THE GHOST OF *LIAOZHAI*: PU SONGLING'S GHOSTLORE AND ITS HISTORY OF RECEPTION

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Abstract

This dissertation looks beyond the prevailing view of Pu Songling's (1640-1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* as an undisputed classic of Chinese literature, positing that much of the work's cultural relevance and popular appeal derives from its status as "minor discourse" rooted in the tradition of the ghost tale. The first half of the dissertation examines the ghosts depicted within *Liaozhai*, reconnecting their tamed and feminized images with their dark and anarchic origins. The second half studies the reception of *Liaozhai*, chronicling the book's cultural ascension from *xiaoshuo*, in the original sense of a minor form of discourse fraught with generic and ideological tensions, to a major work of fiction (*xiaoshuo* in its modern sense). However, the book's canonical status remains unsettled, haunted by its heterogeneous literary and cultural roots.

The Introduction reviews current scholarship on *Liaozhai*, justifying the need to further investigate the relationship between popular perceptions of *Liaozhai* and the Chinese notion of ghosts. Chapter One delineates Pu Songling's position in late imperial ghost discourse and examines how the ghost tale reflects his ambivalence toward being a Confucian literatus. Chapter Two reads Pu Songling's "The Painted Skin" in conjunction

with its literary antecedents, demonstrating that Pu's uses of both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* modes are essential for the exploration of the ghost's critical and creative potential. Chapter Three takes up the issues of genre, canon and ideology in the "remaking" of the book by Qing dynasty critics, publishers and commentators, a process in which *Liaozhai* gains prestige but *Liaozhai* ghosts become aestheticized into objects of connoisseurship. Chapter Four looks at the ruptures in modern ghost discourse that paradoxically create new vantage points from which *Liaozhai* regains its "minor" status, most notably in Hong Kong ghost films. The Conclusion revisits "The Painted Skin," a *Liaozhai* story that exemplifies the complex cultural ramifications of the ghost.

The dissertation combines a study of *Liaozhai*'s textual formation and its subsequent history of reception with a dialogic inquiry into the ghost, which occupies a highly contested field of cultural discourse, functioning variously as a psychological projection, a token of belief, a literary motif and an aesthetic construction.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisors and readers: Professors Graham Sanders, Richard John Lynn, Vincent Shen, Allan Barr, and Judith Zeitlin. Without their patience and guidance this dissertation would never have been completed. I am also indebted to the three individuals who read and illuminated these pages with their warmth and insight: Roo Borson, Peter Hajecek, and Zhou Yan. Many friends and classmates have lent me moral support, among them Lidu, Xiaowen, Lan Fei, to name just a few. This project is dedicated to the idea of the wandering ghost, whose longing for home resonates with our own.

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Introduction

> The King of Qi had a retainer who was good at painting. The King asked him: "What is the most difficult to paint?" "Dogs and horses are the most difficult," was the reply. "What is the easiest to paint?" "Ghosts are the easiest." Dogs and horses are commonly known, and they appear in front of our eyes day in and day out. One cannot simply approximate them. Therefore they are difficult to paint. Ghosts are formless. They are not visible to us. That's why they are easy to paint.
>
> 客有為齊王畫者，齊王問曰："畫孰最難者？"曰："犬馬難。""孰易者？"曰："鬼魅最易。"夫犬馬，人所知也，旦暮罄於前，不可類之，故難。鬼魅，無形者，不罄於前，故易之也。
>
> —*Hanfeizi* 韓非子[1]

A ghost, by popular definition, is a disembodied soul, and therefore is formless and invisible. But a ghost also manifests itself in the most varied guises through human imagination. As the painter in the *Hanfeizi* parable suggests, ghosts might be the easiest subject to paint. But the portrait of a ghost—being a mere guess, or at best, an approximation—might be the most challenging to the viewer. The thing that inspired the painting is always beyond the viewer's grasp. Thus the ghost becomes an apt metaphor for the elusiveness of literary representation. This dissertation is an attempt to view, and to make sense of, one of the greatest literary portraits of ghosts—Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異.

The mention of the name "Liaozhai" immediately conjures up alluring and yet vaguely ominous images of ghosts, and the book has, to many, become synonymous with the genre of the ghost story. Conversely, when the word "ghost" enters into a

[1] All English translations are mine unless otherwise noted. I thank Prof. Graham Sanders, Prof. Allan Barr, Roo Borson, and Peter Hajecek for their critique and suggestions.

conversation, as it is not infrequent among the Chinese, the word nearly always brings to mind *Liaozhai*, or at the very least certain impressions of the ghost coloured by memories of reading a *Liaozhai* story or watching a *Liaozhai* film. So intimately bound are the Chinese notion of ghosts and the popular perception of the book that they have become two cultural phenomena whose interrelations are often tacitly acknowledged, but have yet to be thoroughly articulated. It is the aim of the present study to describe and crystallize this interwoven relationship, an aim motivated by two of my personal interests that mutually reinforce one another: ghosts—a curiosity incubated by childhood experience with ancestral worship, and *Liaozhai*—a single body of work, or perhaps a single name, that evokes and embodies the Chinese ghost sensibility.

Liaozhai is arguably the most read, studied, staged, and filmed Chinese ghost story collection. Pu Songling's work was already sought-after during the author's lifetime among members of the literati, who avidly copied and circulated various versions of the work in manuscript form.[2] After its publication in 1766, half a century after Pu Songling's death, a succession of editors, publishers and commentators defended and promoted the book from personal, ideological, commercial, and literary standpoints.[3] Almost immediately after the book's publication, a long history of popular reception began: first, there were eighteenth-century southern dramas inspired by *Liaozhai*; then the rest of the dynastic period witnessed the sweeping success of *Liaozhai* adaptations in

[2] For a detailed account of *Liaozhai*'s textual transmission in various manuscript editions, see Allan Barr, "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 44.2 (Dec. 1984): 515-562.

[3] See Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange* (Chapter 1), for a discussion of *Liaozhai*'s critical reception during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

regional theatrical and storyteller's repertoires.[4] After a period of hiatus during the twentieth century, *Liaozhai* once again thrived in both scholarly and popular circles. New and repackaged editions of *Liaozhai*, with commentaries, illustrations, and modern translations, are quickly put on the book market to compete with new releases of other literary classics. *Liaozhai* scholarship is not only flourishing, but has courted new heights of popularity by scholars like Ma Ruifang 馬瑞芳, who appears frequently in "The Master's Forum" 名家講壇 on China Central Television. Film and television adaptations of *Liaozhai* tales continue to thrive.[5]

Yet *Liaozhai*'s current status as a literary classic and a popular cultural phenomenon belies the fact that the ghost is still a sensitive subject in contemporary Chinese media. In the summer of 2003, a new television adaptation of the famous *Liaozhai* story, *Nie Xiaoqian*, jointly produced by Taiwan and the Mainland, caused much controversy in Chinese newspapers, apparently due to its "ghost and demon" subject. One report warned that the TV series might have trouble passing Mainland

[4] In 1768, two years after *Liaozhai*'s publication, Qian Weiqiao 錢惟喬 (1739-1806) wrote *Yingwumei* 鸚鵡媒 (The Parrot Matchmaker) based on the *Liaozhai* tale "A Bao" 阿寶, the first *Liaozhai*-inspired southern drama on record. There are at least fourteen extant southern dramas based on *Liaozhai* from the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. According to Ji Genyin's statistics, *Liaozhai* stories have been adapted into more than 150 *jingju* and other regional theatres, a phenomenon that lasted well into the twentieth century. By the 1950s, nearly all the main regional theatres in China had staged *Liaozhai* plays. See Ji Genyin 紀根垠. "Pu Songling zhuzuo yu difang xiqu" 蒲松齡著作與地方戲曲, in *Pu Songling yanjiu jikan* 蒲松齡研究集刊, vol. 2, pp. 363-389. Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1981.

[5] For information on *Liaozhai* adaptations into drama, vernacular stories, and film, see Chang Chun-shu and Chang Hsueh-lun, *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits, and Human Society in P'u Sung-ling's World, 1640-1715*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998; Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄 ed., *Liaozhai zhiyi ziliao huibian* 聊齋志異資料彙編 (A sourcebook of *Liaozhai zhiyi* research material). Henan: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1986; and Wang Fucong, *Liaozhai yingshi pinglun* 聊齋影視評論 (Review of *Liaozhai* film and TV adaptations), Shandong wenyi chubanshe, 1993.

censorship and its official release in China was not guaranteed.[6] Another newspaper soon followed with the headline: "To avoid a ban, Xiaoqian turns from ghost to immortal in the new television series." According to this report, the producers, not wishing to lose the lucrative Mainland market, had hired the acclaimed screenwriter Chen Shisan 陳十三 to "de-ghost" the original *Liaozhai* story.[7] About a week later, it was confirmed that the television series had finally passed state censorship and would be aired on Mainland television in August.[8]

No doubt some of the perceived threat of censorship is a ploy for media hype. However, such belaboured and contradictory responses to screen adaptations of *Liaozhai* are reminiscent of, and are indeed a continuation of, that time-honoured debate on the legitimacy of ghosts and the dubious literary enterprise of recording the strange. Such responses testify to the relevance of the ghost to popular and critical receptions of *Liaozhai*, to the ghost's ambiguity as a source of both fascination and unease, and to its capacity for generating discourse.

To call *Liaozhai* the quintessential Chinese ghost story collection is to call to attention some of the chasms between the general acclaim for the work now and its earlier struggles throughout its textual transmission and reception. To modern readers and literary historians, *Liaozhai* is an undisputed literary classic, best known for a gallery of beautiful and sensual ghost women whose images are permanently enshrined in a

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[6] "Qiannü youhun sheji "guiguai" ticai; tongguo shencha youdian xuan" 倩女幽魂涉及"鬼怪"題材 通過審查有點懸, *Tianfu Morning News* 天府早報, 2003 (June 27).

[7] Zhang Xuejun 張學軍, "Qiannü youhun buxiang bei jin: xiaoqian you gui bian xian" 倩女幽魂不想被禁 小倩由鬼變仙, *Beijing Xin Bao* 北京信報, 2003 (July 3).

[8] Tang Xiaoshi 唐曉詩, "Qiannü youhun shenpi guoguan; sida zhuyuan zhenqing gaobai" 倩女幽魂審批過關 四大主演真情告白, *Shenyang Today* 瀋陽今報, 2003 (July 10).

series of elegant tales with intricate plotlines, vivid characterization, and unfettered imagination. However, the term "ghost story," now almost synonymous with "Liaozhai," obscures the fact that *Liaozhai* is more than just an assembly of ghost narratives; the enchanting images of *Liaozhai* ghosts in the public mind also overshadow many other *Liaozhai* images that are grotesque, horrid, and dangerous.

Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* is a heterogeneous collection encompassing a broad array of genres and modes of writing, from records of the strange (*zhiguai* 志怪) to tales of the marvellous (*chuanqi* 傳奇). His sources range from the oral (folktales, stories, hearsay), the written (old books, records, tales), to the experiential (personal experiences, dreams, memories). His theme and subject matter range from ghosts, foxes, and all sorts of strange flora and fauna, to insightful, incisive depictions of human characters and social realities. *Liaozhai*'s textual hybridity, a seemingly literary problem, proves to have broader cultural implications. The promiscuous nature of Pu Songling's text reactivated centuries of critical and ideological debate on the legitimacy of *zhiguai* writing, and on the very definition of the genre. Dismissed by the literary establishment as generically impure and inconsistent, and faring poorly in a genre that was itself under attack, *Liaozhai* was excluded from the philosophers section (子部) of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (the Qianlong Imperial library) catalogue. Thus the book's now-unshakable literary status threatens to erase the tortuous route of *Liaozhai*'s literary (and cultural) ascension.

It would be more accurate to describe *Liaozhai* as a major work in a minor genre (or a mixture of genres) written by an undistinguished member of the literati, but this assertion inevitably evokes many of the irregularities, contradictions, and controversies that have surrounded Pu Songling's work. It is a collection of tales that has been, and is

perhaps meant to be, always partially read; a literary classic whose renown is founded on, and is in fact dependent on, a small selection of the entire collection. It is a work whose author's social standing is as ambiguous as the literary status of his work; a work whose reputation and popularity are continuously destabilized, made problematic, but also fuelled by the subject matter of ghosts. This dissertation is an attempt to examine some of these contradictions and discrepancies, and to raise the question: in what sense is the literary status of *Liaozhai* inextricably linked with the cultural functions of the ghosts that it portrays?

Which *Liaozhai*?

Lu Xun 魯迅 famously remarked that *Liaozhai* is a book of *zhiguai* in the *chuanqi* mode 用傳奇法而以志怪.[9] The development of these two closely related genres is indeed the most pertinent literary and historical context for the study of *Liaozhai*. Much of the critical debate on *zhiguai* centres round the genre's ambiguous position in relation to historiography and fiction. Chen Wenxin 陳文新 traces the roots of *zhiguai* back to early philosophical and historical writings, such as *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Zuozhuan* 左傳, which contain narrative elements of a fanciful or fantastic nature.[10] Many scholars consider the fictional elements in *zhiguai* to be the beginning of a narrative trend, which

[9] See Lu Xun 魯迅. *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 (A brief history of Chinese fiction). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998, p. 148.

[10] Chen Wenxin 陳文新. *Wenyan xiaoshuo shenmei fazhan shi* 文言小說審美發展史 (A history of aesthetics in classical fiction). Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2002.

was developed further in Tang *chuanqi* tales, and finally blossomed in Ming and Qing fiction.[11]

Robert Campany counters the "birth of fiction" theory by arguing that *zhiguai*, in its formative stage from the Warring States period to the Six Dynasties, was practiced as an extension of the ancient cosmographic tradition, in which strange reports from the periphery were collected in the capital as a way of ordering the world.[12] In his book entitled, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*, Campany further explains how authors writing from most of the religious and cultural perspectives of the times—including Daoists, Buddhists, Confucians, and others—used the genre differently for their own persuasive purposes.

To a great extent, the scholarly divide on the *zhiguai* tradition—between adherents of the "birth of fiction" theory and those who advocate *zhiguai* as a peripheral form of writing with clear persuasive ends—has shaped two predominant scholarly approaches to the study of *Liaozhai*. These two scholarly orientations—one emphasizing literary art and the other cultural discourse—and the attempts to reconcile them, also characterize much of existing *Liaozhai* studies in English.

In a number of seminal essays published in the mid-twentieth century, Jaroslav Průšek examines the creative process of *Liaozhai* and argues that Pu Songling utilizes his prose to express what writers of an earlier age conveyed in their lyrical poetry, and that Pu's work brings to a close the thousand years' development of Chinese literature in the

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[11] See Kenneth DeWoskin, "The Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the Birth of Fiction." *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*. Ed. Andrew H. Plaks. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 21-52; Maeno Naoaki, "The Origin of Fiction in China." *Acta Asiatica*, 16 (1969): 27-37.

[12] Robert Ford Campany, *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 1996, p. 162.

classical language.[13] Průšek's high regard for *Liaozhai* is echoed in the general scholarly tendency to treat *Liaozhai* as a work of consummate literary art. But in the foreword to his own Czech translation of a *Liaozhai* selection, Průšek emphasizes Pu's affinity with the common people and the strong note of social criticism in his work, which are seen as an overture to modern literature. By connecting Pu Songling's writing with the notion of the "modern," Průšek seems to suggest that there are certain qualities in *Liaozhai* that would help the work move beyond the confines of pre-modern literati culture, a point that has been amply supported by *Liaozhai*'s multifarious reincarnations in modern and contemporary Chinese culture.

Allan Barr's work on *Liaozhai*, published as a series of essays in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, is indispensable for understanding the textual formation, transmission, and reception of *Liaozhai*. His study reveals that the textual boundaries of *Liaozhai* remained unsettled long after the author's death, and that the various manuscript and print editions, bearing strong evidence of interpolation, intervention and censorship, have made it difficult to ascertain an "original" version as envisioned by Pu Songling. This complicated textual history brings up the issue of authorial intention and the need for carefully qualified strategies of interpretation. Barr's solution is to reconstruct a chronology of the tales, and then to chart the trajectories of Pu Songling's artistic development and narrative interests.[14] This chronological approach, as Sing-chen Lydia Chiang has pointed out, is rewarding but needs to be readjusted as a method of reading.

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[13] See Jaroslav Průšek. "P'u Sung-ling and His Work." *Chinese History and Literature: Collection of Studies*. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1970, pp. 109-38.

[14] See Allan Barr. "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai* zhiyi." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 44.2 (1984): 515-62.

The dating of some of the tales is by necessity tentative. The formulation of a more or less linear artistic development, based on the earlier and the later tales, might exclude the possibility of the author revisiting and rearranging earlier work, or switching back and forth between literary modes.[15] Nevertheless, the thoroughness of Barr's work is significant in that it is perhaps the only *Liaozhai* study in English that takes into account the entire collection with its full range of tales, from the anecdotal *zhiguai* to the elaborate *chuanqi*.

Most close readings of *Liaozhai*, owing to the sheer number of tales in the collection and the reader's own literary taste and scholarly orientation, have been based on a limited selection of tales that are often stylistically similar or thematically coherent. *Zhiguai* and *chuanqi* can be seen as two code words that mark two discernible tendencies in *Liaozhai* studies: those that favour the long romances and those who prefer the short anecdotes; those who focus on literary representation and those who emphasize cultural discourse. This divergence in scholarly approach has also reinforced the two seemingly contradictory images of *Liaozhai* ghosts: the enchantingly beautiful and the grotesquely dangerous.

In *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, Wai-yee Li describes a particular mechanism of "taming the strange" that propels *Liaozhai* narratives, with the effect of creating a constant textual tension between "desire and order."[16] But in order to demonstrate how Pu Songling deftly balances the urge toward extravagant fantasy with moral constraints, Li relies primarily on Pu's long *chuanqi* romances and does not

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[15] Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, pp. 80-83.

[16] Wai-yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 94.

consider how the numerous *zhiguai* anecdotes might resist her neatly formulated dichotomy of desire and order. Most of the elliptical *zhiguai* narratives in *Liaozhai* are characterized by an overpowering sense of fear and anxiety that might complicate desire, and the brevity of such anecdotes often does not allow for the reestablishment of order.

In *Historian of the Strange,* Judith Zeitlin places her close reading of a selection of *Liaozhai* tales under the rubric of "boundary crossing," identifying three themes—obsession, gender, and dreams—that were of "keen interest" to late Ming literati culture.[17] Similarly, Zeitlin focuses on the long tales, whose elaborate plots and narrative turns admittedly allow more space for creative reading. The preference for the *chuanqi* mode, in Zeitlin's case, also seems to accentuate a particular vision of *Liaozhai* that situates Pu Songling's work within seventeenth-century elite culture.[18] As is made evident in her more recent book on Chinese ghost literature, *The Phantom Heroine*, Zeitlin reads Pu Songling's ghost tales alongside the famous seventeenth-century *chuanqi* plays by Hong Sheng and Kong Shangren, approaching these stylistically divergent works written by socio-economically divided authors as part of a collective literati response to the traumas of Ming-Qing dynastic change.

It is debatable if seventeenth-century literati culture is the most fitting context to historicize Pu Songling's work. As Průšek has reminded us, Pu Songling's close affinity with the "common people" makes his elite status ambivalent. *Liaozhai* may have taken the *form* of literati culture, but the emotional tone and critical stance of Pu Songling's tales set his work apart from those of most other *zhiguai* writers of the time. The book's

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[17] Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange,* pp. 11-12.

[18] Judith Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine,* p. 8.

history of reception also indicates that, although *Liaozhai* was written mainly in the seventeenth century, critical and popular responses to the work were delayed and *Liaozhai*'s cultural function did not come into full play until the late eighteenth century. Thus the question of situating Pu Songling and his work cultural-historically not only conditions one's reading (and choice) of *Liaozhai* tales, but also affects how one understands and defines the work as a whole.

In *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, Sing-chen Lydia Chiang is justifiably critical of the privileging of the *chuanqi* tales over the *zhiguai* anecdotes in much of pre-existing studies of *Liaozhai*. She argues that this scholarly neglect of the *zhiguai* mode is both symptomatic of and responsible for a biased understanding and acceptance of Pu Songling's work primarily as romantic fantasy. Chiang remedies this scholarly imbalance by focusing on the "horror fiction" in *Liaozhai*, positing that the grotesque bodies portrayed in many of the *zhiguai* anecdotes reveal Pu Songling's identity crisis as a member of the Qing literati. Chiang writes: "Similar to the monstrous forms representing terra incognita on a pre-modern European map… the figures of grotesque aliens are juxtaposed with stories of marvels in *Liaozhai*. These tales of disenchantment were meant to contrast with, set in sharp relief, and perhaps to reinforce, the centrality of tales of enchantment in the famed story collection."[19]

The short horror tales in the *zhiguai* tradition and the long romances in the *chuanqi* style are clearly two identifiable literary modes with which Pu Songling

[19] Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, p. 124.

negotiated and experimented. But, the inventiveness of Pu Songling's writing has also meant that the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* modes do not fall into clear-cut divisions in *Liaozhai* as Chiang's image of the pre-modern European map suggests. To ponder the relationship between the two modes, we are better off with Lu Xun's deliberately ambiguous formulation: *Liaozhai* is a work of *zhiguai* written in the *chuanqi* mode/method. In this dissertation, rather than trying to determine which mode represents the "truer" vision of Pu Songling, I will seek to demonstrate that the juxtaposition of the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* modes in the reading of *Liaozhai* can yield surprising connections between the two, and that both are necessary for making sense of the conflicting emotions of fear, anxiety, desire and fantasy in Pu Songling's work.

"Minor Discourse" Revisited

It would be tempting to tell the success story of *Liaozhai* as that of a work that reinvents the lowly genres of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, and elevates itself from the tradition of minor discourse (*xiaoshuo* 小說 in its pre-novelistic sense) to the ranks of the great works of Chinese fiction (*xiaoshuo* in its modern sense). Such a story of literary ascension would fit in neatly with the rise of fiction in Chinese literary history, and lend support to the notion that Chinese fiction developed concurrently in both the classical and the vernacular medium, and that the classical tale had much to contribute to Chinese narrative art. It is widely acknowledged that, in terms of literary sophistication, Pu Songling's work holds up to the greatest full-length novel that the Ming-Qing period had produced.

Yet, as Allan Barr has pointed out, *Liaozhai* was by no means a famous work during Pu Songling's lifetime.[20] And as Judith Zeitlin has shown, the literary status of *Liaozhai* continued to be questioned long after the author's death.[21] The notion that *Liaozhai* was a major work of Chinese literature was not widely embraced until the nineteenth century. Even then, it remained unclear where *Liaozhai* was to be placed in the literary canon due to the ambiguous nature of the work's form and genre. Since the early twentieth century, the status of *Liaozhai* again went through dramatic and violent fluctuations. It is therefore important to question any complacency about *Liaozhai*'s canonical status and ask: in what sense is *Liaozhai* popular, problematic, but never truly "major" or "classic"?

In *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits, and Human Society in P'u Sung-ling's World, 1640-1715*, Chang Chun-shu and Chang Hsueh-lun argue that Pu Songling's writing could be "his private, alternative way to fulfill his scholar-official ambition."[22] Excluded from the centre of the official discourse, *zhiguai* writers such as Pu Songling were not willing to give up their own voice, a voice that was self-conscious of its difference from official history. The Changs' "redefinition of history" echoes Campany's understanding of the *zhiguai* tradition as an "anti-locative" cosmography: the practice of writing and collecting anomalies on the margins as a way of challenging the powers at the centre.[23] This definition of *zhiguai* as a literary practice that resists or challenges

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[20] Allan Barr, "Novelty, Character, and Community in Zhang Chao's *Yu Chu xinzhi*," in *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, p. 282.

[21] Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, pp. 17-25.

[22] Chang Chun-shu and Chang Hsueh-lun, *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits, and Human Society in P'u Sung-ling's World, 1640-1715*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998, p. 65.

[23] Campany, *Strange Writing*, p. 168.

official historiography interestingly corresponds with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature": a collective enunciation, a politically conscious literature written from the margins, where it is possible "to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility."[24]

These overlapping concepts, with their emphases on the personal, communal, political, and ideological implications of a writer's choice of genres and themes, will help to anchor the critical perspective of the present study. A caveat for studying *Liaozhao* is the consciousness of *Liaozhai*'s fame as a masterpiece of classic Chinese fiction, and the temptation to treat it as such. Suspending the modern designation of *xiaoshuo* as fiction and revisiting the original sense of the term, as a "minor discourse" fraught with generic and ideological tensions, the dissertation seeks to demonstrate that *Liaozhai*'s literary excellence alone cannot fully account for the complexities of Pu's work and its cultural function.

The emphasis on the minor status of *Liaozhai* requires an investigation of not only what the work *is*, but also what it *does*. It requires historicizing the cultural production of *Liaozhai* beyond the literati culture of the seventeenth century, thus opening up a line of inquiry that bridges conventional divisions of the pre-modern and the modern. And most importantly, the concept of "minor" underscores a deep symbiosis not only between author and genre, but also between genre and theme.

[24] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16-17.

Redefining the "Ghost"

It is as a collection of ghost stories for which Pu Songling's work is the most celebrated. No other major work in the Chinese literary canon is so singularly recognizable by a subject matter that serves as a signature or shorthand. Ghosts not only encapsulate *Liaozhai*'s main theme and characters, they also offer a vantage point from which to examine how the ghost tale participates in the larger Chinese discourse on ghosts. *Liaozhai*'s critical reception was initially centred on the very issue of belief, namely the legitimacy of ghosts as a subject matter of discourse. Even though *Liaozhai* publishers and commentators sought to circumvent that debate by focusing on literary and aesthetic issues, the subject matter of ghosts always looms in the background and comes to the fore from time to time. Ghosts, both as an issue of belief and as a trope of literary representation, have anchored and carried forward the course of *Liaozhai*'s textual formation, transmission and reception, sometimes invigorating it, sometimes troubling it, but never completely absent from it.

Ghost narratives not only account for a high percentage of *Liaozhai* stories, they are also the most read and the best known due to their frequent representation in popular culture. [25] However, *Liaozhai* scholarship in English has been generally reluctant to approach Pu Songling's work from the viewpoint of ghosts. This critical caution may partly be based on a wariness of the unqualified uses of *zhiguai*, especially the earlier

[25] According to Wang Fenling, of approximately five hundred *Liaozhai* tales, two hundred and fifty-eight explicitly deal with ghosts and spirits. See Wang Fenling, *Guihu fengqing* 鬼狐風情, pp. 187-195, 219-220.

collections, as source material for the study of Chinese religion.[26] Nevertheless, many *Liaozhai* studies are drawn to ghosts and choose to study the ghost tales by using less culturally loaded terms such as "the strange" and "the grotesque," or by borrowing Western cultural concepts such as "the fantastic," the uncanny," or "the supernatural." To some extent, these terms are useful for communicating specifically Chinese traditions and ideas across cultural barriers, but over-reliance on these terms has the disadvantage of universalizing the unique cultural functions of the Chinese ghost tale.

In studies that explicitly deal with ghosts, the approach has been mainly typological, perhaps due to the need to distinguish the ghost from other forms of spiritual manifestations. This typological approach is primarily concerned with thematic content rather than narrative function. For example, Wang Fenling 汪玢玲 classifies *Liaozhai* ghost stories into eight broad thematic groups according to each tale's religious affiliation or the characteristics of individual ghosts.[27] While the typologies afford us a general sense of the distribution of character types, it tells us little about the relationship between the types. Some of the clichéd labels, such as karmic retribution or governance of the underworld, place the ghosts within pre-existing belief systems without sufficiently

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[26] J. J. M. de Groot pioneered this method of study in *The Religious System of China, Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect. Manners, Customs, and Social Institutions Connected Therewith*. (Leiden: 1892-1910). The six-volume work covers all major aspects of the Chinese religious tradition: Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, funeral rites, and ancestral worship. His treatment of the more general subjects, such as death, worship, and the notion of the soul, relies heavily on *zhiguai* texts. In *The Changing Gods of Medieval China (1127-1276)* (Princeton: 1990), Valerie Hansen provides an account of the rise of popular religion in the Southern Song period, using sources such as local gazetteers, temple inscriptions, and Hong Mai's *zhiguai* collection, *Yijianzhi*.

[27] Wang Fenling divides the total number of 176 *Liaozhai* ghost stories into eight categories: ghost-human love stories (28); governance of the underworld (24); demons and malicious ghosts (18); benign ghosts and reciprocity (10); transcendents, immortals and spirits (38); karmic retribution (29); obsession and object-spirits (6); and souls (23). She places the fox stories (82) into a separate typology. See *Guihu fengqing*, pp. 187-195, 219-220.

accounting for the ghost's unorthodox, non-institutional lineage.[28] The typological approach reflects a structuralist, synchronic view of the ghosts against a more or less constant cosmological background. The emphasis on type rather than cultural function also limits our understanding of the complexity of representation on the level of the narrative.

Of all the typologies, the fox deserves a special mention due to its frequent representation in literature and its deep roots in folk worship. Rania Huntington's study of the literary fox, *Alien Kind*, is firmly anchored by a Proppian conviction in the archetype, and at the same time rich and fluid in its post-structuralist analysis of discourse. Although her focus on foxes helps to draw out the intricate relationship between a particular cultural species and the literary genre it inhabits, I will maintain that the fox-spirit, in literary representation, is not always as distinctive a genre as Huntington defines it to be. A non-species-based vision of the supernatural world is especially apparent in *Liaozhai*. While Pu Songling pays much attention to the differences between the species, he is mainly driven by the narrative interest of such details rather than by the desire to differentiate and categorize. Huntington admits to the fact that "Pu's foxes have a great deal in common with his other supernatural heroines, often more than they would

[28] The typological approach harkens back to the method of thematic organization of texts in *Taiping guangji*, the Song dynasty court-sponsored compendium of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* writings up to the tenth century. This approach is also prevalent in English-language studies of *zhiguai*. See Anthony Yu, "'Rest, Rest Perturbed Spirit!' Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Fiction." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 47.2 (Dec. 1987): 397-434; Robert Campany, "Ghosts Matter." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 13 (1991): 23-34. English translations of *zhiguai* anthologies also tend to follow the topological format. See Karl S. Kao, ed. *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic: Selections from the Third to the Tenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. A system based on theme rather than genre can perhaps enable the scholars to evade the thorny issue of genre associated with the Chinese tradition of *xiaoshuo*. Also implicit in this practice of sorting and classifying based on typologies and species is the desire to bring order to an otherwise chaotic world of multifarious spiritual manifestations.

with foxes in another collection..."[29] This admission supports my definition of the ghost, which is broadened to include a spectrum of spiritual manifestations.

It is evident that ghosts, foxes, fairies, and various human, animal and plant spirits occupy the same terrain of Pu Songling's literary imagination. In this dissertation, the use of the term "ghost" is almost akin to the *gui* 鬼 radical that serves as a common component in various Chinese characters and phrases with spiritual connotations, such as *hunpo* 魂魄 and *chimei wangliang* 魑魅魍魉. The ghost therefore is not employed as a catchall phrase that is the sum total of different species of spirits, but rather a concept that emphasizes the literary and cultural functions shared by all species. While such a formulation of the term can be interchangeable with the concepts of the strange, the anomalous, the supernatural, or the spiritual, the word "ghost" provides these abstract cultural concepts with physical embodiment and offers the added vantage-point from which literary representations of the ghost can be treated as *characters* rather than ideas.

To paint a living portrait of *Liaozhai* ghosts as full-fledged characters is to understand Pu Songling's ghost world not as a monolithic, taxonomic vision of the cosmos, but as a constantly evolving discourse on human identities and on human perceptions of the world beyond. At the centre of this discourse formation is the figure of the ghost, with multi-layered functions as a projection of human psychology, as an object of religious belief, as a literary motif and an aesthetic construction, and finally, as a contested field of cultural and ideological debate.

Another difficulty in dealing with the ghost, especially as it is envisioned in *Liaozhai*, is the need to maintain a balance between the ghost's roots in popular belief

[29] Huntington, *Alien Kind*, p. 248.

and its representation in literature. Judith Zeitlin emphasizes the latter by fashioning the term "literary ghost" in her study of seventeenth-century ghost tales, poetry and drama in *The Phantom Heroine*. Zeitlin is sensitive to the cultural roots of the ghost, especially the relationship between ghosts and gender, but she appears to be rather hasty in debunking the notion of belief as a valid basis for the study of ghost literature.[30]

Recent developments in the study of Chinese popular religion suggest that belief could still be relevant to the study of ghosts, even if textual records of them come to us mainly in the form of literary representation. According to Catherine Bell, beliefs are not prior to or separate from action; they are not something mental, cognitive, or linguistic in opposition to the physical or active. Bell maintains that it is more accurate, and more interesting, to read texts as argumentative practices involving complex sharing of ideals, not as representations of a static, coherent situation.[31] In the case of literary representations of ghosts, the issue of belief seems to be not a question of whether one believes in ghosts or not, but rather a process in which notions of the ghost are formulated to serve various cultural functions. As the Chinese discourse on ghosts suggests, the notion of the ghost has been, and continues to be, hotly debated and contested, and the ghost tale has been an important participant in that debate. To evade the issue of belief is to overlook the popular roots and the ontological basis of the ghost, which are of key importance to the understanding of *Liaozhai* ghosts not simply as reflections of cultural ideas, but also as active agents of cultural discourse.

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[30] Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p. 9.

[31] Catherine Bell, " 'The Chinese Believe in Spirits': Belief and Believing in the Study of Religion." *Radical Interpretation in Religion*. Ed. Nancy K. Frankenberry. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002, pp. 100-116.

The term "popular religion," says Poo Mu-chou, connotes a wide basis among the populace, carries an inherent ambiguity concerning its social constitution, and presupposes the political nature of the relationship between official and popular religions.[32] C. K. Yang coined the term "diffused religion," pitting it against institutional religion. He argues that in traditional Chinese society, diffused religion was everywhere and always primary, and therefore, the old model for discussing Chinese religion, which looked first at the precepts of the organized religions and only secondarily, if at all, at other forms of religion, needs to be inverted and modified.[33] It would be erroneous to assume that the radical broadening of the concept of popular religion means the erasure of all social, economic, and ideological distinctions. In fact, once the formerly separated social groups are brought into a common cultural sphere, the study of popular religion requires a more acute sense of cultural difference and specificity.

Liaozhai, through the telling and retelling of tales from mythology, Daoist and Buddhist sources, and folklore, offers a perfect textual and literary analogy of "popular religion" as an ongoing dialogic process. Although there is no lack of *Liaozhai* stories with explicit reference to Buddhism, Daoism, or various aspects of Confucian ritual, simply dividing up the texts into categories such as "pro-Buddhist," "pro-Daoist," or "pro-Confucian" betrays an endorsement of institutional religion. Such an endorsement is essentially at odds with the ambivalent figure of the ghost—an embodiment of an unorthodox worldview that is inherently fluid in form, irreverent in spirit, and ambiguous in moral attitude. As a "diffused" concept largely derived from pre-organized beliefs and

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[32] Poo Mu-Chou, *In Search of Personal Welfare*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998, ix-xii.

[33] C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*. Berkeley: UCP, 1961.

practices, and an entity capable of engaging with a diverse range of moral and religious positions, the ghost offers a fresh perspective that avoids conventional sectarian labels commonly used in study of the Chinese *zhiguai* tradition.

The significance of ghosts to *Liaozhai* is not simply as a subject waiting to be written about; ghosts, in this context, also represent a yet-to-be-inherited literary tradition, a yet-to-be-continued cultural discourse, a site for negotiation and contestation. The cultural roots of the ghost and the literary roots of *Liaozhai* are thus intertwined, and the present study seeks to unravel and make sense of that entangled history. I will ask the questions: Why did the ghost tale particularly appeal to Pu Songling as a writer? How does *Liaozhai* survive wave after wave of criticism, rejection, and censorship, and finally establish itself as *the* Chinese ghost story collection? What might the ghost have to do with the extra-literary forces that continue to make *Liaozhai* both popular and problematic?

