

Anders Cullhed and Lena Rydholm (Eds.)
True Lies Worldwide

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Fictionality in Global Contexts

Edited by
Anders Cullhed and Lena Rydholm

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Preface

Once upon a time, Chuang Chou [Zhuang Zhou] dreamed that he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting about and happily enjoying himself. He didn't know that he was Chou. Suddenly he awoke and was palpably Chou. He didn't know whether he was Chou who had dreamed of being a butterfly, or a butterfly who was dreaming that he was Chou. Now, there must be a difference between Chou and the butterfly. This is called the transformation of things.

*Zhuangzi*¹

Edward: I don't know if you're aware of this, Josephine, but African parrots, in their native home of the Congo – they speak only French.

All three stop to listen.

Josephine (amused): Really.

Edward: You're lucky to get four words out of them in English. But if you were to walk through the jungle, you'd hear them speaking the most elaborate French. Those parrots talk about everything: politics, movies, fashion – everything but religion.

Taking the bait ...

Will: Why not religion, Dad?

Edward: It's rude to talk about religion. You never know who you're going to offend.

A beat.

Will: Josephine actually went to the Congo last year.

Edward: Oh, so you know.

Screenplay from the movie *The Big Fish* (2003)²

Fiction and Fictionality ...

What is reality, or truth, and what is fiction? What purposes and needs does fiction fulfill in people's lives? People of all times and in all cultures have produced and consumed fiction in a variety of forms, not only for the sake of entertainment, but also to spread knowledge and to disseminate religious or political beliefs. Moreover, fiction has played a part in reflecting and shaping the cultural identity of communities, as well as the identity of individu-

1 The philosopher Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi) lived approximately between 369 and 286 BCE. This is one of the most famous passages in the philosophical and literary masterpiece *Zhuangzi*, here in translation by Victor H. Mair in *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 45.

2 "The Big Fish," directed by Tim Burton, was based on a novel by Daniel Wallace. Quotation from John August's screenplay (Copyright © 2003 Columbia Pictures), http://johnaugust.com/downloads_ripley/big-fish.pdf (16 August 2013).

als, in the past and in the present. While all kinds of story-telling, literature, opera, theatre and art were major transmitters of fiction in past times, modern media – through radio, film and television up to our present computer games and virtual worlds – seem to fill an important function all over the globe. In today's global society, fiction enjoys an increasingly influential position, as part of our daily lives and as an incredibly profitable industry. In spite of its renown for lacking veracity (“lies and accursed stuff,” as Henrik Ibsen famously put it), the apparent impact of fiction on peoples' values and ways of thinking, on opinions and life-styles, has led authorities in many countries to subject fiction to heavy censorship, both in the past and at present. So what does the power of fiction consist in? Why do we use and abuse it? In short: What is the function of fiction in human civilization?

In 2012, on the 16th–17th of August, a number of distinguished scholars gathered at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities in Stockholm for the conference *Fiction in Global Contexts: History and Recent Developments*. The aim of this cross-disciplinary conference was two-fold: one strictly theoretical, to explore the concepts of fiction and fictionality as they are understood and implemented in various disciplinary contexts, and one pragmatic, to look into the uses of fiction in different cultures, in different forms, and from different epochs, both ancient and more recent. The organizers, Anders Cullhed (Professor of Literature at Stockholm University) and Lena Rydholm (Professor of Chinese at Uppsala University) wanted the conference to cover a broad range of interests, from ancient literature, art, opera, and theatre, to modern media, such as film or computer games/blogs. Another goal was to enable scholars from sometimes widely different academic areas or fields of interest, who would otherwise probably not have the opportunity to meet and exchange views, to take part in comparisons and discussions about topics such as: the nature of fiction; fiction and its relationship to “truth”; the demand for fiction; its function and uses; the development of fiction from ancient to modern times; different forms of fiction; fiction in social contexts or in a gender perspective; the view of and function of fiction in different cultures, and other related topics.

Owing to the overwhelming response to the conference, we were not able to carry out all our plans for this cross-disciplinary intercourse. We were obliged to single out certain aspects of fiction and fictionality, reflected in this volume, which covers the main part of the contributions to the conference.

... And Globalization

Globalization is often emphasized as something typical of our time. But in many respects, the global network has been growing for centuries. A specific characteristic of globalization in the 21st century, however, is that we are discussing questions globally and simultaneously. The two major causes of this development are the internet and that a number of political, religious and cultural issues (for instance, the subject of this volume) have been promoted from a national to an international level.

By all appearances, this overall dislocation of certain debates and topics from domestic to global contexts does not result in any cultural homogenization on a grand scale. Local religions and regional customs will prevail. What is emerging these days, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, seems to be a transcultural discourse in media, in politics, and at universities – a global agenda, as it were, with a number of items.

In addition, on an academic level, this development appears to be connected with a new interest in World History that emerged as a distinct discipline in the 1980s. In every ideological interpretation, history will inevitably play a role. It is the storage chamber from which arguments are regularly brought to bear on the issues of the present day. This gives World History a specific role in a period characterized by increasing globalization.

In 2008, a conference was organized in Istanbul, where leading Swedish scholars working on World History gathered, only one, however, from each discipline: one historian, one archaeologist, one sinologist and so on. The idea was to bring about long-term interdisciplinary and high-quality World History projects. This initiative was followed up by a conference in Stockholm to which younger scholars and postgraduate students were invited, in an endeavor to scan the total field of World History on a national level. A third step in this project was to organize three both international and more specialized conferences during the years 2012 and 2013: one on fiction (the outcome of which is documented in this volume), one on global trade and one on methodology in World History.

The Conference

Gregory Currie, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nottingham, and Göran Malmqvist, Professor Emeritus of Sinology at Stockholm University and a member of the Swedish Academy, were our keynote speakers and have both contributed to this book. Currie, incidentally the author of one of the most influential works in the field of fiction theory, *The Nature of Fiction* (1990),

kindly agreed to write the Afterword to the book, summarizing his impressions of the papers and discussions during the conference. The other eighteen distinguished contributors in this volume are Lars-Erik Berg (Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Skövde), Margalit Finkelberg (Professor of Classics at Tel Aviv University), Ming Dong Gu (Professor of Chinese and Comparative Literature at the University of Texas at Dallas), Mari Hatavara (Professor of Finnish Literature at the University of Tampere), Stefan Helgesson (Professor of English at Stockholm University), Fritz Peter Knapp (Professor Ordinaris Emeritus of Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, Heidelberg, and a member of the Academies of Humanities and Sciences in Heidelberg and Vienna), Christian Kupchik (poet, editor and translator from Buenos Aires), Stephan Larsen (Assistant Professor of Literature at Stockholm University), Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (Professor of Japanese Studies at Stockholm University), Torbjörn Lodén (Professor of Chinese Language and Culture, Stockholm University), Christina Nygren (Professor of Theatre Studies at Stockholm University), Anders Pettersson (Emeritus Professor of Swedish and Comparative Literature at Umeå University), Göran Rossholm (Professor of Literature at Stockholm University), Lena Rydholm (Professor of Chinese at Uppsala University), Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback (Professor of Philosophy at Södertörn University), Bo Utas (Professor Emeritus of Iranian Studies at Uppsala University), Wim Verbaal (Professor of Latin Language and Literature at the University of Gent), and Ayling Wang (Professor of the Academia Sinica, Taipei).

