From Premodern Xiaoshuo To A Modern Sino-Japanese Discourse On Fiction: A New History Of Xiaoshuo From The Warring States To The Twentieth Century

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Abstract
The first modern Chinese study of the history of premodern Chinese fiction is Lu Xun's 魯迅 (1881-1936) A Brief History of Chinese Fiction 中國小說史略 (A Brief History hereafter), a work of fundamental importance in Western and Chinese academia. Lu's influence on the study of premodern Chinese fiction is three-fold: 1) confounding the concept of fiction with xiaoshuo 小說; 2) establishing a Social Darwinist, evolution-centered approach as a major way of studying premodern Chinese fiction; and 3) setting an arbitrary scope for what can be considered fictional in Chinese literary history based on the desire to transform xiaoshuo into the modern Western notion of fiction. In this dissertation, I examine how Lu's problematic discourse has shaped modern studies of premodern Chinese literature. I address the three facets of his influence by contextualizing his Social Darwinist and teleological views in the formative period of Sino-Japanese modernity, providing an alternative theoretical framework to conceptualize the development of fiction based on current narrative theories, and clarifying the historical relationship between fiction and xiaoshuo with the aid of digital tools. I argue that the equivalence between xiaoshuo and fiction drawn by Lu Xun and modern scholars and the current understanding of what constitutes fiction in premodern China are largely based on a teleological and Social Darwinist theoretical framework; this framework is characterized by searching for qualities that define the modern Western novel in premodern Chinese literature, which is an intellectual legacy of late nineteenth century Japan and early twentieth century China—the formative period of a modern East Asian discourse on fiction.

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FROM PREMODERN XIAOSHUO TO A MODERN SINO-JAPANESE
DISCOURSE ON FICTION: A NEW HISTORY OF XIAOSHUO FROM THE
WARRING STATES TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Yingxue Ashley Liu

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FROM PREMODERN XIAOSHUO TO A MODERN SINO-JAPANESE DISCOURSE ON FICTION: A NEW HISTORY OF XIAOSHUO FROM THE WARRING STATES TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Yingxue Liu
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The transition from being a student to standing at the podium is filled with hardships. No amount of one’s own mental strength can prepare one for this journey. In the darkest moments, it is support from those who one looks up to that makes the difference between perseverance and self-doubt. Simple acts that convey “I am here for you” and “I am proud of you” can weigh as much as the bestowing of a lifetime’s knowledge. This kindness will stay with me for the rest of my career and be passed on to my own students.
ABSTRACT

FROM PREMODERN XIAOSHUO TO A MODERN SINO-JAPANESE DISCOURSE ON FICTION: A NEW HISTORY OF XIAOSHUO FROM THE WARRING STATES TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Yingxue Ashley Liu
Victor H. Mair

The first modern Chinese study of the history of premodern Chinese fiction is Lu Xun’s 魯迅 (1881-1936) A Brief History of Chinese Fiction 中國小說史略 (A Brief History hereafter), a work of fundamental importance in Western and Chinese academia. Lu’s influence on the study of premodern Chinese fiction is three-fold: 1) confounding the concept of fiction with xiaoshuo 小說; 2) establishing a Social Darwinist, evolution-centered approach as a major way of studying premodern Chinese fiction; and 3) setting an arbitrary scope for what can be considered fictional in Chinese literary history based on the desire to transform xiaoshuo into the modern Western notion of fiction. In this dissertation, I examine how Lu’s problematic discourse has shaped modern studies of premodern Chinese literature. I address the three facets of his influence by contextualizing his Social Darwinist and teleological views in the formative period of Sino-Japanese modernity, providing an alternative theoretical framework to conceptualize the development of fiction based on current narrative theories, and clarifying the historical relationship between fiction and xiaoshuo with the aid of digital tools. I argue that the equivalence between xiaoshuo and fiction drawn by Lu Xun and modern scholars and the current understanding of what constitutes fiction in premodern
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PREFACE

One of the most important developments in modern East Asian literary history is the transformation of the Sinographic compound 小説 (pronounced xiaoshuo in Chinese and shōsetsu in Japanese) into the modern Sino-Japanese equivalent of “fiction” in the Western sense. An examination of this compound’s historical meanings reveals a complex and elusive relationship between it and the meaning of fiction before the modern era. This compound’s clear designation of “fiction” in modern Chinese and Japanese is the outcome of an ideological manipulation motivated by Social Darwinism; the architects behind this process include Lu Xun and Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遥 (1859-1935), who were instrumental in founding a modern Sino-Japanese discourse on fiction. The modern equivalence between xiaoshuo/shōsetsu and “fiction” is due to a desire to “evolve” traditional Sino-Japanese literature into its modern, Westernized reincarnation at the turn of the twentieth century. This desire and the anachronistic equivalence between xiaoshuo and fiction drawn by Lu Xun have created unresolved theoretical problems and confusions in the study of premodern Chinese literature until today.

Lu’s discourse on xiaoshuo and fiction, which is heavily influenced by that of Shōyō, has fundamentally shaped theoretical approaches in the study of premodern Chinese fiction in the East and the West. Lu’s powerful evolutionary paradigm finds its way into the discourse of scholars who would otherwise eschew Social Darwinism and the Western Supremacy behind it. This is partially because, whether we admit it or not, all scholars of Chinese fiction are students of Lu Xun, who was the founding father of modern Chinese fiction and the study of premodern Chinese fiction. Scholars of East
Asian literature hold on to beliefs from the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries because that was when East Asian writers founded a modern, Westernized discourse on East Asian literature. The comprehensibility of East Asian literature to the Western mind is largely the legacy of this founding generation of writers’ efforts to create a discursive space for East Asia in Westernized literary and intellectual modernity; the Social Darwinist explanations of East Asian literary developments can be seen as an attempt by this generation to render the East Asian past intelligible in the Westernized modern world. Today, we are still living in the shadows of these larger-than-life figures such as Lu Xun and Tsubouchi Shōyō. As we benefit from the readability through a Westernized lens, we also inherit the ideological problematics of their time.

This dissertation criticizes the Social Darwinist and teleological tendencies in the studies of premodern Chinese fiction by Lu Xun and Lu Xun-inspired Western scholars. Moreover, it examines Lu’s theoretical assumptions and challenges them with new insights from narrative studies and digital humanities. In Chapter 1, I analyze how Western scholarship on premodern Chinese fiction has been affected by Lu’s views. In Chapter 2, I propose a framework for understanding fiction and fictionality based on current narrative theories that can serve as an alternative to that of Lu; moreover, I challenge the scope of what can be considered fictional in Chinese literary history set by Lu. The theoretical framework established in this chapter will guide my approach to fictionality in Chinese literary history in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3, I study the development of the concept of xiaoshuo from the Warring States period to late imperial time with the aid of digital tools, which allows for an exceptional scale of investigation, and explore its relationship with fiction; my study reveals a relationship between xiaoshuo and fiction.
that is much more complex than the linear evolutionary paradigm suggested by Lu. In Chapter 4, I address the fundamental Social Darwinist assumptions behind Lu’s discourse on *xiaoshuo* and fiction that reflect the ideological concerns of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century China and Japan.
Chapter 1

From Evolutionary Discourse to Narrative Studies:

Xiaoshuo and Theoretical Approaches in the Study of Chinese Fiction from Lu Xun to the Present Day

Introduction

The first modern Chinese study of the history of premodern Chinese fiction is Lu Xun’s A Brief History of Chinese Fiction, a work of fundamental importance in Western and Chinese academia. Lu’s influence on the study of premodern Chinese fiction is three-fold: 1) confounding the concept of fiction with xiaoshuo; 2) establishing a Social Darwinist, evolution-centered approach as a major way of studying premodern Chinese fiction; and 3) setting the scope for what can be considered fictional in Chinese literary history. This chapter explores how Lu’s discourse shapes scholarship on Chinese fiction in Western academia in the three aforementioned ways and a post-1970s turn toward narrative studies; by doing so, I analyze Lu Xun’s legacy and shed light on fundamental assumptions in scholarship that are long overdue for discussion and criticism.

The Tangling of Xiaoshuo and Fiction in Current Scholarship

For scholars who study the history of fiction in China, a question of utmost importance is to what extent the premodern term xiaoshuo signifies “fiction” or “the novel.” In modern Chinese, xiaoshuo is used to translate and act conceptually equivalent to the Western notions of fiction and the novel. Because of this, premodern works of
literature labeled *xiaoshuo* are often treated as predecessors to or variations of fiction in modern scholarship. Wilt Idema expresses his frustration over this issue:

> Ever since the Chinese term *xiaoshuo* has been used to translate the English notions of ‘the novel’ and ‘fiction,’ traditional *xiaoshuo* has been treated as the Chinese counterpart to ‘the novel’ and ‘fiction,’ and the result has been a mess. To the extent that *xiaoshuo* includes all categories of non-normative narrative in the Chinese tradition, from short notes in classical Chinese to 120-chapter or even longer vernacular works, it includes many works that in the West would not be considered ‘a novel’ or ‘fiction’ at all. (“Review,” 397)

Idema rightly points out that the designations of the premodern notion of *xiaoshuo* venture vastly beyond what the English word “fiction” entails. In *A Brief History*, Lu includes premodern literature of a wide range of subjects and genres that are, at one point or another, understood to be *xiaoshuo* in the historical development of fiction in China. At the beginning of the volume, Lu acknowledges that *xiaoshuo* did not always denote fiction:

> *Hsiao-shuo*, the name for fiction, was first used by Chuang Tzu who spoke of ‘winning honour and renown by means of *hsiao-shuo*.’ All he meant by this expression, as a matter of fact, was chit-chat of no great consequence. So here the term has a different connotation from that acquired later. (1)

However, such acknowledgement does not result in a distinction drawn between fiction and *xiaoshuo*. Lu’s volume confounds the history of Chinese fiction with the history of Chinese literature labeled *xiaoshuo* in the premodern sense, which has long-lasting effects in the studies of premodern Chinese fiction around the world; until this day,
scholars in the East and the West struggle to untangle the relationship between fiction and xiaoshuo.

In his 1983 publication, Victor Mair raises the issue that the premodern notion of xiaoshuo cannot be confounded with the word “fiction.” He states,

I should, perhaps, begin this section by repeating that the Chinese term for ‘fiction’ is hsiao-shuo (literally, ‘small talk’ or ‘minor talk’). This immediately points to a fundamental contrast with the English word [fiction] which is derived ultimately from the participle of Latin fingere (‘to form’ or ‘to fashion,’ ‘to invent’). Where the Chinese term etymologically implies a kind of gossip or anecdote, the English word indicates something made up or created by an author or writer. ‘Hsiao-shuo’ imports something, not of particularly great moment, that is presumed actually to have happened; “fiction” suggests something an author dreamed up in his mind.

(21)

Sheldon Lu, in his 1994 From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative, agrees with Mair and cites the part of Mair’s publication quoted above to support his claim that “hsiao-shuo is only an approximation to the Western ‘fiction,’ never an equivalent” (42). He argues,

Generally speaking, the Chinese have entertained two distinct and yet related conceptions of ‘fiction’ or hsiao-shuo. Hsiao-shuo—‘small talk,’ ‘minor discourse’—has been regarded as either a minor philosophical discourse or a type of unofficial, inferior history. The first conception classifies fiction within the corpus of philosophical works, and the second makes it a species of the genus history. (39)
Although he acknowledges that *xiaoshuo* is not equivalent to “fiction,” he uses these two terms interchangeably in this statement. The two “distinct and yet related conceptions” described here apply to *xiaoshuo*, not fiction. Whereas *xiaoshuo* in Classical Chinese can denote philosophical and historiographical genres, the English word “fiction” does not function the same way. Fiction and *xiaoshuo* are also used interchangeably in Luo Yuming’s 2011 *A Concise History of Chinese Literature*:

The Chinese word “fiction,” in original, refers to trifling, silly gossip, or anecdotes from hearsay. So “fiction,” in the usage of the ancients, includes a great variety of miscellaneous writings, of which what is related to fiction in the modern sense of the word are primarily all kids of supernatural tales of a folklore nature. (189) Here, “trifling, silly gossip, or anecdotes from hearsay” refers to the definition of *xiaoshuo* in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*The Book of Han*): “The school of *xiaoshuo* writings came from the petty officials of the court. They are creations by those who engaged themselves in idle talk in the streets and alleys and by those who heard gossip and rumors on the way” (Gu 26).

Sheldon Lu’s claim that *xiaoshuo* denotes “unofficial, inferior history” derives from his observation that starting from the Tang period, the *xiaoshuo* category includes fantastic stories that often present themselves as belonging to the *zhuan* 傳 (“biography”) genre, which is traditionally a historiographical genre (93-128). His contention that *xiaoshuo* was understood to be a minor philosophical discourse is based on Warring States texts, namely the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Master Zhuang*) and *Xunzi* 荀子 (*Master Xun*), that use *xiaoshuo* as a term in contrast with concepts like “the Way” (*dao* 道), “great
understanding” (dada 大達), and “wisdom” (zhi 智) (40). Though not mentioned by him, his argument can be corroborated by Hellmut Wilhem’s 1972 research on the designation of xiaoshuo in the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC). Wilhem attempts to reconstruct the type of Zhou literature that falls into the bibliographical category of xiaoshuo jia 小說家 (“the school of xiaoshuo”) as documented in the Hanshu: “The Chou titles listed under this category [The Hanshu’s xiaoshuo jia bibliographical category] are unfortunately all lost. Of some, however, fragments survive; of some, the authors are known personalities who have titles inserted in other, more strictly philosophical, sections of the bibliography” (252). He posits that these lost texts were likely “expository writings with political intent” characterized by unconventional philosophical and rhetorical practices that involve the “artistry of language”, “oratorical excellence,” and “ornate language” (252-253). He notes that his conjecture matches how the term xiaoshuo is used in the Zhuangzi and Xunzi:

It [xiaoshuo] occurs once in the Chuang-tzu and once in the Hsun-tzu. In the cases the word (說) is to be read shui, meaning ‘political advice or persuasion’ also in connection with the word (小), ‘minor or petty’; and in both cases reference is made to the adornment or embellishment of such political advice. (252)

Wilhem’s interpretation significantly differs from and is more substantiated than that of Lu Xun, as quoted above, where xiaoshuo in the Zhuangzi refers to “chit-chat of no great consequence.” Despite Wilhem’s association of xiaoshuo with philosophical and rhetorical practices, he translates xiaoshuo as “fiction” and cites Lu Xun as the basis for such translation (251), which reflects Lu Xun’s influence in confounding xiaoshuo and fiction.
The Notion of An Evolutionary Genealogy in the Study of Chinese Fiction

The importance of establishing a genealogy of fiction for China should be contextualized in the transition from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), China’s last imperial government, to China as a modern nation state at the turn of the twentieth century. Fiction was ideological and political; it was a tool to modernize and demonstrate modernity in an era of crisis when Chinese intellectuals desperately searched for a new identity for China. Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873-1929), in his seminal 1902 essay “On the Relationship between Fiction and Mass Management,” 論小說與羣治的關係 states that fiction was essential to renewing a nation’s morality, religion, politics, culture, art, mind, and character because the general population learns how to think and behave from fiction (73-81). To reform-minded and Western-educated intellectuals like Liang and Lu, fiction in the post-imperial era must serve to instill a modern mindset in the general public.

If fiction was to become a force to drive changes in a nation, fiction itself must change. A Brief History can be read as Lu’s attempt to demonstrate Chinese fiction’s ability to change and evolve. He states,

Many historians have told us that the history of mankind is evolutionary, and China naturally should be no exception. But when we look at the evolution of China we are struck by two peculiarities. One is that the old remains long after the new has appeared—in other words, retrogression. The other is that the old remains long after the new has appeared—in the other words, amalgamation. This does not mean there is no evolution, however. Only it is comparatively slow, so that

1 Liang uses xiaoshuo to denote the modern Western notion of fiction.
hotheads like myself feel that ‘one day is like three autumns.’ The same applies to literature, including fiction. For instance, today we still find dregs of the Tang and [Song] dynasties in modern writing, or even the ideas and behaviour of primitive man. In my talk I mean to ignore these dregs—popular as they still are—and try to find the trend of development in our regressive and chaotic literature. (393-394)

A Social Darwinist outlook, as visible in Lu’s description of the evolution of Chinese literature, was behind many contemporary intellectuals’ burning desire for cultural change.² The idea that China, an icon of the Orient, is slow in social and cultural progression in comparison to the West was internalized by Lu. The remnants of the old in the new and alongside the new—a universal phenomenon—are seen as a “particularity” of China. Carlos Lin points out that Lu’s construction of a Social Darwinist history of Chinese fiction is a “response to imperialism and globalization” of his time, as Darwinism was perceived to be “an illuminating perspective to envision a new Chinese culture” (637-638). Despite the inferiority he perceived in Chinese culture, Lu was hopeful: signs of evolution, albeit not obvious nor abundant, indeed exist in Chinese literary history if one pays close attention. Lu’s history of fiction describes that mythology of “primitive men” evolved into records of the supernatural and eventually consciously created fiction in different dynasties.

An account of changes over time affirms that Chinese fiction—and Chinese literature and culture by extension—can evolve and has evolved throughout history. Moreover, it establishes the latent potential for China to modernize. The technological

² See Lin 636-640 for more on the historical context of Social Darwinism and evolutionism in early twentieth century China.
and economic advancement of the West was perceived to have origin in and be intimately tied to its philosophical and literary traditions. Lu searched Chinese history for forces that would drive China’s progress and found that fiction, a symbol of modernity, is native to China and has been waiting to be transformed into the modern type all along. Moreover, Lu’s history sets up the stage for the rise of the vernacular script, which was perceived to be a major developmental achievement in Chinese culture’s evolution. Lu was an activist in the movement to vernacularize the written language, which was seen as essential to modernization. The last stage of premodern fiction’s development in *A Brief History* is late-imperial novels, which are commonly written (at least partially) in vernacular; this fits Lu’s vision of China’s evolution toward vernacularization.³

The idea of an evolutionary lineage of Chinese fiction was born amidst Chinese intellectuals’ frantic search for modernity at the turn of the 20th century but did not stop there. In fact, it remains influential in Chinese and Western academia and is generally not explicitly challenged, though it is no longer the sole methodology. John Bishop’s 1965 publication seeks the origin of a group of Ming-Qing vernacular stories known as the *sanyan* 三言 collection. The notion of evolution is visibly behind his approach as he describes narratives from the Song-Yuan (960-1368) period as “merely an intermediate form” between earlier Tang (618-907) transformation texts and later Ming-Qing (1368-1912) works (2-3). The search for an evolutionary ancestry also characterizes W. L. Idema’s 1974 study of Ming-Qing stories, though he treats the Song-Yuan texts

³ See Chapter 4 for a detailed explanation of this process.
disregarded by Bishop as “a mere intermediate form” as the origin of vernacular fiction (xv-xix).

Ming Dong Gu’s 2006 *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System* is perhaps the strongest proponent for an evolutionary view on the development of fiction in North American scholarship. In it, he attempts to comprehensively delineate the history of *xiaoshuo* from the very beginning: “I will explore how the Chinese notion of *xiaoshuo* evolved from an amorphous category in the beginning to the modern notion of fiction culminating in the maturity of *zhuanghui*-style *xiaoshuo* (the chaptered novel)” (18). He acknowledges *xiaoshuo*’s wide variety of meanings: “the word *xiaoshuo* is [. . .] a ‘catchall basket’ in the Chinese tradition, broad enough to necessitate a reconsideration of its denotations and connotations over history” (17). To make sense of *xiaoshuo*’s plethora of meanings, Gu sees them as part of an evolutionary process toward the Ming-Qing episodic novel:

I consider the chaptered novel in the Chinese tradition as the final product of an evolutionary process and as the perfected narrative form that earlier forms of narrative—myths, legends literary anecdotes, folktales, personal biographies, historical narratives, short stories, novellas, and so on—have helped to make. (18-19)

Moreover, he depicts the development of fiction in China as moving toward the eventual blossoming of “pure fiction” as embodied in the *Plum in the Golden Vase* 金瓶梅 and *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢. He defines pure fiction as “a fictional work that does not rely on previous narratives or stories for its genesis and has its narrative strength in its
own fictionality” (51); his emphasis on the independence from previous narratives should be understood in the context that premodern Chinese fiction often borrows material from history or popular story-telling, which renders the two aforementioned novels exceptional in the sense that they, for the most part, do not. He praises the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which is even more original in content than the *Plum in the Golden Vase*, as the “apotheosis of the creative drive in Chinese fictional development” (153). In a subchapter named “The Drive toward Pure Fiction,” he describes a “visible movement of Chinese *xiaoshuo* from historical narrative to pure fiction” since the Tang period (84-88). To him, late imperial novels were the result of fiction progressing toward pure fiction.

In order to justify the proposition that “Chinese fiction evolved from the early *xiaoshuo* writings” (25), Gu reinterprets the definition of *xiaoshuo* in the *Hanshu*. His retranslation of the *Hanshu*’s passage concerning *xiaoshuo* aims at proving that *xiaoshuo* had been fictional since the beginning of Chinese literary history. He argues,

Ban Gu’s remarks on *xiaoshuo* [in the *Hanshu*] constitute the earliest source for the nature of this category [*xiaoshuo*] and have been regarded as authoritative.

