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Postmodernist Theory in Recent Studies of Chinese Literature

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POSTMODERNIST THEORY
IN RECENT STUDIES OF CHINESE LITERATURE

by

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POSTMODERNIST THEORY IN RECENT STUDIES OF CHINESE LITERATURE

Preamble

The past decade has seen an explosion of Sinological interest in the application of postmodernist theoretical approaches to a variety of works in the Chinese literary tradition. This reflects the shift in Western literary studies away from the traditional humanistic disciplines of philosophy, rhetoric, and aesthetics, toward the human sciences of sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, and linguistics. The evolution of these disciplines in recent decades has been so marked that it constitutes a break, or rupture, with the past. This shift in perspective and this rupture with tradition is generally known as Postmodernism, and in its current expression it derives from the theoretical writings of the Paris School of the Human Sciences since the 1970s. The most influential among these writings has been Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, Lacan's psychoanalytical theory of the self, and Derrida's textual deconstruction. The interrelatedness of the formerly autonomous disciplines has generated a new language, or discourse, which is primarily centered in the study of literature, with such terms as hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation, and intertextuality, which is more than the traditional concepts of literary quotation, borrowing, imitation, and rewriting. Besides these new terms, Postmodernism has appropriated old words, such as reader and audience, or subject and object, self and other, and has made them function as revisionary, complex critical terms.

Central to this radical shift in critical perspective has been the foregrounding of what had previously been overlooked, or invisible, in a cultural or literary tradition. The most important new subject in postmodernist discourse is gender, which generally denotes Woman, in terms of the female as a gender construct, or as a component in gender relations, and especially as a rhetorical medium for exploring logic and language within a cultural or literary system.

The new subjects of postmodernist discourse include the following, listed in no particular sequence, to point up the variety of approaches: marginality, liminality, or the notion of boundaries (Van Gennep, Mary Douglas); transgressive writing and the avant garde (Poggioli); the ludic (Huizinga); the pleasure of the text (Barthes); homoerotics (Foucault); disciplinary regimes (Foucault); the gaze, or theories of looking (Freud, Lacan); narratology (Genette, Todorov); approaches to the body (social body, the body politics, and the female body); laughter (Baudelaire, Cixous); *jouissance* (Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray); pornography; concepts of readability versus the writable (lisible/scriptible); the cultural other (Said); popular and elite cultural interaction; and cultural imperialism (Said).

Numerous recent studies by Sinologists who specialize in literary studies have shown a remarkable willingness to engage with the theories, concepts, approaches, and terminology of Postmodernism. In their work they have pursued a revisionary imperative which has resulted in the rediscovery of many neglected literary works in the tradition, and in the awareness of new subjects of critical inquiry. This article constitutes a brief survey of some of the new trends in the study of Chinese literature. It is limited to 74 books and 15 articles published between 1986 and 1999.

1. Liminality, Rites de Passage, Marginality, Boundaries

The theories of liminality and rites de passage (Van Gennep), of marginality (Turner), and boundaries (Douglas), have had a creative impact on literary studies. Their important related concepts are the interrelatedness of self and other, the transformation process, the interchangeability of gender roles, the danger of the boundary position in relation to the dominant center, and the innovative energy generated by the voluntary or involuntary removal of the self away from a dominant, other, culture that has become repressive or ossified.

These theories have been fruitfully applied by Judith Zeitlin in her study of the classical short stories of P'u Sung-ling. In *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale (Liao-chai chih-yi)*, (Stanford University Press, 1993), she focuses on the transgression of boundaries between self and other (subject and object), between genders, and between illusion and reality. These theories have also been used to good effect by Keith McMahon in *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Duke University Press, 1995). In the exploration of these themes he presents a great deal of new material in English, and he also addresses the theme as it is seen in familiar fiction, such as *Dream of Red Towers (Hung lou meng)*. Other critics use theories of marginalization and liminality less self-consciously, while some discuss the themes without recourse to theoretical approaches. The first example is seen in Ellen Widmer's study of utopian ideas in *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyatism* (Harvard University Press, 1987). The second example occurs in Ronald C. Egan's study of Su Shih's covert activism during periods of exile, in *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Harvard University, Council of East Asian Studies, 1994). John Hay's collection of essays, on the other hand, directly engages with the practical application of theories of liminality to diverse literary and cultural products, in *Boundaries in China* (Reaktion Books, 1994), edited by Hay. This postmodernist approach could usefully be applied, too, to the subjects of the

deserted woman, the reclusive hermit, the Monkey figure, and the outlaw community of the novel, *Water Margin* (*Shui hu chuan*).