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Anders Cullhed, Janken Myrdal and Lena Rydholm

Contents

Preface — v

Here, There – and Everywhere? Eastern examples

Lena Rydholm

Chinese Theories and Concepts of Fiction and the Issue of Transcultural Theories and Concepts of Fiction — 3

Torbjörn Lodén

Literature as a Vehicle for the Dao: Changing Perspectives of Fiction and Truth in Chinese Literature — 31

Gunilla Lindberg-Wada

Murasaki Shikibu and *The Tale of Genji*: Fate and Fiction — 51

Fictional Spaces: Image, Language & Identity

Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback

The Fiction of the Image — 67

Anders Pettersson

Linguistic and Psychological Mechanisms Behind Literary Fiction — 83

Lars-Erik Berg

Photons of the Human Mind: The Fiction of Personal Identity — 95

Live Fiction: Play & Performances

Ayling Wang

Interaction Between the Reader, the Critic and the Author: The Qing Dramatist Hong Sheng's Historical Play *Changshengdian* and Wu Yiyi's Commentary — 111

Christina Nygren

Performing Life and Live Theatre: Fiction in Popular Performances — 137

Fiction Past and Present: Historical Perspectives

Margalit Finkelberg

Diagnosing Fiction: From Plato to Borges — 153

Bo Utas

Classical Persian Literature: Fiction, Didactics or Intuitive Truth? — 167

Fritz Peter Knapp

Historicity and Fictionality in Medieval Narrative — 179

Wim Verbaal

How the West was Won by Fiction: The Appearance of Fictional Narrative and Leisurely Reading in Western Literature (11th and 12th century) — 189

Telling Tales: Narratology & Fictionality

Ming Dong Gu

Toward a Transcultural Poetics of Fiction: The Fusion of Narrative Visions in Chinese and Western Fiction Studies — 203

Göran Rossholm

General Beliefs from Fiction — 227

Mari Hatavara

Historical Fiction: Experiencing the Past, Reflecting History — 241

The Frontiers of Fiction: Recent Developments

Stefan Helgesson

Unsettling Fictions: Generic Instability and Colonial Time — 261

Stephan Larsen

Whose Magic? Whose Realism? Reflections on Magical Realism in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* — 275

Christian Kupchik

Confessions of the Hydra: Variations on the Concept of Fiction in Latin America — 289

Coda: Fiction, Translation & Interaction

Göran Malmqvist

Fiction in Global Contexts: Translation, the Universal Language of Literature — 301

Gregory Currie

Afterword: Fiction as a Transcultural Entity — 311

List of Contributors — 325

Index of Names — 333

**Here, There – and Everywhere?
Eastern examples**

Lena Rydholm

Chinese Theories and Concepts of Fiction and the Issue of Transcultural Theories and Concepts of Fiction

Introduction

In our present globalized world, researchers in many fields explore the possibilities of creating transcultural theories and concepts within the humanities and social sciences. This paper deals with the issue of creating transcultural theories and concepts of fiction. I will be using mainly Chinese notions of fictionality, in a domestic as well as in a global context, to raise certain basic questions about transcultural theories and concepts of fiction. The paper begins with a discussion of the “nature” of fiction in the context of Western theories of literature, genre and fiction, followed by a discussion of Chinese theories of literature and fiction, in the past and in the present.¹ The paper ends with a discussion of three of the major problems related to the creation of transcultural theories and concepts of fiction. These are: the problem of the normative impact of Western paradigms on transcultural theories and concepts of fiction, problems concerning the ideological foundation of transcultural theories and concepts of fiction and, finally, problems related to the very “nature” of fiction when attempting to create transcultural theories and concepts of fiction.

What Is the “Nature” of Fiction?

Theories of fiction in the West abound, especially from the 20th century onwards. In this short paper, I will merely refer to a few theories that are relevant to my present view of the “nature” of fiction and that can assist me in explaining my way of dealing with this complex concept in the context of transcultural theories of fiction. I will also draw on certain theories and concepts of literature and genre for analogies. The concept of literature in many Western theories of literature in the 20th century, as proposed by René Wellek and Austin Warren, David Lodge and many others, is closely related to the

¹ Translations from Chinese sources into English in this paper were made by the author unless otherwise stated.

concept of fiction. (Harris 1992, 193) J. M. Cameron even claimed that “the making of fictions” is the purpose of literature.² In *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory*, W. Harris provides four explanations of the concept of fiction:

1. That which is feigned or invented in order to entertain and/or to instruct. 2. The previous sense as restricted to prose narrative. 3. That which is feigned or pretended as an agreed practical convenience. 4. That, feigned or invented, which comes to be believed. (Harris 1992, 99)

My discussion of fiction touches upon all of these aspects of fiction, with the exception that it is not restricted to narrative prose (point 2 above). In classical Chinese novels, prose narrative mixes perfectly well with interspersed songs and poems, as in novels in many other cultures. Therefore, a discussion of transcultural concepts of fiction should not be limited to prose narrative and could in fact involve many literary and popular fiction genres, although in this paper, I will mainly focus on discussing Chinese novels, novellas and short stories. However, when discussing the very “nature” of fiction, there is one basic prerequisite for its existence that we should not ignore. Regardless of whether a literary work is fiction in the sense of Harris’s four definitions (cited above); and regardless of whether a fictional work is considered literary or popular; regardless of its relationship to a certain “reality” or “truth”; regardless of the form or medium it is expressed in; and regardless of the time, place or culture in which it was created, all works of fiction still share one inevitable prerequisite: they were all created *by someone*. They are created by human beings, based on a thought, an idea, a concept, an emotion, a dream, a fantasy, a vision or whatever in the creator’s (or creators’) mind. In this sense, fiction resembles literature itself, or literary genres for that matter. To draw on an analogy, Anders Pettersson, when discussing literary genres, just as John Searle does in his *Construction of Social Reality*, distinguishes two kinds of reality, the natural and the social:

In one sense, genres do not exist: they have no material existence [...] If human kind were to be wiped out while the rest of the world remained intact, neutrons and stones and stars would continue to be there – at least according to realist ontologies of various descriptions – but not literary genres. In another sense, however, literary genres do exist, the novel for example. [...] So a literary genre like the novel possesses a social existence or, with perhaps a clearer formulation, ideas about such literary genre as the novel exist in people’s minds. [...] The mental or social mode of existence should not, however, be conflated with the material or natural one. (Pettersson 2006, 294–295)

2 J. M. Cameron, “Poetry and Dialectic,” in *The Night Battle*, London: Burns and Oates, 1962, 136–37, quoted in Harris 1992, 194.

Literary genres are mind-dependent. In Pettersson's view they exist as intellectual and social constructs. I believe the same can be argued about the "nature" of fiction: *Ideas about fiction exist in people's minds*. If mankind did not exist, neither would fiction. Since fictions are in essence intellectual and social constructs, our ideas about what fiction is may change at any time. Kendall Walton (1990) describes fiction as a kind of social activity, a game of make-believe played by author and reader. But to engage in a game, you have to know the rules. Reader and writer have to *share certain ideas about fiction*, that are the prerequisite to enable this kind of communication between author and reader to function. And these "rules of the game" apply in a specific culture, at a specific time, and among people familiar with them, and may change at any time. There are no limits to what fiction is, or should be, or could become in the future.

Shuen-fu Lin describes genres as "clusters of stylistic and thematic traits that a number of works hold more or less in common and that change irregularly over the course of time." (Lin 1994, 5) Fiction, in my view, can also be seen as a cluster of features of all kinds, intra-textual, inter-textual and extra-textual, that change irregularly over time, and in addition, vary in different literary cultures, depending on the ideas about fiction in people's minds. As opposed to the case in the natural sciences, we cannot, by means of empirical studies, uncover the basic laws of nature governing this process of transformation, of assimilation of new features and/or rejection of other features within these clusters, since there are no laws of nature that pertain to the concept of fiction.

