



**Disillusionment with Chinese Culture in the 1880s:
Wang Tao's Three Classical Tales**

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Leading scholars of modern Chinese literature have long discussed how the May Fourth became a hegemonic force and have sought to uncover the “burdens of May Fourth”; that is, those discourses eclipsed by the May Fourth intellectuals as they promoted the goal of openness and pluralism in the New Culture Movement.¹ They have discovered Chinese modernity in the Late Qing writings as early as the mid-nineteenth century, decades before the May Fourth movement.² Particularly, some scholars have argued that features of modernity might have stemmed from indigenous genres or classical language. For instance, David Der-wei Wang concludes that “Western stimuli notwithstanding, [...] Chinese literature derived its modernity no less from the inherent dynamism of its own tradition.”³ Leo Ou-fan Lee’s 李歐梵 research on “Free Discourse” (“Ziyoutan” 自由談) in *Shanghai News* 申報 (*Shenbao*) shows that discussions of strengthening the Chinese race or of Western science and technology were written in classical language and “derived their persuasive power from clever reinventions of traditional literary genres.”⁴ My study of how the West is portrayed in three classical tales written by the pioneering Late Qing thinker Wang Tao 王韜 in the 1880s contributes to this discussion. These three classical tales, “Biography of Mary” 媚梨小傳, “Travel Overseas” 海外壯遊, and “Wonderland under the Sea” 海底奇境, were first published as literary supplements in *Dianshibizhai Pictorial* 點石齋畫報 and later reprinted in Wang Tao’s story collection *Songyin manlu* 淞隱漫錄. They are notable because they represent the first tales in Chinese literary history to imagine Western cities and Western women—as opposed to any other places or races or ethnicities—in a period when Chinese intellectuals had begun looking to the West for ways to modernize their nation.⁵ I argue that these three tales reveal signs of disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture surfacing as early as the 1880s, a time when most reformers were advocating solely for technological and institutional changes. Even more interesting, modern sentiments are expressed in classical Chinese. Wang Tao utilized the traditional narrative form of the classical tale to lament the degeneration of the very civilization in which it had flourished.

1 Dolezelova-Velingerova, Milena and David Der-wei Wang, “Introduction,” in *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China’s May Fourth Project*, eds. Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova, Oldrich Kral and Graham Sanders (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 23.

2 Ibid., 11.

3 Ibid., 21.

4 Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Incomplete Modernity: Rethinking the May Fourth Intellectual Project,” in *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital*, 37.

5 For a summary of “Biography of Mary,” “Wonderland under the Sea,” and “Travel Overseas,” see Sheldon H. Lu, “Waking to Modernity: The Classical Tale in Late-Qing China.” *New Literary History* 34.4 (2003): 752-54, 754-55, and 756, respectively.

In his comprehensive biography of Wang Tao's life and thought, Paul A. Cohen questions whether Wang Tao's justifications for reform re-interpret Confucianism "to death";⁶ that is, does Wang Tao merely re-evaluate or entirely abandon Confucianism when he searches for ways to reinvigorate China? Cohen never offers a definitive answer. While Cohen analyzes two decades of Wang Tao's extensive writings, from the early 1870s to the early 1890s, my scope is much narrower. The three tales in question were written around 1884–1887, shortly after Wang Tao finally returned to Shanghai after more than twenty years of exile in Hong Kong and Europe. Cohen's biography ignores Wang Tao's literary life after he comes back to Shanghai, concentrating instead on his contribution to the Gezhi Shuyuan 格致書院 in his twilight years. By investigating literary works Wang Tao produced after his prime (i.e., his time in Hong Kong), I identify a progression in his thought regarding the revival of China that was not confined by Confucianism or any other dogma.

Sheldon H. Lu 魯曉鵬 has done extraordinary research on these three tales. In fact, my interest in them was inspired by his work.⁷ Lu was the first scholar to recognize a "tension" in the tales "between a traditional form" and the author's "ever-globalizing sensibility."⁸ He asserts that Wang Tao's tales emulate Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 and therefore he places them in the *chuanqi* 傳奇 tradition, a subgenre of the classical tale,⁹ but his in-depth analyses do not elaborate on how the classical genre plays a role in conveying Wang Tao's modern consciousness. As for Wang Tao's ever-globalizing sensibility, Lu claims that Wang Tao "recuperates the potency and subject position" of China "by situating Chinese men as the center and love object of Western women."¹⁰ Building on Lu's insights, this essay investigates these three tales from a different angle, one inspired by the concept of fetishism as described by Sigmund Freud and Laura Mulvey.¹¹ I discern a modern sensibility in Wang Tao's disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture, a disenchantment which

6 Paul A. Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T'ao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 153.

7 Lu, "Waking to Modernity."

8 Ibid., 746.

9 Ibid., 749. According to Lu, the major subgenres of the classical tale include "*zhiguai* (records of the strange, or, records of anomalies), *chuanqi* (stories of marvels), *biji* (random jottings), and *yishi* (anecdotes)." Please see detailed explanations on page 748-49 of Lu's "Waking to Modernity." Lu places these three tales in the *chuanqi* tradition.

10 Ibid., 752.

11 Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Thousand Oaks, 1999), 324-26; Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity: Cinema and the Mind's Eye* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013).

he expresses via his reworking of the classical genre. Furthermore, in attempting to synthesize and develop insights found in the work of Lu, Cohen, and others, I bring them into dialogue with Freud and Mulvey via interpretations of Wang Tao's fiction.

Before I delve into analysis, an explanation of my cultural studies approach is in order. As Cary Nelson points out, "Cultural studies typically maintains that meaning is the product of social, cultural, and political interaction. Neither texts nor authors, nor even their readers, can simply *mean* on their own."¹² My study pays attention to the context, in other words, to local conditions and concerns at the time when these three stories were composed and published. While my argument dates the disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture to the 1880s, and thus has much to do with intellectual history, I think of history spatially or as a process that brings together multiple forces.¹³ Particularly, my reading derives from the interactions between the text, the author, the milieu when these stories were created, and the visual content published with the text. In instances where I make connections with past events, the time span I consider is distinctly short-term, confined to a decade or so.¹⁴ For a cultural studies approach, it is necessary to treat these stories as a contextualized discourse, which requires analyzing the immediate circumstances of their utterance. I thus distinguish the following basic components of their situational context.¹⁵

First, regarding the spatial contexts when these three stories were published and composed, I specifically refer to these stories' initial publication in the illustrated newspaper *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. How these stories were printed on the page is integral to the interpretation of meaning.¹⁶

12 Nelson, "The Linguisticity of Cultural Studies," 214.

13 Larry Grossberg, American founding son of cultural studies, states that cultural studies requires a replacement of the temporal frame with spatial and machinistic frames. He also suggests to see history as "becomings." See Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Character of 'History' in Rhetoric and Cultural Studies: Recoding Genetics," in *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies*, eds. (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 171-72 and 175-76.

14 When cultural studies has to tie back to past events, the time span is usually short. *Ibid.*, 170.

15 I am inspired by Verdonk for this framework. In his article "Poetry and Public Life" he treats Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" as "a context-bound and interpersonal act of communication." I find his definition of context as "the immediate situation of utterance" most helpful for my analysis of Wang Tao's tales. See Peter Verdonk, "Poetry and Public Life: A Contextualized Reading of Seamus Heaney's 'Punishment'," in *Twentieth-Century Poetry: From Text to Context*, ed. Peter Verdonk (London: Routledge, 1993), 112-13.

16 In his book, Middleton claims "many of the processes whereby poetry is performed, displayed in magazines, [...] printed on the page, [...] become integral to the possibility of meaning in contemporary poetry." I believe this principle applies to Wang Tao's tales as well. See Peter Middleton, *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Poetry* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), xv.

In addition, when Wang Tao composed these three stories in the 1880s, Shanghai had not yet developed a nationalist sentiment.

The second component is the temporal context in which these stories were written. Before Wang Tao at last returned to Shanghai and wrote these stories, he spent more than ten years in Hong Kong advocating his views on how to reform and revive China. His thoughts on traditional Chinese culture, as manifested in his journalistic writings in Hong Kong, offer a different angle for looking into his fiction writings.

Third, I consider Wang Tao's cultural inclinations in his later years. Although he was an expert in classical Chinese and made his living through it, his lived experiences suggest that in the twilight of his life his cultural disposition may have taken a different direction. In this regard, his life story and his autobiographical writings yield especially pertinent clues.

The fourth and last contextual component is genre. While Wang Tao appears to rework the generic traditions of *zhiguai* 誌怪 and *chuanqi* in his tales, he still had to adapt his discourse to the genre he was using. Therefore, classical conventions are important features of interpreting these stories. In keeping with the last three components mentioned, both Wang Tao's journalistic and autobiographical writings illuminate my understanding of his fictional writings, and thus there is no explicit division among these three genres.

Having delineated my approach and the situational context of these three stories, I turn to the structure of my argument. First, I place these three tales in the context of *Dianshibizhai Pictorial*. By comparing Wang Tao's texts with the accompanying illustrations drawn by reform-oriented artists, I elucidate his standing among his contemporaries and his visionary view of traditional Chinese culture. By incorporating scholarship on Shanghai's ambiance in the 1880s, I am able to read Wang Tao's tales differently from Lu's interpretation, which sets China in opposition to the West, even though this is inconsistent with the psychological atmosphere of contemporary Shanghai. Next I probe Wang Tao's view on traditional Chinese culture by examining his journalistic writings in Hong Kong, which provided the intellectual foundation for his fictional writings. By recounting Wang Tao's life history before and after he returned to Shanghai in 1884, I reveal how his lived experiences led to a change in his belief system and an inclination toward Western. I also investigate the portrayals of Western women in these three tales, particularly the image of Mary in "Biography of Mary." By exposing Wang Tao's fixation on and obsession with the supremacy of Chinese culture, and relating it to Freud's concept of fetishism, I claim that his fetish with Chinese cultural superiority in fact is an acknowledgment of the disintegration of Chinese culture. The emptiness or effeminacy of the portrayals of Chinese males in these three tales serves as a signifier for Chinese culture; their

images are consistent with those of weak male protagonists in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*, the model for *Songyin manlu*. In contrast with the independent Western women profiled in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* news articles and similar images of women in *Liaozhai zhiyi*, Wang Tao fixates on taming Western women in his tales. Yet he is unable to defy the generic conventions of classical tales to conjure images of strong Chinese men that rarely appear in *Liaozhai zhiyi*. The disparity apparent in this feature, namely that Wang Tao resists conventional images of women while conforming to convention in images of Chinese males, betrays his disillusionment with Chinese men. In other words, with traditional culture, since these Chinese men operate in the tales as signifiers for Chinese culture. Last but not least, I scrutinize the narrative structures of these three tales. By analyzing how Wang Tao adheres to or reworks the formal structures of classical tales, I argue that Wang Tao alludes to the need to learn from Western culture in order to reinvigorate China.