To answer these questions, I place Pu Songling's work in a broader cultural and historical context while at the same time remaining focused on the theme of the ghost. Tracing a longer lifespan of the ghost, from its germination in *zhiguai* to its "rite of passage" in *Liaozhai* and to its symbolic deaths and afterlife, I will seek to demonstrate that *Liaozhai* not only inherited and internalized a history of fascination and unease with ghostly images, ideas, and writing, but also, through its many textual permutations and reincarnations, became instrumental in late imperial and modern developments of Chinese ghost discourse. Thus the subject of my inquiry is not only the ghost world within *Liaozhai*, but also the one outside it—or metaphorically speaking, the ghostly nature of the book itself.

Bakhtin, emphasizing the social, political, and anthropological aspects of literary genres, has succinctly stated that, "every genre has its own orientation in life."[34] Both ghosts and the ghost story have occupied marginal spaces in Chinese culture, and yet they continuously challenge and inspire responses from the centre. Similar to the way in which non-ancestral ghosts fill the void and the gaps of a Confucian worldview, *Liaozhai* challenges the rigidity and the blind spots in literary orthodoxy, and carves out a niche for itself in Chinese literature. While *Liaozhai* has been elevated to the ranks of the greatest classical Chinese fiction, the ghost reminds us of the book's humbler beginnings. It began as *xiaoshuo* in its original sense of "small talk" or "minor discourse," and it is as a minor discourse that *Liaozhai* has functioned at the key points of its history of reception.

Methodology, Scope and Significance

Authorial intention has been a thorny problem in the study of *zhiguai*. Even in a relatively late collection such as *Liaozhai*, whose author can be clearly identified, the nature of the authorship remains a contested issue. Sing-chen Lydia Chiang considers Pu Songling's collection a means of constructing a literati self vis-à-vis perceived Confucian norms. She stresses that *Liaozhai* is the product of individual literati scholarship, and therefore must be considered and evaluated as a whole. This is an admirable scholarly position to take, especially in the study of *Liaozhai*'s textual lineage and transmission. However, the position is harder to maintain when it comes to the interpretation of the tales. Considering the complexity of *Liaozhai*'s textual formation, transmission and

[34] Bakhtin and Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Trans. A. J. Wehrle. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U Press, 1985, p. 131.

reception, it is near impossible to reconstruct an "author's version" of the text on which his construction of the literati self can be based. Pu Songling's vision of the literati self, however self-consciously designed and carefully executed it might have been, would have been as quickly dispersed as it was collected. The *Liaozhai* texts we have are but traces of that literati self—altered and amended by a long succession of editors, critics, commentators and readers, who may or may not have shared Pu Songling's vision.

An alternative approach would be to treat *zhiguai* collections as literati representations of commonly shared narrative traditions and cultural ideas. My focus on the ghost, a shared literary motif and cultural construct, thus represents an attempt to resolve a methodological problem in the study of collections such as *Liaozhai*. It is hoped that the thematic focus on the ghost, combined with a fluid intertextual approach, will allow for the understanding of *Liaozhai* on the level of cultural discourse without losing sight of the mediating role of the author.[35] In Chapters One and Two, when I examine Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* as a case study of how the ghost tale participates in the larger cultural discourse on ghosts, I place emphasis on the author's agency. The afterlife of *Liaozhai* or its history of reception, as I will discuss in Chapters Three and Four, enters a more collective sphere of reading and reinterpretation and is therefore largely beyond the control of the original author.

The present study, however, makes no attempt to give a critical account of the entire history of *Liaozhai*'s reception; nor is it based on Western reception theory, which

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[35] Intertextuality as a scholarly approach has been criticized for being ahistorical and not taking into full account the role of the author. In "Presupposition and Intertextuality," Jonathan Culler responds to this criticism by modifying intertextuality and intentionality from two diametrically opposed critical positions into two ends of a continuum that allows for varying degrees of emphasis on authorial agency or intertextual relationship. See Jonathan Culler, In *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981: 100-118.

maintains that the readers, not the authors, make meaning. My shift to *Liaozhai*'s reception is justified by the fact that much of the controversy over the book's literary status and cultural legitimacy persisted long after the author's death, and many of the functions of *Liaozhai* ghosts only became salient in the editorial, critical, and cultural interventions on the work. A broader conception of reception, which includes adaptations, is necessitated by the fact that, in spite of a successful publishing history, the majority of *Liaozhai*'s audiences have likely received the work in forms other than the original written text. Many heard it at teahouses or family gatherings; others saw it as plays and films, and still others read it in *Liaozhai*-esque new renditions. Often, it is when a *Liaozhai* story is transformed into another form that many textual and extra-textual tensions in the ghost narrative become reactivated. Therefore, strategies of adaptation become an interesting site to observe how old ghosts resurface, and how their spectres are dealt with in a different medium or cultural sphere. The many alternative routes to reading the original text further supports the hypothesis that Pu Songling's literary ingenuity and aesthetic refinement alone cannot fully explain the work's cultural significance, and that significance lies precisely (and paradoxically) in the "minor" status of the ghost and of *Liaozhai*.

Thus the *Liaozhai* under scrutiny here is more than just a collection of strange tales whose meaning is contained within Pu Songling's text; it is a cultural phenomenon that is capable of generating meaning beyond its textual and historical boundaries. Pu Songling's work has been altered, rearranged, censored, or promoted, emulated, and commercialized throughout its history of reception. But each instance of textual intervention, rather then being dismissed or deplored as a distortion of Pu Songling's

original work or of his authorial intention, must be reckoned with as yet another occasion to examine the many literary and cultural issues that are embedded in and encrusted onto Pu Songling's work.

Taking departure from much of pre-existing *Liaozhai* scholarship that tends to consider context merely as the background for textual interpretation, I view both text and context as having equal authority and seek for meaning at the crossroads of their intertextuality. The textual matrix that has been spun out of Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* echoes resonantly with Roland Barthes's proclamation that "a text is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."[36] Or as Julia Kristeva has formulated it, "intertextuality" designates a meeting point where texts and contexts interact while authors and readers negotiate meaning.[37] My approach thus reflects larger scholarly efforts to redefine the notion of originality and authorship in discourse formation as well as to break down conventional disciplinary boundaries between classical and modern studies, between elite and popular cultures.

This will be the first study in English to examine the cultural significance of *Liaozhai* in relation to modern and contemporary Chinese ghost culture. In spite of, or perhaps because of, a succession of anti-ghost campaigns in the twentieth century, *Liaozhai* again becomes a textual space where new peripheries can be located and minor discourses can be renewed and created. *Liaozhai*'s ability to cross over to post-dynastic China and remain culturally relevant, as I shall argue, is largely due to the resilience of

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[36] Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana, 1977, p. 146

[37] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 66-69.

the ghost tale. This crossover calls for a mode of investigation that is mindful of the gaps, but also the parallels and the continuity, in the long literary saga of *Liaozhai*.

Overview of Content

This dissertation consists of four chapters and a conclusion. In Chapter One, I survey the terms and concepts associated with ghosts in the Chinese tradition and argue that the ghost narrative emerged outside of the mainstream discourse on ghosts centred round the Confucian rituals of ancestral worship. This interest in the non-ancestral ghost, mainly manifested in literary representation, faced the pressures from Confucian ideology as well as the fear and danger associated with ghosts that are "nobody's ancestors." I then examine Pu Songling's moral-religious views and his approach to ghost-story writing in order to illustrate that Pu Songling's writing is symptomatic of the many tensions and contradictions in the formation of Chinese ghost discourse, and to establish *Liaozhai* as an important case study for my subsequent analysis of this discourse.

Chapter Two addresses the notion of "taming," which is one of the central ideas in Wai-yee Li's chapter on *Liaozhai* ghosts, as well as in Rania Huntington's study of literary foxes. Based on close readings of a set of ghost/human transformation tales in both the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* modes, I will argue that, in addition to what Wai-yee Li calls "the interplay between desire and order," the psychology of fear constitutes an important third dimension of the ghost-human relationship. I will also seek to demonstrate that, in the process of dealing with emotions of fear and accommodating the ontological problem of the non-ancestral ghost, Pu Songling's ghost narratives move beyond taming to explore new possibilities for both male identity and female subjectivity,

as well as for creating emerging identities that are provisional and yet potentially transformative.

Chapter Three looks at the reception of *Liaozhai* after it was first published in 1766, chronicling the book's trajectory from a "minor discourse" to a major work of Chinese fiction. I will illustrate that, as the book is elevated into the realm of major literature, *Liaozhai* gains cultural prestige but *Liaozhai* ghosts become aestheticized into objects of connoisseurship. The discussion will be centred on two instances of censorship—Zhao Qigao's deletion of forty-eight tales from the first published edition of *Liaozhai* and Ji Yun's exclusion of *Liaozhai* from *Siku quanshu*. These critical and editorial interventions bring up the issues of genre, canon, and ideology that had shaped the remaking of *Liaozhai* in the hands of Qing dynasty critics, publishers, commentators, and advocates and detractors of various kinds.

Chapter Four investigates how the ruptures in modern ghost discourse paradoxically create new peripheries and vantage-points from which *Liaozhai* regains its "minor" status, most notably in Hong Kong ghost films. I will discuss the implications of May Fourth anti-ghost rhetoric, the politicization of ghosts in Mao's anti-ghost campaigns, and in what sense *A Chinese Ghost Story*, the 1987 Hong Kong ghost film based on *Liaozhai*, constitutes a new form of minor discourse.

Chapter One

Pu Songling and the Ghost Tale

Chinese ghost culture, after a long gestation in early myths, legends, rituals, and inscriptions on oracle bone and bronze, was gradually distilled into the idea of *guishen* 鬼神. This term, conveying disparate notions about a broad spectrum of ghosts, spirits and gods, has found frequent expression in philosophical, historical, and religious writings, as well as various literary genres since the Eastern Zhou (770-256 BCE). While the Confucian ritual of ancestral worship cemented its position during the Han (206 BCE-220 CE) as the orthodoxy of Chinese religious life, interests in non-ancestral ghosts, gods, and spirits persisted and proliferated during the Six Dynasties period (222-589) in a form of minor discourse now commonly known as *zhiguai* (records of the strange). Although *zhiguai* gradually became overshadowed by *chuanqi* (tales of the marvellous), a more aesthetically oriented mode of literati writing that flourished during the Tang (618-907), *zhiguai* influence remained strong, and the ghost took increasingly varied and complicated narrative forms. Pu Songling's (1640-1715) *Liaozhai*, drawing from the legacies of both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, stood at the highpoint, and arguably also at the closure, of this literary development.

The ghost world of *Liaozhai* is itself haunted by cultural memory. Pu Songling's creative ingenuity notwithstanding, his work is a rich repository of the images, ideas, concepts, and attitudes from a long tradition of Chinese ghost culture. Where do we place Pu Songling's ghost tales in the larger cultural discourse on ghosts? If the ghost tale has, as I shall discuss in more detail in this chapter, developed outside the purview of Confucian orthodoxy, how might the fears and desires associated with the non-ancestral

ghost have shaped and informed the literary genres that it inhabits? Can we establish a link between the cultural status of the non-ancestral ghost and the discursive function of the literary genres of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* (or of *xiaoshuo*, as they are often collectively known)? These questions will be explored as I delineate the relationships among these cultural concepts and literary terms. The findings will become the basis for my analysis of the significance of the ghost in Pu Songling's writing as well as in his moral-religious outlook. I will examine why the writing of *Liaozhai* was of special importance to Pu Songling. And I will seek to establish that the cultural ramifications of the ghost tale particularly resonated with Pu Songling's ambivalent position as a Confucian literatus and as a writer of "minor literature."

Early Formations of the Ghost Discourse

In the Chinese tradition, ghosts have been a force that humans have had to reckon with since antiquity. Summing up the complexity of ancient Chinese attitudes toward ghosts, Zhan Xuzuo 詹緒左 writes: "[Ghosts] have been both revered and feared, loved and forbidden, and they have been kept at a distance and brought up-close" 敬之畏之親之忌之遠之近之.[1] The following terms and concepts reflect some of that complexity. These terms, some philosophical, some religious, some literary, form a larger discourse on ghosts that is crucial to my subsequent discussions of *Liaozhai*. This historical survey is also meant to underline the fact that the ghost tale does not originate solely in literati

[1] Zhan Xuzuo 詹緒左, "Shuosi zhenggui: hanyu zhongde siwang wenhua lunlüe" 說死征鬼: 漢語中的死亡文化論略 (On death and ghosts: a brief essay on Chinese death culture and the Chinese language). Journal of Anhui Normal University, Vol. 24, Issue 1 (1996): 59-64.

imagination; nor is it merely a projection of male fantasy. The ghost can have very concrete psychological and ontological bases.

Ghosts and Fear

In the Chinese folk tradition, the etymological link between the character *gui* 鬼 and the character *wei* 畏 (fear) suggests a less than harmonious relationship between humans and ghosts. The ancient Chinese character for ghost is an ideogram in the shape of a human being wearing a facemask. *Gui*, apparently, does not refer to the ghost itself, but to a representation of an idea and the fear of that idea. At its very etymological root, the ghost denotes something unknown; it is a reification of a perceived psychological need and a cultural function. Words, images and concepts associated with ghosts are thus forever representations, or approximations, of something unknown.

Plato argues that people inappropriately fear death without knowing what it is. But, human perceptions of the world tend to develop around the fear of the unknown and the unknowable, and to some extent civilizations are the result of endeavours to overcome that fear. Humans fear most the invisible. Next they fear the natural forces beyond their control—fierce animals, severe weather, and their own inevitable death. These elements found their way into the human conception of the ghost.

The ancient Chinese did not make a clear distinction between ghosts and wild beasts. Characters bearing the ghost radical *gui* 鬼, such as *chi* 魑, *mei* 魅, *wang* 魍, *liang* 魉, refer to powerful spirits, monsters and demons of various kinds. In modern usage, *chi mei wang liang* are often used together as a four-character phrase to mean all varieties of monsters and demons, and more importantly, as a pejorative metaphor that

refers to evil, dangerous, and ghostly people. In ancient usage, however, their meanings are more specific and concrete. In *Shuowen* 說文, *chi* is defined as "a yellow, dragon-like beast" 若龍而黃, whereas *mei* 魅 (sometimes written as 魑) is "the spirits of ancient beings" 老物精也. According to Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 annotation of *Zhouli* 周禮, *mei* is "the spirit of a myriad of things" 百物之神曰魑. In *Zuozhuan* 左傳, *chi* and *mei* are used together as one phrase.[2] According to Du Yu's 杜預 annotation, "*chimei* are spirits that are born from the anomalous energy in mountains and forests that are harmful to humans" 魑魅，山林異氣所生，為人害者.[3]

The meaning of *wang liang* 魍魎, often used together as one phrase and alternatively written as 罔兩, is "tree ogres and rock monsters" 木石之怪.[4] But according to Guo Xiang's 郭象annotation of *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *wangliang* refers to the "outer layer of a shadow," or the shadow of a shadow 景外之微陰也. In *Huainanzi* 淮南子, it refers to something that "disappears without a trace" 不知所往. The gradual hermeneutic change of *wangliang* from rock and tree spirits to something shadowy and elusive suggests that early notions of ghosts and spirits were often concrete and anthropomorphic. As these notions are absorbed into cosmologies and philosophical systems such as Daoism, they become more abstract, vague, and suggestive. The etymology of *chi mei wang liang* demonstrates that the meanings of these ancient characters, bearing the ghost radical, often had specific references to concrete

[2] *Zuozhuan* 左傳, "Wengong shiba nian" 文公十八年.

[3] *Ci Hai* 辭海 (Encyclopedia of Words), p. 211.

[4] *Guoyu* 國語.

manifestations of the forces of nature. The transformation of these four characters from their etymological origins to their modern usage as a single metaphorical phrase reveals a process of religious, philosophical, and ideological influences and appropriations. The ghost, as the character component that is attached to these early images of gods and monsters, has thus witnessed this process of hermeneutic changes.

The ghost mask, still commonly used in exorcism rituals in rural China, has not one but two pairs of bulging eyes, long teeth, and sharp horns, looking positively beastly and monstrous.[5] The mask, grotesque and angry, represents the displacing of human fear by projecting it back onto the invisible, and thus intimidating the insidious and harmful ghosts that are "out there." But the ultimate function of the mask is to purge fear from within and to purify the human heart. The ritual of dancing with fearsome masks is a communal project of purification, an enactment of both exorcism and catharsis. The ritual function of the ghost-mask, therefore, illuminates an important psychological basis of the literary portrayal of the ghost: it is the emotion of fear and how it must be dealt with.

Ghosts and Return

In a more humanized context, the character for ghost, *gui* 鬼, is associated with its homonym *gui* 歸, which means "to return." The *Tianrui* 天瑞 chapter of *Liezi* 列子 mentions that the ancients called the dead "the returned ones." (古者, 謂死人曰歸人.) In

[5] For a study of Chinese ghost masks, see Hirota Ritsuko 廣田律子, *Gui zhi lailu: Zhongguo de jiamian yu jiyi* 鬼之來路：中國的假面與祭儀 (The route of the ghost: Chinese masks and rituals), trans. Wang Rulan 王汝瀾 and An Xiaotie 安小鐵 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005).

Hanshi waizhuan 韓詩外傳, it is also written that the dead become ghosts; and to become a ghost means to return 死者為鬼, 鬼者, 歸也.[6]

The notion of returning leads to the further differentiation of the human soul into the part that is heaven-bound and the part that is earth-bound. Classical texts, such as *Liji* 禮記, *Yijing* 易經, *Zuozhuan* 左傳, and *Huainanzi* 淮南子, suggest that a person is born with a *hun* 魂 (mental soul) and a *po* 魄 (bodily soul). These *hun* and *po* souls are constituted of *qi* 氣, with the mental soul identified with *qi*'s expansive aspect (*shen* 神) and the bodily soul identified with its contractive aspect (*gui* 鬼). At death, a person's *qi* disperses and "the mental soul ascends to heaven; the bodily soul returns to earth" 魂氣歸於天, 形魄歸於地.[7]

The Han philosopher, Wang Chong 王充 (27- 100), pioneered the line of thinking which attempted to "naturalize" the inexplicable phenomenon of ghosts and spirits. In *Lun Heng* 論衡, he argues that *gui* and *shen* are simply other names for yin 陰 and yang 陽:

> The yin energy inhibits the development of things by returning (*gui* 歸), and thus is called *gui* 鬼; the yang energy guides and gives life to things, and thus is called *shen* 神.

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[6] Other references to the phonetic and semantic link between *guǐ* (ghost) and *guī* (return) include Guo Pu's 郭璞 quote from *Shizi* 尸子 in his annotation of *Erya* 爾雅: "古者謂死人曰歸"; the *Shixun* section of *Erya* 爾雅·釋訓: "鬼之言歸也"; *Shuowen* 說文: "鬼, 人所歸為鬼"; the *Jifa* section of *Liji* 禮記·祭法: "人死曰歸"; and *Jiyi* section of *Liji* 禮記·祭義: "眾生必死, 死必歸土, 此之謂鬼."

[7] *Liji* 禮記.

> 鬼神，陰陽之名也。陰氣逆物而歸，故謂之鬼； 陽氣導物而生，故謂之神。[8]

Wang Chong's theory of yin/yang suggests an attempt to dichotomize the notion of *guishen* 鬼神, two characters that are frequently used in early Chinese texts as a single phrase to encompass an entire gamut of "supernatural" beings that includes ghosts, spirits, demons, monsters, ancestors, and local gods and deities. [9] This lack of emphasis on a more elevated *shen* (or gods) highlights the structure of early Chinese cosmology as a fluid continuum instead of a hierarchy. Implicit in Wang Chong's differentiation of *gui* and *shen* is a cosmological hierarchy, and his abstraction of ghosts in terms of yin and yang also implies a more monolithic worldview guided by a sense of orthodoxy and fixed principles.

In line with Wang Chong's explication of *guishen* in terms of yin and yang, the Song neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200) defines *gui* and *shen* in even more metaphysical and "rational" terms. Later sceptics often cite Zhu Xi as an authority on the "no-ghost theory" (*wugui lun*). His concepts of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣 are often interpreted as attempts to explain *away* the phenomenon of ghosts and spirits as nothing but part of the

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[8] Wang Chong, *Lun Heng*, "On Death" 論衡·論死.

[9] In the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (*Compendium of Ancient and Modern Encyclopaedias*), the character *gui* 鬼 (ghost) appears more than 9000 times, of which 3000 times it appears with the character *shen* 神 (spirit/god). The term "supernatural," as Leo Chan has pointed out, is derived from Western concepts of the "natural" and cannot be applied without qualification to the Chinese context. See *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, p. 77. The term is nonetheless used in this dissertation for lack of a better English word to cover the entire range of ghosts, gods, and spirits in pre-modern Chinese discourse.

natural process of the universe. However, Zhu Xi's writing reveals that he not only acknowledges the existence of certain ghosts and spirits, but also devotes much attention to their functions in ancestral worship.[10] In spite of his rejection of the popular belief in ghosts, Zhu Xi emphasizes the continued existence of a person's *qi* after death, in the form of an ancestral spirit that must be gathered and preserved through the rites of sacrifice performed by the descendents.[11]

The pantheist and animist notions of ghosts of ancient China would eventually become subsumed within a human-centred Confucian ritual system of ancestral worship, a development that seems inevitable once the notion of ghosts is bound up with the notion of returning. The very concept of returning presupposes a direction, an intended destiny for the departed soul. However, the direction of return can be ambiguous. As Judith Zeitlin has perceptively pointed out, Confucian classics typically emphasize the importance of making sure that the dead are properly tended to so that they go *away* from the living, yet literary depictions of ghosts often show that "the dead soul returns to the here and now to haunt the world of the living."[12] It must be emphasized that this difference is not arbitrary; it is grounded in very different and perhaps diametrically opposed religious and ideological standpoints. As I shall illustrate in the following pages, the ghosts that are cared for in the Confucian system are not quite the same as the ghosts portrayed in literary genres outside the Confucian canon.

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[10] In *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, a record of conversations that took place between Zhu and his disciples, two chapters are especially devoted to the discussion of ghosts and spirits. See *juan* 3, *guishen* 鬼神 and *juan* 63, *Zhongyong II* 中庸二.

[11] See Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, *juan* 3, *guishen* 鬼神.

[12] Judith Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, pp.4-5.

Ghosts and Ancestors

It has been observed that three kinds of deities have been worshiped in China since antiquity: heavenly gods (constellations), earthly gods (mountains and rivers), and human gods (ancestral ghosts). Three kinds of ghosts have been identified in the Chinese world of *guishen*: ghosts as the spontaneous activity of the cosmic energy—*qi* 氣; ghosts as spirits, demons, and monsters who threaten humankind; and ghosts as the spirits of ancestors invoked by descendants in ancestral worship.[13] These categories of ghosts and deities do overlap, notably in the figure of the ancestral ghost.

According to Wang Fenling 汪玢玲, rituals of ghost worship were gradually mixed and absorbed into ancestral worship in as early as the Shang period, a development in Chinese ghost culture that reinforced and perpetuated the ambiguous relationship between ghosts and gods, especially prior to the arrival of Buddhism.[14] In *Under the Ancestors' Shadow*, Francis Hsu argues that ancestor worship, rather than god worship, is the universal religion of China. Living under the ancestors' shadow is the central link between the Chinese world of human beings and their world of spirits.[15] The emphasis on the ancestral ghost and on the proper rituals of ancestral worship is of great importance to establishing fundamental Confucian concepts of lineage and patriarchal order. A hierarchy of ghosts thus becomes necessary.

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[13] See Wang Fenling, *Guihu fengqing* 鬼狐風情, Chapter 4, "*Liaozhai zhiyi yu gui wenhua*"; and Leo Chan, *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, Chapter 4, "Boxue: Understanding the Supernatural."

[14] Wang Fenling, *Guihu fengqing*, p. 128.

[15] Francis Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow*, 144.

Arthur Wolf has argued that in the context of Chinese religion, ghosts are by definition "other people's ancestors."[16] Implicit in Wolf's argument is the stance that emphasizes the ghosts' *difference* from ancestors instead of putting both of them under the same category of "ghost." The term "ancestral ghosts," to Wolf, becomes an oxymoron. Similarly, Meir Shahar and Robert Weller place ghosts outside the Confucian kinship system, defining them as "the departed souls of people who died prematurely, leaving no descendant kin behind to provide for them in the netherworld."[17] This is especially true of a young woman who dies before marriage, without children to worship her deceased spirit. She becomes a ghost that wanders outside the Confucian patrilineal family. In other words, she is nobody's ancestor.

The rivalry between ancestral ghosts and ghosts outside the kinship system sets the stage for centuries of debate that forms a large part of the Chinese ghost discourse. In spite of its uneasy relationship with Confucianism and its equally ambivalent position vis-à-vis Daoism and Buddhism, the ghost has been an essential component of Chinese cosmology and popular belief systems. As Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism evolved into three major religious establishments, the disenfranchised ghost, owing to its indigenous roots and popular appeal, became a focus of contention for different schools of religious teaching. The figure of the ghost—whether it was debunked, refuted, exorcised, or courted, co-opted, and appropriated for different moral-religious persuasions—remained the catalyst for important religious debates.

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[16] See Arthur Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors." In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974, p. 141-176.

[17] Shahar and Weller, *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*, University of Hawaii Press, 1996, p. 11.

Confucius himself was famously reticent about ghosts: “The Master did not speak of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders, and spirits” 子不語怪力亂神. But he never categorically denied the existence of ghosts and spirits: “Respecting ghosts and spirits but keeping one’s distance from them—this is true knowing” 敬鬼神而遠之, 可謂知矣. These seemingly contradictory remarks from the *Analects* were frequently quoted by later philosophers to argue for or against the belief in ghosts. In spite of differences in opinion, one common ground shared by nearly all schools of thought was the idea of “moral teaching through religion” 神道設教.[18] This emphasis on didacticism allows some room for ghost culture to develop, but denies the ghost any real legitimacy in Confucian cosmology.

When Confucian thinkers did speak of ghosts, they either referred to the ancestors that must be worshipped or the heavenly and earthly spirits that must be revered but kept at a distance. Rarely did they mention the human ghosts that fall outside the system of ancestral worship. Thus the non-ancestral ghost constituted a type of popular belief and, indeed, a form of common grievance that Confucianism failed to address or accommodate. The fears, desires, and ontological crisis of the wandering ghost, as I shall illustrate later, would incubate a powerful narrative impulse that shaped the literary tradition of *zhiguai* (and to some extent *chuanqi*), a minor discourse forged by literati members writing from the margins of Confucian orthodoxy.

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[18] The notion of “moral teaching through religion” was first expressed in *The Classic of Changes* 周易: “The sage establishes moral teaching through religion, and all under heaven are thus conformed” 聖人以神道設教, 而天下服矣. The only Confucian philosopher who refuted the existence of ghosts on epistemological ground was Xunzi 荀子 (313-238 BCE). In “Jie bi” 解蔽, Xunzi argues that ghosts are simply tricks played on us by the senses.

Ghosts and zhiguai

Although Confucians were either reticent about ghosts, or approached ghosts mainly from a didactic point of view, the emotional power of the ghost had been long recognized in Chinese writing, even in official historiography. In *Hanshu* 漢書 (The history of former Han), Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 CE) recounts the story of Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 seeking to invoke the spirit of Lady Li 李夫人, a concubine on whom he doted:

> The Emperor missed Lady Li incessantly, and it so happened that a Daoist from Qi named Shaoweng claimed that he could invoke the Lady's spirit. So he set up candles and draped tents at night, laid out meat and wine, and had the Emperor sit in a separate tent. The Emperor saw a fine female figure in the distance just like Lady Li, who sat behind the drapery, then paced back and forth. But when he could not see her any longer, the Emperor became even more lovesick and despondent. He wrote a poem: Is it she? Or is it not? Standing and watching from afar—How slowly she moves! How late she comes!
>
> 上思念李夫人不已，方士齊人少翁言能致其神。乃夜張燈燭，設帷帳，陳酒肉，而令上居他帳，遙望見好女如李夫人之貌，還幄坐而

步。又不得就視，上愈益相思悲感，為作詩曰：“是邪，非邪？立而望之，偏何姍姍其來遲！”[19]

On the level of historical discourse, Ban Gu's narrative debunks the shenanigans of the *fangshi* artist, and soberly points out the inappropriateness of such superstitious indulgence, especially on the part of an emperor. Yet, from a literary perspective, the emperor is portrayed in a much more sympathetic light. In the end, the emperor's blind belief in Lady Li's ghost is justified by his poetic expression of genuine emotions. Thus the poem also transforms the figure of the ghost from an object of belief to a trope of literary expression.

Ironically, it was the failure of *fangshi* 方士 or Daoist esoteric artists that contributed to the mood of pessimism and renewed interests in ghosts and mortality during the Eastern Han and the Six Dynasties. The ruling class and the cultural elite of this period were generally disillusioned with the Daoist notion of immortality, which used to be zealously pursued by their predecessors during the Qin and the Western Han.[20] The confirmed deaths of Qin and Han emperors reinforced this disillusionment and gave rise to a fatalistic notion of life. In *Nineteen Ancient Poems* 古詩十九首, life is often compared to "a brief sojourn" 人生忽如寄, and people as "passing voyagers" 忽如遠行

[19] Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 漢書, "Waiqizhuan" 外戚傳, item 67.

[20] Daoism was not the only school of pre-Han philosophy that promoted the belief in ghosts and spirits. The School of Mozi 墨子 (ca. 468-376 BCE) believed in revering heaven and worshiping ghosts 尊天事鬼, whereas the Ying-yang School 陰陽家 of the same period was even more radical in its promotion of ghost worship at the expense of managing human affairs 舍人事而任鬼神. However, the Daoist belief in ghosts and spirits, mainly motivated by the desire for immortality through the practice of esoteric arts, particularly appealed to the ruling class of the Qin and the Western Han. See *Mozi* 墨子 and Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (179-104 BCE) explication of in the Ying-yang School 陰陽家 in *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露.

客.[21] In late Han to Six Dynasties poetry, especially the poetry of the war-torn Jian'an 建安 period (197-220 CE), the ephemeral nature of human life is a frequent subject.[22]

In "Biandao lun" 辨道論 (A treatise on the Dao), Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232) argues that gods and immortals "are talked about year in and year out, but are never verified even once" 終年累稔, 終無一驗.[23] Yu Fan 虞翻 (164-233) debunks the entire notion of immortality altogether: "All those rumoured to be gods and immortals are dead people. How could immortals exist in the mortal world! " 彼皆死人而語神仙, 俗豈有仙人也.[24] In Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187-226) poem, "Zhe yangliu xing" 折楊柳行, not only the notion of immortality is questioned, but the Daoists themselves are also criticized for their lack of credibility:

> Peng Zu lived to be seven hundred,
> But where is he now?
> Lao Dan journeyed to immortal lands,
> But has not yet returned.
> Wang Qiao spoke in false words,
> And Red Pine clung to empty talk.
> Perfect ones can tell the true from the false,
> But fools only spread rumours.

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[21] *Gushi shijiushou* 古詩十九首. In *Wenxuan* 文選, *juan* 29, p. 634.

[22] Cao Cao's 曹操 (155-220) poem, "Duan ge xing" 短歌行, is one famous example.

[23] Cao Zhi 曹植, *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu* 曹植集校注, p. 189.

[24] See Li Shan's 李善 annotation of Yuan Yanbo's 袁彥伯 "Sanguo mingchen xu zan" 三國名臣序贊. In *Wenxuan* 文選, *juan* 47, p. 1054.

彭祖稱七百,

悠悠安可原?

老聃適西戎,

於今竟不還。

王喬虛假辭,

赤松垂空言。

達人識真偽,

愚夫好妄傳。[25]

The spread of Buddhism also contributed to the shift towards a less heaven-centred cosmology during the Six Dynasties. During this period we see the growing acceptance of Buddhist ideas of hell, karma, and transmigration. With the old cosmological order shaken up and a new vision still waiting to be born, partisan groups heatedly debated the reality of afterlife. This debate, however, was not confined to the philosophies, treatises, or official histories of the ruling class or the cultural elite. Various minor literati figures, along with disaffected *fangshi* and Buddhist devotees, seized the opportunity to join the debate, mainly resorting to the narrative and descriptive genre of *zhiguai*, or records of the strange.

It is commonly observed that in Six Dynasties *zhiguai* writing, the number of ghost narratives far surpasses the number of stories involving ancestors. Robert

[25] Cao Pi 曹丕, "Zhe yangliu xing" 折楊柳行. Li Jinghua 李景華, ed. Jian'an shizhuan 建安詩傳, p. 202.

Campany posits that the widespread interest in human encounters with ghosts outside the kinship system reflects Buddhist and Daoist doctrines that mandate universal offerings for the dead. These doctrines challenged the Confucian tradition of ancestral worship. Campany also argues that much of the subsequent scepticism and hostility toward popular belief in ghosts could be viewed as an effort by Confucian scholars to assail Buddhist and Daoist teachings, mainly beliefs in the afterlife, reincarnation, and immortality.[26]

This might have been the case during the late Han and the Six Dynasties, when Buddhist and Daoist influences posed a major threat to Confucian dominance. But since ghosts had existed prior to the rivalry among the three major religious establishments, the proliferation of writings on ghosts outside the kinship system could also have been the by-product of an inherent deficiency in Confucian moral philosophy—the negligence to account for the disenfranchised segment of the human population. I would therefore argue that, instead of posing a direct threat, Buddhist and Daoist teachings of the afterlife exposed and accentuated certain blind spots and weaknesses of the Confucian system. Thus the Confucian hostility towards Buddhism and Daoism could have been more of a defence than an attack. For Confucianism, the root of the problem lies in its failure to accommodate non-ancestral ghosts, which explains why the ghost tale proves to be such a problematic genre for Confucian ideology.

In a pioneering study of the history of traditional Chinese fiction, Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) provides an analysis of the cultural-historical background against which

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[26] Robert Campany, "Ghosts Matter: The Culture of Ghosts in Six Dynasties *Zhiguai*." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, vol. 13 (December 1991): 15-34.

zhiguai developed and flourished, emphasizing that Six Dynasties writings on ghosts and spirits were not limited to Buddhists and Daoists:

> China originally was steeped in shamanism, and since the Qin and the Han, legends of gods and immortals were rampant; by the end of Han, superstition came back with a vengeance, fanning popular beliefs in shamans, ghosts and spirits, aided by the transmission of Hinayana Buddhism to China. Therefore from the Jin to the Sui, an extraordinary amount of ghost tales and anomaly accounts cropped up, some written by literati members, others by devotees. Although unlike Buddhist and Daoist works bent on exerting their religious influence, the works of the literati were not "small talk," or pure fiction, either. The genre was based on the belief that, although the light and the dark occupied different realms, human and ghost were both concrete existences, and therefore, recording strange things was not fundamentally different from recording ordinary human affairs; there was no telling which is true, which is untrue.

> 中國本信巫，秦漢以來，神仙之說盛行，漢末又大暢巫風，而鬼道愈熾；會小乘佛教亦入中土，漸見流傳。凡此，皆張惶鬼神，稱道靈異，故自晉訖隋，特多鬼神志怪之書。其書有出於文人者，有出於教徒者。文人之作，雖非如釋道二家，意在自神其教，然亦非有意為小

> 說，蓋當時以為幽明雖殊途，而人鬼乃皆實有，故其敍述異事，與記載人間常事，自視固無誠妄之別矣。[27]

Here Lu Xun makes the important distinction between literati writings of *zhiguai* and those authored by Buddhist and Daoist devotees. This distinction indicates that during the Six Dynasties, *zhiguai* were not simply what Buddhists and Daoists wrote to challenge Confucianism. Members of the Confucian literati were also actively engaged in the practice of recording the strange. Therefore, literati writing on ghosts, spirits and strange phenomena did not constitute a challenge to Confucian teachings from the outside, but a critical and self-introspective "minor discourse" within the Confucian tradition. Thus *zhiguai* can be seen as a continuation of early philosophical debates on ghosts in an unofficial and marginal literary form. The unofficial nature of this writing expanded the forum and allowed a much broader range of writers to participate; the marginality of the writing also meant that the *zhiguai* writer's view on ghosts is generally different from, if not opposed to, that of a Confucian philosopher or official historian.

