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Denise Gimpel/Lost Voices of Modernity

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Introduction

The reading and writing of fictional works are not and have possibly never been simply a matter of producing and consuming texts that entertain. Whichever culture we turn to, fictional writings have regularly been subjected to the scrutiny of those in power or those who would wish to alter power structures.¹ The regular official proscription of fiction (*xiaoshuo*) in imperial China on the grounds of its ability to seduce the emperor's subjects—to acquaint them with patterns of behavior that were considered undesirable—and Chinese reformers' enthusiastic discussion of a new kind of fiction (*xin xiaoshuo*) as a socio-political cure-all at the beginning of the twentieth century are ample evidence of this phenomenon. Closer to home, and at the end of the same century, discussions of this genre of writing continue in very much the same vein. In 1998, for instance, a leading British newspaper published an article that bore the title "Fiction Is Sacred."² It was by a well-known and popular fiction writer who insisted that those who do not read fiction miss out on "a vital part of human development: the ability to confront your fundamental fears and anxieties."³ Yet, as the author of the article sees it, more important than any psychological or cathartic effect of fiction is its political effect. In terms reminiscent of late-Qing and early-Republican theorists of fiction in China, he states: "Over the

next 10 years, the Government aims to ensure that all 11-year-olds can read well enough to study at secondary school. At present, four children in 10 fall short of that minimum. If that is the Government's only achievement, it will transform our society."⁴

In the final years of the twentieth century, then, a similar attitude to fiction to that vehemently advocated in China in the late 1890s and the early twentieth century was being formulated. Once again the wish to—and the belief that one can—harness the power of fiction in an attempt to improve the society that we live in was postulated. For Ken Follett, this wish concerned the future of society in that he believed that fiction could provide coming generations with greater mental and emotional stability. For the Chinese at the turn of the century, fiction was to help reform, and thus stabilize, their society by introducing readers to new ideas and concepts that would enable China to enter the international community. However we interpret the two positions, separated by some hundred years, we cannot but admit that, for the one and the other, fiction is more than entertaining reading.

That entertaining reading can constitute far more than merely a means of whiling away one's leisure hours should not have to be proven. Its very popularity—the fact that it finds a huge number of readers (and very often has a huge influence upon them)—should rightly draw our attention to it.⁵ Neither Ken Follett nor the authors and texts that provide the material for this book are the stuff of "Great Literature," but they are and were read. Moreover, as Follett's comments clearly show, he sees creative writing as an important element in the social and political development of human beings. This was precisely the role attributed to such writing in China at the beginning of the twentieth century (and in Japan somewhat earlier), and it was a significant reason for the development of literary journals in early-twentieth-century China.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, literary journals and fiction have played a central role in the development of modern Chinese literature. From their beginnings they have constituted the most important medium for the distribution of literary texts. In fact, it is probably true to say that the majority of literary works in twentieth-century China were first published in journals, long before they appeared in book form. At the beginning of the twentieth century, moreover, these journals were also very important features of Chinese political life. Liang Qichao's impassioned call in 1902 for a new form of literary writing that would renovate each and every aspect of Chinese national, social, and private life is in itself eloquent testimony to this fact.⁶

In the very late Qing and very early Republican eras in China, that is, in the period from around 1910 to 1915, literary journals had established themselves as permanent entities within a new and developing field of literary production. They were not only the places—the physical spaces—in which new ideas for reform and writing were formulated and tried out, they were also the physical spaces in which literary careers were forged and consolidated both on the basis of traditional personal and native-place affiliations and within new and more professionally and commercially determined mechanisms of an increasingly sophisticated field of publishing. They were also the places in which most readers received their first introduction to new and foreign authors and new and foreign ideas.

In the 1910s, literary journals were popular and abundant. If we equate popularity with the life span of an individual journal, there can be no doubt that *Xiaoshuo yuebao* or *The Short Story Magazine* (as it called itself) was the most popular of these early periodicals: by the beginning of 1913, the publishing house could already announce that circulation figures had reached ten thousand.⁷ The journal as an entity survived until 1932, and its early period is usually regarded as lasting until 1921, when it was taken over by the young and iconoclastic writers of the May Fourth generation. According to generally held scholarly views, in its first phase *Xiaoshuo yuebao* provided superficial popular entertainment of the sentimental love story or adventure type for an urban audience that needed distraction in its leisure hours. This kind of writing has come to be known as Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature (*yuanyang hudie pai wenxue*) as a result of the extensive use it is said to make of these symbols for pairs of lovers.

The following chapters will demonstrate that this judgment upon the leading journal of its day is unjustified. However, the refutation of later judgments is not the central concern of this book, nor is it an attempt at “restoration” in that it intends to reinstate to its proper place a neglected period of Chinese literature for whatever reasons. It is more akin to an archaeological project, one that will uncover the contents—and thus the concerns—of a group of writers who joined together from 1910 onward to produce one particular literary journal. Uncovering the manifold concerns of the journal on the basis of a textual and contextual analysis of its contents—what concerns were presented and the way in which these concerns were presented before the very particular backdrop of the historical moment—can and must tell us more about the literary-aesthetic and sociopolitical issues of the day. For this reason, the fol-

lowing chapters demonstrate both the contents and the context of the journal. They present the stories and the texts that were published within the pages of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, but they also deal with the forces of Chinese history at the beginning of the twentieth century, with international and national problems, with changing concepts of the art of writing in a changing world, and with how those involved in the making of a literary journal confronted the problems they perceived and how they communicated them to their readership. In other words, these chapters address the questions of creative writing, of public discourse, of modernity, culture, and identity as well as of intercultural processes and perceptions of oneself and others.