The concept of literature is equally illusive: literature, literary genres and fiction all incorporate clusters of features that change irregularly over time and vary in different cultures. Definitions of the concept of literature through the ages have been based on intra-textual, intertextual or extra-textual factors and conventions, or different combinations of these. But from a most basic point of view, literature, just like literary genres and fiction, is mind-dependent. Created by humans, it is in essence an intellectual and social construct, based on ideas about literature that exist in people's minds. And people's minds are far from objective. J. A. Cuddon in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* about "Literature":

If we describe something as "literature," as opposed to anything else, the term carries with it qualitative connotations which imply that the work in question has superior qualities; that it is well above the ordinary run of literary works. (Cuddon 1998, 472)

Literature is often awarded positive qualities, such as being creative, artistic, imaginative, original, aesthetically appealing and so on. Roman Jakobson gave us the concept of "literaturnost" (literariness), but it seems to be beyond us to

create a scientific, all-encompassing definition for this term. As it turns out, it is just as difficult to define “literariness” as it is to define “literature” itself. In the end, what is “quality” in literature is inseparable from human values. Terry Eagleton explains:

[...] the suggestion that “literature” is a highly valued kind of writing is an illuminating one. But it has one fairly devastating consequence. It means that we can drop once and for all the illusion that the category “literature” is “objective,” in the sense of being eternally given and immutable. Anything can be literature, and anything which is regarded as unalterably and unquestionably literature – Shakespeare, for example – can cease to be literature. Any belief that the study of literature is the study of a stable, well-definable entity, as entomology is the study of insects, can be abandoned as a chimera. (Eagleton 2003, 9)

What is labeled literature, what is excluded from this concept, and what is considered the “nature,” function and status of literature depends on ideas about literature in people’s minds (in a certain culture and at a certain time), and this is obviously subject to human values and ideologies. What is considered to be the “nature,” function and status of fiction is, in my view, subject to the same limitations, to the human values and ideologies in a certain culture and at a certain time shaping our ideas about fiction. This will be made clear in the following section describing the view of fiction in Chinese tradition, but the same applies to Western theories and concepts of fiction.

Ideological Orthodoxy and the View of Fiction in China

The first obstacle when discussing Chinese theories and concepts of literature in English has already been pointed out by James Liu.

It is often impossible to draw an equation between a Chinese word and an English one with not only the same referent but precisely the same implications and associations, [...]. In fact, in Chinese there is no word that is the exact equivalent, in conception and scope, of “literature,” as the word is commonly used in English today, but there are several Chinese terms that correspond more or less to it. (Liu 1975, 7)

The same goes for other key concepts in literary theory, such as literary genre, style and the like. As Ming Dong Gu points out: “‘Fiction’ is a Western concept. [...] The closest term to the Western idea of fiction in China is, of course, *xiaoshuo* in its modern sense, which refers to the short story, the novella and the novel in popular perception.” (Gu 2006, 19)³ Although both modern and

3 For a more thorough discussion of the concept of *xiaoshuo*, see Gu 2006, 19–21.

traditional forms of Chinese *xiaoshuo* mainly include the genres generally associated with fiction in the West, namely the short story, the novella and the novel (Cuddon 1998, 320), it is more problematic to apply modern Western concepts and theories of “fiction” to classical Chinese *xiaoshuo*, as this paper will show. Many forms of traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo* share features that differ remarkably from both their modern Chinese and their Western counterparts. The Chinese term *xiaoshuo* originally meant “small talk” or “lesser sayings,” and this concept has had a history of development in many ways different from the concept of fiction in the West. As stated above, classical Chinese *xiaoshuo* are not limited to prose narrative, nor, as will be discussed in the following section, are they limited to the purely “invented,” “feigned” or “pretended” in Harris’s definition quoted above. (Harris 1992, 99)

The following two sections of this paper, dealing with theories of fiction in China, will of course not give an exhaustive account of all theories and concepts of *xiaoshuo* through the ages. In the first section, I will focus on describing theories and concepts of literature and of fiction incorporated in mainstream ideology, in pre-modern and modern times. In the second section, I will discuss some contemporary ideological trends that either have had, or may in the future have, an impact on the development of literary theories in China. I ask my readers to keep in mind the important distinction between Chinese mainstream *theories of fiction*, that is, views of fiction, and Chinese *fiction* itself, that is, fictional works, a topic further elaborated on by Torbjörn Lodén in this volume.

Ideological Orthodoxy and the Mainstream View of Literature and of Fiction in China in Pre-Modern and Modern Times

When the First Emperor unified China in 221 BCE, he realized the importance of unifying the script to control the empire through his administration. The bureaucrats of ancient China were trained in writing in a standardized literary language, *wenyan*, which enabled civil servants all over the empire to communicate regardless of spoken dialects. Confucianism became the state ideology in China during the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE).⁴ Through the ages, young men from families of civil servants or gentry were trained in the Confu-

⁴ Confucianism in China has not been a static and fixed entity, but has developed and assimilated traits from other schools of thought. Idema and Haft points out that already in the Han dynasty, a synthesis of Confucianism, Legalism, Taoism, and Mohism formed a “Central tradition” (a term used by Erik Zürcher), in which Confucianism was the core. (Idema and Haft 1997, 23–27).

cian Classics and other important works to pass the imperial civil service examination (abolished as late as 1905), in order to obtain a government post, to gain status, wealth and power. Only a small fraction of the population was literate, and, to a large extent, these were the government officials. Hence most writers were also at some point bureaucrats and vice versa. These bureaucrats'/writers' view of the function of literature was deeply rooted in Confucianism. James Liu has labeled this view: "The Didactic view: Poetry as moral instruction and social comment."⁵ In the Preface to the Mao edition of the *Classic of Poetry (Shijing)*, the oldest preserved collection of songs/poetry in China dating approx. from 1000–600 BCE, the "Confucian" view of the didactic function of poetry was established:⁶

"Guan ju" is (a reflection on) the virtues of the Empress. It is placed at the beginning of the Feng section (of the *Shijing*); its purport is to influence (*feng*) the entire world in the rectification of the relationship between husbands and wives. The poem is as valid to the humblest dwellers of villages as it is of ceremonial use on national occasions. The word "*feng*" means "influence"; by extension it means "teaching" (*jiao*). Men are affected by influences, they are educated through teaching. [...] The former kings used poetry for the regulation of proper relationships between husbands and their wives, for the establishment of a sense of respect and loyalty for the old, for reinforcement of human bonds, for the amelioration of civilized life and for the removal of bad customs.⁷

The function of "songs/poetry" (*shi*) was to "influence" (*feng*) and to "teach" (*jiao*). Within the orthodox, "Confucian," didactic tradition, a concept of literature developed in which literature should be used for moral instruction: "Literature is a vehicle for the *Dao* [the (Confucian) way]" (*wen yi zai Dao*).⁸ Moral instruction through literature became a prerequisite for a peaceful and harmonious society; literature served to legitimize state ideology, to preserve the hierarchic social, economic, cultural and political system controlled by the bureaucratic power elite of imperial China. The Confucian classics were

⁵ Liu 1962, 65–69. In this book, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, Liu also discusses some alternative views of poetry in China.

⁶ As James Liu points out, orthodox Confucians would claim Confucius as their authority for their view of poetry as moral instruction, but judging from certain remarks attributed to Confucius in the *Analects (Lunyu)*, his view of the function of poetry cannot simply be reduced to a didactic view (Liu 1962, 65–66).

⁷ The anonymous "Mao shi xu" in Guo's edition (1999, vol. 1, 63). Trans. Wong 1983, 1–2. This preface has traditionally been attributed to Confucius' disciple Zi Xia [Pu Shang] (507–400 BCE), (Liu 1962, 66).