The Three Tales and Their Illustrations

Like the other tales later compiled in *Songyin manlu*, “Biography of Mary,” “Travel Overseas,” and “Wonderland under the Sea” were first published as literary supplements in the illustrated newspaper *Dianshizhai Pictorial* between 1884 and 1887. Founded by the English entrepreneur Ernest Major, *Dianshizhai Pictorial* aimed to report current events and introduce new (Western) knowledge to the Shanghai public through a preponderance of pictures. Wang Tao's tales were a good fit because the periodical focused on events and objects deemed strange, fantastic, or marvelous.¹⁷ Since the illustrations were as important as the texts in the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, Wang

17 Chen, *Dianshizhai Huabao xuan* 點石齋畫報選 [*The Selections of Dianshizhai Pictorial*] (Guiyang 貴陽: Guizhou jiaoyu chubanshe 貴州教育出版社, 2000), 27-29. Chen describes *Dianshizhai Pictorial* as primarily containing four types of articles and stories: rumors of strange happenings, examples of karma, new (Western) knowledge, and current events. Even the latter two types, although ostensibly factual, were tinged with elements of the strange and marvelous. Ernest Major's introduction of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, published in *Shenbao*, corroborate Chen's claim. Several scholars have researched the oddities of this illustrated newspaper; see Rania Huntington, “The Weird of the Newspaper,” in *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, eds. Judith T. Zeitlin, Lydia H. Liu, and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asian Center, 2003), 341-96; Rudolf G. Wagner, “Jinru quanqiu xiangxiang de tujing: Shanghai de *Dianshizhai Huabao*” 進入全球想像的圖景：上海的《點石齋畫報》[“Joining the Global Imaginaire: The Shanghai Illustrated Newspaper *Dianshizhai Pictorial*”], trans. Xu Baike 徐百柯, *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術 [*China Scholarship*] 4 (2001): 1-96; Kang Wuwei 康無為 (Harold L. Kahn), “Huazhong youhua: *Dianshizhai Huabao* yu dazhong wenhua xingcheng zhiqian de lishi” 畫中有話：點石齋畫報於大眾文化形成之前的歷史 [“Drawing Conclusions: Illustration and the Prehistory of Mass Culture”], in *Dushi oude: xueshu yanjiang sanpian* 讀史偶得：學術演講三篇 [*Reflections on History: Three Academic*

Tao's tales must be discussed in the context of the illustrations published with them.¹⁸ According to Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, the illustrations were usually drawn first, then a narrative was written to accompany them.¹⁹ In Wang Tao's case, however, he wrote the stories first, and the illustrations were created later.²⁰ The three tales in question were all illustrated by Wu Youru 吳友如, an artist from Suzhou 蘇州. In what follows, I note discrepancies between the content of Wang Tao's three tales and their accompanying illustrations. These discrepancies, I will argue, firmly situate Wang Tao among the Late Qing reformists, demonstrating that his close relationship with Westerners and direct exposure to the Western world equipped him to become a leading advocate for the Westernization of China.

It must be noted that *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was first and foremost a newspaper, so the majority of what was published was current events; Wang Tao's tales were merely literary supplements. Moreover, every article or literary installment in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* carried at least one illustration. In the following discussion, I not only compare Wang Tao's texts with the accompanying illustrations but also compare those illustrations with the ones accompanying news articles. Such comparisons show, while illustrator Wu Youru, a reformist, expresses a strong desire to see the Western world, Wang Tao is far more visionary in that his texts and his policies as editor-in-chief of *Dianshizhai Pictorial's* parent newspaper focus on direct descriptions of things Western.

Comparing Wang Tao's tales with the accompanying illustrations reveals mismatches. For example, "Travel Overseas" primarily recounts the marvels protagonist Qian Siyan 錢思衍 encounters on his tour of Europe, but the illustration depicts his visit to a Daoist fairy before the trip (Fig. 1). "Wonderland under the Sea" focuses on protagonist Nie Ruitu's 聶瑞圖 love affair with a Western woman, whereas the illustration portrays him sailing in a thunderstorm even before he meets the woman (Fig. 2). In other words, the illustrations highlight what happens *before* the

Speeches], ed. Kang Wuwei (Taipei 台北: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica 中央研究院近代史研究所, 1993), 89-100; and Li Xiaoti 李孝悌, "Zouxiang shijie, haishi yongbao xiangye: guankan *Dianshizhai Huabao* de butong shiye" 走向世界, 還是擁抱鄉野——觀看《點石齋畫報》的不同視野 ["Open to the World or Embracing Strangeness: Different Perspectives on *Dianshizhai Pictorial*"], *Zhongguo xueshu* 3 (2002): 287-93.

18 In his discussion of literary journals in the mid-1910s, Hockx advocated "horizontal reading" which emphasizes textual and visual content in a journal issue as it "confronted the historical reader at the time of reading." He believes this approach does more justice to the publishing practices surrounding literary works in this period. I apply the same approach to Wang Tao's tales. See Michel Hockx, *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China 1911-1937* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 118, 156-57.

19 Chen, *Dianshizhai Huabao xuan*, 54.

20 *Ibid.*, 21-22.

海外壯遊



Fig. 1. "Travel Overseas" 海外壯遊, from Wang Tao, *Huitu hou Liaozhai zhiyi* 繪圖後聊齋誌異 (Illustrated Post-tales of the Strange from the Studio of Leisure), 1896, reprinted, courtesy of the National Library of China.

海底奇境



Fig. 2. "Wonderland under the Sea" 海底奇境, from Wang Tao, *Huitu hou Liaozhai zhiyi* 繪圖後聊齋誌異 (*Illustrated Post-tales of the Strange from the Studio of Leisure*), 1896, reprinted, courtesy of the National Library of China.

protagonists interact with the Western Other (i.e., the West), whereas Wang Tao's focus is what happens *after*.

In these two illustrations, the trope “Chinese people fly and see” is evident: Qian Siyan riding a dragon in the clouds and looking down; Nie Ruitu riding in his boat and looking ahead. When discussing the illustrations accompanying news articles in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, Pang Lai-kwan 彭麗君 puts forth the trope “[Western objects] fly and [Chinese people] see.”²¹ According to her, there was a consistent pattern that Western flying objects were above with a “crowd packed together on the ground watching [...] in awe.”²² She argues that the trope represents Shanghai residents' great curiosity about the Western world. Further, the act of looking is “entertaining and fun, relatively devoid of [...] military threat and anxieties of modernity.”²³ Wu Youru's modification of the trope to “Chinese people fly and see” expresses an even stronger desire to see the Other. The fact that the protagonists themselves ride the flying objects and travel to an unknown world vividly represents the eagerness of Late Qing Chinese intellectuals, writers, and readers to understand the West. Notably, whereas in news illustrations the flying objects are things from the West and are thus overtly portrayed, Wu Youru's illustrations do not depict what happens in the West but focus on the moment of setting out to see, or of wanting to see.

When drawing the illustrations for literary supplements, Wu Youru apparently had relative freedom to depict what he wanted to express. Through the “Chinese people fly and see” trope, he intimates a strong desire to see the Western world while disconnecting from Wang Tao's texts, which actually focus on what happens after the protagonists' arrival in the other world. Wu's thoughts, unlike Wang Tao's, remain focused on things at home. In the illustration for “Biography of Mary,” this mental outlook led him to avoid portraying her novelty and to emphasize what makes her familiar. In the tale, Mary impresses us by using surveying equipment and mathematical skills to defeat pirates. An illustration of Mary, however, foregrounds her wearing Chinese clothes, an indication of her assimilation into Chinese culture, and her final duel with her first lover, an Englishman (fig. 3).

One news article in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* did report on a Western woman who was a ship's captain. The accompanying illustration accentuates the grandeur of the ship and the authority of the woman standing on it (fig. 4), a notable contrast to Wu Youru's portrayal of Mary. Given Wang