Unfortunately, due to the accepted opinion which does not view the early notion of *xiaoshuo* as having anything to do with the later notion, scholars have consistently overlooked its implications. A close reading of Ban Gu’s remarks, guided by a desire to overcome exegetical inertia, will reveal that he treats *xiaoshuo* as imaginative creations of some kind. Let me quote again Ban Gu’s statement on *xiaoshuo*. [Hellmut] Wilhelm’s English translation reads: ‘The trends of *Hsiao-shuo-*chia emerged from the (Board) of Petty Officials, *Pei-Kuan* (稗官). It was
created by those who picked up the gossip of the streets and the sayings of the
alleys and repeated what they had heard wherever they went 小说家者流，盖出于稗官。街谈巷语，道听途说者之所造也。’ We should note a few intriguing
but neglected points. First, the word zao, which means ‘invent’ or ‘fabricate’ in
Chinese, has exactly the same root meaning as the Latin root of the Western term
‘fiction.’ Second, the scholarly consensus that equates xiaoshuo with gossip and
rumors seems to be outcome of a reading, based on a time-honored understanding,
that did not take into account the whole context of the statement. In my opinion,
Ban Gu’s statement was incorrectly punctuated. Jietan xiangyu does not stand as
an independent phrase meaning ‘gossip and rumors,’ but serves as a modifying
phrase with the meaning of ‘street talk’ parallel to daoting tushuo. The antithetical
nature of the two phrases suggests that both are attributive phrases modifying the
noun zhe. Thus, the statement should be punctuated as: 小说家者流，盖出于稗
官。街谈巷语、道听途说者之所造也. According to this new reading, Ban Gu’s
statement should be translated as: ‘The school of xiaoshuo writings came from the
petty officials of the court. They are fabrications by those who engaged themselves
in idle talk in the streets and alleys and by those who heard gossip and rumors on
the way.’ The main difference between the traditional and new readings is that
while the former views the rise of xiaoshuo as a trend started by the petty officials
of the court, the latter attributes the origin of xiaoshuo to people in the streets who
turned idle talk and gossip into fabricated accounts. (26-27)
In this passage, “accepted opinion which does not view the early notion of *xiaoshuo* as having anything to do with the later notion” likely refers to the position held by Victor Mair and inherited by Sheldon Lu as quoted above, which distinguishes *xiaoshuo* from the Western notion of fiction. Gu argues against it by suggesting that *zao* in the *Hanshu’s* definition of *xiaoshuo* *jia* signals fabrication and similarity between the meanings of *xiaoshuo* and fiction, which validates his Lu Xun-inspired view that there is a coherent evolutionary genealogy of *xiaoshuo* throughout history in which early and late *xiaoshuo* are of the same fundamental nature.

**Lu Xun’s Influence on the Focus and Scope of Premodern Fiction Studies**

Lu Xun’s emphasis on originality and vernacular writing as developmental landmarks of Chinese fiction can be understood in the context of the search for modernity in his time. It is no coincidence that a self-consciously original novel written in vernacular language corresponds to the modern Western novel; it was from the modern Western novel that Lu acquired his vision for Chinese fiction. While it is true that some novels in late imperial time fit such criteria, the notion that the entire Chinese literary tradition was evolving toward this end-product is a gross mis-characterization and undeniably teleological; it ignores a vast landscape of material that does not neatly fit into this model of development. Ray Chow points out that literary studies of non-Western cultures are often based on the premise of “an encounter with that which is culturally superior” and must be “responsive and oriented toward the West’s imposition of itself on

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4 See Chapter 4 for more on the significance of creativity and originality in Lu Xun’s theory of fiction.
the Rest” (298-300). The expectations shaped by the modern Western novel centralize the search for originality and vernacularization in the study of Chinese fiction, which are concerns that would not have been recognized as important by premodern literary critics and readers. Chinese fiction’s close connection to (or dependence on, in a more derogatory tone) historical narratives and existent stories in the oral performative realm is something that scholars feel the need to justify and defend. Ming Dong Gu’s assertion that the forces of pure fiction were present throughout history can be seen as an attempt to fend off accusations of lack of originality. In a similar vein, Eugene Eoyang argues against John Bishop’s criticism that traditional Chinese fiction lacks originality and individuality by pointing out that the creativity of Chinese fiction is reflected in the process of re-creating oral performances.5

Moreover, A Brief History is influential in modern scholarship in the sense that it sets the scope of what can be considered fictional in Chinese history. In twenty-eight chapters, Lu Xun lists, in chronological order, types of literature throughout history that he considers to be part of the development of fiction. He does not define what he means by fiction, nor does he explain why the literature of his choice can be considered fictional. The literature documented by A Brief History is extremely diverse in nature, form, and content and includes early myths, records of the supernatural, anecdotes, pseudo-historical biographies, dramatized histories, and hagiographies of deities. Though recent scholars in North America would not go as far as including myths and

5 The debate between Eugene Eoyang and John Bishop concerning the issue of originality and creativity in traditional Chinese fiction is summarized by Carlos Lin. See Lin 632. The two publications at stake are Bishop’s “Some Limitations of Chinese Fiction” and Eoyang’s “A Taste for Apricots: Approaches to Chinese Fiction.”
hagiographies in the study of Chinese fiction, the material studied in the field are by and large those included in *A Brief History*, which raises the question as to why these texts are considered fictional in the first place. On one hand, Six Dynasties (222-589) records of the supernatural that contain authorial prefaces stressing the stories’ factuality are considered the “birth of fiction;”⁶ on the other, allegorical stories from the Warring States period (5th century BCE – 221 BCE) and Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 AD) rhapsodies that clearly contain intentional fabricated entities and events consistently have their fictionality ignored.

The Rise of Narrative Studies

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a new approach to premodern Chinese fiction emerged in North American scholarship. In Andrew Plaks’ 1977 edited volume *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, fiction is discussed as a type of narrative commensurable to history, which Plaks perceives to fall into the same “narrative spectrum” as fiction (312). While this approach is clearly influenced by Hayden White and structuralism,⁷ Plaks also looks within premodern Chinese literary criticism for a perceived commensurability between history and fiction and correctly points out that these two forms of literature were recognized as comparable in their narrative nature since at least the Ming period (1368-1644) (311-312). Nonetheless, he expresses concern

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⁶ See DeWoskin, “The Six Dynasties Chih-kuai and the Birth of Fiction.” Lena Rydholm also subscribes to this idea. See Rydholm 10.
⁷ Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges in *Narratives in Social Science Research* points out that “the contemporary study of narrative [. . .] has its origin in four national traditions: Russian formalism, US new criticism, French structuralism, and German hermeneutics.” See Czarniawska-Joerges 2.
over the usefulness of “narrative” as an umbrella term for the vast range of Chinese literature:

the question may still arise at this point as to whether all of these widely varying literary pieces should rightly fall together within a single framework of critical inquiry—that is whether all of the works brought together here under the narrative rubric are [. . .] commensurable with respect to their theoretical underpinnings.

(309)

Compared to former scholarship, Plaks’ search for a “comprehensive critical theory for dealing with the Chinese narrative corpus” (309) is a visible theoretical divergence from the genealogy-centered approach.

The extraction of narrative-ness from literature, whether fiction or history, can be seen as a structuralist activity in the sense that it dissects a quality from a structure and examines it in relation to other things. In Roland Barthes’ words, structuralism is an “activity” that “involves two typical operations: dissection and articulation”; dissection is to find in something “certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning,” like Claude Levi-Strauss’ dissection of mythemes from myths (216). Meili Steele points out that Hayden White’s analysis of historiography follows Levi-Strauss’ structuralist approach of “seek[ing] the invariant ahistorical structures” (43); the extraction of the ahistorical narrative-ness of historiography enables its comparison with fiction in narrative studies. A series of scholarship that focuses on the relationship between fiction and history in premodern China emerges in North America since Plaks’ turn to narrative studies. David Wang’s 1993 “Fictional History/Historical Fiction” studies Chinese fictions by characterizing them as historical novels and attempts to
answer the following questions: “What narrative typologies do we usually refer to as components of a historical novel?”; “How far can a historical novel transmit the message of historical actuality in the name of fiction?”; “What are the distinctions between the historical novel and historiography in the use of narrative strategy?”; “And how is a reader going to modulate his understanding of historical ‘facts’ per se, historical accounts, and historical novel in his reading process?” (64-65) He cites “recent attempts to reveal the ‘narrativity’ of historical discourse” by White and Michel Foucault as what laid the ground for his investigation of the narrative functions of fiction and history (66-67). Sheldon Lu’s *From Historicity to Fictionality* is a more comprehensive attempt to remedy the state of “conspicuously absent [. . .] critical discussions” in the study of Chinese fiction on the “generic category of narrative” (2). He explores how “narrative,” “fiction,” and “history” can be conceptualized in the context of premodern Chinese literature and documents how narratives were interpreted in premodern China. He argues that there was “a gradual change over a long period of time from an emphasis on historical authenticity and factual accuracy to the toleration and recognition of invention and fabrication in the production and reception of narrative texts” (3). Like Plaks, he perceives fiction’s meaning to be tied to the larger narrative family.

Despite the injection of ideas from narrative studies, the evolution-centered approach remains and sometimes even forms a curious synthesis with narrative studies. Martin Huang’s 1990 study traces the “line of evolution of the traditional Chinese novel [. . .] as a movement away from historiography that may be regarded as a process of dehistoricization.” (45) He claims that each novel in his study “contributes to the overall evolution of the genre [fiction]” and “generic evolution” in the history of fiction was
motivated by Chinese people’s obsession with precedents and history (45). While Huang studies fiction in relation to historiography by examining the process through which fiction deviates from the narrative characteristics of historiography, he perceives such development as a stage of evolution. This echoes Ming Dong Gu’s notion of fiction evolving toward pure fiction that does not rely on previously existent material. In fact, Gu also emphasizes the evolutionary course in which fiction breaks away from what he calls “historical inertia,” which refers to fictional narratives’ dependence on the narrative techniques of historical narratives, their tendency to adapt historical material, and fictional discourse’s lack of independence from historiographical discourse (61-66); to him, such are the conditions of fiction before the emergence of pure fiction. Embracing academia’s turn to studying fiction and historiography as two branches of narrative literature, scholars like Gu and Huang integrate the relationship between fiction and history into their evolution-centered discourse.

The understanding of the commensurability of fiction and history has led some scholars to explore the fundamental similarity between history and fiction and lack of clear distinction between the two. John Wang’s essay in Plaks’ 1977 volume argues that the narrative characteristics of the Zuozhuan 左傳 (Commentary of Zuo), one of the earliest surviving Chinese histories, have profoundly influenced the developments of later narratives, including fictional narratives; such characteristics include personality stereotypes, linear depiction of chronology, and third-person narration (3-20). This essay lays the foundation for the perceived origin of fiction’s narrative characteristics in the historiographical tradition, which sets up the stage for Gu and Huang’s aforementioned
arguments regarding fiction’s eventual break from historiography. Kenneth DeWoskin, in response to Victor Mair’s argument on the introduction of highly imaginative fictional discourse to China from India through Buddhist narratives that resulted in a “narrative revolution,” questions the boundary between such literature and historiography:

What parts of history or phases of the narrative process can we describe as factual?

What is fiction? The question arises when we recognize that no narrative record is purely factual or purely fiction [. . .] Is there any essential difference between the Chinese historian’s goal to communicate themes and that of Buddhist missionaries who introduced tales from Buddha’s life, spun fables of Karmic dispensation, and elaborated hagiographic accounts of their illustrious predecessor? If they are the importers of fiction into China, in what way did their accounts differ in intent from Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s? (32-33)

DeWoskin cites scholars like Hayden White and Northrop Frye’s discussions on the fundamental nature of all narratives, historical or fictional, as stories and plots. Following similar lines of argument, Zhang Longxi’s 2004 article states,

In our time, when positivism has lost its grip on our understanding of reality and the different ways we approach it, the rigid opposition between history and fiction collapses [. . .] Not only should we recognize the historical grounding of literary fiction, but we must also appreciate the literary value of good historical writing that can itself be read, to some extent and in some ways, as imaginative literature. (391-394)

Whereas the fundamental commensurability between history and fiction is widely accepted in current narrative studies, skepticism regarding whether there is a
distinction between history and fiction must be checked against a substantial body of scholarship in fictionality studies that seeks to explain the ontological distinction of fiction, which is the focus of Chapter 2.

Conclusion

Almost a century after his death, Lu Xun’s confounding of *xiaoshuo* and fiction, creation of a Social Darwinist approach, and establishment of the scope of what constitutes fiction in premodern Chinese history still fundamentally shape current scholarship. The following chapters seek to address and remedy the negative aspects of his influence by building an alternative theoretical framework for understanding premodern Chinese fictionality (Chapter 2), clarifying the historical relationship between *xiaoshuo* and fiction (Chapter 3), and explaining the modern Sino-Japanese ideological context behind Lu’s views (Chapter 4).

The significance of narrative studies becoming a major methodology in Chinese fiction studies is three-fold. First, narrative studies introduce new theoretical paradigms that direct scholarship away from solely relying on the evolutionary paradigm established by Lu. Although scholars who embrace methods of narrative studies have not yet explicitly denounced Lu’s evolutionary discourse, their scholarship reflects an implicit rejection. Secondly, as narrative studies encompass comprehensive theoretical frameworks on the understanding of human storytelling, they can potentially enable scholars to become aware and critical of pre-existing theoretical assumptions within Chinese studies, namely those established by Lu. Finally, bringing Chinese literature into global narrative studies de-marginalizes it from its regional niche and renders its
scholarly practices more open to critical scrutiny by scholars of other fields. As Western literary studies integrate into global narrative studies, the theoretical flaws that result from Western-centric thinking become more apparent due to the exposure to criticism from scholars of non-Western regions. It is my hope that the methods of Chinese fiction studies will be more refined as scholars acquire enhanced theoretical thinking skills via being engaged in narrative studies. In the next chapter, we will explore how current narrative theories can build a theoretical framework to understand fictionality in Chinese literary history.
Chapter 2

Culture-less Theories of Fictionality and Culture-Bound Literary Scholarship:

Toward an Applicable Theory of Fictionality for Non-Western and Premodern Literary Scholarship

Introduction

In Western scholarship, fictionality is often discussed as an entity without culture. By “fictionality,” I am referring to a set of qualities that render an entity or discourse fictional; the nature of such qualities is highly controversial and the subject of continuous studies in narrative theories. Albeit scholars attach cultures to conceptual categories like “fiction” or “theories of fiction” (e.g. French fiction, Japanese theories of fiction), fictionality itself is not described as culture-specific, though not explicitly proclaimed to be uniform across cultures either. When scholars of fictionality hold culture-specific examples to advance their theories of fictionality, like John Searle’s example of the British novel The Red and the Green in “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse,” the examples serve as illustrations that the validity of the theories can be demonstrated in particular cases, not to argue that there are cultural constraints to the theories (61-63). In Searle’s case, he does not even clarify that the examples he gives are drawn from British and American literature; to him, the examples are just pieces of general human literature. Like narratologists, who have been accused of Western-centrism for trying to develop universal theories while focusing solely on Western literature, it is common for scholars

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8 See Ruth E. Page, Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology, p.32, Biwu Shang, “Toward a Comparative Narratology: A Chinese Perspective,” and Michael
of fictionality to disregard cultural specificity while predominately analyzing Western literature.

Focusing on the universal rather than the culturally specific is not inherently wrong. As human perspectives are limited, we often must choose between the benefits and shortcomings of micro- and macro-level analyses. My goal is not to merely criticize theories of fictionality for being insensitive to cultural specificity and non-Western cultures. Rather, it is to propose a culturally sensitive approach to solve a critical, almost crippling, theoretical bottleneck in the study of fictionality where theories of fictionality are formulated to be culture-less, but the communication of fictionality requires culture-specific communicative contexts. In this chapter, I will reinvent the contextualist theory of fictionality by allowing for the accommodation of cultural specificity; moreover, I will argue that my theory can free scholarship on premodern Chinese fiction from the teleological tendency of imposing expectations set by the modern Western novel onto the study of premodern literature—a prominent characteristic of Lu Xun-inspired scholarship.

Theories of Fictionality: Formalist and Contextualist Interpretations of Fictionality

As Paul Dawson articulates, theorists of fictionality can be divided into two camps: formalists and contextualists (77). In summary, formalists study fictionality as

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Watson, “Theories of Narrative and Their Application to the Study of Heike monogatari” in *Observing Japan from Within*, edited by James Baxter.
qualities found within the fictional narrative, whereas contextualists regard it as qualities found in the external communicative context of the narrative. Simona Zetterberg Gjerlevsen points out that the contrast between these two approaches has its origin in the philosophy of language, where a context-independent semantic approach that focuses on what is internal to the utterance contends with a context-dependent, speaker-centric pragmatic approach that emphasizes the external context of the communication (“Fictionality”). In the formalist camp, Dorrit Cohn’s seminal “Signposts of Fictionality: A Narratological Perspective” and The Distinction of Fiction identify textual features and narratological qualities (“signposts” in her words) that signify fictionality and are unique to fiction. Cohn points out three signposts of fictionality: the bilateral relationship between story and discourse,\(^9\) a high degree of freedom in focalization,\(^10\) and a special author-narrator relationship (The Distinction of Fiction, 109-131). All three signposts are to be understood in relation to the narratological characteristics of historiography. In historiography, the story and discourse are expected to be in accordance with historical records and past reality. In fiction, the trilateral relationship among story, discourse, and past reality (or records of it) is not found; instead, there is only a bilateral relationship between story and discourse because fiction does not need to reflect external or past reality. This is the first signpost. The second signpost concerns the idea that fiction can present the story from perspectives that are impossible in factual narratives and not usable by historians. For instance, a fictional narrator can be an inanimate object who

\(^9\) Story refers to the actual events; discourse is the representation of the events in narrative.

\(^10\) Focalization is the perspective from which the narrated situations and events are presented. Gerald Prince, Handbook of Narratology, 31.
tells stories while being handled by humans; it can also freely move from a subjective first-person narration to presenting the story from the perspective of an omniscient observer. In factual narratives, the narrator does not usually have such freedom. In the third signpost, a special author-narrator relationship refers to the idea that in fiction, the author and narrator can be different entities, whereas those in nonfictional narratives tend to be the same. In *Fiction and Diction*, Gerard Genette disregards Cohn’s signposts by arguing that although some textual features and narratological techniques are more common in fiction than non-fiction, there is no intra-textual feature that is exclusive to fiction and can define fiction since all three of Cohn’s signposts can be found outside fiction (66-68). Nowadays, narratologists generally accept that there is no narratological feature that is exclusive to and can define fiction. (Note that all these inquiries and conclusions were largely made without consideration of non-Western languages and literature.)

Whereas Cohn focuses on narratological textual features, Kate Hamburger and Ann Banfield seek fictionality in the syntactic characteristics of fictional language (i.e. European languages). Both Hamburger and Banfield assert that fictional narratives can be defined by a unique set of syntactic traits that are absent in factual narratives. Hamburger identifies several linguistic phenomena common in third-person fictional narratives but impossible in real life or factual narratives (59-231). Fictional works often present third-person entities’ inner thoughts and emotions as if the entities are first-person entities. The sentence “Mary visualizes a broken glass house in her mind and feels compelled to exclaim in sorrow” presents a third-person entity’s internal activities as if the narrator is
speaking in first-person as Mary. This method of narration is called free indirect speech in narratology. Moreover, Hamburger points out the uniqueness of fictional language’s handling of temporality and space. In fictional language, temporal and spatial deictics do not have to follow the rules of conventional utterance. For example, it is not necessarily ungrammatical for fictional language to use past tense to describe events happening at the moment of narration. Hamburger notes that the preterite is atemporal in fiction and does not indicate pastness in relation to the moment of utterance. Similarly, spatial deictics like “here” or “there” are merely symbols in fictional language because they do not denote orientation in space as they would in non-fictional speech (59-133). Like Hamburger, Banfield attempts to develop a linguistic theory of fictional language. In *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction*, she posits that fictional narratives contain two types of sentences that are fiction-specific: pure narration and represented speech and thought (65-182). She offers a “grammatical definition” for the novel as a genre:

The specific innovation of novelistic style is to have suppressed the first person and, in the process, to have discovered in the linguistic repertoire a third person pronoun which is not an anaphor but what I have called an “E-level deictic.” This discovery permits the language of the novel to overturn the monopoly of the first person and to orchestrate within the confines of a single Text the “shift in point of view,” a traditional notion a linguistic-based theory of the novel can give formal content to. It is the possibility of shifts in points of view within a single Text which sets the novel and the short story apart from other genres [...] (“A Grammatical Definition,” 82)
Banfield’s theory focuses on the special grammatical rules that govern third-person narration in fiction, which allows the narration to have more freedom in shifting its point of view than conventional utterance; to her, such rules are what render fictional language distinct. A challenge facing the syntactic approach, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer points out, is that it can only address certain kinds of fictional narratives, namely internally focalized heterodiegetic narration in the third person (“Fictional vs. Factual Narration”); even Banfield admits that not all novels can be described with her characterization as discussed above (“A Grammatical Definition,” 82). Like the narratological approach of Cohn, Banfield and Hamburger’s syntactic approach cannot find universal defining formal features for all types of fiction, which leads to the contextualist premise that fictionality is not a set of formal features, as will be explained below.

