*buji qijia* 不齊其家) if one cannot regulate one's household, then one cannot rule the nation (*buzhi qiguo* 不治其國), if one cannot rule the nation, then one

<sup>56</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 6, Volume 5; Zhengzhou (1993): 336 - 337.

<sup>57</sup> Taipei (1985): General Commentary 3, Volume 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 171 - 172.

will be unable to pacify the empire (*buping tianxia* 不平天下) should disorder break out as inevitably it must.<sup>58</sup>

Yet the general commentaries also reveal a more gentle humanistic concern at the heart of Bujing xiansheng's moral critique and by extension his vision of the function of literature. The *zhanghui xiaoshuo* form represents a means of depicting what happens to human nature when quotidian moral responsibilities are shed. It seeks to explore human nature and the dilemmas which arise when moral boundaries are transgressed. Clearly Bujing xiansheng and his contemporaries believed only a structurally complex and artistically expansive form such as vernacular fiction could vividly and truthfully describe human frailties without reducing human experience to abstractions or resorting to simplistic didacticism. Bujing xiansheng's final judgement is typically sophisticated; he condemns moral excess but displays understanding for the human condition:

Emperor Yang was gratified for thirteen years. What measure of splendour and riches, yet who could know it would end up like this. Although this was retribution for his profligacy and debauchery, it was extremely cruel. Ah the pain!<sup>59</sup>

Having looked at the functions of the general commentaries, the second part of this chapter examines the interlinear commentaries.

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<sup>58</sup> *Daxue* 大學 (Great Learning). In *Daxue duben* 大學讀本 (A Reader on the Great Learning), *Zhuxi dingben Si Shu*, 朱熹定本四書 (The Four Books edited and annotated by Zhu Xi). Tainan: Fuhun chubanshe, 1981: 1 - 4.

<sup>59</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6; Zhengzhou (1993) does not contain this final general commentary.

The functions of interlinear commentaries

Interlinear commentary (*pangpi* 旁批) is a more flexible and convenient form of literary criticism than general commentaries, breaking after a phrase or line, and implanted at any locum in the text. The fact that commentary is interlinear means that it interrupts the text, and therefore that it acts as a response to the text. Interlinear commentaries are placed in between the lines of the text and vary in length from simple two or four character phrases to longer sentences of several characters length, written in classical language (*wenyanwen* 文言文). Commentaries are, on the whole, short, due to lack of space. As a result of their very fragmentary and dispersed nature, scattered throughout the body of the text, interlinear commentaries can often appear to be no more than formulaic interjections or offhand observations. Closer reading indicates that while a certain degree of spontaneity can be found in some of the comments, particularly those of a sarcastic nature, in fact, there exists a more considered approach which establishes a discernible dialogue with the narrative text and the reader. Interlinear comments can sometimes simply consist of the addition of *quandian* which appear contiguous to the text in question. More often the *quandian* are accompanied by one or two-character expressions which generally take the form of exclamations and add little to our understanding of the commentator's views, such as "wonderful" *miao* 妙, "bizarre" *guai* 怪 etc. This spontaneous form of commentary provides an immediate response to some event occurring in the body of text around them. These comments tend to be rather pithy and are marked by dark humour and exaggerated exclamations of delight or horror. For the purpose of this thesis I will not investigate these comments unless they form part of a discernible pattern.

To better understand the interlinear commentaries I have utilised a critical framework derived from the work of Rolston and McLaren to describe three categories of commentary: impressionistic, socially-oriented, and comparative.<sup>60</sup>

### Impressionistic commentary

Impressionistic commentary refers to two phenomena. First, the subjective reaction of the commentator to events in the plot, revelations of character and the general tone of a narrative passage. These comments give the appearance of having been jotted down spontaneously, but their later incorporation into the final printed text often indicates a pattern of meaning which builds up through a passage or over a longer section of the textual narrative. A simple example is that of repeated use of a phrase to denote increasing tension in a scene: when corrupt official Ma Shumou, charged with digging the imperial canal, comes across a tomb with doors open, the commentaries state “a scene of great wonder” (*guangjing daqi* 光景大奇); as he enters the tomb, the doors close behind him, at which point the commentaries state “even more wondrous” (*geng qi* 更奇).<sup>61</sup> Second, the more measured judgement of the author on the actions of the novel’s characters and the manner in which they are manipulated by the author. My examination of impressionistic commentary utilises the following categories: identification of character typologies; comments on the skill of the author; comments on the underlying structure of the novel; and comments designed to guide the reader to a specific reading of the text.

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<sup>60</sup> See Rolston (1990): 75 - 123; McLaren (1995): 51 - 80.

<sup>61</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 24, page 11; Zhengzhou (1993): 264.

The identification of character typology provides the commentator with a useful shorthand to help the reader identify role categories (e.g. *haohan* 好漢 “real hero” or *jianxiong* 奸雄 “unscrupulous hero”). This is not to say that the characters are necessarily confined by this typology; rather, that the commentator understood that literati readers were educated in the Confucian critical framework of “praise and censure” (*baobian* 褒貶) which propagated the notion of easily identifiable moral exemplars. One might also consider that in identifying these typologies, the commentator is alerting the reader to the possibility that the actual behaviour exhibited by these characters in the narrative text, may not accord with widely-held stereotypes. As noted in Chapter One, the *Sui yanshi jue li xingshi* 隋艷史爵里姓氏 (Honours and titles, family names and native places of characters appearing in *Sensational History of Sui*) places the novel’s characters into a number of categories: emperors (*diwang* 帝王), empresses (*hou* 后), concubines (*feiyang* 妃嬪), biographies of officials (*liezhuan* 列傳), eunuchs (*chenguan* 宦官), rebellious ministers (*zeichen* 賊臣), rebellious subjects (*zeimin* 賊民), immortals and gods (*xianshen* 仙神). While Bujing xiansheng’s comments on the characters in the novel adhere to the general framework laid out in the *Jue li xingshi*, the commentaries do, however, expand on the characteristics of certain typologies.

The most relevant example is, of course, the characterisation of Emperor Yang. Wright, in his definitive study of the historical stereotype constructed around the figure of Emperor Yang, notes that the Emperor was an archetypal “bad last ruler” whose personal attributes served as a warning to later rulers.<sup>62</sup> Depicted in the Standard Imperial Histories as an aesthete concerned more with sensual pleasures than the duties of state, and in popular tales as a megalomaniac with insatiable sexual

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<sup>62</sup> Wright (1964): 158.

desires, Emperor Yang appears a more complex personality both in the characterisation created by Qidong yeren in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and in the appended commentaries of Bujing xiansheng. As one would expect, a large number of Bujing xiansheng's commentaries deal with Emperor Yang's behaviour and as noted in the previous part of this chapter, the commentaries condemn the excesses of the Emperor's character, while displaying some appreciation for the environment in which he lives, and the apparent freedom from the norms of social responsibility his position allows. Emperor Yang is labelled with two typologies: the unscrupulous hero (*jianxiong* 奸雄), and the sensual ruler (*fengliujun* 風流君).

The actions of the unscrupulous hero are described in terms of the underhand methods used to gather support, the secret delight expressed at the difficulties of others and plotting for power and influence. When the future Emperor Yang realises that his future may be complex under the rule of his elder brother, Bujing xiansheng notes:

the ideas of unscrupulous heroes are different from other people.<sup>63</sup>

When Emperor Wen falls ill, Crown Prince Yang is secretly delighted at his father's plight. Bujing xiansheng notes that:

this is the attitude of an unscrupulous hero.<sup>64</sup>

Later, Emperor Wen learns of his son's plans to seize the throne and vows vengeance. Bujing xiansheng describes Emperor Yang's actions in the following terms:

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<sup>63</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 2, chapter 2, page 4a; Zhengzhou (1993): 15.

<sup>64</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 2, chapter 3, page 13; Zhengzhou (1993): 34.

unscrupulous heroes only plot for what is in front of their eyes, they do not care a jot about retribution in future days.<sup>65</sup>

While the unscrupulous hero is skilled at the tactics of achieving power and disposing of enemies, he lacks the strategic vision of a true ruler. This lack of awareness is manifested in the term “deluded ruler” *hunjun* 昏君, as when Bujing xiansheng notes Emperor Yang’s misunderstanding of imperial *qi* vapours over the town of Suiyang, commenting:

how could the subtlety of a Son of Heaven be known to a deluded ruler?<sup>66</sup>

The deluded ruler, obsessed with personal pleasure and in constant pursuit of excess, fails to heed the warnings of the loyal and heeds only the words of unscrupulous ministers. As Bujing xiansheng notes in a passage depicting Emperor Yang’s delight when treacherous ministers describe bandit gangs as mere rats:

one laughs uncontrollably at such a degree of self-delusion and stupidity.<sup>67</sup>

The actions of the sensual ruler are described in terms such as dissipated (*huangyin* 荒淫), excessively wasteful (*shechi* 奢侈), prone to favouritism (*chong'ai* 寵愛). All of these descriptions share one common feature - the pursuit of excess. Many of the commentaries utilising these phrases include comparatives and superlatives such as “what measure” *hedeng* 何等, “extreme” *ji* 極, “many” *duo* 多, “to the full” *jin* 盡. For example when Emperor Yang describes favoured concubine Wu Jiangxian as good enough to eat, Bujing xiansheng states: “Extreme

<sup>65</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 2, chapter 4, page 4a; Zhengzhou (1993): 39.

<sup>66</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 29, page 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 317.

<sup>67</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6, chapter 33, page 9; not included in Zhengzhou (1993).

favouritism”.<sup>68</sup> During a passage describing the leisurely imperial progress to the South, Bujing xiansheng comments: “Extreme gratification”.<sup>69</sup>

Bujing xiansheng’s attitude towards Emperor Yang’s pursuit of sensual pleasures is marked by sarcastic comment. Many interlinear commentaries contrast the Emperor’s interest in and talent for sensual pleasures, for example when at an early stage of planning for his pleasure palaces, the Emperor spends his time planning the selection of concubines, Bujing xiansheng states:

in the field of debauchery, Emperor Yang may be called a man of great talent.<sup>70</sup>

When Empress Xiao praises the emperor’s musical talents as those of a sage, Bujing Xiansheng comments:

it may be said [he is] a sage in debauchery.<sup>71</sup>

The interlinear commentaries also display understanding, however, of the temptations brought by the unlimited power of the imperial institution. With respect to the unending efforts of the concubines to entice the Emperor and provide sensual attractions, Bujing xiansheng states:

a warm and gentle village, and soul-enchanted ranks, at this point which gentleman-king wouldn’t be entranced?<sup>72</sup>

Following a section which describes the simple pleasure Emperor Yang gains from watching concubine Wu Jiangxian painting her eyebrows, Bujing xiansheng notes:

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<sup>68</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 28, page 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 307.

<sup>69</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 13, page 5; not included in Zhengzhou (1993).

<sup>70</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 10, page 12a; Zhengzhou (1993): 113.

<sup>71</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 26, page 10; Zhengzhou (1993): 288.

<sup>72</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 10, page 14; Zhengzhou (1993): 114.

although dissipated, it is a fine romantic section.<sup>73</sup>

Commenting on one of the most famous incidents in the reign of Emperor Yang - the cutting of silks into blossoms by concubines to decorate the winter gardens in the palace - Bujing xiansheng neatly summarises the dichotomy facing the absolute ruler:

between autumn and winter a sudden flourish of red and purple fragrant flowers. While one cannot but be shocked, one cannot but be delighted.

One is simultaneously made conscious of the extravagance and waste, yet overwhelmed by the beauty and sheer aesthetic pleasure of the act. One might therefore expect Bujing xiansheng to lay the blame for Emperor Yang's decline on concubines. While the critical commentaries show great interest in the depiction of the concubines, the majority of comments emphasise the positive qualities of his favoured concubines. Chapter 17 of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is devoted to a poetry competition amongst the concubines, which brings forth admiring comments from Bujing xiansheng, such as:

the tone and sentiment of the beauties' discussion is very fine.<sup>74</sup>

each word [of concubine Han Jun-e's lyrics] is fragrant and gorgeous, if one searched the Late Tang, one fears not many would match them.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the numerous, and one often feels on occasion, pro forma admonitions against the evils of excessive sexual activity and other sensual pleasure, one looks in vain for commentaries which present concubines in a negative light. The major exception, as discussed above is the question of jealousy, however, this emotion is not confined to

<sup>73</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 29, page 13a; Zhengzhou (1993): 324.

<sup>74</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 17, page 4a; Zhengzhou (1993): 186

<sup>75</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 17, page 5a; Zhengzhou (1993): 187

women alone - plotting ministers and crown princes are as capable of jealousy as women. It would appear then that in the commentaries of Bujing xiansheng, we have little of the misogyny which colours the later *Sui Tang Yanyi* (see Chapter One). To illustrate the point I will present a few examples before moving on to the next section. Commenting on the concubine Yuan Ziyan who has knowledge of astronomy and attempts to persuade Emperor Yang to alter his behaviour, Bujing xiansheng makes a number of comments:

Ziyan has great understanding.<sup>76</sup>

her discussion of the moral cosmos is irrefutable, one fears that what she says is no small matter.<sup>77</sup>

Describing concubine Xue Ye'er's horse-riding skills, Bujing xiansheng states:

romantic and graceful, much stronger than Emperor Yang.<sup>78</sup>

Describing the beauty of Wu Jiangxian, famed for her painted eyebrows, Bujing xiansheng notes:

Jiangxian's talents for charm and beauty really make one think.<sup>79</sup>

One observes in the views expressed by Bujing xiansheng both continued condemnation of Emperor Yang in his role as a sensual ruler, but little sense of blame attached to concubines; indeed the interlinear commentaries consistently express admiration for the qualities of these concubines and appreciation of the aesthetic sensibilities.

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<sup>76</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 16, page 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 175.

<sup>77</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 16, page 3a; Zhengzhou (1993): 175.

<sup>78</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 22, page 6a; Zhengzhou (1993): 240.

<sup>79</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 28, page 3; Zhengzhou (1993): 306.