21 Pang Laikwan, *The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 33-68.

22 Ibid., 37.

23 Ibid.

媚梨小傳

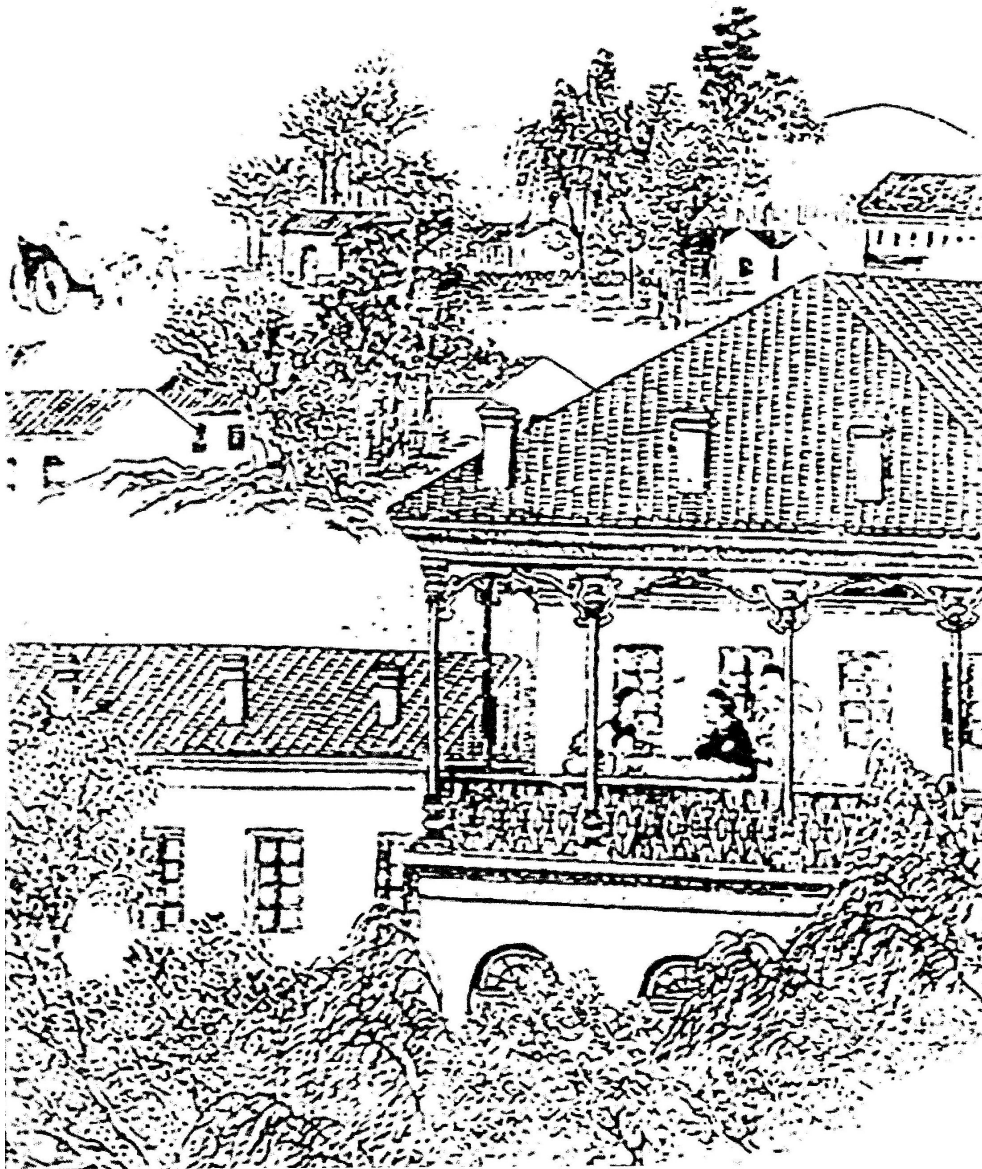


Fig 3. "Biography of Mary" 媚梨小傳, from Wang Tao, *Huitu hou Liaozhai zhiyi* 繪圖後聊齋誌異 (*Illustrated Post-tales of the Strange from the Studio of Leisure*), 1896, reprinted, courtesy of the National Library of China.

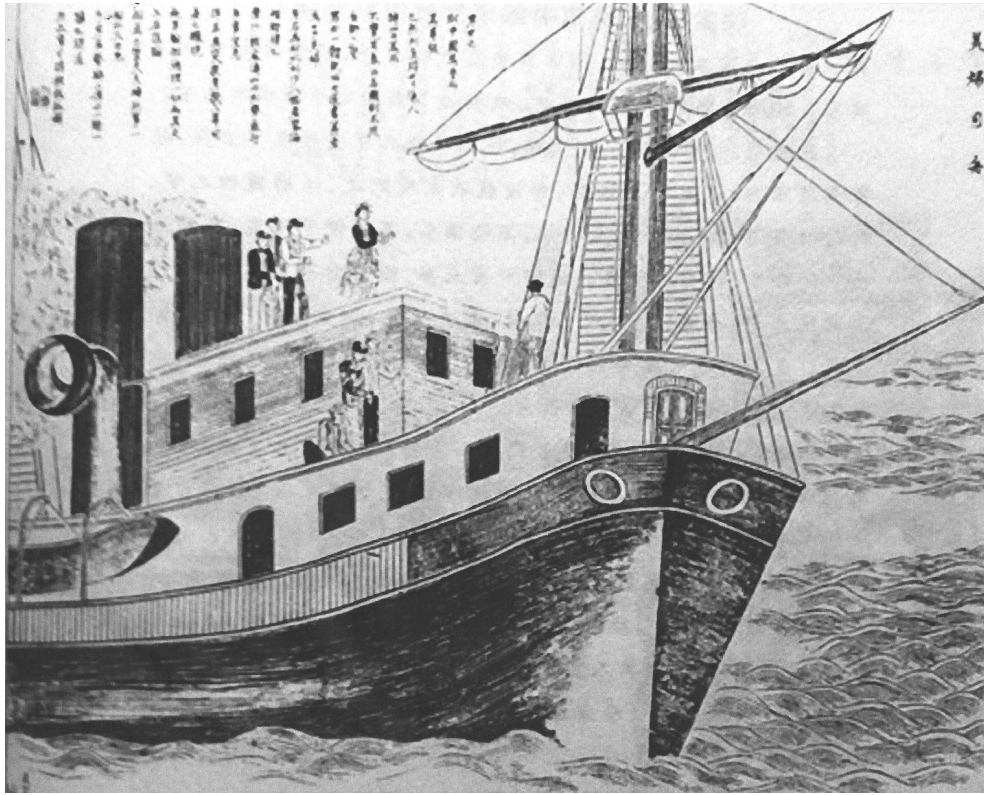


Fig 4. “A Beautiful Woman in Charge of a Ship” 美婦司舟, from *Tuxiang wanqing* 圖像晚清 (*Images of Late Qing*), edited by Chen Pingyuan and Xiaohong Xia (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 81.

Tao’s extensive experiences of travel in Europe and his authority as editor-in-chief,²⁴ it is no surprise that both his texts and news illustrations demonstrate a Western standpoint. “Biography of Mary” and “Wonderland under the Sea” depict love affairs between Chinese men and Western women, mirroring the relationship between Chinese diplomat Li Fuxiang and an American woman reported in “The Anecdote of Fuxiang.” 傳相逸事 The illustration accompanying the news article accurately and unambiguously portrays Fuxiang meeting the woman in New York (fig. 5). Again, this is a notable contrast from Wu Youru’s illustrations for Wang Tao’s tales, which portray the protagonists in China.

Wu Youru certainly could have drawn Mary’s valiant exploits on the ship or Qian Siyan’s and

24 Zhang Zhichun 張志春, *Wang Tao nianpu* 王韜年譜 [*Chronological Biography of Wang Tao*] (Shijiazhuang 石家莊: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe 河北教育出版社, 1994), 158. Wang Tao was editor-in-chief of *Shenbao*, the parent newspaper of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*.

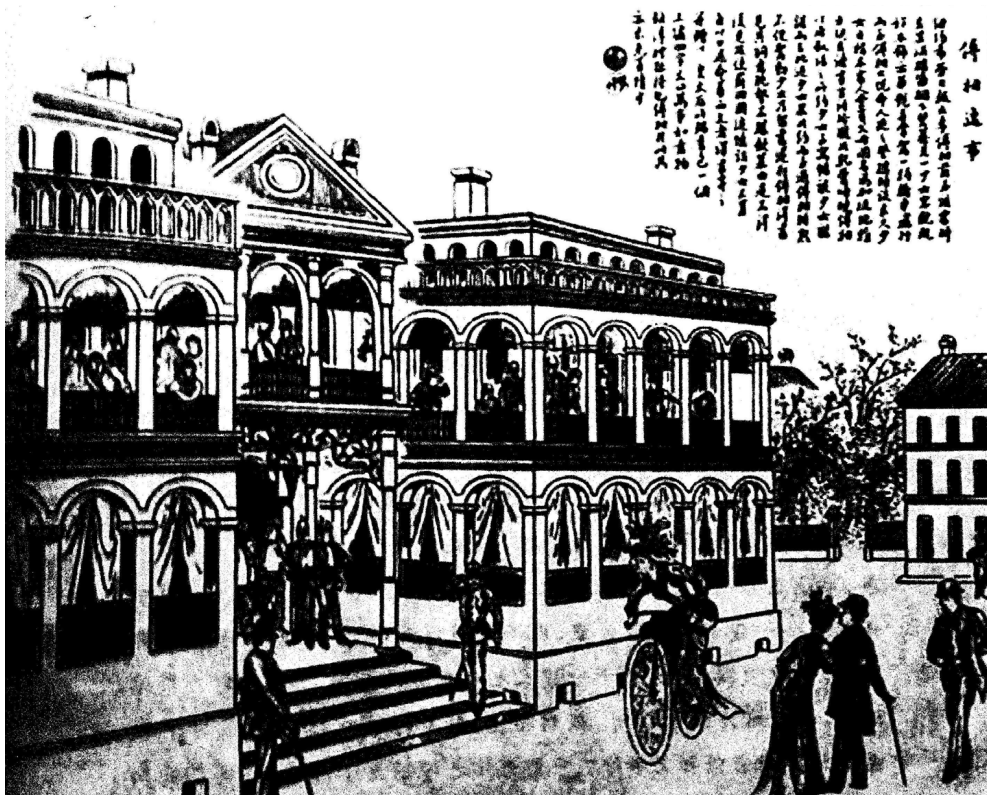


Fig. 5. “The Anecdote of Fuxiang” 傅相逸事, from *Tuxiang wanqing* 圖像晚清 (*Images of Late Qing*), edited by Chen Pingyuan and Xiaohong Xia, (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 139.

Nie Ruitu’s adventures in the West, since he depicted such things in illustrations for news articles. It is not clear how the content for news illustrations was determined—by the illustrator, the author, or collaboratively.²⁵ Whoever made the decision, it was the newspaper’s policy that illustrations should depict novelty. When it came to the literary supplement, however, illustrators were free to choose the content they depicted. The choices Wu Youru made for Wang Tao’s tales do not seem inexplicable. Working for a Western-run periodical gave Wu Youru the privilege of more access to knowledge about the world outside China than most of his contemporaries had—in this sense making him a reform-oriented artist—but he never experienced the Western world firsthand. The “Chinese people fly and see” trope vividly epitomizes the desire of intellectuals so longed to experience the West firsthand that they imagined themselves flying magically to get there.

Wu Youru proved himself to be a reform-oriented artist by implementing Western techniques

25 Chen, *Dianshizhai Huabao xuan*, 53.

in his illustrations for *Dianshizhai Pictorial*.²⁶ But far outstripping Wu, Wang Tao was a pioneering thinker well ahead of his contemporaries. While most of his contemporaries desired to know about the Western world but had little direct experience with it (hence the “Chinese people fly and see” trope), Wang Tao had already worked closely with English missionaries for thirty years, had traveled extensively in Europe in the company of his English friends, and had personally observed the things of interest to him there. After he finished *Songyin manlu*, Wang Tao published a travelogue of his European tour titled *Manyou suilu* 漫遊隨錄. Whereas the news illustrations in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* have been criticized for errors introduced by illustrators lacking direct exposure to things Western,²⁷ Wang Tao not only wrote from firsthand experience but also advocated for changing China along Western lines.