⁸ As Liu points out, "Literature is that by which one carries the Way" is the most famous phrase used to describe that literature should be used for moral instruction, formulated by Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073), (Liu 1975, 114).

believed to contain all human wisdom, and history provided records of the ancient sage kings' and wise ministers' moral words and deeds for future rulers and officials to study and emulate. The Confucian Classics, the Histories, the Philosophers' works, certain forms of poetry such as *shi*, *fu* and the like, and various forms of prose essays and documents used in politics and administration, these genres were held in high esteem, since they were supposed to be used for moral instruction, to disseminate truth and wisdom and to provide examples of correct moral behaviour, deeds and sentiments. (Rydholm 2006, 52–110) Such a view of the function of literature naturally led to suspicion of “fiction” in the sense of that which is “feigned,” “invented” and not true, and simply made up to entertain. The traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo* as a genre was considered to have evolved from myths, legends and folk tales, from “street talk and popular gossip” (*jietan xiangyan*), collected and put into writing by low-rank officials. In the bibliographic treatise (“Yiwen zhi”) of *Hanshu* [The History of the Former Han Dynasty], Ban Gu (32–92) explained the humble origins and low status of the *xiaoshuo* genre:

The school of small talk originates from the baiguan [office of low ranking]. It has been created out of the talk of the streets and the gossip from the alleys and what one has overheard on roads and pathways. Confucius said: “Also on the small roads there must be things worthy of consideration. When you have high-flying aspirations, you are afraid of [getting stuck in] the mud. That is why the prince does not devote himself to this.” However, you may not let it be wasted. Also the petty information that you can receive in alleys and villages suffices to be written down and to be preserved, if there is a word worthy of being edited into an anthology. This is true also of the debating of wood-cutters and clodhoppers. (Ban Gu 1975, vol. 5, 1745, trans. Sommardal 1998, 138–139)

To a certain extent due to the low status of fiction, *xiaoshuo* were excluded from many influential anthologies and genre theories through the ages. No complete theories of fiction appeared in China before the late 19th century (Huang and Han 2000, vol. 1, 649), but ideas about *xiaoshuo* were expressed in prefaces to story collections and the like. Many early stories were accounts of anomalies and contained descriptions of exotic places, birds, plants, strange beasts and supernatural beings such as gods, spirits, demons and monsters. During the Six Dynasties (220 CE–589 CE), a distinguishable prose genre called “tales of the supernatural” (*zhiguai*) emerged and gained a certain popularity.⁹

⁹ DeWoskin 2000, 652. According to Huang and Han, tales about the supernatural (*zhiguai xiaoshuo*), gods and spirits, were closely connected with religious superstition: “Daoism and Buddhism in China bear the responsibility for the unfortunate religiosification of literature, but at the same time contributed to the development of the elements of romanticism such as imagination and fiction in literature.” (2000, vol. 1, 18).

Editors of collections found material in written sources (histories, the Classics, biographies etc.) as well as in local popular legends, tales and rumors. (DeWoskin 2000, 652)

In the eyes of the orthodox Confucian bureaucrats who held a didactic view of the function of literature, that literature should contain truths and morally instruct, these “tales of the supernatural” were fabrications and spread superstition among the people. In the Confucian *Analects*, the supernatural is clearly not suitable for conversation: “The Master [Confucius] never spoke of the supernatural, superpowers, the abnormal, or spirits” (*Zi bu yu guai, li, luan, shen*).¹⁰ Probably to a certain extent to avoid criticism from the orthodox Confucians, in the prefaces to story collections, the editors often claimed that the stories, myths and legends told were accounts of actual events, that they were a form of history or biography writing.¹¹ Although these claims were probably made to avoid criticism, there was indeed a close connection between history writing and “tales of the supernatural,” and initially these tales were seen as “a degenerate branch of history.” (DeWoskin 2000, 652) In ancient China, court historians were often also astrologers, in charge of interpreting signs and omens for the ruler to facilitate his governing, thus the recording of signs, portents and the like (in particular anomalous ones) were an important part of history writing. (Hu 2010, 543) In the bibliographers’ classification system, “tales of the supernatural” were also placed in the category of “history” up to the early Song dynasty. (Hu 2010, 542)

A particularly interesting case is Gan Bao (d. 336), a court historian of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420), who became known as “the Dong Hu of the world of ghosts” (Dong Hu was a legendary historian praised by Confucius).¹² In the famous Preface to his collection of “tales of the supernatural,” the *Soushen ji* (literally meaning “Records of searching for spirits” and variously translated as *In Search of Spirits* and *In Search of the Supernatural*),¹³ Gan Bao claims to be using earlier written and oral sources “to make clear that the way

¹⁰ *Analects*, 7:20. Translation by J. Legge: “The subjects on which the Master did not talk, were – extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings.” (1970, 209) In translation by A. Waley: “The Master never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders [of nature], and spirits.” (1988, 127).

¹¹ For instance Guo Pu (276–324), in “*Shan hai jing xu*” [Preface to the Book of Mountains and the Sea] (Huang and Han 2000, vol. 1, 7–8), and Ge Hong (?284–364), in “*Shenxian zhuan zixu*” [Preface to the Biography of the Immortals] (Huang and Han 2000, vol. 1, 14–15).

¹² “Gan Bao” in *Jinshu* [History of the Jin Dynasty], *juan* 82. (Fang *et al.* 1974, 2150) Trans. Company 1996, 147.

¹³ A recent translation by K. J. DeWoskin and J. I. Crump was published as *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

of the ghosts and gods is not a fabrication” (*yi zu yi ming shendao zhi bu wu*).¹⁴ In other words, ghosts and spirits really exist. As Campamy points out, this entire preface is included in Gan Bao’s biography in *History of the Jin Dynasty*, and the preface was only added to *Soushen ji* by later editors; the preface should therefore be interpreted in the context of Gan Bao’s biography. (Campamy 1996, 146) In this passage in the biography of Gan Bao, it is stated that Gan Bao actually believed in spirits because he himself witnessed a couple of miraculous events (DeWoskin 2000, 652), one of these being the bringing back to life of his brother:

[...] Bao’s older brother once stopped breathing due to illness. For several days he did not grow cold, and later he regained consciousness and spoke of seeing the affairs of the ghosts and spirits of Heaven and Earth; he said it felt as though he were in a dream, and he did not know that he was dead.¹⁵

Now, such a miraculous event that Gan Bao witnessed may have been easily explained by modern medical science, but for people present at the time, it may have seemed no less than a miracle. Today, we can of course not prove beyond any doubt that Gan Bao believed in ghosts and spirits, but the entry in his biography and this preface indicates that it is quite possible that he did. Gan Bao’s *Soushen ji* had a huge influence on the subsequent development of fiction and has in modern times been seen to mark “the birth of Chinese fiction.” (Tian 2010, 202) Kenneth DeWoskin has described the influence of tales of the supernatural on subsequent fiction and drama:

Early collections such as *In Search of Spirits* served as repositories of popular characters and plots, and provided a legacy of character stereotypes, plot devices (e.g. demon impersonators, celestial intervention) and favorite props (e.g. magical mirrors, stones, gems, and swords). It can be argued that the *zhiguai* tales established the degrees and kinds of supernaturalism and coincidence – in general, the canons of plausibility – that were tolerable in later literary fiction. (DeWoskin 2000, 652)

Tales of the supernatural were subject to censorship from early times. Zhang Hua (232–300) compiled and presented Emperor Wu with a huge collection of

¹⁴ Gan Bao, “Soushen ji xu” [Preface to *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record*], in his biography in *Jinshu*, *juan* 82 (1974, 2151), and in Huang and Han 2000, vol. 1, 20. In different translations: “to make clear that the way of spirits is not a fabrication” (Hu 2010, 551), “to show that the spirit world is no fabrication” (Tian 2010, 211) The expression *shendao* means “the way of the ghosts and gods” (*guishen zhi Dao*), according to Huang and Han 2000, vol. 1, 21, footnote 8. Campamy also discusses two possible interpretation of *shendao* (1996, 149–150).

¹⁵ “Gan Bao,” in *Jinshu*, *juan* 82, 1974, 2150. Trans. Campamy 1996, 147.