Impressionistic commentary: comments on literary skill

Bujing xiansheng makes a number of comments on the skill of the author. These comments are often brief expressions of delight such as “a fine phrase” (*jiaju* 佳句). At other times the commentator alludes to painting, for example “written as a picture” (*xie...ruhua* 寫...如畫) or the following example in which a moonlit night, cold breeze and rustling wutong trees are described as “a picture of autumn sounds” (*yi fu qiusheng tu* 一幅秋聲圖).<sup>80</sup> Another example of the appropriation of painting to describe literature can be found when Bujing xiansheng comments on a passage describing a sweet breeze drifting through the palace:

a quietly elegant scene and a gorgeous scene come together, on opening the roll it is as if one comes across a hidden mountain path.<sup>81</sup>

There is even an example of direct comparison with a famous painter: when describing a young concubine who has been tricked into lying in Emperor Yang’s virgin deflowering carriage, Bujing xiansheng states:

Qiu Shizhou’s spring [i.e. sensual] drawings are not as fine as this.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 14, page 11a; Zhengzhou (1993): 157.

<sup>81</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 14, page 10; Zhengzhou (1993): 156.

<sup>82</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 31, page 13; Zhengzhou (1993): 346. The painter referred to is Qiu Ying 仇英 (ca. 1495 - 1552; his *hao* 號 was *shizhou* 十洲), a leading painter from Suzhou who specialised in depicting intimate scenes from the inner palaces. See Wen C. Fong, “The Expanding Literati Culture”. In (editors) Wen C. Fong, James C.Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum*. Taipei. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996: 327 - 334. See also James Cahill, *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368 - 1580*. New York: Weatherill, 1978: 201 - 210. I am indebted to Dr Julian Ward for these references.

As described in the above section on general commentaries, Bujing xiansheng is eager to defend the novel from charges of sleaze. Commenting on a passage in which the Emperor and Empress slip into a drunken sleep, Bujing xiansheng states:

although it is termed vernacular literature, has there been even half a vulgar word?<sup>83</sup>

Commenting on a poem by the author in which he claims that the prophecies of the impending doom contained in the popular ballads sung by the common people are evidence of the will of the moral cosmos, Bujing xiansheng states:

although the *shi* poems and *ci* lyrics in the novel verge on the vulgar, their theory is very penetrating.<sup>84</sup>

Another example comes when the novel describes the Emperor's attempted rape of a young concubine and the streams of rouge on the imperial bed. Bujing xiansheng comments:

spring emotions and spring actions [ie sexual activity], described to the full. Yet before one's eyes there is not half a stroke of debauched sensuality - therein lies the beauty of this literary work.<sup>85</sup>

Such interlinear comments tally with what we have seen both in the prefatory materials examined in Chapter two and the general commentaries analysed above.

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<sup>83</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 14, page 11a; Zhengzhou (1993): 157.

<sup>84</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 29, page 5a; Zhengzhou (1993): 319.

<sup>85</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 31, page 9; Zhengzhou (1993): 343.

Another function of interlinear commentary is to highlight crucial moments in the narrative text. In the case of the interlinear commentaries appended to *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, this form of critical commentary points to a fairly rudimentary analysis of the underlying structure of the novel. While containing the potential to criticise and alter the authorial viewpoint, commentary also serves to highlight the coherence of the text in a variety of ways, despite appearing to break the flow of narrative text. As Gardner has noted:

[commentary] elaborates and articulates the words and sentences of a text into a sustained message.<sup>86</sup>

Bujing xiansheng cannot resist the temptation to include comments designed to guide the reader to a specific reading of the text. This form of commentary approaches serious criticism but often relies on formulaic phrases. Occasionally these comments act to draw the attention of the reader to a particular passage and may constitute an attempt to influence the reading of the text, e.g. *zhuoyan* 著眼 or *juyan* 具眼 “pay attention”.<sup>87</sup> Often these are presented as if the commentator were simply an ordinary reader expressing his feelings, which may also prove a useful technique in guiding the reader towards a desired reaction. This form of commentary is also used to outline the underlying literary structures employed by the author, point out the use of allusion and intertextuality, and express an appreciation of the author’s literary skill. These comments take the form of terse technical terms (often metaphors linked to physiology, construction etc.) designed to label authorial structural techniques, prefiguring phrases alerting the reader to approaching events, and repeated phrases, often buried deep in the text and separated by chapters, which reflect events back upon

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<sup>86</sup> Gardner (1998): 413.

<sup>87</sup> Rolston (1990): 75 - 81. For an example see Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 28, page 9a; Zhengzhou (1993): 310.

each other. As Rolston has noted, the fact that fiction criticism was closely connected to other types of literary and aesthetic criticism resulted in both strength and weaknesses; the implementation of ready-made terminology engendered confusion and imprecise definitions.<sup>88</sup> An example from the commentaries of Bujing xiansheng is the term “embellishment” *dianzhui* 點綴 which appears a number of times to alert the reader to scenes in which sensuality is contrasted with sign of impending trouble. For example, as the Emperor pleads that his love for the Empress far surpasses that for his concubines, a peal of laughter emerges from a nearby grove, which prompts Bujing xiansheng to comment:

beautifully embellished.<sup>89</sup>

A few pages later, the author writes a beautiful scene in which, out of curiosity Empress Xiao follows a cat chasing a butterfly, only to come across what she mistakenly suspects is Emperor Yang plotting with his favoured concubines to get her drunk and distance her from imperial affection. Bujing xiansheng notes:

an embellishment.<sup>90</sup>

Another term which recurs is “appealing” *yun* 韻 which appears to have two functions: first, to signify an appreciation for fine literary description; and second, to alert the reader to a change of rhythm in the text. An interesting aspect of the use of this term is that it is only ever applied to situations involving Emperor Yang and his concubines. For example, following a passage in which Emperor Yang stands

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<sup>88</sup> Rolston (1990): 34.

<sup>89</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6, chapter 33, page 15a; Zhengzhou (1993): 372.

<sup>90</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6, chapter 34, page 5; not included in Zhengzhou (1993).

transfixed in study of a map of Guangling, his concentration is broken when concubine Bao'er hands him a cup of tea, Bujing xiansheng comments:

an appealing embellishment.<sup>91</sup>

Likewise when the Emperor and his concubines engage in banter about the various legends of the Moon Goddess, Chang E (prior to the descent of a fairy maid-servant from the moon to visit the Emperor, Bujing xiansheng notes:

this merry banter is utterly appealing.<sup>92</sup>

A final example is the comment appended by Bujing xiansheng to a description of concubine Han Jun'e, riding into the Milou pleasure complex to order a mock evening summons to arms to gratify the Emperor's wishes - soon afterwards the Emperor refuses to heed messengers who bring news of the collapsing state of the dynasty:

the scene of the night summons is romantic and appealing.<sup>93</sup>

The interlinear commentaries also draw on traditional critical terminology such as the symbiotic relationship between emotion *qing* 情 and scenery *jing* 景, such as when Emperor Yang sighs at the prospect of realising his dream of building a southern capital in Jiangdu:

emotion and scenery are true to life.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 17, page 11; Zhengzhou (1993): 191.

<sup>92</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 14, page 14a; Zhengzhou (1993): 159. The same phrase is repeated in a passage describing Empress Xiao commenting on the Emperor's infatuation with concubine Wu Jiangxian. Soon after the Empress forces Emperor Yang to give up Wu. See Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 28, page 1a; Zhengzhou (1993): 305.

<sup>93</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 32, page 11; Zhengzhou (1993): 357.

<sup>94</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 17, page 13a; Zhengzhou (1993): 192.

Despite the rudimentary attempts at establishing a critical framework, one must acknowledge that *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* lack the sophisticated approach of commentary editions of novels produced from the 1650s onwards.

### Socially-oriented commentary

The second form of critical commentary apparent in interlinear commentary is socially-oriented criticism. This form encompasses three phenomena: first, historical comparisons between Emperor Yang and other historical figures; second, the drawing of parallels between events in the text and contemporary social phenomena; and finally moral judgement which the commentator wishes the reader to extrapolate in order to comment on society at large. The judgments made are similar to those discussed in the above section on general commentaries.

### Socially-oriented commentary: historical comparisons

First, I consider the historical comparisons raised by Bujing xiansheng between Emperor Yang and other historical figures. The commentaries allude to a number of famous emperors: Qin Shihuangdi (founder of the first unified empire), Han Gaozu (founder of the Han dynasty), Tang Taizong (second emperor of the Tang dynasty who is portrayed in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* as the instigator of his father's successful campaign), Zhou Wen (Regent in the Zhou dynasty who stood aside to allow the rightful king to take power when the latter reached the mandated age), and Chen Houzhu (final ruler of the Southern Chen whose reign was extinguished by the Sui and who twice appears as a ghost to warn Emperor Yang in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*). Bujing xiansheng also refers to two Empresses: Empress Lü (Han dynasty), and Empress Wu Zetian (who interrupted the Tang dynasty to found her own Zhou dynasty before the restoration of the Tang). The majority of the commentaries simply

function to belittle the governing abilities of Emperor Yang, for example when he decides to repair the Great Wall, Bujing xiansheng states:

borrowing other people's acts of merit, yet he doesn't govern his own rivers and mountains, how stupid he is.<sup>95</sup>

Another example comes as the text describes the appointment by the emperor of concubine Yuan Ziyan as Imperial Astronomer. Bujing Xiansheng states:

while Ziyan is not inferior to Zifang, Emperor Yang is far from being a Han Gaozu [founder of the Han dynasty].<sup>96</sup>

When Emperor Yang seeks to compare himself to Duke Wen of Zhou, who gave way at the end of his regency to the rightful ruler, Bujing xiansheng states:

[if he] wishes to compare [himself] with Zhou Wen, there is nothing [that can be considered] going too far.<sup>97</sup>

Emperor Yang's literary qualities are recognised as well as his knowledge of history. For example, when he suggests granting the imperial surname to the willow trees lining the banks of the imperial canal, he notes that Qin Shihuangdi granted the imperial surname to the pine tree. Bujing xiansheng adds:

the quoted reference is most appropriate.<sup>98</sup>

Having complimented the Emperor on his historical knowledge, Bujing xiansheng is unable to resist a jibe at Emperor Yang's actions. A few paragraphs later he states:

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<sup>95</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 14, page 6; Zhengzhou (1993): 153.

<sup>96</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 16, page 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 174.

<sup>97</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 27, page 8; Zhengzhou (1993): 299.

<sup>98</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 27, page 10; Zhengzhou (1993): 300.

the Yang willows gaining the same surname of this deluded lord, ought to hang.<sup>99</sup>

Socially-oriented commentary: comment on contemporary society

The second category is the drawing of parallels between events in the text and contemporary social phenomena. The late Ming period was one of political instability and collapse of institutional authority. Court politics were fraught with factionalism and the mechanisms of local government were subject to increasing levels of corruption. The Wanli emperor, who refused to hold court for two decades, undertook extravagant construction projects, such as the refurbishment and extension of the original Sui dynasty imperial canal built by Emperor Yang. This phenomenon is a central issue in the commentaries of Bujing xiansheng. The interlinear commentaries often utilise the phrase “ancient and modern” (*gujin* 古今) to present arguments relevant to contemporary society. During a passage in which the Emperor complains of venal ministers, Bujing xiansheng notes:

in ancient and modern times, this has been a constant problem with ministers.<sup>100</sup>

Another example comes when Ma Shumou, charged with constructing the imperial canal, files false reports on casualties:

reporting acts of merit in a muddled fashion has always been the case both in ancient times and modern.<sup>101</sup>

When rural people flock to the capital to complain of venal officials, the interlinear commentaries note:

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<sup>99</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 27, page 10a; Zhengzhou (1993): 300.

<sup>100</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 2, chapter 7, page 13; Zhengzhou (1993): 80.

<sup>101</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 25, page 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 272

heavenly justice is near, the emperor is far. If the county and district officials are not just, where can one go to complain of maltreatment? One may sigh, one may sigh!"<sup>102</sup>

The people are beaten and sent back to their villages, while the ministers who put forward the plans to build the imperial canal are richly rewarded. Bujing xiansheng notes:

what a roll-call of ministers contributing to the perishing of a state.<sup>103</sup>

Bujing xiansheng uses the tale of Lady Hou, a concubine and talented poet, who, by refusing to bribe eunuch minister Xu Tingfu, forfeits her opportunity to meet the Emperor, to make a barely disguised attack on contemporary officialdom:

even in recent times in official circles, bribery of public servants still occurs. These types should look to the example of this woman of the highest morality.<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the contemporary target of the rot seen at the heart of the Ming imperial state, is in a comment on a failed foreign adventure: Emperor Yang's disastrous campaign to subdue the Korean peninsula. As Hegel has noted, the contemporary readership of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* may have had fresh in their minds the Ming war against Korea in 1594 and the huge levies which were placed on a decreasing taxbase.<sup>105</sup> Bujing xiansheng makes his intent clear in a comments on a passage in which Liu Xuan warns of the dire economic and social consequences of the proposed expedition against Korea:

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<sup>102</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 23, page 9a; Zhengzhou (1993): 253.

<sup>103</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 25, page 7a; Zhengzhou (1993): 274.

<sup>104</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 15, page 5a; Zhengzhou (1993): 164.

<sup>105</sup> Hegel (1981): 93. Hegel also notes the parallels on the obsession with canal-building shared by Emperor Yang and the Ming Wanli emperor.

in ancient times and modern defeat and collapse have always come from this.<sup>106</sup>

These comments, following on from those described earlier critical of ministers, indicate a high degree of dissatisfaction in the mind of Bujing xiansheng with regard to the institutions of state and the policies carried out by the then government. Speculation on the exact motives for this disaffection lie outwith the scope of this thesis but must be borne in mind when considering the motives the critical commentator had in selecting to annotate *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.

#### Social Commentary: a moral critique

The final category is moral judgement which the commentator wishes the reader to extrapolate to society at large. An important message conveyed by the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and the appended commentaries of Bujing xiansheng is that one is largely responsible for directing one's own fate. While acknowledging that certain events and situations have an impact on one's decisions, the commentaries repeatedly highlight the direct consequences of Emperor Yang's actions. Since this topic has been covered earlier in this thesis, a few examples will suffice. When the imperial concubine Lady Sha contradicts Emperor Yang's criticism of concubines for sapping the energy of emperors, blaming instead the emperors themselves, Bujing xiansheng states:

how can sensuality delude people, it is people who delude themselves, Lady Sha's argument is indeed mighty.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 5, chapter 25, page 14; Zhengzhou (1993): 279. For further information on Sino-Korean relations during the Ming see Donald N. Clark, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming". In (editors) Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, *Cambridge History of China. Volume 8. The Ming Dynasty, 1368 - 1644, Part 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 272 - 300.