Shanghai's Ambiance as Presented in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*

Wang Tao seemingly still harbored hope for China when he wrote *Songyin manlu* immediately after his return home. Shanghai had been undergoing rapid Westernization since 1848; Li Xiaoti 李孝悌 cites numerous Western imports: banking (1848), roads (1856), gas lamps (1865), telephones (1881), electricity (1882), running water (1884), automobiles (1901), and streetcars (1908).²⁸ The Jiangnan Manufacturing Bureau Translation House 江南機器製造局翻譯館 and the Christian Literature Society for China 廣學會 were established in 1868 and 1887, respectively, to promote Western learning.²⁹ It is noteworthy that by the time Wang Tao returned in 1884, Shanghai was a tolerant place, curious about things foreign and with little nationalist sentiment. The ethos of Shanghai at the time provides grounds for departing from Sheldon H. Lu's interpretations of Wang's stories.

In his research on *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, Chen Pingyuan points out the newspaper's neutrality in reporting on the Sino-French war of 1884–1885. He contends that this stance cannot be attributed

26 Pan, Yaolang 潘耀昌, “Cong Suzhou dao Shanghai, cong ‘dianshizhai’ dao ‘feiyinge’-wanqing huajia xintai guankui” 從蘇州到上海，從「點石齋」到「飛影閣」——晚清畫家心態管窺 [“From Suzhou to Shanghai, from Dianshizhai to Feiyinge: A Glimpse of Late Qing Artists' State of Mind”], *Xin meishu* 新美術 (*New Arts*) 56.2 (1994): 67-72.

27 Chen, *Dianshizhai Huabao xuan*, 65-67.

28 Li Xiaoti, *Lianlian hongchen: zhongguo de chengshi, yuwang he shenghuo* 戀戀紅塵：中國的城市、慾望和生活 [*Love of the World: City, Desire and Life in China*] (Shanghai 上海: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 2007).

29 *Ibid.*, 273.

simply to the *Pictorial's* apolitical leanings. Rather, it reflects the fact that “Chinese intellectuals and the Chinese public of the time did not realize the danger of national subjugation, nor did a nationalist sentiment form.”³⁰ Chen continues, “Only after the successive failures of the Sino-Japanese War (1895), the Hundred Days Reform (1898), and the Boxer Rebellion (1900) did the Chinese people develop a keen sense of crisis and formulate a clear notion of nationhood and national consciousness.”³¹ This statement is corroborated by Ye Xiaoqing’s 葉曉青 study on Shanghai urban life from 1884 to 1898 as portrayed by *Dianshizhai Pictorial*. After examining a few clashes that occurred between Chinese and foreigners in Shanghai, Ye asserts that “these incidents arose from conflicts of interest rather than anti-foreignism as such.”³² Like Chen, she concludes that “a clearly defined national consciousness or collective antagonism towards foreigners had not developed at this point.”³³ Elsewhere she asserts “Shanghai residents had no strong xenophobic sentiments before the twentieth century. It appears that not until the twentieth century did Shanghai businessmen, workers, and students possess a very strong political consciousness and nationalist sentiments.”³⁴ Both Chen and Ye agree that at the time of Wang Tao’s return, hostility between Shanghai natives and foreigners did not exist, allowing us to read Wang Tao’s opposition between China and the West as openness to the outside rather than a power struggle.

Evidence for Shanghai’s openness to foreign influences comes from residents’ active public participation in celebrations staged by foreigners, including the Bastille Day, Queen Victoria’s fiftieth and sixtieth jubilees (in 1887 and 1897, respectively), and the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of Shanghai as an open port (1893). By contrast, Shanghai residents were much less involved in celebrating the Chinese Dowager Empress’s birthday (1894). Ye Xiaoqing uses these examples to argue for Shanghai’s lack of nationalist sentiment, and Wang Ermin 王爾敏 emphasizes that Shanghai had been to an extensive degree Westernized by that time: “Shanghai townfolk enthusiastically joined [the British Queen’s fiftieth jubilee]. The celebration was held in the British way, but the Chinese did their best to chime in with it.”³⁵ “Shanghai residents crowded

30 Chen, *Dianshizhai Huabao xuan*, 30.

31 Ibid., 30-31.

32 Ye Xiaoqing 葉曉青, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 118.

33 Ibid., 123.

34 Ye Xiaoqing, “*Dianshizhai Huabao zhongde Shanghai pingmin wenhua*” 點石齋畫報中的上海平民文化 [Shanghai Civilian Culture in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*], *Ershiyi shiji* 二十一世紀 [Twenty-First Century] 1.1 (1990): 42.

35 Wang Ermin 王爾敏, *Jindai wenhua shengtai jiqi bianqian* 近代文化生態及其變遷 [The State and Change

around and enjoyed the festivities day and night.”³⁶ According to Wang Ermin many Chinese were “not intimately engaged” but were bystanders “excited to watch the spectacles,” due to their curiosity toward things foreign,³⁷ echoing the same desire to know about the West as the “[Western objects] fly and [Chinese people] see” trope. Shanghai residents’ indifference toward Chinese celebrations compared with their inquisitiveness toward things foreign reinforces the reading of Wang Tao’s stories as open rather than antithetical to the West.

In his examination of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, Wang Ermin argues that Shanghai’s history was one being Westernized, a process that accelerated after the city’s opening as a port.³⁸ Wang Tao echoed this viewpoint: “Ten *li* of foreign territory really opens one’s eyes: one almost suspects one is actually traveling in a foreign land.”³⁹ The rapid Westernization of Shanghai undoubtedly profoundly affected the classically trained Wang Tao. After twenty years of homesickness, Wang Tao did not expect to find Shanghai nearly transformed into a foreign land. Both his nostalgia for and disillusionment with traditional China were natural, instinctive reactions to the altered state of affairs in Shanghai—the latter sentiment predominating in the three tales examined here, and the former permeating his last collection, *Songbin suohua*. 淞濱瑣話

Wang Tao’s Thoughts on Chinese Culture

Paul Cohen asserts that whereas Wang Tao’s contemporaries equated China with *Dao* and the West with *qi* (technology), Wang Tao himself was “deeply engaged in the process of value reorientation,”⁴⁰ even though he still regarded himself as a Confucian. He “unobtrusively, maybe even unconsciously,” suggested that traditional beliefs “had to be altered to ensure the survival of China.”⁴¹ Cohen cites two ways in which Wang Tao did modify Confucianism. First, he contended that Confucius was a reformer who would have supported change if he were living in the nineteenth century. Second, Wang Tao believed *Dao* was practiced in the West as well as China, thus implying that China could borrow more than technology from the West. Nonetheless, Cohen hesitates to

of Pre-modern Culture] (Nanchang 南昌 : Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe 百花洲文藝出版社 , 2002), 424.

36 Ibid., 425.

37 Ibid., 424.

38 Ibid., 429.

39 Ye, *The Dianshizhai Pictorial*, 75.

40 Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 235.

41 Ibid.

term Wang Tao a cultural rebel since Wang never claimed “I am not a Confucian.” Cohen does suggest, though, that there must have been a period of unconscious rejection of Confucianism among reformers like Wang, prior to the May Fourth period.⁴² Evidence of this can be seen in Wang Tao’s views on Chinese culture expressed in political essays written during his Hong Kong exile.⁴³

More than ten years after the Self-Strengthening movement 洋務運動 began, Wang Tao criticized its shortcomings. In his 1876 essay, “Response to Yu Qian’s Directives” 答余謙之大令, he declares that it “is grandiose on the surface through copying the West, but it has no substance.”⁴⁴ Using the metaphor that “the might of a spear comes from using it; the force of a ship derives from steering it,” Wang Tao contends that “although *qi* [technology] has to be sharp, it is the people who use it” give it its strength.⁴⁵ Hence, Wang Tao argues that the problems of the Self-Strengthening movement rested in the people. He claims that “among the urgent affairs of China, the primary task is to transform the people 治民; to improve weaponry 治兵 is secondary.”⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that Wang Tao prioritized transforming people before military might. He further emphasized the internal nature of the necessary transformation in his 1877 essay, “Present to Governor Ding” 代上丁大中丞: “imitation of material things is not as effective as encouragement of the invisible; the furnace and the hammer in factories are not as powerful as people’s hearts.”⁴⁷ To change the people, Wang Tao advocated filling public posts with officials who would take practical action rather than eloquent orators. He even suggested appointing Westerners as deputies to make sure “everything

42 Ibid., 153. Cohen writes that “all modifications of Confucianism” before the May Fourth period led “inexorably” to “the conscious rejection of Confucianism.” I likewise see an unconscious rejection of Confucianism taking place before May Fourth. Although Cohen considers it “a kind of retrospective determinism,” it seems to me a natural and logical progression.

43 The ideas I present later, such as transforming people first then improving weaponry, and Wang Tao’s vehement critique of conformism, were mentioned by Onogawa Hidemi 小野川秀美 in *Wanqing zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu*. However, Hidemi did not interpret these as budding criticisms of traditional Chinese culture as he believes Wang Tao advocated only technological and institutional reforms. See Onogawa Hidemi, *Wanqing zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu* 晚清政治思想研究 (*The Study on Political Thoughts in Late Qing*), trans. Mingde Lin 林明德 and Fuqing Huang 黄福庆 (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chubanshiye youxian gongsi 時報文化出版實業有限公司, 1982), 21-27.

44 Wang, “Response to Yu Qian’s Directives” 答余謙之大令, in *Taoyuan chidu* 弢園尺牘 (Beijing 北京: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1959), 130. Except where noted, all translations from Chinese are my own.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Wang, “Present to Governor Ding” 代上丁大中丞, in *Taoyuan chidu*, 132.

is handled practically because change would have no actual effect if one embraces empty words.”⁴⁸ Although Wang Tao did not forcefully advocate “wholesale Westernization of China” like Hu Shi did, he did mention that after transforming the people and improving weaponry, “all Western ways could be implemented.”⁴⁹ Wang Tao expressed complete confidence that emulation of the West would benefit China, and insisted that transforming the people was the prerequisite for the success of all reforms.