Moreover, since the above-mentioned negative value judgments that have been passed on *Xiaoshuo yuebao* over an almost fifty-year period continue to be repeated to the present day, a critical and analytical reading of the journal for the years 1910–1914 must not only assess the mechanisms that held it together, but must also unravel the strategies within the writing of modern Chinese literary history that ultimately led to the creation of the myth that modern Chinese literature did not exist before the beginnings of either the New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong*) of 1915 or the May Fourth Movement (*wusi yundong*) after 1919. The negative assessments that have been repeated again and again in secondary sources both in China and the West are the result of the strategies employed by a new generation of writers—the May Fourth generation—to distance themselves politically and artistically from their predecessors. The agendas of the two generations were surprisingly similar: both intended to introduce something new—new fiction (*xin xiaoshuo*) and new literature (*xin wenxue*) respectively—and both did this by demonizing that which had gone before.

The Sociopolitical Background

The political and social backdrop to the appearance of literary magazines at the beginning of the twentieth century, the one that frames the first years of the publication of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* from 1910 onward, was a very colorful one. The years between 1898 and 1910 were eventful. They witnessed the first attempts at radical political change in the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898, the Boxer Uprising of 1900 and the flurry of reform activity by the Qing government in its wake, the Revolution of 1911, a new republic, and the era of disintegration and

disruption resulting from the rule of local power holders or warlords. China's defeat by the Japanese in the war of 1894–1895 had had both political and cultural repercussions. It had ushered in a period in which the Chinese bureaucratic apparatus and the Chinese elite not only suffered severe wounds to their pride, but were also confronted with the inadequacy of concepts of order that had been in existence for some two thousand years. China had failed to modernize. At the very least, all previous attempts to change, whether as a result of stimuli from within or without, had failed to provide a viable framework that would allow China to function and survive within the contemporary international community.⁸ Unlike Japan, China had not allowed innovation in technical or practical matters to penetrate deep into basic cultural assumptions and structures of power. The country now found itself among the backward nations of the world, confronted, even, with the scorn of the Japanese victors.⁹ After an initial xenophobic reaction in the form of the Boxer Uprising of 1900, “the last effort to meet China's problems through a radical rejection of modern ideas and technology,”¹⁰ a new attitude developed and manifested itself in a mighty program of reform, much the same reforms that had been thwarted by the court in 1898.

With the reform edict of 1901¹¹ a new phase of activity began, one that would continue until the fall of the dynasty in 1912. The fundamental changes that were envisaged covered the whole range of the political and social framework of the country: the government was to be made into a constitutional monarchy, the armed forces were to undergo radical restructuring, the forms of education at all levels were to be reorganized and brought into line with the requirements of the day. Industry, the prison and police services, even fire brigades were to be part of China's entry into the twentieth century.

Douglas Reynolds has called the thirteen years between 1898 and 1911 “the real revolution of modern China.”¹² He eloquently sets out how the “New Systems Reforms,” or the “Xinzheng Revolution,” as he calls them, constituted such a radical transformation of the country that this period must be classed as one of the great success stories of Chinese history and not, as the majority of historians have seen it to date, as one of insincere and procrastinating lip-service to change by a failing dynasty intent only on holding on to its power.¹³

However, this was not only a time of great institutional change. Hand in hand with alterations to age-old forms of government and social organization, a new mode of thinking was required of Chinese citizens. To benefit from the possibilities offered by a parliamentary system on the

highest level, or from local government institutions at a more immediate level, new and different patterns of behavior would be needed. Of course, these were to be instilled by schooling and training in various contexts. But such training was a lengthy task and one that could only be expected to bear fruit among the children who had gone through a new system without reference to the old. It was one thing for concepts of civic duty and virtues to be intellectually comprehensible, but it would take more than the promulgation of reform edicts, the announcement of new laws and statutes, to anchor their meanings within the hearts and minds of those affected by them. Only then could these concepts be transformed into a new and different kind of “natural” social behavior. Only then could there be any certainty that new policies would be accompanied by a new frame of mind.

Thus this period, rich in political and social events of a momentous nature as it was, also imposed the necessity of rapid cultural change and reorientation among the population, both the educated and the uneducated. Such reorientation meant an awareness and a discussion of the problems inherent in the changed conditions of society. The medium for discussion and for the dissemination and publication of ideas and opinions was provided by the rapidly increasing number of periodicals of all political hues and for all areas of life and work that had been developing since the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ These had provided China with an area of public discourse that was new.¹⁵ Scholars of recent years have argued over whether this area of open debate can and should be called a public sphere in any Habermasian sense of the term;¹⁶ but however it is categorized theoretically, it did provide an arena for the development of new styles of political argument and public debate in the years surrounding the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁷ The increasing numbers of newspapers and periodicals (and the firm establishment of the printed word as a means of direct exchange of political opinion) was one aspect of the situation. Integrally linked with this political sense of the press was the emergence of a wide panorama of literary periodicals: journals and supplements to newspapers that specialized in a form of writing specified as *xiaoshuo* or fiction.