400 fascicles of tales of the supernatural, anomaly accounts of all kinds based on miscellaneous written and oral sources: the *Treatise on Manifold Subjects* (*Bowu zhi*). According to Wang Jia (?–390), the Emperor's response was to quote the statement about Confucius not discussing the supernatural and abnormal (cited above), and then state that the *Treatise* would “startle and bewilder [the public] with things unheard of and unseen of, will scare and mislead the children, and upset the eyes and ears.” (Wang 2000, vol. 1, 25) The Emperor subsequently ordered the removal of large parts of it, and the 400 fascicles of the work were cut down to ten; these ten fascicles were kept by the emperor in a box to be enjoyed in private in his leisure time. (Wang 2000, vol. 1, 25) This account illustrates the double standards of the cultural elite in ancient China, to publicly condemn the *xiaoshuo* and “protect the people” from it through censorship, while still enjoying collecting, reading (and writing) *xiaoshuo* themselves. Interestingly, even today, in a recently published edition of Gan Bao's *In Search of Spirits*, with translations of the tales into modern Chinese to reach a broader audience since modern readers cannot be assumed to read classical Chinese, the editors still feel compelled to denounce the supernatural content of the work. In the editors' preface (“Bianzhe de hua”) to the Wanjuan edition of *In Search of Spirits* (*Soushen ji*), it is stated that there are certain “negative aspects” of the work, namely that it “excessively propagates superstition and spiritual thinking, and in addition a fatalistic viewpoint that should be rejected [...] but the major part of the content is still healthy and progressive.” (Gan 2009, 8)

In the Tang dynasty (618–907), storytellers dwelled in the capital, many of them Buddhist monks telling Buddhist legends in verse or verse mixed with prose, to convert the audience. (Hsia 1968, 6–7) Their tales inspired the writers of short stories about gods, spirits, demons and strange love affairs called “tales of the strange” (*chuanqi*). This genre, which had its roots in the “tales of the supernatural” (*zhiguai*) in the collections by Gan Bao and others (Lu 2009, 46–47), was cultivated in *wenyan* by members of the literati and shared formal similarities with history writing. The authors still often claimed that the stories pertained to real people and actual events (history, biography), rather than admitting to writing fiction. (Idema and Haft 1997, 134–135)

The professional storytellers in the amusement quarters of the growing cities of the Song dynasty (960–1279) told stories about historical events, love affairs, martial arts heroes, supernatural beings and so on, keeping up the interest of the paying crowd by putting vivid exaggeration and imagination into their stories. The most famous classical Chinese novels (*xiaoshuo*) in printed editions from the sixteenth century, the *Sanguo yanyi* [Romance of the Three Kingdoms], *Shuihu zhuan* [Water Margin] and *Xiyou ji* [Journey to the

West], all drew their material from popular legends and story cycles told by professional story-tellers during the Song dynasty or earlier (Idema and Haft 1997, 198, 208), as well as from some historical sources, such as the dynastic histories. They all include, to a varying degree, supernatural and/or religious elements such as demons, monsters and spirits, people with abnormal strength or powers, Daoist recluses, Buddhist monks and others. These stories were written in the vernacular or in combinations of vernacular and literary language, of prose narrative mixed with poems. The anonymous *Jin Ping Mei*, variously translated as *The Plum in the Golden Vase* and *The Golden Vase* from the late sixteenth century was written in vernacular prose narrative mixed with so many songs and poems that C. T. Hsia called the novel a “poetic anthology within a narrative framework.” (Hsia 1968, 169) This novel consists of an “easily summarized” main story plot interspersed with “a large number of borrowed stories” (Hsia 1968, 170), incorporating supernatural elements, such as ghosts, and a Buddhist reincarnation along with karma. This novel is most notorious for its pornographic descriptions and was officially banned well into the late 20th century. In modern times it has been praised by scholars as a break-through in Chinese narrative art, “a most important milestone in the transition of Chinese narrative from historicity to fictionality.” (Gu 2006, 125)

The low status of *xiaoshuo* had several reasons. The genre had deep roots in an oral, popular tradition, in myths, legends, “street talk and popular gossip,” tales of the supernatural and the like. These novels drew material from the storytellers’ tales and were written in a vernacular heavily influenced by the storytellers’ rhetoric and artistic devices. The storytellers told tales that were to a large part “feigned” and “invented” for the main purpose of vulgar entertainment and making money, not to fulfill the orthodox Confucians’ didactic purposes of literature, that is, to convey truth, wisdom and moral instruction about the Confucian way. The *xiaoshuo* supposedly spread lies, sex, violence and superstition and were considered vulgar and immoral. But as mentioned above, this did not prevent the educated elite from collecting, reading and writing *xiaoshuo*.

In the eighteenth century, Wu Jingzi (1701–1754) wrote the famous satirical novel *Rulin waishi* (translated as *The Scholars*, literally meaning “The unofficial history of the literati”). Not including poems and being less influenced by the practice of storytelling, supernatural interventions and the like, this novel differs substantially from the sixteenth-century novels. The eighteenth-century masterpiece *Hongloumeng* (variously translated as *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Dream of Red Mansions*, and *The Story of the Stone*), by Cao Xueqin (1715–1764), is considered to be partly autobiographical and has been praised for its strong element of psychological realism. (Hsia 1968, 246) It describes the eco-

nomic and moral downfall of a wealthy and influential clan, an epic love story, and the life journey of the main character Bao Yu towards Buddhist enlightenment. It is written in the vernacular with poems that blend into prose narrative so well that they appear to have been written by the characters themselves. (Bergman 2005, 41) According to Ming Dong Gu, “*Honglouloumeng* marks the completion of poeticization of fiction in Chinese history and is a poetic novel par excellence.” (Gu 2006, 108) With the creation of *Honglouloumeng*, Ming Dong Gu emphasizes, “Chinese fiction finally rid itself of the odium of lowliness and became a respectable literary art on a par with venerable lyric poetry and classical prose.” (Gu 2006, 108) Another factor stressed by Ming Dong Gu is the “visible movement of Chinese *xiaoshuo* from historical narrative to pure fiction.” (2006, 84–88)

I fully agree with Ming Dong Gu’s description of the remarkable progress in the art of the classical novel that *Honglouloumeng* represents. However, I do not think that “poeticization” or “fictionalization,” or any other intrinsic qualities suffice to explain the rise in status of the novel as a genre. A major factor, in my view, is the change in ideological climate, a change in the ideas about the *xiaoshuo* in people’s minds during the 20th century, when the novel’s status rose to unprecedented levels. This required a “revolution in the realm of the novel” (*xiaoshuojie geming*), as in the famous slogan by reformist and literary critic Liang Qichao (1873–1929). This changed attitude towards the nature, function and status of the *xiaoshuo* is manifest in Liang’s article “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” [On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People], published in 1902 in the first issue of what is considered the first journal in China to specialize in publishing novels (with Liang as editor), *The New Novel* (*Xin xiaoshuo*):

If one intends to renew the people of a nation, one must first renew its fiction. Therefore, to renew morality, one must renew fiction; to renew religion, one must renew fiction; to renew politics, one must renew fiction; to renew social customs, one must renew fiction; to renew learning and arts, one must renew fiction; and to renew even the human mind and remould its character, one must renew fiction. Why is this so? This is because fiction has a profound power over the way of man.¹⁶

For the reformists within the enlightenment movement, fundamental reforms in the political system were required to modernize China – its education, economy, science and technology – to be able to build a strong nation that could withstand the foreign aggression since the Opium wars of the 1840s. Liang

¹⁶ Liang Qichao in the essay “On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People” from 1902. Trans. Gek Nai Cheng (Liang 1996, 74). Translation slightly modified.