In his abovementioned essays, Wang Tao criticized the Chinese national character as impractical and pompous. Apart from this, however, it is not clear what transformations to the people’s attitudes he had in mind. He mentioned appointing unpretentious and pragmatic citizens as public servants in “Response to Yu Qian’s Directives” 答余謙之大令⁵⁰ and retaining talented officials in “Present to Governor Ding” 代上丁大中丞.⁵¹ Both essays point to the importance of government officials, but only in the limited sense of high-level officials selecting talented people for subordinate positions. Furthermore, in “Present to Deputy Governor Zheng” 上鄭玉軒觀察 Wang Tao advocated that all politicians from the prime minister down to the lowest bureaucrats be elected by the people.⁵²

In his essay presented to General He Yousong, Wang Tao first analyzed the imminent threats to China posed by Western powers and Japan, then directly attacked the Chinese national character. He claimed, “China suffers from conformism. Chinese people are lax and lazy, being content to be alive, and do not want to change at all. Short-sighted people are complacent; ambitious people are haughty. Once people become self-satisfied and arrogant, bad things follow. Moreover, these two groups of people denigrate each other in state affairs. They do not understand that nowadays not to change is equivalent to reverting to the archaic.”⁵³ While emphasizing the urgency of change, Wang Tao seemed to suggest that the Self-Strengthening movement had produced no significant transformations. The root of the problem lay in Chinese people’s mindset of conforming to tradition: they were either conceited or overbearing. In fact, every time Wang Tao discussed the weaknesses of Chinese national character he singled out conformism first, and secondarily that people embraced empty words rather than being pragmatic and realistic.

Wang Tao’s critiques of Chinese national character were subsequently taken up by the May

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Wang, “Response to Yu Qian’s Directives,” in *Taoyuan chidu*, 130.

51 Wang, “Present to Governor Ding,” in *Taoyuan chidu*, 131-33.

52 Wang, “Present to Deputy Governor Zheng” 上鄭玉軒觀察, in *Taoyuan chidu*, 172.

53 Wang, “Present to General He” 上何筱宋制軍, in *Taoyuan chidu*, 147-48.

Fourth intellectuals. These iconoclasts radically destroyed conformism, the very characteristic that Wang Tao regarded as the greatest impediment to China's advancement. Wang Tao's keen observations of the weaknesses of Chinese national character paved the way for the May Fourth intellectuals to probe into Chinese culture. Although he never said that these weaknesses derived from Confucianism, he did argue that the national character had to be altered in order to enable reform. Thus, in the interests of protecting China from foreign threats, Wang Tao indirectly rejected Confucianism, even though he had been raised as a Confucian and an expert in the classics. Indeed, he himself helped translate Chinese classics into English, so it is nearly inconceivable that he would overtly claim "I am not a Confucian."

In sum, even before Wang Tao wrote *Songyin manlu*, on an intellectual level he already consciously recognized the urgency of changing the Chinese people's mindset and perceived that tradition was a powerful impediment to change. In this context, it would not be surprising to detect disillusionment with Chinese culture in his fictional writings.

Wang Tao's Life before and after His Return to Shanghai

Wang Tao was able to view Chinese culture from the perspective of an outsider for two reasons: he had worked with English missionaries from the age of twenty-one, and he spent more than twenty years in exile in Europe and Hong Kong. By the time he returned to Shanghai in 1884 and started to write *Songyin manlu*, he already fifty-seven years old. I contend that Wang Tao, though well versed in Confucian literature, was more inclined to identify with Western culture near the end of his life because his experiences abroad had altered his belief system and led to his disillusionment with Chinese tradition, a change of sentiment manifested in his autobiography written before *Songyin manlu*.

Wang Tao attained a thorough education in Confucian literature during his adolescence, and later used his knowledge in classics to earn a living and gain respect. Nevertheless, nothing in his adult life suggests intellectual or emotional attachments to Confucian beliefs. Wang Tao's first job was to translate the Bible into classical Chinese. He later converted to Christianity, though he never acknowledged this publicly. It is a mystery how he reconciled the two belief systems of Christianity and Confucianism; Cohen believes that his conversion was due more to pressure from missionaries he worked with than a change of faith.⁵⁴ I disagree, however, believing that this secret conversion hints at a change in beliefs, even if Wang Tao was unwilling to acknowledge it. Moreover, he formed

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54 Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 19-23.

sincere friendships with his colleagues. On hearing of the death of Walter Medhurst, for whom he had worked before fleeing to Hong Kong, Wang Tao confided to a friend that Medhurst was “one Westerner with whom he had felt truly intimate.”⁵⁵ Certainly, this comment carries much more weight than Wang Tao’s pronouncement that Ding Richang was his “intimate friend” in his “Autobiography of Wang Tao” 韜園老民自傳.⁵⁶ His feelings for Medhurst are understandable since it was the latter’s son, then a consul at the British Consulate in Shanghai, who protected him from the Qing court’s manhunt and secured him a place to live in Hong Kong. In this life-or-death situation, it was his Western friends who saved his life. Wang Tao was also grateful that Western medicine cured a foot problem from which he had suffered for a long time.⁵⁷ Thus, his inclination to Westernize China finds roots in both his change of belief and his personal experiences.

In the last few years before his return home, Wang Tao was depressed. He described himself as “down and despondent” and claimed “I can do nothing except sit next to a stove because I suffer from coughing up blood.”⁵⁸ He turned down offers of official posts from Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang, and Ding Richang because he had lost “vigor and sagacity after successive hardships” and consequently considered himself “good-for-nothing.”⁵⁹ His mental state signals his disillusionment with the Confucian beliefs that he had maintained until that point.

After going back to Shanghai, Wang Tao wrote few political essays. Most of his contributions to *Review of the Times* 萬國公報 were republications of essays he had written in Hong Kong.⁶⁰ As he neared the end of his life, Wang Tao dedicated himself to educating young people, as well as producing three important collections: first *Songyin manlu*, then *Manyou suilu*, and finally *Songbin suohua*, the first of which contains the three tales. Wang Tao stated his reasons for writing *Songyin manlu* in its prologue: “If I cannot find [the things I cherish] in China, I look for them in faraway places, in remote regions, and among foreign people. If I cannot find them among my

55 Ibid., 14.

56 Wang, “Autobiography of Wang Tao” 韜園老民自傳, in *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, 409.

57 Zhang, *Wang Tao nianpu*, 35.

58 Wang, “Autobiography of Wang Tao”, in *Taoyuan wenlu waibian*, 412.

59 Ibid., 410.

60 Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 80. Cohen claims that “in the first half of the 1890s, [Wang Tao] was a regular contributor to the reform-oriented missionary periodical *Wan-kuo Kung-pao* (Review of the times).” This statement implies that Wang Tao continued to produce ideas for the revival of China in his final years. By cross-checking between *Nations Bulletin* and *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* 韜園文錄外編, however, I determined that most of Wang Tao’s contributions to *Nations Bulletin* were first published in *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* before he returned to Shanghai.

contemporaries, I search for them at the beginning of antiquity and through thousands of years of future time. Since I cannot find them among my own species, I search for them among ghosts, foxes, immortals, grass, birds, and beasts.”⁶¹ Apparently, Wang Tao created the stories in *chuanqi* form because he was determined to produce works of fiction. What happens in the West and with Western women in the three tales comes from Wang Tao’s imagination. That he longed for them to happen but was certain they never could in fact speaks volumes about his disappointment with reality. By comparison, Pu Songling, author of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (ostensibly the model for *Songyin manlu*), was not as assertive about his desire that the events he depicted would actually occur, and was equivocal concerning their fictional status, claiming they were “*perhaps hearsay*” (*italics mine*).⁶² In other words, Wang Tao’s stories derived from a desire for impossible events to happen.

After *Songyin manlu*, Wang Tao’s writing took two opposite directions: *Manyou suilu* is a travelogue of his European tour, whereas *Songbin suohua* adopted the traditional *zhiguai* genre, another subgenre of the classical tale, mainly to recount stories about the supernatural, ghosts, or animals; humans are largely absent.⁶³ The West and China were no longer intermixed the way they had been in the three tales. A lifelong intermediary between the West and China, Wang Tao in his final years treated the West as real and China as a mirage, as if *Songbin suohua* were an elegy for the moribund civilization. Though he advocated for Westernization of China throughout his lifetime, Wang Tao was nonetheless unable to transcend his upbringing, and utilized the classical tale, rather than other narrative forms, to write his last work. By returning to the *zhiguai* genre, Wang Tao expressed his nostalgia for Chinese tradition in his final literary creation. For a learned Confucian scholar like Wang Tao, the choice is comprehensible.

East-West Romance: News Report versus Fiction

The preceding analysis of the illustrations accompanying Wang Tao’s three tales focused on how Wang Tao’s texts and the illustrations of news articles about current events directly depict events in the West, whereas Wu Youru’s illustrations of Wang’s tales focus on events in China and express a less direct, vicarious desire to experience the West through the “Chinese people fly and

61 Lu, “Waking to Modernity,” 751. Translation by Lu.

62 Pu Songling 蒲松齡, *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 [*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*], ed. by Zhu Qika 朱其鏜 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe 人民文學出版社, 1989), 1.

63 Wang, *Songbin suohua* 淞濱瑣話 (Jinan 濟南: Qilu shushe 齊魯書社, 1959), 2. Since humans are largely absent in *Songbin suohua*, I place it in the *zhiguai* tradition.

see” trope. According to Chen Pingyuan, news stories were written based on pre-drawn illustrations, whereas Wang Tao’s stories were illustrated after the text was written.⁶⁴ In other words, illustrations were created before news articles whereas Wang Tao’s tales preceded the illustrations. In this section I analyze how Wang Tao’s tales invert the patterns in news illustrations with regard to images of Western women and power dynamics in East-West romances, thus highlighting the fictional nature of Wang Tao’s writing. Then I recapitulate current scholarship on the reading of Wang Tao’s three tales, led by Sheldon H. Lu, and point out that a careful reading of specific textual details in the stories affords an alternative and more complex reading.

Wang Tao’s three tales recount, respectively an East-West romance, a Chinese man’s tour of Europe, and a Western woman’s experiences in China. While accounts of these kinds of events appear in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* news, their course is the opposite of Wang Tao’s tales. For instance, in “The Anecdote of Fuxiang” (a news story) it is Fuxiang, a Chinese diplomat, who courts an American woman he meets in New York.⁶⁵ In Wang Tao’s tales, however, Western women frequently pursue Chinese men. Whereas in Wang Tao’s accounts Western women long for acculturation to China, news stories report Western men requesting to become Chinese citizens.⁶⁶ News accounts profile Western women who are independent, career-oriented, and adventurous, whereas with the exception of Mary in “Biography of Mary,” the heroines of Wang Tao’s tales are amiable, affectionate, and nurturing. It is worth remembering that the current events in *Dianshizhai Pictorial* were not, strictly speaking, “news” in the sense of objectively reporting actual events; instead, the content was often tailored to suit the public’s appetite for the strange or marvelous. Rania Huntington, Rudolf Wagner, Kang Wuwei, and Li Xiaoti have discussed this dynamic from different perspectives.⁶⁷ The taste for the exotic stems from the tradition of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, the very genre in which Wang Tao wrote these three tales. The inclination of news reports to focus on strange or marvelous events makes the pattern reversal in Wang Tao’s tales more meaningful. First, Wang Tao makes Western women rather than Western men his protagonists. Second, he inverts the pattern of Chinese men courting Western women. Third, except for Mary, the Western women in Wang Tao’s tales are largely Orientalized.