The Literary Background

Writing and writing about writing had, from earliest times, always been a major concern of educated Chinese. The history of Chi-

nese writing offers an immense corpus of historical, political, philosophical, and lyrical texts and an even larger body of exegetical writings on these texts. Together they constituted what Chinese tradition came to view as major writings, the body of works to which the Chinese literatus turned his attention in training, officialdom, and life. They were the works of “high literature” and were distinguished by their quality of cultural and literary refinement (*wen*). Minor fictional writings were categorically excluded from orthodox textual work. However, and inseparably parallel to the major concerns with matters of the directing and recording of human conduct and the running of the greater and smaller community, this “small talk” had traditionally constituted a lively current of writing that had found a readership and appreciation despite its not being accorded the status of *wen*. Traditionally it was officially scorned and feared: scorned for the supposedly unpolished nature of its expression and feared for its alleged potential to cause the population to revolt or become unruly. Official proscription of works of fiction well into the nineteenth century clearly testify to its continuing popularity: an art form of only minimal acceptance and influence will never need to be subjected to official proscription.

The literary genre of the *xiaoshuo* was not consciously rediscovered and accorded artistic recognition until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many scholars date this rediscovery, the reappraisal of the function of fiction, with the publication of Liang Qichao’s much cited article “On Fiction and the Governance of the People” in 1902.¹⁸ In this rousing text, Liang firmly installed the genre as an acceptable literary activity for the man of letters and for the patriot. *Xiaoshuo* became the literary medium of choice for the transformation of China into a modern nation and the awakening of its citizens to the concerns that should be theirs. Writing and reading fiction had become an approved occupation. Thus fiction as a genre gradually began to enter the realm of the literary or *wen*.¹⁹

Liang’s appeal, of course, was as much a result of as the catalyst for major changes in the perception of fictional writing in China. The late-Qing period had seen numerous and popular works of fiction concerned with the state of the nation and the practices and malpractices of its elite. These included Li Boyuan’s *Guanchang xianxing* [The bureaucrats], Liu E’s *Laocan youji* [The travels of Laocan], Wu Woyao’s *Ershi nian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang* [Strange events seen in the past twenty years], and Zeng Pu’s *Niehai hua* [Flowers in an ocean of sin].²⁰ Liang himself and a number of his contemporaries had also come to believe that, in the Western world, works of fiction had played an emi-

nently important role in the modernization of countries and in the inculcation of new values.

In addition to these immediate influences from home and abroad, Liang was able to build upon a smaller tradition of the appreciation and practice of fiction that had always been present within the world of Chinese writing, albeit, perhaps, as an undercurrent. Officially forbidden works of fiction had no doubt included tales of superstition and pornography, tales of sentimental love and Robin Hood-like figures, the larger-than-life heroes, villains, and beauties that are the mainstay of the fairy tale and its extensions. They had assuredly, and especially in the form of the storyteller's art, been produced and performed to a large degree for the sake of entertaining an audience. Moreover, fiction will certainly have constituted a pleasurable means of whiling away one's leisure hours and thus provided relaxation and enjoyment of a transitory kind to its readership. However, and long before the late-Qing insistence on a sociopolitical function of the genre, fiction had traditionally also provided a medium in which the disenchanting could voice their concern and their criticism or contempt of the state of society and its leaders. In the late Ming period, the first half of the seventeenth century, Jin Shengtian had revised the popular novel *Shuihu zhuan* [The water margin] and, as Robert Hegel has shown, had used the revised version together with his copious notes and commentaries on the text "to express his own political and social concerns"²¹ and as a means of warning and instructing his fellow countrymen. Jin was not alone in using fiction for educational purposes, and although those who wrote and criticized works of fiction at this time entertained serious moral intentions, they did not neglect the element of entertainment and creative skill in their writings.²² Hegel also sees them as the precursors of the castigatory novels that intended to expose the corruption and decadence of Chinese society during the late nineteenth century.²³

Despite Liang Qichao's absolute refutation of the corrupting influence of traditional Chinese fiction, there were clear reverberations of earlier didactic attitudes to writing in his theoretical formulation of "new fiction" at the turn of the century. These echoes of early novels and stories also show themselves to be present in the minds of most twentieth-century writers and reformers. However, refuting the old is an integral part of creating the new, and Liang's concept of new writing to renovate the Chinese people, their morals, and their society would certainly have lost some of its rhetorical efficacy had he consciously harped back to earlier centuries. What was absolutely new at this time, however,

was the construction of political and social respectability for fictional writings, and the public and virtually unanimous esteem they were then accorded.