In addition to the aforementioned narratological and linguistic approaches, another way to understand fictionality as qualities internal to fictional discourse in the formalist camp is to view fiction as non-referential language. Let us imagine that the sentence “there is a big lion” can be found both in a fictional narrative and a non-fictional one. When it is in a news report, “big lion” refers to an entity in real life and has a referential target in our universe. When the sentence is in a work of fiction, “big lion” is non-referential in the sense that it either refers to a non-existent entity or one that exists in a fictional world that is not our world. Non-referentiality as a defining feature of fiction was conceptualized in as early as the nineteenth century by the German philosopher Gottlob Frege (“On Sense and Reference”) and further argued by Bertrand Russell at the turn of the 20th century (“On Denoting”). By mid-1970s, philosophers influenced by Leibniz’s philosophy and the possible worlds theory in formal semantics developed the
possible worlds theory for fictionality to discuss the referentiality of fictional language. As Marie-Laure Ryan explains, “the foundation of PW [possible worlds] theory is the idea that reality—conceived as the sum of the imaginable rather than as the sum of what exists physically—is a universe composed of a plurality of distinct worlds” (“Possible Worlds”). In this theory, fictional works produce their own worlds and their language refers to entities in their worlds. For example, in a novel about Hilary Clinton winning the 2016 election, the name “Hilary Clinton” refers to an entity in the fictional world created by the novel rather than the one in our world. The language is rendered fictional by the fact that the targets of the references do not exist in our world. This theory is especially useful when addressing the ontological difference between historical novels and historiography. Imagine a historical novel and a historical record that both describe events of the Second World War accurately. How are these two texts different in ontological status as they both describe the same events and entities? According to the possible worlds theory, the novel’s fictional status is signified by the fact that the entities and events described in it refer to those in its own fictional world, which is separate from our world. This line of argument refutes the common postmodernist notion that there is no fundamental difference between fictional and factual narratives.

The contextualist approach focuses on elements of communication that are external to the speech or text. In his seminal 1979 “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse,” John Searle invokes a paradox in the philosophy of language to illustrate the difficulty of seeking fictionality within the discourse:
We might put the problem [of fictional discourse] in the form of a paradox: how can it be both the case that words and other elements in a fictional story have their ordinary meanings and yet the rules that attach to those words and other elements and determine their meanings are not complied with: how can it be the case in “Little Red Riding Hood” both that “red” means red and yet that the rules correlating “red” with red are not in force? (58)

Searle is perplexed by the possibility that fictional discourse can make assertions in language, like “the hood is red,” but not be held accountable to linguistic rules that normally govern assertions; examples of such rules include “the maker of an assertion commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition” and “the speaker must be in a position to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition.” If I make the assertion that “there is a bus outside” in a non-fictional context, I am either committed to the truth that there is a bus outside and can defend my assertion or lying. However, when the author of a novel makes the same assertion, she is neither committed to the truth of the assertion nor able to defend her assertion with evidence; but unlike in my case, she is not lying even if she can do neither. In this sense, she and I are using exactly the same words, in the same language, and in the same order, but are governed by different linguistic rules. How can this be the case? Searle suggests that this is because the utterer of a fictional statement is only pretending to make the statement: “to pretend to do or be something is to engage in a performance which is as if one were doing or being the thing and is without any intent to deceive”(65). He states that since pretense is intentional, the “identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of
necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author”; moreover, he emphasizes that “there is no textual property, syntactical or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction” (65). Searle perceives the defining features of fictionality to be located outside the fictional discourse and in communicative intention; the linguistic rules of the discourse can be broken by external “conventions” of fiction, which “enable the speaker to use words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by those meanings” (66-67).

The notions of fictional conventions and communicative intention are picked up by Meir Sternberg about a decade later in his inquiry into the ontological status of the Bible:

Intention no longer figures as a psychological state consciously or unconsciously translated into words. Rather, it is a shorthand for the structure of meaning and effect supported by the conventions that the text appeals to or devises: for the sense that language makes in terms of the communicative context as a whole. (9)

Sternberg argues that debates on the Bible’s generic status as fiction or history must take into account its communicative context and textual conventions. A text’s communicative context refers to the understanding of it facilitated by literary and generic conventions at the time of its production and in its culture; textual conventions refer to the visible qualities of a text that suggest what kind of literary conventions it is following and appealing to. When an author tries to communicate with the reader via a text, he assumes that the reader understands a certain set of literary conventions that she is appealing to (Sternberg 1-41). For example, when a twenty-first century American historian writes a
history, she inserts footnotes and includes a bibliography, which are contemporary North American textual conventions of history-writing. She expects the readers to understand that by following the conventions of history-writing, she is implying that her book is intended to be a record of what really happened in the past rather than an imaginative account because this is what history as genre entails at the time of the text’s production in North America; such understanding is the communicative context of the history genre in twenty-first century North America. To Sternberg, when considering whether a text is fictional or historical, it is essential to reconstruct the communicative context of its production to understand what textual conventions the author adheres to. The reconstruction of a historical communicative context allows us to see a text through the eyes of a contemporary reader. Authorial intention is communicated via the adherence to or defiance of conventions in a given communicative context.

In recent years, the most comprehensive contextualist approach in English language scholarship is provided by Richard Walsh, who advocates for a rhetorical understanding of fictionality. In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Walsh states that fiction has no “exclusive formal distinction”; the defining features of fictionality reside in “the recognizably distinct rhetorical set invoked by a way of using a language” (15). He asserts that fictionality is rhetorical in the sense that it makes a “special kind of appeal to the receiver's interpretative mindset” (15). In daily conversations, it is common for us to switch in and out of the fictional mode of communication. For example, when I talk about stories of my childhood, I can insert some fictional stories of my childish imagination and the listener would be able to understand which portions of my narrative
are fictional with relative ease because the human mind is equipped with the ability to
distinguish the fictional mode of communication, which is why we often do not need a
book or video to be explicitly labeled as fiction to know that it is fictional. The lack of
formal features that enable the recognition of fictionality explains why it can be
recognized across genres and media; a novel and a chorographical performance of a
fictional story have no common formal features but can both be understood as fictional.
To explain why fictional communication can be recognized, Walsh invokes a theory in
communication studies: “inference is not a supplementary component of communication
but its core; human communication is ostensively inferential” (23). To Walsh, fictionality
is inferred from the context of communication.

“Ten Theses About Fictionality,” which Walsh co-authored with Henrik Skov
Nielsen and James Phelan, lays out a vision for how fictionality is to be studied as a
rhetorical strategy. Walsh sees fiction as a ubiquitous mode of human communication.
Whereas past studies of fictionality mainly focus on the novel, Walsh et al. regard the
novel as one of many possible manifestations of the fictional mode of communication.
The components of a communicative context that allow the recognition of fictionality are
explained:

A sender can signal fictive intent in various ways: paratextually (Atonement: A
Novel), metatextually (“Consider this scenario”), through certain uses of the
affordances of the medium (in speech, significant changes in one’s tone of voice),
as well as through foregrounded violations of the conventions of nonfictive
discourse. (“Ten Theses About Fictionality,” 65)
The communication of “fictive intention” through these signals is reminiscent of Sternberg’s notion of literary conventions that facilitate the recognition of authorial intention regarding the work’s fictional or historical status. Like Searle, Walsh et al. emphasize the communicative intention:

In fictive as well as nonfictive discourse there is a communicative agent who intends to speak fictively, nonfictively, or to blur the line between the fictive and the nonfictive status of her discourse. In other words, communicative agency and intention are more significant than any a priori divide between fiction and nonfiction based solely on textual features. (“Ten Theses About Fictionality,” 64)

I would like to point out that there is no theoretical inconsistency in locating fictionality in both communicative intention and signals/conventions that suggest fictionality because intention is manifested through communicative signals and conventions; without such manifestation, intention cannot be conveyed or understood.

Paul Dawson’s “Ten Theses Against Fictionality” is a criticism of “Ten Theses about Fictionality” and Walsh’s *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*. In it, Dawson argues that Walsh’s usage of “fictionality” encompasses too many things for the concept to be clear, precise, and meaningful:

In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Walsh seeks to bypass the logical questions of reference and the philosophical issue of truth by focusing on the use of fictionality, but in doing so does not proffer a clear sense of what it actually is. According to Walsh, fictionality ought to be seen as both “a rhetorical resource” and a “contextual assumption” rather than an “ontological category.” But he also argues
that “it is the quality of fictionality rather than the genre of fiction” that provides for the “theoretical integrity” of the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. So fictionality is a resource, an assumption, and a quality. The problem here stems from asking the word fictionality to perform too many different functions. (82)

Walsh’s inability to provide a clear definition of fictionality in both The Rhetoric of Fictionality and “Ten Theses About Fictionality” is indeed a problem. I understand Dawson’s frustration from firsthand experience as someone who deeply admires Walsh’s theory and read through his works only to realize that he cannot clearly define “fictionality.” In a published response to Dawson’s criticism, Walsh offers no resolution to this conceptual vagueness and claims that the several seemingly disparate usages of “fictionality” in his works “are actually related to each other in clear and distinct ways, and do important work in our characterization of the uses of fictionality in fiction and nonfiction” (Walsh et al. “A Response to Paul Dawson,” 105). This inability to precisely characterize what constitutes fictionality is the theoretical bottleneck I wish to discuss and attempt to resolve.

The Theoretical Bottleneck in Fictionality Studies: Problem and Solution

Amongst all the theories of fictionality that I have introduced, I find the possible worlds theory to be the most logically sound way of giving a precise definition to “fictionality,” at least for verbal fiction. Fictionality is the usage of language whose targets of references are entities and events that exist in fabricated worlds separate from our own; such usage of language is what renders something fictional, which is
fictionality. I recognize that fiction can be understood to be non-verbal (e.g. painting, choreography, video game); I cannot address non-verbal fiction, an issue very new to the study of fictionality, due to increased theoretical complication beyond my and most scholars of fictionality’s expertise. Although logically sound and precise, the possible worlds theory resolves philosophical and ontological concerns, as it is formulated by philosophers, but does not advance conversations on fictionality in literary scholarship. For the purpose of literary scholarship or Chinese studies, it is not very meaningful to illustrate how the name “Cao Cao” 曹操 (155-220) in the *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) refers to the character Cao Cao in the fictional world the novel creates rather than the historical Cao Cao in our world. It is not enough that we have a definition and theory of fictionality that are philosophically sound; literary scholars need a theory and definition of fictionality suited for literary analysis.

The difficulty of applying theories of fictionality to literary scholarship is that while the theories are formulated to be culture-less, albeit built upon analysis of Western languages and literature, real life literary scholarship is culturally confined and particularized to area studies. This problem is beyond concerns of cultural inclusivity, as it has caused a serious theoretical bottleneck in theories of fictionality. Let us recall the contextualist premise that fictionality resides in communicative contexts and conventions in conjunction with Walsh’s inability to precisely characterize fictionality. When we consider these two issues together, the problem appears to be that what conveys fictionality is culture-dependent and varies across communicative contexts, which reflects the contextualist approach’s nature as a context-dependent approach (as opposed to the
context-independent formalist approach). **The context is cultural and culture-dependent.** The precise characterization of fictionality that eludes Walsh should be built upon analyses of particular cultures derived from the expertise of area studies scholars. The communicative context and conventions that signal fictionality in eleventh century Chinese literature are different from those in modern European literature; even within the same civilization, communicative contexts and conventions change throughout history. For literary scholars, it is more useful to define the qualities that convey fictionality within a certain culture, which may or may not uncover signals of fictionality that are cross-cultural, persistent in time, and universal.

For example, the modern Western notion of fiction fundamentally conceptualizes it as a distinct art form with a special creative license that entails the willful forfeiting of truth claims, which is a culture-specific interpretation of the fictional mode of communication that did not exist in premodern China. In premodern China, apparently and/or intentionally fabricated narratives created solely for the sake of art did not exist as an ontological category. Moreover, the forfeiting of truth claims was not seen as a central quality of fictional narratives, which is evident in the constant and common criticism regarding fiction’s lack of adherence to historical facts throughout premodern history, including the late imperial period. Although both premodern China and the modern West demonstrate the ability to produce fictional narratives, qualities that communicate a narrative’s fictional nature differ; whereas the invocation of the aforementioned creative license for the sake of art enables modern Western readers to recognize something as fictional, what signaled fictionality to premodern Chinese people could be an author or
performer’s apparent and morally dubious intention to prioritize entertainment and sensationalism over the obligation to convey historical facts, which potentially opened him or her up to criticism along the lines of Confucian ethics. I would argue that in premodern China, the defining feature of a fictional narrative form, such as the episodic novel or *zaju* 雜劇 theater, was not the act of fabrication itself but the narrative form and genre (e.g. oral storytelling, musical storytelling, regional theater, puppetry, shadow play), whereas the modern Western notion of fiction requires the fabrication itself to be the defining feature of fiction as an art form. In premodern China, allowance for fabrication is merely a morally dubious aspect of certain narrative forms, not the defining feature of a particular art. This explains why the same narrative genre could encompass both largely accurate historical accounts and complete fabrications. A fictional narrative form or genre in the context of premodern China can perhaps be more accurately described as one that was widely recognized to likely contain fabrication and/or allow or tolerate a certain extent of fabrication, though fabrication itself was not necessarily seen as its defining feature. In premodern Chinese, there is no word to designate an art form principally defined by fabrication or the creative license to fabricate because this particular articulation of the idea of fiction is culturally specific and particular to the modern West; it was introduced to non-Western civilizations through colonialism and imperialism and something that non-Western cultures had to learn to adopt as part of the modernizing process. In Chapter 4, we will discuss how the meaning of *xiaoshuo* was transformed in modern times to emulate the Western and Japanese models of literary modernity.
Despite some shortcomings, I would argue that the contextualist approach is better suited for culture-bound literary scholarship than the formalist approach. In the formalist camp, the narratological attempt to find qualities that are unique to fictional narratives is already recognized as a dead-end in narratology, which leaves us with the syntactic approach and the possible worlds theory. The possible worlds theory, as well as the broader notion that fiction is non-referential language, is philosophically valid but has very limited application in literary analysis and area studies, as it cannot account for cultures; it also suffers from the fact that most literary scholars are not trained to engage in complex philosophical discourse required to apply this theory. The syntactic approach is built upon European languages and may or may not be meaningful for non-European languages. The application of this approach requires training in linguistics, which can alienate literary scholars who are not also linguists. Unlike the possible worlds theory and the syntactic approach, the contextualist methods as practiced by Sternberg and Walsh do not demand intensive training in another field of study and can address cultural specificity when improved, which is essential to literary scholarship. The contextualist approach also has the benefit of potentially being versatile enough to address fictionality in non-verbal fiction.

What is Fiction?

Despite different ways of communicating fictionality across cultures, I believe there can be a culture-independent definition of fiction. **Fiction is a mode of communication characterized by intentional and/or apparent fabrication.** A novel is
a written fiction of a substantial length. Such is how I use these two terms in this dissertation; I do not use them interchangeably with xiaoshuo. My definition of fiction is based on the insights offered by the contextualist camp and reflects its concerns with intentionality and communicative contexts. Most people can agree that fiction entails fabrication; what sets fiction apart from non-fiction that contains fabrication, like inaccurate history or fake news, is that fabrication in fiction is apparent or intentional, often both. “Intention” here refers to Sternberg’s notion of authorial intention communicated via adherence to or defiance of conventions in a given communicative context. For example, the Ming-Qing communicative context dictates that the episodic novel is a fictional genre; an author’s choice to write in that style communicates his or her intention to fabricate. A text’s defiance of the conventions of a factual genre can also be potentially interpreted as intention to fabricate. Of course, explicitly communicated fictional intention can also satisfy the criterium of intentionality. Since fictional intention is not merely an invisible psychological process but communicated via concrete discernable features, it should be apparent to others within the same communicative context barring extraordinary circumstances. I made “apparent” optional to accommodate rare cases where the author, perhaps a creative genius ahead of his or her time, does not communicate fictionality in culturally recognizable ways but have somehow asserted fictional intention otherwise.

It is important that fiction itself has a fixed definition because otherwise, the study of fictionality descends into complete structural and theoretical chaos. Scholars of fictionality study what makes something fiction; it is very difficult to discuss what makes
something A if we do not even know what A is. My assertion is that while fiction can be a uniform concept applicable cross-culturally, what signals fictionality is culture-dependent. The universal application of the definition of fiction does not imply that all cultures understand fabricated narratives in the same way. Such application merely accepts the Walshian premise that the fictional mode of communication is universal and transmedia; how this mode of communication is understood and deployed is a separate matter and unique to each culture. Whereas the ontological categorization of apparently fabricated narratives into one distinct artistic or literary genre (i.e. the novel) is a culture-specific practice of modern Europe and cultures influenced by modern Europe, the communication of the intentionally and apparently fabricated is an innate ability of the human mind and not culture-specific. In my view, the study of premodern Chinese fiction should be conceptualized as the study of the fictional mode of communication in premodern Chinese culture, as manifested in literary, oral, and performative media, which can account for the fact that traditional Chinese novels existed in a creative space at the intersection of literature and oral and performative story cycles.

My definition of fiction creates a different landscape for the study of premodern Chinese fiction. The current scope of the field, largely set by Lu Xun, focuses on written genres that fall into the xiaoshuo category and/or concern subject matters deemed imaginative or supernatural by the modern reader. Kenneth DeWoskin’s aforementioned notion of Six Dynasties zhiguai being the origin of Chinese fiction in Chapter 1 is likely based on the assumption that fiction is a written genre defined by its concern with the nonexistent. This is likely due to the confounding of “fiction” with “novel.” In my view
inspired by Walshian theories, fiction is a mode of communication in which a written
genre defined by fabrication is merely a possibility, not a requirement. If we look for
apparent and/or intentional fabrication in Chinese literary history, the Six Dynasties are
by no means even close to the earliest instance. DeWoskin’s argument presumes that
fiction only comes into existence when it becomes its own written genre, which imposes
a modern Western interpretation of the fictional mode of communication onto premodern
cultures. This mentality would become especially problematic when dealing with non-
literate or pre-literate cultures, as it is Western-centric and cannot account for the wide
range of communicative possibilities in the human race. Beginning in the Zhou period,
philosophical discourse regularly entailed anecdotes intentionally fabricated to convey an
argument; the fabricated nature of such anecdotes was apparent to contemporary
audiences. Since the formative period of the Chinese literary tradition, fiction has been a
vital part of communication, even though it will not become a literary genre until much
later. Conceptually separating fiction and written genre is compatible with a theoretical
framework in which fiction is universal, but its manifestation is culture-specific.
Identifying fiction solely as a written genre is Western-centric and modern-centric as the
expectation is built upon the novel, which excludes civilizations around the world and
across time from the possibility of having fiction. This problematic perception also leads
one down the slippery hill of teleological literary historiography, where the study of
premodern fiction is centered around searching for qualities that define the modern
novel—a prominent characteristic of Lu Xun-inspired scholarship. We will discuss the
rationale and ideological agenda behind Lu Xun’s views in Chapter 4.
Conclusion

The definitions of fiction and fictionality proposed in this chapter provide an alternative theoretical framework to one founded by Lu Xun. Through it, I seek to liberate scholarship on premodern fiction from expectations built upon the modern Western novel. It also challenges the scope of premodern Chinese fiction studies set by Lu Xun based on an ideologically motivated and unjustifiable view on what constitutes fiction. Moreover, establishing the universality of fiction and cultural specificity of fictionality is significant vastly beyond the study of premodern Chinese fiction; it addresses narrative studies’ tendency of attempting to build a universal discourse based on what is predominately applicable to Western, especially modern Western, civilizations. This chapter lays the foundation for clarifying the relationship between xiaoshuo and fiction in the next chapter. A clear definition of fiction is the first step toward resolving the problematic tangling of the concepts of xiaoshuo and fiction in modern scholarship.
Chapter 3

Understanding Xiaoshuo From Warring States to Late Imperial China with the Aid of Digital Tools

Introduction

In their study on mind-body relationship in ancient China through textual big data, Edward Slingerland et al. point out that scholarly understanding of the relationship is misshapen by over-emphasis on the *Mengzi*’s 孟子 (*Master Meng*) explicit definition of it rather than how it is implicitly described in a large number of early texts. They argue that to draw conclusions from a few explicit definitions in famous texts is to “mistake an explicit claim for a background assumption.” In the case of the *Mengzi*, the text is “making an argument, which he [the author] no doubt expects to be surprising or counterintuitive,” which should not be conflated with an indication of how this issue is understood by the general public (990). To demonstrate how the *Mengzi*’s explicit definition differs from general understanding, Slingerland et al. use a combination of word collocation, hierarchical clustering, and topic modeling to analyze the relationship between *xin* 心 (“mind”) and *ti* 體 (“body”) in 96 texts totalling 5.7 million characters from Donald Sturgeon’s Chinese Text Project (988), which reveals that these two terms are usually used in conceptual opposition, contradicting the *Mengzi*’s claim that they are a unity.