2. Inscribing the Self

The term, "inscribing the self," has evolved from feminist theory. It usually denotes a woman author's conscious incorporation of her personal experience into her own writing as a deliberate authorial strategy. In his innovative study, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (University of California Press, 1994), Richard E. Strassberg applies the term to a collection of literary texts which record the response of traditional writers to natural scenery. These lyrical or autobiographical writings inscribe the landscape in two ways: they affect the perception of others who later view the place, and they physically alter the landscape itself by being transferred to stone inscriptions in situ. This book is just one of several recent publications on travel writing, the genre of *yu-chi*, including James Hargett's *On the Road in Twelfth Century China: The Travel Diaries of Fan Chengda (1126-1193)* (Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1989), and Morris Rossabi's *Voyager from Xanadu: Rabban Sauma and the First Journey from China to the West* (Kodansha International, 1992).

3. The Representation of Self

Postmodernist critics have come to recognize that traditional studies of autobiographical literature have not sufficiently taken into account the complex relationship between reader and audience. The variability of individual response to a text, the function of feeling, the interaction between text and reader, and the problem of interpretation are key aspects of contemporary audience-oriented criticism. Postmodern critics now accept that authorial strategies may construct surface meanings in a text, especially the autobiographical text, in order to conceal a complex of significant codes. The notion of the reader in the text becomes more problematic when a critic seeks to apply interpretative strategies to novels which traditionally have been perceived to include self-representations by authors.

Pei-yi Wu's *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton University Press, 1990) usefully defines early autobiographical writings in the literary tradition. These were often masked by the use of the third-person voice, and were limited by exemplary representation, rather than the techniques of introspection or self-representation. He also identifies a "golden age" of Chinese autobiography in the liminal historical period of the late Ming-early Ch'ing, when the historiographical model of exemplary writing was abandoned in favor of fictional models of self-representation.

Martin Huang's *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation: Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Stanford University Press, 1995) is more self-conscious in his approach to the theoretical problems inherent in this form of writing. Focussing on four eighteenth-century novels, he argues that the authorial self is translated into fiction through a variety of autobiographical strategies of appropriating the experience of others: through masquerade in *The Scholars* (*Ju-lin wai-shih*), and through gender displacement in *Dream of Red Towers*.

Representation engenders more complex problems for critics attempting to reinvest the life and person of literary figures who have long been perceived to be on the periphery of the literary canon. With the postmodernist shift of emphasis, however, what used to be perceived as peripheral has now become central. For example, the study of early medieval literature and history, traditionally dismissed and marginalized as a Period of Disunion, has been foregrounded in Sinology in the past two decades. A fine example of this revisionary perspective is seen in Richard B. Mather's biography *The Poet Shen Yüeh (441-513): The Reticent Marquis* (Princeton University Press, 1988). He positions this literary and political figure in mainstream medieval culture, giving equal weight to the maneuvers which facilitated the ascendancy of Hsiao Yen as the founding emperor of the southern Liang dynasty, and to the way the poet secured recognition for the development of prosodic rules for tonal euphony in poetry in the era of formal experimentation. The poet's crucial role in preserving the earliest popular texts of ancient balladry exemplifies the importance of elite literary intervention in the transmission of oral literature.

Other notable reconstructions of the biographies of writers, based on the literary evidence of their own texts, are the following: Egan's study of Su Shih, *Word, Image, and Deed*, and Michael Fuller's *The Road to East Slope: The Development of Su Shi's Poetic Voice* (Stanford University Press, 1990); J. D. Schmidt's *Stone Lake: The Poetry of Fan Chengda (1126-1193)*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Robin D. S. Yates's *Washing Silk: The Life and Selected Poetry of Wei Chuang (834?-910)*, (Harvard University, Council on East Asian Studies, 1988).

The reconstruction of a writer's self represented in his own work is seen in Stephen W. Durrant's *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (State University of New York Press, 1995). Starting from an analysis of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's autobiographical postface to *Historical Records* (*Shih chi*), he discusses the issues of literary fame, the exemplary model (of Confucius), causes of personal failure, and the textual contradictions inscribed into the first history by the historian's own fluctuating authorial sympathies.