Many of the *zhiguai* writers are decidedly "pro-ghost." Gan Bao 干寶 (? -336), one of the earliest authors of *zhiguai*, claims that *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (*In Search of Spirits*) was written to illustrate that "the way of the spirits is no lie 發明神道之不誣也."[28] He further argues: "The ghosts and gods between heaven and earth exist alongside human

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[27] Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 (*A Brief History of Chinese Fiction)*, p. 24.

[28] Apparently, Gan Bao wrote *Soushenji* also for more personal reasons. According to his biography in *Jinshu*, he reportedly became a staunch believer after witnessing his brother's resurrection from death, and learning that a maid who was buried along with his father survived after ten years in the tomb (*Jinshu* 晉書, *juan* 82, "Gan Bao zhuan" 干寶傳). See Gan Bao's preface and Li Jianguo's annotation in *Xinji Soushen ji* 新輯搜神記, ed. Li Jianguo. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007, pp. 19-20.

beings. It is only that our energies are separate, and nature different, and could not be mixed. The living is anchored in yang, and the dead dominated by yin. Our natures are different, but we coexist in peace" 天地鬼神, 與我並生者也。氣分則性異, 域別則形殊, 莫能相兼也。生者主陽, 死者主陰, 性之所托, 各安其生.[29] Gan Bao's differentiation of the dead and the living by using the concept of yin/yang is reminiscent of the Han philosopher, Wang Chong. While Wang Chong uses yin/yang to render ghosts and spirits into abstract metaphysical concepts, Gan Bao imagines these categories in concrete ontological terms.

In his *zhiguai* tales, Gan Bao has no trouble in envisioning ghosts in full-fledged human form. In one anecdote, he tells the story of Ruan Zhan 阮瞻 (281-310), a contemporary who made a name for himself with his "no-ghost theory" (*wugui lun* 無鬼論):

> Ruan Zhan, courtesy name Qian Li, had been an adherent of the "no-ghost theory." No physical evidence could dissuade him of this belief. Often he claimed that this theory could explain the phenomenon of light and dark realms. One day, a visitor arrived and requested to see Zhan. After exchanges of courtesies, they began to chat about metaphysics. The visitor was a talented debater, and Zhan engaged him in a long conversation. The debate became especially heated when it came to the subject of ghosts and spirits. Finally, the visitor gave in, and said angrily:

[29] *Soushenji* 搜神記, *juan* 12.

> "The saints and worthy gentlemen of today and yore have all passed on stories of ghosts and spirits. Why is it that you alone deny their existence? Look, I am a ghost myself." Upon saying these words, he transformed into an alien shape and disappeared. Zhan fell silent, and looked as ghastly as he felt. By the end of the year, he fell sick and died.

> 阮瞻，字千里，素執無鬼論。物莫能難。每自謂，此理足以辨正幽明。忽有客通名詣瞻，寒溫畢，聊談名理。客甚有才辨，瞻與之言，良久，及鬼神之事，反復甚苦。客遂屈，乃作色曰："鬼神，古今聖賢所共傳，君何得獨言無？即仆便是鬼。"於是變為異形，須臾消滅。瞻默然，意色太惡。歲餘，病卒。[30]

Mixing serious intent with black humour, Gan Bao portrays a ghost that is intellectually and physically powerful, and a famous non-believer who dies because of his refusal to be enlightened by the ghost. Such an end for the staunch non-believer might have been an enactment of poetic justice for Gan Bao, but it also reveals a darker imagination of the ghost where fear and death are frequently invoked. This anecdote clearly indicates that, even when it is not directly engaged in a philosophical debate on ghosts, early *zhiguai* sought every opportunity to participate in the ghost discourse with intricate narrative manoeuvrings and a strong discursive bent.

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[30] *Soushenji, juan* 16.

Belief in ghosts acknowledges their existence, but it does not necessarily mean worshipping or respecting them. In another anecdote from *Soushenji*, "Song Dingbo" 宋定伯 (*juan* 16), Gan Bao recounts how Song Dingbo, a man versed in the ways of the ghost, first tricks a ghost into believing that Song himself is a fellow ghost, and then manoeuvres the ghost's transformation into a lamb, which he eventually sells in the market for a profit. The moral of this type of ghost tale, as Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau insightfully put it, is that "the ways of the ghost can be learned and that there is always a way of dealing with the unknown that makes the world of the ghost and the unknown less terrifying than it otherwise would be. To be versed in the lore of ghosts thus also serves a practical purpose."[31]

If ghosts represented human fear of the unknown, as ancient writings and folk rituals suggest, it would seem logical that one function of the ghost tale is to deal with that fear by acquainting oneself with the facts of the ghost world. "Broad learning" (*boxue* 博學) had indeed been pragmatically embraced by *zhiguai* writers as a way to justify their writing of ghost stories. But it is perhaps more accurate to view the vast body of Chinese writing on ghosts, whether narrative, descriptive or philosophical as a collective attempt to deal with the fear of ghosts and the ghostly not so much through learning, but through creative enactments of the ghost/human relationship in its multifarious forms and scenarios.

While the philosophical discourse tends to deal with fear by denying or explaining away the phenomenon of the ghost, *zhiguai* narratives generally acknowledge the

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[31] *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations*, eds. Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 61.

existence of ghosts and deal with ghosts by directly confronting them. The ancient practice of envisioning harmful spirits in concrete forms has no doubt influenced early *zhiguai* writing, in which ghosts are frequently portrayed in non-human, foreign, and monstrous forms, each representing some manifestation of untamed natural forces. It is only later in the tradition, when the relationship between humans and ghosts takes on sexual, romantic, or familial implications, that the notion of the benign ghost emerges and the ghost is increasingly portrayed as beautiful, female, and virtuous. As I will discuss in greater detail in later chapters, even in a relatively late work such as *Liaozhai*, best known for its beautiful female ghosts, vestiges of malicious ghosts remain, however obscured and tamed.

Chinese literary discourse on ghosts did not exist independently, but was morphed into existence through interaction and negotiation. One can assert that the ghost tale developed to fill the void created by Confucian reticence on ghosts, spirits and other anomalous phenomena. From the point of view of the dominant ideology, literary representations of non-ancestral ghosts imply a resistance or challenge. Therefore, dominant cultural forces always feel the need to control and channel the energies of the ghost discourse— by suppressing it, by appropriating it, and by accepting some aspects while rejecting others. On the other hand, each generation of ghost-story writers feels the need to justify their discoursing on ghosts and spirits, by using pre-existing genres, by didacticism, or by emphasizing the contribution of the discourse to broad learning. One might further argue that *zhiguai*, and to some extant *chuanqi*, was created not only in reaction to the Confucian injunction against discoursing on ghosts and spirits, but as a

necessary compensation for a type of discourse about which Confucianism was guarded and reticent.

The Chinese notion of the ghost stems from deep-rooted human fear of death and of the unknown. This powerful psychological impulse, combined with the ontological problem of the non-ancestral ghost, lends the literary portrayal of ghosts a reality of its own. Emerging as an imagined community that became increasingly real and demanded recognition, literary representations of ghosts are ultimately projections of desire and hope. In Chinese folk belief, as reflected in popular mourning and burial practices, the ghost stands for the extension of a person's life, for the possibility of an afterworld, and for the chance to return to the human world. This desire for life is firmly anchored in the human world, which differs from the Daoist notion of immortal life (a life that is no longer of this world), and from the Buddhist resignation to reincarnation (a life which may no longer be in the human form). In the literary tradition, the ghost also represents the desire for freedom—freedom of bodily movement, sexuality, thought, emotion. All that which is not possible in ordinary life is projected onto the ghost through literary imagination, making the ghost not only an embodiment of the other, but also a projection of the self.

A Note on Chuanqi

The beautiful and romantic images of female ghosts that *Liaozhai* is famous for are much indebted to *chuanqi*, the aesthetically sophisticated "tales of the marvellous" that were developed and flourished in the eighth and ninth centuries during the Tang dynasty. While Six Dynasties *zhiguai* purport to record ghosts, spirits, and other

anomalies with the intent of religious and moral persuasion, Tang *chuanqi* are more concerned with depicting legendary motifs and displaying literary talent. Encounters with the wide world of the unknown in Six Dynasties *zhiguai* gave way to the love affairs involving great beauties and courtesans (whether historical, fictional, or fantastic), and the Tang authors' own elite circles of poets and officials. Observing the genre's gravitation from the supernatural towards the human, and from the factual to the fictional, Sheldon Lu simply translates *chuanqi* as "fictional biography."[32] The Tang tales left an indelible imprint on later classical tales, including *Liaozhai*, with both an outward expansion of the literary imagination and the introspective probing of personal identities and interpersonal relationships.

If *zhiguai* represents the discursive orientation of the *xiaoshuo* tradition, then *chuanqi* will be on the fictional end of the *xiaoshuo* spectrum. In the case of *Liaozhai*, if *zhiguai* informs the religious dimension and the critical function of the ghost tale, then *chuanqi* provides the creative space for the ghost's transformation from merely projections of fear and desire to full-fledged agents and emerging identities. The interaction between these two narrative modes, as I will seek to demonstrate in Chapter Two, will also enable authors and readers not just to approach the ghost tale as romantic fantasies, but also as a "minor discourse" that is both critical and creative.

Tang dynasty *chuanqi* did not entirely eclipse *zhiguai* in the ensuing development of the classical tale. The *zhiguai* mode remained strong in Tang and Song collections, such as Duan Chengshi's段成式 (803-863) *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 and Hong Mai's 洪

[32] Sheldon Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, pp. 9-10.

邁 (1123-1202) *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志, and persisted throughout the late imperial period. The compilation of *Taiping guangji* in the tenth century gathered both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* writings from the Six Dynasties to the early Song, although the two literary modes were not recognized as distinct genres until the Ming. The Ming scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602) dismissed *zhiguai* as reports based on hearsay while praising *chuanqi* for its fictional imagination.[33] However, the lack of genre distinction in *Taiping guangji* as well as in later collections suggests that *chuanqi* was not necessarily perceived as a higher or more advanced stage of *zhiguai*; the two modes coexisted and mutually influenced each other throughout the course of the classical tale tradition.

Taiping guangji was an invaluable archive of the otherwise poorly preserved tradition of *zhiguai*, *chuanqi*, and other forms of "minor discourses" up to the early Song period. Its re-publication in the Ming also stimulated renewed interests in recording the strange, the marvellous, and the arcane among the Ming-Qing literati. This 500-*juan* compendium was also the first large-scale attempt to systematically organize the knowledge on the subject of ghosts and spirits that had accrued over time. Eschewing the amorphous ambiguity of *guishen* of early Chinese cosmography, *Taiping guangji* meticulously catalogues and classifies a broad array of texts into ninety-seven thematic groups, including immortals 神仙 (55 *juan*), female immortals 女仙 (15 *juan*), retribution 報應 (33 *juan*), gods 神 (25 *juan*), ghosts 鬼 (40 *juan*), and foxes 狐 (9 *juan*). Such a systematic and scholarly approach implies that, by the Song, there was increased recognition of a tradition of writing that existed outside the Confucian canon. The

[33] Hu Yinglin, "Jiuliu xulun xia" 九流緒論下, in *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 少室山房筆叢, *juan* 29, pp.280-288.

method of typological and thematic classification is also indicative of the need to discipline and regulate the non-official discourse carried by this minor tradition. [34]

The Ghost Tale in Qing Ghost Discourse

The discourse on ghosts continued throughout late imperial China in both philosophical debate and literary experimentation. The High Qing was a time when anti-superstitious treatises and *zhiguai* storytelling both flourished. In a chapter entitled "Questions of Belief and Disbelief," Leo Chan gives an account of eighteenth-century philosophical debates on ghosts and the supernatural.[35] He divides Qing discourse on ghosts broadly into two camps—scepticism and its proponents vs. supernaturalism and its adherents.

For scepticism, Chan cites Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746-1809), a staunch critic of both Buddhist and folk beliefs in ghosts, and Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804), who attacks Buddhist beliefs in rebirth and hell, and criticizes the notion of reincarnation as a sign of unfiliality and selfishness. But neither Hong Liangji nor Qian Daxin absolutely rules out the legitimacy of certain types of spiritual existence. In "Ghosts and Divinities" 鬼神篇, Hong Liangji recognizes the existence of "real" spirits from remote antiquity—those of mountains, rivers, and ancestors, and differentiates them from the "anomalous" spirits that should not be feared. In "On Reincarnation" 輪回論, Qian Daxin writes: "The

[34] The editors of *Taiping guangji* were not particularly concerned with the issue of literary genre, probably because in the early Song neither *zhiguai* nor *chuanqi* was important enough to warrant serious discussion as an established literary genre. This lack of interest in genre strikes a sharp contrast with Ming-Qing scholars' obsession with genre classifications and their polarized positions in regard to the literary status of *xiaoshuo*. I will discuss the issue of genre in the reception of *Liaozhai* in Chapter 3.

[35] Leo Chan, *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, Chapter 3, p.77.

ancient kings knew of the nature and character of spirits, and thus instituted the sacrificial rites in order that they could return to their own proper places and not cause violence."[36]

As for the Qing defenders of supernatural belief, Chan cites Yao Ying 姚榮 (1785-1853), who recapitulates Zhu Xi's idea that ghosts and deities are both created from *qi*, the basic stuff of the universe. In "On Ghosts and Deities" 鬼神篇, Yao writes: "When the physical body decays, *qi* is left, marauding as ghosts in the vast empty space. When activated, *qi* becomes wind, rain, thunder, and hail; when tranquil, it takes the form of mountains and rivers." Yao also emphasizes the mechanism of "metamorphosis" 化機 in all phenomena: "All physical matter undergoes transformation. Things are self-transformed, and they also transform into each other." [37] Thus Yao Ying's theory reinforces the Neo-Confucian abstraction of the ghost, seeing its manifestation as part of a continuous cosmic flow.

A common ground that the believers and the non-believers share is their endorsement of Confucian ritual and propriety. Mei Zengliang 梅繒恨 (1786-1856), although considered a main defender of supernaturalism, nevertheless agrees with the sceptic Qian Daxin on the importance of sacrificial rites. In "On Graves" 墓說, Mei "laments the disrespect towards deities and ghosts, *particularly* the neglect of graves and the abandonment of various rituals of ancestral worship."[38] These overlapping ideas between the two camps indicate that Qing philosophical debate on ghosts does not seem to be hinged on whether or not ghosts exist, but rather on differentiating the authentic,

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[36] Quoted from Leo Chan, *Discourse of Foxes and Ghosts*, pp. 83-86.

[37] Ibid., p. 91.

[38] Ibid., p. 90. My emphasis in italics.

worship-worthy spirits from the kinds that are anomalous and heretical. Clearly Qing intellectuals write with a "ghost hierarchy" in mind, with some ghosts to be refuted, some to be appeased, and a chosen few to be revered and worshipped.

Chan's survey of Qing philosophical debate on ghosts is meant to foreground and to contextualize his extended analysis of Qing literary representations of ghosts and foxes, the main focus of his book. However, Chan's discussion of eighteenth-century ghost story writing, which is also based on the two-camp structure, suffers from the rigidity of this dichotomy. For example, he places Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716－1797), author of the *zhiguai* collection, *Zibuyu* 子不語, in the sceptics' camp, whereas Ji Yun's 紀昀 (1724－1805) work, *Yueweicaotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記, is interpreted as pro-supernatural.[39]

Admittedly, Yuan Mei, as a prolific writer of ghost stories, is paradoxically sceptical about the popular belief in ghosts. Yuan's scepticism is evident in *Suiyuan suibi* 隨園隨筆, where he enumerates historical instances of the unreliability of fortune telling, physiognomy, geomancy, magical arts, and astromancy. However, as Chan has noted, Yuan also believes that "the spirits fool men" (*guishen nongren* 鬼神弄人): "Once one believes in what one dreams of, one renders oneself vulnerable to the tricks of deities and ghosts."[40] While suggesting that real spirits are no more than spectres originating in the human heart/mind, Yuan Mei does not deny or condemn popular belief in the supernatural. On the contrary, he seems to take great interest in the psychological implications of ghosts, especially in people's willingness to subject themselves to such flights of fancy. Rather than putting Yuan's idiosyncratic mixture of scepticism and

[39] See Chan's discussion in *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, Chapter 3.

[40] Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan suibi*. Translation quoted from Chan, p. 82.

obsession into the same category with orthodox Qing thinkers such as Qian Daxin, it is perhaps more interesting to consider Yuan's treatment of ghost stories as specimens of cultural mentality to be the dawning of a "modern" sensibility of ghosts unhampered by established moral-religious paradigms. Ji Yun, the main focus of Chan's book, might also be profitably discussed outside the duality of belief vs. non-belief. Ji's *Yueweicaotang biji*, as I will explain in more detail in Chapter Three, could be viewed as a critical response to Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* not only from the perspective of moral-religious outlook, but also in terms of genre distinction and literary taste.

In analyzing ghost story writing as part of the larger ghost discourse, it is worth noting that philosophical and theoretical debates on ghosts do not necessarily precede or engender literary and popular representations of ghosts. I propose that Qing literary representations of ghosts, due to the writers' different literary visions and ideological standpoints, offered an important counterpoint to the philosophical debate of the period. Instead of subjecting ghost story writing to philosophical polemics, it would be more fruitful to treat philosophical debate and literary representation as different strands of ghost discourse that often respond to and compete with one another.

One example that Chan uses to capture the complexities and contradictions of late imperial ghost culture is Luo Pin's 羅聘 (1733-1799) famous painting, "Ghost Amusement" 鬼趣圖, composed of a series of eight images of ghosts interacting with humans, juxtaposed with dozens of colophons, notes, poems, and short essays, all dealing with the subject of the ghost. Among the contributors are some of the most eminent scholar-officials and literary men of the Qianlong era, including Ji Yun and Yuan Mei. Leo Chan is most insightful when he writes: "[Luo Pin's] 'Ghost Amusement' scroll

must have served to draw the literati together by providing an occasion for discourse on ghosts—perhaps as much as the *zhiguai* collections through the centuries had."[41]

The "Ghost Amusement" painting also makes it evident that the Neo-Confucian-influenced theories of ghosts were but one facet of late imperial ghost discourse. As the title itself suggests, discoursing on ghosts could also be an elegant literati pastime. The roster of cultural luminaries who participated in the creation of the scroll also points to a more diffused, more personal, and more creative approach to discoursing on ghosts. Indeed, the playfulness of "Ghost Amusement" takes on a tone of gleeful iconoclasm, and the painting could be a tongue-in-cheek response to the *Hanfeizi* parable, in which painting ghosts is dismissed as being easy and therefore inferior in artistic value.

While it might be an over-generalization to speak of a dichotomy of late imperial ghost discourse in terms of the philosophical debate on ghosts vis-à-vis the literary representations of ghosts, it is not far-fetched to observe that the ideological differences between Qing orthodox intellectuals and Qing writers who dabbled in telling ghost-stories have produced two competing currents in late imperial ghost discourse: one current consists of the righteous advocacy of restoring ancestral lineage and proper rituals of spirit worship on the part of Confucian thinkers and orthodox scholar-officials; the other is characterized by the unbridled imaginings of unauthorized encounters with ghosts and spirits outside the kinship system. Although these two currents, for the sake of differentiation, could be loosely labelled "pro-ancestor" and "pro-ghost," the positions that individual authors assume in this dialogic discourse are often ambiguous, as the same literati figure can move along a spectrum and negotiate between the different positions.

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[41] Ibid., p. 89.

No writer better embodies the ambiguity and the complexity of the late imperial ghost discourse than Pu Songling. Pu Songling's *Liaozhai*, although mostly written in the late seventeenth century, only became widely available, and immensely popular, through its publication in the mid-eighteenth century. Much of the writing on ghosts from the mid-eighteenth century onward could hardly escape *Liaozhai's* influence. As the book's history of reception has made evident, the cultural implication of *Liaozhai* is not only literary, but also personal and ideological. Therefore, the ways in which ghosts occupy Pu Songling's literary imagination as well as his worldview become particularly illuminating for our understanding of the larger ghost discourse in late imperial China. On a personal level, the contrast between the author's general outlook as a Confucian literatus and the more complex and unconventional worldview depicted in *Liaozhai* indicates that Pu Songling was in a deeply private mode when he wrote *Liaozhai*, as he used the writing of the ghost tales as way to explore and fulfill his personal identity.

Pu Songling As a Confucian Literatus

Pu Songling was born to a formerly prosperous family of landlords and merchants in Zichuan County, Shandong Province, in 1640, merely four years before the fall of the Ming Dynasty. Except for a brief sojourn in present day Jiangsu, Pu Songling lived his whole life in an economically insular, and culturally conservative, rural region. In early childhood, he witnessed the final days of the Ming, followed by a prolonged period of unrest, terror and bloodshed during the dynastic transition. Frequent bouts of natural and manmade disasters left indelible marks on him in his formative years and inculcated a strain of fatalism in his worldview.

Pu Songling was greatly indebted to his father, Pu Pan 蒲槃 (1595-1667), for his early education and intellectual development. In a cultural atmosphere dominated by orthodox Confucian ethics, Pu Pan encouraged his young son to read extensively outside the Confucian canon: *Zhuangzi*, *Liezi*, *Chuci*, and poetry by Tao Qian and Ruan Ji. These works, representing a Chinese literary tradition of imaginative freedom and non-conformity, instilled in the young Pu Songling an aversion to political and intellectual indoctrination. Moreover, they exposed Pu Songling to the supernatural world of myths, legends, and fantasies, a world that he would frequently explore in his own writing.

Some scholars consider Pu Songling a firm believer in karmic retribution. In his evidential study of *Xingshi yinyuanzhuan*, a work of vernacular fiction erroneously attributed to Pu Songling, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962) claims: "Pu Songling believes in fox-fairies; that's true belief. He believes in ghosts; that's also true belief. He believes in karma; that, too, is true belief."[42] Meng Yao 孟瑤 , in *A History of Chinese Fiction*, maintains: "His life philosophy, I'm afraid, is a thorough fatalism based on karmic retribution."[43]

Pu Songling's own preface to *Liaozhai* contains an account suggesting that, according to a dream of Pu Songling's father, the boy was born as the reincarnation of a Buddhist monk:

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[42] Hu Shi, "*Xingshi yinyuanzhuan kaozheng*" 醒世姻緣傳考證 (An evidential study of *Xingshi yinyuanzhuan*). In *Hu Shi lunxue jinzhu* 胡適論學近著, p. 297.

[43] Meng Yao, *Zhongguo xiaoshuoshi* 中國小說史, vol. 4, p. 478.

At the hour of my birth, my late father had a dream: a gaunt, sickly Buddhist monk, whose robe left one shoulder bare, entered the room. A plaster round as a coin was pasted on his chest. When my father awoke, I had been born, with an inky birthmark that corroborated his dream. Moreover, as a child I was frequently ailing, and when I grew up, my fate was wanting. The desolation of my courtyard resembles a monk's quarters and what "plowing with brush and ink" brings is as little as a monk's alms bowl. I often scratch my head and muse: "Could 'he who faced the wall' have really been me in a former existence?" In fact, there must have been a deficiency in my previous karma, and so I did not reach transcendence, but was blown down by the wind, becoming in the end a flower fallen in a cesspool. How murky are the "six paths of existence!" But it cannot be said they lack coherence.[44]

松懸弧時，先大人夢一病瘠瞿曇，偏袒入室，藥膏如錢，圓粘乳際。寤而松生，果符墨志。且也：少羸多病，長命不猶。門庭之淒寂，則冷淡如僧；筆墨之耕耘，則蕭條似缽。每搔頭自念：勿亦面壁人果是吾前身耶？蓋有漏根因，未結人天之果；而隨風蕩墮，竟成藩溷之花。茫茫六道，何可謂無其理哉！

[44] Trans. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p. 48.

Pu's autobiographical reference, in which he portrays himself as a child of the workings of fate, seems to indicate that he was Buddhist in temperament and disposition, if not in actual practice. Although the supernatural aura might have been added as a form of literary posturing that befits the subject matter of his book, it is to be taken seriously, given the tone of solemnity and sincerity of the preface. Pu Songling's expository writing expresses a similarly strong awareness of the workings of fate. In "Preface to Understanding the Will of Heaven" 會天意序, he writes:

> Expediency, setbacks, delays, speediness—these are predetermined; fruitfulness, restraints, likes, and dislikes—they each have their *raison d'etre*. Therefore, each creation, each transformation, is the work of nature, not of oneself; harmony and discord are decided by fate and cannot be changed.
>
> 順逆遲速，各有定數；生克喜惡，皆有常情，是故一造一化，出於自然，而不容己；一治一亂，本於運數，而不可更。[45]

The trials and tribulations of his life, especially his repeated failure at the imperial examinations, could have cast a strong shade of fatalism on his worldview. In the larger cultural environment, it was not uncommon for literary men of his time to read Buddhist sutras, visit Buddhist temples, or discuss Buddhist philosophy. These activities were,

[45] *Pu Songling ji* 蒲松齡集, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986, p. 55.

however, engaged in as a form of intellectual and spiritual exercise for the Confucian literati, not much different from their dabbling in philosophical Daoism, or discoursing on ghosts and fox-spirits. These cultural pursuits are held to be different from idol worship, blind superstition, and religious dogmatism, which were generally considered outside the bounds of Confucian purview and, therefore, frowned upon.[46]

In his capacity as a venerable member of the local elite, Pu Songling wrote numerous prefaces and inscriptions for temples and places of worship, often in praise of the merit of building temples and statues of gods. He did not particularly favour or disfavour any one sect, as he wrote dedications for Buddhist and Daoist temples as well as for unorthodox sites of folk worship. In "Preface to the Dedication of the Water-and-Land God's Statue" 募請水陸神像序, he writes:

> Yet without physical anchor, gods would not respond; without sensual stimulants, people could not be moved. Therefore it is necessary to employ fine artists and craftsmen to create divine portraits in gold and green, dressed in precious gowns and drapery, solemn and dignified; and to erect sword-trees and knife-mountains, to illustrate portentous manifestations for public viewing, worship, and edification. Thus, the teachings of Small-Vehicle Buddhism may instil in people an awareness of karmic retribution, and purge vile and evil thoughts through their pores,

[46] In *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*, Tim Brook has demonstrated that even the most outwardly avowed Confucian gentlemen would visit Buddhist temples or engage in the most superstitious observances and rituals. It seems that among the educated class, Confucian ethics occupy a central position as the code of conduct, but in the day-to-day social practice of religious life, Confucian principles are frequently renegotiated and compromised.

> so the sons and daughters fear gods and ghosts who enter their dreams. It was precisely in this manner that the ancient sage used religious teaching to edify the populace.
>
> 然神無所托則不靈，人無所感則不動。是以專門良匠，遊藝文人，方幅以肖尊嚴，金碧以開生面，寶幢櫻珞，凜凜莊嚴；劍樹刀山，種種顯示，因而大眾瞻仰，動菩提之心靈；小乘禪宗，發因果之妙義，奸邪出其毛髮，兒女惕其夢魂，聖人神道設教之意義，遂得行乎其間以。[47]

In a dedication for a temple of the Three Teachings, Pu Songling writes: “How merciful the cosmos, how enduring the accomplishments of religious teaching!” 慈悲宇宙，神道之教，為功已久.[48] Pu’s intention seems clear: building temples and erecting statues are not an end in itself, but a means to educate and edify the populace. Allan Barr has pointed out that Pu probably accepted many of these commissions primarily for financial reasons and may have written what was expected, not what he truly thought. Indeed, these commissioned works reflect the typical sentiment that a Confucian gentleman would have held towards religious institutions: temples and statues are useful in that they fulfill a human need and a social function, but whether gods or spirits really exist is quite a different issue.

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[47] *Pu Songling ji* 蒲松齡集, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986, p. 76.

[48] *Pu Songling ji* 蒲松齡集, p. 114.

Pu Songling's view on religion is characteristically practical, didactic, and eclectic on the surface, but Confucian at the core. In this respect, he is no different from other followers of the Confucian edict "*shendao shejiao* 神道設教" (the purpose of religion is moral education). Whether the precept is of Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist origin is not as important as the effect of its moral teaching. Evoking hellish images of knives and teeth, he reveals his familiarity with all three teachings, but his adherence is nonetheless to core Confucian values:

> There are axes and cleavers above, mouths and teeth below, and knives and needles in hell. As for evil killings and debauchery, there is the mass condemnation of angry voices. Buddha mentions the void, Laozi says great purity, and Confucius advocates self-restraint. Taking different paths, they all reach the goal of teaching loyalty and filial piety.
>
> 上有斧鉞,下有唇齒,陰有刀錐。至於惡殺惡淫, 則齊聲而共怒。佛曰虛無,老曰清淨,儒曰克復,至於教忠教孝,則殊途而同歸。[49]

The *Liaozhai* story, "The Great Sage Equalling Heaven" 齊天大聖, is ostensibly in praise of pious worship. It chronicles the conversion of the protagonist, Xu Sheng, from a sceptic to a staunch believer in the Monkey King, a popular icon Xu Sheng once dismissed as merely a literary allegory. After going through a series of ordeals due to his

[49] Pu Songling, "Wenxin ji ba" 問心集跋, in *Pu Songling quanji* 蒲松齡全集, Xuelin chubanshe, 1998, p. 1115.

non-belief, Xu Sheng is finally converted. However, Pu Songling uses authorial commentary to distance himself from the depiction of religious views within the narrative. The "Historian of the Strange" concludes the story with the comment:

> A thing under heaven does not necessarily have to exist in material form. If humans consider it numinous, then it is numinous. How is it so? When the human mind concentrates, a thing may materialize through the senses of the eyes and ears.
>
> 天下事固不必實有其人，人靈之，則既靈岩矣。何以故？人心所聚，而物或托眼耳。[50]

This comment suggests that Pu Songling remains unconverted even though the character within the tale has become a believer in the Monkey King and benefited from such belief. Pu Songling seems to suggest that, even though he prefers to see the Monkey King in a literary, allegorical light, it would benefit the less educated to worship it as the Great Sage. To Pu Songling, the Monkey King does not really possess supernatural powers; the power comes from the desiring forces of people's hearts. When natural phenomena and human desire correspond, people regard the natural phenomena as supernatural or divine. What is considered supernatural, or a deed of the gods, in Pu Songling's eyes, is based on the workings of the human mind. It is the human mind that gives natural phenomena a

[50] *Liaozhai, juan* 11, p. 1459. All *Liaozhai* tales are referenced according to Zhang Youhe's *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 三會本 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1962).

spiritual aura. Pu Songling's view of the spiritual reveals a strong neo-Confucian influence, namely an emphasis not so much on the physical existence, but on the manifestation of the mind/heart. However, he differs from neo-Confucians in his recognition of the importance of physical structures, such as temples and statues, as a way to give body and form to human spiritual expression.

Although Pu Songling apparently showed support for the building of temples and statues, he became decidedly critical when ritual activities were carried to the point of excess and when they threatened the integrity of the socio-economic fabric. In *A Petition to Ban Shaman Rituals* 請禁巫風呈, he writes:

> The customs of Zichuan of old had been simple and good. In the past twenty years, however, shaman performances have taken over the villages. Farming and commerce have been abandoned, and funds exhausted to build stages. Families let their taxes go in arrears, and pawned their clothes to attend theatricals.
>
> 淄[城]民風，舊號淳良，二十年來，習俗批靡，村村巫戲。商農廢業，竭資而為會場，丁戶欠糧，典衣而作戲價。[51]

In both expository and creative writing, Pu Songling treats ignorance and superstition with the same impatience and disdain he has reserved for dogmatism and inhumanity.

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[51] *Pu Songling ji* 蒲松齡集, p. 206.

For example, in the poem "Song for Catching Locust Nymphs" 捕蝻歌, he ridicules those who, in the event of a locust epidemic, choose to pray for gods' help instead of fighting the pests themselves.[52]

Pu Songling As a Ghost Story Writer

In his expository writings, especially those written in the role of a Confucian literatus, Pu Songling exhibits a moral-religious outlook not fundamentally different from that of a well-educated member of the elite. It is an outlook that is essentially non-sectarian, backed up by strong Confucian morality, and tempered by commonsense and humanistic concerns. Often equivocal and sometimes contradictory in his belief in the actual existence of gods, ghosts, and spirits, Pu Songling nonetheless recognizes the social value of religious institutions, rituals, worship, and even superstition. He is not so much against superstitious belief as he is against excessive practice born of ignorance, dogmatism, and hypocrisy, no matter on which sectarian ground these excesses are bred. The core of Pu Songling's moral-religious outlook is Confucian, but there are strong suggestions of an enlightened humanism unrestrained by Confucian doctrines and social strictures.

In the strange records and the marvellous tales of *Liaozhai*, Pu Songling depicts a worldview that is more complex and idiosyncratic than what the prestigious genres of poetry and expository essay would allow him. There is clear indication that, in writing *Liaozhai*, Pu Songling enters a creative mode that is not commensurable with his persona as a public-spirited Confucian, a persona that he cared about but never fully embraced

[52] *Pu Songling quanji* 蒲松齡全集, Xuelin chubanshe, 1998, p. 1709.

due to his lack of a successful scholar-official career. In many *Liaozhai* tales, it is the modest and private concerns that are emphasized and placed above righteousness or moral high ground, and there is a palpable impatience with religious dogma of any kind. Consider, for example, the story of "Le Zhong" 樂仲.

Le Zhong was a very filial son. His mother, a devout Buddhist, fell seriously ill and craved meat. Le Zhong cut off some flesh from his thigh and presented it to his mother. For fear of breaking the vegetarian bond, his mother refused to take the flesh and died. Le Zhong deplored his mother's foolishness and burned all the Buddhist images at home. He then went to the south sea to look for his mother. He brought a prostitute with him along the way, ate meat and spices, and drank wine, breaking all the Buddhist taboos. In the end, he was generously rewarded.

Here, the Confucian superstition of slicing off one's flesh for an ailing parent ends up appearing equally preposterous as the dying mother's refusal to take the meat, which supposedly could have saved her life. In the disillusioned son, we see an almost gleeful irreverence toward Buddhist doctrine and idol worship. But that irreverence is, paradoxically, not founded on Confucian reason, but on a seemingly erratic and flamboyant rejection of all dogmatism, a position reminiscent of philosophical Daoism or Chan Buddhism.

Religious irreverence is common in *Liaozhai*. In the story, "Gong Xian" 鞏仙, the Daoist, Gong, uses his magical sleeve as a cover for the amorous liaison between Shang, his host, and Huige, a court woman. Not only does the Daoist allow the lovers to consummate their love in his sleeve, he also lets the pregnant Huige have her baby in it. After the baby is delivered, the Daoist takes off his robe, and says: "Now my clothes are

stained with blood from birth—a real taboo for a Daoist. I've had this robe for two decades, now I part with it for your sake" 產血濺衣，道家最忌。今為君故，二十年故物， 一旦棄之. He then tells Shang not to discard the bloodstained robe. "Cut a small piece and burn it," he says. "The ashes can be of use for difficult births" 舊物勿棄卻，燒錢許，可療難產，墮死胎.[53]

The character, Gong, is portrayed as a Daoist immortal in an extremely enlightened state, who is willing to break a religious taboo for the sake of love and human compassion. In spite of his irreverence towards religious doctrine, the Daoist does yield to other lines of orthodox thinking. When Gong decides to risk everything and let Huige give birth to her child in his sleeve, he says to Shang: "The continuation of your ancestral lineage relies on this. How could I stand by and not help?" 君宗祧賴此一線，何敢不竭綿薄. This emphasis on the continuation of the family line, unlikely to have come from a Daoist, betrays Pu Songling's own Confucian upbringing and serves as a reminder that, in spite of the eclectic and sometimes radical reordering of values in many *Liaozhai* tales, certain Confucian values still make up the bulk of Pu Songling's moral background. But such values could be just as well based on a general humanistic outlook and a high regard for human life, rather than on the endorsement of a Confucian doctrine.