<sup>107</sup> Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 15, page 7a; Zhengzhou (1993): 165.

As Emperor Yang boasts, on the death of his father, that the empire is now his playground, Bujing xiansheng states:

this phrase is the seed of Emperor Yang's debauchery.<sup>108</sup>

When Emperor Yang, jealous of the jade pear tree (with its symbolic link to the Li family, who later found the successor Tang dynasty), orders it cut down to expel flower demons, Bujing xiansheng notes:

flowers are not demons, it is he himself who has sown the seeds of retribution.<sup>109</sup>

Emperor Yang's problem in the eyes of Bujing xiansheng is a lack of awareness. Bujing Xiansheng later contrasts this with Di Quxie, who, after encountering the rat incarnation of Emperor Yang, realises that the dynasty is doomed and retires from public service:

being able to achieve awareness, really (he) is a hero.<sup>110</sup>

This last commentary goes to the heart of the criticism of Emperor Yang both in the text of the novel and in the critical commentary. The Emperor is so absorbed in the pursuit of material and sensual excess that he grows ever more distant from reality and ever more remote from awareness.

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<sup>108</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 2, chapter 6, page 1a; Zhengzhou (1993): 61.

<sup>109</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 16, page 10a; Zhengzhou (1993): 179.

<sup>110</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 22, page 1a; Zhengzhou (1993): 237.

Comparative commentary

Underlying the third form of critical commentary - comparative commentary - is the principle of elevating vernacular fiction into the higher tradition of prose works such as philosophy and historical writings. I earlier discussed interlinear comments on the literary merits of the author in terms of descriptive abilities and avoidance of sensationalism. In this section I briefly examine how critical commentaries often praise the literary skills of authors and make comparisons with canonical works in terms of didactic purpose and aesthetic qualities. Commentators often compare the fictional works with works of philosophy and history in prefatory material in order to highlight the contribution that the former literary mode makes, a contribution which lies beyond the scope or ability of the latter.

Bujing xiansheng alludes to a number of canonical works and respected literary figures. These linkages largely act as satirical references, though there are comparisons of literary qualities (always in favour of the author or the vernacular fiction form). They form a linkage between the events in the narrative body and the subjects of the earlier works. In doing so they open up the possibility of intertextual reference - a subject which is examined in more depth in Chapter Five. The linkages also advance the concept, heavily promoted in the prefatory material, that vernacular fiction should be taken as seriously as other forms of literature.

The satirical use of canonical reference is often employed to undermine the reference while at the same time retaining the essential truth of the situation described in the novel. A fine example is when Di Quxie, sent to oversee the building of an imperial canal, falls into an underground palace where he sees that Emperor Yang is the incarnation of a giant rat. Bujing xiansheng states:

the ancients, in order to lament avarice and cruelty, wrote the rhapsody ‘Giant Rat’, an example of which may be seen here.<sup>111</sup>

The “Giant Rat” referred to is a poem from the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry) in which subjects bemoan the rapacious nature of the ruler of the state and claim that they are to depart for a happy land.<sup>112</sup> The theme of the poem echoes the concerns of the book. Millions die toiling on imperial canals built to join together Emperor Yang’s pleasure palaces. The happy land to which they venture is to their deaths; the happy lands of Emperor Yang’s pleasure palaces also prove to be the venue for his dissipation and death at the hands of rebel ministers. Yet one cannot escape the humour of the commentator who, on reading of the depiction of Emperor Yang as a rat spirit, immediately invokes a lamentation from the most revered of texts - the Classic of Poetry. A few pages later, Bujing xiansheng adds a typically tongue in cheek comment, when, Di Quxie, freshly escaped from his ordeal seeing Emperor Yang’s rat spirit whipped by the immortals, still harbours doubts as to what he has witnessed:

one cannot but have doubts.<sup>113</sup>

Another example of the teasing satire utilised by Bujing xiansheng is a reference to the Song poet and polymath Su Dongpo (1036 - 1101 AD). Among Su’s many hobbies was his interest in food. In *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, Ma Shumou, an official charged by the emperor with constructing the imperial canal, is tricked into saving an ancestral tomb by a family of criminals who cook a stew made of the flesh of young

<sup>111</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 21, page 5a; Zhengzhou (1993): 229.

<sup>112</sup> The source is poem nine from the state of Wei, in the Guofeng section of the Mao edition (毛詩國風魏國第九). See Chen Zizhan 陳子展 (editor), *Shijing zhijie* 詩經直解 (An Explication of the Classic of Poetry). Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1983: 334 - 337. For an English translation see Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1954: 307.

<sup>113</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 22, page 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 238.

children but tell Ma that it is made from lamb. As the novel describes Ma's delight at the taste of the stew, Bujing xiansheng states:

[Su] Dongpo's [cooking] methods originated here.<sup>114</sup>

Another satirical literary reference which ostensibly functions to make comparisons with the classics of literary endeavour is the reference to the "Gao Tang Fu" 高唐賦 (High Tang Rhapsody), a famed poem of the Six Dynasties depicting the dream-like encounter between a young aristocrat and a beautiful immortal woman, which is regarded as a locus classicus for much erotic poetic imagery. In the novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, Emperor Yang awakes from a drunken slumber to see what appears to be a beautiful young woman before his eyes. At this point Bujing xiansheng states:

no different from "Gao Tang" (Fu Rhapsody).<sup>115</sup>

What does differ, however, is that the beauty Emperor Yang sees before him, is a young eunuch, whom Emperor Yang proceeds to sodomise. Here again we see that, amidst what could simply be interpreted as a sarcastic aside, the critical commentator is drawing comparisons between vernacular fiction and institutionally accepted forms of literature. Implicit in this linkage is the notion that vernacular fiction is better placed to depict these human situations, both in terms of literary description but also in its capacity to retain moral judgement.

### Conclusion

This chapter has examined the functions of the interlinear commentaries and demonstrated how they form an integral element in the reader's appreciation of the

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<sup>114</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 4, chapter 23, page 2; Zhengzhou (1993): 248.

<sup>115</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6, chapter 33, page 11a; Zhengzhou (1993): 369.

novel. They provide a voice from within the body of the narrative text which often provides a counterpoint to that of the narrator. They form the basis of a dialogic exchange which encompasses the ideologies of the author, the critical commentator and the perception of the readership. Critical commentaries can provide a textual space in which a multiplicity of voices and opinions emerge. Yet as we have seen, the commentator does not confine comments simply to the narrative in hand; rather, the commentator can play a variety of roles. *Bujing xiansheng* is by turns a polemicist arguing for the validity of the vernacular fiction form, or a social commentator discussing the ills of society, and sometimes a connoisseur of aesthetic pleasures.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXTENDING THE RESONANCE OF THE PAST -  
INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCE AND CENTRES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN *SUI  
YANGDI YANSHI*

This chapter discusses the role of intertextual reference found within the construct of the pre-modern vernacular language novel, principally through a detailed examination of the interplay of references raised in the discourse between the narrative body and embedded interlinear critical annotation. A central aspect of Bakhtinian thought is the transmission of knowledge over long periods of time and the ability of language to contain past meaning which can be revived by the reader (and given further meaning by the reader's act of reconstruction). Intertextuality allows the creation of centres of significance; that is to say certain key images or incidents within the text which resonate beyond the confines of the specific situation and contain within them links to earlier works which can be re-activated by the reader and which enrich the reader's experience of the novel.

In Chapter Three, the role of the critical commentator was addressed and in Chapter Four the function of critical commentary was examined. This chapter investigates the relationship between interlinear critical annotation and the surrounding textual body. It examines how a judgement must be made as to the function of interlinear commentary within the narrative body; how that function operates within a wider narrative environment; how the operation of that function differs from that of other textual elements; and the means whereby the interplay between the function and the textual environment may be reconstructed by the reader in order to generate meaning. This chapter concentrates on one form of intertextuality; that is the placement of an identifiable historical or semi-mythical reference amidst the body of a defined narrative event. It will demonstrate the way in which application of embedded extra-narrative reference creates a potential textual opening through which the reader may

enter a realm of significance beyond the immediate narrative body, and from which the reader generates meaning on the basis of a non-enclosed and pluri-signified literary-historical reconstruction. The generated meaning can also add layers of significance for future understanding of the novel.

The chapter also examines the potential divergence (or convergence) of fictional expositions presented by the text-bound narrative event, as composed by the author, and the embedded interlinear historical reference, as appended by the critical commentator. I further illustrate how the reader may utilise this divergence as a critical tool to expand centres of significance and press back the boundaries of the novel's potential for meaning. The function of interlinear critical commentary as a means by which the critical annotator offers the explication of an alternative or expanded fictional exposition, is judged against the background of two mechanisms of literary criticism, the orthodox notion of fixed allusion and the more recent concept of intertextuality. In the following section a theoretical distinction is drawn between allusion and intertextuality. A concrete example is provided from the text of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.

#### Allusive borrowing and the domination of meaning

The concept of borrowed literary reference was one familiar to pre-modern Chinese writers and critics who utilised the critical method of *yongdian* 用典, “allusive borrowings”<sup>1</sup> to invoke a general air of authority from the sage philosophical, historical and literary works of tradition, and appropriate them to contemporary classical language literature and vernacular fiction. *Yongdian* has been interpreted as rooted in an appeal to a broadly-accepted canon of philosophy, history and poetic literature, principally, though not exclusively, Confucian in nature, from which authors drew literary inspiration, philosophical orientation and a comprehensive

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Jing's translation, Wang Jing (1992): 9.

system of personal ethics. As discussed in Chapter Two, the net result of this Confucian influence on literati culture was a general belief in the notion of literature as an active agent of didactic moral exposition, and the clear delineation of moral exemplars as preferable to historically accurate portrayal. This moral imperative resulted in the elevation of historical writings as a vehicle for moral truth. This preference, rooted in long-standing cultural norms, also saw the advancement of poetry as an ideological tool to the detriment of the status of fiction.<sup>2</sup>

By the early seventeenth century, however, authors of vernacular fiction were actively advocating the notion that fictional writings could be considered on a par with the canons of history and poetry. Though their view of human nature was more ambiguous than that presented in Standard Imperial Histories and other works which promoted the strictures of Confucian didacticism, authors of vernacular fiction were, like Confucian traditionalists, still fundamentally concerned with human behaviour, ethical standards and the mutually influencing relations between the individual and society at large. As noted in Chapter One of this thesis, the greater degree of realism portrayed in vernacular novels should not therefore be interpreted as a move away from moral concerns; it simply represents a more complex approach to these problems engendered both from the generic tendencies of the vernacular novel form, and from their own sophisticated reading of human nature.

#### Allusive Borrowings: domination of the past

Allusion can be characterised as an attempt to effect a self-conscious linkage of a historical event - or orthodox interpretation of the morality of that event - to one being described within the apparently narrow bounds of a narrative event placed in a

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<sup>2</sup> A fine outline of the elevated role of poetry in Chinese literary criticism can be found in Wong, Sui-kit, *Early Chinese Literary Criticism*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1983; reprint, Taipei: Bookman, 1990.

specific textual body. This linkage may serve two primary purposes: first, it attempts to anchor the reader's interpretation of the textual event in the narrative body in the foundation of historicity; second, it seeks to encompass the extra-textual values implicit in the historical allusion contained in interlinear commentary appended to the narrative text. Given the prevalence of Neo-Confucian values in late Ming socio-political life, the utiliser of allusion could reasonably assume that an educated reader would be sufficiently well-versed in the canons of the Confucian tradition (and to a lesser degree in Buddhist and Daoist traditions) as to recognise and accurately place an allusion in its historical context.<sup>3</sup>

It is premature, however, to assume first, the universally successful recognition of an allusion and the concomitant capacity to trace it back to the correct primary source; and second, an orthodox interpretation of an allusion by the reader. Such assumptions would overlook the implications involved in the possibility of the reader failing to recognise an allusion, an unwitting misinterpretation or a deliberate re-interpretation of a reference, thus resulting in the failure to accomplish an adequate, predictable or authorially directed reconstruction of the link between allusion and historicity, and the reader's contemporaneity. As Wang has pointed out:

inherent in the practice of [*yongdian*]...is the paradox that the historical content of an allusion is often both present and concealed in the new text. Thus while the use of allusion is a self-conscious act on the part of the author [or equally on the part of the critical commentator], it by no means guarantees the automatic retrieval of their historicity.<sup>4</sup>

One may determine three potentially negative traits contained within the above-defined concept of allusion which may hinder the reader in the search for a successful

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<sup>3</sup> For details of the influence of Neo-Confucian thought on literati and official life in the late Ming, see Handlin-Smith, Joanna, *Action in Late Ming Thought: The Reorientation of Lu Kun and other Scholar-Officials*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Wang Jing (1992): 9.

activation of meaning in a text: first, the potential for allusion to repress links with historicity; second, the possibility that allusion will unconsciously limit the potential of meaning available for the reader to exploit; third, allusion may be used by the author or critical commentator as a dynamic element to direct the reader towards a narrowly defined objective. The following section examines these three potentialities.

First, allusion contains the potential to repress both itself and its ties with temporality and historicity, thereby undermining its basic function as a link with the past. The repression of historical ties may arise from the failure of the reader to recognise the relevant allusion, or from the choice of an obscure allusion by the author or critical commentator. Concurrent with the repression of ties with temporality and historicity comes a suppression of potential centres of significance which should be open to reconstruction and interpretation by the reader. The curtailment of textual reconstruction is rendered yet more effective by its repression of the three primary textual elements involved - the embedded allusion, the historical text to which the allusion refers, and the narrative event upon which the author seeks to comment. This curtailment both decreases the potential of the text to contain a polyphony of opinions and may even lead to the risk of an increased sense of alienation in the reader toward the novel. Narrow application of allusion may in fact serve both to limit the open-ended nature of a literary work and isolate the reader even further from the centres of significance whose presence in the text should serve to draw the reader into a deeper consideration of the dialogical nature of the novel. Another consequence of the decoupling of allusion and historicity is the undermining of any work's claim to present a contemporary exposition of the wisdom of the ancients. The resulting loss of this proxy moral justification would entail a severe diminution of both its moral and literary authority. Deprived of the platform of moral authority, the status of the work would diminish in the estimation of the literati audience.