4. Narratology

More recent theories of narrative have developed far beyond the conceptual dyad of the story and the storyteller. The critical construct of narrative is now positioned on the triadic concept of story, audience, and narrator, and has become audience-oriented criticism. Its innovative perspectives include the idea of the narratee, the figure receiving the narrative (Genette); the frame narrative; the *histoire*; reader response; the implied reader (Iser); the relationship between reading publics and the text; the dialectic of production and reception of a literary work in different periods (Jauss); hermeneutics, or the concept of reading and interpretation; and the theory of textual deconstruction (Derrida).

Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu's *From History to Fictionality: The Poetics of Narrative* (Stanford University Press, 1994) addresses the dual problem of how to apply comparative narrative theories to the study of fiction, and how to situate the study of narrative in an ideological and historical context. His major critical strategy is to question the dominant position of historical discourse in relation to traditional fiction, and to examine their mutually creative interaction. In addition to his use of the hermeneutic approach, he applies Todorov's theories of the fantastic to a classical T'ang tale. Dore J. Levy's *Chinese Narrative Poetry: The Late Han Through T'ang Dynasties* (Duke University Press, 1988) introduces some postmodern narratological approaches to her study of four famous narratives, including Iser's concept of the implied reader and Genette's narrative discourse, besides Ricoeur's concept of narrative time. Peter H. Rushton, in *The Jin Ping Mei and the Nonlinear Dimensions of the Traditional Chinese Novel* (Mellen University Press, 1994), applies the concept of a plurality of competing discourses to his study of the rhetorical system of that novel. He identifies the self-conscious authorial strategy of rejecting a linear plot for a hierarchical system of narrative discourse. Although the use of the term, "author," is problematic in the study of the classic Chinese novel, the idea that the linear plot is more characteristic of the European novel (prior to the postmodern period) suggests a useful way of perceiving the non-linear structure of traditional Chinese fictional works.

5. Desire and Disenchantment

Postmodernist literary criticism avoids traditional terms such as love, amatory, passion, and romance, as they have been used in, for example, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1936), by C. S. Lewis, or *Passion and Society* by Denis de Rougemont (Faber, 1956, trans.). Other, old words have taken their place, and with this shift in terminology they have acquired new, specific, theoretically-based connotations. The new terms are desire, sexuality, and pleasure, as in,

for example, *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow and others (Monthly Review Press, 1984), or *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the 'école freudienne'*, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (Macmillan, 1982), *The History of Sexuality* (Penguin Books, 1986, trans.), by Michel Foucault, and *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* by Linda Williams (University of California Press, 1989). The term "sexuality" derived from Freudian theory, as formulated in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* by Sigmund Freud (Standard Edition, Vol. 7, Hogarth Press, 1953-74, trans.), is preferred by postmodernist critics for its scientific usage, instead of the other emotional terms which also have religious or literary connotations. The term "desire" has been newly invested with connotations of the power play of gendered relationships and the psychology of obsession. A related term in postmodernist usage is disenchantment, as in, for example, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the Canterbury Tales* by H. Marshall Leicester (University of California Press, 1990), and "Troilus and the Disenchantment of Romance" by Barry Windeatt (*Studies in Medieval English Romances*, edited by Derek Brewer, D.S. Brewer, 1988). Several concepts are implicit in this term: the liminal experience, or the boundary, the transformational process, and the efficacy of instruction. The latter concept is explored in Bruno Bettelheim's study of the lessons to be drawn from fairy tales, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Penguin Books, 1978, 1985).

These concerns are addressed by Wai-yeet Li in *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1993). Starting out from the gendered construct of the sexually ambivalent divine woman in early literature, she discusses the transformative power of desire in late Ming literary works, and goes on to show how the themes of desire and disenchantment become privileged concepts in *Dream of Red Towers*.

The theme of desire is linked to postmodernist theories of looking, especially the secrecy of the act of looking. In this context, voyeurism, which has a new significance from psychoanalytic discourse, is a key theme in ideas of scopic desire, and the panoptic gaze. Anne Birrell has explored these themes in "Panopticon Is Her Bedroom: Love Lyrics of Early Medieval China," which analyzes the relationship between the male poet as voyeur and the female object of his gaze (*New Medieval Literatures*, Oxford University Press, 1999). Her article follows the models of A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1979, trans.).

6. Gender As a Category of Literary Analysis

In postmodernist discourse the old word, "sex," has been redefined and supplemented by three words with new connotations: "sex" refers to biological identity as female or male; "sexuality" refers to the totality of an individual's orientation, preference, and behavior; and "gender" denotes, in general, the cultural reformulation of a biological fact. By extension, the gendered terms, masculinity and femininity denote a set of culturally defined characteristics.