As discussed in Chapter 1, existing scholarship generally focuses on explicit definitions in famous early texts (pre-Qin and Qin-Han) to understand the meanings of
This is problematic because *xiaoshuo* acquired different meanings throughout history; relying on philosopher or historian-bibliographers’ words on the meaning of *xiaoshuo* is also concerning because their primary consideration is *xiaoshuo* as a rhetorical or bibliographical concept, which differs from its usage in other contexts. Moreover, as in the case of the *Mengzi* mentioned above, those who offer explicit definitions of *xiaoshuo* are likely making an argument about its nature and status, which may not reflect general understanding.

When we seek to understand how a common term is understood and used throughout history, which is an essential aspect of literary and historical scholarship, the sheer quantity of its usage poses an immense challenge for human reading, as it is difficult to virtually impossible to locate all cases of usage without digital help. Due to the availability of a large quantity of digitized text, it is now possible to detect the usage of *xiaoshuo* throughout ages from a wide variety of literature, which can remedy our bias built upon a small number of explicit definitions.

In *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History*, Matthew Jockers points out that the abundance of digitized texts in the humanities is comparable to the big data revolution in the sciences and social sciences, as “massive data sets are allowing for investigations at a scale that reaches or approaches a point of being comprehensive,” which alleviates problems associated with observations based on small sample sizes (7). In this chapter, I study the meanings of *xiaoshuo* throughout premodern Chinese history and its relationship with fiction with the aid of digital tools, which alleviates the potential

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11 See Chapter 1’s discussion of Ming Dong Gu, Sheldon Lu, and Luo Yuming.
biases derived from focusing on a handful of famous texts by allowing the machine to
find usages of *xiaoshuo* without making assumptions about what texts are more
important.\(^{12}\) I found that whereas *xiaoshuo* could denote fiction since as early as the Tang
Dynasty (618-907), fiction will not become a dominant aspect of its significations until
the late imperial era, especially the Qing Dynasty. Moreover, the meanings of *xiaoshuo*
had accumulated since the Warring States period; as it developed new meanings
throughout the ages, its older meanings did not fall into obscurity or disuse, which
renders its nature and definitions more and more complex as time progresses.

**Chronological Database of Chinese Literature (CDCL)**

In this chapter, my research on primary sources relies on performing keyword
searches in Donald Sturgeon’s Chinese Text Project and the Chronological Database of
Chinese Literature (CDCL); moreover, I performed collocation analysis on the Song,
Yuan, Ming, and Qing corpuses of the CDCL. I created the CDCL, which is a fully
machine-accessible digital database that consists of almost 2,000 titles from the Three
Kingdoms period (220-280) to the Republican era (1912-1949). The premodern part of
the CDCL, which excludes texts from the Republican period, contains 1,865 titles
(totalling 154,711,312 characters) sourced from my scraping of Wikisource and Paul

\(^{12}\) It is important to note that although the machine does not make assumptions about
what texts are more important in a corpus, the constitution of the corpus can reflect
human biases regarding what is important and what to include in the corpus. In my case,
what I included in the corpus is largely based on what is available in a digitized format,
which reflects the human biases of those who decide to prioritize the digitization of
certain texts.
Vierthaler’s digital *Siku quanshu* collection. All texts in the CDCL are plain text files that are not formatted for human reading but are suitable for computational processing.

The CDCL collection is built based on the catalogue of the *Guoxue baodian* wangluo ban 国学寶典網絡版 (“Treasured Index of Chinese Studies, Internet Edition,” hereafter the Treasured Index), the largest online digital library of premodern Chinese texts that encompasses the Zhou period through the Qing Dynasty. 13 In addition to texts that fall into the *jing* 經 (“classics”), *shi* 史 (“history”), *zi* 子 (“philosophy”), and *ji* 集 (“collection”) categories, the Treasured Index includes content that cannot be characterized by these four traditional divisions, such as novels and dramas. In total, the Treasured Index contains 6,003 titles, out of which more than 5,800 are from the Three Kingdoms through the Qing period. 14 The CDCL represents about 32 per cent of the Treasured Index collection from the Three Kingdoms era through the Qing period.

Although the Treasured Index is one of the most comprehensive online collections of premodern Chinese texts and highly representative of the entire extant traditional literary tradition, it is not in plain text and cannot be freely used for computational analysis, which necessitates the creation of the CDCL. I did not include pre-imperial and early imperial material in the CDCL because Donald Sturgeon’s Chinese Text Project covers this period to a highly comprehensive extent.

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13 See http://www.guoxue.com/cp/gxbd_ml01.htm for a comprehensive catalogue of the Treasured Index.

14 The Treasured Index does not provide statistics on its holdings based on time periods. “More than 5,800” is based on my manual counting.
Whereas the Treasured Index cannot sort content by time periods, one of the CDCL’s key features is the chronological arrangement of its texts. All texts in the CDCL are categorized by the dynasty of origin, which enables synchronic and diachronic analysis. Each text’s dynasty of origin is determined in accordance with information provided by the Treasured Index catalogue.\textsuperscript{15} In cases where a dynasty is divided into two segments, like the Northern (960-1127) and Southern Song (1127-1279), the sorting is based on my own research, as the Treasured Index catalogue does not always acknowledge chronological divisions within a dynasty.\textsuperscript{16} To ensure the accuracy of analysis based on historical periodization, I have, to the best of my abilities, manually deleted parts of texts that were written in another period, such as a preface or postface composed in a later dynasty; this is to prevent texts categorized in a dynasty to include content from another period. Though it can be used for a variety of purposes, the primary intended function of the CDCL is the study of the development of literary and linguistic properties across different eras. For this dissertation, the CDCL is used to study the meanings of xiaoshuo throughout history. Currently, the CDCL does not have

\textsuperscript{15} Although the Treasured Index does not have mechanisms to sort texts based on the dynasty of origin, it provides a catalogue that indicates each text’s dynasty of origin. I used this catalogue to sort the texts in the CDCL into different dynasties. See the catalogue here: http://www.guoxue.com/cp/gxbd_ml01.htm.

\textsuperscript{16} The vast majority of texts that require me to sort into sub-dynasties are those from the Song dynasty. Fortunately, I am very familiar with Song literature and history during the Northern-to-Southern transition, so I was able to sort them into Northern and Southern Song with relative ease. Texts that cannot be determined to be either Northern or Southern Song are kept in a separate category. I wanted to distinguish Northern and Southern Song texts because these two periods saw important changes in literary culture, especially in the realm of popular and vernacular literature; the ability to distinguish these periods can be critical in literary studies.
mechanisms to sort texts based on non-chronological criteria, such as by bibliographical category or author.

The following section provides a detailed break-down of the CDCL catalogue.

**By Dynasty**

Three Kingdoms: 7 titles

Western Jin: 9 titles

Eastern Jin: 13 titles

Southern and Northern Dynasties: 23 titles

Sui: 2 titles

Tang: 165 titles

Five Dynasties: 18 titles

Northern Song: 201 titles

Southern Song: 266 titles

Yuan: 251 titles

Ming: 378 titles

Qing: 481 titles
Proportion of Each Bibliographical Category\textsuperscript{17} in Title Count\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Jing}: 5.2\% of all titles

\textit{Shi}: 7.8\% of all titles

\textit{Zi} (Confucian and Daoist): 2.5\% of all titles

\textit{Ji}: 13.7\% of all titles

\textit{Biji} 筆記 ("brush notes"): 45.5\% of all titles

\textit{Wenlun} 文論 ("literary discourse"): 8.7\% of all titles

\textit{Xiqu} 戲曲 ("theater and tunes"): 8.9\% of all titles

\textit{Xiaoshuo} (vernacular and classical language): 7.7\% of all titles

Proportion by Character Count\textsuperscript{19}

Pre-Tang: 6,466,320 characters; 4.2\% of all characters

Tang: 9,470,301 characters; 6.1\% of all characters

Five Dynasties and Song-Yuan: 50,366,521 characters; 32.6\% of all characters

Ming: 24,654,026 characters; 15.9\% of all characters

Qing: 63,754,149 characters; 41.2\% of all characters

\textsuperscript{17} The bibliographical sorting and naming of the bibliographical categories are in accordance with the Treasured Index catalogue (http://www.guoxue.com/cp/gxbd_ml01.htm) and does not represent my personal views. The titles categorized to be \textit{xiaoshuo} are not necessarily fictional; they are designated as \textit{xiaoshuo} by the Treasured Index catalogue. This percentage break-down accounts for only the premodern portion the CDCL and excludes the Republican section.

\textsuperscript{18} The percentage is calculated by dividing the number of titles in each category by 1865, the total number of titles in the premodern portion of the CDCL.

\textsuperscript{19} The percentage is calculated by dividing the number of characters in each period by 154,711,312, the total number of characters in the premodern portion of the CDCL.
Warring States Through the Six Dynasties

呂海龍 points out that it was not until the Northern Song when xiaoshuo began to predominately denote narrative literature (94). Prior to that, xiaoshuo referred to narrative and non-narrative discourse. In the Chinese Text Project’s pre-Qin corpus, two mentions of xiaoshuo are in the Zhuangzi and Lüshi Chunqiu (The Annals of Lü Buwei). As mentioned in Chapter 1, xiaoshuo in the Zhuangzi is contrasted with dada:

(But) if the prince had taken his rod, with a fine line, and gone to pools and ditches, and watched for minnows and gobies, it would have been difficult for him to get a large fish. Those who dress up their small tales [xiaoshuo] to obtain favour with the magistrates are far from being men of great understanding [dada]. (Legge 134)

In the Lüshi Chunqiu, it is used in parallel to “slight errors” and described as something that causes “monumental calamity”: “An incompetent ruler brings about a catastrophe because of some slight error. Bao Si ruined the state by causing King You to indulge some trivial pleasure [xiaoshuo] that would lead to monumental calamity” (Knoblock and Riegel 573-574). In both cases, xiaoshuo seems to be a derogatory term that refers to inferior knowledge, pursuit, or discourse that is potentially harmful. This notion of xiaoshuo is also seen in the Eastern Han (25-220) text Zhonglun 中論 (Balanced Discourse):

A lord’s greatest weakness is none greater than being too attentive to petty things and negligent of the great Way; he [a weak lord] is aware of what is near him but
oblivious to distant plans. Thus, since antiquity until present day, it has never been that [the lord] is like this and there is no chaos; it has never been that [the lord] is like this and [the state] does not collapse. Those who are attentive to petty things and aware of what is nearby can be said to be hearing the harmony of zithers, flutes, songs, and chants with their ears, seeing the colorful patterns of carvings with their eyes, voicing the words of debates, riddles, and poetic compositions with their mouths, comprehending the texts of short stories and minor discourse \[xiaoshuo\] with their hearts, learning the tricks of archery, horse-riding, calligraphy, and math with their hands, and pursuing the appearance of bowing and dancing with their bodies. (Xu 463)

人君之大患也, 莫大於詳於小事, 而略於大道; 察其近物, 而闇於遠圖; 故自古及今, 未有如此而不亂也, 未有如此而不亡也。夫詳於小事, 而察於近物者, 謂耳聽乎絲竹歌謠之和, 目視乎琱琢采色之章, 口給乎辯慧切對之辭, 心通乎短言小說之文, 手習乎射御書數之巧, 俯仰折旋之容。

Here, \textit{xiaoshuo} is held as an example of a \textit{xiaoshi}, “petty things,” that distracts one from \textit{dadao}, “the great Way,” which causes the destruction of the state when excessively indulged in. Other than this, two mentions of \textit{xiaoshuo} in the Han period are from the \textit{Hanshu}, where Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) characterizes it as talks from the streets as mentioned in Chapter 1. This particular notion of \textit{xiaoshuo} is also seen in the Eastern Han history \textit{Qianhan ji} 前漢紀 (\textit{History of the Former Han}): “There is also the school of
xiaoshuo, which generally originates from the talks of the streets and discussions of the alleys” 又有小說家者流 蓋出於街談巷議 (Xun 247).

The Hanshu’s “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 (“Record of Art and Literature”) section contains the earliest extant\(^\text{20}\) catalogue of xiaoshuo jia writing. This catalogue is dominated by titles that do not appear to be narratives, such as Fengshan fang shuo 封禪方說 (Discourse on Worshipping Ceremonies) and Daizhao chen raoxin shu 待詔臣饒心術 (The Art of a Bountiful Heart of a Minister Awaiting an Edict) (Ban Gu 1744-1745), which seem to be discursive and instructive in nature. Wang Qizhou 王齊洲 observes that the majority of these titles are fangshu 方術 (“magic”) writings (22-23), which suggests that xiaoshuo was closely associated with non-canonical knowledge, but not necessarily related to narratives. This is in accordance with the study by Hellmut Wilhelm mentioned in Chapter 1, which argues that the Zhou texts in the Hanshu’s xiaoshuo jia catalogue are likely discursive and rhetorical in nature. Regarding Ban Gu’s characterization of xiaoshuo as gossip on the street (cited in Chapter 1), Wilhelm notes that it does not seem to match the nature of the texts included in Ban’s own xiaoshuo jia category:

[...] it emerges that the content of the books [the titles in the xiaoshuo jia category] could not possibly have been popular lore; rather, they must have been expository writings with political intent. In other words, they were of exactly the

\(^{20}\)The earliest, not earliest extant, catalogue of xiaoshuo writings is likely in Liu Xiang’s Qilue 七略 (Seven Overviews), which is lost. The “Yiwenzhi” section of Hanshu derives heavily from Qilue’s catalogue of titles. See Wang Qizhou.
same type referred to in the Chuang-tzu and Hsun-tzu passages. His definition to the contrary, a substantial part of the hsiao-shuo for him, also, constituted expository prose. Some characteristic other than content and pragmatic use must have induced Pan Ku to include them in the category of the hsiao-shuo. (252)

As far as I am aware, no other scholar has drawn attention to the contradiction between Ban Gu’s explicit definition of xiaoshuo and the fact that texts in his xiaoshuo jia category seem to be discursive. Wilhelm speculates that Ban’s definition could be motivated by an “attempt to reduce [...] a literary school to the functions of a particular office” (252). This contradiction exemplifies the problem of relying on explicit definitions noted by Slingerland et al.

In the CDCL pre-Tang corpus, which covers the Three Kingdoms period through the Sui, xiaoshuo only appears twice. The Sanguozhi zhu 三國志注 (Commentary on the History of the Three Kingdoms), a commentary on the Sanguo zhi 三國志 (History of the Three Kingdoms) compiled in the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479), quotes a fragment from the Weiliüe 魏略 (Concise Account of the Wei), a lost text from the Three Kingdoms period: “[He] then bared his head and upper body, performed the barbarian dance ‘Five Anvils,’ juggled balls, swung swords, and recited xiaoshuo by performers until it reached some thousands of numbers” 遂科頭拍袒，胡舞五椎鍛，跳丸擊劒，誦俳優小說數千言 (Chen 449). Xiaoshuo here has a substantially different meaning, as it denotes oral performance. Since the Three Kingdoms period and the Eastern Han neighbor each other chronologically, it is possible that this notion of xiaoshuo informed Ban Gu’s characterization of xiaoshuo being from talks on the streets, which addresses the
aforementioned concern raised by Hellmut Wilhelm that the expository titles in the *Hanshu’s xiaoshuo jia* category do not reflect Ban’s claim. This *Weilüe* fragment indicates that *xiaoshuo’s* denotation of narratives, specifically oral narratives, significantly predates the Song period, which subverts the understanding proposed by Lü Hailong that the Song was the beginning of *xiaoshuo’s* denotation of narratives. The second appearance of *xiaoshuo* in the pre-Tang corpus is in the *Nanqi shu* (The Book of Southern Qi), compiled in the Liang Dynasty (502-557): “Those who talk must say that debased arts like brush notes cannot be used to handle matters of life and death; minor discourse [*xiaoshuo*] like *kaiquan* cannot be depended on to make judgements” 議者必雲筆記賤伎，非殺活所待；開勸小說，非否判所寄 (Xiao 894). Here, *xiaoshuo* seems to be a debased, unworthy pursuit that cannot be depended upon for critical judgement; its usage is similar to that in Warring States literature as discussed above.

**Tang**

The next extant major catalogue of *xiaoshuo* writings is found in the *Suishu’s* 隨書 (The Book of Sui) *Jingji zhi* 經籍志 (“Record of Classics and Books”) section, compiled in the Tang Dynasty, where the *xiaoshuo jia* category is filled with writings related to speeches, like *Bianlin* 辯林 (Forest of Debates), *Za duiyu* 雜對語 (Miscellaneous Conversations), and *Suoyu* 瑣語 (Trifling Talks) (1011-1012). While this reflects a change in *xiaoshuo’s* denotation as compared to that in the *Hanshu*, the notion of narrative or fiction is not apparent. In the CDCL’s Tang corpus, *xiaoshuo* appears
fourteen times, among which five signify book titles: Xiaoshuo and Liangwu xiaoshuo 梁武小說.

These two titles—both no longer extant—can be found in the xiaoshuo bibliographical section in the Suishu, though there is no description concerning the exact nature of them (1011-1012). In the Beihu lu 北戶錄 (Records of the Northern Gate), composed by Lu Xisheng 陸希聲 (d. 895), xiaoshuo is explicitly described to be a literary genre predominately characterized by fabrication:

There have been many xiaoshuo-writers in recent years. They generally write about absurd and baseless things like ghosts, gods, transformations, and fantasy. Otherwise, they use comedy and humor to inspire laughter and joy. Aside from these two, they also force stories out of words, which all defame wise men of previous ages and are taken as facts by the unsuspecting. (6)

As far as I am aware, this is the earliest instance of xiaoshuo denoting written narratives predominately characterized by intentional and/or apparent fabrication (i.e. fiction).

As mentioned previously, none of the four traditional bibliographical categories can accommodate literary genres predominately characterized by apparent and/or intentional fabrication. Lu Xisheng’s characterization of xiaoshuo is the only instance in the Tang corpus that leaves xiaoshuo outside the four traditional bibliographical categories. Aside from the Beihu lu, other mentions of xiaoshuo seem to contain it in the

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21 In Beihu lu juan 1 and 3 and Suishu juan 34.
zi or shi bibliographical category. In Liu Zhiji’s *Shitong* 史通 (*Historical Perspectives*),

*xiaoshuo* is discussed in the context of *shi* writings:

As for the likes of the *xiaoshuo* of various masters, chronicles, and miscellaneous records, such as Wei Zhao’s *Records of the Cave* and Tao Hongjing’s *Yearly Calendars of the Imperial Era*, they were made according to memorials and created as texts. They are not in the same tier as stately histories. Thus, although they are extant, I will not discuss them. (77)

若諸子小說，編年雜記，如韋昭《洞紀》、陶弘景《帝代年曆》，皆因表而作，用成其書。既非國史之流，故存而不述。

In this passage, *xiaoshuo* seems to denote an inferior type of *shi* writings that is unworthy of being taken seriously. In *Sui-Tang jiahua* 隋唐嘉話 (*Fine Tales of the Sui and Tang*), Liu Su 劉餗 (fl. 742-756) reinforces this interpretation: “Ever since I was a little child, I have often heard stories of the past. They are not worthy to be grand records, so I have appended them at the end of the minor discourses [*xiaoshuo*]” (Manling Luo 1443).

There is also evidence that *xiaoshuo* was used by historians in the process of compiling history:

Jun’s talent and knowledge are sufficiently broad and grand. However, they cannot fully explore the profundity of Biao and Qiao nor comprehensively capture that of Ban and Ma. Hence, he favors the minor talks [*xiaoshuo*] of the alleyways and devotes his mind to vulgar short stories. This can be described as hard work without merit and unfitting exhaustion of the mind. (Liu Zhiji 222)
Here, a historian is criticized for being frivolous due to his adoption of *xiaoshuo* in his craft. The association of *xiaoshuo* with talks of the alleyways is reminiscent of Ban Gu’s statement in the *Hanshu*. This notion is also repeated in the *Suishu*’s definition of *xiaoshuo* in its bibliography of *xiaoshuo* texts: “*Xiaoshuo* is the talks of streets and alleyways” 小說者，街說巷語之說也 (1011). Another example of *xiaoshuo* being consulted by historians is found in Li Yanshou’s 李延壽 (fl.679-680) *Shang Nan-Bei shi biao* 上南北史表 (“Memorial of Offering the History of the Southern and Northern Dynasties”): “I examined the titles of chapters; there are many fascicles of histories. They all express hearings and witness accounts with an excessive amount of similarities and differences. *Xiaoshuo* and short stories are prone to being lost; they miss parts or have withered and have no means of being verified” 考之篇目，史牒不少，互陳聞見，同異甚多。而小說短書，易為湮落，脫或殘滅，求勘無所 (946). Li Yanshou seems to bemoan that the pitiful state of *xiaoshuo*’s preservation is what causes it to be not dependable for historiographical purposes. This is a markedly different characterization from that of Lu Xisheng where *xiaoshuo* is described to be predominately fabrication, which cannot be used for history-writing regardless of its condition of preservation.