Second, allusion may unconsciously limit the bounds of expression sought by its practitioners by internalising a work of fiction. That is to say, the author may construct a work of fiction which integrates elements of allusion, and appeals to a prescribed canon of ancient and unchallengeable verities. As a consequence of this appeal, however, the author may be creating a textual body unwilling to subject itself to alternative modes of thought - in Bakhtinian terms, a monological work. In this way the contemporary author seeks to gain a measure of prestige through the appearance of a fixed relationship reaching back to canonical truth. The attempt to realise an internalised fictional construct serves only to exclude the multiple contingencies of meaning inherent in literary production. It further denies the reader the opportunity to explore both conscious and subconscious generation of significance from the textual body and encourage a multi-signified reconstruction of meaning. In other words, by binding the text in a rigid relationship with an omnipotent past-oriented perspective, the text is unable to realise its potential for polyphony and is consequently trapped by a fixed and unvarying critical interpretation of history - an interpretation which lacks the inherent capacity to broaden the significance of the contemporary text or extend the range of manifold meanings and implications contained within the historical reference. Such a past-oriented text would appear to the reader to be committed solely to the judgements of past references, canonical texts and overt cultural constraints and thus reduced to a series of closed judgements excluding alternative opinions, endlessly repeating platitudes and based on ossified and alienating structures of reference.

Third, by presenting an enclosed allusion, with its scope of meaning in the narrative body founded in and defined by its relationship with a fixed historical or literary reference alone, the textual function of allusion could be construed as a conscious and dynamic means to define narrowly the limits of textual revitalisation possible for the reader. It may repress the significance of meaning accommodated within the potentially active and mutually influential relationship between historical

reference and narrative body. In other words it suppresses the generation of altered or extended meaning which may arise as a result of the interaction between textual event and embedded extra-textual reference and instead restricts these elements to strictly defined units of meaning whose relationship may be described as a hermetic link, and which, though presented as an integrated body of textual significance, remain mutually uninvolved. The allusion would then present a contained event under the domination of the authorial identity, rendered stable by its fixed relationship with the past oriented perspective embodied by orthodox judgement. The reader would be presented with a literary *fait-accomplis*, a stifling element in the body of text whose presence limits narrative polyphony by neither contributing to the generation of meaning nor allowing the expansion of the potential significance of the reference itself.

These three potentially negative elements reveal how the narrow application of allusive borrowing limits the potential reconstruction of meaning by the reader and restricts the degree of polyphony the author may embed within the text. At this juncture we shall turn to an alternative model which fully explores the positive potential raised by allusive borrowing - that of intertextuality.

#### Intertextuality: mining the potential of the past

Wang Jing defines intertextuality as:

the communicative relationships between one text and another, and, particularly in the case of age-old writing traditions, between a text and its context.<sup>5</sup>

Intertextuality maps out a terrain in which one recognises that it is inherent in the nature of textual production that a number of texts may converge, according to Wang,

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<sup>5</sup> Wang Jing (1992): 2.

without relying on the question of influence or direct authorial intention. That is not to devalue knowledge of the cultural background or antecedent texts; this remains indispensable to the endeavour of reconstructing meaning. Rather, my interest lies in the degree to which the text escapes the control of the author and the relationship a reader may build with the text - a relationship which should be mutually enriching. Given the vagaries of human learning and organic social memory, this relationship is incomplete and to a certain degree arbitrary. From the viewpoint of the reader, one should make a distinction between the texts that the author has consciously reworked in the act of composition, and those that operate as a function of the cultural and social milieu in which the author lives. Given that our subject is a chronologically distant novel, particular attention will be paid to the implications of intertextuality with regard to historicity. With regard to historical reference, intertextuality restructures the concept of historicity by dividing it into two manifestations: first, that based on the perceptions of the contemporary reader; and second, the text's awareness of its own historicity.

First, I examine the perception of the contemporary reader, what Wang describes as:

the reader's experience of his or her own contemporaneity through intertextual reading.<sup>6</sup>

The notions carried by the contemporary reader are a product of the time in which one exists and therefore one is imbued with a sense of language and philosophy related to one's particular historical period. The reader's contemporaneity is necessarily removed by chronological distance, as well, on occasion, as cultural difference, from those notions contained within a historical text under critical scrutiny. One's sense of contemporaneity is heightened by contact with a narrative body of an earlier era and

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<sup>6</sup> Wang Jing (1992): 7 - 8.

leads one to question the distance between one's perceptions - linguistic, ethical, generic and political - and those evident within the work of fiction. This process of questioning leads the reader to an awareness of language and thought as constantly evolving entities whose previous manifestations and subtleties must be interpreted and reactivated if they are to be subjected to contemporary critical analysis and understanding. Moreover the lexical and philosophical tensions evidenced in the historic gap between perceptions of linguistic units revealed by such critical judgement heighten the sense of the unconscious power of language and deepen the prospect of reconstruction. It is clear that this form of critical analysis must be founded in the judgement that textual production is open-ended and replete with both conscious artifice in structural form, and subconscious generation of meaning through the constant tension created by the process of reconstruction and the potential expansion of textual significance and the limits of cultural constraint.

Second, the text's experience of its own historicity as the rewriting and, more specifically, the re-contextualisation of the prior text.<sup>7</sup> While this statement holds implications for various literary elements, for the purposes of this chapter it is applied solely to the utilisation of an open reference to some historical event or figure - here in the form of the embedded critical annotation, the effect of whose placement within the narrative text is both to revalorise itself and transform the text around it. Embedded reference may potentially gain an extended scope of meaning, adding to that which it has previously been signified as containing, through its active dialogue with the textual context in which it is placed. Moreover this interaction has a similar transformative effect on the surrounding body of text leading the reader to re-evaluate the significant meaning contained amidst the narrative surface, both in terms of the narrative event in its immediate context but also extending out into the relationship between that narrative event and its relative significance within the particular literary work, its associated

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<sup>7</sup> Wang Jing (1992): 7 - 8.

texts and, by extension, literary tradition as a whole. In effect the open-ended reference may contribute to the overall generation of significance underlying the structure of a work of literature. In narrow terms the revalorisation of a reference may significantly extend its range of designation as a lexical unit thus creating greater possibilities for future usage and continuing the process of expansion of meaning and deepening of literary resonance. It also has the perhaps unintentional and generally unconscious effect of pressing back the bounds of cultural constraint.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore the contemporary reader is conducting analysis in the light of contemporary critical techniques and thus may also unconsciously place significance in certain modes either taken for granted by the author or even unnoticed by the author in the construction of the work. This tension between textual surface and creative critical reconstruction has the effect of highlighting the constraints placed on the author when viewed from the contemporary standpoint.

The process of revalorisation affords one the opportunity to subject the text to renewed interpretation and re-evaluation. That is to say the intertextual reference opens the way to a variety of interpretations, unhampered by the need to define itself or its effect in narrow causal, temporally-based, or comparative terms. One may conclude from the above discussion that, by allowing the contemporary reader to utilise critical tools to reconstruct historical texts, intertextuality presents a useful method for evaluating the relationship between embedded reference and the narrative event in which it is placed.

Having established intertextuality as the theoretical model offering the highest degree of potential for reconstructing meaning from the textual surface, it is necessary to apply this theoretical model to a concrete example taken from the text of *Sui Yangdi*

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<sup>8</sup> The utilisation of the term unconscious simply signifies the fact that at the time of writing the author was unaware of future developments in linguistic and literary modes.

*Yanshi*. In order to investigate this issues raised above, an example from the narrative body of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* was selected along with the relevant embedded interlinear critical annotation, that is, the historical reference in the interlinear critical annotation to Golden Valley Garden *Jinguyuan* 金谷園 amidst a narrative passage describing the building of West Park *Xiyuan* 西苑.

### West Park and Golden Valley Garden

In chapter ten of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* we find a discrete narrative event, a passage which describes the construction of West Park, Emperor Yang's massive pleasure garden lying west of the new imperial capital of Luoyang, which I shall quote at some length:

Yu Shiji [the official given the task of constructing the new palace] behaved like Qin Shihuang building the Great Wall, first ordering the people to build the 200 *li* garden perimeter wall; like King Yu of Xia controlling the floods, he ordered the people to dig the Five Lakes. [Dredging] a North Sea and a long Linking Water Channel, he both resembled the five knights opening a path through the mountains, and Nügua smelting stone to repair the firmament. In the middle of the sea he ordered people to raise three great mountains; in the midst of the park a great palace was constructed. Beside the canal were built 16 Imperial Harems, and all around were constructed hundreds and thousands of towers and leisure pavilions, wayside pavilions and viewing platforms. By the lakes and sea were built numberless dragon barges and phoenix skiffs. The wall of the complex was topped with glass tiles, while the walls were plastered with imperial purple plaster. The Five Lakes and North Sea were banked with dark stones. The bottom of the Long Linking Channel was constructed from multicoloured stone chippings so that when the clear spring water shone brightly, the surface of the water rippled into five colours. The Three Divine Mountains used 'long peak' oddly shaped stones, piled up in peaks and heights - just like three great stone mountains heaven-born, not at all resembling a construction of human labour. The platforms and pavilions were without exception made from wondrous materials and rare substances, gold decorations and jade linings, intermeshed like tailored brocades and silk, and made of pure pearl. Not one thing nor one item, did not exhaust the beauty of All under Heaven. [*Bujing xiansheng states: ] In its expert craftsmanship and dazzling beauty, the Golden Valley of the Shi family is not worth counting.* Another decree was sent down to every province, county and locality, ordering all flora and fauna, creature and fish to be sent in tribute to the capital. In a short time, from every part of All under Heaven, wondrous flora and rare fauna, walking beasts and flying birds were sent from local government posts to the East Capital. The finest items from West Capital were also brought over, filling West Park to the

point that peach trees formed footpaths, pear trees lined lanes, plum trees wound round buildings, willows hung on river banks, immortal cranes formed ranks, brocade chickens made pairs, golden gibbons wailed in unison, green deer wandered back and forth. It was just like opening up a place between heaven and earth.<sup>9</sup>

Here, replete with references to historical emperors and mythical figures, is a narrative section which takes as its main focus of attention the splendours and exotica of a newly constructed pleasure complex. The imagery is rich and highly suggestive, and overflows with cultural icons and symbolism. It portrays a world of limitless wealth and opportunity for sensual delight on a massive scale. However within this long ostensibly boastful passage describing the splendours of Emperor Yang's pleasure park, the reader may detect signs of uneasiness in the text's appropriation of historical reference and use of intertextuality.

The passage begins with historical and semi-mythical references to acts of creation such as Qin Shihuang building the Great Wall, King Yu of Xia controlling the floods, the Five Dingli knights opening a path through the mountains, the goddess Nügua smelting stone to repair the firmament. One notes that the author mixes the factually verifiable, Qin Shihuang and the Five knights, with the semi-mythical, King Yu of Xia and the mythical Goddess Nügua: within the text no conceptual difference exists between the two categories of the factually historical and semi-mythical. Whether such a distinction was important in the mind of the readership of the Late Ming is uncertain given the Chinese predilection for the mythologisation of historical characters and the historicisation of mythical characters.<sup>10</sup> What is important here is the means by which the text chooses to highlight the fusion of the two in mighty

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<sup>9</sup> Taibei (1985): Vol. 3, roll 10, 7a - 8a; Zhengzhou (1993): 109 - 110.

<sup>10</sup> For a full length study of the process of mythologisation of historical characters see Andrew Hing-bun Lo, *"San-kuo-chih yen-i" and "Shui-hu chuan" in the Context of Historiography: An Interpretive Study*. PhD thesis. Princeton University, 1981; see also Chang (1990).

endeavours of construction. Implicit criticism is evident in the text through the selective use of historical reference. The reference to Qin Shihuang, one of many throughout *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, recalls his cruelty and explicitly makes the connection for the reader of his massive construction projects which led to the death of millions and the chaos resulting from Emperor Yang's overweening desire for grandeur. Emperor Yang seeks on many occasions to compare himself to Qin Shihuang, and the text draws on this explicit historical reference. One may regard the reference to King Yu as ironic in light of the consequences of Emperor Yang's efforts to control the waters - the construction of the Grand Canal - namely the ultimate destruction of the Sui dynasty.

The passage moves on to actual details of the earthly construction process which is described as being on a heroic scale, listing the material wealth of the palaces and the gathering at imperial command of exotica from all over the empire. This list of precious materials and natural resources seems designed to dazzle the literary eye of the reader, a blazon of wondrous wealth. Linguistically the passage contains multiple references to rocks, stone, peaks, walls, chippings. The mountains are described as in imposing terms "great" and "Divine", "heavenly born" "not at all resembling the construction of human labour". The human habitations, i.e. palaces, pavilions etc., are described in terms of luxurious materials rather than imposing origin or spectacle. Beyond the central arenas of the novel's action - such as the Sixteen Harems - there are only vague descriptions of location within the walls; "all around", and numbers "thousands", "countless". Even the description of materials - "imperial purple plaster", "wondrous materials and strange substances, gold decorations and jade linings, intermeshed like tailored brocades and silk" - owes more to poetic convention than description. The author notes "not one matter nor one item, did not exhaust the beauty of All under Heaven": the sections immediately preceding and following the quoted

narrative passage recount the cost in economic terms and the devastation wrought upon the lives of the common people.