This humanistic outlook is especially apparent in Pu Songling's portrayal of ghost characters in *Liaozhai*. Pu's private interest in the non-ancestral ghost draws a stark contrast with the Confucian emphasis on ancestral worship. This divergence in moral-religious allegiance also explains why the ghost tale had always been a problematic genre

[53] *Liaozhai, juan* 7, p. 895.

to Confucian literary orthodoxy. Earlier in this chapter, I have analyzed the relationship between the ghost and *zhiguai* writing, suggesting a connection between the marginal status of the non-ancestral ghost and the unofficial status of Six Dynasties literati. I have also noted that from the late Han to the Six Dynasties, Confucianism was endorsed by the court but was severely challenged by forces from outside the mainstream, creating the perfect cultural climate for the emergence of *zhiguai* as a dynamic "minor discourse." Why did *zhiguai* continue to be written by literati members throughout the dynastic period? How did its cultural function change? What motivated Pu Songling to collect and create ghost tales?

In an article on Tang Dynasty material culture, Sarah M. Allen argues that Tang *zhiguai* writing had gone through a fundamental change from serious religious persuasion to a light-hearted connoisseurship of the strange and bizarre. The ghost tale became a curiosity item to be collected and circulated among the literary elite.[54] This view of collecting ghost tales as connoisseurship is no doubt influenced by the culturally privileged milieu that gave rise to Tang dynasty *chuanqi*. The *chuanqi* influence has also lent support to the interpretation of much of later *zhiguai*, including *Liaozhai*, as romantic fantasy or a form of male literary game. To what extent was Pu Songling a participant in this literary game, and to what extent was *Liaozhai* a result of this elite cultural production? On several occasions, mainly in poetry, Pu Songling refers to discoursing on ghosts as an elegant pastime, a posture that was familiar to members of the literati. In the poem, "Seeping Garden Spring" 沁園春, Pu Songling writes:

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[54] Allen, "Becoming Material: From Story to Object." AAS conference, 2006.

To mimic Dongpo's way of killing time,

in vain we talk of ancient ghosts;

the pure-hearted master takes his seat,

refreshing the spirit of Zen.

學坡仙撥悶，

妄談故鬼；

清公上座，

杜撰新禪。

In the poem, "Traveling" 途中, he writes:

Traveling, with nothing to do, we talk of ghosts;

On the boat, carried away like immortals.

途中寂寞姑言鬼

舟上招搖意欲仙[55]

These poems, presenting the ghost tale in social situations, suggest a notion of the ghost tale as a rarefied form of literary practice in moments of leisure or at quiet gatherings. The reference to Su Dongpo, the great Song dynasty cultural luminary who had a

[55] *Pu Songling quanji*, pp. 2019, 1574.

penchant for the ghost tale, helps Pu Songling to situate himself in that cultural milieu in writing if not in actual social interaction. As a live-in tutor in the residence of one of the most prestigious families in the Zichuan area, with a host who appreciated literary talents, Pu Songling would have had access to social gatherings where the local elite discoursed on ghosts and foxes. However, the socio-economic gap between Pu Songling and the upper-class scholar-officials would have prevented him from fully identifying with this type of cultural practice.[56] It is this gap, which placed Pu Songling socio-economically below the landed gentry and closer to that of the tenant farmer, that has prompted a different envisioning of his relationship with the ghost tale. The widely circulated anecdote, probably apocryphal, of Pu Songling setting up a tea-stand by the village to attract ghost-story tellers, highlights a recognition of Pu Songling's affinity with the common people and an awareness of *zhiguai*'s early roots in folklore and "talks in the alleyways".[57] These two visions of the social origins of the ghost tale are equally valid in Pu Songling's literary production, considering Pu Songling's ambiguous social status and the complex blend of literary modes and genres in *Liaozhai*.

Apart from the social aspects of the production of ghost tales, Pu Songling's writing suggests that *Liaozhai* held a great deal of personal significance to him as a writer. In his preface to *Liaozhai*, written early in his literary career in 1679, Pu Songling reveals

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[56] Pu Songling's closest affiliation with the cultural elite of his time was his literary exchanges with the great Qing poet-official, Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634-1711). Later scholars and commentators had made much of Wang's positive comments on Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* manuscript. But as Zhan Xiaoyong 占驍勇 has pointed out, Wang's comments on *Liaozhai* were generally positive but by no means recognized or established it as a literary masterpiece; a much closer relationship between Pu Songling and Wang Shizhen was imagined by later scholars in their efforts to promote *Liaozhai*. See Zhan Xiaoyong, *Qingdai zhiguai chuanqi xiaoshuoji yanjiu* 清代志怪傳奇小說集研究 (Studies of Qing dynasty collections of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* fiction), pp. 70-71.

[57] See Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, p.147.

a serious-minded understanding of the ghost story as an important written form of self-expression. The preface, which opens with references to the great poets Qu Yuan and Li He, indicates the author's ambition to seek posterity through writing. The subsequent references to Gan Bao and Su Shi not only reveal a familiarity with the tradition of Chinese ghost lore, but also serve as an implicit endorsement of ghost story writing as a legitimate literary undertaking worthy of respect and recognition:

> "A belt of wood-lotus, a cloak of bryony"—the Lord of Three Wards was stirred and composed "Encountering Sorrow"; "Ox-headed demons and serpent gods"—of these the Long-Nailed Youth chanted and became obsessed. The pipes of Heaven sound of their own accord, without selecting fine tones; in this, there is precedence. I am but the dim flame of the autumn firefly, with which goblins jockeyed for light; a cloud of swirling dust, jeered at by mountain ogres. Though I lack the talent of Gan Bao, I too am fond of "seeking the spirits"; in disposition I resemble Su Shi, who enjoyed people telling ghost stories. What I have heard, I committed to paper, and so this collection came about. After some time, like-minded men from the four directions dispatched stories to me by post, and because "things accrue to those who love them," what I have amassed grew even more plentiful.[58]

[58] Trans. Zeitlin. *Historian of the Strange*, p. 44.

披蘿帶荔，三閭氏感而為騷；牛鬼蛇神，長爪郎吟而成癖。自鳴天籟，不擇好音，有由然矣。松落落秋螢之火，魑魅爭光；逐逐野馬之塵，罔兩見笑。才非幹寶，雅愛搜神；情類黃州，喜人談鬼。聞則命筆，遂以成編。久之，四方同人，又以郵筒相寄，因而物以好聚，所積益夥。

The reference to receiving ghost stories from friends by post, while underlining the ghost story as a token of social exchange, would also imply that the stories had gone through a series of transmissions before finally being written down by Pu Songling. As a collector and "recorder" of ghost stories, Pu Songling's relationship with tales of the strange must have been multi-layered. First, he had a taste for the strange, the unusual and the supernatural due to his personal inclination and his formative education. Second, personal interest not withstanding, Pu Songling must have been fully aware that *zhiguai* had a long tradition of its own, an awareness that would have prompted him to treat his collecting and rewriting as a serious literary endeavour. Finally, as he reworked his raw material into tales of his own, he would also have woven in his reflections on his personal experience and the circumstances of his time. It is these final indelible touches of personal reflections of first-hand experience that set Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* apart from most *zhiguai* collections, and made *Liaozhai* ghosts more than objects of fantasy or connoisseurship.

The ghost world, as envisioned by Pu Songling, reflects both fantasy and reality, with intentions both playful and utterly serious. The seriousness of *Liaozhai* ghosts, encapsulated in the phrase "*gufen*" (lonely anguish) in Pu Songling's preface, did not go

unnoticed. However, the personal significance of such seriousness has been drowned out by ideologically inclined modern interpretations of *Liaozhai* tales as anti-Manchu allegories, or as a literature of anti-feudalism. Recent *Liaozhai* scholarship has endeavoured to resist both the paradigms of romantic fantasy and political allegory and to focus on the author's agency and the personal implications of *Liaozhai* tales. Chun-shu Chang and Shelly Hsueh-lun Chang have written extensively on Pu Songling's predicament in the problematic civil service examination system, his repeated failures at acquiring a higher degree, and his struggle to forge an alternative identity through *zhiguai* writing. The Changs compare Pu Songling's fiction writing to *xiaodao* 小道, the small way, as opposed to the Confucian classics that represent *dadao* 大道, the great way. They further argue that, "Pu was inspired to write his stories in such a way that they would make his [*xiaodao*] work equal the [*dadao*] in value and importance."[59] In a more radical move, Sing-chen Lydia Chiang positions Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* collection, especially the short "horror stories" in the *zhiguai* mode, opposite from the Confucian mainstream, arguing that Pu's creative writing defines his own identity as man and artist vis-à-vis the female other, the patriarchal order, as well as his literary peers and forefathers.[60]

While Chun-shu Chang and Shelly Hsueh-lun Chang might be too optimistic in aligning Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* with the Confucian literary mainstream, Lydia Chiang's interpretation of *Liaozhai* as an all-out critique of a dead-end Confucian literati identity, on the other hand, might be too totalizing and insensitive to the exploratory and

[59] Chang & Chang, *Redefining History*, pp. 190-194.

[60] Sing-chen Lydia Chiang, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, p. 123.

regenerative functions of Pu Songling's literary undertaking. The concepts of the "ghost" and "minor discourse," as I have reformulated in the Introduction, may be useful for readjusting and refining both of these potentially fruitful critical positions. The Changs are certainly right in pointing out *Liaozhai*'s importance as a competing cultural discourse and as a means of personal fulfillment. But the vitality of these discursive and expressive functions, as I shall argue in Chapters Three and Four, lies in *Liaozhai*'s personal and ideological *differences* from the Confucian classics. The work's value and importance, therefore, is not realized in "equalling" the great way, but in remaining the small way, in forging a minor discourse.

Lydia Chiang's identification of the grotesque bodies portrayed in the short tales, as representative of a male self alienated from the "uncanny" female other, supports the ghost's origin in fear and its affiliation with the problematic non-ancestral spirit. However, if the *zhiguai* anecdotes are read in juxtaposition with, not in opposition to, the *chuanqi* tales, it is possible to discern a development from male alienation from the female other to a growing sympathy or even identification with the female ghosts. Pu Songling lived in a cultural milieu that was different from the Tang literati culture of Chang'an, or even from the Qing literati culture of Jiangnan. But in the literary world of *Liaozhai*, one detects a strong note of sympathy and commiseration with the female ghosts not dissimilar to the way in which Tang literati portrayed their friendships with courtesans.

To illustrate the point that Pu Songling deliberately kept *Liaozhai* private, thus ensuring himself a certain creative freedom not allowed in more "public" genres, I shall draw a brief comparison between the different literary and cultural concerns that

informed his writing of *Liaozhai* and his own adaptation of *Liaozhai* tales into *liqu*, a popular theatrical form in his local region. When Pu Songling adapted his *Liaozhai* tales for the theatre in his late years, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Qing theatre had been transformed into a "popular" domain, where locally derived folk theatrical styles, collectively known as *huabu* 花部 (flowery, or miscellaneous, theatre), quickly flourished to fill the void left by the increasingly shelf-bound southern drama. Pu Songling's choice of this theatrical medium, a folk theatre form popular in his native Zichuan area, again reflected his rural roots that set him apart from the typical Qing literati. Zhou Yibai 周貽白 has written enthusiastically about Pu Songling's unusual theatrical interests, hailing his *liqu* plays as a deliberate turning away from the conventions of literati drama. Pu Songling's *liqu* is thus considered groundbreaking in the history of Chinese theatre, reaffirming the "revolutionary" spirit that has guided the writing of his equally unconventional *Liaozhai*.[61]

Many scholars have taken note of the strong didactic tendencies of Pu Songling's *liqu*, both the ones based on *Liaozhai* tales and the ones he created especially for the medium. Of the fifteen *liqu* plays on record, seven are adapted from *Liaozhai*. Yet many of the familiar *Liaozhai* themes, such as ghosts and foxes, the imperial examination candidate, and romantic love, are conspicuously absent from the *liqu* plays. Instead, the plays are dominated by social concerns such as family relations, social injustice, and official corruption. For example, "Gufu qu" 姑婦曲, based on the *Liaozhai* story "Shanhu" 珊瑚, depicts the relationship between in-laws. "Rangdu zhou" 禳妒咒,

[61] Zhou Yibai, *Zhongguo xiqu fazhan shi gangyao* 中國戲曲發展史綱要, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979, p. 495.

adapted from “Jiangcheng” 江城, dramatizes family life centred round an infamous shrew. “Hansen qu” 寒森曲, based on both “Shang Sanguan” 商三官 and “Xi Fangping” 席方平, exposes a corrupt officialdom. The spiritual void that has been left by the absence of ghosts is compensated for by the notion of karma and retribution, giving these plays a clear didactic purpose. This didacticism, made light and palatable with a smattering of bawdy jokes and comic banter, would have suited the pragmatism Pu Songling adopted in his old age, when he spent most of his energy in promoting literacy, practical knowledge, and social propriety in his local rural community.[62]

Although the social concerns and didactic tendencies in Pu’s *liqu* may have been to a large degree dictated by the theatrical conventions of that genre, Pu’s choice of genre was in and of itself significant. By focusing on social and family issues in *liqu*, Pu Songling seems to have entered a public-spirited literary mode—that of a socially conscious member of the literati using literature as a didactic tool for the moral education of the masses. Ma Ruifang 馬瑞芳 has written that *liqu* broadened Pu Songling’s literary scope as he forsook the typical literati obsessions for a much wider and more realistic social world.[63] He Manzi 何滿子 has compared Pu Songling’s classical tales in *Liaozhai* and his vernacular *liqu* to the two dimensions of a bas-relief, one representing his private interests in romantic fantasy, the other reflecting his social realism.[64] It is not that social

[62] In his old age, Pu Songling not only wrote popular *liqu*, but also compiled practical guidebooks, including *Nongsang jing* 農桑經 (The Book of Husbandry), and *Riyong suzi* 日用俗字 (Words for Daily Use). It would be useful to examine the *liqu* adaptations outside the context of the eighteenth century theatre world, and consider the connection between Pu’s *liqu* and the phase of public-spirited and socially oriented pragmatism in his life.

[63] Ma Ruifang, “Pu Songling liqu de sixiang chengjiu he yuyan tese,” in *Pu Songling yanjiu jikan*, vol. 1, Qilu shushe, 1980, pp. 198-212.

[64] See He Manzi, *Pu Songling yu Liaozhai zhiyi*, Shanghai chuban gongsi, 1955.

concerns are entirely absent from *Liaozhai*, or that *Liaozhai* is merely romantic fantasy. But it is clear that *Liaozhai*, particularly the ghost tale, occupied a unique space in Pu Songling's overall literary creativity. As Lydia Chiang has succinctly put it, the strange tales "demarcated for both the writer and the reader a safety zone within which the dominant cultural values might be toyed with, temporarily suspended, or even subverted."[65] I will maintain that both the creative freedom and critical edge of that literary "zone" have to do with the critical as well as the regenerative potential of the ghost. Due to *Liaozhai*'s entanglement with subsequent developments in Chinese ghost discourse, that zone would not remain "safe" or insular but openly contested.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the psychological, ontological, and ideological foundations for the Chinese notion of ghost, namely its ties with the emotion of fear, its affiliation with the non-ancestral ghost, and its representation in early *zhiguai* that constitutes a form of minor discourse vis-à-vis the Confucian orthodoxy. The ghost tale departs from the philosophical debates on ghosts, but these two different moral and ideological stances nevertheless form a larger dialogic discourse on ghosts. The status of *zhiguai* as a minor discourse is also closely related to the ambivalent status of the practitioners of *zhiguai*, who were marginal literati figures but nonetheless Confucian. Thus *zhiguai*, particularly the ghost tale, also constitutes a form of self-criticism of Confucian moral philosophy and self-reflection on spiritual matters. In the related genre

[65] Sing-chen Lydia Francis (Chiang), "What Confucius wouldn't talk about: the fantastic mode of the Chinese classical tale." Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1997, p. iv.

of Tang dynasty *chuanqi*, this mode of self-reflection on male literati identity is further developed in tales of personal encounters not only with ghosts but also with human characters and social others such as courtesans.

Such a cultural archaeology of the ghost and the genres that it inhabits serves to inform and underscore the complex relationship between Pu Songling and the ghost world of *Liaozhai*. As a writer who was supremely aware of this tradition of minor discourse and of his own minor status as a Confucian literatus, Pu Songling identified with the minor discourse that lent his writing its critical edge, and yet he remained fully cognizant of the regenerative forces and the creative potential of the ghost tale. He respected and conformed to the literary conventions of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, but he never forsook his agency as an author. Serious about his mediating role between the cultural elite and his immediate rural community, he nonetheless reserved the ghost tale as a private space to explore personal and cultural concerns that would not befit his moral and social obligations as a Confucian literatus. Reflecting this complex author-subject relationship, the ghosts in *Liaozhai* exist on several levels: they manifest themselves as concrete evidence of popular belief, as projections of the human unconscious, as the author's private metaphors, and as allegorical vehicles for social and cultural commentary. All these functions of *Liaozhai* ghosts will be shown as fully operative within Pu Songling's text and outside it, in the subsequent reception of his work.

Chapter Two

Taming and Becoming: Ghosts and Emerging Identities

In the previous chapter, I identified two narrative impulses that have guided the development of the ghost tale—the overcoming of fear and the accommodation of the non-ancestral spirit. This chapter turns to the *Liaozhai* tales and examines how these fundamental issues of the ghost are dealt with in Pu Songling's narratives and their literary antecedents. By situating the ghost-human relationship in a broad selection of *Liaozhai* tales depicting both human and non-human spirits, I also seek to bridge and reconcile what appears to be a schizophrenic perception of *Liaozhai* ghosts in popular and scholarly discourses: the enchanting ghosts in the *chuanqi* mode that promise romantic fantasy; and the grotesque ghosts in the *zhiguai* mode that spell fear and anxiety.

To link up these two visions of *Liaozhai* ghosts—the grotesque and the enchanting— and to explore their interconnection, I will employ the notion of "taming," an idea that Wai-yee Li has elaborated as "the interplay of desire and order" that governs the narrative structure of many *Liaozhai* tales, especially the long *chuanqi* romances.[1] Based on close readings of a set of ghost/human transformation tales in both the *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* modes, I will introduce the psychology of fear as another important emotional and narrative force that complicates the dichotomy of "desire and order." In the process of taming, fear and desire become transmutable through the mechanism of projection, and the semblance of order does not hold. When the structure of desire and order is thus destabilized, ghost taming then becomes a process of dealing with the

[1] Wai-yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 94.

emotions of fear and of accommodating the ontological problem of the non-ancestral ghost. As a result of such ghost-human interactions, *Liaozhai* ghosts experience a critical transformation from objects of fear, desire, and fantasy to agents of initiative, action, and individuation. Pu Songling's narratives move beyond "taming" to explore new possibilities for both male identity and female subjectivity, creating emerging identities that are provisional and yet potentially liberating.

I begin with a portrait of *Liaozhai* ghosts. Scholars such as Judith Zeitlin and Rania Huntington have written eloquently on the ghost's body as an important site of late imperial gender discourse, but their analyses are predicated on a vision of the *Liaozhai* ghost as feminine, sexual, beautiful, and romantic. Sing-chen Lydia Chiang has attempted to counter this highly influential literary vision by drawing attention to less publicized *Liaozhai* images that are dark, dangerous, and sometimes deadly. Assembling a gallery of anti-aesthetics that includes the walking corpse, the grotesque womb, the shamaness, the polluting female body, and the reluctant or failed exorcist, Chiang considers these "uncanny embodiments of the repulsive other" as markers of "the outer boundaries of the author's selfhood," reflecting the fear and anxiety associated with an epidemic identity crisis among the late imperial literati.[2] Although based on a different group of tales, namely the *zhiguai*-style anecdotes, Chiang's "horror aesthetics" is not fundamentally different from the "romantic fantasy aesthetics" of scholars who focus on the long tales in the *chuanqi* style. Both approach *Liaozhai* from a predominantly human, male point of view, one emphasizing desire while the other highlighting fear.

[2] Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, pp. 123-124.

A less human-centred conception of the ghost, which combines human psychology with the ghost's own existential dilemma, may help to account for both male and female subjectivity in the present analysis. Much of the literary representation of ghosts is implicitly a collective endeavour to deal with fear (hence the need for taming). However, the ghost's affiliation with the predicament of the non-ancestral spirit has also meant that the ghost tale is not all about the male protagonist. As I shall illustrate in greater detail later, Pu Songling's ghost tales, even in their horror mode, are not devoid of sympathy and compassion for the ghost in distress. If the initial project of taming is to identify the ghost as the repulsive other and to get rid of it, the process of taming eventually turns fear into desire and into compassion, to the extent that it is possible for the male protagonist and the human reader to identify *with* the ghost.

Grotesque Bodies and Unidentified Ghosts

For all their ethereal and elusive qualities, the ghosts that inhabit the world of *Liaozhai* prize the body. Many tales emphasize the primacy of the body, through which the soul manifests itself. Without the soul, the body is potentially harmful, capable of reverting to its animalistic state. Although the soul is important in generating human identity, the body is the only possible conduit for contact and communication between human and ghost. It is the pervasive concern over the body that sets the ghost tale apart from philosophical and religious discourses on ghosts. In the world of ghosts, the body becomes a primary concern precisely due to the lack or absence of it. For many *Liaozhai* ghosts, their entire existence is based on the desire to attach themselves to a body, preferably a male, human body. The *Liaozhai* story, "The Beauty's Head" 美人首, is an

elliptical account of an encounter with a disembodied head, through which we can glimpse a few fundamental notions of the ghost's body:

> Several traders who were lodging at an inn in Peking occupied a room that was divided from the adjoining apartment by a partition of boards from which a piece was missing, leaving an aperture about as big as a basin. Suddenly a girl's head appeared through the opening, with very pretty features and nicely dressed hair; and the next moment an arm, as white as polished jade. The traders were much alarmed and, thinking it was the work of devils, tried to seize the head, which, however, was quickly drawn in again out of their reach. This happened a second time, and then, as they could see no body belonging to the head, one of them took a knife in his hand and crept up against the partition underneath the hole. In a little while the head reappeared, when he made a chop at it and cut if off, the blood spurted out all over the floor and wall. The traders hurried off to tell the landlord, who immediately reported the matter to the authorities, taking the head with him, and the traders were forthwith arrested and examined; but the magistrate could make nothing of the case, and, as no one appeared for the prosecution, the accused, after about six months' incarceration, were accordingly released, and orders were given for the girl's head to be buried.[3]

[3] Trans. Giles, 2-135.

諸商寓居京舍，舍與鄰屋相連，中隔板壁，板有松節脫處穴如盞。忽女子探首入，挽鬟髻，絕美；旋伸一臂，潔白如玉。眾駭其妖，欲捉，已縮去。少頃，又至，但隔壁不見其身。奔之，則又去之。一商操刀伏壁下，俄首出，暴決之，應手而落，血濺塵土。眾驚告主人，主人懼，以其首首焉。逮諸商鞫之，殊荒唐。淹系半年，迄無情詞，亦未有一人送官者，乃釋商，瘞女首。

The head without the torso, though beautiful, is considered a manifestation of evil, and is consequently lopped off by the traders. There is real blood spurting out when the head is cut off, suggesting that it is not merely an apparition: the ghost's body can be a physical, corporeal being made of flesh and blood, and yet it is not entirely human. There is no identity attached to the head. It is not yet claimed by human society, and part of its danger lies in its unattached, free-floating status outside the kinship system. Several of the standard ghost-story motifs are already present in this story: a) the ghost or demon, appearing in flesh and blood, is alluringly beautiful but anonymous; b) in spite of a certain amount of physical attraction, the anonymous body is ultimately considered dangerous and must be gotten rid of; c) the subsequent arrest of the traders and the magistrate's attempt to treat the severed head as a case of homicide demonstrate the human effort to contain the unidentified, ghostly head within a social and moral structure; d) when the attempt at social containment fails, the burial of the girl's head demonstrates yet another attempt to deal with the ghostly being—by putting it to rest. From the perspective of Confucian ancestral worship, this burial of a non-ancestral ghost already

indicates a compromise, a step toward making peace with the ghost that falls outside the kinship system.

"The Resuscitated Corpse" 屍變, is one among the many *Liaozhai* stories that portray the body of the newly dead, which is shown as capable of harming the living. The recently deceased daughter-in-law of an innkeeper kills three out of the four travelers who stay the night in the room where her corpse is kept. The fourth tries to escape and the corpse chases after him. After a wild chase around a tree near a Buddhist temple, both man and corpse collapse, having exhausted their energy. The corpse then dies again, rigidly embracing the tree, its fingernails stuck in the bark, whereas the man drops to the ground. The man, later revived by a monk, goes back to tell the story.

The "undead" corpse is a vivid illustration of the body as emblematic of the animalistic dimension of human existence, in both living and ghostly forms. The identity of the corpse as the innkeeper's daughter is known from the outset, but she is yet to be identified as an ancestor through proper burial and rituals of worship. The tale seems to suggest that, without a morally conscious human soul attached to it, the human body, before dying off completely and being properly tended with the funerary rituals, can revert to an animalistic, vampire-like state. This in-between state of the ghost's body—when it is neither human nor ancestor—is perceived to be the most dangerous and disturbing. It is no coincidence that the wild chase between corpse and man takes place near the grounds of a Buddhist temple. Often in ghost stories, when the human social order is disrupted by a ghostly intrusion, the presence of a religious institution—in the form of a Buddhist temple or a Daoist sorcerer—becomes a necessary ingredient in the human effort to quell the ghost and restore human order. However, in this story, the

transfer of the setting from the inn to a Buddhist temple 蘭若 is of no help to the man fleeing from the pursuit of the resuscitated corpse. In fact, when the fugitive desperately seeks refuge in the temple, the monk 道人 is suspicious of him and refuses to take him in. This narrative detail is clearly meant as a criticism of the hypocrisy and perhaps futility of the religious institution.

Temples, whether Buddhist or Daoist, are often fondly portrayed in literati writing as either secluded spots for concentrated study or quiet meditation. As a life-long examination candidate, Pu Songling was probably familiar with the function of temples as retreats and sanctuaries. The story, "Mountain Ghost" 山魈, begins with such a premise, as Mr. Sun Taibai 孫太白 recounts his grandfather's study retreat at a Willow Dale Temple 柳溝寺. The idyllic experience soon turned nightmarish when one night, "a giant ghost suddenly squeezed in and stood in front of his bed, almost as tall as the beams in the ceiling. Its skin was the colour of old melon rind, its eyes shining, skirting around the room. The mouth opened like a basin, showing a few teeth three inches in length. When its tongue moved, it made a roaring sound that shook the four walls... (忽視之，一大鬼鞠躬塞入，突立榻前，殆與梁齊。面似老瓜皮色，目光睒閃，繞室四顧，張巨口如盆，齒疏疏長三寸許，舌動喉鳴，呵喇之聲，響連四壁…)[4] Sun's grandfather put up a good fight with the mountain ghost and narrowly escaped to tell his story. He then packed up and returned home. When he inquired afterwards, things had returned to normal at the temple, and the ghost never returned.

[4] *Liaozhai, juan* 1, p. 18.

This could have been the kind of tale that cropped up when scholars exchanged tips about temple retreats. But the carefully structured narrative—with the clichéd beginning of studied tranquility, the horrific encounter with the ghost in the middle, and the perfunctory ending with a somewhat unconvincing note that things have returned to normal—indicates the end of a literati ideal both as a physical space and a literary trope. That space has now been invaded by an alien creature. The terse portrayal of the giant ghost without obvious gender distinction, the ghost's association with the mountain, its large frame and its great force also thwart the anticipation of another familiar literary trope that has come to be expected of *Liaozhai*—that of the ghost/human romance set in a remote, dilapidated locale.

The typical *Liaozhai* ghost, in Chinese popular imagination, is female, beautiful, and sexual. However, a study of the ghost's body based on a wider selection of *Liaozhai* tales suggests that the physical features of *Liaozhai* ghosts are more diverse than what a handful of the most popular *Liaozhai* tales may suggest. As we have already seen, a considerable number of *Liaozhai* anecdotes portray the ghost characters as grotesque and dangerous. Encounters with ghosts, whether in human form or as incarnations of the brute forces of nature, are often addled with fear and anxiety. The peripheries of the human domains, such as inns and temples, have been encroached. But nowhere are ghostly intrusions more feared as when it comes to the patriarchal family and the male body. "Biting a Ghost" 咬鬼 and "Ghost Saliva" 鬼津 are two *Liaozhai* anecdotes that offer glimpses into such fear and anxiety. The ghost figure is clearly female, but she is by no means portrayed as the object of male fantasy. In both tales, the unattractive ghost figure invades the bed and forces herself on the man that she preys upon. Sexuality,

which is closely associated with the body, is abundantly suggested in these brief but intense ghost narratives. However, the sexual act, from the male point of view, is presented as unwelcome and repulsive. The heaviness of the ghost's body, the monstrosity of the facial features, and the odorous saliva convey a strong sense of disgust:

> She was about thirty, her face jaundiced and puffy, her eyebrows knit, her entire countenance fearsome… The woman walked right into the bed, and sat heavily on his stomach like a thousand pounds… She sniffed all over the man's face, cheeks, nose, eyebrows, forehead and all. Her icy breath seeped right through his bones.

> 年可三十餘，顏色黃腫，眉目蹙蹙然，神情可畏…女子攝衣登床壓腹上，覺如百鈞重… 女子以喙嗅翁面，顴鼻眉額殆遍。覺喙冷如冰，氣寒透骨。[5]

> He saw a woman emerge out of the wall, her unkempt hair completely covering her face like a bundle of hay. When she was near the bed, she parted her hair with her hands, and revealed her face: it was a dark, fleshy, ugly face. Terrified by what he saw, he tried to run away. But the woman suddenly jumped into bed, held down his head, and started kissing his mouth by force. The saliva from her tongue, as cold as ice, oozed down his throat in profusion. He tried not to swallow it, but breathing became difficult. Then he swallowed it. It was viscous and stuck to his throat.

[5] "Biting a Ghost" 咬鬼, *Liaozhai, juan* 1, p. 20.

見一婦人自牆中出，蓬首如筐，發垂蔽面，至床前，始以手自分，露面出，肥黑絕醜。某大懼，欲奔。婦猝然登床，力抱其首，便與接唇，以舌度津，冷如冰塊，浸浸入喉。欲不咽而氣不得息，咽之稠粘塞喉。[6]

"Pulling Intestines" 抽腸 describes a bizarre and horrid encounter that presents the kind of ghost images that are often hidden from public view, as the story is rarely commented on, and even less likely dramatized or adapted for teahouse storytelling:

The woman opened up her clothes and revealed a belly as large as a drum. The man pulled out a butcher's knife and slit it open from the heart down to the navel. The hidden spectator was horrified and held his breath. The woman knit her eyebrows and stomached it all without a groan. The man then held the knife in his mouth, reached his hand into the woman's belly and pulled out a length of her intestines. As he pulled, he hung the intestines around his elbow. Soon, he had an armful. He then put the intestines on a low table and resumed pulling. When the low table was full, he hung the rest of it on a chair. Then the chair was full. He was loaded with another armful. Then, like a fisherman casting his net, the man threw the whole pile into the corner, right in the direction of where

[6] "Ghost Saliva" 鬼津, *Liaozhai, juan* 7, p. 945.

the spectator was hiding. With a hot wave of fishy smell, his face was completely covered with the woman's bowels.

婦便自坦胸懷，露其腹，腹大如鼓。男子出屠刀一把，用力刺入，從心下直剖至臍，蚩蚩有聲。某大俱，不敢喘息。而婦人攢眉忍受，未嘗少呻。男子口銜刀，入手於腹，捉腸掛肘際；且掛且抽，頃刻滿臂。乃以刀斷之，舉置幾上，還複抽之。幾既滿，懸椅上；椅又滿，乃肘數十盤，如漁人舉網狀，望某首邊一擲。覺一陣熱腥，面目喉膈覆壓無縫。[7]

The anonymity of the encounter, the unsettling visceral sensations, and the violence of misogynic sadism – all suggest the unconscious that is at work in Pu Songling's narrative, revealing a darker imagination of the ghost that has long been obscured by the beautiful ghosts that populate the romantic *Liaozhai* stories. While their differences are striking, some continuity is discernible between these obscured images of *Liaozhai* ghosts and their more famous counterparts. Though not necessarily always beautiful, the ghosts are predominantly female, which marks their non-ancestral status. Although these ghost narratives do not always conform to the scenario of male sexual fantasy, a sexual overtone is clearly present, suggesting the female ghost's desire for human contact.

In "Pulling Intestines," the man in hiding at the beginning is expecting the voyeuristic pleasure of witnessing a sexual act. Little does he know that what lies ahead

[7] *Liaozhai*, *juan* 9, p. 1226.

is a nightmarish scene of butchering and disembowelment. In this rudimentary tale, we see an inverted image of the sexualized female ghost as the object of male fantasy; it also serves as a cautionary tale, or a forewarning of that fantasy. The other descriptions of ghosts, with emphases on saliva and various bodily fluids, reinforce the impression that, in spite of their spectral nature, ghosts are often imagined in concrete, corporeal terms. With a few exceptions (most notably "The Painted Skin"), the *Liaozhai* tales that portray ghosts as grotesque and terrifying are usually short in length and underdeveloped in plot and characterization.[8] On the surface, they are no different from Six Dynasties *zhiguai*. However, due to their placement in juxtaposition with the longer narratives in *Liaozhai*, their messages of religious and moral persuasion seem less coherent and less pronounced than early *zhiguai* collections such as *Soushenji*. Instead, they appear shocking in their frank, straightforward depictions of the dangerous and violent forces of nature.

If Six Dynasties *zhiguai* writers used the non-ancestral ghost and other anomalies to launch a minor discourse against Confucian orthodoxy, did Pu Songling compile these horror-ridden ghost tales also to challenge Confucian power? Sing-chen Lydia Chiang has given a resoundingly positive answer to this question in her study, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*. As the title suggests, Chiang's focus is on the self—the human, male self. She is perceptive in suggesting that the grotesque bodies and anonymous ghosts could be seen as the "uncanny others" and they could be the author's means (or that of the literati as a

[8] In *Liaozhai*, the shorter *zhiguai*-style tales depict a far more dangerous, violent, and bizarre world that is inhospitable to human beings than the highly romanticized *chuanqi* tales do. The difference is already evident in the titles of these short anecdotes, such as "The Resuscitated Corpse" 屍變, "Spurting Water" 噴水, "Mountain Ghost" 山魈, "Biting a Ghost" 咬鬼, "The Beauty's Head" 美人首, "The Hanged Ghost" 縊鬼, "The Ghost's Cry" 鬼哭, and "Pulling Intestines" 抽腸, etc.

collectivity) of exploring the limits and exposing the insecurities of Confucian literati identity.[9] But implicit in this argument is the privileging of the human male point of view. This critical slant is reinforced in Chiang's interpretation of the long *chuanqi*-style tales, which again centres on "masculinity, its loss and its gain." Chiang's focus on the Confucian male in *crisis* is probably intended to counteract the prevailing interpretation of the long tales as safe and unproblematic male *fantasy*. For example, in her reading of the long tale, "Jiaonuo," Chiang interprets the story as an ironic portrayal of a union with a "heterodox" female fox-spirit that allows a descendant of Confucius to claim heroic masculinity.[10] It seems that Chiang recognizes the importance of the "female other" only in terms of the role that the female can play in resolving male issues.

In contrast with his carefully embellished long tales, Pu Songling's terse accounts of encounters with the grotesque and the ghostly are marked by an intensity and tautness that is surprisingly free of heavy-handed didacticism. Rarely does Pu frame these accounts with his signature "historian of the strange" comments. He leaves the emotions of fear raw, immediate, and largely unmediated. While Lydia Chiang is certainly right in pointing out the critical potential of these horrid encounters between the Confucian male and the heterodox other, the emotional register of these tales remains on a visceral level rather than on an intellectual or critical level. The reader is invited to take another look at the monstrous ghost before going into self-introspection.

Allan Barr has shown that it can be fruitful and equally valid to look at the "alien women" in *Liaozhai* from the perspective of the female rather than the male protagonist.

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[9] Chiang, *Collecting the Self*, p. 126.

[10] Ibid., pp. 134-143.

In "Disarming Intruders: Alien Women in *Liaozhai zhiyi*," Barr uses the legal terms of immigration to differentiate the "resident aliens," ghosts who seek permanent membership in human society, from the "transient aliens," ghosts who interact with humans on a temporarily basis, often in their own terms. Most importantly, Barr includes a third category of ghosts—the predatory demons that frequently appear in early *zhiguai* and are still very much present in *Liaozhai*.[11] The term "predatory demons" suggests female initiative and agency, no matter how undesirable or unwelcome. It implies danger, fear and victimhood, but it also denotes a sense of purpose on the part of the female predator. Her intrusion becomes justifiable if it is remembered that the intruder might have a grievance or some unfinished business that must be dealt with in the human world.