The number of gender studies by Sinologists has increased steadily during the past decade. Among a recent collection of articles edited by Pauline Yu, *Voices of the Song Lyric in China* (University of California Press, 1994), the following are noteworthy: "Man's Voice/Woman's Voice: Questions of Gender" by Pauline Yu; Grace S. Fong's study of three women writers, Ku Ch'un (Ku T'ai-ch'ing), Shen Shan-pao, and Ch'iu Chin, in "Engendering the Lyric: Her Image and Voice in Song"; Kang-i Sun Chang's study of women writers in "Liu Shih and Hsü Ts'an: Feminine or Feminist?"; and John Timothy Wixted's "The Poetry of Li Ch'ing-chao: A Woman Author and Women's Authorship," which identifies fifty-nine women writers in the compendium of Sung dynasty lyrics (*Ch'üan Sung Tz'u*), and asks relevant questions on the existence of a tradition of women's writing. Jeanne Larsen has brought the poetry of the female author Hsüeh T'ao to life in her attractively presented *Brocade River Poems: Selected Works of the Tang Dynasty Courtesan Xue Tao* (Princeton University Press, 1987).

Anne Birrell examines the factors contributing to the making of literary women in her study of early medieval writing, "In the Voice of Women: Chinese Love Poetry in the Early Middle Ages" (*Women, the Book and the Worldly* (Oxford; ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor, D.S. Brewer, 1995). She has also examined the theme of mutual love in "The Psychology of the Couple: An Assessment of Early Medieval Chinese Love Poetry with Comparative References to Christine [de Pizan]'s *Le Livre Des Trois Vertus*" (*Études Christiniennes*, Champion, 1998), with a close reading of poems on gendered relationships within marriage. In "Canonicity, Micropoetics, and Otherness in the Eighteenth-Century Anthology of Medieval Chinese Poetry, *Three Hundred Poems of the T'ang*" (*Papers of the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar*, London University, ed. Alan Deyermond, 16, 1998)), Birrell applies several revisionary approaches and postmodern criticism to explore its status as a canonical work, but also the presence of transgressive writing, intertextuality, the concept of the boundary, and gender bias among the poems selected by the compiler, Sun Chu. Sun Chu's neglect of women writers (for example, he omitted Hsüeh T'ao and Yü Hsüan-chi), reflects typical attitudes of his day. She argues that it was customary for traditional poetry anthologies to diminish women's role as a professional writer.

The self-representation of the literary couple has been examined by Kang-i Sun Chang in *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises of Love and Loyalism* (Yale University Press, 1991), focussing on Ch'en Tzu-lung and Liu Shih. The theme of gender transposition has been explored in Keith McMahon's *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Duke University Press, 1995), especially in Chapter 13, "The Soft Male Hero," and Chapter 8, "Polygyny, Crossing of Gender, and the Superiority of Women in *Honglou Meng*." The theme has also been addressed by Judith Zeitlin in *Historian of the Strange*, especially in her discussions of "Dislocations in Gender" and "Crossing Boundaries."

The etymology of the term "pornography" is: to write about the prostitute. To the extent that the courtesan or entertainer in traditional Chinese culture belongs to the category of a woman who offers her body to sexual intercourse for money, it would be interesting to have a postmodernist reconstruction of sexual discourse as defined by the gendered relationship between poets and courtesans, with an explication of the complex poetic texts written between the second and seventeenth centuries in China.

Postmodernist theory situates the subject of pornography in the context of the avant garde, as an authorial strategy of transgressive writing. This aspect is underscored by a new study of Li Yü by Chang Chun-shu and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century China: Society, Culture, and Modernity in Li Yü's World* (University of Michigan Press, 1992). This cultural interpretation of the writer identifies his writings as a means by which he self-consciously sets himself apart, and from his marginal position he finds the freedom to defy and redefine conventional notions of literary value. This study complements Patrick Hanan's literary biography of Li Yü, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Harvard University Press, 1988), besides his recent translations from Li Yü, *A Tower for the Summer Heat* (1992) and *Silent Operas* (1990). The latter work has also been studied by Stephan Pohl, *Das lautlose Theater des Li Yu (um 1655): eine Novellensammlung der frühen Qing-Zeit* (Verlag für Orientkunde Dr. H. Vorndran, 1994). In contrast to this ludic, transgressive male author, a study of literary women in southeast China offers a different perspective. Dorothy Ko's *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford University Press, 1994) argues from the evidence of women's poetry, letters, dramas, and commentaries the existence of a series of female literary communities which played a role in defining woman's identity and self-awareness as a writer.