The passage ends with a picture of a miniature paradise recreated on earth, populated by animals of cultural significance, representing in some ways an attempt to imitate the symbolism of the cosmos (immortal cranes, deer) as evidenced in the description of it as a place between Heaven and Earth. However the unnatural gathering of this so-called paradise is evident from the start, since these treasures of nature are gathered “in tribute” to the emperor.<sup>11</sup> The natural order is disturbed in the layout of the Park, which is contrived to the point that the number of animals and flora is too great, gathering into unnatural groupings. Conventional flora are named, peach, pear, plum, willows, while exotic animals, such as cranes, ‘brocade chickens’, golden gibbons, and green deer, fill the Park. The author’s choice of places and objects represents a form of literary foregrounding as each of the places mentioned later turns out to be the site of mysterious meetings and the fauna mentioned appear as omens of doom for the dynasty and the personal fate of Emperor Yang. The text alerts the reader to the locations and sources of future omens for the collapse of Emperor Yang’s dynasty. The long-linking water channel is the conduit through which a magic dragon carp enters West Park, the Three Mountains are the location of the first encounter between Emperor Yang and the ghosts of the Last Ruler of Chen and his concubine Zhang Lihua; the Sixteen Harems are the playground in which Emperor Yang dissipates his vital energies and the construction of which undermines the achievements of his father in reunifying the nation; the myriad of palaces foreground on a grand scale his desire to build the more intimate Milou; the flora play the role of bearing the omens of Cosmic Order, through the interlinked fates of the jade pear (*li*)

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<sup>11</sup> *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is replete with tales of animals and fauna bearing omens, and of human interference with the natural order resulting in false reward, best exemplified in the tales of an immortal crane which plucks its own feathers to avoid capture, and the example of Gao Deru who falsely reports the sighting of a fabulous *luan* bird in the palace and thus gains high office.

which represents the rise of the Li family which founds the Tang, and the plum blossom (*yangmei*) which symbolises the Yang family, the ruling House of Sui.

The judgement of the author is to compare the Park, and its construction, to “just like opening up a place between heaven and earth”. This description, ostensibly depicting the West Park, would no doubt be recognised by late Ming audiences as a reference to the fact that Emperor Yang fulfils neither the proper functions of the earthly ruler nor is he able to aspire to the wisdom or powers of the immortals. Emperor Yang, by failing to fulfil the triad of Heaven, Earth and Man, fails in his cosmic and temporal roles.

Interlinear critical commentary: Golden Valley Garden

In the midst of this passage the critical annotator, Bujing xiansheng embeds an interlinear critical annotation broadening the potential significance of the surrounding text through historical reference to another great pleasure park of bygone days:

in its expert craftsmanship and dazzling beauty, the Golden Valley [Garden] of the Shi family is not worthy of counting.<sup>12</sup>

The commentator may be asserting a fixed link between West Park and Golden Valley Garden which could be read as a simple comparison of the skilful construction and lavish appearances of two great projects or indeed an assessment of the aesthetic qualities of the respective parks. This would fulfil the basic function of the fixed allusion but would betray a monologic approach on the part of the commentator. It would leave the reader with a fixed link to a historical reference whose range of meaning has been neither extended nor revalorised, and whose relationship with the

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<sup>12</sup> Taipei (1985): Vol.3. Roll 10: 8; Zhengzhou (1993): 110. Chinese text reads: 精工華麗石家金谷不足數矣.

textual event precludes the possibility of it inducing any degree of transformation of text or reference. To this extent it would be said to exclude the reader from the possibility of reconstructing and revalorising the relationship established between the text and interlinear commentary and reduce the nature of the text to that of the expression of a single past-oriented viewpoint - in effect the reader would be faced with a domination of meaning by one of the two contributing parties to the production of the novel, in this case the ideology of the critical commentator.

However, if the concept of intertextuality is introduced and we look beyond the basic comparison utilising to extend concepts of historicity and other potentialities of meaning contained within the centre of significance embodied by the constructed identity of Golden Valley Garden, one may discern a more complex and disturbing picture in which a polyphony of voices serves to remind the reader of the complexity of thought and construction involved in the narrative and interlinear critical commentaries and the levels of creative reconstruction necessary to gain a dialogic reading of the text. In order to investigate this question it is necessary first to present the historical background as recorded in the *Jin Shu* 晉書 (Standard Imperial History of the Jin dynasty) and then move on to an assessment of the range of potential meaning which may be extrapolated from the relationship between West Park and Golden Valley Garden.

The Golden Valley Garden was a private estate built by Shi Chong 石崇, the most powerful minister serving Emperor Hui 惠帝 (reigned 290-306 AD) of the Jin Dynasty.<sup>13</sup> Its fame was widespread and its splendours outshone the palaces and estates of the emperor, having been founded on the powerful position and patronage afforded by high office. Golden Valley Garden came to symbolise extravagance,

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<sup>13</sup> For a biography of the life of Shi Chong in the Standard Imperial History, see chapter 33 of *Jin Shu* 晉書 (History of the Jin dynasty). (Compiler) Fang Xuanling 房玄齡. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975: 1004 - 8.

official corruption and wastefulness and provoked envy: cliques formed to oppose Shi Chong's grip on power. As his power waned Shi fell prey to the intrigues of a powerful enemy, Sun Xiu 孫秀, who schemed for an opportunity to depose Shi and soon created an opportunity:

Chong had a concubine named Green Pearl (綠珠), who was beautiful, sensually attractive and excelled at playing the flute. Sun Xiu sent a messenger to demand her as his own. At the time Chong was residing in his Golden Valley Garden, and had just ascended a tower to enjoy the coolness, and stood in the pure breeze with his lady at his side. A messenger brought word of [Sun's] demand. Chong hurriedly brought out dozens of other concubines to show him, all of whom were a 'collection of orchid perfume clad in silks and fineries', saying: "Take your pick." The messenger said: "The beauties my lord has shown are indeed lovely, however my orders state only that I must collect Green Pearl, which one is she?" Chong said angrily: "Green Pearl is my dearest love, she cannot be given away." The messenger said: "My lord has wide knowledge of ancient times and is fully versed in modern matters, think of the far and reflect on the near, and please consider this matter thrice." Chong said: "It is out of the question." The messenger left and returned again but Chong would still not countenance it. [Sun] Xiu was enraged...and issued a specious order arresting Chong...Chong was in the middle of a banquet atop a tower, when the troops arrived at the main gate. Chong said to Green Pearl: "I have incurred this crime for your sake." Green Pearl wept and replied: "Then my lord as repayment I shall kill myself in your presence." She thus threw herself from the tower to her death. Chong said: "I am no more than a wandering vagabond like Jiao and Guang." As he was taken to the eastern capital in a prison cart, Chong sighed and said: "Guard, you could benefit from my family's fortune." The guard said: "Knowing that wealth leads to danger, why did you not disperse it sooner?" Chong was unable to give a reply. Chong's entire family was arrested - mother, elder brother, wife and children, in all fifteen people were executed. That year Chong was 52 years old.<sup>14</sup>

On the face of the matter it appears that the fate of Shi Chong and Green Pearl have little in common with Emperor Yang's glorious pleasure park. On closer examination, however, many similarities can be found. These correspondences may be arranged in two groupings. First the historical resemblance between the two cases, what may be described as the text's awareness of its own historicity. Second the range of meaning built up through these two human situations which form a centre of

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<sup>14</sup> *Jin Shu* (1975): 1008.

significance, in other words, the bounds of reconstruction of historicity open to the reader.

### Recontextualisation and historicity of the text

The notion of text in the history of Chinese writing has always been hedged with a measure of ambiguity. No work of literature, which traditionally encompasses a broad range of forms including historical, philosophical, and fictional writings, was ever immune to editorial revisions or appended commentaries. The development of full-length vernacular novels, in particular, is dominated by multiple versions of stories and materials compiled by a series of editors over a long span of time. This range of source material would appear to allow the reader to usefully utilise the tool of intertextuality. Wang Jing describes intertextuality as:

an ideological instrument to attack the concept of the founding subject as the originating source of fixed meaning in the text.<sup>15</sup>

This statement raises two theoretical questions about the role of the author in the production of text. First, Wang's statement appears to indicate a greatly diminished role for the author in the creative production of the novel. Second, it identifies the need to question the concept of fixed meaning and sources of authority within the framework of a narrative text.

With regard to the role of the author, one must acknowledge that, as described above, textual integrity was not a major issue for authors of fiction. Wang's approach, however, appears to overlook two crucial roles played by the author in the production of works of literature: the editorial control an author retains during the production of any novel, and the ability of the author to alter substantially the prevailing ideology at

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<sup>15</sup> Wang (1992): 7.

the heart of a particular work. When one considers the implications of Wang's view of the editorial role that any author plays in the process of textual production one faces, in effect, the reduction of the function of the author to inscription of the work rather than creative expression. As a consequence the burden of interpretation would be left solely to the reader who would approach the text without the benefit of knowledge of authorial input. This thesis has consistently demonstrated that while much of the burden of reconstructing meaning lies with the reader, one needs to investigate as far as possible the process of textual production in order better to ascertain the polyphony of views which comprise the dialogic novel.

The very existence of various recensions and different critical commentary editions indicates, however, a degree of unifying authorial intention. Equally one may argue that since a number of antecedent texts to *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* are clearly identifiable one may identify those texts consciously revalorised by the author. In Chapter One I demonstrated the degree to which Chu Renhuo's authorial intention consciously altered the ideological stance of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and revalorised important aspects of the text in order to establish a radically different framework for *Sui Tang Yanyi*. The process of revalorisation allows the reader to distinguish these from those texts which the author understood to have remained part of the cultural fabric of his contemporary society. As Satyendra has pointed out:

while ultimately readers will have to construct a version of the novel based on their sense of artistic coherency...it is important to know as much as possible about what the exclusive contributions of the author might have been so that we may distinguish them from those of the editor, commentator, censor, and especially the mantle of received tradition.<sup>16</sup>

In the field of pre-modern Chinese literary production copying from or imitation of great works from the past was a commonly practised mode of writing in

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<sup>16</sup> Satyendra (1989): 4.

itself. Originality and creativity were not singled out as values prized among all others - rather Ming fiction authors often focused on attempting to expand the boundaries of literature within the mantle of literary tradition. In this respect *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is typical of many seventeenth-century novels in importing into its literary structure a multiplicity of historically distant and functionally diverse materials, ranging from Tang classical language tales, poetry, expositions on astrology, and historical documents culled from Standard Imperial Histories. This range of voices, though, is first gathered and processed by the author before incorporation into the text. When this process has been completed, the critical commentator appends his views which are a response to those expressed within the authorially-constructed text. Finally the reader reads the complete work and gains an understanding of the novel through interpretation of the text and the critical commentary. One cannot ignore the role of the author, without whose contribution the work would not exist.<sup>17</sup>

The second question - the need to question the concept of fixed meaning and sources of authority within the narrative framework - is clearly more readily defensible. This is not to say, however, that one may not endeavour to ascertain an authorial attempt at achieving textual integrity; rather that, as argued above, the polyphony which lies at the heart of seventeenth-century Chinese vernacular fiction escapes the control of a single authorial control simply because of its generic tendencies. By consciously speaking through borrowed voices, seventeenth-century vernacular fiction insists on reminding us of its own fictionality: a fictionality which is aware of the many voices struggling to be heard, and a fictionality intimately bound up with an awareness of the interpretation of historicity and socio-cultural consciousness.

#### Cyclical typology: expanding the bounds of human experience

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<sup>17</sup> In fact, at various points in the discussion of vernacular novels, Wang acknowledges the existence of the author and implicitly accepts the importance of authorial input. See Wang (1992).

In approaching the type of textual analysis described above, consideration must be paid to the historical resemblances which have been noted within the traditional Chinese context of the cyclical concept of human history. There existed a deep and abiding philosophical view maintaining the actuality of the repetition of social and dynastic events in accordance with a ubiquitous Cosmic Moral Order.<sup>18</sup> Having accommodated this viewpoint one may approach the text's awareness of this pattern of repetition in the knowledge that the pre-modern Chinese author or reader would be conscious of a cyclical historical pattern both on the level of a philosophical concept and as an influence in the literary construction of didactic historical writings and thus very much open to the idea of assemblage of models of human experience. The societal and literary approaches to the description and understanding of certain forms of behaviour were thus framed within a system of open historical reference and behavioural patterns, direct consequences of actions (often described in terms of karmic retribution), and a sense of causality resulting from the Cosmic Moral Order.

Were this philosophical mode adopted as one of the conceptual structures underpinning pre-modern literary production, one could minimise the extent of linear chronological historical concerns and view the two incidents in the garden complexes from the viewpoint of identifiable and repeated, though not identical, patterns of human experience.<sup>19</sup> This process of open historical reference allows writers a heightened awareness in their psychological approach toward history by offering both an accessible guide to the actions and motives of individual historical characters, and also the range of previous historical characters with whom the subject shared both similar classified traits and, just as importantly, differences. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, authors of the late Ming and early Qing were certainly aware of the bias

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<sup>18</sup> A theory developed principally in the Han by such figures as Dong Zhongshu.

<sup>19</sup> This may also have implications for the structure of Chinese novels, i.e. their lack of obsession with linear plot progress, and interest in sub-plots and non-events.

of Standard Imperial Histories and the tendency of officially-sanctioned literature towards didactic expression and discrete filtering of documentary evidence. Authors of vernacular fiction in seventeenth-century China actively sought to include non-official sources, such as folk tales to present a wider depiction of historical reality. By addressing achronological archetypes established by the Standard Imperial Histories, authors of vernacular fiction extend and deepen these typologies to create centres of significance while remaining within a philosophical framework still recognisable to the reader.

Within vernacular fiction of the seventeenth century there exists a mutually influencing historical *weltanschauung* which on the one hand, endorses a conscious awareness of and, to a large extent, validation of a moralistic philosophy of repeated patterns of human experience; and on the other hand, promotes the broadening of the bounds of historical evidence beyond that recognised by the Standard Imperial Histories and encourages elaboration upon recognisable models of human patterns of behaviour. The temptation to adhere to an overarching structure in which individual instances of action conform to familiar stereotypes always existed. In the case of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* these stereotypes are evidenced in the Emperor's extreme profligacy, his apparent adherence to the model of the last bad emperor and ultimate dynastic downfall.<sup>20</sup> However the concept of history one sees displayed in vernacular fiction also allows the text to recontextualise apparently stereotyped patterns of human behaviour with the purpose of broadening and elucidating the complexity of

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<sup>20</sup> Perhaps it is from this point that one may begin delineate what the Chinese term as the "work of genius" *caizishu* 才子書, that fictional creation which both presents a world apparently familiar to the reader yet which engenders a process of re-evaluation and expansion of understanding of human nature, beyond that which has previously existed or represented the norm. We must also be aware however of the unceasing attraction, for various reasons, of the stereotype, particularly powerful in repressive times, viz. the popularity of hackneyed "scholar-beauty romances" *caizi jiaren* 才子佳人 in the early to mid Qing.

understanding of the manifold possibilities inherent both in human decision-making and in the reconstruction of text.