No different from many other traditions, the Chinese notion of the ghost emerged out of human fear of the wild and the unknown. What is perhaps unique to the Chinese tradition is the centrality of ancestral worship in Confucian cosmology, which has turned the status of the ghost into both an ontological problem and a literary cause. Literary representations of the ghost may have been marked by a lack of ancestral status, but that deficiency has helped to return the ghost to a "pre-ancestral" state that is free from the constraints of the kinship system. These free and unruly non-ancestral ghosts remind us of "bodies without organs," a term Deleuze borrowed from Artaud to suggest the "true" condition of the body as a dynamic force-field "traversed by a powerful, non-organic vitality," before it is subjected to an externally imposed law of reward and punishment.[12]

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[11] See Allan Barr, "Disarming Intruders: Alien Women in *Liaozhai zhiyi*," *HJAS*, 49.2 (Dec. 1989): 501-517.

[12] I use this Deleuzian concept in its most general sense. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari speak of a "body-without-organs" of the earth. "The Earth," they write, "is a body without organs. This body without organs is permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free

No doubt a "body without organs," or a body *yet-to-be-organized*, would appear overwhelming and threatening in the eyes of the human and socially inscribed male protagonist. Thus, the depiction of the undesired sexual advances in "Biting a Ghost" and "Ghost Saliva" is at once an acknowledgement and a rejection of the sexuality of a not-yet-identified female body; and the disembowelment of the woman in "Pulling Intestines" spells out the mixed emotion of awe and fear when the human subject is faced with the fecundity and the power of the "body without organs."

Deleuze and Guattari posit a radical human entity without a face, based on the notion that our face locks us in individual consciousness and social roles.[13] In the abrupt, bizarre, and grotesque *Liaozhai* tales, the ghost is not so much faceless as it is unidentified, and its power to inspire fear partially stems from the fact that it is unknown and untamed (to the human subject). Yet in the world of *Liaozhai*, the ghost as a "body without organs" is only the beginning of a story. It begins with a lack—a lack of ontological status. A "body without organs," although not subjected to organization and hierarchy, is also a body devoid of human identity. Therefore the *Liaozhai* ghost, in its ephemeral and unstable materiality, is forever in search of a more stable and humanly sanctioned existence. The oxymoronic and provisional status of the ghost's body—its

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intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles." (*A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, p. 40). This notion of the body as flows of earthly and regenerative material corresponds with the corporeal and anthropomorphic characteristics of the early manifestations of the ghost. The "virtual" dimension of the "body-without-organs", as a vast reservoir of potential traits, connections, affects, movements, also pinpoints the psychological aspects of the ghost, as projections of complex and contradictory human urges.

[13] Deleuze and Guattari describe "the facialization of the body" as the process of the detailing of physical characteristics, but it is also the process of the emptying of the body into the system of signs and subjects. *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 170-5.

corporeality and its ephemerality—dictates that, in literary representation, the physical appearance of the ghost produces a site of conflicting desires and constant negotiations.

Fearing and Desiring the Ghost/Woman

The ghost draws much of its awe-inspiring power from its pre-organized, in-between state, and the indeterminacy of its identity. The ghost's body provides fertile ground for the expression of fears and desires while at the same time setting the physical limits for that expression. This mixture of fear and desire manifests itself the most palpably in the figure of the ghost/woman hybrid—a "body without organs" that appears amoral in both its productive and destructive functions, a liminal body that could turn in either direction: it can take an animalistic form, but it flirts with the idea of becoming human again; it can appear as enchantingly beautiful or grotesque and dangerous. The *Liaozhai* story, "The Painted Skin" 畫皮, is a transformation tale depicting a half-demon, half-human hybrid, through multi-layered and nuanced play on appearance and truth, fantasy and reality.[14] It recounts the story of Wang, who encounters a beautiful girl walking alone along the outskirts of the city. Knowing that she is a runaway bride, and much smitten, Wang offers to put her up in his private studio:

[14] Authors both ancient and modern have theorized about the all-important concept of transformation in Chinese cosmology. The idea that non-human creatures, could, with advancing age, assume human form is presented in Wang Chong's *Lunheng*. Wang suggests that the ghosts seen by sick men might be the spirits of venerable plants and animals in human disguise; and these spirits come into contact with humans and cause afflictions and illusions. (Wang Chong, "*Dinggui pian*", *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 4:22.) According to the fourth-century philosophical work *Baopuzi*, "When any one of the myriad creatures grows old, its spirit can assume human shape in order to dazzle human eyes and frequently test men." ("*Dengshe pian*," in Ge Hong, *Baopuzi*, 17.) Leo Chan identifies *qi*, *yin-yang* and *bian* (transformation) as the three governing forces in the "world of the supernatural." (Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, pp. 141-142.) Transformations have been one of the central themes of *zhiguai* since the genre's inception in the Six Dynasties. Campany describes the exposure of the true forms of a transformed creature as one of the principal modes of anomaly. (Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 253-55.) Illusion followed by exposure is also the narrative pattern of many *Liaozhai* tales.

> Wang said, “My humble place is not that far away. Would you care to come along?” She gladly acquiesced. Wang picked up her bundle and returned to his studio with the girl. Finding no one there, she asked, “Have you no family?” “This is only my study,” he replied. “Very nice indeed,” she said. “But if you have pity for me and wish to save my life, you mustn’t tell anyone that I am here.” Wang promised her, and then they went to bed together. He kept her hidden for some days without anyone knowing about it.[15]
>
> 生言：“敝廬不遠，即煩枉顧。”女喜從之。生代攜襆物，導與同歸。女顧室無人，問：“君何無家口？”答雲：“齋耳。”女曰：“此所良佳。如憐妾而活之，須秘密勿泄。”生諾之。乃與寢合。使匿密室，過數日而人不知也。

But Wang soon tells his wife, who urges him to send the girl away. He then runs into a Daoist priest, who warns him that he is bewitched and his life is in danger. But Wang, enamoured with the girl, shrugs off the admonishments of both wife and priest.

The pivotal scene of Wang’s return to the studio, where he peeps through the window and witnesses, in horror, a demon putting on a human skin and changing into a beautiful girl, is played out in an intense, dramatic sequence of disguise, illusion and revelation:

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[15] *Liaozhai, juan* 1, p. 119.

> Wang returned to the studio only to find the gate shut, and he couldn't get in. Growing suspicious, he climbed over the wall, and found the door of the inner chamber shut too. He tiptoed toward the window and looked through: there he saw a hideous ghost, its face green and teeth jagged like a saw, spreading a human skin upon the bed and painting it with a brush. When the painting was done, the ghost threw aside the brush, shook out the skin as you would a coat, and threw it over its shoulders. Lo and behold! It changed into the girl.[16]

> 至齋門，門內杜不得入，心疑所作，乃逾垝坦，則室門已閉。躡足而窗窺之，見一獰鬼，面翠色，齒巉巉如鋸，鋪人皮於榻上，執彩筆而繪之。已而擲筆，舉皮如振衣狀，披於身，遂化為女子。

From there, the narrative shifts its focus to the project of exorcising the ghost woman. Wang beseeches the priest, who agrees to help by telling him to hang a fly-brush on the door. But when the Daoist's charm fails to ward off the ghost, Wang succumbs to a second blow, this time more horrible and deadly:

> The girl came and saw the fly-brush and dared not enter. She stood there a long time, grinding her teeth, and then went away. But in a little while she came back,

[16] Ibid., p. 120.

> cursing, “You priest, you think you can scare me away? You think I am going to throw up the meat that’s already in my mouth?” She took down the fly-brush and tore it to pieces, stormed through the bedroom door, and descended upon Wang’s bed. Then and there she ripped open his chest, tore out his heart, and left.[17]
>
> 但見女子來，望拂子不敢進，立而切齒，良久乃去。少時複來，罵曰：“道士嚇我，終不然，寧入口而吐之耶！”取拂碎之，壞寢門而入，徑登生床，裂生腹，掬生心而去。

The girl’s tearing out the man’s heart has become an iconic scene of Chinese horror. Now the family is not only faced with the task of exorcising the ghost, but also the tall order of reviving Wang’s life. Wang’s wife, after going through a series of trials and tribulations, with the help of a crazy beggar who orders her to crawl through garbage and swallow his sputum, miraculously brings her husband back to life. Meanwhile, the ghost woman, who returns to wreak more havoc in the disguise of an old maidservant, is finally struck down by the Daoist priest:

> The old woman fell and shed her human skin. Underneath it was the hideous ghost, grunting like a pig. When the priest struck off its head with a wooden sword, it turned into a dense column of smoke curling from the ground. The priest took out gourd, uncorked it, and placed it right in the

[17] Ibid., pp. 120-1.

> smoke. With a sucking noise, the smoke disappeared into the gourd. The priest then corked it up and put it in his sack. They all looked at the skin, complete to the eyebrows, eyes, hands, and feet. The priest rolled it up as if it had been a scroll…[18]
>
> 嫗仆，人皮劃然而脫，化為厲鬼，臥嗥如豬。道士以木劍梟其首。身變作濃煙，匝地作堆。道士出一葫蘆，拔其塞，置煙中，颼颼然如口吸氣，瞬息煙盡。道士塞口入囊。共視人皮，眉目手足，無不備具。道士卷之，如卷畫軸聲…

First a beautiful girl of sixteen, then an old housemaid, the ghost/woman has at least two sets of skins to put on. She is first revealed to be a green-toothed monster under the gaze of a disillusioned Wang, and then under the Daoist priest's sword, a fiend grunting like a pig, and finally a puff of smoke captured by the priest's gourd. The skin, once disembodied from the vital essence represented by the smoke, becomes a lifeless mask, a scroll that can be rolled up and stowed away like a painting.

The scene of Wang peeping into the studio to face the moment of truth calls to mind a commingling of familiar scenes and images from early *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*: a husband peeping into the boudoir of his wife; the wife grooming with her head on her lap; a woman putting on an animal hide and turning into a tiger. Prototypes of beast/woman transformation narratives begin to appear in *zhiguai* writing from as early as the fifth

[18] Ibid., pp. 121-2.

century—for example, in this brief account in Liu Jingshu's 劉敬叔 (? - ca. 468 CE) *Garden of the Strange* 異苑:

> At the end of the Taiyuan era of the Jin Dynasty, Xu Huan went out and saw a woman, and flirted with her. The woman invited Huan to the wilderness, and he followed, enchanted by her beauty. Suddenly the woman turned into a tiger and carried Huan into the depths of the mountains. Huan's family searched for him far and wide, but only saw tiger tracks. Ten days later, the tiger carried Huan back and left him outside his door.
>
> 晉太元末，徐桓乙太元中出門，彷彿見一女子，因言曲相調，便要桓入草中，桓悅其色，乃隨去。女子忽然變成虎，負桓著背上，徑向深山。其家左右尋覓，惟見虎跡。旬日，虎送桓下著門外。[19]

Written in the classic unadorned, elliptical *zhiguai* style, Liu Jingshu's account, although it does not closely resemble the plotline of "The Painted Skin," contains one of the earliest examples of beast/woman transformation with all of the essential ingredients: disguise, seduction, revelation, and reaction. It follows the man who forays into the animal world, is seduced by feminine beauty, and surrenders to sexual desire, but nonetheless returns unscathed to his familiar human world. But the story can also be read

[19] Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔, *Yiyuan* 異苑, *juan* 3; quoted and translated from *Siku quanshu*.

as the tiger's intrusion upon the human world in an act of kidnapping. The peaceful ending of the story suggests a certain comfort level with animal/human interactions. It implies recognition of the connection between human beings and a natural world permeated with sexual energy and yin-yang dynamism. Apart from communicating a sense of apprehension and awe for the brutal forces of nature, the story is not overtly laden with moral-religious concerns. However, a certain anxiety over human sexuality does show through, and there is a slight admonition against the perils of feminine beauty. The point of view is gendered, in favour of male subjectivity. The family is also involved and intervenes. These early signs point out the directions in which the beast/woman transformation tales would later develop.

The beast/woman transformation tale, which began as terse *zhiguai* accounts of anomaly, blossomed through the fertile imagination of Tang literati and evolved into full-fledged narratives of the marvellous, also known as *chuanqi*. Many Tang authors wrote in both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* modes. In *Records of Gathering Anomalies* 集異記, a collection by the Tang Dynasty author Xue Yongruo 薛用弱 (fl. 8th-9th centuries), we find a more extended account of a beast/woman, but with clear *zhiguai* references:

> Cui Tao, a native of Puzhou, traveled to Chuzhou and arrived at a hotel named the Hall of Benevolence and Righteousness. The attendant told him not to stay there because it was a dangerous place. But Tao wouldn't listen. He entered the room with his luggage, and had the attendant bring him a lamp. At nine in the evening, just when Tao was about to retire, he saw a big-footed beast break in. Scared, Tao hid in the dark and watched.

The beast took off its skin and turned into a beautiful woman, who walked across the hall and went straight to Tao's bed. Tao came out of his hiding place and asked: "Why are you sleeping in my bed? I saw that you were a beast when you came in. What are you?" The woman rose and said: "Please don't be alarmed. My father and brothers are hunters, and our family is poor. I wanted to find a good match, but there was no way I could get here by myself. That's why I put on a tiger skin and stole out here at night. I knew that there are gentlemen staying here, and I wanted to give myself to one of them as a wife. The guests prior to you were all scared to death when they first saw me. Finally, I have the good fortune to meet a truly open-minded gentleman, and to you I confide my real intention!" Tao said: "If that's your intention, I'll be glad to be your mate." The next day, Tao dropped the beast hide into a dry well in the back yard, and left with the woman.

Later Tao passed the civil service examination and was awarded a position at Xuancheng. Tao decided that he would take his wife and their boy along when he traveled to the new post. A month later, they again stayed at the Hall of Righteousness and Benevolence. Tao laughingly mentioned: "This is where we first met." He went to the old well and saw that the beast hide was still there. He told his wife: "Your old clothes are still here." The wife said: "Send someone to fetch it." Once it was retrieved, she said to Tao, laughingly: "Let me try it on again." She then took the skin in her hands and went down the stairs. As soon as she put on

the animal skin, she turned into a tiger. Roaring, the tiger jumped up to the hall, gulped down Tao and the son, and left.

崔韜，蒲州人也。旅遊滁州，南抵歷陽，曉發滁州，至仁義館，宿館。吏曰：此館凶惡，幸無宿也。韜不聽，負笈昇廳，館吏備燈燭訖。而韜至二更，展衾方欲就寢，忽見館門有一大足如獸，俄然其門豁開，見一虎自門而入。韜驚走，於暗處潛伏視之，見獸於中庭脫去獸皮，見一女子奇麗嚴飾，昇廳而上，乃就韜衾。出問之曰：何故宿餘衾而寢？韜適見汝為獸入來，何也？女子起謂韜曰：願君子無所怪。妾父兄以畋獵為事家貧，欲求良匹，無從自達，乃夜潛衾皮為衣，知君子宿於是館，故欲託身，以備灑掃。前後賓旅，皆自怖而殞。妾今夜幸逢達人，願察斯志。韜曰：誠如此意，願奉懽好。來日，韜取獸皮衣，棄廳後枯井中，乃挈女子而去。後韜明經擢第，任宣城，時韜妻及男赴任，與俱行。月餘，復宿仁義館。韜笑曰：此館乃與子始會之地也。韜往視井中，獸皮衣宛然如故。韜又笑謂其妻子曰：往日卿所著之衣猶在。妻曰：可令人取之。既得，妻笑謂韜曰：妾試更著之。接衣在手，妻乃下階，獸皮衣著之纔畢，乃化為虎，跳躑哮吼，奮而上廳，食子及韜而去。[20]

[20] Collected in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, *juan* 433; quoted and translated from *Siku quanshu*.

Xue Yongruo's version of the beast/woman story exhibits the unmistakable marks of Tang *chuanqi*—elaborate plot, detailed description, and first-person dialogue. We can detect a more conscious narrative voice, an impulse to tell a good story. The basic narrative sequence—disguise, seduction, sexual union, revelation, and return—remains, but with several interesting plot twists. First, the woman debuts as a ghastly beast before convincing Cui Tao, the male protagonist, that she is really a woman in search of a mate. This additional layer of disguise makes her identity doubly confusing. By appearing as a beast, the beast/woman seems to be giving Cui Tao fair warning, and yet by claiming to be a woman, she makes her deceit more deliberate and misleading. Unlike Liu Jingshu's beast/woman who creates an illusion with her physical body, Xue Yongruo's beast/woman accomplishes her deceit through both bodily and verbal language. Her animal form, coupled with human intelligence, puts her in a category of being that is neither animal nor human, creating a hybrid identity that's unclassifiable, ghostly, disturbing and, as it turns out later, dangerous.

There is a prolonged union between the two during which Tao obtains office and a son, both coveted prizes for a Confucian gentleman. At one point, the story gives the impression that our female protagonist is securely established in human society and the reader stops questioning her problematic identity. However, this illusion does not last long, for in a dramatic reversal of fate toward the end, a seemingly sentimental return to the site where the two first met turns nightmarish. Not only does the woman turn herself back into a tiger, she also mercilessly devours both Tao and their son.

It is typical for a virgin ghost, a girl who dies unmarried, to come back to haunt the human world and hunt for a male companion. The scenario is derived from the

Confucian notion that a girl does not obtain her full identity until she is married. If she dies prematurely, no one will mourn for her, and she is disqualified from the ritual of ancestral worship. Interestingly enough, the beast/woman seems to have a similar goal in mind. But instead of fulfilling her destiny by remaining the wife and mother, she leaves and takes the fruits of her efforts with her by devouring both man and child. To borrow Allan Barr's term, she would be classified as a "transient alien" who interacts with the human world on her own terms. When read in contrast with tales depicting non-ancestral ghosts who seek permanent human membership, the story of the beast/woman simultaneously re-enacts and subverts a woman's place in the Confucian family. She resembles the non-ancestral ghost in her need for male companionship and familial ties, but she rebels against her prescribed role by annihilating it. Her violent exit from human society signals a statement of independence, an individual fulfillment achieved through renouncement.

From the male point of view, the violence that puts an end to Cui Tao's family and career serves as a reminder that the dangerous, brutish force of nature is never far from human civilization: it is forever lurking in the background and is capable of surfacing at any time to wreak havoc upon the social order. The killing of the husband and the child is described in a matter-of-fact, amoral tone, making the violence seem even more random and irrational. While the fifth-century *zhiguai* account by Liu Jingshu suggests a fluid, uncomplicated and surprisingly harmonious relationship between the human and the animal worlds, Xue Yongruo's story depicts a naturalistic world that is both more treacherous and more alienated from human society. To the Confucian male, the beast/woman represents the ultimate other, marked by all its sexual, physical and

moral differences. The failure to control and integrate the beast/woman betrays a fear of the wild, the beastly, and the female.

In surveying various *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* collections, one finds that the beast/woman characters are not isolated, one-of-a-kind creations. Their frequent and varied appearances strongly suggest the tiger/woman's taxonomic linkage with the ghost-woman, the fox-woman, and other hybrid female identities. These half-spirits, half women represent a constant tension between increasingly human-centred values and a seemingly amoral outside world. The beast/woman characters' entry into human society through sexual relations, their temporary integration into the patrilineal family and their ultimate departure, foreshadow many of the familiar characteristics of the ghosts and foxes that populate numerous *Liaozhai* tales. The gamut of spirit/human hybrids from tiger/woman, fox/woman to ghost/woman suggests a gradual attempt at controlling and containing the other, either through purging and exclusion, or taming and containing. Human society's overzealous desire for control reflects its insecurity about human identity and a growing anxiety over the animalistic, uncultured parts of humanity. This anxiety runs so deep that sometimes the urge to purge is directed not against the other, but against the human species itself. Consider this variation of the theme in "Scholar Wu of Jiangnan 江南吳生," from *Xuanshi zhi* 宣室志, a Tang Dynasty collection by Zhang Du 張讀 (834-882):

> Mr. Wu, a native of Jiangnan, traveled to Huiji and took a concubine there whose surname was Liu. A few years later, Wu was appointed magistrate of Yanmen prefecture, and traveled to the new post with his wife Liu. At

the beginning, Madam Liu was known for her mild temperament. But as time went by, she became increasingly hot-tempered. She would throw a tantrum whenever she was contradicted and beat the maids until they bled. Realizing his wife's real disposition, Wu grew a little distant from her. One day, Wu went hunting with some colleagues and captured quite a few foxes and rabbits, which were left to be cooked in the kitchen. The next day, as soon as Wu left, the wife sneaked into the kitchen and gulped down all the animals raw. Wu returned home and asked about the foxes and the rabbits, but Liu wouldn't say anything about it. Angered, Wu interrogated the maid, who said: "Madam Liu ate them all." It was then that Wu suspected that Liu might be something of a monster. About a week later, a local official presented Wu a deer as a gift. Wu ordered that the deer be put in the hall, and then claimed that he would be away for a long time. As soon as he walked out the front door, he went back inside and hid himself. He saw Liu standing in the middle of the hall, hair loose, arms bare, eyes wide open, looking like a monster. She grabbed the deer in her left hand, tearing off its flesh with the right hand, and ate it. Wu was so shocked that he couldn't get up from the ground for a long time. Then he summoned a group of soldiers to besiege the hall. Seeing Wu with the armed soldiers, Madam Liu tore off her sleeves and stood straight up in the hall, a true demon. Her eyes flashed like lightning, her teeth were as sharp as knives, her flesh convulsed and blue in colour. The

soldiers trembled with fear and didn't dare to approach her. When she finished eating, she shot off eastbound. No one knew where she went.

有吳生者，江南人，嘗遊會稽，娶一劉氏女為妾。後數年，吳生宰縣於雁門郡，與劉氏偕之官。劉氏初以柔婉聞，凡數年，其後忽曠烈自恃，不可禁。往往有逆意者，即發怒。毆其婢仆，或齧其肌，血且甚，而怒不可解。吳生始知劉氏悍戾，心稍外之。嘗一日，吳與雁門部將數輩獵於野，獲狐兔甚多，致庖捨下。明日，吳生出，劉氏即潛入庖舍，取狐兔，生啖之且盡。吳生歸，因詰狐兔所在，而劉氏俛然不語。吳生怒，訊其婢，婢曰："劉氏食之盡矣。"生始疑劉氏為他怪。旬餘，有縣吏以一鹿獻，吳生命致於庭。已而吳生始言將遠適。既出門，即匿身潛伺之。見劉氏散發袒肱，眥皆盡裂，狀貌頓異。立庭中，左手執鹿，右手拔其髀而食之。吳生大懼，仆地不能起久之。乃召吏卒十數輩，持兵仗而入。劉氏見吳生來，盡去襦袖，挺然立庭，乃一夜叉耳。目若電光，齒如戟刃，筋骨盤蹙，身盡青色。吏卒俱戰怵不敢近。而夜叉四顧，若有所懼。僅食頃，忽東向而走，其勢甚疾，竟不知所在。[21]

This story is not so much about a sudden transformation as it is about a woman's gradual descent into her animalistic state. There is no mention of any anomaly in regard to

[21] Zhang Du 張讀, *Xuanshi zhi* 宣室志, quoted and translated from *Siku quanshu*.

Madame Liu's origins when Wu married her. Except for descriptions of her monstrous looks when engaged in animal eating, there is no indication of any disguise or transformation. If there is a transformation, it is her slow progression, or rather regression, from a mild-mannered woman to a flesh-eating monster. As a legitimate member of human society, Madame Liu represents a strain of humanity that remains untamed. It seems that she cannot be tamed, as the soldiers who besiege her are awestruck by her terrifyingly wild state. The story ends with her sudden disappearance. Without being successfully purged or destroyed, her presence still looms large within the narrative space. In terms of plot, this tale seems closer to early *zhiguai*—episodic, elliptical, sudden, and unexplained. In terms of characterization, the monster figure seems the closest to the ghost/woman in Pu Songling's "The Painted Skin." These unclassifiable, undesirable hybrids, whether they come from the wild or hide in some dark corner of human society, exhibit two prominent character traits: female and dangerous.

Why these hybrid identities are predominantly female has by now become a question that begs to be answered. On one hand, the patrilineal basis of Confucian ancestral worship has meant that the non-ancestral ghosts are by default female. The proliferation of the non-ancestral ghosts in the minor genre of *zhiguai* could be a genuine attempt to address the ontological issue of the ghost. On the other hand, projecting the feminine onto the wild and the dangerous, as evidenced in the appearance of beautiful, sexual and female ghosts, reveals a subconscious male desire to subjugate the female body with patriarchal power, and thereby symbolically place the wild and the dangerous under human control. However, this effort to conquer the fear of the ghost relies on the

misrecognition of the ghost's body—in its pre-organized, unclassifiable state—as a female body, a culturally constructed category based on the gender biases of a patriarchal society. This misrecognition also means that vestiges of the powerful and mysterious female body, the "body-without-organs," will always return to haunt and destabilize the ghost-human relationship.[22]

The Taming of the Ghost

Many strategies of dealing with ghosts are already found in the short *zhiguai*-style tales in *Liaozhai*. Before more sophisticated means are developed, ghosts are simply exorcised with a single strike, be it brute force or moral-religious power. In "Mountain

[22] Compared to the proliferation of female ghosts and female transformations in *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, there is a conspicuously limited selection of male ghosts and male transformation tales in this literary tradition. One of the rare *Liaozhai* tales about a male transformation into a tiger is "Xiang Gao" 向杲. This tale has a few variations in Tang *chuanqi*, including "The Man from Nanyang" 南陽士人 by Huangfu Shi 皇甫氏, and "Zhang Feng" 張逢, by Li Fuyan 李複言 (fl. 830 CE). (See Zhu Yixuan, *Liaozhai huiping huizhu ben*, pp. 175-177.) A typical male transformation tale follows a man who is transformed into a tiger, commits murder and faces the moral consequences when transformed back into a human. Throughout the narrative, there is no doubt that the identity of the tiger/man character is firmly anchored in the human world, even when he is temporarily changed into animal form. Not only does the tiger/man enjoy a more secure status within human society, he is also portrayed as morally superior to the beast/woman. Unlike the beast/woman who gets caught in her act of deceit, the tiger/man voluntarily reveals his identity by verbal confession, after he regains possession of his human faculties. In male transformation tales there is usually no sexual activity. Firmly situated along the axis of man-to-man and father-to-son relationships, these tales are largely concerned with "masculine" issues of filial piety, revenge, and justice. On the surface, male transformation tales are not visibly concerned with gender relations. The lack of gender awareness creates the impression of universality and serves to elevate the male experience to the level of the human. Like the *Liaozhai* story, "The Buddhist Priest of Changqing" 長清僧, in which male identity is defined in universalized and ungendered notions of the body and soul, the male transformation tales operate similarly on the premise that for the male person, the human is the default or "natural" state. Both female and male transformations involve violence that leads to revenge. While the male characters in their animal state might kill from animal instinct or for morally justifiable reasons, their actions are always judged morally once they return to human society. Thus their acts of violence in animal form highlight the need to maintain and restore moral order in human society. The male transformation tale invariably ends with the men's reintegration into the human realm. In female transformation tales, the violence happens so abruptly and so close to the end of the narrative that no moral judgment can be made within the textual boundary. What lingers on after reading such a story is the anxiety that these random acts of violence cannot be contained either textually or morally. The source of this particularly male anxiety stems from the notion that for the beast/woman, her default state is the non-human, the ghostly, and the other.

Ghost," the giant monster is struck with a dagger. In "Biting the Ghost," the ghost was bitten in the face. In "Ghost Saliva," the ill effect produced by the ghost's saliva is cured by a kind of herbal medicine. In "Spurting Water" 噴水, the cadaver that killed three people by spurting water at them is tracked down and destroyed with a heavy blow. In "Yu Gui" 諭鬼, the magistrate Shi disperses a group of ghosts with a written inscription that combines moral teaching and threats of punishment.

In the short *zhiguai* anecdotes, while the ghost is often presented in grotesque or dangerous form, it is also more easily exorcized. Generally speaking, such tales manage to exorcize the demonic or the beastly while keeping the Confucian family more or less intact. Some tales even entertain the possibility of using the ghost to fulfill Confucian goals and then getting rid of her. In "Ghost Zhang" 鬼張, a Ming Dynasty tale by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646), the Confucian quest for public office and male offspring is a prominent feature that drives the plot.

> It happened during the Hongzhi reign [1448-1505]. Commander Zhang of Gaoyou had no son, and wasn't successful in obtaining a new wife. One day he happened upon a lake, and saw a beautiful woman on a wrecked boat floating in the water. When asked, the woman said, "I'm from out of town; I lost my entire family when our boat capsized. I survived by clinging to this board. Please save me." Mr. Zhang rescued her and took her home. He doted on her, and a year later, she bore him a son. But, the woman always closed the door when bathing. One day, a maid peeped in through a crevice in the door, and saw the woman putting her own head on

her lap, decorating her hair with jade pins, and putting it back on her neck. Shocked by what she saw, the maid informed Zhang of the secret. Zhang wouldn't believe her. One day, Zhang spied on his wife himself, and knew it was true. Convinced that the woman was a monster, he forced his way into her room and killed her. She turned out to be a rotten board from a boat. The son, already a few years old, showed no signs of anomaly. Later he inherited his father's post, and has been known as Ghost Commander Zhang ever since.

弘治中，高郵張指揮無嗣，求妾未得。偶出湖上，見敗船板載一女甚麗，浮波而來。問之，曰："妾某邑人，舟覆，一家皆沒，妾賴板得存，幸救我。"張援得之，甚寵愛，逾年生子。女沐必掩戶。一日婢從隙窺之，見女取頭置膝上，綰結加簪珥，始加於頸。大驚，密以啟張。張未信。他日張占之，果然，知為妖，排戶人斬之，乃一敗船板耳，子已數歲，無他異，後襲職，至今稱鬼張指揮云。[23]

The woman, a drowned ghost attached to a piece of a rotten boat, is assimilated into human society by performing the domestic functions of a wife. When found out to be a ghost, the woman is killed, but the son is kept in the patrilineal family system without meeting prejudice. It seems that the open-minded acceptance of the foreign, the other, the ghostly, is based on the pragmatic assumption that anything that contributes to the

[23] Feng Menglong, *Tangai* 譚概, in *Feng Menglong sida yishu* 馮夢龍四大異書, p. 831.

upholding of the Confucian family is useful and tolerable, even if it is transitory. On one hand, we observe a catholic, almost permissive attitude towards strange beings and unusual practices; on the other hand, this inclusivity is conditional on unwavering Confucian moral principles.

Pu Songling's *Liaozhai*, especially the long tales, are often characterized by a more ambivalent and complicated attitude toward the role of moral-religious power in exorcising the ghost. When faced with a powerful or tenacious ghost, a helpless human community often solicits a Daoist priest to tame the unruly spirit and rectify the chaos it has brought. The intervention of institutional religion represents yet another means to tame the ghost and restore the social order.[24] The figure of the Daoist priest is ubiquitous in *Liaozhai* and yet he has an ambivalent, sometimes uneasy relationship with the secular world. He is met with distrust. In "The Painted Skin," Wang refuses the Daoist's initial offer to help purge the evil ghost. Later, when Wang begs the Daoist priest for help, the priest declines with the excuse of not having the heart to drive the poor thing away: "She must be in great distress to be seeking a substitute for herself. Besides, I could not bring myself to injuring a living being."[25] After Wang's heart is torn out, the enraged Daoist finally withdraws his leniency and exorcises the ghost. However, there are limits even to the Daoist priest's capacity for conquering evil, and he does not have the power to revive the dead:

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[24] Buddhism, in spite of its contribution to Chinese notions of hell and reincarnation, is rarely depicted positively or prominently in *Liaozhai* tales. As in the tale, "Resuscitated Corpse," discussed earlier in this chapter, Buddhist monks are ridiculed and Buddhist temples often appear not as sacred places of worship, but as the backdrop of the story.

[25] *Liaozhai, juan* 1, p. 122.

> Chen [Wang's wife] greeted and bowed to him at the door. Crying, she begged him to bring her husband back to life. The priest declined, saying he couldn't do it. Chen became even more inconsolable and threw herself to the ground. The priest thought for a moment and said, "My power is limited; I cannot revive the dead. But I will direct you to someone who might be able to do it." The wife asked who that person was, and the priest replied, "In the market there is a madman who is often seen grovelling in the dirt. Go and try to persuade him with your entreaties. If he hurls insults at you, please refrain from showing anger."[26]
>
> 陳氏拜迎於門，哭求回生之法。道士謝不能。陳益悲，伏地不起。道士沉思曰："我術淺，誠不能起死。我指一人或能之。"問："何人？"曰："市上有瘋者，時臥糞土中，試叩而哀之。倘狂辱夫人，夫人勿怒也。"

The blending of the sacred and the profane in the image of the maniac/sage projects an irreverent attitude toward institutional religious hierarchy and the conviction that there is no clear divide between good and evil. Placing humans and ghosts on a moral-religious continuum, the story deploys a strategy to accommodate and contain evil forces, rather than seeking to eradicate them. The Daoist priest, a representative of an established religion, is apparently engaged in a battle with the evil ghost, an icon of popular religion.

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[26] Ibid.

It is a battle in which the Daoist cannot claim absolute victory. The ghost is struck and evaporates, and is then sucked into the Daoist's gourd. The Daoist succeeds in controlling the ghost, but cannot completely rectify her disruption of human order. He has to send Wang's wife to look for a more powerful sage, a crazy beggar living near a huge garbage dump. The deference suggests that the superior powers often hide in the mundane, profane world, unaffiliated with any religious establishment.

Liaozhai's distrust of institutional religions such as Buddhism, its subversion of conventional Confucian morality, and its scepticism toward the supernatural powers of Daoism combine to make a powerful anti-religious discourse. In *Liaozhai*, the unruly ghost becomes the metaphorical body that religious institutions seek to conquer and contain. Yet the ghost, itself an icon of popular religion that is essentially open and diffused, resists the pressure for closure and clear-cut definitions. This internal tension between ghosts and the religious establishment informs much of the structural and thematic characteristics of *Liaozhai*.

If religious institutions prove to be ineffectual in taming the ghost, the moral strength of the human protagonists is used as a last resort in the communal effort to fend off the ghost. Comparing "The Painted Skin" with the earlier versions of the beast/woman transformation tale, we notice in Pu's version a much more complicated structure of moral justification and reciprocity. Even though Wang's death is brought about by his amorous liaison with an evil ghost, his wife, Chen, shows an unconditional forgiveness by taking all necessary steps to restore his life:

Chen moved forward on her knees. The beggar leered at her: “Do you love me, my beauty?” Chen told him about her plight, but he only laughed louder, “You can have any man as your husband. Why bring the dead one to life?” Chen kept imploring, and the beggar remarked, “How strange! People beg me to raise the dead as if I were the king of inferno.” He angrily hit Chen with his staff. That she suffered without complaint in front of a crowd of spectators. The beggar then spit profusely into his own hand and put it right in front of Chen’s mouth: “Here, swallow it!” Chen’s face turned red, and she couldn’t bring herself to it. But, remembering what the priest had told her, she gave in and forced it all down her throat. It went down like a dry lump of cotton and lodged right in the middle of her chest. The beggar roared with laughter: “You really do love me!”[27]

陳膝行而前。乞人笑曰：“佳人愛我乎？”陳告以故。又大笑曰：“人盡夫也，活之何為！”陳固哀之。乃曰：“異哉！人死而乞活於我，我閻羅耶？”怒以杖擊陳，陳忍痛受之。市人漸集如堵。乞人咯痰唾盈把，舉向陳吻曰：“食之！”陳紅漲於面，有難色；既思道士之囑，遂強啖焉。覺入喉中，硬如團絮，格格而下，停結胸間。乞人大笑曰：“佳人愛我哉！”

[27] Ibid.