Recent translations of fiction focus on the institution of marriage: *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, Vol. 1, by David Tod Roy (Princeton University Press, 1993), and the less familiar novel, *The Bonds of Matrimony: Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*, Vol. 1, by Eve

Alison Nyren (Edwin Mellen Press, 1995). Another view of marriage and gender relations is seen in a study of early prescriptive strategies for feminine survival, "The Historical Template of Pan Chao's *Nü Chieh* [Lessons for Women]" by Yu-shih Chen (*T'oung Pao* 82.4-5, 1996).

A useful introduction to the theme of boy love is presented in Bret Hinsch's *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (University of California Press, 1990). The postmodernist term for this subject is the "homoerotic". A theoretical model for further investigation of this is Michel Foucault's study of the Roman discourse on sexuality, *The History of Sexuality*.

The Chinese discourse on sexuality has been the subject of two recent works: *The Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics, Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts* (State University of New York Press, 1992) by Douglas Wile and *Sexual Culture in Ancient China (Chung-kuo ku-tai hsing wen-hua)* by Liu Dalin [Liu Ta-lin] (Ning-hsia jen-min, 1993).

Recent postmodernist writing on gender has focussed on the body, especially the female body, as the symbolic object around which strategies of power and dominance are played out. This theme has been examined in Western medieval studies, for example, *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, edited by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), through the disciplines of politics, religion, medicine, and literature. A similarly comprehensive approach is seen in the Sinological work, *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, edited by Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (University of Chicago Press, 1994), with essays by Keith McMahon and John Hay on the expression of the theme in literature and art.

7. Reading and the Reader

The old word, reading, has never been the same since Derrida's theory of textual deconstruction. In Sinology, much research based on conventional, premodernist methodologies, is still a prerequisite to any theoretical approach or interpretative strategy in the case of the great number of invisible texts that have not been given a privileged status in the traditional literary canon. *How To Read the Chinese Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1990), edited by David L. Rolston, fulfils this sinological requirement, and at the same time it serves the function of presenting one level of reading, through traditional commentaries. This collection of seventeen articles by specialists in narrative fiction focuses on the convention, begun by Chin Sheng-t'an, of appending critical essays to the commentaries on the classic novels, which were called *tu-fa*, or methods of reading. These essays on methods of reading the classic novel by Chin, Mao Tsung-kang, Chang Hsin-

chih, and others, have been translated, with introductory notes and a guide to the commentators' interpretative strategies. This book also provides useful information on the history of fiction criticism up to the early critical method of "method of reading," besides pertinent analysis of the terminology of traditional fiction criticism. Thus non-specialists are facilitated in reading for "the pleasure of the text," but also shown how traditional critics responded to the same text. This book complements Andrew Plaks's *Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1987), which discusses the transmission of the texts of the classic novel within their cultural contexts.

The postmodernist usage of the term reading has attracted two recent studies, each focussing on the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shih ching*). Steven Van Zoeren's *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford University Press, 1991) gives an account of the history of the interpretation of this classic through the hermeneutic systems of major classical authors, from the mid-sixth century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D., such as Confucius, the two Maos, Cheng Hsüan, K'ung Ying-ta, and Chu Hsi. His presentation enables readers to perceive the way generations of authoritative classicists inscribed their interpretative strategies into their commentaries. This difficult task has been achieved partly because Van Zoeren has maintained a critical distance between himself and his material, and also because he has found a method of explicating the diverse hermeneutic approaches of classical commentators who were writing within a closed canonical discourse. In *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford University Press, 1993) Haun Saussy situates his discussion in the center of the orthodox exegetical tradition of the *Classic of Poetry*. In the ludic manner of postmodernist criticism, this classic does not constitute the subject of his authorial strategy, except peripherally. His real argument concerns the epistemological foundation of sinological literary criticism in general. Arguing that critical methodologies of modern Sinologists are grounded in the philosophical theories of Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel, he concludes that what is mistakenly posited as a Chinese aesthetic, or a system of aesthetics for evaluating Chinese literature, derives from a nineteenth-century Western cultural construct. In a similarly ludic manner, reviewers of his book arrive at such different interpretations of his book as to constitute a plurality of hermeneutic approaches. His book comes at a liminal moment, when Sinologists make use of the Hegelian and the postmodernist approaches in the discussion of literature.