Qichao blamed the traditional novel for virtually all of China's contemporary misfortunes: the corruption, the superstition, and the passive attitude towards foreign intruders could all be traced back to the "poisonous" thoughts spread by the traditional *xiaoshuo*. (Liang 1997, 286–287) Just like the bureaucrats of the past, Liang decided to use literature for education and "moral instruction." In that sense, Liang adheres to the traditional, mainstream didactic view of the function of literature, seeing novels as vehicles for a certain ideological content. But instead of viewing literature as a vehicle for the "Confucian way" (*wen yi zai Dao*), as discussed above, and using it to maintain the status quo, Liang wanted it to convey the ideas of the Enlightenment (*qimeng sixiang*); and he chose the *xiaoshuo* genre to bring about this major change in culture and society. The novel could and should save China. This opened up the scene for the development of a modern Chinese realistic and political novel, exposing and criticizing Confucianism and traditional culture and society.

One problem with spreading the messages of the reformists was the low level of literacy in China at the time. The use of the vernacular in literature increased rapidly, and after many debates, with Hu Shi as a major advocate for this development, the literary language *wenyan* was abolished in the educational system in favor of the vernacular (*baihua*). Hu Shi also claimed that the modern novel in the vernacular was not based on "imitating" the traditional *xiaoshuo* but rather became "true literature" (*zhen wenxue*), by describing contemporary society in a straightforward, realistic way.¹⁷ There was an urge for realism in the novel and a critique against traditional Chinese literature in this regard, to a certain extent inspired by Western literature and literary theories. Guan Daru wrote that the major "shortcoming of the Chinese novel" was that it was not "realistic" as in the West; in his view, novels should "reflect society," and it was even against the very "nature" of the novel when writers were "facing the wall and fabricating [a content] out of nothing" (*xiangbi xuzao*).¹⁸ Lu Xun, the great writer of the 20th century, versed in both the Chinese and the Western literary heritage, wrote *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (*Zhongguo xiaoshuo shiliue*) in the 1920s. Previously, in 1918, he wrote in the vernacular what has been called the first "modern Chinese novel," *A Madman's Diary* (*Kuangren riji*), inspired by Nikolai Gogol's *The Diary of a Madman* (1835). Lu Xun's novel is deeply satirical and critical of traditional Confucian values, culture and society. He wanted to change not only the political system but also the Chinese people's national character, *guominxing*. (Qian,

17 Hu Shi, "Wenxue gailiang qianyi" [A Discussion of Literary Reform], *Xin qingnian* [New Youth] 2.5 (1917), quoted in Guo 2008, 206.

18 Guan Daru, "Lun xiaoshuo" [Discussion of the Novel], in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* [The Novel Monthly Magazine], 1912, quoted in Guo 2008, 205.

Wu, Wen and Wang 1987, 5) Lu Xun also shared views similar to those of Liang concerning the didactic function of the novel.

In speaking of “why I write novels” just like ten years ago, I still hold on to “the idea of enlightenment,” and that it [the novel] must “serve human life,” and even improve human life. I deeply detest those who call novels “leisure books,” and in addition believe in “art for art’s sake,” seeing the novel merely as a new name for “passing time in a leisurely way.” Therefore, I draw my material from the unfortunate people of a sick society; my idea is to uncover the symptoms of the disease and draw attention to finding a cure.¹⁹

Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party continued in the same tradition of using literature as a didactic tool, as “a vehicle” for political ideology, for Marxism-Leninism. The Chinese Communist party took the politicization of literature to extreme levels, especially during the Cultural Revolution with its almost complete isolation from the West and report-like works on the class struggle. The Communist Party’s literary policies also meant increased popularization, a return to developing domestic oral story-telling, drama and other forms that were more accessible to the illiterate farmers, with political themes and contents. (Li and Jiang 1999, vol. 1, 202–224) The importance of conveying a certain ideological/political message also led to the tendency to focus on content rather than form: to evaluate literary works (and their authors) based on whether they contained a politically correct content, rather than discussing formal, linguistic features or aesthetic merits.

To sum up, in my view, the unprecedented rise of the *xiaoshuo* genre’s status in China in the 20th century cannot be explained solely by the maturing of the traditional *xiaoshuo* with regard to intratextual qualities such as “poeticization” and “fictionalization.” Nor do I think that the elevation of the status of the novel was solely due to the influence of Western literature and literary theories in the early 20th century. It is rather a matter of a politicization of *xiaoshuo* with deep roots in traditional, mainstream Confucian ideology and literary theory. Reformists and politicians such as Liang Qichao and Mao Zedong, however critical they were of the culture and society of ancient China and of Confucianism, realized the potential of the *xiaoshuo* to “educate” and “indoctrinate” the public. They realized that the novel could effectively convey certain ideological/political messages and “influence” (*feng*) people. This was in essence consistent with a traditional “Confucian” view of the didactic purposes of literature, now applied to the formerly disdained genre of *xiaoshuo*.²⁰

¹⁹ Lu, Xun, “Wo zenme zuoqi xiaoshuo lai” [Why I Write Novels]. Quoted in Qian, Wu, Wen and Wang 1987, 5.

²⁰ Genres aimed at entertaining people, especially forms of oral literature and of popular entertainment, popular song lyrics, texts written in the vernacular (instead of *wenyan*), and/

Thus they changed the ideas about the *xiaoshuo* in people's minds in a way that actually conformed with traditional ideological orthodoxy, since it suited their contemporary political purposes.

Some Ideological Trends and Ideas About Literature, Literary Style and Fiction by Chinese Scholars Since 1978

Since 1978, China has opened up to the West in the realm of economy and trade but also to a large extent in the realms of culture and science. Politics takes much less precedence compared to the preceding period of the Cultural Revolution. Western literature and theories of literature have been pouring into China in translations of varying quality, along with books on Western philosophy, linguistics, rhetoric, narratology, fiction and so on. Western linguistic research, Russian formalism and structuralism initially inspired many Chinese scholars. With the diminished influence of politics in literary studies, the earlier focus on the political content of literary works alone shifted to the study of aesthetic aspects. Formal and linguistic features were now being incorporated into theories and studies of literature, literary genres, styles, and fiction. The recent scholarly freedom, relatively speaking, stirs emotions within writers and critics who have experienced the oppression during the Cultural Revolution, and who have suffered as a result of their works being judged by non-literary (i.e. political) criteria. Wang Meng describes his sentiments in the preface to a series of literary style (*wenti*) in the 1990s:

I thank heaven and earth that it is finally acceptable to study literary style. At last, there are many scholars and specialists doing research within this field, and it is now possible for the publishers to publish such books. [...] Writers need to be understood and appreciated. This understanding/appreciation mainly concerns style. When a reader or critic admits that style exists in this world, it already makes one feel warm inside; if they also recognize the stylistic features of an author's work, then this simply makes one's eyes fill with tears. (Wang Meng 1999, 1-2)

This shift in ideology, allowing literary research based on literary criteria instead of simply political correctness, along with the openness towards West-

or with immoral content (love, eroticism), or fictional content, supernatural beings etc. would often be excluded from the functionalistic genre systems and anthologies created by the orthodox Confucian bureaucrats. The song lyric genre *ci*-poetry as well as *qu*-drama have also suffered neglect and contempt in the past for "shortcomings" in some of these areas. But just as the novel, these genres have gone through a similar process, gaining status with a change in theme and content that better fulfilled the didactic purpose of literature. (Rydholm 2006, 107-108).

ern scholarship, has led to an upsurge in new research on literature, genre, style, and fiction/*xiaoshuo* in China, as well as among overseas Chinese scholars. A large part of major works on fiction in recent decades will also be enumerated and discussed by Ming Dong Gu in this volume, and will therefore not be treated here.