Several scholars have commented that Wang Tao dismisses Western men and substitutes

64 Chen, *Dianshizhai Huabao xuan*, 54.

65 Ibid., “The Anecdote of Fuxiang” 傳相逸事, 430.

66 Ibid., “A Western Man Takes the Civil Exam” 西人赴試, 259.

67 Huntington, “The Weird of the Newspaper;” Wagner, “Jinru;” Kang, “Huazhong youhua;” Li, “Zouxiang shijie.”

Chinese men as the love objects of Western women. For instance, Lu claims that “by situating Chinese men as the center and love object of Western women,” Wang Tao “recuperates the potency and subject position of Chinese citizens by masculinizing China and feminizing the West.”⁶⁸ This assertion is echoed by Wang Yichuan, who maintains that Wang Tao creates “the illusion of the centrality of China.”⁶⁹ Whereas both Lu and Wang analyze East-West romances from the perspective of China’s geopolitical position in international politics, Li Dongfang points to Wang Tao’s “fantasy of Chinese culture,” which has “naturalized uncivilized Western cultures.”⁷⁰ Regardless of their different perspectives, these scholars’ readings of Wang Tao’s tales all correlate gender with nationhood (female suggests weakness whereas male indicates strength). Hence that Western women woo Chinese men bespeaks the supremacy of China and Chinese culture. This figurative approach may have externalized Wang Tao’s desire for China’s reinvigoration, since he was among the first Chinese intellectuals to promulgate a nationalist consciousness.⁷¹ A careful reading of specific textual details in the stories, however, furnishes an alternative and more complex reading. What I detect is Wang Tao’s disillusionment with Chinese culture and simultaneous construction of an illusion of its superiority. To support my argument, I first analyze the images of the Western women, especially Mary in “Biography of Mary,” and then those of the Chinese men, Feng, Qian Siyan, and Nie Ruitu. Finally, I examine the narrative structures of the three tales. Because Wang Tao’s writing had to conform to the style of the classical tale, I weave an investigation of the traditions of that genre throughout my discussions. In other words, scholarship on the genre is integral to my argumentation.

The Image of Mary: A Tamed Western Woman

Whereas Lana in “Wonderland under the Sea” and Zhouxi in “Travel Overseas” are the antithesis of the independent Western women who figure in the news of *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, Mary stands out for her adventurousness and bravery. A close reading, however, suggests that she is tamed over the course of the story. I propose that Wang Tao’s eagerness to domesticate Mary is either a sign

68 Lu, “Waking to Modernity,” 752.

69 Wang Yichuan 王一川, *Zhongguo xiandaixing tiyan de fasheng* 中國現代性體驗的發生 [*The Emerging of Chinese Modern Experiences*] (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press 北京師範大學出版社, 2001), 241.

70 Li Dongfang 李東芳, “Yiguo qingai xushi moshi de houzhimin zhuyi jiedu” 異國情愛敘事模式的後殖民主義解讀 [“The Postcolonial Reading of Interracial Relationship Narratives”], *Zhejiang shehui kexue* 浙江社會科學 [*Zhejiang Social Science*] 5 (2007): 164.

71 Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 234-35.

of his awareness of the decline of Chinese culture in actuality or a desperate act to rescue it from degeneration.

Mary not only uses her mathematical skills to defeat pirates, but also proposes marriage to Feng on her way to China, which puts her in the subject position. Contrary to Lu's claim that Wang Tao feminizes the West,⁷² Teng maintains that the tale employs "the trope of gender inversion" and masculinizes Western women.⁷³ She points out that "such masculinization of Western women was not uncommon in Late Qing writings."⁷⁴ While it is true that Western women were presented as capable and courageous in Late Qing writings, the same was often true for women portrayed in the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* tradition. Since *Songyin manlu* imitates Pu Songling's *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, the portrayal of women in that text assists us in understanding the lineage of Mary. Several scholars have argued that it is "common enough" for heroines to be "stronger" than their male counterparts in *Liaozhai Zhiyi*.⁷⁵ In fact, independent and competent women represent "one of P'u Sung-ling [Pu Songling]'s feminine ideals."⁷⁶ In some stories, smart women taking their fate into their own hands and choosing their own husbands "becomes a central theme."⁷⁷ Therefore, Mary's defeating pirates and proposing marriage to Feng is more of a continuity with *Liaozhai* heroines' heroic deeds than a construction of Wang Tao to present the West as masculine and aggressive. While Mary's accomplishments disclose Sheldon Lu's dismissal of the textual details in the story, a consideration of the genre tradition cautions against over-interpretation of her agency

Two things distinguish Mary as an unusual Western woman: First, she possesses the mathematical skill to use a surveying instrument in order to determine when to fire the cannons

72 Lu, "Waking to Modernity," 752.

73 Emma Jinhua Teng, "The West as a 'Kingdom of Women': Women and Occidentalism in Wang Tao's Tales of Travel," in *Traditions of East Asian Travel*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 107.

74 Ibid., 109.

75 Li Wai-ye, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 107. Judith Zeitlin points to several tales that recount "the exploits of women" who model themselves on "the assassin-retainers of the histories or the knights-errant of Tang dynasty tales." Two male impersonators serve to illustrate her point: Shang Sanguan dresses as a male to avenge her murdered father while Miss Yan disguises herself as a man to pass the civil service examination and take an official post. See Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 125.

76 Chang Chun-shu and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits, and Human Society in P'u Sung-ling's World, 1640-1715* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 95.

77 Ibid., 94.

to hit their target. Her martial prowess, which Sheldon Lu ignores, derives from mathematical precision. Second, although she is portrayed as able and intelligent, she is also tamed over the course of the narrative. By “tamed,” I do not mean Mary’s willingness to marry Feng, because the female knights-errant in *Liaozhai* exemplify similar traits of self-sacrifice and dedication to the feminine role, especially after they fulfill their mission.⁷⁸ What I am referring to are Mary’s efforts to assimilate into Chinese culture by learning the Chinese language, dressing like a Chinese woman, and living a Chinese lifestyle.

Indeed, Mary is domesticated from the very beginning. Even before she leaves her homeland, Mary oddly consents to a marriage arranged by her parents, a custom practiced in traditional China. This is strikingly out of keeping with Wang Tao’s travelogue *Manyou suilu*, where he commends free marriage in England,⁷⁹ as well as with the overall depictions of the West in the travelogue.⁸⁰ Mary’s arranged marriage is the only incident in the tale that is incongruent with *Manyou suilu*. Associating the unfamiliar, Western woman (Mary) with the familiar (the arranged marriages prevalent in Chinese tradition) serves to attenuate the otherness of Mary.

In contrast to the strictures of England, Wang Tao affords Mary the right of free marriage as soon as she sets off for China. The captivating English lady who refuses a proposal from the son of a wealthy and noble English family wastes no time before proposing to the handsome but poor Feng. The immediacy and urgency arouse suspicions about Wang Tao’s motives: seemingly he is eager to assimilate her to Chinese culture and lifestyle. While creating a story in which a Western woman exerts her subjectivity, Wang Tao is also anxious to acculturate her. As I stated earlier, this eagerness shows his metaphorical desire to inject her energy and agency into Chinese culture.

I believe that Freud’s notion of fetish applies to Wang Tao’s fixation on Chinese culture naturalizing Westerners, interpreted as something that he desires deeply. In the classic Freudian articulation, a fetish is an object that a little boy uses to substitute for the penis he believes his mother lost. A fetish, however, “may not be an object at all, but rather an abstraction which is treated as if it were.”⁸¹ In Wang Tao’s case, the fetish is the concept of Chinese cultural supremacy, which is concretized as the aforementioned fixation. Freud claims that “in very subtle instances both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of

78 Ibid.

79 Wang, *Manyou suilu tuji* 漫遊隨錄圖記, ed. Wang Jiaju 王稼句 (Jinan 濟南: Shandong huabao chubanshe 山東畫報出版社, 2004), 93.

80 Ibid..

81 Roy Ellen, “Fetishism,” *Man, New Series* 23.2 (Jun., 1988): 220.

the fetish itself.”⁸² By constructing a fetish, the boy disavows his fear of both his and his mother’s castration while affirming the absence of a penis in his mother. In the same manner, the fixation in Wang Tao’s tales—as a fetish—speak volume about his negation and simultaneous acknowledgment of Chinese culture’s actual deterioration. Sheldon Lu’s, Wang Yichuan’s, and Li Dongfang’s readings are valid in pointing out that Wang Tao “reveres his fetish;”⁸³ in other words, they treat the fetish as a metaphor, a figure of nostalgia for a primal wholeness, or as Wang Tao’s steadfast belief in Chinese culture’s superiority, which can be traced to his infantile and adolescent upbringings. Nevertheless, as Freud cautions, “to point out that he reveres his fetish is not the whole story; in many cases he treats it in a way which is obviously equivalent to a representation of castration.”⁸⁴ That is, the fetish is also a metonymic structure,⁸⁵ underlining the absence of a penis, or in Wang Tao’s case, either conscious or unconscious realization of the disintegration of Chinese culture. Laura Mulvey emphasizes the metonymic structure of fetish using the word *marking*: “The fetish object also commemorates. It is a sign left by the original moment of castration anxiety and is also a mark of mourning for the lost object.”⁸⁶ In other words, fetish marks the loss and the lack of a penis. While fetish combines a double and contradictory metaphorical and metonymical function—which parallels the negation and acknowledgment of castration—my reading of Wang Tao’s tales focuses on the latter, the concealed lack, since Lu, Wang and Li have done impressive studies on the former.