The *Shitong* contains a passage that justifies *xiaoshuo*’s status as a proper historical genre:
The texts of ancient emperors and kings and the more recent records of various lords span across generations and are used as models of virtue. The remaining unofficial biographies include [ones that record] Shen Nong tasting medicine; hence there is the *Compendium of Materia Medica*. Yu of the Xia tended to the land; in fact, he authored the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*. The *Book of Generations* differentiates family names; it was written by the Zhou royal house. *Sayings of the Kong Family* documents speeches; it was passed down from various descendants of the Kong family. Thus, we know that side records and *xiaoshuo* form their own school. It can be mixed with official histories because of its ancient origin. (Liu Zhiji 454-455)

Although this passage asserts that *xiaoshuo* is comparable to official history because it has ancient origins, some of the texts it mentions are traditionally understood to be *zi* writings, like the *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (*Compendium of Materia Medica*) and *Kongshi jiayu* 孔氏家語 (*Sayings of the Kong Family*). Moreover, this seems to contradict the dismissive attitude toward *xiaoshuo* seen in the *Shitong* passage cited above. The *Shitong* contains another instance of attributing value to *xiaoshuo* and associating it with *zi* writings:
The talks of the streets and discussions of the alleyways are sometimes worth looking into. *Xiaoshuo* and debased sayings can still be beneficial when they are in the past. Thus, the gentlemen who are interested do not abandon them all. Works like Liu Qingyi’s *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, Pei Rongqi’s *Forest of Sayings*, Kong Sishang’s *Record of Sayings*, and Yang Jiesong’s *Marsh of Discussions* are called trifling talks. (Liu Zhiji 459)

As discussed previously, such records of speech are classified in the *zi* category in the *Suishu*. Although the *Shitong* is inconsistent in its evaluation of *xiaoshuo*’s value, all of its statements regarding *xiaoshuo* attempt to contain it within the four formal categories of bibliography, namely the *zi* and *shi* categories, to give it a place in documented literature.

In summary, there are five ways to understand *xiaoshuo* before the Song period (960-1276): 1) an unworthy pursuit or inferior discourse, 2) a type of inferior or unofficial *shi* writing, 3) a type of *zi* writing, 4) a type of oral performance, and 5) written fiction intended for entertainment. Among these, 1) to 3) significantly outnumber the rest in quantity, as 4) and 5) each only occur once. All five of these meanings established by this period will remain important aspects of how *xiaoshuo* was used throughout premodern history. Although the following sections on the Song-Yuan and Ming-Qing (1368-1911) periods will focus on *xiaoshuo*’s new identities in the realm of popular
performance and vernacular literature, it is important to keep in mind that its meanings as an unworthy pursuit or a type of *shi* or *zi* writings will not be eroded until the modern era.

**Song-Yuan**

In the Northern Song, Ouyang Xiu’s (1007-1072) *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*A New History of the Tang*) took a decisively different approach to categorizing *xiaoshuo* by filling the *xiaoshuo jia* category with titles that appear to be narratives, such as *Guishen liezhuan* 鬼神列傳 (*Various Biographies of Ghosts and Deities*), *Yuanhun zhi* 冤魂志 (*Record of Wronged Ghosts*), and *Da-Tang qishi ji* 大唐奇事記 (*Extraordinary Affairs of the Great Tang*) (16601). Notably, many of these narratives are catalogued in *shi* 史 categories in the *Suishu*; Ouyang made the effort to reassign them into the *xiaoshuo* category. To scholars like Lü Hailong and Sheldon Lu, this redefinition signifies a turning point for *xiaoshuo*. Sheldon Lu states, “Beginning in the Sung, attitudes toward the nature of fictional biography and *hsiao-shuo* in general began to change, partly because of the vast output of fictional writings produced in the T’ang dynasty”; to prove this claim, he points to “the nature of the titles listed in the *hsiao-shuo* section of the *Hsin Tang-shu*, which come close to the modern conception of fiction” (132). Although some of the texts in the *Xin Tang shu*’s *xiaoshuo jia* category can be read as fictional, we must not assume that *xiaoshuo* in the Song-Yuan period was equivalent to fiction.

*Xiaoshuo*’s denotation of narrative literature assumed different forms in the realms of literati writing and popular entertainment. Despite Lu Xisheng’s usage of
*xiaoshuo* to denote written fiction in as early as the Tang period, in the realm of literati writing, there was a general expectation that *xiaoshuo* should be factual and reflect real historical experiences. Ouyang Xiu explains the role of *xiaoshuo* in history-writing:

*History of the Ten Kingdoms*, compiled in the previous era, was a copy to be presented to the Emperor and needed to have many fascicles. Now, if it were to become standard history, it is appropriate to edit and cut out [some of the writings] and preserve what is central and important. As for trivial and petty matters, though they can be recorded, they are not relevant to the core content. They can be preserved in *xiaoshuo*; they are not worthy enough to fill up standard history.

*(Ouyang Xiu Ji, 537)*

前歲所作《十國志》，蓋是進本，務要卷多。今若便為正史，盡宜刪削，存其大要，至如細小之事，雖有可紀，非幹大體，自可存之小說，不足以累正史。

According to Ouyang, *xiaoshuo* is made from historical records of a trivial nature that are not important enough for more serious histories. Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) also describes the role of *xiaoshuo* in compiling the history *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 *(Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance)*, where he “comprehensively read previous histories and collected *xiaoshuo* on the side” 徑閱舊史，旁采小說 *(9).* This seems similar to the process of *xiaoshuo* being consulted for historiographical purposes in the Tang Dynasty as discussed above.

The Song-Yuan period saw the rise of the *biji* genre among the literati. In her study of *biji* writings, Cong Ellen Zhang characterizes the content of such literature as “the
authors' real-life experience as measured by the information they gathered from direct observation and hands-on investigation” concerning “court and capital life, famed political and literary figures, and strange occurrences [. . .] regional conditions, everyday material culture, local practices and customs, and interesting personalities [. . .]” (44-45).

Despite the late imperial habit of cataloguing fictional tales in the category of *biji xiaoshuo*, which might lead some to perceive *biji* as a fictional or semi-fictional genre, in the Song-Yuan period, *biji* writings emphasized factual knowledge acquired via real-life experience. The late imperial conflation of the terms *biji* and *xiaoshuo* is not without precedent in this period as contemporary evidence suggests that *xiaoshuo* can be used to denote *biji* writings. See the following passage by the late Northern Song writer Li Xianmin 李獻民 (dates unknown):

The spread of *xiaoshuo* in the world is extensive. In our dynasty, Yang Yi²² is widely read through *Garden of Talk*, Ouyang Xiu²³ is widely read through *Record of Returning to the Field*. After them are Shen Kuo’s²⁴ *Brush Talk of Mengxi*²⁵ and Shi Dan’s *Miscellaneous Notes*. They all collect the affairs of their time [. . .] (1)

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²² Yang Yi 楊億.
²³ Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修.
²⁴ Shen Kuo 沈括. Cunzhong 存中 is his courtesy name.
²⁵ Mengxi bitan 夢溪筆談.
Here, *xiaoshuo* is used to refer to famous *biji* writings like Ouyang Xiu’s *Guitian lu* 归田録 (*Record of Returning to the Field*) and Shen Kuo’s 沈括 (1031-1095) *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 (*Brush Talk of Mengxi*). In the Xin Tang shu’s “Yiwen zhi” section, a number of Tang dynasty writings that are similar to Song-Yuan *biji* in style and content are included in the *xiaoshuo jia* category, such as Fan Shu’s 範攄 (dates unknown) *Yunxi Youyi* 雲溪友議 (*Discussions Among Friends at Yunxi*), Wei Xuan’s 韋絢 (b. 796) *Liu Gong Jiahua lu* 劉公嘉話錄 (*Record of Liu Gongjia’s Talks*), and Zhang Gu’s 張固 (dates unknown) *Youxian guchui* 幽閒鼓吹 (*Flute-Blowing and Drumming in Seclusion and Leisure*) (Ouyang, *Xin Tang shu Renshou ben ershiliu shi* 16601). In the realm of Song-Yuan literati writing, *xiaoshuo* referred to narratives about real-life experiences and real-world events and was not primarily a space of fictional creation, though one cannot rule out the possibilities of authors experimenting with fictionality in *biji* writings, especially those related to supernatural occurrences.

*Xiaoshuo* in the realm of popular entertainment had considerably different denotations. The Song, especially the Southern Song, saw the escalation of urbanization; combined with the commercialization and popularization of the printing press, the Song-Yuan period left us the first substantial collections of records of urban popular entertainment. The following account in the early Yuan (1279-1368) text *Mengliang lu* 夢梁録 (*Dreaming Over a Bowl of Millet*) describes oral storytelling in the Southern Song capital Lin’an 隨安, in which *xiaoshuo* is a performative category:
Oral storytelling was called “tongue-discourse.” It had four subsects; each had its own following. “Minor tale” (xiaoshuo) is called “silver character.” [Its story content is] like romance, supernatural, and tales of the extraordinary [. . .] History-tellers told [stories from] Zizhi tongjian and writings, history, literature, and biographies of the Han and the Tang and each dynasty; they told the affairs of prosperity, ruin, conflicts, and wars. There were Scholar Dai, Jinshi-Degree-Holder Zhou, Miss Zhang, Miss Song, Qiu Jishan, and Preacher Xu. There was also Sir Wang Liu, who was originally a story-teller in the imperial court and paid like an imperial guard. He thoroughly knew all of history. In the Xianchun reign period, he performed Chapter of Restoring the Central Plain and biographies of famous generals of the Restoration period.26 Listeners were plentiful. Indeed, his speech was truly elegant; his memory and knowledge and their sources were very vast. However, he feared those who told minor tales the most. The minor tale tellers could tell the past affairs of a dynasty or period and instantly make up [stories]. It was like making up stories during drinking games.27 They occupied their own places [in the realm of entertainment]. (Wu Zimu 170-171)

26 Zhongxing 中興 refers to the period of restoring the Song court in the South.
27 Qiling suiling 起令隨令 is a drinking game where players made up poems and stories.
間，敷演《復華篇》及中興名將傳，聽者紛紛，蓋講得字真不俗，記問淵源甚廣耳。但最畏小說人，蓋小說者，能講一朝一代故事，頃刻間捏合，與起令隨令相似，各占一事也。

Here, *xiaoshuo* refers to a subset of oral storytelling about romance, the supernatural, and the extraordinary. At the end of this passage, *xiaoshuo*-telling is held in stark contrast with history-telling as *xiaoshuo*-tellers could instantly make up stories. It is apparent that *xiaoshuo*-telling was an art of oral fictional narratives. This is further supported by another contemporary account of urban performance in Lin’an found in the Southern Song text *Ducheng jisheng 都城紀勝 (Records of Sights from the Capital City):*

Dangling wire puppet show started as “Chen Ping Breaking Sieges with Six Wonders.” Cane-head puppetry, water puppetry, and flesh puppetry used children and young people. When puppets performed romance and supernatural stories or the kinds of warfare and disputes, their scripts were like mixed theatre or lyrical story-telling: in general, they were mostly fictional and rarely true, like the kinds of the Juling deity or the great immortal Zhuji. (9)

In this account, *yanfen 煙粉* (“romance”) and *lingguai 靈怪* (“supernatural”) stories are described as “mostly fictional and rarely true.” In the previous account, *yanfen* and *lingguai* are said to be major genres of *xiaoshuo*-telling, which again points to the
fictional nature of *xiaoshuo*-telling. For another contemporary indication of *xiaoshuo*-telling’s fictional nature, see Hong Mai’s 洪邁 (1123-1202) following comment:

“Though *xiaoshuo*-telling and theatre plays were fictional with ghosts and the like, they had twists, turns, thoughts, and nuances” 雖小說戲劇，鬼物假托，莫不宛轉有思致 (34). Such *xiaoshuo* are certainly very different from the kind consulted by Sima Guang to compile the *Zizhi tongjian*.

The accounts of Song-Yuan *xiaoshuo*-telling cited above illustrate the awareness that *xiaoshuo* is self-consciously fictional. Sheldon Lu argues that by the Tang, literati’s interpretative strategies toward writings that are possibly fictional can be divided into two types: historical or allegorical. In other words, such writings were either read as (defective) history or as allegories. By “allegories,” he means *yuyan* 寓言 stories like the ones found in the *Zhuangzi* (93-128). To him, it is not until the Ming-Qing period when people increasingly started to recognize that fictional writings were “self-consciously non-historical and ostensibly creative and [...] ought not to be judged and read as defective history and quasi-history but to be understood on its own terms” (134). While I agree that there is a drastic difference between Tang and late imperial interpretative strategies toward fiction and the Ming-Qing period saw the full maturity of the awareness of the nature of fiction, Lu’s brief treatment of the Song-Yuan period overlooks the important developments in the realm of popular entertainment that are fundamental to the Chinese fictional consciousness.

Hong Mai, the author-compiler of the *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志 (*Record of the Listener*), is a Southern Song scholar who is vocal on the rather silent issue of fictionality. The
*Yijian zhi* is a collection of strange stories, allegedly based on what people have seen and heard. It is written in the *biji* style: short anecdotes written in literary Chinese placed next to one another around a loose theme, often preceded by the author’s preface.28 Whereas Song *biji* writings tend to stress their factuality, Hong’s preface toys with the ideas of fictionality and factuality:

When the first installment of [*Yijian zhi*] was complete, it was circulated among gentlemen and scholar officials. Today it has been published in Fujian, Sichuan, Wuzhou as well as Lin’an. Every household has a copy. Due to my interest in the extraordinary and veneration of the strange, people from far and wide send me details whenever they hear of such a story. Therefore, the amount of material I have received these last five years is comparable to what I had previously collected. And so I compiled it all under the name of Yi zhi. In total, both the two books and Jia and Yi comprise of six hundred stories and all manner of strange and uncanny stories found throughout the world have been included therein.

As for the anomalies of Qi Xie and the reciprocity of Zhuangzi, they are but illusive and insubstantial and cannot be questioned. Moreover, Gan Bao’s *Record of the Search for Spirits*, Niu Sengru’s *Anomalies of the Recondite*, Gu Shenzi’s *Broad Expanse of the Extraordinary*, the *East of the River*, the *Record of the Dark Chamber*, the *Examining Spirits*—these works cannot all be without some allegorical content. My book, however, having come about within a cycle of no

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28 For extensive analysis of *Yijian zhi*, see Alister D. Inglis.
more than sixty years, has utilized both my eyes and ears—and the stories within are all based on factual sources. If one does not believe me, they may go to Mr. Nobody and ask him. (Inglis 24)

This brief preface, when read in the light of a rising Song consciousness of fictionality, contains significant commentaries on the issues of fictionality and factuality that have been overlooked. The statement that stories in the *Yijian zhi* are “all based on factual sources” and deriving from “eyes and ears” (as opposed to imagination) is a nod to the Song custom of stressing factuality and real-world evidence in *biji* records of anecdote as demonstrated in this preface to a Northern Song *biji* collection of supernatural tales:

> Things that are not extraordinary are not worth being passed down; affairs that are not strange are not worth being recorded. Because of my leisurely days, if my eyes have seen something, my heart does not forget it; if my ears have heard something, I certainly chant it in my mouth. I observe spirits and go after [beings of] the other realm; I search for deities and collect the strange. When I run into something, I erect my brush and record it right after. I name my writings *The Secret Record of Searching for the Supernatural*. I open discussions and debates and extensively collect the ill and auspicious omens. I do not differentiate or grade them. My writings are not literary or decorated. I do not lie or avoid [certain subject matters]. My nature is carefree and unrestrained; I cannot make sure that nothing is left out.

(Zhang Bingwen 593-594)

雖然物之不奇，不足以為傳也，事之不異，不足以為記也。予因暇日，苟目有所見，不忘於心，耳有所聞，必誦於口。稽靈即冥，搜神纂異，遇事直
Moreover, Hong’s assertion of factuality is also an acknowledgement of similar practices found in earlier collections of supernatural tales referred to in the preface, notably the *Soushen ji (In Search of the Supernatural)* 搜神記 from the Jin 晉 period (226-420). In the author’s preface, it is stated that the purpose of this collection of supernatural tales is to “make clear of that the Way of the gods is not a fabrication” 發明神道之不誣也 (Gan 5). Such emphasis on real-world evidence falls into the long literary tradition where recorders of anecdotes and extraordinary tales, as observed by Victor Mair, painstakingly “tell us exactly from whom, when, where, and in what circumstances they heard their stories” (22), which calls for a historical and factual, rather than fictional, reading of the stories, however strange they may seem.

Now, is Hong asking for a historical and factual reading of the *Yijian zhi*? Alister Inglis suggests that the preface attests to Hong’s “obsession with achieving a historically accurate record” (26). If so, how would one explain Hong’s ending statement “if one does not believe me, they may go to Mr. Nobody and ask him”? As explicated by Inglis, *Wuyou xiansheng* 烏有先生 (“Mr. Nobody”) in this sentence is found in Sima Xiangru’s 司馬相如 (179-117 BC) “Zixu fu” 子虛賦 (“Rhapsody of Master Illusion”) and literally means “this person does not exist,” which is a play on words (141). In “Zixu fu,” both *Zixu* (“Master Illusion”) and *Wuyou xiansheng* are made-up entities, as their names suggest. After painstakingly assuring his readers that his stories are factual, Hong tells his
readers to ask a Mr. Nobody for the validity of the stories. Does this not render his
previous assertion of factuality ironic and sarcastic? If we recall the above-cited comment
made by Hong elsewhere that “xiaoshuo-telling and theatre plays were fictional with
ghosts and the like,” it is apparent that Hong is explicitly aware of the fictionality in
stories of “ghosts and the like”; read in this light, this preface seems to implicitly give
readers permission to read the stories as fiction whose validity can only be verified by a
fantastic Mr. Nobody. In my reading, Hong pretends to be serious about asserting the
factuality of his stories until the end of the preface, where the readers are suddenly
thrown off by Mr. Nobody.

There is one Southern Song source that describes xiaoshuo in a unique way titled
Zuiweng tanlu 醉翁談錄 (Record of Talks from a Drunken Old Man). It is a collection of
short stories prefaced by the following statement on xiaoshuo by Luo Ye 羅燁 (dates
unknown):

The tradition of xiaoshuo originated from the office of secretive remonstration.
Then, it was assigned to administer the records of the hundred offices. Thereafter,
there are persuaders travelling throughout the four seas and galloped across the
hundred schools. They use the elusive and profound writings of the high antiquity
to differentiate and illuminate today’s debates and discourses. It [xiaoshuo] is also
called “history-telling,” “joined-origin,” “tongue-sowing,” or “pick-and-dodge.”
They all have evidence and do not dare to tell lies. They speak of the wise men of
previous generations as teachers; they single out the fools of recent ages to caution.
Their speeches are not without basis and are beneficial to hear. (2)
小說者流，出於機戒之官，遂分百官記錄之司。由是有說者縱橫四海，馳騁百家。以上古隠奧之文章，為今日分明之議論。或名講史，或謂合生，或稱舌耕，或作挑閃，皆有所據，不敢謬言。言其上世之賢者為師，排其近世之愚者可謂戒。言非無根，聽之有益。

There are several claims about *xiaoshuo* in this passage that contradict other more well-known accounts. First, the claim that the *xiaoshuo* tradition originated from a secretive remonstration office is nowhere else to be found. It significantly deviates from the aforementioned *Hanshu*’s statement about the origin of *xiaoshuo* as well as that of Ouyang Xiu: “As for biographies, *xiaoshuo*, as well as regional speech, geography, records of offices, and family trees, they all originated from the tradition of official historians” (Ouyang, *Xin Tang shu* Vol.5 1421). Secondly, the *Zuiweng tanlu* claims that “history-telling” (*jiangshi* 講史) is an alternative name for *xiaoshuo*. In all other extant contemporary accounts of urban performances, including the *Mengliang lu*, *Ducheng shengji*, *Wulin jiushi* (Old Affairs of the Martial Forest), and *Dongjing menghua lu* (Record of Dreams and Extravagance of the Eastern Capital), history-telling is described as a different type of oral performance than *xiaoshuo*; none of these sources state or imply in any way that *xiaoshuo* is highly factual or equivalent to history-telling. Without a manifesto of authorial intention, we can only speculate that perhaps the author is trying to elevate *xiaoshuo*. As mentioned above, this passage is a preface to a collection of short stories. Although it is apparent that *xiaoshuo* as used in
this passage refers to the oral performative kind (“Their speeches are not without basis and are beneficial to hear”), it is not implausible to speculate that the preface implies that the written short stories that follow are also called *xiaoshuo*. However, as the preface stresses the factuality of *xiaoshuo* stories, we cannot say that the author uses *xiaoshuo* to denote written fiction, though the stories can certainly be read as fiction. Although the Song-Yuan period shows considerable fictional consciousness and the rising usage of *xiaoshuo* to denote oral fiction, we will not see a clear relationship between *xiaoshuo* and written fiction until late imperial times.