Several recent books present individual readings of poetry. Pauline Yu's *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1987) addresses the problem of stasis in the hermeneutics of traditional metonymic systems and the concept of original development in metonymic discourse. Paul F. Rouzer's *Writing*

Another's Dream: The Poetry of Wen Tingyun (Stanford University Press, 1993) presents a reading of poetry through genre, explicating the rules governing literary expression in different forms. David Palumbo-Liu's *The Poetics of Appropriation: The Literary Theory and Practice of Huang Tingjian* (Stanford University Press, 1993) introduces the creative and critical writings of a late Sung dynasty author, and explicates for the modern reader, who finds Huang difficult and inaccessible, why his contemporaries viewed him as a major, and representative writer. Joseph R. Allen's *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry* (University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1992) applies the approach of intertextuality to demonstrate the continuity of the early balladic tradition in literary verse from the early medieval era to the period of Li Po in the T'ang. Birrell's study of the early anonymous balladic tradition, both lyrical and narrative verse, *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China* (University of Hawaii Press, 1993) appears in a revised edition, and offers students of the form a reading of the basic repertoire supported by sinological apparatus.

8. Myth Studies and Literature

In 1857 Friedrich Schelling argued that myth has its own autonomy, being a human experience that is to be understood on its own terms and in its own right. Chinese myth studies have developed to a point in the past decade where the discipline has separated itself from the different disciplines of religion, folk-lore, regional cults, and philosophy. The idea of disciplinary autonomy does not mean that mythology does not interact with those other fields. On the contrary, mythology has a special function in relation to them, none more so than to literature.

Two recent books explore this relationship between literature and myth. One is Suzanne E. Cahill's *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford University Press, 1993), a gendered study of the evolution of the punitive goddess into a votive figure. The other is Wu Hung's reading of the mythological paintings in a Han dynasty tomb, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford University Press, 1989), which demonstrates the privileged status of exemplary literature in this period, with its illustrative material from scenes in *Biographies of Women* (*Lieh nü chuan*).

In *History and Legend: Ideas and Images in the Ming Historical Novels* (University of Michigan Press, 1990) Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang focuses on the representation of mythic themes in the historical novel. She calls attention to the mythical figure of the military hero, or the warrior figure, and the motifs of friendship and courage, that recur in traditional novels. Among the new data presented are the two novels on the cosmogonic

myth, *P'an Ku* and *K'ai-p'i*, besides the dynastic myth of *Yü Hsia*, and the mythic representation of historical figures such as Sui Yang-ti, Yüeh Fei, and Wang Yang-ming. It is also good to have the mythological novel, *The Foundation of the Gods* (*Feng-shen yen-yi*) (Beijing, 1992, trans.), translated by Gu Zhizhong.

In *The Story of Stone: Intertextuality, Ancient Chinese Stone Lore, and the Stone Symbolism in Dream of the Red Chamber, Water Margin, and The Journey to the West* (Duke University Press, 1992), Wang Jing usefully assembles a corpus of mythic and fictional texts on the motifs of stone and jade, and demonstrates the function of these two motifs in three classic novels, focussing on *Dream of Red Towers*.

Two books have addressed the genre of strange writing, or *chih-kuai*, which evolved to become a major form of literature in the early medieval period. Since this prose genre embodies components from myth, folk-lore, and fiction, and since it predates formal expressions of narrative fiction, its categorization in Western literary criticism is problematic. Most literature specialists would classify the *chih-kuai* genre as literature. In *Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford University Press, 1996) edited and translated by Kenneth J. DeWoskin and J.I. Crump, Jr., is a complete version of *Sou-shen chi* by Kan Pao. A partial translation, with annotation, has also been published by Rémi Mathieu, *À la recherche des esprits (Récits tirés du SOU SHEN JI) par Gan Bao* (Gallimard, 1992). These versions of the classic demonstrate the extent to which this text constitutes a medieval repository of mythic motifs, especially that of the trickster figure. Robert Ford Campany's *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (State University of New York Press, 1996) provides a useful service to medievalists with his meticulous presentation of the textual history of numerous major and minor collections of narrative accounts of the strange. His presentation of this data amounts to the first critical bibliography in English of this literary material. In the second part of his book, he offers interpretations of the authorial or editorial strategies implicit in the compilation of these large collections of prose narratives.

The collected essays of David Hawkes, *Classical, Modern, and Humane: Essays in Chinese Literature* (The Chinese University Press, 1989) continue his contribution to Chinese myth studies with "The Heirs of Gaoyang" and "Myths of Qu Yuan." His revised edition of *The Songs of the South* (*Ch'u Tz'u*) (Penguin Books, 1985) contains more detailed annotation to the primary mythological text, "Questions of Heaven" (*T'ien wen*).