Within the space of a decade, institutional reform had removed political decision making and deliberation from the arcane workings of an inner circle of the imperial court and transferred it into a public realm, a middle realm, as it has also been called,²⁴ of journalists, political pressure groups, reform- and revolutionary-minded individuals. They found a forum for the discussion of national and local issues in the shape of committees and deliberative assemblies, in societies and study groups, and in the periodical press. At the same time, fictional writings had obtained a respectability and national significance that required them to assist in the mental transition from imperial subjects to national citizens. The opportunity to participate in the reform-through-fiction project was provided by the new literary magazines. Such an invitation to take part in the molding of public opinion would have been inconceivable some years previously. Now educated Chinese saw for themselves, and were constantly being reminded of, the possibility of joining in the national effort to strengthen their country. They could publicize their opinions on local, national, even international matters; they could contribute to the education of those who had not had the opportunity to study abroad or had not had access to Western books and thought. Moreover, they could do this in the journalistic essay form within the realm of political journalism or in the form of fiction. Many, in fact, combined both. Now that the unfailing popularity and affective qualities of fictional narrative were to be harnessed and placed within the service of the community, fiction magazines became an important factor in publishing in early-twentieth-century China.

All of the important literary journals published to 1910 placed national reform and the inculcation of new ways of thinking high on their list of aims. The first had been called into life by Liang Qichao in 1902: *Xin xiaoshuo* [New fiction], published in Japan. The first journal to be published in China was the Commercial Press of Shanghai's *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* [Fiction illustrated] in 1903.²⁵ Both of these stopped publication in 1906. Equally short-lived publications followed in their wake: *Xin xin xiaoshuo* [New new fiction] (1904–1907), *Yueyue xiaoshuo*, which gave itself the English title *All-Fiction Monthly* (1906–1909), and *Xiaoshuo lin* [Grove of fiction] (1907–1908).

With the exception of Liang Qichao's *Xin xiaoshuo*, all of these journals were published in Shanghai, the city that had become the center

of literary and publishing activities and of new lifestyles, the city that was the epitome of all that was modern in early-twentieth-century China. None of them was able to hold the market for very long, possibly because of the deaths of leading contributors, of changing spheres of interest or commitment, of dwindling interest amongst the readership, or of a combination of reasons.²⁶ What is clear, however, is that there was a developing market for this kind of publication. Journals continued to appear and disappear throughout the 1910s. It is also clear that *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, a Commercial Press publication that entered the field of literary journals in the second half of 1910, managed to conquer and retain a large portion of this market, remaining popular into the 1930s.²⁷

Literary Publishing as an Area of Scholarly Research

Given the central importance of literary periodicals for the late-Qing and early-Republican eras, it is surprising that there have been no major studies dedicated to them to date. Recently, Joan Judge has published a detailed analysis of the newspaper *Shibao* [Times], but, as the title of her study shows, her bias is strictly toward political journalism.²⁸ Other studies, such as those within the University of Heidelberg's Chinese Public Sphere research group, have concentrated on Chinese newspapers, in particular on *Shenbao* and the work of Ernest Major and his role in publishing at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁹ There is a tendency to center research on the political or institutional parameters of publishing³⁰ or to discuss selections of thematically related articles from a number of sources with regard to particular issues.³¹ Scholarly attention has, perhaps naturally, tended to be directed toward the major thinkers of the period or to official policies and it has used materials and articles published in various political periodicals to illustrate and sustain its arguments. These studies are extremely important to our understanding of political and intellectual trends and developments; they can throw light upon various individual areas of the society in which those writing for a journal like *Xiaoshuo yuebao* were living. What they do not do is include the contribution made by fictional writers to the discussion of the issues they examine. They are not primarily concerned with an understanding of the literary venture that undertook to be part of the general reform venture of its day.

Interest in and reference to late-Qing and early-Republican literary

journals has generally had two main emphases. Scholars in the West have analyzed the various theoretical arguments or treatises concerning the concept of “new fiction” in the wake of Liang Qichao’s article of 1902.³² Second, much attention has been paid to the late-Qing novel in all its forms. In fact, the theoretical discussion of fiction that was opened in earnest by late-Qing theorists has almost always been exclusively related to the long narrative or novel. Although short contributions constituted the mainstay of fiction magazines and provided readers with an element of variety, short pieces of writing, whether fictional or essay, are very rarely acknowledged, examined, or discussed,³³ and the short story of the day is summarily dismissed as not warranting attention. The judgment is a one-sided one. Critical attention to the long narrative has meant that short fictional writings have generally not found the interest of the scholarly community. Clearly, this bent obscures the wider view of literary trends before the 1920s.

With one exception, there has been no scholarly interest in a single period in the history of an individual journal, its contributors and its contents in general. The exception is a volume edited by Ding Shouhe, which contains short essays as introductions to periodicals of the period of the 1911 Revolution.³⁴ This collection includes one article by Fan Mingli on the early phase of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, which Fan dates between 1910 and 1921. The twenty-six-page essay cannot do justice to a ten-year period of publication. It can in no way reflect the variety and scope of the contributions published in a journal that comprised approximately one hundred pages each month. Thus Fan concentrates largely on the later years of this first phase, seldom taking stock of contributions that were published in the first five years. His treatment of the journal generally restricts itself to a listing of articles and authors and to long quotations from the original source; he rarely ventures into critical analysis. His basic assessment of the journal is reflected in the opening lines, in which he states categorically that the years 1910 to 1921 were characterized by bourgeois entertainment literature, the years after 1921 by the new literature of the May Fourth era of realism. This is a fairly representative example of the dichotomy of good and bad that can be found in all other secondary sources. It is a consensus of scholarly opinion about the journal *Xiaoshuo yuebao* that has retained its position to the present. Thus the latest descriptive survey of modern Chinese literature by Bonnie McDougall and Kam Louie has not failed to reproduce these arguments. Like all others, however, it has failed to produce evidence for them.³⁵