**Ming-Qing**

According to Sheldon Lu, the late imperial period saw a rise in general understanding of the nature of fiction:

> In the Ming and Ch’ing periods, people increasingly realized that much of fictional narrative is self-consciously non-historical and ostensibly creative and that fiction ought not to be judged and read as defective history and quasi-history but to be understood on its own terms. Many commentators no longer regarded *hsiao-shuo* as something that needs to be faithful to history. (134)

Lu argues that Ming-Qing discourse explicitly and implicitly suggests an understanding of the fabricated and fictional nature of certain narratives. He points to terms commonly used to analyze novels in this period, such as *bizhen* 逼真 (“realistic”), *moxie* 模寫 (“imitative writing”), *mohua* 模畫 (“imitative drawing”), and *ruhua* 如畫 (“drawing-like”), as indications of an acknowledgement of “the fictionality of literary texts [that]
point to their artistry and artifice” (134-135). Moreover, he quotes a passage in Xie Zhaozhe’s 謝肇淛 (1567-1624) Wu zazu 五雜俎 (Five Miscellanies) that explicitly admits to the fabricated nature of xiaoshuo: “In regard to fiction [xiaoshuo] and dramatic compositions, there should be a mixture of the fictive and the real. Then they become writings that capture the essence of literary games” (Sheldon Lu 135). Wang Wei 王煒 points out that in the Ming-Qing period, it was common to refer to vernacular novels like the Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳 (Water Margin) as xiaoshuo (85).

While it is true that xiaoshuo denoted written fiction by the Ming-Qing period, its older meanings, as noted by Li Zhongming 李忠明, did not disappear and were still in usage; Li points to the Siku quanshu’s 四庫全書 (Complete Library in Four Sections) usage of xiaoshuo as a bibliographical category that includes non-fictional works as an example (11-12). In fact, in Wu zazu, Xie also uses xiaoshuo in a way that refers to its earlier meanings as a catch-all category of a wide range of writings and a bibliographical division:

Aside from the schools of ru, dao, yinyang, ming, mo, zongheng, xiaoshuo and nong, there is the school of za. It is said that its writings generally originated from the office of remonstration. It combines [the teachings] of yinyang and mo and merges [the teachings of] ming and fa [. . .] The school of xiaoshuo came from the petty officials of the court. They are creations by those who engaged themselves in idle talks in the streets and alleys and by those who heard gossip and rumors on the way. The two schools are different on these grounds. Ban [Gu] says there are nine schools that are worth looking into; he means to debase [the school of] xiaoshuo.
In later ages, *xiaoshuo* has been extremely popular. It encompasses everything; in this way, *xiaoshuo* is similar to [the school of] *za*. (1)

儒、道、陰陽、法、名、墨、縱橫、小說、農之外有雜家。云其書蓋出於議官，兼陰陽墨合名法 [...]. 小說家出於稗官，街談巷語，道聽途說者之所造。兩家不同如此，班言可觀者九家。意在黜小說。後代小說極盛，其中無所不有，則小說與雜相似。

In this passage, Xie draws a link between the school of *xiaoshuo* as documented in the *Hanshu* and *xiaoshuo* of “later ages,” which likely includes fictional writings that contain a “mixture of the fictive and the real.” This linkage, which disregards the difference between early discursive *xiaoshuo* and later narrative and fictional *xiaoshuo*, is also seen in Lu Xun and Ming Dong Gu’s evolutionary discourse. Though the notion of evolution is a modern product, the perceived connection between these two distinct categories of *xiaoshuo* has a premodern origin.

In the CDCL Ming-Qing corpus, *xiaoshuo* is often used to denote vernacular episodic novels, which were widely understood to be fictional. In *Tongsu bian* 通俗編 (*Collection of Common Customs*), the Qing bibliophile Zhai Hao 翟灏 (d. 1788) refers to vernacular novels like the *Shuihu zhuan* and *Sansui Pingyao zhuan* 三遂平妖傳 (*The Three Sui Quash the Demons' Revolt*) as *xiaoshuo* (655-656). Due to the sheer magnitude of *xiaoshuo*’s prominence in late imperial discourse and the size of available literature, the relationship between *xiaoshuo* and fiction can be better illustrated through machine reading and computational analysis.
Collocation Analysis: Methods

As the CDCL is compiled in plain text, the data can be easily used for machine reading and analysis. I used the relevant modules in the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK), a Python platform for natural language processing, to perform collocation analysis. The NLTK’s collocation function is based on Christopher Manning and Hinrich Schütze’s *Foundations of Statistical Natural Language Processing* (hereafter *Foundations*). In *Foundations*, collocation is defined as “an expression consisting of two or more words that correspond to some conventional way of saying things” (151). According to this definition, phrases like “nuclear weapon” and “United Arab Emirates” are collocations. Collocation analysis is often used to detect fixed expressions that contain words that frequently appear next to each other, which enhances machine understanding of natural human language. However, in digital humanities, the usage of collocation analysis can significantly differ from that in computer science. For example, in “The Eurocentric Fallacy. A Digital Approach to the Rise of Modernity, Civilization and Europe,” Joris Van Eijnatten and Ruben Ros search a corpus of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dutch newspapers for the co-appearances of words like “Europe,” “modern,” and “civilize” to study the association between the conception of Europe and the ideas of modernity and civilization (714-716). In this case, the digital humanists are not necessarily looking for set, conventional expressions; rather, they are interested in the intensity of the association among these concepts to understand the cultural perceptions.

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29 For the NLTK collocation module’s theoretical basis in *Foundations of Statistical Natural Language Processing*, see the documentation: [https://www.nltk.org/api/nltk.html?highlight=collocation#module-nltk.collocations](https://www.nltk.org/api/nltk.html?highlight=collocation#module-nltk.collocations).
regarding their inter-relationship. To understand the development of xiaoshuo, I attempt
to delineate the textual contexts of its usage throughout history by searching for
characters with which it most frequently co-appears in literature of different eras. In such
cases, it is better to understand collocation as a **co-appearance of words or characters**
**that is meaningful and significant for a particular investigative purpose.**

According to the NLTK documentation, collocation-finding entails “calculating
the frequencies of words and their appearance in the context of other words”; to filter out
meaningless co-appearances that occur by mere coincidence, they are “scored according
to some association measure [. . .] to determine the relative likelihood of each [co-
appearance] being a collocation” (“NLTK 3.4.5 documentation”). Depending on the
association measure, which estimates the validity of attributing significance to a co-
appearance by calculating its likelihood of being purely coincidental (and thus having no
meaning), the results can be significantly different. There are four association measures
offered by the NLTK that are explained in *Foundations*: the t test, chi-square test,
likelihood ratio, and mutual information (163-183). As mutual information is specifically
designed to more accurately identify fixed, conventional phrases and expressions
(Manning and Schütze 178-183), it is not appropriate for this study and will be excluded
from consideration. The t test, chi-square test, and likelihood ratio all measure, with
different statistical reasoning processes, the likelihood of words in a co-appearance
having a dependent relationship; if a co-appearance scores low, the words or characters
likely reside near each other due to pure chance. Out of these three, as pointed out by
Manning and Schütze, the likelihood ratio is the most suitable for sparse data and works
well with words that rarely appear in a corpus (172-175). The dataset used in this study is
considered sparse because the targeted keyword, *xiaoshuo*, occurs in a very small portion of the whole corpus. Moreover, according to Manning and Schütze, the likelihood ratio is more interpretable and easier to understand compared to the t test and chi-square test, as it is “simply a number that tells us how much more likely one hypothesis is than the other” (172). The hypotheses here refer to two possibilities: 1) the co-appearance has significance and its words or characters have a dependent relationship and 2) the co-appearance has no significance and its words or characters have no dependent relationship because they co-appear due to pure chance.

The tokenization is performed using *jieba*, a Python text segmentation tool for modern Chinese. Compared to the conventional way of tokenizing Classical Chinese, which assumes the basic unit of meaning to be mono-syllabic and segments texts into single characters, *jieba* has the advantage of being able to recognize and work with bi-syllabic words like *xiaoshuo*. As this study heavily focuses on the Song-Yuan and Ming-Qing periods and involves a large quantity of vernacular literature, the ability to detect bi-syllabic words is essential. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that

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30 Under the guidance of Professor Paul Vierthaler, I have experimented with tokenizing the corpus via an algorithm that segments the corpus into non-overlapping bigrams. This algorithm produces many more false positives than *jieba*, especially with the Qing Dynasty corpus, in the sense that a much larger portion of the bigrams it identifies are not real words. In other words, *jieba* is much better at find real bi-syllabic words in the CDCL, probably because bi-syllabic words largely overlap in modern and premodern Chinese. Although *jieba* proves to be the most suitable method of tokenization for this particular investigative purpose, it is important to keep in mind that tokenizing and segmenting Classical Chinese is an ongoing difficulty in digital research; there is no one-size-fit-all solution as of now. For a summary of currently available ways to segment Classical Chinese, see Shilei Huang and Jiangqin Wu, “A Pragmatic Approach for Classical Chinese Word Segmentation.”
jieba’s imperfect segmentation of Classical Chinese can affect the calculation of likelihood ratios in unpredictable ways.

**Collocation Analysis on the CDCL Corpus**

Other than words and characters, the segmentation of time can also affect the quality of this study. Though considerable in size, the CDCL does not have the same amount of texts in each historical period and has drastically fewer texts for earlier periods. As a small amount of text likely will not provide enough occurrences of the word *xiaoshuo* for meaningful computational analysis, it is necessary to combine some periods into one corpus. The entire pre-Tang segment of the CDCL only contains two appearances of *xiaoshuo*; thus, the pre-Tang dynasties cannot form individual units of analysis and must be combined with other periods. Even though the NLTK likelihood ratio analysis is supposed to be able to handle sparse data, it failed to produce any result based on two data points. We can experiment with using Three Kingdoms through the Tang as one historical unit of analysis and using texts from this period to form a pre-Song corpus. The Tang corpus contains fourteen appearances of *xiaoshuo*; in total, the pre-Song corpus contains sixteen mentions of *xiaoshuo*, which is enough to generate some results. However, sixteen is still a very small number of data points and the analysis did not generate any co-appearance that contains information valuable to this study. Since the pre-Song corpus does not contain enough mentions of *xiaoshuo* for the collocation algorithm, we can only use collocation analysis on the post-Tang corpuses.

In the Song-Yuan corpus, *xiaoshuo* occurs 214 times, among which 196 are in the Song corpus. The Ming corpus contains 200 mentions of *xiaoshuo*. The Qing corpus
contains 2,350. The vastly higher number of xiaoshuo’s appearances in the Qing corpus is not purely a function of the Qing corpus being larger. To illustrate, the Qing corpus is about 2.5 times larger than the Ming in character count, but 2,350 is significantly beyond twice or thrice of 200. The following are the top collocations, ranked by likelihood ratio, that contain xiaoshuo in each corpus (the numerical value is the likelihood ratio as measured by the NLTK):

Northern Song
雑家 小説 43.63
小説 漢武帝 31.86
小説 元后 25.14
小説 晉習 25.14
小説 晉陸士 25.14

Southern Song
稗官 小説 60.92
小説 尋之經史 25.86
小説 私記則 25.86
小説 載毅 25.86
小説 類定 25.86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yuan</th>
<th>Ming</th>
<th>Qing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>稗官小說 97.50</td>
<td>稗官 小說 118.31</td>
<td>稗官 小說 520.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>妙靜 小說 28.28</td>
<td>唐人 小說 106.94</td>
<td>英文 小說 475.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>小說 演史 24.47</td>
<td>古今 小說 97.73</td>
<td>唐人 小說 289.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>小說 私史 22.54</td>
<td>小說 補附 49.01</td>
<td>明人 小說 94.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>小說 寓目 22.01</td>
<td>野史 小說 31.28</td>
<td>小說 家言 85.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The output data is modified by a stop-word list that filters out common characters that have no value for our purpose and highly associated with many words due to their quotidian nature, like yi 矣, yan 焉, yue 曰, zai 载. For example, yue (“to say”) is highly associated with xiaoshuo to form the compound xiaoshuo yue (“xiaoshuo says that . . .”); since this compound provides no insight for our purpose, it is disregarded as noise in the data and not included in the lists above. However, even with a stop-word list, the output data still contains significant non-sensical data and noise, like si ji ze 私記則, due to the imperfect word segmentation performed by jieba, which is inevitable since there is currently no word segmentation tool that can accurately decipher what constitutes a word in Classical Chinese. Nonetheless, the amount of Classical Chinese words recognized by jieba as shown in the lists is still impressive considering that jieba is designed for modern Chinese.

In the Qing corpus, xiaoshuo is highly associated with xiqu 戲曲 (“theater and tunes”) and zhanghui 章回 (“episode”). As discussed above, since the Song-Yuan period, theater was perceived to be largely fictional; this association between xiaoshuo and theater reflects a prominent relationship between xiaoshuo and fiction. “Episode” here is indicative of the rise of the episodic novel, a literary genre widely understood to be fictional in the late imperial era; this collocation also ties xiaoshuo to fiction. Whereas there are instances where xiaoshuo explicitly indicates fiction since the Tang Dynasty, it is not until the Qing period that the connection between xiaoshuo and fiction is prominent
enough for the relevant collocations to rise to the top of the rankings. Based on my manual reading of *xiaoshuo*’s usage throughout history, I believe the machine’s analysis on this issue accurately reflects that *xiaoshuo* did not overwhelmingly denote fiction until the Qing Dynasty.

The collocation *yingwen xiaoshuo* (英文小說 (“English novel”)) curiously occupies the second place in the list of the Qing corpus. In this particular case, the high likelihood ratio is probably due to the fact that *yingwen* is a rare compound in premodern literature and most of its occurrences are next to *xiaoshuo*, which tells the machine that it has a highly dependent relationship with *xiaoshuo*; it does not necessarily indicate that people in the Qing era regularly discussed English novels. It is important to keep in mind that the likelihood ratio calculates how likely that two words form a meaningful expression and the intensity of their association; the frequency of their appearances is only one factor in this calculation. If a word rarely appears but when it does, it is almost always next to *xiaoshuo*, the machine reckons that they must have a special relationship beyond merely neighboring each other due to pure chance. Among thirty-one appearances of *yingwen xiaoshuo* in the Qing corpus, most are from one text: *Chushi Ying-Fa-E guo riji* (出使英法俄國日記 (Diary of My Diplomatic Missions to England, France, and Russia)) by Zeng Jize 曾紀澤 (1839-1890). In the diary, Zeng repeatedly documents himself reading English novels (99-101). Although this collocation does not shed light on widespread phenomena, it points to a finding that I would not have otherwise noticed: *xiaoshuo*’s capacity to denote foreign novels in as early as the nineteenth century. The significance of this to the emergence of a modern East Asian discourse on fiction will be discussed in
the next chapter. Another nineteenth century instance of xiaoshuo denoting foreign novels is in a text by Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) in 1842, Haiguo tuzhi 海國圖志 (Maps and Records of Oceans and States), in which he discusses the culture of Aden (in modern day Yemen) and refers to the Arabian Nights (Yiqian ling yi ye 一千零一夜, or “one thousand and one nights,” in Chinese) as xiaoshuo (773).

The collocations Tangren xiaoshuo 唐人小說 (“xiaoshuo of Tang people”) and Mingren xiaoshuo 明人小說 (“xiaoshuo of Ming people”) in the Ming and Qing rankings also deserve attention. Since the Song period, xiaoshuo is regularly discussed in the context of xiaoshuo from a previous dynasty; this phenomenon started with Song literati’s fondness of invoking Tang xiaoshuo. This is important because it reflects the fact that the meanings of xiaoshuo are accumulative throughout the ages. As mentioned before, although xiaoshuo acquired new significations throughout history, its previously established meanings persisted and would not be erased until the modern era; by late imperial times, not even one of xiaoshuo’s earlier significations discussed above fell into obscurity and disuse. In the Tang period, literature concerning “absurd and baseless things like ghosts, gods, transformations, and fantasy” was denoted as xiaoshuo; this meaning of xiaoshuo carried over to later dynasties and can be invoked as Tangren xiaoshuo. In the Song period, biji writings and tales of the supernatural were called xiaoshuo; these meanings were passed on to the later ages and became Songren xiaoshuo 宋人小說 (“xiaoshuo of Song people”). The immensely persistent nature of xiaoshuo’s layers of meanings built on top of each other over the course of Chinese history is what
renders it one of the most puzzling and complex concepts to decipher. In the next chapter, we will examine yet another layer of meaning added to it in the twentieth century.

The most prominent, and also the most puzzling, pattern shown in the collocation analysis is the rise of xiaoshuo’s close relationship with baiguan （“petty official”）starting from the Southern Song period. A collocation analysis performed on baiguan also demonstrates its strong relationship with xiaoshuo since the Southern Song period. Due to the scarcity of baiguan’s appearance before the Southern Song (seven in the Northern Song corpus and two in the entire corpus prior to the Northern Song), the entire corpus prior to the Southern Song is combined together to form a pre-Southern Song corpus:

Pre-Southern Song
庶繼代洪烈 稗官 29.46
旁收 稗官 29.46
逮傳記 稗官 29.46
稗官 所采 24.96
秘方 稗官 22.76

Southern Song
稗官 小說 60.92
稗官 虞初 49.08
稗官 小 30.57
稗官 帝之學 26.39
稗官 街談巷 26.39

Yuan
稗官 小說 97.50
之燕談 稗官 52.30
稗官 小 43.88
稗官 之紀 38.36
下極 稗官 26.08

Ming
稗官 小說 118.31
不博覽 稗官 26.31
旁史 稗官 26.31
海誌 稗官 26.31
碎之言 稗官 26.31

Qing
稗官 小說 520.64
The collocation analyses on *xiaoshuo* and *baiguan* reveal that the close association between these two is a distinctly post-Northern Song phenomenon. The lists of collocations as shown above are not complete, as the complete ones are very long and include collocations with likelihood ratios as low as less than three. In both analyses, pre-Southern Song corpuses do not contain the collocation *baiguan xiaoshuo* at all, not even at the bottom of the lists with a low likelihood ratio.

The earliest extant appearances of the word *baiguan* can be found in the excavated Qin bamboo slips from Shuihudi 睡虎地 and Yunmenglong 雲夢龍. In these documents, *baiguan* refers to low officials at the level of counties and villages; it designates the administrative level, not a specific job function (Wang and Liu 68-70). In terms of received literature, a search in the Chinese Text Project’s pre-Qin and Qin-Han corpus demonstrates that the only appearance of *baiguan* in this period is in the aforementioned passage by Ban Gu in the *Hanshu*, where *baiguan* is an agent who collects talks from the streets. This particular definition of *baiguan* is the one that is passed onto later literature. In the CDCL pre-Song corpus, *baiguan* only appears twice.

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31 Qin here refers to both the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) and the Kingdom of Qin.
The first is in the *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*), compiled by Liu Xie 劉勰 (fl. 5th century):

Perhaps puns and parables were indispensable to literature, as ‘Trivia’ [*xiaoshuo*] must be accorded a place among the ten schools of philosophy; what the minor officers [*baiguan*] gathered could after all still be a useful source of information. (54)

In the Tang corpus, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819), in his preface to a poem, writes,

In honesty, such unsightly words and profligate sounds are not worthy of being inscribed in metals and stones. Fortunately, due to the great contributions of each generation, *baiguan* and villagers can collect and sing them. (320)

誠醜言淫聲，不足以當金石，庶繼代洪烈，稗官里人得采而歌之。

Though not in the CDCL, Wang Qizhou 王齊洲 and Liu Fuling 劉伏玲 point out that the Three Kingdoms scholar Ru Chun’s 如淳 (dates unknown) commentary on Ban Gu’s passage claims that the office of *baiguan* was specifically created to collect talks on the streets:

Discussions from the streets and talks from the alleyways are words of a trifling and piffling nature. Kings wished to know the customs and cultures of the villages and alleyways and thus created the office of *baiguan* to have [*baiguan* officials] report them. (Wang and Liu 68)

街談巷說，其細碎之言也。王者欲知閭巷風俗，故立稗官，使稱說之。
It is evident that Ban Gu’s narrow definition of *baiguan* was taken de facto in later times and eroded the earlier, broader notion as found in the excavated bamboo slips.