Chinese Mythology: An Introduction (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) by Anne Birrell assembles the major myths of the classical tradition, and organizes them into thematic categories based on the Stith Thompson system of motifs and mythemes, such as cosmogony and miraculous birth, and the great number of mythic figures featured

in the myth narratives are further organized by name and motif in one of two indices. Her study of the mytheme of the world catastrophe of the flood, "The Four Flood Myth Traditions of Classical China" (*T'oung Pao*, 83.4-5, 1997) assembles the texts and classifies them into four distinct types, including the gendered myth of the creatrix figure Nü Kua (Woman Kua), and gives reasons for the emergence of the dominant patristic myth of Yü, the first dynastic founder.

9. Art and Literature

In addition to the recent work of Wu Hung and Suzanne Cahill, and also John Hay's essay on the invisibility of the nude in Chinese art, there is the unusual study of a Chinese artist and poet who converted to Catholicism and became a Jesuit priest. In *Singing of the Source: Nature and God in the Poetry of the Chinese Painter Wu Li* (University of Hawaii Press, 1993), Jonathan Chaves discusses the religious verse of this scholarly painter. Chaves's earlier work, *The Columbia Book of Later Chinese Poetry: Yuan, Ming, and Ch'ing Dynasties* (Columbia University Press, 1986), reveals through his translations and notes the interrelatedness of painterly and literary perspectives in poetry, especially through the medium of poems written on paintings, and poems on the painterly life.

10. Translations and Editions

Although the books in this section do not adopt postmodernist methodologies of literary criticism, they do, in the main, express the spirit of postmodernist criticism to the extent that they explore subjects beyond the orthodox literary canon, and they endeavor to inscribe those Derridean spaces, the interstices that have been long invisible between the monumental structures of the traditional canon.

It is good to see the appearance of another volume in the complete translation of the early medieval imperial anthology, prepared by David R. Knechtges and his team, *Wen xuan, Or Selections of Refined Literature*, Vol. 3 (Princeton University Press, 1996). This covers Chapters 13 to 19 of the anthology's sixty chapters, and brings to a close the difficult section on rhapsodies. In this connection, Anne Birrell's complete translation of the related imperial anthology, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace (Yü-t'ai hsin-yung)*, has appeared in a new revised edition (Penguin Books, 1995, retitled *Chinese Love Poetry*). She has also published a complete annotated translation of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shan hai ching)* (Penguin Classics, 1999). 1986 saw the completion of the great work of translating *The Story of the Stone (Shih-t'ou chi/Hung lou meng)* by David Hawkes and John Minford, in five volumes (Penguin Books, 1973-86).

It is also good to have the literary treatment of a subject in two distinct genres. The new edition of Li-li Ch'en's translation of the popular narrative, *Master Tung's Western Chamber Romance, A Chinese Chantefable* (Columbia University Press, 1976, 1994) may now be compared with the dramatic version, *The Moon and the Zither: The Story of the Western Wing* (University of California Press, 1991), edited and translated by Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema, which comes with a monograph-length introductory essay and a complement of critical notes, besides an illustrated essay by Yao Dajun on the Ming woodblock illustrations of the text. Piet van der Loon's *The Classical Theatre and Art Song of South Fukien* (SMC Publications, 1992) presents three texts with a critical essay on the history of the classical theater of this region, supported by historical textual sources and data from recent fieldwork.

Victor H. Mair is one of the few Sinologists whose range of research interests goes beyond the boundary of Sinology into the cultural influence of Central and South Asia. Mei Tsu-lin and Mair's "The Sanskrit Origins of Recent Style Prosody" (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 51, 1991) helps to clarify the reasons for the Chinese awareness of the principles of tonal euphony in the early medieval period. In *T'ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China* (Harvard University, Council on East Asian Studies, 1989), Mair presents his theoretical position on the problematical term, *pien-wen*, supported by arguments based on comparative philology and historical criticism. Denis Mair and Victor H. Mair's translation of P'u Sung-ling's classical story collection, *Strange Tales from Make-do Studio* (Foreign Languages Press, 1989), complements the study of this prose work by Judith Zeitlin.

Robert E. Henricks has brought numerous translations of the poet Han Shan to their culmination with his complete annotated edition, *The Poetry of Han-shan: A Complete Annotated Translation of Cold Mountain* (State University of New York Press, 1990). A postmodernist critique of this T'ang poet may now be envisaged.