It is unfortunate, then, that anyone approaching the literature of

the late-Qing and early-Republican eras is confronted with this sharp demarcation between the good and the bad, the old-style and the modern. This line has been drawn to distinguish between the entertainment writings of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly type and the modern literature of China to which literary criticism has accorded almost canonical status. Put simply, this is the difference in degrees of fame, critical and public acclaim, awareness and acknowledgment between Yun Tiejiao (one of the early editors of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*) and Mao Dun, for example. The critical and scholarly acclaim that has been accorded to the studied generation of the May Fourth era has, of course, been withheld from the unstudied generation of writers of the early 1910s. It cannot surprise us, then, that the acknowledged generation of May Fourth writers includes a large number of well-known and well-documented “famous names” of modern Chinese literature: Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Hu Shi, Yu Dafu, and the like. What is more important in the present context is that this studied generation and the studies of this generation have also provided the vocabulary for all later assessments of the period that immediately preceded it, and the intolerance of the May Fourth generation toward their immediate predecessors has colored both Chinese and Western opinions ever since. The new generation of writers established their leading position in the field of culture by negating virtually all that had gone before them and by redefining the parameters of the acceptable in literature. To that extent they formulated and to an extent instigated a radical break with their past (or their tradition), even if close study of their works and attitudes often shows this break to be more postulated than practiced. Even they remained indebted to the tradition they had inherited. However, their posturing and theorizing, and their reception by subsequent generations of scholars in the East and the West, have cemented the view of the good versus the bad in literature, modern versus feudal (Mandarin Duck and Butterfly) entertainment literature. This situation is clearly reflected in all critical statements on the character of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* to date. It will be one of the tasks of the present study to unravel the developments that led to such judgments.

The Source Materials

At this point mention has to be made of the source materials used for this study. Researchers are fortunate that Chinese scholars

have, for some time, been involved in the collection of materials related to publishing and writing in the late-Qing and early-Republican eras. With regard to the discussion of literature, two such useful collections are the pioneer work of A Ying³⁶ of 1960 and the later and enlarged collection of articles compiled by Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong.³⁷ Both provide useful source materials. For publishing in general, Zhang Nan's³⁸ collection of primary materials covering the period 1900–1911 and Zhang Jinglu's³⁹ supplementary materials on publishing in China are invaluable. These and similar collections, however, rarely offer systematic research. They are, in the main, collections of materials, and any characterization of periodicals they make can prove problematic on closer examination of the journal in question. Personal memoirs or recollections of individuals personally involved in publishing activities at the beginning of the twentieth century constitute a further source of information that must be approached with care. I have tried to incorporate such collections, where they could provide useful insights, but always with the proviso that they may be untrustworthy: the memories of very aged individuals may have been colored by so many factors and influences that it would be foolish to treat them as factual accounts of a situation.⁴⁰ For this reason it is absolutely essential that magazines and newspapers are seen individually at first and then compared with those of a similar nature in order subsequently to enable useful and well-founded conclusions to be made about publishing in China during this early period.

Many of the magazines and periodicals of the day have been lost forever. Luckily, some are available as reprints, and it is to be hoped that the scholarly community's growing interest in publishing during the late-Qing and early-Republican eras will encourage more reprints of periodicals to be made available. They do, however, need to be complete reprints or copies. The Japanese reprint of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*,⁴¹ for example, has strangely omitted to reproduce almost all of the advertising material contained in its pages. This is a distortion of the general nature of the journal, since, as the present study shows, the advertising material is indicative of the character of the journal and directly reflects the concerns of those involved in it. This material is also an invaluable source of information about the activities of writers and translators and of developments in the book market. It is often the only place in which we can find references to magazines and works whose existence has otherwise not been registered.

Related to this question of the information that such nonliterary material can provide are the difficulties in working with these source

materials of the period. One of the major difficulties concerns language and terminology. The texts contained in the more than four thousand pages of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* that form the basis of this study are often uneven and are written in a mixture of styles and modes that are not particularly readable today. The texts span the spectrum of Chinese antiquity, China's literary and cultural heritage, contemporary political and social events, individuals of contemporary importance, and recent writing. Moreover, they cross national boundaries and open up a Chinese panorama of foreign literatures and histories. In doing so they also open up a rich panorama of terms that were doubtless immediately comprehensible to the reader of the day but that send the researcher of today onto long and tortuous paths in search of references and information. This is most particularly the case with foreign names and terms. Since there was, at the time, no standard way of rendering Western names into Chinese, the individual had much freedom to invent the combinations of characters he used. This also meant that proper names were not transliterated in the same way each time they were used. The difficulties involved here are obvious. Further problems arise with Chinese references to "famous" Western writers, whose fame, unfortunately, has dwindled to the extent that they are no longer ever mentioned in literary histories. The only solution to this problem has been to scour contemporary British magazines for similar names. Thus I have endeavored to pay a great deal of attention to the character and contents of foreign contemporary literary journals such as *The Strand Magazine* or *The Windsor Magazine*. In cases where it was possible to identify foreign authors, I have also made every attempt to read and assess the nature of their works.