In the CDCL’s Song corpus, *baiguan* designates discourse that is unreliable, nonserious, unorthodox, or fabricated. This passage in Liu Qi’s 劉跂 (fl. 1079) *Xueyi ji* 學易集 (*Collection on the Study of The Classic of Changes*) illustrates *baiguan*’s inferior status to orthodox learning:

Being passionate about learning, he frequently and persistently [studied] the classics and histories of various schools. Reaching as low as biographical tales and the talks of *baiguan*, there was nothing he did not seek out and read. (611)

For *baiguan*’s capacity to designate fabricated narratives, see this passage from the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (*A Collection of Conversations of Master Zhu*) where *baiguan* denotes fabricated stories:

The old eunuch Huang Jiefu served Emperor Hui. He said that the Daoist Lin Lingsu used magic; there is no truth in that. Talks like those of Wen Ge regarding seeing ghosts and gods are all *baiguan*. I have never seen them. (Zhu 576)

In all cases of its appearances, *baiguan* seems to be highly interchangeable with *xiaoshuo*, except that it can specifically refer to the agent that collects such discourse, which *xiaoshuo* cannot. Such interchangeability partially explains these two words’ link in the collocation ranking and is likely due to the fact that the very concept of *baiguan* is
defined by Ban Gu, who firmly ties it to *xiaoshuo*. After looking through each individual appearance of *baiguan* in the entire CDCL corpus, I have seen no example of this word being invoked in contexts unrelated to Ban Gu’s notion of it. Like *xiaoshuo*, *baiguan* does not exclusively refer to narratives. For example, in the anonymous Southern Song text *Airi zhai congchao* (Collected Writings of the Airi Academy), *baiguan xiaoshuo* is explicitly described to include treatises on subject matters such as magic, medicine, and ritual:

> The nine hundred forty-three pieces of *baiguan xiaoshuo* are all about magic, medicine, banquets, sacrificial prayers, and talks that are passed around in alleyways. They were collected to form this book. (691)

盖稗官小說凡九百四十三篇皆巫醫厭祝及里巷之所傳言集為是書。

Prior to the Southern Song, I have not found the exact compound *baiguan xiaoshuo*, though these two words often appear close to each other. Since the compound is a distinctly post-Northern Song phenomenon, its rise is potentially connected to the Northern to Southern Song transition. As discussed above, *xiaoshuo* became significantly entangled with the performative tradition in the Southern Song. However, there is no usage of *baiguan xiaoshuo* in the Southern Song or Yuan corpus that ties it to the performative tradition. Its meanings include all of *xiaoshuo*’s meanings established by the Northern Song period and it has no specific designation that *xiaoshuo* cannot accomplish on its own, which begs the question as to why this compound even needed to exist. The

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32 The collocation analysis only account for characters and words that appear immediately next to each other.
sudden appearance of this compound in the Southern Song and its progressively increasing popularity ever since might be linked to a lost Southern Song text titled *Baiguan xiaoshuo*, which is referred to in two Southern Song texts in the CDCL. In both cases, the texts quote a specific passage from *baiguan xiaoshuo* concerning a curious worm:

According to *Baiguan xiaoshuo*, there is a worm in the Southern Sea that has no bones and is called *ni*. When it is in water, it lives; when it leaves water, it collapses and resembles a pile of mud. (Wu Zeng 623)

按《稗官小說》南海有蟲，無骨，名曰泥。在水中則活，失水則醉，如一堆泥然。

This segment is preceded by a few sentences of similar structures in which *an* 按 ("according to") is followed by known text titles like *Hangong yi* 漢宮儀 (*Rituals of the Han Palace*) and *Beishan jing* 北山經 (*Classic of the Northern Mountain*), which renders it very likely that *Baiguan xiaoshuo* here is also the title of a text. In the other case, the context also suggests that *Baiguan xiaoshuo* is a title:

I saw *Baiguan xiaoshuo* and learned that it says there is a worm in the Southern Sea that has no bones and is called *ni*. When it is in water, it lives; when it leaves water, it collapses and resembles a pile of mud. Then, I read *Tales of the Five Kingdoms*, which says […] (Zhang Jibang 62)

予觀《稗官小說》乃得其說 云南海有蟲 無骨 名曰泥 在水則活 失水則醉 如一堆泥 然後又讀五國故事雲 […]。
The matching wording of the boneless worm reference also points to the likelihood that *Baiguan xiaoshuo* here refers to a text from which exact sentences can be copied, as opposed to the general notion of minor discourse. Other than these two, I have found no other instance of this compound being the title of a text; the association between *xiaoshuo* and *baiguan* post-Northern Song is not due to this title being mentioned over and over again. Barring other potential explanations that I have yet to discover, we can only speculate that the compound *baiguan xiaoshuo* was perhaps popularized by a text bearing this title.

**Conclusion**

This chapter illustrates that *xiaoshuo*’s linguistic development is better understood as a process where its signifying capacity expands throughout the ages, rather than a linear trajectory where it steadily evolves toward the modern notion of fiction—a view founded by Lu Xun that will be the focus of the next chapter. In my view, the study of fiction and that of *xiaoshuo* should be considered related but separate fields. Whereas the study of fiction is based on understanding premodern literature based on a modern Western concept (i.e. fiction) with no exact equivalent in premodern Chinese, the study of *xiaoshuo* concerns a traditional Chinese concept with no equivalent in English. Although the concept of fiction is modern and Western, applying it to premodern Chinese literature can avoid becoming teleological if there is no presumption that developments in premodern literature should be understood in the context of an evolution toward an end-

33 See Chapter 1 for Ming Dong Gu’s support of Lu’s view.
product like the late imperial novel or the modern concept of fiction. The interchangeability of *xiaoshuo* and fiction in Lu Xun’s discourse and modern scholarship is highly problematic because fiction is only one of many significations of *xiaoshuo* in some periods of history; confounding *xiaoshuo* and fiction is necessarily a teleological process because the initial equivalence drawn between them in the formative period of Chinese and Japanese modernity was motivated by a desire to help traditional East Asian fiction transition to its modern, Western-inspired reincarnation. In the next chapter, we will discuss how the traditional notions of *xiaoshuo* laid the foundation for a modern Sino-Japanese discourse on fiction founded by Lu Xun and Tsubouchi Shōyō, who transformed the meanings of *xiaoshuo/shōsetsu* to lead China and Japan into literary and intellectual modernity.
Chapter 4

_Xiaoshuo/Shōsetsu_ and the Birth of a Modern East Asian Discourse on Fiction: Reading Lu Xun’s Theory on the Historical Development of _Xiaoshuo_ in a Sino-Japanese Intellectual Context

**Introduction**

The tremendous influence of Japan on Lu Xun and his May Fourth contemporaries is well-understood in the study of modern Chinese fiction. However, Japanese influence on Lu’s theory of the development of premodern Chinese fiction has gone largely unnoted. In my view, the Sino-Japanese intellectual context that shaped the earliest formation of modern Chinese fiction should also be applied to analyzing Lu’s understanding of premodern Chinese fiction. In this chapter, I argue that the equivalence between _xiaoshuo_ and fiction drawn by Lu Xun is inspired by Japanese modern discourse on fiction, namely that of Tsubouchi Shōyō, and driven by the desire to modernize Chinese literature and conception of fiction; the capacity of _xiaoshuo/shōsetsu_ to signify the modern Western notion of fiction was created by Lu and Shōyō to lead China and Japan into a Western-inspired literary and intellectual modernity.

_Shōsetsu/Xiaoshuo and the Novel_

In his 2014 publication “The Rise of Xiaoshuo as a Literary Concept: Lu Xun and the Question of ‘Fiction’ in Chinese Literature,” Carlos Lin studies the transformation of
the concept of *xiaoshuo* during the formative years of modern Chinese literature and raises a concern:

The question of how *xiaoshuo* come [sic] to translate “fiction” is further complicated by a consideration of the cultural exchange between Japan and China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is very likely that the classical Chinese term was first appropriated by Japanese scholars as a neologistic term to translate the Western concept of the novel and was only later adopted by Chinese intellectuals for the same purpose. (633-634)

While Lin is correct about the fact that Japan played a role in the modern transformation of the concept of *xiaoshuo* in China, whether or not *shōsetsu* can be considered a neologism in this case is a complicated issue. Whereas Lin focuses on the relationship between *xiaoshuo* and the Western notion of fiction, this chapter attempts to delineate that between *xiaoshuo* and *shōsetsu* and explores the Japanese side of the story.

In terms of establishing a nation’s modern discourse on fiction that is fundamentally influential until today, Lu Xun’s Japanese counterpart is Tsubouchi Shōyō, the author of the *Shōsetsu shinzui* 小説神髄 (*The Essence of the Novel*, hereafter *Essence*). He is considered to be the founder of modern Japanese literary criticism for initiating one of the first modern Japanese attempts to provide a comprehensive framework to understand the nature and history of fiction. Although *Essence*, published in 1885, did not gather much immediate attention, it had become a central piece of modern Japanese literature by the early twentieth century (Ueda 144-168). As Lin points out, *Essence* “is generally considered the seminal work in transforming the Chinese
compound *xiaoshuo* (pronounced as *shōsetsu* in Japanese) into a widely accepted term for ‘novel’ in the Japanese context” (634). Indeed, *Essence* explicitly draws an equivalence between *shōsetsu* and the English word “novel”: “I hope that my theories will bring readers to their senses and at the same time enlighten writers, so that by henceforth planning the steady reform and improvement of *shōsetsu* we may finally bring it to the point where it surpasses the European *shōsetsu =* novel” (Ueda 29). As Atsuko Ueda, who translated this passage into English, notes, “the term *noberu* (or ‘novel’) is provided alongside the word *shōsetsu* in the form of [...] glosses that show how the sinified characters should be read” (183). In order to understand why *shōsetsu* can be used to translate “novel,” two historical contexts need to be considered: late imperial China and Tokugawa Japan.

As revealed in the previous chapter, by late imperial times, especially the Qing Dynasty, *xiaoshuo* was commonly used to denote Chinese novels; by the mid-nineteenth century, *xiaoshuo* was even used to designate foreign novels. Tokugawa Japan’s popular literary culture intersected with that of late imperial China via importing Chinese novels and Chinese terminologies surrounding late imperial novels. The notion of *shōsetsu* imported to Japan during this time corresponded to its late imperial Chinese counterpart; like *xiaoshuo, shōsetsu* designated domestic and foreign (mainly Chinese)

34 I do not mean to suggest that this is the first time the word *xiaoshuo/shōsetsu* had ever entered Japan; I am only referring to the late imperial notion of *xiaoshuo* (as opposed to its earlier meanings in, for example, the Warring States period) being imported to Tokugawa Japan. Chinese literature had been long integrated into Japanese literary culture by the Tokugawa period, so Japanese scholars certainly had encountered earlier notions of *xiaoshuo* prior to this period.
novels (Suzuki 16). In fact, the late imperial notion of *xiaoshuo* even affected how Japanese readers perceived earlier Japanese fictional works. In the mid-nineteenth century, Hagiwara Hiromichi 萩原広道 (1815-1864) established a new way of interpreting the *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (*The Tale of Genji*), which defines it “as a work of narrative fiction [*shōsetsu*] rather than a work of didactic literature or lyric prose” (Caddeau 49). According to Patrick Caddeau, Hiromichi’s approach is informed by a perception of fiction based on the late imperial Chinese novel and its attached commentaries, which were popular in Tokugawa Japan (44-47). Moreover, Caddeau posits that Shōyō’s understanding of the concept of *shōsetsu* is based on that established by Hiromichi (45).

In *Essence*, Shōyō seems to adopt a very broad definition of *shōsetsu* that designates a wide range of fictional narratives, which reflects how *xiaoshuo* could be used in late imperial China:

> How the *monogatari* has thrived in our country. Antiquity gave us *The Tale of Genji*, *The Tale of Sagoromo*, *The Tale of Hamamatsu*, and *The Tale of Sumiyoshi*, followed later by Ichijō Zenkō’s *gesaku* and Ono no Otsū’s *The Tale of Princess Jōruri*. Closer to our own times, the fame enjoyed by such writers as Saikaku, Kishō, Fūrai, and Kyōden contributed still further to *shōsetsu*’s ever-increasing popularity, and thus literary talents of the day competed in producing *haishi*. Ikku and Sanba gained popularity in “humorous stories” (*kokkeibon*) and “books of wit

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35 Also see Yamazaki Fusako for how Hiromichi uses late imperial Chinese methods for analyzing novels on *The Tale of Genji*. 
and fashion” (*sharebon*), and Shunsui’s name is remembered for his “books of sentiment” (*ninjōbon*). Tanehiko’s fame derives from his *Rustic Genji* and Bakin’s from *Hakkenden*.

Then the upheavals of the Restoration put a temporary stop to *gesaku* writers, and *shōsetsu* lost ground. Recently, however, it has made a very considerable comeback, the time being now propitious to the publication of *monogatari*.

Everywhere we see all sorts of *haishi* and *monogatari*, each trying to outdo the others by simply seeking superficial novelty. Things have come [sic] to such a pass that even newspapers and magazines are publishing rehashings of threadbare old *shōsetsu*. As a result of this trend, there are innumerable *shōsetsu* and *haishi* of all varieties in circulation in our country [. . .] (Ueda 29)

Ueda stresses that we must resist the impulse to treat *monogatari* 物語, *haishi* 稗史, and *shōsetsu* as interchangeable concepts that constitute a linear development of the history of fiction because they have disparate literary histories and significations (30-31). However, in this passage, it is apparent that Shōyō uses *shōsetsu* as an inclusive umbrella term that covers a large variety of traditional Japanese fictional works, such as theatrical plays, *monogatari*, *haishi*, *kokkeibon* 滑稽本, *sharebon* 汨落本, *ninjōbon* 人情本, and *gesaku* 戏作.36 In the third sentence of the passage, *gesaku* writer Santō Kyōden 山東京伝 (1761-1816) and theatrical play composers Fūrai Sanjin 風来山人 (1728-1780) and Hachimonjiya Kishō 八文字屋其笑 (d. 1750) are said to have contributed to *shōsetsu*’s

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36 See Ueda 182 for definitions of these types of Japanese fiction.
popularity, which implies that Shōyō considers their works to be shōsetsu. Moreover, in the same sentence, the production of haishi is described as a part of the increasing popularity of shōsetsu. The close semantic relationship among xiaoshuo, xiqu, and baiguan in late imperial China is revealed in the collocation study of the previous chapter; Shōyō’s usage of shōsetsu to designate theatrical plays and haishi reflects a pre-established common linguistic practice.

Shōyō’s translation of “novel” as shōsetsu, which largely cemented the equivalence between the Sinographic compound 小説 (pronounced xiaoshuo in Chinese, shōsetsu in Japanese, and soseol in Korean) and the Western notions of fiction and the novel in modern East Asia, should be contextualized in the Sino-Japanese linguistic environment in which the compound has historically designated a wide range of domestic and foreign fictional works since late imperial China and Tokugawa Japan. The mere usage of this compound to denote Western fictional works is not a drastic stretch of its meanings or a neologism. However, it is not to say that there is no neologism in “shōsetsu = novel” at all. To find the neologistic dimension of using this compound to translate the Western idea of fiction, we need to dig deeper into how Shōyō and Lu Xun transformed the notion of shōsetsu/xiaoshuo for modern discourse.

Tsubouchi Shōvō and the Creation of the Modern Notion of Shōsetsu

To Shōyō, understanding the nature and history of the novel is crucial to the progress of civilization. According to Tomi Suzuki, Essence “should be understood as a
part of the larger movement in the 1880’s to promote the rapid development and westernization of Japan as a modern nation-state” (20). Shōyō articulates,

The *shōsetsu* is not something to be used in the service of man’s carnal passions. It aspires to entertain him by appealing to his more refined tastes. A taste for elegance and an emotional sensitivity, however, are the most noble of attributes, to be found only in people of civilized, culturally advanced nations [. . .] an art lover who indulges himself frequently will develop more and more of a taste for elegance, and his character will become increasingly finer. (Ueda 49-50)

To him, the enjoyment of fiction as an art form is an essential aspect of an advanced civilization toward which Japan should strive. He explicitly acknowledges the West as the goalpost:

If the *shōsetsu* has such values, it behooves us to reform and improve our immature *shōsetsu-haishi* to perfect them so that they surpass the Western *shōsetsu*, thereby making our *shōsetsu* the greatest art, the flower of our nation (*kokka no hana*). If we really desire to achieve this goal, we should first investigate why and how advanced civilizations obtained their strength while avoiding their past mistakes. Unless we study and follow the superior ways of the West, thereby creating the basis for a superior *haishi*, our Eastern *shōsetsu-haishi* will remain at the stage of Western romance and never have the opportunity to progress. (Ueda 20)

It is apparent that Shōyō’s perception of the development of fiction is fundamentally Social Darwinist and focused on advancing Japanese fiction according to the ways of the
West. He compares the state of Japanese fiction at the time to an early stage in the evolution of Western literature: romance. In the West, the quintessential modern novel is often thought to be the nineteenth century realist novel, which is a rejection of and departure from romance. Influenced by this view, Shōyō perceives the modern Western realist novel as the evolved, superior form of fiction: “The shōsetsu is a form of fiction, a modification of the fantasy. Unlike the fantasy (or romance, as the English style it), which is a tissue of absurdities fabricated without regard to verisimilitude, the novel [noberu] sets out to portray human nature and behaviour, basing its themes on realistic material” (Tsubouchi Chapter Two). Here, he debases non-realist fiction, which he refers to as “fantasy” and “romance,” in favor of modern Western fictional realism; this aligns with the contemporary Western view that fictional realism is a sign of modern civilization, as it embodies values like reason, rationality, scientific objectivity, and a willingness to perceive reality as it is without superstitious and fantastic elements—qualities lacking in backward, primitive civilizations. Shōyō’s high regard for realism as an advanced form of art and dismissal of romance as backward can also be seen in this statement: “It was inevitable that the romance, in a natural progression, should also turn gradually away from outlandish plots towards realistic descriptions of society” (Tsubouchi Chapter 2). Moreover, in the chapter of Essence titled “The Aims of the Novel,” Shōyō extensively discusses psychological realism as a key goal of novel-writing (Tsubouchi Chapter 3). To him, the realist novel is the epitome of fiction’s evolution.

37 All instances of Nanette Twine’s translations are modified because Twine does not distinguish concepts like monogatari, shōsetsu, or noberu and translates them all as “novel” or “fiction.”
In order for Japanese fiction to approximate the Western role model, Japan must develop a new discourse on fiction that is distinct from the traditional Confucian one. The demeaning and oppressive Confucian attitude toward fiction is well-noted by scholars of Chinese and Japanese literature. As discussed by Sheldon Lu, Confucianism prescribes two main ways of reading apparently fabricated narratives (i.e. fiction): allegorical and historiographical. In the allegorical mode of reading, the purpose of fiction is to use fabricated stories for didactic purposes and to deliver valuable lessons; this narrative and interpretative tradition dates back to the Warring States period when philosophers frequently used apparently fabricated stories to convey philosophical ideas and educate their intended audiences. In the historiographical mode of reading, fiction is inaccurate or made-up history for wrongful or playful purposes. The allegorical and historiographical interpretive strategies, neither of which can accommodate the modern Western notion of the novel as an art form without didactic purposes and not subjugated to historiographical judgements, correspond, respectively, to the two bibliographical categories into which fiction is often categorized in premodern China: zi and shi. To depart from this traditional interpretative framework, Essence rejects didacticism in fiction and separates fiction from historiography by emphasizing its imaginative and fabricated nature. Regarding didacticism in fiction, Shōyō exclaims,

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38 On the Chinese side, see Ming Dong Gu 17-42 and Sheldon Lu 37-73. On the Japanese side, see Suzuki 16-17 and Ueda 40-41.
39 See Sheldon Lu 93-128 for how Tang fiction was read using these two modes of interpretation.
There is certainly no shortage of writers of *shōsetsu*, but most of them write adaptations of other people's work. Not one can be called an author in his own right. Every recently published *shōsetsu-haishi* has been either a reworking of Bakin or Tanehiko, or an imitation of Ikku or Shunsui. Novelists of late have taken to heart the words of Li Yu—they regard didacticism as the main purpose of *shōsetsu-haishi*, and construct a moral framework within whose bounds they strive to devise a plot, with the result that even if they have not consciously set out to ape earlier writers, the restricted scope of their work nevertheless forces them along already well-worn paths. A deplorable state of affairs! (Tsubouchi Introduction)

In this passage, didacticism in fiction is explicitly linked to the Chinese fictional tradition, namely that of Li Yu 李漁 (1610-1680). In addition to didacticism, Shōyō bemoans the lack of originality in recycling materials of previous ages, which echoes the aforementioned tension between the need for self-conscious originality in the Western view of fiction and the traditional Chinese—in this case, Sino-Japanese—practice of retelling existing stories in Chapter 1. In contrast to Eugene Eoyang, Shōyō does not try to justify such practices; in his view, such lack of originality is caused by adherence to the model of fictional didacticism established by the Chinese, who were considered backward and imprisoned by outdated thinking in the early years of modern Japan. Atsuko Ueda points out that *Essence* demonstrates a conscious effort to separate the Japanese fictional tradition from Chinese influences:

Here, I wish to touch upon *Shōsetsu shinzi*’s de-Asianizing impulses in producing a genealogy of *shōsetsu* of “our country” [. . .] efforts to isolate “Chinese literary
tradition” as that which is not Japanese are apparent in Shōsetsu shinzui. This was especially true with the hakuwa tradition, despite its rich history in Japan and China. The deliberate omission of Luo Guanzhong and Li Yu in establishing the genealogy of the shōsetsu of “our country” is one indication. (32-33)

To create a modern notion of fiction, Shōyō constructs a genealogy of fiction detached from the fundamental didactic nature of the Chinese narrative tradition. He claims,

Through generations of pre-history, historical material was always passed on in song form, which in the dark ages before the advent of writing seemed the simplest and most convenient way of transmitting it with a minimum of error. The singers, wanting to be able to memorize and recite easily, naturally chose as smooth and fluid a diction as they could. Knowing that stylistic refinement and graceful circumlocution often catch the attention, they devoted much effort to clever phrasing. As the wording of those passages in songs which express emotion is usually full-bodied and elegant, the facts were often distorted for the sake of this effect. The chants thus became increasingly ostentatious and responsive to popular fancy, and in the process the veracity of their source material was much eroded, until little resemblance to the original remained. In this transformation of mythology from a historical mould to a form of entertainment, the shōsetsu had its beginning. (Tsubouchi Chapter 2)

This statement about the origin of shōsetsu is unmistakably iconoclastic against the Confucian discourse about xiaoshuo originating from the office of baiguan. Shōyō
portrays *shōsetsu* as deriving from a narrative tradition that has the creative licence to fabricate and distort for the sake of entertainment, appealing to the mass, and verbal artistry, which approximates the modern Western notion of fictional art. Ueda argues that Shōyō’s categorization of *shōsetsu* into the realm of orality is an effort to separate fiction from historiography:

The two oppositions, truth/fiction and writing/oration, clearly align themselves with one another [. . .] By the use of two oppositions, *Shōsetsu shinzi* allocates truth to the realm of history and manages to sever the *shōsetsu* from the discipline of history. This is on a par with *Shōsetsu shinzi*’s later claim in “The Main Themes of the *Shōsetsu*” that *shōsetsu* is fiction: “There is, on the whole, no external difference at all between a *shōsetsu* and documentary writings (*jitsuroku*), but the hero of the *shōsetsu* is entirely a product of the writer’s imagination.” Unlike documentary writings that grew out of newspaper reports of actual events, the *shōsetsu* thus thematizes entirely fictional characters. (Ueda 54-55)

Such separation is another significant step of distancing *shōsetsu* from the traditional Chinese and Confucian interpretative framework, which often views *xiaoshuo* as a minor subset of *shi* writings.