Moss Roberts has also fulfilled the need for an accurate, scholarly, complete annotated translation of the classic novel, *The Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel*. By Luo Guanzhong (University of California Press, 1991), with an informative introductory essay.

David McCraw has rediscovered the neglected lyrical work of six early Ch'ing poets and presents them in an elegant translation in *Chinese Lyricists of the Seventeenth Century* (University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

Ssu-ma Ch'ien's magisterial first history of the Chinese people attracts more research, with the publication of Burton Watson's translation of the chapters on the Ch'in dynasty, and with the appearance of Volume 1 of the projected full, annotated translation of

the history by William H. Nienhauser, Jr. and his team, *The Grand Scribe's Records* (Indiana University Press, 1994). The historian has been fortunate with his scholarly Sinologists--Chavannes, Viatkin, Watson, and Nienhauser. The scholarly community awaits the completion of this 120-volume *magnum opus*.

Besides his research on women's literature, John Timothy Wixted has kept Sinologists in touch with Japanese sinological research, with two books, *Japanese Scholars of China* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), and *Yoshikawa Kōjirō: Five Hundred Years of Chinese Poetry, 1150-1650* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

11. Anthologies

Anthologies are ephemeral collections reflecting the literary values of an era. It is not surprising, then, that so many have not survived the struggle for existence over the centuries. Some two decades ago, Adele Austin Rickett showed how much had been lost from the early medieval period, in "The Anthologist as Literary Critic in China" (*Literature East and West*, 19.1-4, 1975). In her recent article, "Song Lyrics and the Canon: A Look at Anthologies of Tz'u," Pauline Yu found the same rate of attrition. In terms of women's literature, the question posed by Timothy Wixted, whether there is a tradition of women's writing, is hard to answer in the face of so much material that has not survived. The bibliographic sections of the T'ang and Sung dynastic histories that list "Collections of Writings by Women" (*Fu-jen chi*), compared with the extant titles of such collections, reveal that female-authored anthologies generally did not survive beyond their own era of compilation, despite their evident popularity with contemporary readers. In terms of male-authored anthologies, the survival rate is higher. In her study of the anthology compiled by Sun Chu, *Three Hundred Poems of the T'ang (T'ang-shih san-pai shou)*, Birrell offers several reasons for the enduring popularity of this eighteenth-century collection, in "Canonicity, Micropoetics, and Otherness" (1999).

Anthologizing constitutes the personal statement of the compiler's literary vision. Each anthology has its individual nature, given the subjective process of selection and omission. Most recently, there have been the anthologies of Stephen Owen and Victor H. Mair (1994, 1996). There have also been specialist anthologies, mainly of verse, such as those by Liu Wu-chi and Irving Lo (1975) and Burton Watson (1984), followed by the companion volume by Chaves (1986). The purpose of these has been educational, designed for undergraduate and graduate courses in oriental civilizations and comparative literatures. Over the past three decades much research and translation work have provided new source material and cultural data, and also introduced innovative interpretative approaches to familiar material. Moreover, every anthologist considers the literature under

study for his or her own generation, presenting the amalgam of new research and interpretation. The present period is significant for the postmodernist spirit of its pluralist theories and approaches which have influenced all areas of the human sciences. It is a testament to Sinology of the late second millennium that students and specialists are enabled, through the diligence of Mair and Owen, to select, compare, and draw research material from these two texts. It is good to have a second volume (1988) of the *Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, edited by William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Indiana University Press, 1986).

Conclusion

In 1974, Jacques Derrida coined the phrase, "Let us space." By this he meant the rewriting of traditional philosophical concepts. He also meant the rediscovery of past invisible subjects of cultural discourse, such as the history of woman, the history of sexuality, or the history of those other, neglected areas of the human sciences, which had been marginalized or ignored in the context of the great tradition. Derrida's agenda was to put those peripheral subjects into postmodernist discourse, and to explore the foundations of logic and language.

Thus for Derrida, spacing means writing, or as Alice Jardine put it, "Writing as spacing is a new kind of philosophy." This overview of sinological writing during the past decade shows that new spaces have been opened up in the monolithic, monumental tradition of Chinese literature, so that new periods have been explored, new genres have been rediscovered, new approaches have been adopted, and new subjects have been pursued. The resulting list of publications, both those mentioned briefly in this article, and those which each reader could also suggest, is a matter for celebration in the postmodernist spirit of the pleasure of the text and in the spirit of *jouissance*.

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