The wife's unwavering devotion in the face of such humiliation is finally rewarded. The spit she had to swallow turns out to be a human heart, which she regurgitates straight into her dead husband's chest. The revival of the husband, with the healing of his wound, signals the end of a social rupture. The miraculous restoration of domestic order is brought about as much by the supernatural power of the maniacal beggar as it is by the moral strength of the wife. The wife's actions suggest the healing power of love, but the healing requires the public display of her morality so that her private feelings can be witnessed and socially approved.

Many *Liaozhai* tales end with Pu Songling's trademark commentary in the voice of the "Historian of the Strange," which is unfortunately often left out in English translations. The original story of "The Painted Skin" ends with the comment:

> How foolish people are, mistaking a demon for a beauty! And how confused the foolish, not recognizing faithfulness when it is as clear as day! However, for the one who desires sex and gets it, his wife will have to swallow spit and relish it. Heaven knows the way of retribution, and yet how deplorable, the foolish who remain unaware of their foolishness!
>
> 異史氏曰："愚哉世人！明明妖也而以為美。迷哉愚人！明明忠也而以為妄。然愛人之色而漁之，妻亦將食人之唾而甘之矣。天道好還，但愚而迷者不悟耳。哀哉！"[28]

[28] Ibid., p. 123.

This is a typical piece of moral didacticism that denounces sexual promiscuity, extols faithfulness, and endorses belief in karma and retribution. According to Stephen Owen, one further aspect of the "domestication of the strange" is the intrusion of the narrator at the end of each story, offering a judgment in the manner of a Chinese official historian.[29] The moralizing comment seems to echo the moral forces within the story to further subjugate the unruly ghost and contain it within an elaborate moral-religious framework. In terms of narrative structure, the commentary also frames the story and distances it from the reader, thus creating the effect of a parable or allegory.

At the end of the male transformation tale, "Xiang Gao," in which a titular hero takes on the form of a tiger to avenge his brother's murder, the Historian of the Strange comments:

> History laments the death of the hero, who seldom returns alive from his mission. Yet some manage to borrow another body to kill, and survive—how marvellous are the powers of the immortals! However, terrible injustice abounds in this world. Rather than making those with grievances invariably remain human, one regrets that they cannot be allowed to be tigers even for a while!

[29] Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, p. 310.

> 壯士志酬，必不生返，此千古所悼恨也。借人之殺以為生，仙人之術亦神哉！然天下事足髮指者多矣。使怨者常為人，恨不令暫作虎！[30]

Compared with the commentary at the end of "The Painted Skin," which warns the reader of demonic forces in female disguise, this commentary offers a decidedly more positive take on male transformation. Xiang Gao's revenge tale is eulogized and placed within the tradition of tragic heroes such as Jing Ke, who attempted to assassinate the Qin emperor. His temporary disguise as a fierce tiger is also allegorized as an indictment of human corruption. While displaying obvious gender biases, both commentaries serve to interpret the fantastic tales in moral, allegorical terms. Thus, these didactic commentaries, as a device of symbolic exorcism, not only perform the function of quelling fear of the ghost/woman, but also effectively rationalize all manner of anomalous phenomena.

In *Liaozhai* tales that portray ghosts as dangerous and grotesque, the ghosts are often dealt with forcefully in the public sphere of moral-religious systems. However, the public sphere of taming proves to be ineffectual in dealing with fear. As it is shown in "The Painted Skin," moral-religious forces might be sufficient to temporarily exorcise the ghost, but they can never completely subjugate the ghost or dispel the fear that the ghost inspires. In "The Painted Skin," the ghost/woman is transformed into a dense column of smoke, which is sucked into the Daoist's gourd; her skin is rolled up and stowed away like a scroll of painting. But the ghost remains an inexplicable force, an unrequited desire, and an unknown entity that loom in the atmosphere, and there is fear that it may come back anytime, in a different guise. In the public sphere of Confucian moral-

[30] *Liaozhai, juan* 6, p. 833.

religious system, human fear is rejected rather than addressed, just as the ghost's desire is denied rather accommodated. To genuinely engage with the issues of fear and desire, ghost taming will have to move from the public sphere to the private sphere where personal relationships between human and ghost can be explored and imagined.

Of representations of private human-ghost relationships, the most common kind is the romantic fantasies found in the *chuanqi*-style narratives in *Liaozhai*. But many ghost-human romances are not about ghost taming but rather tamed ghosts. The flight of male fantasy creates its own assumptions about human fear and the ghost's desire. Fear is often denied, or displaced back onto the ghost. In a typical romantic fantasy, the focus is almost exclusively on desire, mostly male desire. The ghost might be tamed, refined, beautiful, and a willing partner, but her tamed state is largely seen from the perspective of male fantasy, the effect of make-believe. The portrayal of *cai gui* 才鬼 (talented ghosts) is particularly revealing of the extent of male fantasies, especially the type in which a beautiful and talented ghost lures the male scholar. Ghosts who combine physical beauty with artistic talent not only elevate the ghost fetish to a new level, but also offer new occasions for taming in the relatively private realm of art and poetry. In this case, the sexual fantasy is both elevated and reined in by the added layer of literary fantasy. Such literary representations of the ghost assuage fear while at the same time cloak sexual desire with a semblance of propriety.

In the *Liaozhai* tale, "Lian Suo," poetry and song are a means of courtship between the ghost and the male protagonist. Yang sets up his studio in an open field by the river. Not far from the wall of his studio, there is an ancient graveyard. At night, he hears someone chant:

In the dark night, a weeping wind sweeps backward,

fireflies flirt with the grass, then land on a curtain.

玄夜淒風卻倒吹，

流螢惹草複沾幃。

It is a woman's voice, chanting a couplet that awaits completion. Yang continues the poem with the following lines:

Whence come such delicate feelings of sadness?

Green sleeves so thin and cold against the moonrise.

幽情苦緒何人見？

翠袖單寒月上時。[31]

Thus opens the love affair between the scholar and Lian Suo, a beautiful ghost who turns out to be poetically gifted, but physically fragile. In an insightful reading of this scene, Zeitlin interprets the poetic exchange as the scholar's solution to a literary problem, i.e. the ghost's inability to finish the poem. Linking the literary problem with the greater problem of the revival of the ghost's life, Zeitlin observes: "The scholar's completion of

[31] *Liaozhai, juan* 3, p. 331.

the quatrain is thus indispensable as the first step toward 'curing' the ghost, a process of resolution that culminates in her resurrection and marriage."[32] The poetic exchange, it seems, places the female ghost once again in a position subordinate to her male benefactor.

There has been some disagreement on whether the scholar's couplet matches Lian Suo's lines in poetic quality; Dan Minglun's comment seems to suggest that the ghost is in fact the superior poet.[33] This type of literary arbitration might be just a matter of opinion, or Pu Songling might have been deliberately playful in subverting the trope of male literary dominance. Nevertheless, the competition for poetic competence, a conventionally elite male game, is extended to the scholar-ghost relationship. In an effort to tame or dominate the female ghost in arenas outside the typical domestic setting, the male scholar is compelled to place the ghost lover in a field that her human counterpart would not normally be allowed to enter. Like the hypersexual ghost whose sexuality becomes liberated and unleashed in romantic fantasy, the talented ghost enjoys cultural privileges that are often denied her female human counterparts, except perhaps women in upper-class society.[34]

While poetic exchange as the scholar's fulfillment of the ghost's literary want could be the prelude to the scholar's fulfillment of the ghost's physical need, poetic offerings from the ghost could also be a token of exchange that cancels out her

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[32] Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p. 85.

[33] *Liaozhai*, *juan* 3, p. 331.

[34] In Tang *chuanqi* tales, we see a similar mechanism of poetic exchange played out in the romantic relationships between male scholars and female courtesans. The strong resemblance between the courtesan and the ghost, in literary representation, is perhaps based on their similar needs to be liberated from their subordinate state. In *Liaozhai*, ghosts and foxes may function as a kind of surrogate courtesan figure for Pu Songling.

indebtedness to her human benefactor. The *Liaozhai* tale, "The Green-sleeved Girl" 綠衣女, portrays an amorous encounter between a scholar named Yu and a female spirit who knows music and poetry, with a strong sense of mutual reciprocation:

> One night, when they were drinking together, the conversation turned to music. Yu said: "You have a lovely tender voice. If you sing, it'll steal my breath away." The girl said, laughing: "Then I won't sing, for fear that I might take your breath away." But Yu insisted. The girl said: "It's not that I'm withholding it. I worry that others might hear us. If you insist, I'll offer a humble tune, but just a little bit to give you the idea." Then she tapped the bed frame gently with her tiny foot, and sang:
>
> > The dark bird, perched in the tree,
> > complains that I roam about at night.
> > I am not afraid of wetting my shoes,
> > only of no companionship.
>
> Her voice was as thin as a fly's, barely audible. But upon close listening, it was so melodious and full of passion that it stirred the man's heart.

一夕共酌，談吐間妙解音律。於曰："卿聲嬌細，倘度一曲，必能消魂。"女笑曰："不敢度曲，恐銷君魂耳。"於固請之。曰："妾非吝惜，恐他人所聞。君必欲之，請便獻醜，但只微聲示意可耳"遂以

> 蓮鉤輕點床足，歌云：“樹上烏臼鳥，賺奴中夜散。不怨繡鞋濕，只恐郎無伴。”聲細如蠅，裁可辨認。而靜聽之，宛轉滑烈，動耳搖心。[35]

The thin voice, as well as the slender waist, foreshadows her identity as the spirit of a green bee. Her display of poetic talent also earns her the love and devotion of her human lover. After Yu rescues the bee from the clutches of a spider, the story ends with a most charming depiction of an insect-spirit blessed with great literary sensibility: the green bee dives into an inkwell, and then uses her ink-soaked body to trace out the character *xie* 謝, to thank the scholar for saving her life. The green bee, therefore, becomes an embodiment of several scholarly ideals and fantasies: cultural refinement, erotic promise, and feminine virtue.

The portrayal of ghosts and spirits who are culturally refined represents a more advanced stage of domestication at which the ghosts are tamed and then refined and remodelled to better fulfill the fantasies of literary men. Sometimes, a ghost is portrayed as an eager student of poetry and the male protagonist a willing teacher. Often the literary studies are mixed with sexual intercourse. In the story, “Xiao Xie 小謝,” the male fantasy of using teaching as a means of dominance and sexual gratification is vividly dramatized in the love triangle between a scholar and two ghosts:

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[35] *Liaozhai, juan* 5, p. 678.

One day, the scholar Tao left his work unfinished and went out. When he came back, he saw Xiao Xie sitting at his desk, copying the text he had left off. She saw Tao, threw away the brush, and smiled at him mischievously. Her writing was poor and barely legible, but it was done in tiny lines. Tao exclaimed: "You are a person of refinement! If you like, I can teach you." Then he gathered her in his arms and started teaching her calligraphy. When Qiu Rong came back and saw them, her colour changed as if overcome with jealousy. Xiao Xie said: "I used to learn from my father as a child, but it's been a long time. This is as if my dream has come true." Qiu Rong remained sullen. Pretending that he did not notice her mood, Tao embraced her, gave her a brush, and said: "Let's see if you can do it." Qiu Rong wrote a few characters and rose from his lap. Tao exclaimed: "You are good with the brush!" Only then did Qiu Rong become happy again… From then on, the two girls began treating Tao as their teacher, rubbing his back when he was at the desk, massaging his legs when he was in bed. Not only did they stop teasing him, they vied to bring him pleasure.

一日，錄書未卒業而出，返則小謝伏案頭，操管代錄。見生，擲筆睨笑。近視之，雖劣不成書，而行列疏整。生贊曰："卿雅人也！苟樂此，仆教卿為之。"乃擁諸懷，把腕而教之畫。秋容自外入，色乍變，意似妒。小謝笑曰："童時嘗從父學書，久不作，遂如夢寐。"秋容不語。生喻其意，偽為不覺者，遂抱而授以筆，曰："我視卿能

此否？”作數字而起，曰：“秋娘大好筆力！”秋容乃喜…… 二女由此師事生，坐為抓背，臥為按股，不惟不敢 侮，爭媚之。[36]

Strategically positioning himself between two ghosts eager for learning, the scholar is able to enjoy the status of both teacher and lover. Taming through cultural refinement is not only aesthetically satisfying to both male authors and readers, but also psychologically gratifying, because the literary arena is where scholars such as Pu Songling have the most power and symbolic capital.

Typically, literary and artistic ghosts are projections of the predictable male fantasies of a beautiful, submissive, and yet talented female companion. But sometimes, the depiction of the talented ghost does not position the male protagonist as the teacher with absolute authority, but as a connoisseur, a *zhiyin* 知音, who discovers and appreciates the artistic accomplishments of a ghost. “Huanniang” 宦娘 is a *Liaozhai* story about a love for music that crosses the line between the dead and the living. An admirer of Wen’s musical talent, the ghost Huanniang follows Wen around and helps him with his courtship of Lianggong, a beautiful girl from a rich family. She also anonymously composes an erotic *ci* poem, which becomes instrumental in the success of the courtship. When Huanniang makes her presence and intentions known, Wen gladly becomes her music teacher. After Huanniang has learned all she could about *qin* music, she takes leave of the couple, leaving them her fine, unparalleled musical compositions. “Huanniang” is one of those rare *Liaozhai* romances in which the beautiful and talented

[36] *Liaozhai, juan* 6, p. 774-5.

ghost does not get involved with the male protagonist sexually, but purely through their mutual love of music. There is a suggestion of equality and mutual identification. While the male protagonist is still portrayed as the more accomplished teacher, the ghost student, in the end, surpasses the teacher in musical virtuosity.[37]

However, when ghosts are tamed through art, art can also take on a ghostly quality of its own, and shift the power imbalance between the dead and the living. Sometimes, the blind admiration, or fetishization, of art is turned around to work against the infatuated male voyeur. In the story, "The Painted Skin," we see an inversion of the trope of the beautiful "talented ghost." Art is both the attraction and the disguise of the demon underneath the painted skin. Here, art takes on a connotation that is opposite to truth, and closer to artifice and artfulness. "The Painted Skin," perhaps unconsciously, signals a warning that art, the trappings of cultural refinement sought after by literary men, may hide something guileful, untrue, or utterly demonic. Therefore, the story once again reminds us of the limitations of taming, whether it is by moral-religious forces or by compassionate sexual and romantic relationships.

In spite of the many different strategies of taming, rarely does a tale in *Liaozhai* end with the ghost/woman secure in domestic unity. As Rania Huntington has pointed out, "the relationship between domesticity and its limitations, and the exit of the fox, were of keen importance to Pu Songling. Rather than offering a single solution to these dilemmas, he worked through them again and again, creating a unique vixen with each

[37] This is partly because Huanniang's music, being ghostly, is "not of this world," a cliché often used to describe something of rarefied artistic beauty. In Chinese literary culture, there is a genuine recognition of the otherworldly qualities of extremely fine art. As Judith Zeitlin has demonstrated in her analysis of Li He's posthumous reputation, the ghostly poetic voice offers the promise of an aesthetic experience that transcends death, where the cultural limits of literary immortality are drawn and tested. See *The Phantom Heroine*, pp. 68-76.

unique solution."[38] The lack of a single, firm solution indicates that the taming of the ghost is ultimately an unresolved process. The apparent limitation of taming thwarts the expectation of an uncomplicated ghost/human union and exposes the problematic cultural roots of the ghosts. Operating under fear and desire, and oscillating between order and disruption, the project of taming remains unfinished.

This unresolved state of taming does not necessarily indicate a failure of human willpower, nor must the process of ghost taming be construed as the institutional or ideological suppression of the wild and the free. The dynamics of taming, and its significance, might be illuminated by Julia Kristeva's definition of the "semiotic" and the "symbolic" as the two elements that make signification possible.[39] If the ghost is the manifestation of the bodily urge to communicate (semiotic), then the social, moral, and religious codes (symbolic) provide the structure necessary to communicate and generate meaning. Both elements are essential to signification, and it is the tension between them that makes a dynamic discourse.

Taming and Compassion

The world of early *zhiguai* is a world not particularly hospitable to human life, and people respond to it by worshipping fierce animals and other elements of nature. As the two genres evolved, first from *zhiguai* to *chuanqi*, and then coexisted, there is a discernible process of humanization and domestication. The awe-inspiring beast/human hybrids were gradually depopulated from the genre, and tamer variants such as ghosts

[38] Huntington, *Alien Kind*, p. 246.

[39] This concept of signification is elaborated in Kristeva's early work, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

and fox-spirits became the more standard characters in later tales. *Liaozhai*, blending both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* modes, is a textual illustration of this development. In the more elaborate *chuanqi*-style narratives, instead of exorcism by force, we see the development of subtler ways of engaging with ghosts through sexual and romantic relationships. From the male point of view, these tales are mainly projections of sexual and cultural fantasies. The notion of "ghost taming" implies approaching the ghost-human relationship from the human, male point of view, which means that the very notion of "tamed ghosts" is based on male fantasy.

As an antidote to this human/male-centred perspective, let us now look at taming from the female ghost's perspective. From the female point of view, taming would no longer be based on sexual fantasy; it becomes a process in which fear is gradually overcome and efforts are made to alleviate the plight of the wandering female ghost. From the ghost's point of view, taming would no longer be based on antagonism but on compassion, which makes it possible for her to seek and formulate a personal identity.

What happens when a ghost, as an anonymous "body without organs," acquires a personal identity? And how does she achieve a sense of individuality? In the *chuanqi*-style *Liaozhai* tales that portray beautiful, sexual, female ghosts, the ghost's identity is not so much based on beautiful and clearly defined physical features, but on social and familial relations. Often they first appear anonymous, marking her non-ancestral status, but they are eventually identified by a name, and sometimes, by family relations. Yet the strongest affirmation of the ghost's identity comes from the male protagonist's eagerness to engage the ghost in a sexual relationship, and by the ghost's willingness to acquiesce to such sexual relationships in order to revive her own life or gain acceptance into human

society. Thus, the beautification of the ghost's physical appearance does not necessarily signify her increasing sense of individual identity; it is mainly a manifestation of male fantasy. Most *Liaozhai* ghosts and foxes are beautiful in a generic way, and the beauty is mainly portrayed from the perspective of her human lover. The beautiful ghost, therefore, is a by-product of the sexual ghost, or it is a prerequisite for her sexual relationship with the male protagonist.

In *Liaozhai* romances, a sexual relationship with a male may attract a ghost to follow him into human society, but unconditional love is necessary to keep her there. In the story "Beloved Maid" 愛奴, Xu misses the ghost of his beloved and goes to her grave to bring back her corpse. When the tomb is opened, he sees that the corpse has the colour of a living person. The skin is still fresh, even though the clothes have rotted away. The corpse gets up, and confesses to Xu: "I stole gold from the lady I served. I fell sick, and had no other relatives, so I hid the gold and killed myself. My lady was so fond of me that she buried me with more gems. The energy of the gold and gems preserved my body. If you insist that I follow you home, please never force me to eat or drink. It would disturb and disperse my spirit."[40]

Xu then builds a fine house and lives there with the ghost woman. She speaks and laughs just like a living person, but takes neither food nor rest, and avoids seeing any other living being. At the end of the year, Xu gets drunk and forces some wine down her throat. She collapses immediately, blood seeping out of her mouth. By the end of the day, she is changed back to a corpse again. With deep regret, Xu gives her a lavish burial.

[40] The translation here is a summary loosely based on the text in *Liaozhai*, *juan* 9, p. 1191.

"The Beloved Maid" depicts a middle state where the ghost's body is revived, but she is not granted a full-fledged human identity (但不能類生人). That her body is preserved not through male essence, but through the vital energy of gold and gems, entitles her to a certain measure of autonomy—she chooses to be brought back to life on her own terms. However, the autonomous, non-sexual route of her resurrection seems to have placed a limit on the scope of her social interaction—she never achieves full human identity. At the end of this story, the Historian of the Strange comments: "A beautiful corpse is not as good as an elegant ghost" 余謂豔屍不如雅鬼. Pu Songling's preference of a "living" ghost over a dead body is in keeping with his unorthodox worldview. Still, it is a worldview that places value on quasi-human qualities, as exemplified in the ghost's willingness to forsake her ghostly but mobile existence, and embrace a limited and risky human identity.

Thus the ghost's attainment of her identity comes with a price, namely the weakening of the ghost's power and autonomy. In the romantic tales in *Liaozhai*, the ghost's body is often depicted as simultaneously enfeebled, sickly, and yet hypersexual. In the story, "Lian Suo" 連瑣, the titular ghost heroine has a body "so thin, timid, and afraid of cold that it can barely support her own clothes" 瘦怯凝寒，若不勝衣. When her lover, Yang, flirtingly fondles her, he finds her breasts "as fresh and tender as the flesh of water chestnut — still a virgin" 雞頭之肉，依然處子. This graphic description is followed by the equally explicit depiction of the revival of Lian Suo's ghostly body with her lover's semen and blood. Lian Suo warns Yang, her human lover, that after copulating with her ghostly body, he would fall sick. But Yang is willing to make that sacrifice for love. After coitus, Lian Suo states that her revival will not be complete

without a few drops of human blood. Yang then lets some blood from his arm, dropping it into the girl's navel. They then make arrangements to disinter her corpse from her grave after a hundred days. When the coffin is opened, the girl appears alive, and is warm to the touch. Her breathing slowly comes back after her body is placed in a warm place. That a ghost thrives on human semen and blood due to her physical deficiencies is also what makes a ghost both alluring and terrifying.

In spite of the centrality of the physical body in Pu Songling's literary imagination of ghosts, the sexual, familial and social relationships are what ultimately determine a ghost's identity. In *Liaozhai*, the ghost's achievement of individual identity requires the submission of her "body-without-organs" to sexual and social orders. In the pre-organized body, as shown in "Ghost Saliva" and "Pulling Intestines," the bodily fluids and functions are portrayed in grotesquely exaggerated proportions, affecting a complex feeling of attraction and aversion often associated with the fecund, maternal body. The ghost's body in *Liaozhai* romances, such as "Lian Suo" and "The Beloved Maid," is presented as both female and feminine, organized around the gender relations of human society.

Judith Zeitlin has pointed out that the human fear of the ghost, in ghost-human romances such as "Lian Suo," is displaced back onto the ghost through Freudian projection. This projection, she argues, is further abetted by the "gendering of the specter," making the female ghost "doubly shy and vulnerable" in her relationship with the male human.[41] Zeitlin's observations about the displacement of fear are perceptive, a strategy that is already evident in the ghost mask used in folk rituals of exorcism.

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[41] Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine*, p.3.

However, the notion of "gendering" the ghost as female needs to be further examined. By projecting human-based gender inequalities and power relations onto ghost figures and reproducing them in the world of the supernatural, these tales do manage to marginalize and tame the once-powerful beasts, gods, demons, and spirits. But the female gender of the ghost is also a recognition of the non-ancestral status of the ghost, and her need to be accounted for in posthumous relationships with humans. If the displacing of fear back on to the female ghost helps the male protagonist to overcome fear, then the "doubly shy and vulnerable" female ghost now inspires not fear, but desire, identification, and compassion in her human lover.

Beyond Taming: the Possibility of Becoming

By the time Pu Songling wrote his tales, there was an established confidence about the place of humans in the world. In *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* writing from this period, there are subtle shifts in the power relations between human society and the world beyond. Many *Liaozhai* narratives are no longer obsessed with the wilder, cruder species found in early *zhiguai*. The demon in "The Painted Skin" is an exception rather than the norm. Most *Liaozhai* ghosts seem disarmingly domesticated, living in peaceful coexistence with men. Domestication, apparently, is no longer represented as a contested process, but rather as a given. The domesticated varieties of ghosts, fairies, and fox-spirits appear as bewitchingly beautiful women, who enter romantic relationships with men and seek nothing more than love and acceptance from the men, the family, and human society.

However, the ghost-human relationship after domestication is not without its intricacies of power and submission. In these *Liaozhai* stories, where the constructs of human identity and male superiority no longer seem threatened by the once-feared female ghosts, gender relations remain unstable and negotiable. The tamed species of ghosts, animal and plant spirits, and fairies, continue to interact with the human and predominantly male protagonists, offering glimpses of the psychological makeup of both the characters and their creator. The ghosts and spirits are not entirely tame, either. In fact, in *Liaozhai*, Pu Songling portrayed some of the strongest female characters in classical Chinese literature—self-assured and assertive, if not subversive.

"Pian Pian" 翩翩 tells the romantic story between Luo Zifu, a young man whose dissolute life leads him to the verge of death, and Pian Pian, the titular heroine, a lovely fairy who heals the man both physically and spiritually, and restores him to the correct course of life. First, Pian Pian brings Luo back to her cave, a sanctuary from the corruptive forces of the human world. Then she goes about bathing, clothing, and feeding the young man, not unlike a mother who cares for her child. Once Luo's body and spirit have been refreshed and Pian Pian has accomplished her maternal task, their relationship becomes a sexual one. They are married. Early in their married life, Luo still clings to his promiscuous ways and attempts to seduce Lady Huacheng, one of Pian Pian's fairy friends. But each time Luo flirts with Lady Huacheng, his clothes, which Pian Pian has made from fresh leaves, yellow and wilt. In addition to performing her wifely duties, Pian Pian doubles as Luo's moral teacher. Eventually, Pian Pian gives birth to a son, raises and educates the boy, and marries him to the daughter of Lady

Huacheng. When all is said and done, Pian Pian sends a very homesick Luo, together with his son and daughter-in-law, back to his native place.

The appearance of supernatural women such as Pian Pian indicates an important shift in the depiction of gender relations in *Liaozhai*. In the story, the gender roles of the typical human-ghost romance are reversed, for it is the fairy, Pian Pian, who helps to reintegrate the male protagonist into human society. Pian Pian's predominant role in Luo Zifu's personal growth strongly suggests that the fairy is no longer presented as the vehicle to fulfill male fantasy, but as the projection of the deficiencies in the male psyche. Here, Jung's concept of the anima might be helpful to shed some light on the psychological basis of this type of literary representation. Defined as the inner feminine side of a man, the anima is both a personal complex and an archetypal image, often personified through the mechanism of projection. Initially identified with the personal mother, the anima is later experienced not only as other women in a man's life but also as a pervasive psychological influence within the man's psyche. [42]

Pian Pian's nurturing and restorative role in Luo Zifu's symbolic rebirth makes her an exemplary anima figure. At the beginning of the story, Pian Pian performs the maternal function, not for a newborn child, but for a ruined man on a quest for rebirth. (It is worth noting that Luo Zifu is orphaned as a child.) Pian Pian's cave, safe and warm, symbolizes the maternal womb, and her motherly love manifests in the detailed actions of bathing, clothing, and feeding. While her transformation into the ideal sexual image

[42] The Jungian term for the inner masculine side of the female psyche is the animus. Jung discusses the theory of anima/animus in "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (translated by R.F.C. Hull, edited by H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, and Wm. McGuire. Princeton University Press, 1953-1979). For a précis, see 'anima' in Daryl Sharp's *Jung Lexicon*, available online at the C. G. Jung Page: http://www.cgjungpage.org.

obviously displays another facet of the anima, she does not abandon her earlier role as the nurturing mother as well as her anticipated role as a moral teacher and soul-image. Instead of employing different female characters to represent each anima function, the story uses Pian Pian, the fairy, to embody all the complexities of this archetypal force. Only a supernatural woman would be convincing in this role.

In sharp contrast with the strong supernatural woman is the weak and ineffectual male scholar. In "The Crazy Bookworm" 書癡, the male protagonist Lang Yuzhu is so devoted to bookish studies that he neglects all the important social skills necessary for one's life. "He passed his twentieth year and gave no thought to marriage, but hoped that some day a lovely maiden would step forth from his books. If guests or relatives visited him, he had no idea how to entertain them…"[43] However, despite his bookish ways, he always fails the examinations. The official examination, which is considered the only way to real success in a man's life, has become an obsession and also an obstacle to Lang's integration into society. Lang Yuzhu, it would seem, has an under-developed persona. He seems to fit in nowhere socially and buries himself in books, where he hopes to find riches and the woman of his dreams.

Lang's fantasy comes true when a lovely maiden steps forth from a picture in a volume of *The History of Han* 漢書. On the surface, it seems that the girl, named Jade-like Face, is so moved by Lang's love and devotion that she comes alive. On a psychological level, however, the girl may well be an anima projection of Lang's overabundant feeling and sentiments, which have clouded his capacity for thinking and action. Jade-like Face, however, is by no means an embodiment of excessive feeling.

[43] Trans. Rose Quong. *Chinese Ghost & Love Stories* (New York: Pantheon, 1946), p. 59.

She proves to be a great tutor in all the practicalities of life from socializing to sexual skills. She bears Lang a son, preparing him thoroughly for a successful and respectable life, with one condition: that he withdraw himself from bookish study and part with his books. Lang's failure to comply brings him a series of personal tragedies including his wife's disappearance and his own imprisonment. But after a brief setback, all comes to a happy ending when Lang is freed and, with the help of Jade-like Face's spirit, passes the highest official examination.

In the story "Feng Xian" 鳳仙, the titular fox woman's approach to study makes a humorous contrast with Jade-like Face's firm stance against bookishness. Feng Xian's human lover is Liu Chishui, a dandy who wastes his time in romantic rather than scholarly pursuits. In order to keep her lover from mischief and lead him to a successful life, she urges Liu to study. Whereas Jade-like Face disappears every time Lang picks up a book, Feng Xian leaves Liu with these parting words: "Find me in the books." Every time Liu sits down to concentrate on his study, Feng Xian's image would appear in a mirror, all smiles. And whenever Liu slackens in his efforts, Feng Xian would weep in the mirror and turn her back to him. After two years of hard work, Liu passes the official exam and Feng Xian rejoins him in real life.

While Jade-like Face and Feng Xian's approaches to study cannot be more different, they share a common goal: to help their human lovers achieve personal success. Both female spirits possess a quality of dedication and perseverance that is lacking in their male lovers. Although they obviously do function as something that complements and repairs the men's underdeveloped personae, they depart from the feminine traits traditionally assigned to the ghost character. In the case of a socially maladjusted scholar

who lacks willpower, the female ghosts seem to have taken on the masculine characteristics of the unconscious. There is a reversal of traditionally perceived gender roles, as it is the female who provides the male with initiative and the capacity for planned action.

It is not surprising that Pu Songling, himself a poor, failed scholar all his life, felt the need to compensate for his deficiencies by creating supernatural women who are especially capable in bringing about career successes. Such fantasy fulfillment of the male scholar, seen from a Jungian perspective, strongly suggests that the ghost/woman is no longer just an embodiment of the feminine, or the other. The female ghost, in Pu Songling's literary imagination, can take on both feminine and masculine traits and alternate as anima and animus projections.[44] In the Tang tale, "Scholar Wu of Jiangnan" by Zhang Du, Wu's family is shocked into realizing that the evil monster to be exorcised from human society is none other than a member of their own (Wu's cannibalistic concubine). In *Liaozhai* tales that depict male individuation through strong anima figures, there comes the revelation that the female need not be the opposite "other," but an integral part of the self. Thus the long process of taming has led to the realization that the ghost, originated from an earthly "body-without-organs" where the self and the other are inseparable, has come full circle when the self and the other are reunited in the human psyche.

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[44] The ghost's complication of the anima/animus dichotomy points to recent developments in Jungian theory. To avoid the gender stereotyping implicit in Jung's alignment of the anima with the feminine, "post-Jungian" critics have attempted to replace "anima projection" with the "anima field," a sphere of influence in which both men and women could become actively involved. See Michael Conforti, "On Archetypal Fields," *The Round Table Review of Contemporary Contributions to Jungian Psychology IV*. Nov./Dec. 1996.

While the concept of anima is useful for understanding Pu Songling's portrayal of many strong ghost characters on the psychological level, it does not account for the full complexity of the ghost/human relationship in *Liaozhai*. Martin Buber, in the preface to his German translation of Pu Songling's tales, points out the volatile nature of the spirit-human relationship – it is a relationship that offers both "joys and dangers"; it can be both a "menace" and "unmingled bliss." Buber also observes a nearly obsessive quality in the ghost/spirits' quest for human relationships – "they all seek men." [45] While the anima figure in a story typically wants to be loved or to be hated, the ghosts and spirits in *Liaozhai* seek more complex goals: to play, instruct, punish, carouse, and work. The ghost-human relationship is never one-sided as the spirits help men and also receive help from them, and the story does not simply end with the male character's success in integrating his anima. The female character also achieves her own fulfillment and takes on a reality of her own.

The assertive role of the ghost in the ghost-human relationship makes her more than just representative of the man's unconscious Eros. The anima figures, insisting on a life of their own, blur the line between mere anima projection and full-fledged female identity. From wild beasts and terrifying monsters, to tamed ghosts and spirits, the process of domestication inevitably leads to the point where ghosts and spirits demand acknowledgement and respect as full individuals. Unlike the fairy Pian Pian, who is merely an instrumental anima figure without her own needs for human identity, many ghosts and fox spirits in *Liaozhai* are, in fact, primarily driven by their own need for personal fulfillment.

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[45] Quong's translation of Buber from the German, *Chinese Ghost & Love Stories*, pp. 12-3.

Pu Songling interest in female identity and female subjectivity is already evident in his short *zhiguai*-style anecdotes. In two seldom-discussed tales about hanged ghosts, the author reveals an attentiveness to women's issues and an understanding of the ghost as a genuine existential dilemma that particularly affects women. In "The Merchant's Wife" 商婦, a bizarre incident between two women—one human, one ghost—is situated within a masculine framework of crime and justice, and notions of the hanged ghost are examined and discussed within the human community:

> A merchant in Tianjin was getting ready to go on a business trip somewhere faraway, and he decided to take a loan of several hundred from a rich man. A thief found out about this plan. The evening the merchant went for the loan, the thief hid in the merchant's bedroom, waiting for him to return. But when the merchant got the money, he took advantage of the fine day and set out on his trip right away without coming home. The thief waited in hiding for a long while; all he could hear was the merchant's wife tossing and turning in bed as if unable to sleep. Then suddenly a small door opened in the wall, and the room was awash in light. A woman walked in through that door. She was fine looking, a long rope in her hand. When she walked up to the bedside, she gave the rope to the merchant's wife, who refused it with her hand. The woman insisted, so the wife accepted the rope, hung it down from a beam in the ceiling, and hanged herself on it. The woman then left through the

small door, which closed after her. The thief was terrified by what he saw, and ran away.

At daybreak, the family found the wife dead, and reported it to court. The court arrested a neighbour and tortured him until he confessed to killing the wife. He would soon be executed. It was too much to the thief's conscience, so he turned himself in and told the court everything he saw that night. The thief's testimony was so heartfelt that everyone believed what he said, and the neighbour was acquitted. People asked around in the neighbourhood, and it was said that the former owner of the merchant's house had a wife who died young. Descriptions of her features corroborated what the thief said, so it is believed that it was the ghost of the former owner's wife. People say that those who died violent deaths always come back to look for substitutes. Is it truly so?

天津商人某，將賈遠方，往從富人貸資數百。為偷兒所窺，及夕，預匿室中以俟其歸。而商以是日良，負資竟發。偷兒伏久，但聞商人婦轉側床上，似不成眠。既而壁上一小門開，一室盡亮。門內有女子出，容齒少好，手引長帶一條，近榻授婦，婦以手卻之。女固授之；婦乃受帶，起懸樑上，引頸自縊。女遂去，壁扉亦闔。偷兒大驚，拔關遁去。既明，家人見婦死，質諸官。官拘鄰人而鍛煉之，誣服成獄，不日就決。偷兒憤其冤，自首於堂，告以是夜所見。鞫之情真，

鄰人遂免。問其裏人，言宅之故主曾有少婦經死，年齒容貌，與盜言悉符，因知是其鬼也。欲傳暴死者必求代替，其然歟？[46]

Of all ghost characters, the hanged ghost is quintessential "ghost with a grievance." It is remarkable how readily the thief's testimony is accepted by the court. Of course the thief's confession is itself remarkable for his unexpected show of righteousness and, paradoxically, unselfish honesty. But the fact that his account of what happened overnight is legally accepted implies that belief in the hanged ghost is not uncommon. His testimony achieves additional credibility because it is "heartfelt" 情真, suggesting that tales about hanged ghosts command a strong emotional power over the listener. This emotional sway of the hanged ghost is also indicative of a recognition of the ghost's moral right to have her grievance addressed.