In *Essence*, Shōyō creates a modern notion of *shōsetsu* that approximates the Western idea of fiction by detaching it from Confucianism, historiography, and didacticism, re-inventing it as a product of a fictional tradition with the creative licence to fabricate, and situating it in an evolutionary genealogy whose end is the blossoming of Western-style realism. Although using *shōsetsu/xiaoshuo* to denote foreign or Western
novels is not a neologism, this new conception of *shōsetsu* transforms its premodern Chinese-influenced meaning to a modern Western-inspired one; the neologism lies not in designating Western novels with *shōsetsu*, but in building an equivalence between *shōsetsu* and the modern Western notion of fiction as an art form. In the following section, we will explore how this process plays out in Lu Xun’s founding of a modern Chinese discourse on *xiaoshuo* about half a century after the publication of *Essence*.

**Lu Xun and the Creation of the Modern Notion of Xiaoshuo**

As discussed in Chapter 1, Lu Xun’s theory of the development of fiction is fundamentally Social Darwinist and aims to propel Chinese fiction and civilization to evolve. Like Shōyō, Lu is concerned with constructing an evolutionary lineage of fiction that allows *xiaoshuo* to transition from its premodern meaning to a Western-inspired modern one. Lu also rejects the traditional Confucian view on the origin of *xiaoshuo*:

> How did *xiaoshuo* first come to be written? According to the bibliographical section of the *Book of Han*, “the school of *xiaoshuo* writings came from the petty officials of the court.” Whether such an official function existed or not is another question. But even if it did, this can only explain the origin of such writing, not the origin of *xiaoshuo*. (394)

The distinction Lu draws between *xiaoshuo shu* 小說書 ("*xiaoshuo* writing") and *xiaoshuo* is curious and has no known precedent in traditional Chinese literature, but it makes sense when we situate his discourse in that established by Shōyō; read in this light,
Lu’s claim can be compared to Shōyō’s effort to construct a non-literary, oral origin of *shōsetsu* and divorce it from the written historiographical tradition.

After establishing his departure from Ban Gu’s characterization of the origin of *xiaoshuo*, Lu goes on to articulate a view that closely resembles that of Shōyō:

Nowadays most students of the history of literature believe that *xiaoshuo* grew out of mythology. When primitive men living in caves or in the wilderness were puzzled by such ever-changing phenomena of nature as wind, rain and earthquakes, which they could not account for, they attributed these things to supernatural beings, and made stories about the life and behaviour of the gods, as in the account of the creation of heaven and earth in Chinese mythology. So myths started. When these myths developed and became more human, demigods appeared—ancient heroes who achieved great deeds by means of superhuman attributes given to them by the gods [. . .] These tales, which show the difference between demigods and ordinary men, are today called legends. Then these stories evolved further, and truthful accounts became history while other anecdotes became *xiaoshuo*.

For a comparison, see Shōyō’s account regarding the origin of *shōsetsu* and history:

In the barbaric age of fighting, there were many who rose precipitately in the savage wilderness to become heads of families and, soon after, clan leaders. . . .They told of the hardship they had endured and of their own exploits in battle. The stories were true accounts of their own firsthand experiences and observations, but, in time, as they were passed on down the generation by word of
mouth, faulty memories and exaggerations finally resulted in the loss of the original core of fact, and overdramatized versions, transmitted orally over long periods, eventually became the basis for mythology. . . .It seems quite certain that the myths of antiquity were the beginnings of the romance, and that many had been added to or falsified in the telling. . . .(The myths) are not completely true, but not all fictitious; they are facts dressed up with a combination of invention and misrepresentation to produce something in the style of history; it is partly history and partly shōsetsu. History and shōsetsu thus have a common source, their present dissimilarity being merely the result of their subsequent development. (Ueda 53-54)

Both Lu and Shōyō hold mythology as the origin of history and xiaoshuo/shōsetsu, a view likely influenced by the primacy of Greek mythology in the Western literary tradition. Lu’s adherence to this view is particularly striking since, unlike Japan and the West, China does not even have a prominent mythological tradition; such an absence is acknowledged by Lu (395-356). By connecting xiaoshuo/shōsetsu to mythology, Lu and Shōyō construct an origin of xiaoshuo/shōsetsu that is more rooted in imagination.

To align xiaoshuo with the modern Western notion of fiction, Lu’s genealogy of xiaoshuo emphasizes imaginative discourse concerning the mythical and supernatural. In Chinese literary history, the Tang and Song periods saw the first wave of narrative genres that are predominantly characterized by apparent fabrication, like chuanqi 傳奇 and
Prior to that, what can be described as *xiaoshuo* include a wide range of discursive and nonfictional texts. Even in the Ming-Qing period when *xiaoshuo* commonly designated the novel, its early association with discursive and nonfictional literature remained a prominent aspect of its meanings. Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602) lists six types of *xiaoshuo*:

The *xiaoshuo* group is further divided into several subgroups. The first is called "records of anomalies" (*zhiguai*), which contains works such as the *Soushen (ji)* 搜神記, *Shuyi (ji)* 述異記, *Xuanshi (zhi)* 宣室志, and *Youyang (zazu)* 酉陽雜俎. The second is called "tales of the remarkable" (*chuanqi*), which contains such stories as those about [Zhao] Feiyan, [Yang] Taizhen, [Cui] Yingying, and [Huo] Xiaoyu. The third is called "miscellaneous accounts of anecdotes" (*zalu*), which contains collections such as the *Shishuo (xinyu)* 世說新語, *Yulin 語林*, (*Beimeng* suoyan 北夢瑣言), and *Yinhua (lu)* 因話錄. The fourth is called "miscellaneous notes" (*congtan*), into which are put such works as the *Rongchai (suibi)* 容齋隨筆, *Mengxi (bitan)* 夢溪筆談, *Donggu (suojian)* 東谷所見, and *Daoshan (qinghua)* 道山清話. The fifth is called "evidential research" (*bianding*), in which are found books such as the *Shupu* 鼠璞, *Jilei (bian)* 雞肋編, *Zixia (ji)* 資睱集, and *Bianyi (zhi)* 辨疑志. The last is called "moral admonitions" (*zhengui*箴規), in which

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40 Fictional narratives exist in earlier literature like Warring States philosophies, but they are not genres predominantly characterized by apparent fabrication.
Categories such as moral admonitions and evidential research reflect *xiaoshuo*’s inclusion of genres far from fiction or even narratives. Although Lu Xun is aware of Hu’s classification and even cites it in *A Brief History* (6), he firmly excludes non-narratives from his history in order to transform *xiaoshuo* into a term that can be equivalent to the Western notion of fiction. Overall, his portrayal of the early history of *xiaoshuo* is heavily characterized by the mythological and supernatural—a significant departure from the traditional Confucian discourse on this matter. For the era before the Tang period, he focuses on literary traditions that concern the mythical and supernatural such as the *Shanhai jing* (The Classic of Mountains and Seas) and *zhiguai* writings (29-70).

In his lecture series on the development of *xiaoshuo*, the first two sections are “From Myth to Legend” (394) and “Tales of Men and of the Supernatural During the Six Dynasties Period” (400). From his modern scientific perspective, these texts are highly imaginative and suited to the Western notion of fiction; whereas such texts only form a very small subset of *xiaoshuo* in premodern China, they are central in Lu Xun’s history of *xiaoshuo*. The emphasis on early supernatural texts established by Lu is still very prominent in recent scholarship on premodern Chinese fiction. In North American academia, this is reflected in the line of scholarship inspired by Kenneth DeWoskin that holds Six Dynasties *zhiguai* as the origin of Chinese fiction.

It is important to note that judgements like “imaginative” and “supernatural” on these genres stem from an anachronistic modern viewpoint and do not necessarily
represent their original authorial intent and historical communicative context, which are important criteria for determining the fictional status of a work in current narrative theories.\textsuperscript{41} Lu Xun’s consideration of these criteria is visible in his description of Six Dynasties zhiguai writings:

As I have already pointed out, the scholars of the Six Dynasties did not consider their tales as fiction [xiaoshuo], for they believed those ghost stories and anecdotes. Hence the bibliographical section in the Tang Dynasty History [Jiu Tang shu 舊唐書] does not classify writing about the supernatural [zhiguai] as hsiao-shuo, but as history [lishi 歷史] or biography [zhuangji 傳記]. Not until the time of Ouyang Hsiu of the Sung Dynasty was such literature considered as [xiaoshuo]. (406)

This passage complicates the definition of xiaoshuo by pointing out that what was not meant to be xiaoshuo and fictional at one point can become xiaoshuo later. Lu does not state if he considers such texts as fictional; it is unclear whether he considers an authorial intention of writing fiction to be a pre-requisite for a work to be fiction. It is likely that he views such texts in a similar light as myths and legends: they are not fictional but laid the imaginative foundation for fiction to develop. In an above-cited passage, Lu claims that both history and fiction originated from myths, which indicates that he does not consider them to be the same thing. Shōyō, with whom Lu’s understanding of this matter aligns, explicitly stresses this distinction:

\textsuperscript{41} See the importance of authorial intent and communicative context in fictionality in Chapter 2.
It is a serious mistake to speak of myths, as some do, as the romances of ancient times. Nonsensical though they may be, they are intrinsically different from fiction in that while the stories they relate are not strictly factual, neither are they pure invention. (Chapter Two)

Another noteworthy aspect of the passage above is Lu’s mentioning of Ouyang Xiu’s categorization of zhiguai as xiaoshuo in the Northern Song. Lu sees the classification of imaginative narratives as xiaoshuo as an important evolutionary development in the history of fiction. In the first chapter of A Brief History titled “The Historians’ Accounts and Evaluations of Fiction,” he documents how premodern historians and bibliographers categorized imaginative narratives and traces a developmental trajectory in which such narratives were gradually separated from historiographical categories and non-fictional and non-narrative literature. He elaborates on the significance of Ouyang’s xiaoshuo bibliography by pointing out that it contains many texts that concern the mythical and supernatural, which were previously categorized as historiography (5). Lu asserts, “But from this time onwards these accounts of the supernatural were considered as fiction and ceased to be classed as history” (5). However, he acknowledges that Ouyang’s xiaoshuo bibliography, as well as that in the Songshi 宋史 (History of Song) compiled in the Yuan Dynasty, contains a wide range of non-fictional and non-narrative literature (5-6); he finds that at this point of history (i.e. the Song-Yuan period), imaginative literature still did not have their own category, which is a problem from the perspective that China needs to develop the modern Western notion of the novel. Lu goes on to describe xiaoshuo bibliographies in the Ming-Qing period and
finally locates one that approximates his modern view of *xiaoshuo* in the Qing Dynasty: the *Siku quanshu*. He states,

If we compare this [the *xiaoshuo* bibliography in the *Siku quanshu*] with Hu Ying-lin’s categories, we can see that there were actually two main groups: miscellaneous anecdotes [*zalu* 雜錄] and tales of marvels [*zhiguai*]; but here those tales which are more complete are classified as records of marvels [*yiwen* 異聞], the briefer and more miscellaneous are described as anecdotes [*suoyu* 瑣語]. Prose romances [*chuanqi*] are not included, neither are miscellaneous sayings [*congtan* 叢談], short studies [*bianding* 辯訂], and moral admonitions [*zhengui* 箴規]. From this time on, the *hsiao-shuo* genre seems to be more clearly defined [. . .] Since then, historical legends [*fei yituo zhi shi* 非依托之史] have been classed under *hsiao-shuo* as tales of marvels, and the section on history [*shibu* 史部] contains no more legendary accounts [*chuanshuo* 傳說]. (7-8)

Lu points out that the *Siku quanshu’s* *xiaoshuo* bibliography excludes non-narratives like short studies and moral admonitions and absorbs legendary accounts from historiographical categories, which renders the conception of *xiaoshuo* “more clearly defined,” especially vis-à-vis historiography. This search for evidence of the recognition of *xiaoshuo* as a distinct category separate from historiography initiated by Lu still

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42 See Hu Yinglin’s *xiaoshuo* categories above.
characterizes a significant portion of current scholarship on the historical development of premodern Chinese fiction.\footnote{See Lü Hailong and Sheldon Lu’s concerns with the significance of Ouyang Xiu redefining certain narratives as *xiaoshuo* in the *Xin Tang shu* in Chapter 3 for an example.}

So far, we have discussed Lu’s construction of a history of *xiaoshuo* where *xiaoshuo* had a basis in orality and imagination and eventually became recognized as distinct from historiography. Let us turn our attention to another historical paradigm established by Lu and still fundamentally influential in scholarship today: *xiaoshuo*’s evolution into self-consciously fictional creation and transition to vernacular language. As mentioned above, Lu acknowledges that Six Dynasties *zhiguai* writings are not self-consciously fictional; in his history, this acknowledgement lays the foundation for the next stage of *xiaoshuo*’s development in the Tang-Song period (618-1279). He posits,

> In the Tang dynasty fiction underwent a great change. Whereas during the Six Dynasties period brief tales about real men and ghosts were recorded as facts, Tang scholars began to write fiction consciously. So this was a great step forward in the history of Chinese fiction. (407)

In his view, the Tang period marks *xiaoshuo*’s evolution (“a great step forward” in his words) toward becoming self-conscious fiction, which is a core aspect of the modern Western notion of fiction. According to Lu, *xiaoshuo*’s attainment of another landmark feature of the modern novel occurs in the Song period:

> As far as original writings were concerned, the Sung scholars did not achieve much. But at that time another kind of story-telling arose [. . .] These stories were
different in form as well as in language, for they used the vernacular—a
tremendous change in the history of Chinese fiction. (415)

For more evidence on Lu’s emphasis on the vernacular tradition, the fourth lecture in his
lecture series on Chinese fiction, titled Songren zhi shuohua ji qi yingxiang 宋人之說話
及其影響 (“Song Period Oral Performance and Its Influence”), is dedicated to
demonstrating that Song-Yuan oral performance and vernacular literature are the
ancestors of the late imperial novel (414-424). This developmental lineage of vernacular
fiction drawn by Lu effectively created a new type of literary scholarship that focuses on
reconstructing the vernacular narrative tradition in premodern China and, to a certain
extent, reverse-engineering Chinese literary history based on the late imperial novel,
which is one of the dominant approaches in modern studies of the history of premodern
Chinese fiction. 44

Conclusion

Inspired by the Japanese reform of the concept of shōsetsu, namely that of
Tsubouchi Shōyō, Lu Xun constructed a history of premodern Chinese fiction that
situates the origin of xiaoshuo in orality and imagination and illustrates its gradual
evolution toward the modern Western notion of fiction by attaining self-conscious

44 See Chapter 1 for examples of such scholarship. I am specifically referring to
scholarship that concerns the broader history of Chinese fiction and takes a diachronic
approach. I am not suggesting that all scholarship, including ones that focus on specific
individual works, is influenced by this particular paradigm.
fabrication, vernacular language, and distinction from historiography. Although Lu understood the distinction between the concept of xiaoshuo and the modern Western notion of fiction, he conflated them to build a version of history where Chinese literature had long been evolving toward modern Western standards. This conflation laid the foundation for the tangling of the concepts of xiaoshuo and fiction in current scholarship and a fundamental teleological impulse to reverse-engineer literary history based on the late imperial novel. I do not mean to suggest that Lu’s studies have no valuable or valid insights that we should inherit. What I wish to point out is that a historical vision based on the ideological agenda of early twentieth-century China, characterized by Social Darwinism and Western-centric teleological historiography, forms the foundation of modern scholarship on premodern Chinese fiction and shapes our perception of the complex landscape of premodern literature into a linear evolutionary trajectory.
Conclusion

Almost a century after Lu Xun’s death and half a century after the rise of post-colonial and post-modernist critiques of Western-centric modernity, we still live in a world where discourse and scholarship regarding Chinese literature and fiction are fundamentally shaped by Lu’s early twentieth century ideological agenda. Since the very inception of the modern study of Chinese fiction, his conflation of xiaoshuo and fiction, evolutionary views, and arbitrary scope of what constitutes fiction have directed scholars to view the history of Chinese fiction in terms of a linear trajectory of evolution toward xiaoshuo’s transformation into its modern Western reincarnation. Moreover, the origin of Lu’s perspective in the explicitly Social Darwinist and Western-centric theories of Tsubouchi Shōyō is virtually never acknowledged. In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that xiaoshuo’s linguistic development is better understood as a process where its signifying capacity expands throughout the ages, rather than a linear trajectory where it steadily evolves toward the Western notion of fiction. Moreover, I have provided an alternative theoretical framework to conceptualize fiction and fictionality in premodern China that defines fiction as a mode of communication with a wide variety of formal manifestations—an approach that frees scholarship from its teleological tendency to reverse-engineer an evolutionary trajectory that leads to the end-product of the late imperial novel and the modern notion of fiction. Though I do not believe that Lu Xun’s scholarship provides no valuable insight that we should inherit, it is my contention that the field is long overdue for a critical examination of his legacy.
There is no easy answer as to how to handle Lu Xun’s legacy in the study of Chinese fiction. Let us recall the three aspects of his influences mentioned above: 1) confounding the concept of fiction with *xiaoshuo*; 2) establishing a Social Darwinist, evolution-centered approach as a major way of studying premodern Chinese fiction; and 3) setting an arbitrary scope for what can be considered fictional in Chinese literary history based on the desire to transform *xiaoshuo* into the modern Western notion of fiction. This dissertation provides a guide on how to address 1) by distinguishing *xiaoshuo* and fiction and clarifying the relationship between them. As for 3), if one is aware of the difference between *xiaoshuo* and fiction, one may look for fiction outside the pre-established scope of *xiaoshuo* discourse. In my view, 2) is the most problematic because it is difficult to conceptualize historical developments in non-evolutionary terms. Although I no longer perceive *xiaoshuo*’s history as a linear trajectory where it eventually evolves into the modern Western concept of fiction, I still cannot think beyond describing *xiaoshuo*’s history in terms of developmental stages demarcated by dynasties. Is my narrative of dynastic developmental stages a real non-Social Darwinist alternative to that of Lu Xun? The answer to this might lie in the realm of history rather than literature.

The persistence of Social Darwinist discourse in the study of premodern Chinese fiction by no means exists in an anachronistic temporal vacuum in a world that has supposedly moved on from such “outdated” assumptions; it is not the case that scholars of premodern Chinese fiction are somehow more backward-thinking than their more politically correct peers with sharper post-colonial sensibilities. Rather, this persistence demonstrates the power of Western-centric and Orientalist beliefs in contemporary thoughts. My analysis of the “culture-less” theories of fictionality in Chapter 2 is a prime
example of scholars in narrative theories adhering to Western-centrism; such recklessness is even happening in a field that is fiercely critical of one’s underlying assumptions. When we try to explain developments over a long period of time, especially ones that involve modernization and cultural differences, it is very difficult to escape Social Darwinist inclinations because they have such deep roots in our ways of thinking; the likes of Lu Xun and Tsubouchi Shōyō certainly took part in making sure that Social Darwinism is ironed into the minds of later generations.
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