In light of the preceding analysis of Freud’s concept of fetish, I argue that on the surface Wang Tao’s plot is that a Western woman woos a Chinese man and assimilates herself into Chinese culture; the very excessiveness of the image, the fetish, indicates that it conceals, or distracts from, an absence. It is because Wang Tao recognizes the actual disintegration of Chinese culture that he poignantly magnifies it in fantasy when the genre allows. In her discussion of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, Li Wai-ye expresses similar ideas. She asserts that Pu Songling’s motivation for writing the tales was to make up for “the deep sense of loss rooted in awareness of the flaws of existence.”⁸⁷ Being aware of the decline of Chinese culture in reality, Wang Tao compensates through Mary’s voluntary

82 Freud, “Fetishism,” 326.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Both Garber’s and Metz’s articles elucidate these two attributes of fetish as a metaphoric and simultaneously a metonymic structure. See Marjorie Garber, “Fetish Envy,” *October* 54 (1990): 48-49; Christian Metz, “Photograph and Fetish,” *October* 35 (1985): 85-86.

86 Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996), 5.

87 Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, 97.

acculturation to it. By constructing this fetish, Wang Tao disavows his realization of Chinese culture's deterioration—which is what motivated him to create the image in the first place. Wang Tao is thereby able to regain contact with lost parts of himself. As Mulvey points out, however, “disavowal implies that the psyche partially ‘knows’ what the fetish conceals.”⁸⁸ Wang Tao may very well have been conscious that by erecting the fetish he was paradoxically covering up its lack.

Chinese Men: Signifiers for Chinese Culture

In addition to the fetishism of Wang Tao himself, the Chinese men in his three tales (Feng, Qian Siyan, and Nie Ruitu), virtually function as fetishes for the Western women (Mary, Zhou Xi, and Lana, respectively). While a careful investigation of these men reveals that they lack defined personalities and are even devoid of substance, the narratives inform us that the heroines are attracted to them because they signify Chinese culture. Indeed, in fetish sometimes “the signified is treated as though it were embodied in the signifier.”⁸⁹ In other words, signifier and signified are conflated.⁹⁰ In some cases signifier “may become more important than what it stands for, and may be venerated for itself.”⁹¹ This is true of these Chinese men. Because they function as signifiers for Chinese culture, they are revered and even fetishized by the Western women and thus are treated as more important than what they signify. In light of Wang Tao's venture to tame Western women in his tales, it is thought-provoking that he is not able to transcend the genre conventions to generate images of strong Chinese men. On the contrary, his portrayals of Chinese men mirror those in *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Given that men operate as signifiers for Chinese culture, I contend the following. First, the absence of commendable traits in Feng reveals Wang Tao's disappointment with Chinese culture. Second, centering Nie Ruitu's relationship with Lana around learning the Chinese language suggests Wang Tao is aware that China's deficiency ultimately rests on its culture. Third, Qian Siyan's effeminacy on his tour of European countries intimates Wang Tao's keen sense of Chinese culture's emasculation in confrontations with Western powers. This figurative approach works here owing to the conflation between signifier and signified in fetish.

88 Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*, 2013, ix.

89 Ellen, “Fetishism,” 226.

90 In “Fetishism, Ellen talks about the conflation of signifier and signified in a fetish. He claims “fetishes are, to a degree, representations which have become signifieds and causative agents in their own rights.” In other words, in a fetish, the boundary between signifier and signified is sometimes broken down.

91 Ibid.

Whereas Mary is alluring and capable, Feng does not have comparable attributes to justify their relationship except that he is gigantic in stature and wears sumptuous clothes. In his relationship with Mary, Feng takes no initiative: it is Mary who not only proposes to him but also suggests battling the pirates, and eventually succeeds in doing so on her own. Feng himself acknowledges that he is much less capable than Mary. For Mary's part, she is attracted to Feng mainly because of her desire to learn Chinese and her admiration for Chinese culture. In other words, for Mary, Feng functions as a signifier for Chinese culture. Unfortunately, whereas the signified (Chinese culture) supposedly is profound, the signifier (Feng) is devoid of substance. Mary, in essence, fetishizes Feng, attributing a cultural plenitude where the actual appendage of culture, the man, is notably lacking. Feng is arguably castrated by Wang's narrative, which provides the reader with virtually no information about him. The image of Feng is not novel: in *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, the portrayal of men is always weak. That Wang Tao lacks the capacity to defy the generic conventions regarding images of men the way he did for women shows not only his capitulation to the tradition but his impotence to assert power when it comes to signification of Chinese culture.

Compared to Feng, the handsome and wealthy Nie Ruitu seems more worthy of Lana's love. Nevertheless, Lana is attracted to him primarily because she "has long admired China" and has wanted to learn the Chinese language.⁹² Their subsequent relationship centers on learning Chinese language and literature but is devoid of any other emotional content to lend it credibility. According to Mulvey, the pretentious display marks Wang Tao's acknowledgment of the degeneration of Chinese language and literature. Moreover, unlike Mary, who dresses like a Chinese woman and lives a Chinese lifestyle, Lana is only interested in learning the language. Wang Tao's fixation on this particular aspect of Chinese civilization implies his repressed awareness that China's inadequacies rest on more subtle aspects such as, to borrow a term from his political essays, its people's mindset.

Whereas both Feng and Nie Ruitu function as signifiers for Chinese culture in their relationships with Mary and Lana, Qian Siyan signifies China through his effeminacy on his tour of European countries. In London, women fall for him because "standing between two Western beauties, he is graceful, elegant and charming. People cannot help praising his handsomeness,"⁹³ recasting Wang Tao's real experiences in Britain.⁹⁴ It is notable that Qian's appearance and mannerisms

92 Wang, *Songyin manlu*, 352.

93 Ibid., 358.

94 Wang Tao's real tour in Europe was much less splendid than Qian Siyan's or Nie Ruitu's. He was not good-looking, was poor, and was much less popular; see Wang, *Zhongguo xiandaixing tian*, 235-42. Cohen also mentions that Wang Tao was mistaken for a Chinese lady in Britain; see Cohen, *Between Tradition and*

are significantly feminized, and he is compared with Western women while traveling abroad. By contrast, within China he is portrayed as ambitious, aspiring to possess martial prowess, a masculine trait, and actually passing the civil service examination, a “token of cultural sophistication and elite social status” in Ming-Qing culture.⁹⁵ That is, although Qian is a competent male at home in China, he not only achieves nothing but also is reduced to a mere effeminate beauty on his tour of Europe. If Feng and Nie Ruitu are attractive for their Chinese cultural identity, Qian’s literary talents are rendered mute abroad since nobody comprehends his learning. In other words, Wang Tao is not able in his tales to hide his apprehension that in comparison with Western powers, Chinese culture is essentially emasculated, even though his fiction glamorizes his actual experiences in Britain.

Comparison of Narrative Structures

An investigation of the narrative structures of the three tales unveils the same disillusionment with Chinese culture that is apparent in Wang Tao’s portrayal of men who have been impoverished to the point of emptiness (Feng and Nie Ruitu) or effeminacy (Qian). Turning first to “Biography of Mary,” the romance between Mary and Feng comprises only a small portion of the plot. When the story opens, Mary is involved in an intense love triangle with her lover, John, and her designated husband, Ximen. Mary initially refuses Ximen because she is in love with John, but her parents eventually persuade her to marry the man of their choice. Ximen however commits suicide on their wedding day upon reading a letter from John exposing his relationship with Mary, causing Mary to flee her homeland. While the love triangle reinforces Mary’s allure and thus sets Feng apart in the competition for possession of the superwoman, her tumultuous romance with John moves the tale forward. Mary marries Feng and spends a significant amount of time with him, throughout which period Feng serves as a foil for her intelligence and capability. Eventually, John shows up again and plans to murder the couple, leading to the climax of the plotline.

Mary is determined to confront John. Significantly, her decision is based more on her understanding of John’s character and her desire to avenge Ximen’s death than on her allegiance to Feng: “The man [John] plotted to kill my ex-husband and almost killed me. He is crafty and brutal and has no mercy. He is coming after me. But I have found whom I belong to and I won’t be turning back. If he comes, I will reject him; if something happens, I will kill him. This way I can avenge

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Modernity, 68.

95 Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 145.

my late husband's death and I can see him in the underworld."⁹⁶ Mary demonstrates admirable independence in both her comprehension of John's personality and her resolve to confront him, but Feng plays little part in her considerations. Consequently, Feng is by no means the "ultimate love object of the foreign woman" as Sheldon Lu asserts,⁹⁷ serving instead as a mere bystander in Mary's fatal decision. In her final duel with John, Mary easily dismisses Feng, rendering him absent from the scene. In essence, the tale portrays a female knight-errant whose saga begins with an unfortunate affair with a possessive first lover and ends with her having to duel with him, and dying by his hand, owing to his malicious character flaws. In this sense, the tale is more an epic tale of Mary than a romance between a Western woman and a Chinese man. Focusing unduly on the East-West romance neglects the overall structure of the tale. At the end, Feng erects a tombstone to pay deepest reverence to Mary, just as the whole tale is a panegyric of the marvelous Western woman.

While the fictional aura of "Biography of Mary" is attenuated by its biographical mode, the fact that Nie Ruitu and Lana's romance takes place in an undersea wonderland reveals outright its fantastical nature. "Wonderland under the Sea" starts out in the human world, where Nie Ruitu is mistreated in his home country. He then travels overseas, enjoying fame and popularity because of his wealth. En route from London to New York, Nie encounters a violent thunderstorm and falls overboard. At this juncture the story transits to a dreamland, the unearthly quality of which is underscored by various means. In the undersea land, Lana confesses her love for Nie. After spending a wonderful interlude with Lana, Nie returns to the human world, feeling that his time with Lana under the sea was like a dream. Within the three-unit structure of this tale—the primary (human) world, the secondary (undersea) world, and the return to the primary (human) world—what happens in the undersea world is a dream in nature. Dreaming has a long tradition in the classical tale, arising during the Tang.⁹⁸ Karl S. Y. Kao points out the illusory nature of the dream: "accounts of strange phenomena generated in dreams seem to point to a conscious exploration of mental states as the source of supernatural 'reality,' a reality derived from fantasy or originated within instead of without."⁹⁹ With regard to *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, Kao emphasizes that the secondary world becomes "the manifestations of idealized, most desirable beings," and that the collection as a whole is "in one sense

96 Wang, *Songyin manlu*, 309.

97 Lu, "Waking to Modernity," 754.

98 Karl S.Y. Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic: Selections from the Third to the Tenth Century*, ed. Karl S. Y. Kao (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1985), 12.