The period after 1978 up to the 1990s is in some ways very similar to the beginning of the 20th century, when intellectuals and scholars in all fields were eager to learn from Western theories to modernize China, to develop Chinese society and its economy, science and technology. For a while, it appeared that Western theories could solve all of China's problems, even in the fields of the humanities and social sciences. After a period of isolation, scholars in every field were struggling to "catch up," applying Western theories and models, adopting Western paradigms, not only in the natural sciences but also in economics, foreign politics, media studies and literary studies. But in the 1990s, there was a reaction to this trend. Not only did the market economy not automatically bring democracy, but in many other fields within the humanities and social sciences it became increasingly clear that Western models did not fit Chinese reality. Western theories and models failed to incorporate the specific experience of Chinese history, its political system and its cultural heritage. Many scholars turned to Chinese tradition to search for a way to define a specific Chinese cultural identity in a globalized world. This led to an upsurge in interest in Chinese philosophy, in Confucianism as well as in Daoism. China could develop its economy and society in a "Chinese way" and become extremely successful in terms of economic power in the world, so there was obviously an alternative model, the "Chinese model," which could be applied to other fields as well. A Chinese model could integrate parts of Western theories but is expected to be rooted in Chinese history, society and politics, as well as in traditional Chinese cultural values and ideas. Hence there is "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (*you Zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi*), "reform with Chinese characteristics," and many others. A quick Google search on the Internet shows that almost everything can have "Chinese characteristics" (*Zhongguo tese*): "microfinance with Chinese characteristics," "Legal precedents with Chinese characteristics," "Theory of rights with Chinese characteristics," "Human resource management with Chinese characteristics," and so on. This is not simply a matter of political or commercial slogans (or a sense of humour), it is a serious issue in research within many fields, for instance media and communication, as Hu Zhengrong and Ji Deqiang points out:

Instead of seeing western paradigms as "advanced experiences" with universal values and applicability from a developmentalist perspective, Chinese communication scholars must first contextualize the theories that have been introduced and translated into Chi-

nese [...] Key concepts like journalism, communication, state, party, freedom, democracy, modernization, market, public spheres and globalization are fundamental components of current communication theories, yet less serious academic attention has been paid to the historical and social backgrounds where the concepts emerged and make sense. They are considered as common sense and can be used directly and without modification. (Hu and Ji 2013, 152–153)

In their article, Hu Zhengrong and Ji Deqiang point out the many problems connected with applying Western paradigms to Chinese reality and call for “a new paradigm in order to combine theory and practice on the basis of ‘Chinese characteristics’.” (Hu and Ji 2013, 148) The field of literary studies is not different in the sense that it follows the trends and shifts of ideology in the rest of society. Are Western theories of literature, genre, style, and fiction applicable to Chinese literature? Many scholars have come to the conclusion that to a large part they are not. Chinese literature has its own distinctive features and qualities as a result not only of the language, literary conventions or aesthetic values, but also from its deep roots in China’s cultural, philosophical, political and historical background that neither Western theories nor terminology can completely cover. Literary scholar Zhang Yi aims to create a “Literary stylistics with Chinese characteristics” (*you Zhongguo tese de wenxue wentixue*) that can combine “modern Western” studies of linguistic style, stylistic theories and research methods with a “traditional Chinese” analysis of content and the impact of culture and society (Zhang 1996, 4–5, 9–11):

Now we will establish a theory of literary stylistics with Chinese characteristics. On the one hand, we shall incorporate the excellent parts of traditional [Chinese] literary theory and modern Western theories of literary stylistics; on the other hand we shall struggle to overcome all kinds of shortcomings in both [...]. (Zhang 1996, 329)

What is the place of Chinese literature and literary theory in a globalized world? Should everything distinctively Chinese simply be reduced to a “special case” of Western theories or paradigms? Or is there something basically wrong with Western paradigms being unable to accommodate the Chinese experience? And why should not the West open up to Chinese literature and literary theories? Ming Dong Gu in his *Chinese Theories of Fiction*, written in English, introduces Chinese ideas and notions of fictionality through the ages, and furthermore aims “to construct a non-Western system of fiction theory in the context of the international fiction studies,” and to “contribute to a paradigm shift in fiction studies.” (Gu 2006, 10) This important work gives Western scholars within the field of literature a deeper understanding of Chinese fiction and fiction theory, and even presents, in my view, new perspectives on Western fiction and fiction theory, as discussed in the following section dealing with the issue of transcultural theories and concepts of fiction.

The Issue of Transcultural Theories and Concepts of Fiction

As has been stated above, theories of fiction are, in my view, essentially ideas about fiction in people's minds, and are therefore inseparable from human ideologies and values. In this section, I will discuss some problems related to the creation of transcultural theories and concepts of fiction. In the first part, I will discuss the problem of the normative impact of Western theories and concepts of fiction; in the second part, I will focus on the problem of the ideological foundation of transcultural theories, concepts and paradigms in general; and in the third and final part, I will discuss the problem of the "nature" of fiction in the context of transcultural theories and concepts of fiction.

The Problem of the Normative Impact of Western Theories and Concepts of Fiction

The first reason for my skepticism of transcultural theories and concepts of fiction has to do with the normative impact of Western theories and concepts. In the West in the past few decades, scholars within the field of literature, just as in many other fields, have started to "wake up" and to explore what globalization and increasing encounters between literary cultures mean for the writing of world literary history and the development of transcultural literary theories. In research programs such as the Swedish "Literature and Literary History in Global Contexts," scholars in the fields of several languages and literatures gathered to discuss the problem of the lack of knowledge of non-European literatures in the West; the Eurocentric-perspective of Western world literary histories of the past (and the little amount of space allotted to non-European literatures, if included at all); and the theoretical and methodological problems that occur when writing world literary history from a non-Eurocentric perspective, treating the different literary cultures on equal terms.²¹ The four volumes of *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective* published by the program in 2006 contain studies of the notions of literature and genre in different cultures and in different times, and elucidate literary encounters between literary cultures in modern times. In the second volume, Anders Pettersson warns against the danger of applying Western terminology to literary cultures in a global context:

²¹ See Gunilla Lindberg-Wada, "General Preface to the series *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective*," in Lindberg-Wada 2006a, vol. 1, IX–XII.

Every description of something implies the use of some specific system of representation ultimately connected with purposes, values, and ways of viewing the world. Thus we cannot hope for a neutral, value-free system of transcultural literary-historical representation [...]. Even if we wanted to create a new terminology, we would have to employ these words and concepts [Western literary-critical vocabulary] in explaining it and agreeing on it. (Pettersson 2006, 303)

Pettersson also quotes Paul Jay warning of “the danger that globalizing literary studies will colonize world literatures for Western academic consumption by channeling them through its own normalizing vocabulary.”²² It is obvious that the very same dangers are present when trying to develop transcultural theories and concepts of fiction. That is the first reason for my doubts about transcultural or “universal” theories and concepts of fiction. If we look at many influential Western theories of literature, genre or fiction, they have had a huge normative impact even though the terms and concepts used in them (as James Liu, Ming Dong Gu many others have pointed out) do not readily apply to Chinese literature.