Pu Songling's question at the end of this tale may suggest a note of scepticism, but it may not constitute scepticism about the status of the hanged ghost, but a questioning of the way her grievance is supposed to be addressed, namely, by finding a female substitute. In a similar tale, simply entitled "The Hanged Ghost" 縊鬼, Pu Songling again shows a male spectator confronted with a scene of suicide by hanging:

A scholar named Fang put himself up at an inn during a trip. After dinner, he lit a candle, and was about to dose off with his eyes half-closed. Suddenly a maid walked in, laid out some clothes on a chair, placed a

[46] *Liaozhai, juan* 7, p. 1016.

mirror case and a vanity box on the table, and left. Then a young lady came in from an adjacent room, opened the boxes of toiletry and started to groom herself. She made her hair into a bun, decorated it with jewellery, and looked at herself long and admiringly in the mirror. Then the maid re-entered, bringing in a washbasin. The lady washed with the water in the basin, which the maid then took away. The lady opened the clothes bag full of gowns and drapery, all shiny and new, which she put on. She carefully tucked in her shirt, straightened her collar, and tied up her sashes. Fang remained silent, suspecting that she must be a prostitute dressing up for her client. When all the grooming was done, the woman took out a long rope, draped it down from the beam and tied a knot with it. Fang was flabbergasted. Then the woman calmly grasped the rope, lifted up her feet, and got ready to hang herself. As soon as her neck touched the rope, her eyes closed, eyebrows knit tight, two inches of her tongue hung out from her mouth, and her face turned into a ghostly colour. Terrified, Fang ran out and cried to the host. By the time they came back to the room, everything was gone. The host said: “My late daughter-in-law hanged herself just like that. Could it have been her?”

範生者宿於旅，食後燭而假寐。忽一婢來，袱衣置椅上，又有鏡奩掃篋，一一列案頭，乃去。俄一少婦自房中出，發篋開奩，對鏡櫛掠；已而髻，已而簪，顧影徘徊甚久。前婢來，進匜沃盥。盥已捧帨，既，持沐湯去。婦解襆出裙帔，炫然新制，就著之。掩衿提領，結束

> 周至。範不語，中心疑怪，謂必奔婦，將嚴裝以就客也。婦裝訖，出長帶，垂諸梁而結焉。訝之。婦從容跂雙彎，引頸受縊。方一著帶，目即合，眉即豎，舌出吻二寸許，顏色慘變如鬼。大駭奔出，呼告主人，驗之已渺。主人曰："曩子婦經於是，毋乃此乎？"[47]

In this tale, the hanged ghost, rather than looking for a female substitute as way of avenging her death, chooses to re-enact her own hanging and perform her suicide in front of a male audience, any male audience. The female ghost is without doubt the protagonist of her own tale, and her performance suggests a strong sense of female subjectivity. While the scene itself is predicated on the male gaze, the narrative thrust thwarts, confronts, and indeed, interrogates that male gaze. It is no wonder that the authorial comment by the Historian of the Strange begins with a question:

> How strange! Someone dead acting out her death like this, how could it be? The Historian of the Strange says: "Someone must have met grave injustice to hang herself—how bitter must she have felt! When alive, she would have not known her own death. When a ghost, she will not feel its pain. The hardest to endure is the moment of dressing herself and tying the knot. Thus she remembers nothing after her death, nothing but that moment, that scene that plays out vividly again and again, and never will she forget it."

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[47] *Liaozhai*, *juan* 6, pp. 780-781.

> 異哉！即死猶作其狀，此何說也？異史氏曰：“冤之極而至於自盡，苦矣！然前為人而不知，後為鬼而不覺，所最難堪者，束裝結帶時耳。故死後頓忘其他，而獨於此際此境，猶歷歷一作，是其所極不忘者也。”[48]

Starting with a rhetorical question, Pu Songling provides an answer that is soul-searching, revealing an astonishing sense of human compassion that transcends any gender barrier or distinction. Not only does he fully sympathize with the predicament of the hanged ghost, he is capable of stepping into the role of the ghost to explore her own subjectivity.

Such an awareness of female subjectivity on the part of the author supports my argument that, even in the *chuanqi*-style ghost-human romances, the female ghost must not be reduced to merely an object of male fantasy. Even within the mode of romantic fantasy, Pu Songling is attentive to female desires and female-to-female relationships. The *Liaozhai* story, “Heng Niang” 恒娘, depicts the close interaction between a fox spirit and a woman. Similar to the earlier examples, Heng Niang, the fox-spirit, also plays the role of an advisor to a human character, but this time, to a neglected wife named Zhu. Zhu used to be happily married. But when her husband takes a concubine and dotes on the younger woman, Zhu’s ‘first wife’ status becomes threatened. She is so miserable that she would rather trade places with the concubine. Then Heng Niang, an ordinary looking woman in her thirties, comes to Zhu’s rescue. Heng Niang advises Zhu to

[48] Ibid.

neglect her appearance, busy herself with household chores, refuse her husband's amorous advances for as long as possible, and then unexpectedly groom herself in the most alluring fashion and display her charms to her husband. The combined tricks of self-effacement and hard-to-get work out as planned and Zhu is restored to her nuptial bliss. Then it turns out that Heng Niang is a fox-spirit, who disappears toward the end of the story.[49]

It is clear that Heng Niang and Zhu take pains to manipulate the husband only to reinforce a male dominated social order. It is true that a strong ghost/woman, even when she is the most resourceful and dynamic, can still embody and reinforce many of the male-centred gender biases. But such stories nonetheless demonstrate the power of female bonding and the possibilities of female agency, regardless of the means or the goal of such initiatives. In the eyes of female readers, the fox woman, along with other *Liaozhai* ghosts and spirits who surpass their human counterparts (both male and female) in willpower, intelligence, and sense of purpose, would no doubt have served as role models that could not be easily found in the real world. Perhaps the shaping of female subjectivity through ghosts and foxes also helped to usher in full-fledged women characters in *Liaozhai*. In the story "Yan Shi" 顏氏 (*juan* 6), we do not see a ghost or a fox helping her male lover succeed, but a precocious woman who disguises herself as a man to pass the examinations and achieve high office in lieu of her husband. No longer merely functioning as the male protagonist's anima projection, these ghosts/women enter the "anima field" pushing their own agendas or usurping traditionally male functions. No

[49] *Liaozhai, juan* 10, pp. 1431-35.

longer do these *Liaozhai* stories focus exclusively on male individuation; they dramatize individuation as a dialogic, two-way process.[50]

Conclusion

Surveying the history of ghost literature from Six Dynasties *zhiguai* to Pu Songling's *Liaozhai* reveals that the notion of ghosts has been constantly evolving, from brutish beast/human hybrids to amicable fox-spirits. The notion of ghosts and the ghostly remains a vital link between the present and the past, between the human realm and the beyond. *Liaozhai* transformation tales, drawn from a long tradition of literary representations of animal-to-human metamorphoses, invite us to look at the ghostly realm as a broad but liminal zone of hybrid and transformative identities. To ponder the ghost in this light is to ponder human and proto-human identities not simply within the kinship system, but in relation to the larger world that is pre-organized and pre-ancestral. Thus, the ghost world of *Liaozhai* offers refreshing ways to examine human identity on both cosmic and psychological levels, complementing and yet simultaneously challenging the Confucian tenet that familial and societal relations are the only legitimate means of constructing human identity. It is in this sense that the ghost tale constitutes a minor discourse vis-à-vis a central, dominant worldview.

In the polyphonic genres of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, especially in later works represented by *Liaozhai*, the commingling of narratives of the strange and the marvellous

[50] In *Liaozhai*'s history of reception, the emergence of nineteenth-century dramatizations of *Liaozhai* tales by the female dramatist Liu Qingyun 劉清韻 and the publication of *Nü Liaozhai* 女聊齋 (The female *Liaozhai*), compiled by the female author Jia Ming 賈茗, are textual proof that women, through reading ghost tales, will eventually become capable agents who narrate their own stories.

with religious and moral persuasions suggests a humanistic effort to tame and control the ghost. The taming of the ghost also reflects, on the level of moral-religious discourse, an attempt to "tame" popular religion from its unruly, amoral state and infuse it with orthodox values. However, while attempting to instil a sense of moral order into the ghost, moral systems such as Confucianism are found to be fraught with their own inconsistencies, contradictions, and hypocrisies. All these cultural forces clash, compete, and compromise in the world of *Liaozhai*, and it is against this background that Pu Songling forged and formulated his own "minor discourse." Ultimately, it is a discourse of religious scepticism and moral ambiguity, and the ghost/woman hybrid serves as a site of negotiation between "desire and order" as well as a space for exploring new and emerging identities.

My analyses throughout the chapter have reinforced my contention that Pu Songling's uses of the literary modes of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* are both essential for his exploration of the critical and creative potential of the ghost. The *zhiguai* mode allows him to respond to ghosts viscerally and emotionally, as a way to identify the psychological, ontological and ideological foundations of the ghost. The *chuanqi* mode allows him the room to grow intimate with the ghost, to identify with her predicament and to explore both male identity and female subjectivity in an atmosphere of mutual compassion. It is important to juxtapose these two modes in reading *Liaozhai*. Without *chuanqi*, it is easy to view ghosts only as the disenfranchised and suppressed female other, while losing sight of its transformative potential for forging new and emerging identities. Without *zhiguai*, Pu Songling's ghosts become the objects of romantic fantasy, not anchored by their own needs and desires.

Emphasizing both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* narratives and their intertextuality helps the reader to discern in Pu Songling's work a genuine human relationship with ghosts. This conception of the ghost implies the refusal or the suspension of seeing ghosts as objects or as embodiments of the other. It requires an almost quixotic vision that sees ghosts as "people." A minor literature, as Deleuze and Guattari have defined, is a literature of the people. A truly visionary writer of minor literature, suggest Deleuze and Guattari, does not simply act as the voice of a minority group, but creates a voice for "a people to come."[51] Inhabiting the minor genres within a vast literary tradition, *Liaozhai* ghosts thus embody the true spirit of a people in the process of becoming.

[51] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (1986), p.17.

Chapter Three

Genre, Canon, Ideology: the Cultural Ascension of *Liaozhai*

When Pu Songling died in 1715, what he left behind were multiple manuscript versions of hundreds of anecdotes of anomaly and tales of the marvellous, occupying an embattled zone between two genres (*zhiguai* and *chuanqi*), and a preface with elusive autobiographical overtones and brazen literary ambition. Since the author's death, generations of critics and commentators have been grappling with the issues of genre, legitimacy, canonicity, and a host of extra-literary ramifications that the work has spawned. With the continuous outpouring of different editions, commentaries, imitations and adaptations, the reception of *Liaozhai* could be seen as a prolonged effort to come to terms with the book, the genres that it represents, and the ghost discourse in which it participates. To recount that history of reception is to witness what is essentially the remaking of a book in the hands of the publishers, critics, commentators, and followers and detractors of various kinds.

This chapter examines the afterlife of *Liaozhai*, looking underneath the aura of its mass appeal and the shroud of its literary fame, most conspicuously the growing perception of Pu Songling's work as a crowning achievement in the realm of literary art. This is not to begrudge *Liaozhai* its belated and much-deserved recognition, but rather to critically examine the disparity between the minor literary genre(s) that *Liaozhai* inhabits and its gradual transformation into a classic of Chinese fiction. The cultural ascension of *Liaozhai* is amply illustrative of the etymological changes of the Chinese term *xiaoshuo*, which began as a form of minor discourse affiliated with early cosmography and

unofficial historiography but eventually became synonymous with the genre of literary fiction. In the case of *Liaozhai*, a work that was not written as *xiaoshuo* in a strictly fictional sense, it is important to pause for a moment and examine the impact of this etymological change. In regard to our understanding of Pu Songling's literary vision, how might the fictionalization or aestheticization of *Liaozhai* in literary discourse have affected the critical relevance and the creative capacity of *Liaozhai* ghosts? What types of critical and editorial intervention were deployed to negotiate *Liaozhai*'s trajectory from a generically mixed "minor discourse" to a highly regarded but more narrowly understood work of fiction?

The discussion will be anchored by two instances of critical intervention during the eighteenth century—Zhao Qigao's 趙起杲 (d. 1766) deletion of forty-eight tales from the first print edition of *Liaozhai* and Ji Yun's 紀昀 (1724-1805) critique of Pu Songling's work that manifested most emphatically in his exclusion of *Liaozhai* from *Siku quanshu*. While Ji Yun dismissed the fictional aspects of *Liaozhai* as unfitting for his definition of *xiaoshuo* as unofficial historiography, Zhao Qigao's promotion of *Liaozhai* aesthetics dovetailed with the growing prestige of literary fiction and led to *Liaozhai*'s canonization. However, as *Liaozhai* was elevated into the realm of major literature, *Liaozhai* ghosts became objects of connoisseurship and the work's relevance as a minor discourse diminished. Although both Ji Yun's rejection of *Liaozhai* and Zhao Qigao's promotion of it seem to be based on the literary issue of genre, their critical intervention has been interpreted by later scholars in an overwhelmingly political light. In spite of the tendency toward aestheticization, the critical discourse on *Liaozhai* repeatedly alludes to the work's anti-Manchu inclinations, which brings up the question:

does this perceived political subversiveness reinforce or limit *Liaozhai*'s relevance as a minor discourse?

A Brief History of Reception

Liaozhai was compiled during an approximately thirty-year period from 1670 to 1700, but the main body of the work would have taken shape by as early as 1679, when Pu Songling wrote his own preface. For decades, Pu Songling's manuscript was being read, copied, and circulated among a select circle of family members, friends, and literary associates.[1] It was not until 1766, after decades of circulation in manuscript form, that Zhao Qigao published the first edition of the book, the "Qingketing" 青柯亭 edition. The book's appearance in print no doubt allowed Pu Songling's work exposure to a much wider audience, both socially and geographically. In 1767, at least two more editions appeared in print: one was a reprint of Zhao's edition by Li Shixian 李時憲 (*jinshi*進士 1730) in Fujian; the other is an independently compiled edition by Wang Jinfan 王金範, an 18 *juan* edition that comprises 267 titles classified under twenty-six thematic headings.[2]

The rapid appearance of new editions suggests that the publication of *Liaozhai* was an instant success. The book's popularity also proved to be enduring, as dozens more new editions were produced throughout the late imperial period. In the nineteenth

[1] For a detailed account of *Liaozhai*'s textual transmission, see Alan Barr, "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*," *HJAS*, vol. 44: 515-562.

[2] According to Allan Barr, Wang Jinfan so tampered with the text of *Liaozhai*—by selecting, revising, abridging them, and rearranging them in thematic categories—that his version merits little scholarly or public interest. Barr, "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*," *HJAS*, vol. 44: 537.

century alone, at least fourteen editions of *Liaozhai* appeared in the market.[3] However, the Qingketing edition remained significant not only in that it went through frequent reprints, but also because it became the textual basis for most of the subsequent annotated and illustrated editions throughout the Qing dynasty. Over the next century and a half, Zhao's edition was to be published in several major editions incorporating commentary by He Shouqi 何守奇 (1823), annotation by He Yin 何垠 (1839), commentary by Dan Minglun 但明倫 (1842), annotation by Lü Zhan'en 呂湛恩 (1843), and commentary by Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮巒 (commentary in 1818, published in 1891).

The success of *Liaozhai* triggered a spate of new collections of classical tales in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries.[4] However, except for Ji Yun's *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 and Yuan Mei's *Zibuyu* 子不語, most of the *zhiguai* collections of this period, such as He Bang'e's *Yetan suilu* 夜譚隨錄, were considered imitations of *Liaozhai* and received little critical attention in their own right.[5] Many were promoted as *Liaozhai* "sequels," or shoddily produced as anthologies by later publishers who sought to take advantage of an increasingly lucrative publishing industry that employed "Liaozhai" as a brand name. For example, *Liaozhai zhiyi xubian* 聊齋志異續編 (A collection of sequels to *Liaozhai zhiyi*), edited by Shi Zhengren 石正人, is in fact a selection of 326 stories from some two-dozen books such as Yuan Mei's *Zibuyu*, Xu

[3] Chang & Chang, *Redefining History*, p. 199.

[4] For a summary of *zhiguai* collections published in the wake of *Liaozhai*'s success, see Allan Barr's chapter on "The Later Classical Tale" in The Columbia History of Chinese Literature, ed. Victor H. Mair, pp. 693-696.

[5] Zhan Xiaoyong has taken some initial steps toward addressing this critical imbalance in his excellent survey of Qing collections of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, *Qingdai zhiguai chuanqi xiaoshuoji yanjiu* 清代志怪傳奇小說集研究, Wuhan: Huazhong keji daxue chubanshe, 2003.

Kun's 徐昆 *Liuya waibian* 柳崖外編, Wang Tao's 王韜 *Songbin suohua* 淞濱瑣話, and Jia Ming's 賈茗 *Nü Liaozhai* 女聊齋. Although publications of this kind did not appear to be directly related to Pu Songling's work, they testify to the growing cultural importance of *Liaozhai*, which not only implied the book's ascension in literary status, but also its great commercial value.

Another major component of *Liaozhai* production and reproduction was its adaptation into dramatic literature (both southern drama and folk theatre) and vernacular storytelling (*huaben* 話本) formats.[6] Vernacular and dramatic adaptations helped further expand *Liaozhai*'s audience both socially and geographically. It is worth noting that, although written in the classical medium, *Liaozhai* was never exclusively the cultural capital of the elite. Pu Songling, a poor scholar occupying the social borderline between the local elite and the impoverished gentry, had actively sought to find a popular audience for his own work by adapting several *Liaozhai* stories into *liqu* 俚曲, a folk theatre form popular in his native Zichuan area. What was different in the nineteenth century was that *Liaozhai*'s popular audience was no longer limited to rural Shandong Province, but extended to a largely urban population who patronized teahouses and amusement centres all across China.

It would be no exaggeration to say that, toward the end of Qing Dynasty, *Liaozhai* had become recognized as the ghost story *par excellence*. The critical and popular

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[6] *Liaozhai zhiyi xiqu ji* 聊齋志異戲曲集 (A collection of dramatic literature based on *Liaozhai zhiyi*), edited by Guan Dedong 關德棟 and Ju Xilun 車錫倫, features fourteen *chuanqi* plays based on *Liaozhai* stories by eight Qing dramatists; *Liaozhai zhiyi huaben ji* 聊齋志異話本集 (A collection of *huaben* literature based on *Liaozhai zhiyi*), edited by Guan Dedong 關德棟, contains twelve Qing dynasty *huaben* adaptations of *Liaozhai* stories. For a more comprehensive survey of Qing dynasty and twentieth-century *Liaozhai* adaptations into popular culture, see Zhu Yixuan, *Liaozhai zhiyi ziliao huibian*.

success of *Liaozhai* helped elevate the classical tale to new levels of popularity and literary prestige. But, paradoxically, *Liaozhai*'s towering status may have hindered our appreciation of the proliferation of voices and styles in Qing classical tales, as *Liaozhai*'s stylistic brilliance increasingly overshadowed the numerous *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* works produced before and after it. Moreover, the *Liaozhai* as the late Qing audience knew it was no longer the *Liaozhai* as Pu Songling wrote it, but rather the collaborative result of a long succession of interpretations, commentaries, adaptations, and reinterpretations. These different "versions" of *Liaozhai*, as I shall demonstrate in the following analysis, were often at odds with each other, each based on a different combination of literary, ideological, social, and moral premises.

The Issue of Genre

The literary ascension of *Liaozhai* came with a price. Like the ghost's "body without organs," *Liaozhai* as Pu Songling left it was a textual "body without organs" that straddled different literary genres and narrative modes. There were elaborate *chuanqi* romances featuring ghosts and foxes, *zhiguai* records of anomalous events, descriptive *biji* entries of noteworthy subjects, first-hand accounts of extraordinary experience, as well as the seemingly random injections of authorial comments in the name of "Historian of the Strange."

Attempts to place the work in relation to the traditional genre of *zhiguai* were made when the book was still circulating in manuscript form. Pu Songling's literary associates Gao Heng 高珩 (1612-1697) and Tang Menglai 唐夢賚 (1627-1698) each wrote a preface (Gao 1679, Tang 1682) to promote *Liaozhai* as a superb example of

zhiguai. True to the rhetoric of *zhiguai*, both prefaces emphasize the moral and didactic value of discoursing on ghosts and spirits. However, by the time the first print edition of the book appeared in 1766, the editor(s) no longer seemed keen on casting *Liaozhai* as a work of *zhiguai*. In a publisher's note, Zhao Qigao stated that he deleted dozens of "uninteresting" brief entries, and made it clear that his editorial criterion was primarily literary. This shift from thematic content to literary style conforms to Judith Zeitlin's charting of *Liaozhai*'s interpretative history, which she describes as the "three waves." According to Zeitlin, Gao Heng and Tang Menglai's prefaces belong to the first wave, which aimed at "legitimating the practice of recording the strange." Zhao Qigao's editorial intervention falls into the second wave, which sought to reshape the work as "an allegorical vehicle for serious self-expression." The nineteenth-century commentaries on *Liaozhai* constitute the third wave, which was responsible for the growing recognition of the work as a model of stylistic brilliance and as a great work of fiction.[7]

From the standpoint of genre, Zeitlin's "three waves" theory delineates a more or less chronological process by which *Liaozhai* was gradually dissociated from the *zhiguai* tradition after its publication in the mid-eighteenth century and became re-established as a masterpiece of fiction, a genre that was growing in influence and prestige in the nineteenth century. Implicit in this trajectory of genre transformation is the assumption that *Liaozhai* was accepted as *zhiguai* from the outset, and that it was reinvented as a work of fiction by the nineteenth century. This may have been the intent and the desired goal of *Liaozhai*'s promoters. But during the process of this transformation, *Liaozhai* apparently remained neither *zhiguai* nor *chuanqi*, neither fiction nor historiography. The

[7] See Zeitlin's discussion in *Historian of the Strange*, Chapter 1, pp. 15-42.

heterogeneity of Pu Songling's genre references and literary modes meant that to qualify as any genre, whether historical or fictional, the work needed to be textually altered or critically intervened.

Zhao Qigao's Solution

When *Liaozhai* first appeared in print in 1766, some fifty years after Pu Songling's death, it was already a considerably different work from the one that Pu Songling had put together. Zhao Qigao sponsored the publication now known as the Qingketing 青柯亭 edition, based on Zheng Fangkun's 鄭方坤 (*jinshi* 1723) manuscript version, a sixteen *juan* "original" version Zheng claimed to have obtained directly from Pu's family.[8] In spite of Zhao Qigao's claim to authenticity, he did not seem overly concerned with keeping the original format of the manuscript in his editorial process. According to Allan Barr, Zhao initially selected what he considered the best tales from the manuscript and arranged them into twelve *juan*. He then decided to add another four *juan* by culling the remainder of the tales. Zhao's edition was eventually published in sixteen *juan* like the Zheng manuscript that it was based on, but the sequence of the tales was quite different.[9]

Zhao Qigao's note on the publication suggests that his editorial decisions were primarily based on literary and artistic criteria. He claimed that his first twelve *juan* contained tales of "rare elegance and beauty" 尤雅者, but he amended this first selection and restored the work to its original sixteen *juan* so that "all beautiful sentences are held

[8] For a detailed account of the pedigree of the Zheng manuscript, see Allan Barr, "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai* zhiyi," *HJAS*, vol. 44, no. 2: 530.

[9] Ibid, p. 531.

within the fine brocade, and no bright pearl slipped through the iron mesh" 佳句已盡入錦囊，明珠實無遺鐵網矣.[10] These phrases clearly refer to the literary qualities of the tales, but they sound rather vague. Did Zhao Qigao's apparent focus on aesthetics constitute a specific conception of *Liaozhai* in terms of literary genre?

In regard to the tales that Zhao Qigao later incorporated in *juan* 13-16, Allan Barr has observed that "[these tales] are by no means lacking in interest (to us), but have much more in common with the short anecdotes recorded by other seventeenth and eighteenth century writers, and as such, are rather unexceptional."[11] Here, Barr suggests that the shorter, more commonplace items were marginally placed because they betrayed *Liaozhai*'s similarity to traditional *zhiguai*. This observation accords with Judith Zeitlin's positioning of Zhao Qigao among the "second wave" of interpreters who sought to set *Liaozhai* apart from standard *zhiguai* collections. Also on the agenda of the second wave, according to Zeitlin, is the downplaying of the importance of content in order to focus on style and self-expression.[12]

There is no doubt that stylistic brilliance combined with the pathos of self-expression was what eventually distinguished *Liaozhai* from most other *zhiguai* collections. Zhao Qigao's deletion of some *zhiguai*-style anecdotes and his reluctant inclusion of some others were indicative of a certain dissatisfaction with Pu Songling's original manuscript and a desire to bring out the brilliance that was embedded in the work.

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[10] "Qingben ke Liaozhai zhiyi liyan," in Zhang Youhe's "*sanhuiben*" 三會本 edition, p. 28.

[11] Allan Barr, "The Textual Transmission of *Liaozhai zhiyi*," *HJAS*, vol. 44, no. 2: 533.

[12] Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, pp. 26-27.

Apparently, the book as Pu Songling assembled it did not conform to the literary taste and the readerly expectations held by its publisher and its target readership.

In fact, Zhao Qigao made three editorial moves: first, he picked all the gems and arranged them into the first twelve *juan*; then he included the second-bests and grouped them into another four *juan*; and in the end he eliminated some tales altogether. As he conscientiously informed us: "I have expunged from each *juan* simple items and brief notes which are dull and superficial, forty-eight in all" 卷中有單章只句，意味平淺者刪之，計四十八條.[13] Zhao Qigao seemed to know what he did *not* want for the book—to read like just another collection of *zhiguai*. The first two editorial moves—the selection and rearrangement of the tales—did indeed help to distance *Liaozhai* from standard *zhiguai* collections by emphasizing its literary and aesthetic qualities, qualities that are more commonly associated with *chuanqi* rather than *zhiguai*. However, *zhiguai* anecdotes were amply represented in both the first twelve *juan* and the remaining four. This indicates that, at least for Zhao Qigao and his target readership, literary brilliance was not the sole property of *chuanqi*. *Zhiguai* pieces could be excellent in terms of both style and content. As a publisher, Zhao Qigao could also have been motivated by commercial concerns, namely to make the book a good read. While Zhao's edition did effectively accentuate the *chuanqi* aesthetics of *Liaozhai*, his editorial choices were more likely to have been guided by general literary qualities that enhanced readability and marketability rather than by specific concerns over genre differentiation.

[13] "Qingben ke Liaozhai zhiyi liyan," Zhang Youhe, p. 28. Zhao's 16-*juan* collection contains a total of 431 tales. Zhang Youhe's "*sanhuiben*" 三會本 edition, in 12 *juan* and an appendix, contains 491 tales.

As Zhao Qigao himself suggested, the deletion of the forty-eight tales was an editorial choice based not only on style, but also on content. Stylistically, most of the items that had been excised are brief and simple in form, which confirms their *zhiguai* pedigree. Many deleted items (such as "A Freak Melon" 瓜異, "The Clam" 蛤, "A Passion for Snakes" 蛇癖, "Rabbits Born from Mud" 土化兔 and "Red Characters" 赤字) are as short as one or two lines and range from short descriptions to rudimentary narratives. However, some equally short *zhiguai* items were kept in Zhao's edition ("Sharp Knife" 快刀, "The Rolling Head" 頭滾 and "Fox in a Bottle" 狐入瓶) whereas some fairly well developed tales ("Pulling Intestines," "The Wife of the Zhang Family" 張氏婦 and "Sex with a Dog" 犬奸) were left out. This suggests that brevity of form was not the determining factor in Zhao's choice and that the *content* of these deleted items warrants a closer look.

Among the deleted tales, the ones that stand out because of problematic content are the ones that depict war and unrest in the aftermath of the Manchu conquest. In "The Ghost Clerks" 鬼隸, a tale Zhao had censored, Pu Songling mentions the massacre of Jinan 濟南 (capital of Shandong): "Shortly after the northern army [the Manchus] came, and the massacre of Jinan began. The number of corpses amounted to a million 未幾北兵大至，屠濟南，扛屍百萬." In "The Wife of the Zhang Family," another tale left out of Zhao's edition, Pu Songling gives graphic accounts of rapacious and debauched soldiers:

> When the Three Feudatories revolted in the year of Jiayin [1674], the southbound government troops reached Yanzhou [in southern Shandong]

and camped there. The soldiers looted the area completely and raped the women. It was the rainy season, and the fields were flooded into lakes. Many fleeing villagers sought refuge in flooded sorghum fields. After finding out about this, the soldiers stripped themselves naked, and rode out to the fields on horseback. They searched for women in the water and raped them. Few escaped.

甲寅歲，三藩作反，南征之士，養馬衮郡，雞犬廬舍一空，婦女皆被淫汙。時遭霪雨，田中瀦水為湖，民無所匿，遂乘桴入高粱叢中。兵知之，裸體乘馬，入水搜淫，鮮有遺脫。[14]

These candid depictions of war and suffering have caused much scholarly speculation that Zhao Qigao's editorial choices were primarily governed by political concerns, and that these tales revealed a strong anti-Manchu sentiment on Pu Songling's part.[15] But such an interpretation may in fact reflect the critical biases of the scholars writing in highly ideological environments. Allan Barr has pointed out that during a debate on the question of "nationalist thought" in *Liaozhai* in China during the 1950s, somewhat exaggerated emphasis was laid on Zhao Qigao's suppression of stories that might have

[14] *Liaozhai*, *juan* 11, p. 1527.

[15] Allan Barr has identified the soldiers involved in "The Wife of the Zhang Family" as Mongols, not Manchus. See Barr, "*Liaozhai zhiyi* zhong suo sheji de 'Sanfan zhi luan' shiji kao," *Liaozhai xue yanjiu lunji*, ed. Zhang Yongzheng and Sheng Wei, Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian, 2001, pp. 194-197.

offended the Qing authorities, while in fact, only a handful of tales were likely to have been censored purely for political reasons.[16]

Curiously, many equally frank depictions of war and massacre such as “Someone from Zhucheng” 諸城某甲, “The Ghost Cry” 鬼哭, “The Wild Dog” 野狗, “Han Fang” 韓方, and “Gongsun Jiuniang” 公孫九娘 are included in Zhao’s edition and various manuscript versions. The story, “Gongsun Jiuniang” is especially heart-wrenching in its description of mass killings, death, and suffering resulting from the atrocities of the Manchu troops:

> Most of those who were involved in the Yu Qi Revolt and were subsequently executed came from the counties of Qixia and Laiyang. As many as several hundreds a day were captured and killed in the military-training fields. Blood soaked the ground and the white bones of the corpses piled up to the sky. The local magistrates, who were sympathetic, donated timber for coffins. Almost all the timber in Jinan wood workshops was emptied. Many of the executed people were buried in the southern suburbs, where their ghosts lingered.
>
> 于七一案，連坐被誅者，棲霞、萊陽兩縣最多。一日俘數百人，盡戮於演武場中。碧血滿地，白骨撐天。上官慈悲，捐給棺木，濟城工肆，材木一空。以故伏刑東鬼，多葬南郊。[17]

[16] Barr, “Textual Transmission,” p. 533. For details of this debate, see Yang Renkai 楊仁愷, *Liaozhai zhiyi yuangao yanjiu* 聊齋志異原稿研究, Liaoning renmin chubanshe (1958), pp. 48-58; and Lin Mingjun 林名均, “*Liaozhai* zhiyi suo biaoxian de minzu sixiang” 聊齋志異所表現的民族思想, in *Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu lunwen ji* 明清小說研究論文集, Renmin wenxue chubanshe (1959) pp. 39-70.

[17] *Liaozhai, juan* 4, p. 477.

The case of Yu Qi refers to the Manchu crackdown of the peasant revolt that took place in 1661-62, when Pu Songling would have already come of age. Both Qixia and Laiyang counties were located in eastern Shandong, not far from Pu Songling's native Zichuan. The same historical incident also serves as the backdrop of another *Liaozhai* story, "The Wild Dog": "In the case of Yu Qi, there was a frightful mass slaughter" 于七之亂，殺人如麻. In "The Ghost Cry", Pu Songling again set the story in his native Zichuan, against the background of the revolt of Xie Qian 謝遷之變 (1646-47).

The fact that Zhao Qigao kept these tales that seem just as politically sensitive supports Allan Barr's contention that political sensitivity was not a major concern in Zhao's editorial decision. But, do these tales imply that Pu Songling was an anti-Manchu writer? If Zhao Qigao appeared somewhat guarded and apprehensive about tales depicting war and genocide perpetuated by the Manchu conquers, Pu Songling, as the author, seemed surprisingly candid in recounting these tragic historical events and largely unconcerned about the political repercussions that these writings might have. While acknowledging the anti-Manchu sentiment in Pu Songling's writing, Chang Chun-shu and Shelley Chang sensibly place this sentiment within a personal rather than political context: "Such feelings were neither based on Pu Songling's dynastic loyalty to the Ming nor on nationalistic sentiments. Pu Songling… considered himself a Qing subject, not a Ming loyalist. He wrote his stories as a sensitive writer, a historical minded observer, and an artistic transmitter of local folklore."[18]

[18] Chang & Chang, *Redefining History*, p. 141. Earlier in the book, the authors argue that Pu Songling believed in loyalty to the dynasty in which one was raised. Pu Songling had reservations about his father's

Born a few years before the fall of the Ming, Pu Songling could have written these horrific war accounts on the basis of written sources, hearsay, eyewitnesses, and possibly certain childhood memories. In most of these accounts, Pu Songling eschewed the allegorical means of ghosts and foxes, which suggests that they were written more as gut-level responses to human suffering, rather than as carefully constructed political allegory or satire. If these tales are to be understood as anti-Manchu, they must be first understood as anti-war and anti-barbarism.

While an excessively political interpretation might overpower the personal and emotional dimensions of Pu Songling's tales, an overemphasis on the deletion of anti-Manchu tales also allows ideological concerns to drown out other aspects of Zhao Qigao's editorial decisions. Zhao's editorial choices were likely to have been guided by a combination of literary, political and commercial motives, but a second look at the deleted tales begins to reveal less obvious psychological, emotional, and moral factors at work. Most of the deleted items do not seem to be noticeably different from standard *zhiguai*, although there seems to be a higher concentration of what Lydia Chiang calls "the grotesque." Read one after another, these tales begin to build up an accumulative effect of dread and horror. The censored tales about the Manchu massacres of course contain their own share of horrific deaths, piles of corpses and incessant ghostly cries. But even tales outside the context of war are filled with the grotesque, the ghostly, and the animalistic.

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participation in the local resistance against Ming-loyalist rebels, and he considered himself a subject of the Manchu's Qing Dynasty. See Chang & Chang, p. 26.

The two "grotesque" tales that have been discussed in Chapter Two, "Ghost Saliva" 鬼津 and "Pulling Intestines" 抽腸 are both among the deleted. In addition to these tales about disembowelment and unwanted bodily fluids, we find more than a few other deleted tales that depict bowel movement ("Lieutenant Yang" 楊千總); strange eating habits ("A Passion for Snakes" 蛇癖 and "Jin Shicheng" 金世成, a man who has a passion for scabs); and unusual sexual behaviour ("Sex with a Dog" and "The Wife of the Local Earth God" 土地夫人). "Sex with a Dog" and "The Wife of the Local Earth God" are particularly unsettling not just because of the themes of bestiality and sexual transgression, but also because both tales depict the alien invasion and defilement of the conjugal bed between husband and wife. The moral questions these tales raise are so pressing that Pu Songling is compelled to offer extensive authorial comments after the narrative, a practice that is unusual in his *zhiguai* anecdotes. The two tales about the ghosts of hanged women ("The Merchant's Wife" 商人婦 and "The Hanged Ghost" 縊鬼) are also among the deleted. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, these two tales ask hard-hitting questions about the welfare of the female ghosts and provide crucial evidence of Pu Songling's empathy for and identification with the ghosts' predicament.

Far from being "dull and superficial" 意味平淺 as Zhao Qigao suggested, these tales are disturbing and shocking even to someone who might have grown blasé from overexposure to *zhiguai*. Pu Songling's own impassioned comments on some of these tales testify to their intrigue and attraction. By deleting these tales, Zhao Qigao also denied access to some important windows of the author's self-expression.