A similar approach applies with regard to the immense variety of topics presented in the journal. Narratives, essays, and reports take one straight into all the issues of the day, be they scientific (the development of aviation, uses of electricity), political (constitutional monarchy, minor wars and clashes in Europe and their causes), social, educational, or, even, the recent military history of China, its heroes and failures. In all cases, the first step was to identify the individuals, events, or developments that the Chinese texts pinpointed in relevant Chinese or Western sources. However, I have endeavored to refer both to Chinese newspapers and periodicals of the day for further information as well as to ascertain foreign sources for ideas, translated works, and texts. This is, of course, not always a systematic method of research, and it is certainly time consuming and demands patience and endurance. But it is the only one that will begin to offer answers to the questions posed by

work with journals such as *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. It can open up the journal and its context and provide far greater insights than any treatment that does not enter into such detail. Reading publications such as *The Strand Magazine* for a parallel period, for instance, has exposed the sources for a good number of texts, perhaps even the inspiration for the form of the journal. Yet, more than that, it has provided the context for appreciations of writing and the reception of foreign authors in China at the time.

A Study of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*

The problems of the critical reception and the imbalances in critical perception with regard to *Xiaoshuo yuebao* in the years 1910–1914 will be addressed in the following five chapters in a number of ways. The texts published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* between 1910 and the end of 1913 fill some 4,700 pages. Such an extensive and heterogeneous primary source poses a problem. Despite being published in bound form, something like booklets, literary magazines were not a single work of literature and were never produced with the intention of constituting one.⁴² They are a complex web of various strands of information, and the forms in which the information is presented vary greatly. A study of the journal must, at one and the same time, provide a detailed picture of the periodical itself—its contents, main concerns, and contributors—and must analyze these within broader categories. That is, the fundamental and immensely important descriptive requirements of such an undertaking must be balanced by the wider theoretical issues. To tackle these two areas of the descriptive and the theoretical-analytical, a short period in the life of a journal needs to be studied. Such study can provide more detailed and more reliable information than attempts at broad generalizations on the character of the journal over many years. A detailed study of one phase is all the more important in cases such as the present one, where a small but persistent body of secondary literature continues to misrepresent the materials. In this way, and given that further smaller periods are likely to be studied in the future, comparisons of contributors, contributions, formats, and so on can offer greater insights into the general development of the publication and into the relative importance of a particular journal.

For all of these reasons, I have chosen to limit the present study to

the period from 1910 to the beginning of 1914. It is not an arbitrary choice; it is one that suggests itself on the basis of political developments in China. This choice enables us to observe what was being discussed in the period directly before the fall of the dynasty, at the time of the revolution, and in the wake of the revolution. On January 10, 1914, President Yuan Shikai dissolved the newly formed parliament and then announced a constitution that transferred all real power into his hands. An era of optimism came to an end, and gradually hopes for a new China were dashed. The texts published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* in the wake of these events have to be approached with somewhat altered assumptions as a result of the different social and historical context.

The contents of the journal must be seen in relation to the historical period that framed their publication. This is not to adopt an overly historicist approach to the task and to assume that historical factors are the only means of understanding the workings of the journal and the aims, motivations, and literary works of its contributors. The assumption underlying the present approach is that educated Chinese who were active in reform efforts in the period in question were, for the most part, guided by their concern for their country and by their sense of the imminent danger their nation was facing at the time. The fictional texts they wrote were not executed as a form of intellectual or aesthetic exercise or as artistic experimentation or pleasure; they were aligned to the necessity of taking China out into the world and of bringing a knowledge of the outside world into China. The contributors to the journal were keenly aware of the particular moment in history that was determining their activities, and they were keenly aware of their role in the development of their country. They were not primarily artists or authors, and they did not see themselves primarily as such: they were generalists and reformers, and they wrote in fiction magazines.

A study of the themes these writer-reformers chose to portray and the manner in which they chose to portray them can tell us much about the group of educated individuals who took part in what I have termed the reform-through-fiction project. It cannot tell us what the great majority of the Chinese population of the day thought. It tells us nothing of the uneducated masses directly; it informs us of the scope of reform ideas and the areas of change that were deemed necessary by members of the leading groups in society. Those who wrote for *Xiaoshuo yuebao* were writing for themselves, for their own class or stratum of society. This bias is not necessarily a sign of an elitist attitude. Literary magazines were still relatively new, and even though they called

for and published contributions in the vernacular, the majority of texts were written in a language that readers with but a smattering of education would not be able to read. Moreover, if we accept that the writers of this generation were not specialists, were not simply literary men but instigators of reform in various modes, then fiction writing was, for them, but another means of formulating their concerns, for themselves and for those with whom they would wish to communicate those concerns. They had not yet discovered an affinity for the lower classes; they were far more attentive to finding the best means of political tutelage for those less fortunate than themselves.