This approach offers an opportunity for the re-evaluation of Chinese views of literary production, in that it appears to present the possibility that the basis for a fledgling theory and practise of dialogism was being developed in the early to mid-seventeenth century. If Chinese literature of the period is viewed simply from the narrow approach of Confucian didacticism, then this approach ceases to be valid. The production of novels such as *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, *Jin Ping Mei*, Li Yu's 李漁 *Rou Putuan* 肉蒲團 and Jin Shengtan's 金聖嘆 critical commentary edition of *Shuihu Zhuan* offer evidence that a conscious process to broaden the philosophical scope of literature was a key intellectual trend in the late Ming and early Qing.

#### Reconstruction of centres of significance

The starting point of this section is the basic premise that when approaching a text the reader may identify historical reference, close the gap of chronological and cultural distance through close textual analysis, investigation of the socio-historical background and use of the concept of creative understanding to expand upon a core of reconstructed meaning expressed in centres of significance. This is precisely the terrain where intertextuality comes into play, that is, in the constant expansion of centres of significance and the potential for the reader to reconstruct meaning through the approach towards historicity demonstrated above. In utilising this critical method one may focus on centres of significance and view the means by which the reader may identify various elements in the narrative body, reconstruct a web of meaning and implicit understanding, while at the same time broadening the constraints placed on each previous reference. Moreover these centres of significance do not stand alone, but, by virtue of their polyphony of sources and implications, become interlinked

forming networks of reconstructed meaning which contribute to the overall signification of the textual body.

From the above passage selected from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, I have selected two interlinked centres of significance which appear to form a nexus of meaning and which highlight the interaction between the text and interlinear critical comment examined above. These may be defined as pleasure gardens, and self-sacrifice by loyal concubines. These two centres may be seen as the human and material manifestations of the spiritual and moral corruption induced by overwhelming power and Emperor Yang's obsession with history. In the following section, these two centres of significance shall be reconstructed in terms of their immediate significance to their immediate textual surroundings, and their importance to the novel as a whole.

### Pleasure gardens

Pleasure gardens are a recurring theme in Chinese literature. The topos gained prominence through the ancient *fu* 賦 poetry of the Han and Six dynasties.<sup>21</sup> Gardens also form the central locum of interaction between characters in many of the major novels of pre-modern Chinese literature, most notably in *Honglou Meng* and *Jin Ping Mei*. The garden locus, as Plaks has noted, generally divides into two typologies: the imperial garden, which generally symbolises excess; and the personal garden which symbolises retreat from the world, such as those of Tao Yuanming (365 - 427) and Xie Lingyun (385 - 433).<sup>22</sup> Both types of gardens share some common characteristics. First they are enclosed spaces, separated from the outside world by

<sup>21</sup> The most obvious examples are: *Gao Tang fu* 高唐賦 (High Tang Rhapsody), *Luo Shen fu* 洛神賦 (Goddess of the Luo River Rhapsody), *Shang Lin fu* 上林賦 (Shang Lin [Imperial Hunting Park] Rhapsody), *Chang Men fu* 長門賦 (Long Gate Rhapsody). See the following section on pleasure parks as a locum for expression of sensuality.

<sup>22</sup> Plaks (1976): 148 - 149.

walls. They are thus both physically removed from the outside world, and potentially removed from the moral boundaries of society. Both kinds of gardens attempt to act as a reflection of the cosmos. While the personal garden may better illustrate the idiosyncracies of the individual (e.g. Tao Yuanming's obsession with chrysanthemums), the imperial garden takes on a wider symbolism as it embodies the interaction between the Moral Cosmos (*tiandao* 天道) and the temporal actions of the ruler.

The text and commentaries of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* invoke models of huge pleasure gardens from various literary sources and much of the novel is set within the boundaries of two pleasure gardens - the West Park and later the *Milou* 迷樓 (Palace of Mesmerising Delights) which marks the pinnacle of Emperor Yang's debauchery. The following section shall briefly discuss two aspects of the imperial park, as depicted in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*: first the imperial park as a symbol of waste and extravagance and withdrawal from duty; and second, the park as a locum for expression of fantasy.

#### Pleasure gardens: extravagance and withdrawal from responsibility

The typology of the imperial pleasure park encompasses several layers of meaning. An overwhelming concern expressed by fiction authors is the financial and material extravagance at huge cost to the people and the state. Ancient philosophers saw the imperial pleasure park as conveying an ostentatious and wasteful deployment of national resources which would bring only misery and deprivation to the general populace.<sup>23</sup> Within the Confucian concept of history, the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命) encompassed the close observation of natural phenomena as

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<sup>23</sup> For example, see 21A. D.C. Lau (translator), *Mencius*. London: Penguin, 1970: 113.

indicators of the moral worth of the political regime. This theme recurs throughout the text of *Sui Yangdi Shi* and in the critical commentary of Bujing xiansheng: there is no need therefore to repeat the commentarial quotes seen in Chapter Four.

The potential of great novels to encompass meaning not considered by the author during production is the key to centres of significance. The topos of the pleasure garden draining financial and spiritual resources is one familiar to readers of *Jin Ping Mei* and *Honglou Meng*. In both these novels the reader sees that the emotional and spiritual state of the protagonists is intimately linked with the conditions of their gardens, particularly in the latter novel. One might venture that it is here that the influence of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* which Zheng Zhenduo claimed had had on *Honglou Meng* can be discerned.<sup>24</sup> As the fortunes of the characters rise, the splendours of the gardens grows correspondingly; when decline sets in, the garden becomes a place of retreat from the outside world. Yet the existence of the gardens with their fading glories serve only to remind both the characters and the readers of the inevitable collapse of this world.

#### Pleasure gardens: a locus for fantasy

A second theme is sensuality and fantasy. The ancient *fu* poems are the locus classicus for much erotic imagery. Pleasure gardens are constructed for the sexual delectation of the Emperor and provide numerous opportunities for illicit love affairs. The text and commentaries of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* include references to the Han and Six Dynasties *fu* (賦) poems, “Gao Tang *fu*” 高唐賦 (High Tang Rhapsody)<sup>25</sup>, “Luo Shen *fu*” 洛神賦 (Goddess of the Luo River Rhapsody), “Shang Lin *fu*” 上林賦

<sup>24</sup> Zheng Zhenduo (1961): 923.

<sup>25</sup> A drunken Emperor Yang viewing a hazy beauty who says she has come to be with him, Bujing xiansheng notes, “no different from ‘High Tang’ [Fu Rhapsody].” See Taibei (1985) Volume 5, chapter 33, page 11a. Zhengzhou (1993): 369.

(Shang Lin [Imperial Hunting Park] Rhapsody), and “Chang Men fu” 長門賦 (Long Gate Rhapsody).<sup>26</sup> The commentarial references to these *fu* poems are in the main sarcastic: as demonstrated in the Chapter Four, the reference to the “High Tang Rhapsody” precedes the homosexual rape of a young eunuch.

The pleasure complexes constructed by Emperor Yang are the realised vision of his desires. He spends much time planning the layout of parks and richly rewards those ministers who provide him with various objects of pleasure, e.g. mechanised puppet concubines, various mechanised carriages in which he makes love etc. Within the confines of the inner palace, Emperor Yang is the only male presence - with the exception of eunuchs - thus the emperor inhabits an environment in which he is free to exercise his desires and fantasies without the restraint of ministers of state, and in which he succumbs to sensual pleasure. The realm of the garden is also one dominated by feminine sensibilities. As noted earlier, the portrayal of the leisure activities are not exclusively sexual. The novel depicts various poetry competitions, barge trips, torch-light parades, all organised by concubines, often in an inverted reflection of the rituals of state. The emperor mimics his role as head of state by presiding over these events and dispenses rewards to his “loyal ministers” - the concubines. As Santangelo has written in the context of *Honglou Meng*, these garden are:

the utopia of a purely juvenile and feminine domain, free from the social restrictions, responsibilities, authority and hierarchy of everyday life, an island where sentiments are unrestrained and spontaneously expressed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> With regard to the sad description of her predicament, Bujing xiansheng states: “the Long Gate Rhapsody is not as tragic as this.” See Taibei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 15, page 4; Zhengzhou (1993): 163.

<sup>27</sup> Paolo Santangelo, “Conceptions of Nature in some literary texts of Ming-Qing times”. In (editors) Mark Elvin, Liu Ts’ui-jung, *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 617 - 656. For quote see 644.

One witnesses in the novel a state in miniature evolve within the garden realm, whose main purpose is to satisfy the desires of the emperor. This state witnesses many of the problems which afflict the realm of politics: jealousy amongst concubines who vie for the attentions of the emperor; corruption among eunuchs who seek bribes to allow concubines to gain access to the person of the emperor; extravagance and waste, moral and physical decline. The organic link between Heaven, Earth and Man is reflected in the omens which appear in the garden - for example the withering plum blossom which heralds the physical decline of the emperor, the magic carp which evades death at the emperor's hands and transforms into a dragon to reflect the advent of the succeeding dynasty and signs which appear within the garden. Emperor Yang's abdication of responsibility from the duties of state are mirrored in his gradual loss of authority amongst rival concubines. At the heart of this state is the overwhelming obsession of Emperor Yang to expand the boundaries of his sensual experiences. Early in the novel he complains:

we wish to fulfil our role as Emperor, our riches encompass the Four Seas, thus all lands within the Four Seas are the playground of the Son of Heaven. Now we are Emperor in name alone. One has only these few deathly dull palaces, and nowhere where one may unburden oneself in the pursuit of pleasure. [*Bujing xiansheng states*] these words are the seed of Emperor Yang's debauchery.<sup>28</sup>

Within the confines of his pleasure gardens, the Emperor engages in a series of illicit affairs which eventually undermine his relations with his Empress and concubines, and destroy his health and result in the destruction of his political power. As has been mentioned above, the passage from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* is designed to unsettle the reader and adheres to the technique of literary foregrounding, including as it does the major elements of Emperor Yang's later descent into debauchery and madness. Having thus alerted the reader to the uneasy vision of future events through the appropriation of past historical models, the interlinear commentator

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<sup>28</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 2, chapter 6, page 1a; Zhengzhou (1993): 61.

interpolates a statement offering another model of fateful debauchery. It would seem that this is a deliberate policy based on the commentator's understanding of the unsettling elements displayed within the narrative body which perhaps make the reader more receptive to the interlinear reference.

Self-sacrifice by concubines: Zhu Gui'er and Green Pearl

The second centre of significance I consider is self-sacrifice by loyal concubines. The behaviour of the concubine Green Pearl as reconstructed by the reader from reactivation of the source of the above interlinear critical commentary lays the foundation for the creation of a centre of significance based on the concept of the loyal concubine who sacrifices herself on behalf of her master. This theme is realised in the text of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* through the character Zhu Gui'er who, like Green Pearl, is talented, beautiful and ends her life in the service of her lord.<sup>29</sup> From the two textual examples one may discern two linked centres of significance: historical correspondence; and the text's awareness of its intertextuality.

In terms of historical correspondence each of the loyal concubines consciously chooses death as preferable to dishonour - in stark contrast to their masters. Both concubines choose dramatic deaths: Green Pearl leaps from a tower, while Zhu Gui'er is hacked to death for cursing the rebels who have deposed Emperor Yang.<sup>30</sup> There are some striking similarities in the characters involved in the two situations, most notable is the behaviour of the concubines in adopting fatal gestures to demonstrate their commitment to masters, who ultimately prove undeserving of their gesture. The remorse felt by Emperor Yang and Shi Chong lead to belated enlightenment before execution. As noted in Chapters One and Four, the depiction of concubines in *Sui*

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 1, page 30 -33.

<sup>30</sup> This act of bravery is commented upon by a poem of praise attributed to a later historian. See *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* chapter 39.

*Yangdi Yanshi* is relatively positive compared to that in the later *Sui Tang Yanyi*. Bujing xiansheng identifies the primary role of Zhu Gui'er as a representative of those values which are conspicuously absent from Emperor Yang and his ministers. She takes on the virtues of loyalty and bravery, as manifested in her willingness to speak out against the rebels in the full knowledge that she will pay the ultimate price. As the Emperor cowers before the rebels and disloyal ministers fail to rise to his defence, only Zhu Gui'er has the courage to speak out against the imminent regicide. Two interlinear commentaries note:

unexpectedly a soft and charming serving girl is able to struggle thus, truly it makes Sui Court ministers die of shame.<sup>31</sup>

loyal and upright words are naturally imposing.<sup>32</sup>

This concept of Zhu Gui'er is more of a cipher than a rounded human being, and in this respect, resembles the depiction of Green Pearl. There are clear differences in the literary forms. The death of Zhu Gui'er is detailed in its description, while Green Pearl is reduced to a single sentence. The courage of both, however, has been taken as exemplary therefore a historical linkage is achieved and a topos is formed. To expand the concept further, however, one must apply the lessons of intertextuality.

As far as the text's awareness of intertextuality is concerned the actions of the two concubines are remarkable in two respects; first, they give the reader a degree of insight into characters previously presented merely as a cipher, giving the women the opportunity to speak for themselves and seize the moment to attain humanity. Both characters have remained in the background, and have functioned on two levels: as objects of sexual desire, and later as unwilling participants in political powerplay. It is

<sup>31</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6, chapter 39, page 14; not included in Zhengzhou (1993).