99 Ibid., 15. Y.W. Ma draws similar conclusions. He claims that "the secondary world is one of illusion and fantasy, separable from the world of real existence, from which it may depart and to which it must return." See Y.W. Ma, "Fact and Fantasy in T'ang Tales," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 2.2 (1980): 172.

a kind of fantasy that portrays human desire; it betrays particularly the desires of Chinese males.”¹⁰⁰ Following this line of reasoning, Lana’s falling in love with Nie and studying Chinese with him in the undersea world is merely Wang Tao’s desire, or fantasy. The fact that these events take place in a dreamland proves their illusory nature.

In “Wonderland under the Sea,” Nie’s entry into the undersea world and departure from it are clearly demarcated. Moreover, the fanciful quality of the undersea world is underscored by both its environment and denizens. The land—which resembles China in the nature of the setting and the maidservants wearing Chinese clothes and speaking Chinese—is filled with exquisite flora and celestial plants. When Nie savors one, he discovers it energizes him with unearthly vigor. Lana, still wearing Western clothes, resembles an ethereal figure when Nie first sees her from a distance. This Chinese-style land under the sea is odd, but it is odder still that Lana, who cannot speak Chinese, drowns off Scotland but ends up here to enjoy her afterlife. In other words, Lana’s yearning to study Chinese culture is incarnated in her transformation into an immortal being who manifests in a Chinese land. The romance between Lana and Nie is no less fantastical.

At first glance, the narrative structure of “Travel Overseas” seems to parallel that of “Wonderland under the Sea.” Nevertheless, a closer look at “Travel Overseas” reveals that it has two secondary worlds: E’mei Mountain and Europe. In addition, at the very end, the story does not specify where the protagonist returns to: E’mei Mountain or China. Wang Tao’s revision of the three-unit structure in the last flowering of the classical tale merits close analysis.

“Travel Overseas” opens with Qian Siyan’s passing the civil examination in China, then moves to E’mei Mountain, where Qian quests for Dao. While E’mei Mountain is a secondary world, as demonstrated by its celestial quality, manifested by Daoist fairies and unearthly settings, Qian’s subsequent tour in Europe is also treated as taking place in a secondary world. As in “Wonderland under the Sea,” the beginning and ending of Qian’s tour are clearly demarcated. He arrives in Scotland by flying in the clouds like an immortal and falling to the ground like a magician possessing extraordinary power. The descriptions of the tour itself are realistic, but Qian’s departure from Europe is marked with the same sense of the fantastical. The tale ends with “on his way to Berlin, Qian encountered the Daoist monk who brought him to Europe. He patted Qian’s shoulder with his fan and said: ‘Are you happy with your European tour? It is time to return.’ He then waved his whisk and transformed it into a dragon. Qian Siyan got on it and left.”¹⁰¹ That the Daoist monk

100 Kao, “Projection, Displacement, and Introjection: The Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi*,” in *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Eva Hung (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1994), 209-10.

101 Wang, *Songyin manlu*, 359.

fetches Qian home, returning him to either China or E'mei Mountain, creates the sense that Qian's whole European tour is just a fantasy.

In his analysis of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, Kao claims that “dreams in Chinese narrative traditionally perform two functions: either they are allegorical, as is the case in the well-known Tang tale ‘Zhenzhong ji’ 枕中記 (‘The World Inside the Pillow’), or they form a ‘twilight zone’ where the living and the dead or other beings may communicate with each other (as often seen in the Six Dynasties *zhiguai* and early historiographies).”¹⁰² Apparently, “Travel Overseas” belongs to the former category. If Qian Siyan's quest for Dao on E'mei Mountain and his tour of Europe are both allegorical, they function as a grand metaphor signifying that only by learning from the West can China achieve Dao. More importantly, the event that Qian marvels most at on his tour is a social dance, by which Wang Tao implies that China has more to learn from the West than just its military strength and technology. Wang Tao expends much ink describing how at the ball men and women dance together holding hands in public. Even though such behavior is counter to Confucian notions of propriety,¹⁰³ Qian “clapped his hands and exclaimed: ‘Wonderful!’ He could not help but acclaim it as perfection.”¹⁰⁴ Though a Confucian scholar, Qian does not seem to think dancing with someone of the opposite sex actually violates Confucian principles. By comparison, museums, libraries, factories, workshops, and greenhouses are mentioned only in passing. Qian's wholehearted embrace of Western-style dancing connotes Wang Tao's openness toward studying Western culture. Taken together with the panegyric of the wonderful Western woman in “Biography of Mary,” the fact that both E'mei Mountain and Europe serve as secondary worlds in “Travel Overseas” reveals Wang Tao's ultimate vision: only by learning from Western culture can China achieve Dao.

Conclusion

Classical Chinese poetry of modern times has been identified as one area worth exploring in order to unpack the “burdens of May Fourth.”¹⁰⁵ Wu Shengqing, Lam Lap, and Jon Eugene Von

102 Kao, “Projection, Displacement, and Introjection,” 209. Kao expresses the same view in his discussions of dreaming in Tang tales. He claims that dreams are “used primarily as an allegorical vehicle, to show the Taoist-Buddhist view of the ephemerality and the illusion of human life.” While the particular themes are the reflection of influences of Buddhism and Daoism in Tang, the general function of the dream is allegorical. See Kao, introduction, 15.

103 Teng offers a wonderful analysis of this in her article “The West as a ‘Kingdom of Women.’”

104 Wang, *Songyin manlu*, 358.

105 Quite a few areas, but not the classical tale, are identified as useful for this purpose. See Dolezelova-

Kowallis pursued this avenue. In her article on Lü Bicheng's *ci*, Shengqing Wu attests to "the resilience and adaptability of old forms to new, modern realities"¹⁰⁶ and challenges the May Fourth's paradigm that classical language and form are necessarily incapable of capturing modern experience whereas the vernacular is inevitably more radical and subversive.¹⁰⁷ Jon Eugene Von Kowallis's study of old-school poets during Late Qing and early Republican China challenges, to quote his exact words, "the assumption that the classical forms were intrinsically 'moribund' and that they had, by the late nineteenth century, simply exhausted themselves."¹⁰⁸ He claims that profound changes were made within classical poetry beginning around 1871.¹⁰⁹ My research on Wang Tao extends this discussion to the genre of the classical tale. By utilizing the traditional narrative form to imagine Western cities and Western women, by engaging in and reworking the conventions of this genre, Wang Tao shows in these three tales that he is able to articulate his agony and self-doubt at the traditional order in a culturally authentic genre and language. Though it represented "the final flowering and the end of the classical tale in China,"¹¹⁰ Wang Tao's work indicates the potential for using the classical tale to espouse the concept of modernity. Its buds might be traced in the literary developments within the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* genre, which had been brought about by the sensitivity of authors to the profound changes going on in the world order, just like Wang Tao. The assumption that the classical tale had exhausted itself by the end of the nineteenth century is thereby challenged. Wang Tao's three tales create a discursive space in the classical tale, a crucial discontinuity, that distinguishes this author in vital ways from other writers of classical tales writer.

My conclusion derives from a contextualized reading of the three tales. That is, I take into consideration the author, the conventions of the genre, the milieu in which these three tales were written and the visual content that accompanied their publication. Regarding the author, I pay attention to both his life history and thoughts on the issue, which provide lived experience and intellectual foundation for my reading of the tales. As for the genre traditions, I consider the images of women and men and the narrative structures of the *chuanqi* genre, especially in *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, the model for these three tales. A comparative perspective is also important to my study as I compare the texts of Wang Tao's tales with their accompanying illustrations, with news reports in *Dianshizhai*

Velingerova and Wang, introduction to *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital*, 23.

106 Wu, "Old Learning." 61.

107 Ibid., 21.

108 Kowallis, *The Subtle Revolution*, 3.

109 Ibid., 237.

110 Lu, "Waking to Modernity," 749.

Pictorial and with his travelogue, *Manyou suilu*. My approach is similar to Wu Shengqing's and Jon Eugene Von Kowallis's. Kowallis emphasizes re-setting poems in their "proper historical and literary context,"¹¹¹ and the first chapter of his book discusses poets' political and social lives. Before examining Lü Bicheng's *ci*, Wu first outlines the features of *ci* as a genre with regard to space, gender, and imagination, which are pertinent to her argument; she then proceeds to articulate Lü's telling experience as an independent new woman and her views on women's writing.¹¹² Wu also compares Wang Jingwei and Kang Youwei's poems on the same theme to highlight Lü Bicheng's modern feminist viewpoint. Therefore, it is clear that a contextualized reading is suited to the endeavor of exploring how modernity is expressed in traditional genres and classical language.

Michel Hockx conceptualizes the meaning of contextualized reading in his book *Questions of Style*. He claims that biographical knowledge about an author is not only relevant to a correct understanding of his work but also enhances the aesthetic experience of it.¹¹³ "Horizontal reading" is particularly advocated, which emphasizes the "textual and visual content"¹¹⁴ of a journal publication and "the spatial relation between texts published in the same issue of the same journal."¹¹⁵ Slightly different, in my analyses, the latter is relevant to my comparison between the texts of Wang Tao's tales and news reports of similar events in *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, not necessarily in the same issue but definitely in the same publication. In addition to authorship and "horizontal reading," I argue that generic conventions are an essential dimension of contextualized reading, as attested by my interpretation of Wang Tao's tales and Wu Shengqing's reading of Lü Bicheng's *ci*. Moreover, the author's writings in other genres can provide important context for understanding his literary work, just as Wang Tao's autobiographies, travelogue, and political essays do. Last but not least, the *Zeitgeist* of the period when a work is created also furnishes perspective on its meaning.

Having delineated the attributes of what I have so far called contextualized reading, I propose that we call it *spatial reading*, since we treat the production of a literary work as a becoming among multiple forces that exert simultaneous influences on its formation. If there is a span of time between different forces, it is short term, confined to within a decade or so. In addition to authorship, genre

111 Jon Eugene Von Kowallis, *The Subtle Revolution: Poets of the "Old Schools" during Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2005), vii.

112 Wu Shengqing, "'Old Learning' and the Refeminization of Modern Space in the Lyric Poetry of Lü Bicheng," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 16.2 (Fall 2004): 9.

113 Ibid., 188-89.

114 Ibid., 156.

115 Ibid., 118.

conventions, and writings of other genres, components of spatial reading are contingent upon the specific situation of a work's creation. ※