Thus fiction journals of the 1910s can also be seen as a forum for the exchange of ideas about reform. Moreover, they may well have fulfilled what the sociologist Leo Lowenthal has called one of the functions of both writers and sociologists: “to describe and label new experience.” Lowenthal continues that not until “such creative tasks have been performed can the majority of people recognize and become articulate about their predicament and its sources.”⁴³ The texts published may not have been quite so “emotionally charged” as those of their successors in the late 1910s and 1920s, but the aim of writing was a similar one: to make their readers “conscious of what the readers had not yet perceived” and thus to lead them to change.⁴⁴

The problems and issues pinpointed in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* were, to a great extent, those that the later generation of more rebellious writers were once again to take up and emphasize: women and their role in society, relationships between the sexes and in the family, the modern world and its problems, a scientific approach to life. The difference between the two approaches, which were separated by approximately eight years, was that the earlier writers wanted to reform and restructure their society; the later generation was intent on destruction.⁴⁵

To present the contents and the concerns of the journal within the framework of wider issues, the following chapters will be grouped around broad headings: modernity, modern issues, genre and fiction, writing, writing literary history. The aim is not to force the journal into a strait-jacket of fashionable scholarly terms but to examine what this immensely popular periodical can contribute to our knowledge of the development of the respective areas in China.

After defining the terms of the subsequent discussion—above all the connotations of the terms “modernity” and “tradition” for the present study—chapter 1 describes and analyzes the basic context of the journal, the background to the publication, and its general makeup. It

examines the various sections of the journal, their salient features, and the types of writing they contain, and it includes a survey of the illustrative and the advertising materials to be found in the journal. These nonliterary parts of the publication are informative, reflecting as they do all the general topics of discussion and interest of the day. They also add much to our general understanding of the character of the journal. They clearly underline the journal's interest in issues such as the role of women in society and politics, the importance of education and of young people for the future of the country, and the need for reading matter adequate to the requirements of a changing society. They reflect political changes in the types of books and manuals they present for sale and, moreover, offer a representative sample of the range of books and educational aids published by the Commercial Press of Shanghai at the time.

Since the approach underlying this study emphasizes the descriptive as a prerequisite for the analytical, chapter 2 is the heart of the matter. It is the longest chapter of the book and provides a survey of the contents and their context. It concentrates on the major themes in the journal to assess to what extent the contents contributed to a presentation and discussion of contemporary ideas and issues. The chapter examines how Chinese writers reacted to their world and its problems and takes stock of the reflection, discussion, or comment on such matters as contemporary national politics, the state of the nation in general, the attitude toward "things foreign" or international, social questions such as the family, the position of women in society, love and relationships between the sexes, the morals of the nation, its attitude toward the young, toward education and scientific discovery.

Seen within the context of the political and social debates and developments of the day, the texts themselves demonstrate that *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, far from providing its readers with a comforting realm of escape, a cushioned domain of sentiment and adventure beyond the very pressing problems of the times, offered them modern food for thought and mental stimulus. Modern and modernity, as will be repeated in this study, refer to the sense of living in a changing world, of reconsidering past attitudes and examining new possibilities of thought and action. A modern stance is one in which the individual or group consciously reviews the premises of previously accepted modes of behavior and, where it is found to be necessary, consciously distances itself from aspects of the past that are felt to be obsolete. In China at the beginning of the twentieth century the possibility, and, for some,

the necessity of reconsidering many of the facets of the Chinese world —its writing, the basic assumptions of its political and social system, and its fundamental philosophical tenets—were the catalyst and driving force of their writing. This modern agenda will be found in the texts surveyed.

Such a modern agenda is clearly of a different quality from that which Leo Lee has recently discussed and illustrated.⁴⁶ It has only peripheral significance for the urban modernity “structured and governed by a semiotics of *material* culture”⁴⁷ that Lee describes. It was an intellectual undertaking that attempted to offer new mental images of the world that would influence and change the usual and well-practiced ways of seeing oneself and others as well as the concomitant patterns of behavior (i.e., traditional responses). Stories, for instance, provided new role models and new heroes, and an investigation of these can tell us much about attitudes and approaches to life that were to be inculcated into the readership as a prerequisite for coping with the changes that were taking place around them. These were, indeed, as Lee now also acknowledges, “the ‘textual’ sources of modernity.”⁴⁸

The aim of the present study is to delineate the concerns of those who produced and contributed to *Xiaoshuo yuebao* and to show the means with which they depicted them. Such an undertaking does not require a discussion of any intrinsic and timeless “aesthetic” or “literary” quality or value to the texts. Such terms are vague and misleading at best; they invariably draw their scales of reference and classification from one of the dominant views of writing at any given period in history. Before this kind of terminology can be used with any expedience, detailed information must be furnished about contemporary assessments and attitudes to the act of reading and writing. For this reason, the most important criteria for judgment must not be questions about whether an observer from a later period would class these writings as good or bad. To elicit a sense of any value the texts may have had in their own day, we need to ask what those of that day considered to be good and proper writing and how they saw and understood the genres they were using. Literature as an entity, as Terry Eagleton succinctly and aptly put it, “does not exist in the sense that insects do.” Moreover, he states quite clearly what is often forgotten: “the value judgements by which it [literature] is constituted are historically variable.”⁴⁹ If we wish to reconstruct these historical variables, we need to understand the factors that both writers and readers invested in their activities. Put simply, the context is seen as the key.