<sup>32</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 6, chapter 39, page 14b; Zhengzhou (1993): 446.

only with the emergence of an opportunity to speak for themselves that they so dramatically bring the actions of their masters into stark perspective. It may be argued that their choice of suicide is a profoundly negative decision, yet it remains the only avenue open to self-fulfilment. According to Stephen Owen, by committing suicide, renouncing the safety of her status as possession, Green Pearl thus:

seizes for herself, if only for a brief moment as she falls from the tower, the status of human being.<sup>33</sup>

Hegel's assessment of the martyrdom of Zhu Gui'er is more negative, seeing it as an example of impotence and loss.<sup>34</sup> What the tales of Green Pearl and Zhu Gui'er demonstrate is the ability of the vernacular novel to expand upon the topos of the self-sacrificing concubine. Whereas Green Pearl never escapes the role of cipher and is reduced to a few terse sentences of classical language, Zhu Gui'er emerges throughout *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* as a talented and intelligent woman whose aesthetic judgement is admired by the critical commentator. On two occasions Bujing xiansheng notes Zhu's poetic talents:

one song sung, her rendition is most sweet.<sup>35</sup>

new meaning and languid lyrics.<sup>36</sup>

Thus one can discern the function of vernacular fiction: to expand our understanding of the dilemmas people face, and the choices they make in response to their environment. While Green Pearl appears briefly and disappears with only a fleeting hint of humanity, the reader of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* sees the development of the

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<sup>33</sup> Owen (1989): 146.

<sup>34</sup> Hegel (1981): 100 - 102.

<sup>35</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 11, page 10; Zhengzhou (1993): 122.

<sup>36</sup> Taipei (1985): Volume 3, chapter 13, page 14b ; Zhengzhou (1993): 148.

relationship between the Emperor and Zhu Gui'er, the love that develops between them, and the ultimate bond which leads her to make her final fateful decision.

Second, as part of an expanding centre of significance, this tale of love driven to destruction may lead the actively participating reader to other literary references both within and beyond the textual body of the novel. An example from within the novel is a reference to the Golden Valley Garden in a poem opening Chapter 31<sup>37</sup>. An example of intertextual reference open to the reader is the consideration of Golden Valley Garden related by Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803 - 853 AD), who on visiting the derelict site composed the poem *Golden Valley Garden* :

What happened in seasons of splendour  
scatters in fragrant dust:  
the flowing waters lack all feeling,  
plants turn to spring as they will;  
the sun sets and east wind's offence  
makes the birds cry out in pain:  
where falling flowers resemble still  
the person who leapt from the tower.<sup>38</sup>

From the context of this one incident, the vernacular novel has encompassed a plurality of literary forms selected from a variety of sources. The process of reconstruction of meaning by the reader extends from the Ming dynasty novel to the Tang dynasty poetry of Du Mu, back to the historical account in the *Jin Shu*.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See Taipei (1985) Volume 5, chapter 31, page 1; Zhengzhou (1993): 338. The poem ridicules the transitory extravagance of the *Milou*. The reference to Golden Valley Garden is placed in a parallel couplet which reads, "Laugh at how large his Golden Valley can be, it is a shame his Mount Wu is only a few peaks".

<sup>38</sup> Translated by Stephen Owen in his, *Milou: Poetry and the Labyrinth of Desire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989: 147. Chinese text reads: 繁華事散逐香塵，流水無情草自春，日暮東風怨啼鳥，落花猶似墜樓人。 The reader may already have been alerted to this potentiality by the inclusion of another poem attributed to Du Mu on the subject of the Twenty Four Bridge. See Taipei (1985) Volume 5, chapter 29, page 13; Zhengzhou (1993): 324. See Chapter Four footnote 46.

<sup>39</sup> The romantic lure of the story of Green Pearl continued into the Qing dynasty, viz a poem attributed to Huang Jinshi, the Cloud Student of Jiajiang 夾江雲生黃金石：效死君前酬厚德，剝那金谷嘆荒蕪，齊奴地下應含笑，不負當年一斛珠。

## Conclusion

On the basis of the discussions in this chapter, one may draw the following conclusions. It would appear that the literary tool termed allusion as defined above is insufficient in its scope of analysis, limiting as it does the scope for reconstruction allowed to the reader. A preferable option may be what has been designated as intertextuality, which offers the reader the opportunity to reconstruct meaning beyond the constraints of chronology or historicity. Authors of the seventeenth-century in seeking to expand on the foundations of novel-length fiction, created works which lend themselves to an intertextual mode of analysis, given their organisation around expanding centres of significance, and possibilities for an achronological or perhaps less chronologically-enlaved view of human historical experience. Moreover, the very process of expansion would alter the simple didacticism of official views of history and introduce a degree of subtlety and complexity hitherto underdeveloped in Chinese literature. As a corollary to the previous point, intertextuality enables the reader to expand centres of significance as a tool to extract greater degrees of meaning from a specific text and link that text in a non-hierarchical manner to other texts.

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See “Xiuhua xuyong” 秀華續詠 (More Verses on Famed Beauties). In (editor) Chong Tianzi 蟲天子 (Foolish Son of Heaven), *Xiangyan Congshu* 香艷叢書 (Collection of Fragrantly Sensuous Literature). Volume 10. Hong Kong: 1969: 5863. Interestingly the poem which follows the verse on Green Pearl concerns a character who appears in *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* - the concubine Wu Jiangxian who was famed for her painted eyebrows.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed various elements of the seventeenth century Chinese vernacular novel *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. It has applied aspects of the methods of literary criticism developed by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin to demonstrate that the *zhanghui xiaoshuo* form, which achieved new levels of maturity in the first half of the seventeenth century, is an open-ended and complex form which is capable of accommodating a variety of discourses, and provides an environment in which a multiplicity of views are revalorised.

I first described the production of the *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and its eclipse due to political and social constraints and the arrival of the later *Sui Tang Yanyi*, which incorporated large parts of the earlier novel but substantially shifted the ideological balance away from the intense character study of the earlier work towards an apparently more balanced depiction which nevertheless adhered to more conservative social values. The basic structure of late Ming full-length vernacular was described and a template proposed, based both on the structures of the novel and on a Bakhtinian interpretation of the function of such novels.

I demonstrated that the novel form was regarded by intellectuals of the period as the best means of conveying human truth within the context of historicity. The vernacular novel, while concerned with ethics and social norms, shuns simple didacticism, valuing rather, ambiguity and unresolved tensions. Vernacular fiction was viewed by its supporters as a better vehicle for the expression of the human condition than more institutionalised forms such as the Standard Imperial Histories. By adopting the Bakhtinian concept of genre not just as rhetorical form of expression, but more importantly a new and specific view of the world in which form and vision are mutually informing, the differences between the Standard Imperial Histories and

fictional representation of historicity became evident on the level of generic tendencies. The centripetal authority assumed by Standard Imperial Histories is challenged by vernacular fiction through the creation of a textual space in which reinterpretation of history is achieved through the depiction of the specific contingencies of human existence. In terms of structure, the vernacular novel's emphasis on plotted narrative contrasts with traditional historiography.

The thesis has shown that vernacular fiction displays an awareness of its fictionality which is seen in borrowing, repetition, intertextual allusions, and manipulation of formulaic conventions. A further demonstration of self-awareness of fictionality was evidenced in my examination of the pseudonyms adopted by the author and the interlinear commentator. I proved that the pseudonyms have significant meaning for our reading of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* and that a confluence of significance was demonstrated between the two pseudonyms which indicates that a link exists in the choices made by the author and interlinear commentator. The pseudonyms are an important element in discerning the underpinning ideology of the novel.

Analysis of the respective roles of the author and critical commentator concluded that, while the contributions of both parties to the production of the novel does not necessarily preclude the creation of a monologic work, the basic nature of their roles provides a fertile grounds upon which dialogic novels may flourish. An examination of the critical commentary embedded in the text of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* noted that differences exist in the world-views of the author and critical commentator which add to the polyphony central to a dialogic novel.

In the final chapter I discussed the notion of intertextuality which offers the reader the opportunity to reconstruct meaning without being constrained by the lack of historical and chronological contiguity. While subscribing to the notion that the burden

of reconstructing meaning from the text lies with the reader, I noted the continuing importance of authorial intention and the means by which authors of Chinese vernacular fiction revalorised earlier texts and recensions to reflect their contemporary cultural values. Authors of the seventeenth century in seeking to expand on the foundations of novel-length fiction, created works which lend themselves to an intertextual mode of analysis, given their organisation around expanding centres of significance, and possibilities for an expanding view of human historical experience. Intertextuality enables the reader to expand centres of significance as a tool to extract greater degrees of meaning from a specific text and link that text in a non-hierarchical manner to other texts.

This thesis has focused largely on the wider questions of the evolving ideology of seventeenth-century Chinese vernacular fiction. It has concentrated on those areas where a dialogic exchange is most clearly discerned - the selection of pseudonyms, prefatory material and critical commentary. Further study of the novel would investigate the role of poetry in the novel and sub-structures within the novel, such as the fascinating possibility of a pattern of Five Elements reflecting the actions of the characters. *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* remains, to the best of my knowledge, untranslated in any Western language. A critical translation of the critical commentary edition of the novel may add to the dialogic value of the work and provide future readers with yet another voice added the cacophony of polyphony - that of the translator.

APPENDIX ONE: TRANSLATION OF MAIN PREFATORY MATERIAL FROM  
*SUI YANGDI YANSHI*

Appendix One presents translations of the prefatory materials placed at the front of the 1631 edition of *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*.<sup>1</sup>

1) *Sui yangdi yanshi xu* 隋煬帝艷史敘; Preface to *Sensational history of Sui Emperor Yang*. This preface consists of 288 ideographs and is signed and sealed by *Xiaochizi* 笑癡子 (Master Giggling Fool) at *Duoduoju* 咄咄居 (Wailing Lodge), and is undated.

2) *Yanshi xu* 艷史序; Preface to *Sensational history*. This preface consists of 450 ideographs and is signed by *Yeshi zhuren* 野史主人 (Heretical history manager)<sup>2</sup> at *Xubaitang* 虛白堂 (Void and Purity Hall), and dated *Chongzhen* reign period, *xinweisui qingheyue* 崇貞辛未歲清和月, that is the fourth lunar month (May) 1631.

3) *Yanshi tici* 艷史題辭; Summary of *Sensational history*. This summary consists of 246 ideographs and is signed by *Zuili youren weiyi jushi* 樵李友人委蛇居士 (friend from Zuili, layman at-ease) at *Taotaoguan* 陶陶館 (Happy Hall) and is dated *Chongzhen* reign period, *xinwei zhuming jiwang* 崇貞辛未朱明既望, that is the sixteenth day of the fifth lunar month (June), summer 1631.

4) *Yanshi fanli* 艷史凡例; General introductory statement to *Sensational history*. This statement consists of twelve items and is unsigned and undated.

5) *Sui yanshi jueli xingshi* 隋艷史爵里姓氏; Titles, Family names and native places of characters appearing in *Sui Sensational history*. This list consists of thirteen half pages, and is unsigned and undated.

6) 70 half page engravings and facing half page quotes from famed poetic lines and ten half pages left blank.

<sup>1</sup> All of these prefatory materials are included in Taipei (1985). Only items 1), 4), and 5) are printed in Zhengzhou (1993) under the guise of an appendix (*fulu* 附錄). None of the materials are included in Taipei (1974).

<sup>2</sup> Sun Kaidi identifies *Yeshi zhuren* as the author of the novel and labels this preface as an author's preface. See Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, *Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu* 中國通俗小說書目, Hong Kong: Shiyong, 1967: 43.

*Sui yangdi yanshi xu* 隋煬帝艷史敘:  
Preface to Sensational History of Sui Emperor Yang

Of the ancient rulers under Heaven who are acclaimed as sensational (*yan* 艷), there are none to match Emperor Wu of Han and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. The former with the rhapsody poem *Grief's Lament* and the latter by the lyric poem *Eternal Regret*, appeal to this day to popular imagination. Even though as rulers of All under Heaven they could obtain their hearts' desire, they indulged themselves with the young lady who composed music<sup>3</sup> and the daughter of the Yang family!<sup>4</sup> Had they lacked the arts of the ruler and failed to be effective as such, then like Xinyuan Ping,<sup>5</sup> sighing and sobbing in melancholy, these two rulers would perhaps have pined to their deaths, worse off than once was the 'five piculs of grain farm cottage gaffer'<sup>6</sup>.

What can be termed sensational? It is knowing to look for sensation in the four seasons and not in the humid summer heat or severe winter cold; to seek sensation from the flowers and plants and not among the pines and cypresses; beseech sensation from graceful ladies and not from hunchbacks and cripples. Thus there are cases of things being acclaimed sensational because they astonish, being called sensational because they delight, and being called sensational because they are remarkable, but among the instances of calling things sensational, there are in addition those in which things are called sensational out of jealousy. Stories are pleasing to all. When stories please all, people frequently bitterly regret that the stories have been composed before they themselves have done it, and so jealousy arises. Even if its ideals don't fit those of the great sages of yore, and it's too lustful and boozy, yet if it doesn't harm one, and it is composed once in a while and is of remarkable interest, with the magical wonders of all kinds of beguilement, all kinds of zestful coincidence and all kinds of foundings of dynasties, with all kinds of things that have no mood of didactic moralising and all kinds that have no scholar-pauper pendants, and it also has no childishness, nor any imperial stereotypedness about it, then if it is astonishing and delightful it is bound to be admired as sensational!

Let me ask you if I may, who has there been past or present who has ever matched Emperor Yang of Sui? If you think to enquire why Emperor Yang of the Sui

<sup>3</sup> Reference to Lady Li, subject of the above-mentioned Grief's Lament rhapsodic poem.

<sup>4</sup> Reference to Yang Guifei, whose affair with Emperor Xuanzong is the subject of the above-mentioned Eternal Regret lyric poem.

<sup>5</sup> He was a Han man from Zhao who in the reign of Wendi was given an audience by the emperor because of his promising appearance and subsequently persuaded the emperor to set up the Five Temples of Wei Yang. His motive was to steal the Zhou tripods but he was spotted by Yu Ying. Afterwards when the matter was discovered and he and his clan to three removes were put to death.