Influential Western theories of fiction, for instance Gregory Currie’s *The Nature of Fiction* (1990) and Kendall Walton’s *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (1990), are difficult to apply to Chinese *xiaoshuo* for several reasons. One reason is the early practice by many Chinese literati when collecting stories, or even writing stories themselves, to claim that the stories were true and based on actual events, that they belonged to the genres of history or biography, even though they contained supernatural beings, miraculous events and the like. In this sense traditional Chinese fiction defies modern Western fiction theories by Kendall Walton and others since it is not really a mutual game of “make-believe.” (Walton 1990) It is not really a case of “We are intended by the author to *make believe* that the story as uttered is true.” (Currie 1990, 18) The author’s intention is *not* that the reader “make-believe the text (or rather its constituent propositions),” as discussed by Currie (1990, 30–35). It is rather a case of the author inviting the reader to actually believe that the text is true, regardless of if the story or any of its constituent propositions are true, and in spite of the story and its propositions often being (at least by modern standards), blatantly feigned and invented. But that does not necessarily mean that the author is consciously misleading and deceiving the reader. The author might very well actually believe that the story is true himself. Historian Gan Bao, in his biography mentioned above, is reported to

²² Paul Jay, “Beyond Discipline? Globalization and the Future of English,” *PMLA* 116 (2001), 41, quoted in Pettersson 2006, 302.

have believed in spirits and to have claimed that the supernatural stories in his *Soushen ji* were true. According to Tian Xiaofei:

Although [*In Search of the Supernatural* has been] regarded in modern times as marking the “birth of Chinese fiction,” in this period the recording of such tales was undertaken not as a literary endeavor, but rather in the spirit of chronicling true occurrences or at least preserving ancient documents for future generations. The language of such tales, which are never very long, is usually plain and straightforward, and their narrative pattern betrays a strong influence of the historian’s style. (Tian 2010, vol. I, 202)

Other near contemporary writers were Buddhists or Daoists. Ge Hong (283–343) was a Daoist writer who compiled *Biographies of Divine Transcendents*. Tian Xiaofei describes its content and discusses the authors’ intent (Ge Hong’s and Gan Bao’s):

It [*Biographies of Divine Transcendents*] records the lives of more than a hundred figures from antiquity down to Ge Hong’s own age who had obtained “transcendence” and become immortal beings with extraordinary powers. Despite its fantastic nature, it is important to bear in mind, in the context of Ge Hong’s age and his personal belief system, that *Biographies of Divine Transcendents* was not intended as fiction but as a record of actual facts [...]. The same can be said of the historian Gan Bao’s *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Soushen ji*). [...] In the preface, Gan Bao claimed that he had compiled this work from various written and oral sources to show that “the spirit world is no fabrication.” In fact, much of the material in *In Search of the Supernatural* on omens and portents also appears in the dynastic histories. (Tian 2010, 211)

In Gregory Currie’s words “We need to say that a work is fiction if (a) it is the product of a fictive intent and (b) if the work is true, then it is at most accidentally true.” (Currie 1990, 46) But if the information discussed above, about Ge Hong, Gan Bao and their contemporaries, is correct, these authors had no “fictive intent” in Currie’s sense. Chinese traditional *xiaoshuo* where the author claims the stories to be true, are by Currie’s definition not fiction. At most, in Currie’s terms, they can be labeled “pseudo-fiction,” that is, works without “fictional intent,” but that are obviously (by modern standards) not true, and therefore *read as if* they are fictional works. (Currie 1990, 37) In this way, if we apply Currie’s theory of fiction to the ancient Chinese *xiaoshuo* (a procedure which he has by no means endorsed himself), traditional Chinese fiction is excluded from the realm of actual “fiction.” If we apply Western theories, terms and concepts of fiction to traditional practices of writing Chinese *xiaoshuo*, they will not readily apply, since they were not based on studying Chinese fiction but modeled on Western fiction. Regardless of the author’s intent, which in Gan Bao’s case (or for that matter in the case of most writers) we cannot prove anyhow, and regardless of the readers’ judgment through the

ages on whether the content is fictional or not, the author's ambiguous "intent" has not, and still does not, intrude upon the reading and appreciation of traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo*.

Even though many modern Western theories of literature and fiction were not modeled on Chinese literature and were not intended to apply to traditional Chinese literature, they still have had a huge normative impact, on both Chinese and Western scholars discussing and evaluating traditional Chinese fiction in modern times. Ming Dong Gu has criticized the Eurocentric biases in some Western concepts of fiction used to evaluate Chinese fiction. Western critics/scholars have often tended to regard the idiosyncratic properties of traditional Chinese fiction as "limitations" or even "anomalies":

I admit that Chinese fiction and fiction theory do possess some idiosyncratic features not found in Western fiction [...]. In fictional practice, traditional Chinese fiction displays these interesting features: fiction commentaries may be printed alongside fictional works; a narrator may intrude into his fictional work as he pleases; author, narrator, commentator, and reader may all appear in the same fictional work; the narrator may declare a patently untrue account as relating true events that have happened in life or history; realistic tales may be structured in mythical or supernatural frameworks; in largely realistic stories and novels, gods and fairies, ghosts and demons, fox spirits and animal spirits, may become true-to-life characters who participate in the affairs of the human world; in generic forms, a prose narrative may be intermingled with storytelling, lyric poems, and dramatic songs; in narrative focus, an insistence on total vision and faithful recording of dialogues and events may tend to give rise to the rhetorical foregrounding of conflicting points of view; an extended fictional work may be organized on an episodic structure that sometimes shows no obvious connection between episodes; and the narrative language may range from the most literary and archaic classicism to the most vulgar vernacular of the illiterate. By the standards of Western fiction theory predicated on mimesis and realism, most of these idiosyncrasies seem to be shortcomings or limitations. [...] due to the lack of a systematic study of the laws of Chinese fiction, few scholars have realized that those idiosyncrasies are not symptoms of narrative weakness but signs of fictional artistry [...]. I further contend that those idiosyncrasies are by no means shortcomings or limitations. They are characteristic features that grew out of the philosophical, social, cultural, and aesthetic conditions of a tradition and constitute contributions made by Chinese fiction to the general art of fiction. [...] most of them [the idiosyncrasies] are narrative plays deliberately designed to advance the art of fiction, and some anticipate modern, modernist, and even postmodern techniques of fiction writing. (Gu 2006, 2–3)

Ming Dong Gu's critique of Western theories and concepts applied to Chinese fiction not only points to certain biases in Western research but in addition, renders new perspectives on Western literary fiction. The problem is not that Western scholars have developed theories of literary fiction that seem to apply to (at least parts of) Western fiction. The problem is rather that some scholars/critics in the West and in China seem to have assumed that these theories are

universal and should apply to fiction in all other literary cultures. They have even thought that if fiction in other cultures does not measure up to a Western norm, it is of lesser value, or “immature,” or is caught in a developing stage towards *becoming* more like Western fiction, as if this was the universal goal of literary fiction. I do hope that Chinese fiction will not adapt to and merge into Western fiction and disappear. Nor do I wish for Chinese theories and concepts of fiction to merge into Western theories of fiction and vanish. Chinese literary fiction, traditional and modern, should be studied and discussed with regard to the specific features that are highly valued in Chinese literary culture, and these may be hard to distinguish and appreciate within transcultural theories and concepts. It is hard, not to say impossible, to create a concept on such a high level of generalization that it has universal claims without excluding something that is unique and wonderful about the fiction in different literary cultures. In my view, pluralism is far more preferable in the creation of fiction, as well as in fiction theory, than the creation of “universal” theories, concepts and paradigms.

The Problem of the Ideological Foundation of Transcultural Theories and Concepts

The second reason why I am skeptical of transcultural/universal theories or “paradigms” in literary studies has to do with their ideological foundations, regardless of whether they are Western, Chinese or other. In China, for instance, the initial absorbing and application of Western theories in the 1980s gave way to developing Chinese models to deal with Chinese reality, society, culture and so on that incorporated parts of Western theories in the 1990s. But the urge to define Chinese cultural identity in a globalized world, together with China’s increased integration with and influence in the world, has in some circles also been coupled with nationalism rising to fill the void in political ideology as a legitimizing and uniting force. There is now an interest among some intellectuals and scholars to create Chinese theories and paradigms with universal claims (just as the West has done for centuries). One particularly influential Chinese model of world order with universal claims is the Tianxia system. It was promoted by a philosopher and researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Zhao Tingyang, in the bestseller *Tianxia tixi: Shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* [The Tianxia System: A Philosophy for the World Institution], published in 2005. Tianxia literally means “all under heaven,” but Zhao’s interpretation of this concept is based on what many Chinese scholars regard as misinterpretations of the concept of *tianxia* in the