The themes and the protagonists of stories, then, are one aspect of writing. Subject matter often reveals the motivation for writing and the aims pursued by authors. But we also need to ask about authors' attitudes to the genre of writing they employed. To enable us to gain an understanding of contemporary attitudes toward writing and reading modern *xiaoshuo* writings, chapter 3 opens by examining what contributors to *Xiaoshuo yuebao* had to say about writing and how they said it. Theoretical texts on the writing of fiction are analyzed to assess the extent to which writers were indebted to earlier arguments and whether they had, in the meantime, developed any different approaches or attitudes toward fiction. Historical surveys published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* of both Chinese fiction and Western fiction are presented and discussed in order to ask whether the writers in the journal approached their own tradition in a manner radically different from the way they approached traditions they believed existed in the West. Moreover, an observable tendency of the late-Qing and early-Republican eras—the tendency to write historical appreciations and surveys of the most disparate fields of knowledge—is taken up and discussed. Finally, chapter 3 discusses a further revealing aspect of the writings in *Xiaoshuo yuebao*: the form in which they were presented, the structure of narratives. Fundamental structural elements of the narratives are summarized and related not only to the theoretical aims formulated on the pages of the journal but to the type of issue that was taken up and discussed in fictional and nonfictional contributions. There are striking correlations. The concern with verisimilitude in theoretical writings is closely mirrored in a strict framework of narration that conveys the impression of tales based in reality and in reality alone.

Chapter 4 links a consideration of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* with the ideas put forward by Pierre Bourdieu concerning a “field of literary production” with its particular regulations, laws, and dynamics.⁵⁰ The chapter shows the appearance of the journal not as a reaction to a sophisticated market situation of competition and diversity molded by the influence of institutions, critics, and literary groups vying for positions, but rather within the context of a fundamental consensus among those involved in the new-fiction project about the functions and the practicalities of writing and publishing new writings for a changing world. As will be shown, authors and writers were not affiliated with one individual journal, nor were they limited to one mode of writing. They wrote and published a range of texts on the various subjects that reflected their own reform interests. Closer examination of the lives and aspirations of

the people involved in both the running and the editing of the journal as well as of those of a number of contributors to the various sections provides clear evidence that those involved in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* were a homogeneous group of politically concerned and active individuals who were bound together by personal, local, political, or artistic ties. Their names can be associated with a wide range of reform activity, with educational groups, official and informal political associations, and with the Nanshe (Southern society), a literary group whose influence can be seen throughout the world of political and literary publishing in the years immediately before and after the Revolution of 1911.

Chapter 5 considers the fate of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* at the hands of literary historians. First it reviews basic assumptions about late-Qing magazines and their contents with regard to the question of the development of the short story or the short narrative in China. Literary surveys generally neglect the growing significance of short narratives. Yet, if we take the editors' word for it, short narratives were essential to the popularity—perhaps even the survival—of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. Chapter 5 thus first considers the development of this form of writing in literary journals at the beginning of the twentieth century in China. In *Xiaoshuo yuebao* this kind of narrative was emphasized from the beginning. The editors of the journal did not accord pride of place to the novel or long narrative; they even relegated it to the second section of the journal within the first months of publication. Moreover, they put out special calls for authors to submit short stories at a very early date. They intended it to be a short story journal, as the English title they chose for the publication suggests. The number of short stories published increased with time. Short stories and short nonfiction contributions make up the main part of the journal. The short story as a form may have produced exceptional fruits by the 1920s; the form itself, however, was well established on the literary scene long before.

The contributors to *Xiaoshuo yuebao* were members of a generation that felt the need to implement the demands of a new kind of writing they were in the process of defining. They were searching for definitions and examples and attempting to create examples. This search is clearly illustrated in their discussions of writing and in the contents and structures of the writings themselves. As they perceived it, the new writing required practice and explication to become anchored in society and for society. It was a serious undertaking. In the light of the findings of this study, the final chapter, therefore, closes with a reexamination of the accusation that *Xiaoshuo yuebao* was a journal that dealt

in “mere entertainment” literature. Each chapter and each reference to the primary source is a cumulative negation of these accusations. The final section of chapter 5 unravels the mechanisms involved in the creation of the “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” myth.

One of the aims of this study is to provide a sound body of information on the journal *Xiaoshuo yuebao* as a first step to further and comparative contextual research into literary publishing and journals in Shanghai in the 1910s. This field is such a complex matter that we cannot hope to appreciate it without detailed study of the magazines, the people involved in them, their connections and associations. Thus, although I am indebted to the work of Pierre Bourdieu for providing a framework for many observations I have made with regard to the journal, it is clear that it is impossible, at this stage, to attempt anything like a survey of his concept of “the field of cultural production.” Bourdieu’s theory of a field of literary activity, its struggles, positions, and rules, would provide a stimulating point of reference for a reexamination of the landscape of publishing and literary development in late-Qing and early-Republican China. However, before such theoretical approaches can be made toward the subject, we require detailed studies of individual magazines. Without them we run the risk of repeated misunderstandings and thus misrepresentations of periodicals in secondary sources.

FIG. 1: The “Editors’ Declaration of Intent” (right) was published at the beginning of the first issue of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* in 1910.