<sup>6</sup> Refers the term Tianshe Weng, or to Tianshe Zi. The former refers to the name for an old farmer, The latter is also a term for a farmer, and also means a hanger-on or sponger. It concerns Xu Jingzong (592-672). Emperor Gaozong (r. 650-683) of the Tang wanted to make Wu Zhaoyi, the future Empress Wu, his principal consort, but his ministers opposed this. Xu guessed the emperor's private inclinations and irresponsibly declared, "Even the farm cottage son who harvests an extra ten bushels of wheat wants to change his old wife, so now that You Imperial Majesty has the riches of the world, why do they express the opinion that you cannot set up an Empress!". See *Ci Hai*: 1885.

is acclaimed as sensational, then please sir just read Emperor Yang's *Sensational History*.

*Xiaochizi* 笑癡子 (Master Giggling Fool) at *Duoduoju* 咄咄居 (Wailing Lodge), undated.

*Yanshi xu* 艷史序  
Preface to *Sensational History*

A-Mo [childhood name of Emperor Yang] single-handedly presided over the collapse of a dynasty. When the second son (Emperor Yang) ascended the throne, the institutions of state came tumbling to the ground. Those who reflect and lament on the past claim that the usurping of the years of the Kaihuang [589-600] and Opening Illustriousness [601 - 605; the latter part of Emperor Wen's reign] reign periods, left behind troubles for the Great Enterprise reign period [605 - 618; Emperor Yang's reign]. Though he - Emperor Wen- had five children by the same mother and in his youth did not favour concubines, he could carry on a line that the mighty Narayana could not tear asunder.

Some condemn Mo for his construction projects, others censure Mo for his ruinously expensive military expeditions, yet others chide Mo for his obsession with the literary arts. Yet one must say that is not how it was. As for the construction projects, none were more excessive than those of the Qin dynasty; as for the military expeditions, none were as ruinously expensive as those of the Han dynasty. And as for the tinkling jade words of Heaven and the gold and jade resonances of earth, and the wisdom of the sage kings, none can compare with him. This has been recorded since ancient times. How can it be blazoned empty as a measure of his crimes?

By failing to order the defence of Taiyuan, he lost power to his "uncle" (the founder of the successor Tang dynasty), how could this not have followed on? One says: "That is not the case. This was the will of Heaven." When earthquakes shook the palace of the Crown Prince and gales raked the Imperial Altars at the Southern quarters, the knowledgeable were filled with foreboding - like the man of Qi who feared the sky would collapse. Moreover when the morally just assumed positions of power, and when the sun-horn dragon bathed in the kingly energies, this was a sign of the Son of Heaven in Xi'an. Who can blame Linghu Xingda who willingly took on responsibility for completing the task (of building the Grand Canal)?

Emperor Yang lived for 39 years, but outsiders had plans on the dynasty he perished, and thus I compiled this forty chapter case-book to pass on the details here. With one misjudgement Empress Dugu hastened the demise of the House of Yang. Let us suppose however, that [Emperor Yang] had suppressed his ambitions, reined in his extravagances, repented of his former deeds and thrown Pei Ju to the wolves and jackals. In that case, how could he not have become a common topic of conversation, as a person of flawless virtue. When presented with the joined heart ring by Emperor Yang at dawn, Lady Xuanhua tried to summon the will to refuse it, but although she dressed properly, she still opened up the golden ring box. The hand-written message was a fallacious appeal to his father in the palace, a lofty piece of paper which told of his desire to retire from his position with no explanation, even to the extent of going to the female quarters. With his only other progeny born of a concubine, when [Crown Prince] Yong was removed, he - Emperor Wen - was left with no heir. With cruelty of such a degree, Heaven overflowed with these crimes and evils. Beyond this was every type of debauchery and unrestraint; it is just like the saying "burning oneself without being attacked and too much action precipitating a swift death".

In present days the destruction of eight hundred forests has multiplied into the millions with the appearance of Maze Palaces. The present world has been threaded into a string of Mahamuni pearls, and been turned in its entirety into a subject of idle gossip. Emperor Yang has thus bequeathed to posterity a huge karmic retribution. When this History was completed, a visitor condemned it saying: "This is a slanderous account,

and can't be considered as a canonic work." One who understood it said: "This is transmitting, not creating. The Spring and Autumn period lasted over 240 years, saw the demise of 72 states, and 36 regicides, but did not the venerable Confucius dare to blazon its scandals? Whether you appreciate me or condemn me, please hear me out."

Written by the Manager of Heretical History at Pure Void Hall during the reign of the Chongzhen emperor, on a day between 1 February and 3 March, 1631.

*Yanshi tici* 艷史題辭  
Summary of *Sensational History*.

Privately authored biographies have always had as their highest aim to improve society and the fashion for them is thriving. Is this the reason that they choose to stir and discipline social mores? Or is it so because they are chiefly concerned with entertaining and pleasing the eyes and ears? Connoisseurs are often of the opinion that it is 'grasping the void and lifting shadows' and 'blowing waves and helping billows', creating wonderment at these stories and artfully using their repute to fish for profit. What a pity! Before this biography alone came out, so much profound mental deduction and questing were required, and so much authorial linking-up and assemblage were employed. Is it not indeed sad to toil away so meticulously at such a livelihood!

My friend is a descendant of Dongfang [Shuo]<sup>7</sup> and has always had a superabundance of gallant boldness and moral ardour, as well as being rich in talent and artistry, and, taking another name, he has constructed the compilation *Sensational History*, which concerns the affairs of Sui Emperor Yang, setting them forth in detail. In doing so, with his descriptions of situations and setting of scenes, there are inevitably points of extravagant unrestraint and libertine looseness, and lapses in ideals. But one should acknowledge that in unfolding to the full extent A Mo's<sup>8</sup> administrative excesses, it shows with concealed sadness how the Sui's sacrifices were terminated. By showing with concealed sadness the termination of the Sui sacrifices, it acts as a mirror shining forth the truth to contemporary people, and shows that happiness must not be pursued to its limits, nor ministers be laxly engaged into positions of power, nor advice be too fulsome, and that, the proper moral relationship between a father and son, an elder and younger brother, must not be ripped apart and destroyed. Then in this case it certainly is no fabrication and false telling by an unofficial history or spurious classic, nor certainly is it a stoking of lust and inducement of lewdness by titillating lyrics of passionate adventures.

My friend is concerned with social mores, and humbly reinforces the reform of customs and education, and I, in my impudence, have hastily schemed this block of carving, and pray that those with eyes will enjoy it together with me.

*Zuili youren* 構李友人委蛇居士 (friend from Zuili, layman at-ease) at *Taotaoguan* 陶陶館 (Happy Hall), dated *Chongzhen* reign period, *xinwei zhuming jiwang* 崇貞辛未朱明既望, (sixteenth day of the fifth lunar month [June] in the summer of 1631).

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<sup>7</sup> Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (154-93 BC) was a literatus whose exploits inspired a number of legends, often linked to alleged supernatural powers.

<sup>8</sup> A Mo was the childhood name of Emperor Yang.

The ordinary run of novels seek to expatiate on the relationships of the Standard Imperial Histories, and all and sundry have been made familiar with them, while the recent non-governmental “historical accounts”, ‘catch breezes and grab shadows’ - are concoctions without any factual foundation - designed to dizzy the ears and dazzle the eyes of the vulgar townsfolk. And what happens? By their baseless fabrications, they instead muddle people’s visual and auditory senses. This present book *Sensational History*, even though termed a novel does cite, however, facts of yore, keeping entirely in respectful accordance with the governmental histories, and in no way trying to fuel the world’s delusory folly either by artfully borrowing a single episode or wantonly devising a single anecdote. Thus it has a basis and proper development, with evidence and proofs available, and not only constituting the most ‘fine-sliced roast meat’ - the most delightful and appetising literature- of the age, but fit to bear witness to the truth for all time.

When one writes a book and sets down confident statements, no matter whether they be large or small ones, the most highly esteemed are those that are unfailingly bound up with the human mind and ways of society. Although *Sensational History* plumbs to the uttermost matters of drunkenness, lust and lavish extravagance, the subtle counsel, sardonic phrasings and such things as the *shi* poems and *ci* lyrics in it all embody a sense of mocking cajolery and corrective moral advice, enabling the reader at a glance to realize how wine is the ruination of lives and big civil construction projects the destruction of states. Thus, and certainly not seldom, this compilation is a “Yin mirror” -a salutary warning- sometimes bolstering the improvement of social mores. The difference between it and those books that openly promote lewdness is not merely as between the sky and the earth.

There are minor histories of all the enlightened rulers and noble-minded prime ministers, and of the deluded rulers and sycophantic ministers, sometimes winnowing abroad their fragrant qualities, sometimes strewing knowledge of their foulness, as encouragements and warnings to posterity. Such books as *States, Three Kingdoms, Eastern and Western Jin, Water Margin* and *Pilgrimage to the West* will be passed down imperishably on a par with the twenty one Standard Imperial Histories, and can indeed be regarded as comprehensive. Only in the case of Sui Emperor Yang, who prospered in splendour for a whole era, and whose deeds were all startling or delightful doings, somehow has not yet merited an account, which is a particularly grave gap in the annals. That is why I have assembled these details about him, and produced them into this set of volumes, in the hope that it will permit those with a nostalgic penchant for the past to obtain a rapid overview of the topic in its entirety.

There are many known accounts of happenings in the Sui dynasty, but here I only record the wonderful and sensational events of Emperor Yang. So we start with the birth of Yang and end with his death. We record nothing at all of the rest, of Emperor Wen’s rule and reign.

Emperor Yang was the most dashing romantic Son of Heaven of all time. Every act and deed of his without exception involved occurrences that divert the ear and delight the eye, evoking one’s envy and admiration. Hence this compilation’s bearing the title *Sensational History*.

There are a lot of stories of Yang’s sumptuous splendour and gorgeously beautiful women, but they have had to have profound sentiments and elevated charms for me to have culled and included any of them. For instance, such events as his three

military expeditions to Liaodong [Korea] and his vacation avoiding the summer-heat in Fenyang are ordinary and unremarkable, and so I have dispensed with them and left them out of my publication.

What romantic novels shun most is wordings of salacious lubricity and the like, because they do damage to morality and elegant decorum, however plain and unadorned narration also fails to convey the circumstances of intimacy of those times past. This work contains not a single syllable that sings lewdness, yet its ideas are exquisite and its scope exhaustive, it has beguiling twists and tantalising eventualities, and the intense mental effort with which the author has approached this compilation is self-evident.

The 'embroidered portraits' - illustrations of the books in the book-marts - bear no more than slight resemblances to human form, and they are only supplied for children's amusement. This compilation, however, has made a special point of entreating celebrated painters and marvellous artists to 'convey the expressions and fill in the eyes' - carve the engravings - and they have done so with the utmost finesse, so that as soon as one unfolds the scroll, the wondrous situations and gorgeous circumstances are a vivid as true life. Not only are these illustrations a match for the works of Gu Hutou - celebrated painter of the Eastern Jin dynasty - and Wu Daozi - celebrated painter of the Tang dynasty - as one versed in the lyrical arts of poetry, how can one not slap the table in appreciation!

The fine words of ancient poets have been selected beside each page of illustrations as is appropriate for each picture, in order to provide poetic evidence. The beauty comes from the viewpoint, the interest lies outside the words. Certainly of all the books within the seas never has there been one like this.

The poetic phrases are all bordered [in the style of] brocade with trimmings, just like the raven silk paper of Xue Tao - poetess of the Tang dynasty - so that one's elaborate craftsmanship and dedication may be seen.

The styles of brocade trimmings are all linked to the illustrations, for example in the teasing of Lady Xuanhua then rattan vines are used; for the granting of the 'linked hearts' ring then chains are used; for the cutting of coloured silk then spring silk gauze is used; for the meeting in the flowers' shade then joined branches are used; for the hanging [suicide of Lady Hou] then fallen blossoms are used; when singing songs then scudding clouds are used; in contributing the plan to build the canal then enchantment is used; for the kidnapping of the toddlers then ginseng root is used; when selecting pulley-girls then 'moth brows' are used; for the execution of the treacherous minister then a length of three feet is used; for frolicking under the moon then the 'silver toad' is used; in illuminating colourful sensuality then distant reflections are used; for the remonstrance then sunflower is used; when facing the mirror then water caltrop is used; come the time of death then bamboo is used; for Yuwen's plot to be ruler then thistle is used; when Gui-er curses the bandits, then a branch which has withstood the frost is used; for the regicide of Emperor Yang then cracked ice is used. Not one of them does not achieve its intent. Although it is called a minor history, it raises righteousness and its truth is deep. The poetry and documents are all composed by the brushes of famous ministers within the seas and since names haven't been revealed lightly, the knowledgeable may debate this among themselves.

There are eight rolls and forty linked chapters. , let us leave it thus for the time being.

Unsigned and undated.

## APPENDIX TWO: LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF WANG YI MEMORIAL

This appendix presents a lexical analysis of the memorial presented by Wang Yi to Emperor Yang. It examines the textual differences between the *chuanqi* “Haishan ji” 海山記 (referred to as HSJ), the *huaben* tale Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, “Sui Yangdi yiyou zhaoqian” 隋煬帝逸遊召讒 (referred to as HY24), and the text from *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*. The results are discussed in Chapter Three. Page references for the memorial are as follows, Haishan ji in *Shuo Fu* : 561; *Huaben* tale in Feng Menglong (1988): 479 - 480; *Sui Yangdi Yanshi* in Zhengzhou (1993): 429 - 431.

HSJ ( <i>Shuo Fu</i> : 561)	HY24	SYDYS
p19 1.8 金馬	左右	as HY24
1s.11-12 獨...獻	not included	as HSJ
1.12 于	not included	as HSJ
1.12 革	甲	as HY24
1.14 常踰萬人	常守空宮	常役數十萬
1.15 計	數	as HY24
1.17 膏血草野狐兔大肥	not included	血膏草野狐兔盡肥
1.18 殘	萬	as HY24
1.18 莫	不	as HSJ
1.20 如	至	as HY24
1.20 又	即	as HSJ
1.21 諫	奏	as HY24
1.21 上位	左右	as HY24
1.24-5 壁下欲幸...銷鑠	not included	close to HSJ
1.25 侍	將	as HSJ
1.25 如何	何以	as HY24
p20 1.1 將崩	之崩	之傾
1.2 忽	急	已

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