It is possible that temperamentally and emotionally, Zhao Qigao found it hard to stomach the fruits of Pu Songling's darker imagination and less-than-refined taste. It is

also possible that on an intellectual level, Zhao Qigao found it difficult to deal with some of the morally controversial issues raised in these tales and the positions that Pu Songling took. In this light, "The Wife of the Zhang Family" could have been deleted not only because of its theme of war and conquest but also because of its candid depiction of rape and debauchery. By deleting such tales, Zhao Qigao also inadvertently erased some of the sharp edges of important personal, emotional, and moral dimensions of Pu Songling's work. From this perspective, Zhao Qigao's edition had accomplished the goal of elevating *Liaozhai* above "standard *zhiguai*" with a double-edged sword: on one hand, Zhao accentuated Pu Songling's literary and aesthetic sophistication; but on the other hand, his editorial changes somewhat diminished the unorthodox leanings and the "minor" positions of Pu Songling's work. In the broader context of *zhiguai*, these and similar critical interventions may have helped to augment *zhiguai*'s literary prestige, but they also began a process in which a once-diverse minor discourse became gradually homogenized.

Ji Yun's Solution

While *Liaozhai*'s status as *zhiguai* seems to have been taken for granted by Pu Songling's literary associates such as Gao Heng and Tang Menglai and by his early promoters such as Zhao Qigao, it was not so in the wider literary community. The literary status of *Liaozhai* was contested even until the nineteenth century. Ji Yun紀昀 (1724-1805) was the first prominent literary figure to openly criticize *Liaozhai* on the basis of literary genre. An influential scholar-official and himself a prolific writer of *zhiguai*, Ji Yun famously took Pu Songling to task and rejected *Liaozhai* as a bona fide

work of *zhiguai*. In 1783, Sheng Shiyan 盛時彥, a student of Ji Yun's, wrote a colophon in the fourth instalment of *So I Heard* 姑妄聽之, part of Ji Yun's own *zhiguai* collection, *Random Jottings at the Cottage of Close Scrutiny* 閱微草堂筆記. In this colophon, Sheng Shiyan includes a long quote from Ji Yun, in which Ji compares *Liaozhai* to famous *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* works in the Chinese narrative tradition:[19]

> Master Ji once said: "*Liaozhai* was immensely popular for a time, but it was penned by a literary talent, not by a serious scholar.[20] From Yu Chu down to Gan Bao, the ancient books were mostly lost.[21] Among those that have survived, Liu Jingshu's *Yiyuan* and Tao Qian's *Xu Soushenji* belong to *xiaoshuo* [minor discourses];[22] *Feiyan waizhuan* and *Huizhen ji* belong to biography.[23] *Taiping guangji* [which includes these works] is a compendium organized around themes and therefore it naturally includes both of these genres. Now, *Liaozhai* is one book, but in two genres. This

[19] Ji Yun, *Yueweicaotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記, *juan* 18, pp. 471-473.

[20] *Zhushuzhe* 著書者, literally means one who compiles books, mostly likely books of histories, biographies, and other higher genres. I translate it as "serious scholar," to distinguish it from caizi 才子, a literary talent who is not recognized as a writer of serious books.

[21] Yu Chu is the author of *Zhoushou* 周說 (Discourses of Zhou), a mythological story collection that appeared in the Han 漢 Dynasty (202 BC- 220 AD), but is no longer extant. Gan Bao is the author of *Soushenji* 搜神記 (In Search of Spirits), which appeared in the Jin 晉 Dynasty (265-420). The period from the late Han (the early 3rd century) to the Six Dynasties (the late 6th century) saw the first flourishing of written accounts of strange phenomena, and was the golden age of *zhiguai* 志怪 in Chinese literature.

[22] *Yiyuan* 異苑 (Garden of the Strange) is a collection of stories of strange phenomena by Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (? - ca. 470). Tao Qian 陶潛 (365-427) is the attributed author of *Xu Soushenji* 續搜神記 (Sequel to In Search of Spirits), but the authorship is questionable. Ji Yun categorizes both under *xiaoshuo* 小說, a term that refers to miscellaneous records at the time. In this usage, *xiaoshuo* seems to be a larger term for non-official narratives that include *zhiguai*.

[23] *Huizhen ji*, collected in *Taiping guangji*, is more commonly known as *Yingyingzhuan* 鶯鶯傳, a famous *chuanqi* 傳奇 tale by the Tang poet, Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831).

is inexplicable. *Xiaoshuo* records what is seen and heard in narrative form, unlike the scenes in a drama, which can be embellished at will. Ling Xuan's biography is derived from the words of Fanyi, therefore it's detailed and elaborate.[24] Yuan Zhen's accounts are based on autobiographical information; therefore they are brief sketches. Even when Yang Sheng'an forged the *Mixin* (Secret Histories), he was aware of this difference, because he was knowledgeable about classical works.[25] Now, flirtatious words, amorous demeanours, fine details and intricate plots are vividly described [in Pu Songling's work]. It would seem unlikely that he would describe himself in such a manner. If the author is relating somebody else's story, how could he ever have seen and heard such things? This is also inexplicable. Frankly, I cannot match one ten thousandth of Pu Songling's talent. Yet in these two matters, the summer insect still cannot help being puzzled by ice."

先生嘗曰："聊齋志異盛行一時，然才子之筆，非著書者之筆也。虞初以下，干寶以上，古書多佚矣。其可見完帙者，劉敬叔異苑、陶潛續搜神記，小說類也；飛燕外傳、會真記，傳記類也。太平廣記，事以類聚，故可並收。今一書而兼二體，所未解也。小說既述見聞，即

[24] According to Lingxuan's postscript to his biography of Zhao Feiyan (*Feiyan waizhuan*), his concubine Fan Tongde 樊通德 was related to Fanyi 樊嬿, a main character in *Feiyan waizhan* who lived in the Han court. Because of this relationship, Lingxuan's biography is believed to be based on first-hand sources.

[25] Also called *Zashi mixin* 雜事秘辛 (Miscellaneous Secret Histories), a Han Dynasty collection that is believed to have been forged by the Ming author Yang Sheng'an [Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559)].

屬敍事，不比戲場關目，隨意裝點。伶玄之傳，得諸樊嬈，故猥瑣具詳；元稹之記，出於自述，故約略梗概。楊升庵偽撰秘辛，尚知此意，升庵多見古書故也。今燕昵之詞、媟狎之態，細微曲折，摹繪如生。使出自言，似無此理；使出作者代言，則何從而聞見之？又所未解也。留仙之才，余誠莫逮其萬一；惟此二事，則夏蟲不免疑冰。”[26]

The two genres that Ji Yun mentions here are not *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*—the two genres that are commonly referenced in modern *Liaozhai* studies—but *xiaoshuo* and *zhuanji*. Ji Yun uses the somewhat broader term *xiaoshuo* to denote the tradition of "minor discourse," in which *zhiguai* is included. His eschewing of the term *chuanqi*, on the other hand, suggests a complete dismissal of *chuanqi* as a serious literary genre.[27] Ji Yun considers himself a scholar (*zhushuzhe*), not a mere literary talent (*caizi*). Judging from the perspective of a scholar, *chuanqi*'s status, due to its inclination toward fictionalizing, is no doubt even lower and more marginal than that of *zhiguai*. Instead of *chuanqi*, Ji Yun, perhaps unfairly, judges Pu Songling's long narratives against *zhuanji* (biography), a recognized genre of official historiography.[28]

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[26] Quoted and translated from Sheng Shiyan's colophon, in Ji Yun, *Yueweicaotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記, *juan* 18, p. 472.

[27] In the Annotated Catalogue of *Siku quanshu*, *zhiguai* is one of the three categories of *xiaoshuo* in the "Philosophers" section. By contrast, *chuanqi* is completely excluded as a category from the catalogue. See William Hung's introduction to SKQS catalogue in *HJAS*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1939): 47-58.

[28] One of the works that Ji Yun uses as an example of *zhuanji* (biography), Yuan Zhen's *Huizhen ji* (a.k.a. *Yingying zhuan*), has been widely recognized as a quintessential work of Tang *chuanqi*, even though the tale is believed to be based on Yuan Zhen's own experience as a young scholar. See James Hightower, "Yuan Chen and 'The Story of Ying Ying,'" *HJAS*, vol. 33 (1973): 90-123.

At the beginning, Ji Yun seems to be raising objections to Pu Songling's commingling of two genres—*xiaoshuo* (minor discourses) and *zhuanji* (biographical narratives)—in a single body of work, a practice without precedent. But in the end, the real thrust of Ji Yun's criticism is turned against Pu Songling's undisciplined fictional embellishments. The fictional flourishes in Pu Songling's narrative, in which factually suspect elements are presented as real, are seen as at odds with the criteria of objectivity and plausibility in *xiaoshuo* and *zhuanji*, both historical genres by Ji Yun's estimation. Pu Songling's literary faux pas, according to Ji Yun, is not so much that he included two genres, or two modes of narrative writing in one book. (Ji Yun does make an exception for the genre-mixing in *Tangping guangji*, on the grounds that it is a thematically organized anthology.) The real mistake that Pu has made is his failure to adhere to the literary conventions of *either* one of the two genres; and *that* is without historical precedents.

As Leo Chan has succinctly put it, "few *zhiguai* writers before Pu undertook the drastic move of virtually abandoning the link between *zhiguai* narratives and circumstantial, objective reality." Therefore, Chan calls Ji Yun's rejection of *Liaozhai* "a rejection of the aesthetic mode."[29] Considering Ji Yun's real critical thrust, this rejection of the "aesthetic mode" in *Liaozhai* might be alternatively called a rejection of the *chuanqi* mode, or more explicitly, the fictional mode. *Chuanqi* has never been accepted as part of historiography, whereas *zhiguai* has always been considered a historical genre, however minor. Pu Songling's mixing of *zhiguai* with *chuanqi*, judged harshly, would have been tantamount to literary blasphemy. In writing *Liaozhai*, Pu Songling aspired to

[29] Leo Chan, *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, pp. 166-167.

become a "historian of the strange," modeling his authorial comments after Sima Qian, the great Han dynasty historian. Pu Songling could have been utterly sincere as a self-styled historian. Ji Yun, on the other hand, might have taken Pu's literary posture to be a parody or even wilful subversion of historiography. To Ji Yun, *Liaozhai* was treading on the anarchic borderline of fiction.

Ji Yun's objections to *Liaozhai* were confirmed when he pointedly omitted *Liaozhai* from *Siku quanshu*, the Qianlong imperial library for which Ji Yun was the chief editor. In the role of court bibliographer, Ji Yun was particularly involved in setting generic standards. In his introduction to the *Siku quanshu* catalogue, Ji Yun laid out his theory of *xiaoshuo* and his criterion of selection:

> If *xiaoshuo* is to be classified, there will be roughly three branches: the one that recounts miscellaneous affairs; the one that records strange stories; and the one that collects hearsay and gossip. Since the Tang and the Song, works of this genre have multiplied. Many *xiaoshuo* accounts are untruthful. But, mixed among them, there are some that are useful for didactic, educational, or scholarly purposes. [In *Hanshu*] Ban Gu claimed that the writers of *xiaoshuo* were mostly appointed local officials. According to Ruchun's annotation of *Hanshu*, the rulers and kings wanted to be informed of the talks in the alleyways and the customs of the local people, and therefore they appointed officials to collect and report matters of this sort. So there began the project of broad gleaning and collecting. These are documents made by the ancients, and should not be abandoned

> because of their miscellaneous and trivial nature. Among these, I selected the ones with a certain measure of elegance and refinement to broaden our learning. As for those that are obscene and outlandish, those that merely distract our sight and hearing, they have no place in this collection and are to be discarded.
>
> 跡其流別, 凡有三派:其一敍述雜事, 其一記錄異聞, 其一綴輯瑣語也。唐宋而後, 作者彌繁。中間誣謾失真, 妖妄熒聽者, 固為不少;然寓勸戒、廣見聞、資考證者, 亦錯出其中。班固稱小說家流, 蓋出於稗官。如淳注謂王者欲知閭巷風俗, 故立稗官, 使稱說之。然則博采旁搜, 是亦古制, 固不必以雜冗廢矣。今甄錄其近雅馴者, 以廣見聞。惟猥鄙荒誕, 徒亂耳目者, 則黜而不載焉。[30]

It is clear from this introduction that Ji Yun still considers *xiaoshuo* a lowly genre, but one with didactic and scholarly value. His classification of the three branches of *xiaoshuo* highlights the act of writing—recounting, recording, collecting—which suggests that while the results of these actions may be meagre, the act of writing is itself a worthy endeavour that has benefited both rulers and commoners. The emphasis on the act, not the result, further accentuates the view that *xiaoshuo* is the serious undertaking of a historian, not a frivolous occasion for the literati to flaunt their talents. His enumeration

[30] Quoted and translated from "Xiaoshuojia lei xuwen" 小說家類序文, in *Siku zongmu tiyao* 四庫總目提要 (*zibu* 子部).

of the various debased forms of the genre (the obscene, the outlandish) implies a much harsher judgment on *Liaozhai* than the one quoted by Sheng Shiyan, a judgment verified by his rejection of *Liaozhai* from *Siku quanshu*. Pu Songling's work did not even make it into the annotated catalogue that accompanied the library, in which many *zhiguai* works were included in the *xiaoshuo* category.

As to why *Liaozhai* was excluded from *Siku quanshu* and why Ji Yun suppressed it, scholarly opinion has been deeply divided. The official reason, as Ji Yun's own writing suggests, is that *Liaozhai* was rejected based on the issue of genre, or more precisely, due to its failure to adhere to historical genre conventions. But we cannot completely rule out a certain degree of professional envy, considering the fame and popularity that *Liaozhai* was quickly gaining in the late eighteenth century.[31] Moreover, Ji's criticism of the obscene must have been directed against the frank depiction of sexuality in some *Liaozhai* tales, thus adding a moralistic element to this literary dispute. *Liaozhai*'s political sensitivity, which neither Ji Yun nor his associates alluded to in the context of *Siku quanshu*, does not seem to be the determining factor in Ji Yun's editorial decision.

Scholarly interpretations of Ji Yun's critical intervention generally fall into two camps: those that ascribe the snub to *Liaozhai*'s ambiguous status in terms of literary genre, and those that cite the book's perceived political sensitivity as the reason. The former seems to be the more grounded explanation. It has been backed by solid evidence

[31] A sense of literary rivalry is evident in the colophon quoted earlier, as Sheng Shiyan, after quoting Ji Yun's criticism of *Liaozhai*, goes on to praise Ji Yun's own *zhiguai* writing for its "formal discipline and precision of detail, which set his work leagues apart from that of a mere literary talent" 如疊矩重規，毫釐不失，灼然與才子之筆，分路而揚鑣. Quoted and translated from Sheng Shiyan's colophon, in Ji Yun, *Yueweicaotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記, *juan* 18, p. 473.

and sound scholarly argument. But over time, it is the latter, the more sensational interpretation that has gained the most adherents. The view—that the purported anti-Manchu sentiment in a number of *Liaozhai* tales was the reason for its exclusion from the Qianlong Imperial Library—has become almost a critical platitude. The anonymous remark below, frequently quoted by many scholars, is self-evident in its apocryphal nature as well as its wide currency:

> Rumour has it that *Liaozhai* was not included in the "*xiaoshuo*" section of the imperial library because the story, "The Rakshas and the Sea Market," contains anti-Manchu sentiments and intimations of a political satire. For example, the reference to females dressed in male clothing clearly alludes to a Manchu custom. This allusion, along with the depiction of reversed standards of beauty and ugliness, was condemned and rejected.
>
> 故老相傳，志異之不為四庫全書說部所收者，該以羅剎海市一則，含有譏諷滿人，非刺時政之意，如云女子效男兒裝，乃言旗俗，遂與美不見容，醜乃愈貴諸事，同遭擯斥也.[32]

Not only does this widely publicized view cite the anti-Manchu proclivity of *Liaozhai* as the reason for its exclusion from the Qing literary canon, it also singles out one particular *Liaozhai* tale, namely, "The Rakshas and the Sea Market" ("Luosha haishi"), as the

[32] Jiang Ruizao 蔣瑞藻, *Xiaoshuo kaozheng shiyi* 小說考證拾遺. Quoted and translated from Zhu Yixuan, p. 518.

culprit responsible for *Liaozhai*'s subjection to censorship. In this story, Pu Songling describes an appallingly ugly race and names its country the Rakshasa—a Buddhist term that refers to both barbarians and man-devouring demons. Not surprisingly, the Rakshas are just as appalled by the arrival of a young Chinese traveling merchant, who is seen as the most grotesque-looking man they have ever encountered. One inhabitant of the Rakshasa finally plucks up his courage and explains: "I once heard my grandfather say that twenty-six thousand miles to the west lies the Middle Kingdom; its people all look strange. I used to treat it as hearsay; only today do I believe it." 嘗聞祖父言： 西去二萬六千里，有中國，其人民形象率詭異。但耳食之，今始信.[33]

There is no clear indication that Pu Songling describes the dresses of Rakshasa women in the Manchu style, as Jiang Ruizao's quote claims. However, depicting a world where the beautiful and the ugly, the ordinary and the extraordinary are completely reversed, "The Rakshas and the Sea Market" certainly lends itself to being interpreted as a political satire. In the story, the young Chinese merchant puts on an ugly mask every time he goes to the Rakshasa court, where his disguise wins him tremendous praise. This seems to allude to the fact that the Manchus demanded that all Chinese men shave and braid their hair in the way the Manchus did. Such allusions, interpreted as Pu Songling's veiled criticism of the former Ming officials who sought to please their new Manchu masters by putting on ugly masks, have prompted an overwhelmingly allegorical reading of the story.

However, the postscript by the "Historian of the Strange" suggests that the author has a less political-minded take on the story:

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[33] *Liaozhai, juan* 4, p. 455.

> People put on false faces to faun on their superiors—the way of men is no different from the way of ghosts. The taste for scabs is the same the world over. "Something of which you feel slightly ashamed may win you some praise, and something you feel utterly ashamed of may win you greater praise." But the man who dares to show his true face in public is almost certain to shock the multitude and scare them away. Of old, the stubborn man of Lingyang held a piece of priceless jade in his arms, but the king did not recognize it, so he cried. Alas! Name and fortune are only to be found in a mirage!
>
> 花面逢迎，世情如鬼。嗜痂之癖，舉世一轍。小慚小好，大慚大好。若公然帶鬚眉以遊都市，其不駭而走者蓋幾希矣！彼陵陽癡子，將抱連城玉向何處哭也？嗚呼！顯榮富貴，當於蜃樓海市中求之耳！[34]

Here Pu Songling's language does not seem politically charged, but is instead infused with literary and cultural allusions, making it possible to approach the story from a more personal, non-political point of view. According to Lü Zhan'en's annotation, the phrase "*xiaocan xiaohao, dacan dahao* 小慚小好，大慚大好" originated from a letter the Tang poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) wrote to Feng Su, in which Han discusses the embarrassing situation of being forced to write something from social pressure, and yet winning great

[34] Ibid., p. 464.

praise for what he has half-heartedly written. [35] The Ming dynasty artist and writer Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593) later elaborated on Han Yu's sentiment with the lament—"the less satisfied I am with my own writing, the greater praise I win from the others" 小慚者人以為小好，大慚者則必以為大好.[36] Here, Pu Songling seems to be sharing Han Yu and Xu Wei's frustration at not being recognized, or at being misrecognized, for their literary talent.

The references to the "stubborn man of Lingyang" 陵陽癡子 and the "priceless jade" 連城玉 allude to a story of the Spring and Autumn period: Bian He 卞和, a man from the kingdom of Chu, was in possession of a piece of rare jade. He presented the jade to King Li 楚厲王, but the king thought it was a fake and had Bian He's left foot amputated. When King Wu 楚武王succeeded the throne, Bian He again presented his jade to the court. His right foot was amputated. When King Wen 楚文王became the ruler, Bian He dared not present his jade to the court again. Instead he roamed in the wilderness and cried until his tears turned to blood. King Wen finally found him and recognized the jade for what it was worth. But Bian He left the court without accepting the king's reward.[37]

This *Hanfezi* parable about the difficulty of being recognized as worthy lends Pu Songling's story an unmistakable autobiographical tone. It is well known that Pu Songling's examination career had been a spectacular failure. With a strongly self-

[35] Han Yu 韓愈, "Yu Feng Su lunwen shu" 與馮宿論文書, as quoted in Lü Zhan'en's annotation of "Luosha haishi," *Liaozhai*, *juan* 4, p. 464.

[36] See "Hugong wenji xu" 胡公文集序, in *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), vol. 4, *juan* 19.

[37] *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, "Heshi" 和氏.

referential comment attached to the end, this story was clearly intended to be an expression of Pu Songling's frustration at not being recognized, rather than a critique of the larger social and political problems. The literary reference to Han Yu and Xu Wei also suggests that, at this point, the author was probably not even concerned about succeeding in his examination career, but rather finding true recognition of his literary talent, as the writer of *Liaozhai*.

The fact that "The Rakshas and the Sea Market" can be read on both political and personal levels from different critical perspectives raises the question: How politically subversive was Pu Songling's story intended to be? The fact that this story was not censored in Zhao Qigao's influential first publication raises another question: How politically subversive did the story seem in the eyes of *Liaozhai* publishers, critics, readers, and the *Siku quanshu* editors? Ji Yun and Zhao Qigao both operated on predominantly literary grounds, and yet their acts of censorship were subsequently interpreted in an overwhelmingly political light. The fact that critics of later generation repeatedly allude to *Liaozhai*'s anti-Manchu inclinations brings up a third question: Does this perceived political subversiveness reinforce or limit *Liaozhai*'s relevance as a "minor discourse"?

The Issue of "Minor Discourse"

Political sensitivity could not have been the main source of *Liaozhai*'s critical relevance. Considering the circumstances under which most *Liaozhai* stories were written and transmitted, they could not have been considered politically dangerous during Pu Songling's lifetime. After Pu Songling's death, *Liaozhai* was allowed publication and

wide dissemination. The fact that the book, although in somewhat edited form, survived the series of literary inquisitions during the Qing does not support an overly political interpretation of the work. The most widely circulated *Liaozhai* version during the Qing was based on Zhao Qigao's "clean" edition, which excised tales deemed politically sensitive. However, follow-up collections of the missing tales were produced throughout the nineteenth century.[38] This would even put the subversive nature of the excised tales into question. Periodical cleansing of the literary stage was inevitable in the wake of each literary inquisition, but there was no evidence of an official proscription on *Liaozhai*, nor had there ever been a prolonged ban on the book before the twentieth century.

Ironically, it is the twentieth-century scholars who are the most vehement proponents of the interpretation of *Liaozhai* as a decidedly anti-Manchu work, and of Pu Songling as an author driven by strong political motivations. This critical inclination gained much currency in the ideological climate of Communist China during the 1950s, and the ideological interest in *Liaozhai* remained strong throughout the rest of the twentieth century.[39] In a book published in 1993, Zhu Jidun 朱紀敦 takes up the task of reinterpreting *Liaozhai* as a political allegory coloured by intense anti-Manchu sentiments.[40] Zhu selects twenty-four *Liaozhai* tales and attempts to link them with important historical figures and events during the Ming-Qing dynastic transition, mainly

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[38] The earliest collection of *Liaozhai* tales that are absent from Zhao's edition is Duan Yu's 段[栗玉] *Liaozhai zhiyi yigao* 聊齋志異遺稿 (1824), which contains fifty-six tales. In 1830, Hu Dingsheng 胡定生 produced *Liaozhai zhiyi shiyi* 聊齋志異拾遺, with forty-two tales. See Liu Jieping 劉階平, *Liaozhai zhiyi yigao jizhu* 聊齋志異遺稿輯注, Zhonghua shuju 1969, pp. 2-3.

[39] Parallel to this scholarly tendency is the appropriation of *Liaozhai* in twentieth-century political discourse, a subject that I will take up in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

[40] Zhu Jidun, *Liaozhai mingpian suoyin* 聊齋名篇索隱.

by recombining isolated phrases or finding homonyms that might yield up hidden political messages.

To uncover Pu Songling's political intent, Zhu cites the enigmatic "Red Characters" 赤字, the shortest entry in *Liaozhai*, as an example of Pu's politically charged "riddles":

> 順治乙未冬夜，天上赤字如火。其文云：白苕代靖否復議朝冶馳。
>
> One winter night during the Yiwei year of the Shunzhi reign [1655], the following characters, as red as fire, appeared in the sky: 白苕代靖否復議朝冶馳.

After a complicated process of deciphering, Zhu concludes that the first two characters (白苕) and the last two characters (冶馳), when ideogramatically or phonetically combined, could refer to the Ming and the Qing respectively; and therefore the first half of the sentence is Pu Songling's question to heaven ("Is the Ming safe and sound?" 明代靖否), whereas the second half of the sentence, read in reverse, is Heaven's reply ("The Qing is bound to collapse." 清朝議復). Thus Zhu not only manages to inject a strong anti-Manchu political message into the "riddle," he also tries to re-establish the beginning date of *Liaozhai*'s composition at as early as 1655, the twelfth year of the Shunzhi reign.[41]

[41] Ibid., pp. 180-85.

While the portentous nature of the red characters in the sky seems obvious, it is unlikely that Pu Songling was responsible for inventing this heavenly message in 1655, at the tender age of fifteen. Furthermore, textual evidence suggests that Pu Songling was but one of the recorders, rather than the original creator, of this and many other anecdotal entries. A similar record of the enigmatic red characters (with slight variations) is found in *Chibei outan* 池北偶談, a *biji* collection by Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634-1711), Pu Songling's contemporary and also a Shandong native.[42]

"The Red Characters" was among the anecdotes that Zhao Qigao left out of the first print edition he edited. However, the terse account might have been dropped mainly for its lack of narrative interest. Even if Zhao deleted this anecdote because of its political sensitivity, the sensitivity is less a result of authorial intention than the perception of the editors. The tightened ideological and literary control during the Qianlong reign (1735-1796) might have meant that editors and publishers such Zhao Qigao had to be more politically circumspect than Pu Songling and his contemporaries.

In addition to parsing phrases for hidden messages, Zhu Jidun questions the political implications of Pu Songling's depiction of familiar cultural icons, such as the dragon. In several short, anecdotal dragon tales in *Liaozhai*, Pu Songling portrays the dragon either as a mythical figure associated with popular rain rituals ("The Dragon That Draws Water" 龍取水), as a dark and mysterious force of nature ("The Dragon Without Eyes" 龍無目), or as a cultural icon whose worship is both observed and breached

[42] Wang Shizhen, *Chibei outan* 池北偶談, *juan* 26. Wang Shizhen's record is entitled "*Tianshang chizi*" 天上赤字" (Red characters in the sky). The main difference in Wang's version is an extra line at the end: "[The words] dispersed after quite a while; they were reportedly seen all over the Yi and Ju area" 移時始散，沂莒間皆見之. Wang's report further suggests that the characters were unlikely Pu Songling's creation.

("Dragon Meat" 龍肉). These often-unflattering images of the dragon, Zhu argues, could be seen as a deliberate turning away from the dragon's conventional symbolism as the representation of regal power, and therefore, must be considered politically subversive. The fact that many of these dragon tales are absent from Zhao Qigao's 1766 edition seems to bolster Zhu's allegorical interpretation. However, the *Liaozhai* entries on dragons are of an anecdotal and folkloristic quality, and as such they would have had a close affinity with folk rituals of dragon worship, which was still very popular during the Ming-Qing period. If these tales were meant as political allegories, they would have reflected grass-root resistance to the imperial appropriation of a folk symbol, but in a broad sense rather a strictly anti-Manchu sense. As an important icon in Han Chinese culture, the dragon would have remained an ambiguous vehicle for an "anti-Manchu" allegory.

It is intriguing that when censorship occurs, the political interpretation inevitably overwhelms other possible explanations for the critical intervention, such as literary, moral, socio-economic, and much-overlooked personal concerns. It would be self-deceiving to deny the sensitive subject matter of many *Liaozhai* tales, for the ghost itself had long been the subject of a controversial cultural discourse. However, citing the anti-Manchu sentiments as the main or the only reason for Zhao Qigao's editorial censorship and for the book's exclusion from *Siku quanshu* oversimplifies the complex strands of literary, personal, commercial, as well as ideological considerations that were at play in the book's history of reception. Critics and scholars writing under specific cultural conditions may have also brought their own ideological biases and political agendas into the interpretation of particular tales as well as the work as a whole.

In the Chinese tradition, the allegorical approach has long been an important interpretative strategy in both official discourse and the minor discourse of *zhiguai*. During the Han dynasty, the Chinese ruling class has developed a theory of "*chenwei*" 讖緯之學—the interpretation of omens and signs in order to justify the empire's existence and to direct its operations.[43] The appearance of ghosts, demons, or of anything anomalous, was often linked with important events of the day, thus giving these seemingly random and inconsequential phenomena a cultural significance. This type of ancient "semiotics" also became a feature of Six Dynasties *zhiguai*. For example, in "Jia Bizhi" 賈弼之, an anecdote from Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 (403-444) *Youminglu* 幽冥錄, a man wakes up, his head exchanged with that of a very ugly man who appeared in his dream overnight. The story concludes: "Soon after this incident, King An died, and King Gong succeeded the throne." [44] In *zhiguai* accounts like this, strange phenomena are appropriated to justify the ascension of a new ruler or regime. But, in the politically and ideologically fractured Six Dynasties context, such allegorical uses of omens and signs would have constituted various competing "minor" positions rather than a unified and dominant ideology.

In *Strange Writing*, Campany argues that *zhiguai*, by the Six Dynasties, had emerged as an "anti-locative" cosmography, a series of minor philosophical and religious positions that competed with Confucian orthodoxy and with each other.[45] From the perspective of this minor discourse, the political and moral trappings in *zhiguai* tales

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[43] This theory is first systematically expounded in Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露.

[44] Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Youminglu* 幽冥錄, in TPGJ 太平廣記, *juan* 360, item 2.

[45] Robert Campany, *Strange Writing*, pp. 12-14.

could have been employed as a means to justify the dubious literary practice of recording the strange, and to legitimate the human interest in ghosts and spirits outside the kinship system. In this light, the early *zhiguai* writers' justification of their literary practice was not entirely passive or apologetic; they were in active competition with the official discourse for the claim on omens and signs and for the privilege to interpret them.

Pu Songling continued in this vein of "anti-locative" writing centuries later, but he transformed the genre from a form of cosmographic persuasion into a more personal and contemplative expression. *Liaozhai*'s function as a minor discourse, as I have argued in Chapter Two, manifests itself in the work's capabilities for both critiquing the powers at the centre and creating personal alternatives on the periphery. These capabilities are rooted in *Liaozhai*'s affiliation with the tradition of the ghost tale, in both its horror/destructive mode and its enchanting/transformative mode. Pitting Pu Songling's work against its immediate political background prevents us from connecting the "anti-Manchu sentiment" with the broader cultural implications of *zhiguai*, particularly that of the ghost tale. In *Historian of the Strange*, Judith Zeitlin acknowledges that Pu Songling's prolific writing of ghost stories was profoundly linked to the fall of the Ming Dynasty into Manchu rule, but she makes the subtle distinction that Pu's work not only responded to the political turmoil, but also revealed his own anxiety over the anticipated loss of a cultural past.[46] Therefore, launching an over-sweepingly political interpretation by seizing upon a handful of *Liaozhai* tales that are perceived to be anti-Manchu will considerably narrow down *Liaozhai*'s potential as critical cultural discourse. It will let

[46] Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p. 28. Zeitlin further develops the idea in her reading of ghost stories about the palace lady. See *The Phantom Heroine*, Chapter 3, "Ghosts and Historical Time."

political allegories overpower private allegories, such as Pu Songling's desire for personal fulfillment outside the Confucian mainstream and his genuine concern for the welfare of the female ghost. Over-historicizing *Liaozhai* in the "anti-Manchu" context also betrays an ideological impulse to freeze *Liaozhai*'s cultural function in a safe historical distance or even to appropriate *Liaozhai*'s "minor" function to serve a "major" ideology in a different cultural-historical context.

The Issue of Canon

Zhiguai had long been viewed as non-canonical and unfavourably compared to respectable mainstream literature. However, as evidenced by Ji Yun's editorship of *Siku quanshu*, Ji Yun took the genre very seriously. He was intimately involved in setting generic standards, rejecting work that did not comply with those standards and in writing a body of work to exemplify such standards. These efforts clearly indicate a recognition of the value of *zhiguai* and perhaps a desire to elevate its literary status. According to Leo Chan, an independent canon of *zhiguai* had already emerged by the eighteenth century, and *zhiguai* works were evaluated and judged with reference to an implicitly acknowledged group of works, such as *Taiping guangji*, *Yijian zhi*, and Six Dynasties works such as those by Gan Bao and Liu Yiqing. Chan argues that Ji Yun's advocacy of Six Dynasties *zhiguai* and his rejection of *Liaozhai* are both closely related to the question of canonicity, and that the *zhiguai* works of Ji Yun and Yuan Mei could be considered their attempts to articulate vaguely understood theories about *zhiguai* writing.[47]

[47] Leo Chan, p. 161.

This notion of a "*zhiguai* canon" is reiterated by Duan Yongsheng 段庸生 in an article on Ji Yun's rejection of *Liaozhai* from *Siku quanshu*. Duan counters the prevailing view that the rejection was the result of irreconcilable differences between two political standpoints—Ji Yun's orthodoxy vs. Pu Songling's heresy. Instead, Duan offers Ji Yun's *literary* conservatism as the reason for his objection to *Liaozhai*, and argues that as *xiaoshuo* faced challenges from vernacular fiction and drama, Ji's rejection of *Liaozhai* is commendable as an act of resistance to popular taste and as a proactive measure to maintain the artistic integrity of the Chinese *xiaoshuo* tradition.[48]

It is possible that the emerging canonization of *zhiguai* or *xiaoshuo* was already felt by the "first wave" of *Liaozhai* interpreters in the late seventeenth century, who probably did not take the *zhiguai* status of *Liaozhai* for granted. Gao Heng and Tang Menglai's prefaces, instead of defending *Liaozhai* by legitimating the discourse of the strange, would have been attempts to align *Liaozhai* with a minor tradition that was growing in recognition and prestige.

Ji Yun's omission of *Liaozhai* from *Siku quanshu* may not have determined the book's fate in literary history, but it certainly serves as a reminder that the *zhiguai* status of Pu Songling's work should not be taken for granted. Nor does Zhao Qigao's promotion of the aesthetic *chuanqi* mode necessarily imply the recognition of *Liaozhai* as fiction. Both these instances of critical intervention highlighted *Liaozhai*'s genre ambiguity, its "neither/nor" status. Ji Yun's rejection of *Liaozhai* from the *zhiguai* tradition may have been tantamount to the disqualification of *Liaozhai* as *xiaoshuo* in its

[48] Duan Yongsheng 段庸生, "*Liaozhai* zhiyi weineng ru sikuquanshu de wenxue yuanyin" 聊齋志異未能入四庫全書的文學原因 (The literary reasons behind *Liaozhai*'s exclusion from Siku quanshu), *Qiusuo* 求索, 2003, no. 1: 181-184.

original sense of a "minor discourse." But this disqualification reflects not so much *Liaozhai*'s lack of the qualities of traditional *xiaoshuo*, but rather the increasing rigidity of the generic conventions of the once fluid literary practice of *xiaoshuo*. If *xiaoshuo* as a dynamic minor discourse relied on its marginality and generic ambiguity, the canonization of *zhiguai* by separating it from *chuanqi* and other forms of *xiaoshuo* that are less generically pure would have made this tradition no longer "minor." Perhaps then *Liaozhai*'s neither/nor status, namely its generic ambiguity, would have helped *Liaozhai* avoid canonization and retain its minor function?

Ji Yun was not the first, or the only, writer who took note of the importance of the *zhiguai* tradition, nor was he unchallenged in his definition of the genre and his claim on canonicity. Pu Songling, who wrote decades earlier than Ji Yun, was clearly cognizant of the literary tradition of recording the strange. As was made explicit in his preface to *Liaozhai* (1679), Pu Songling had his own literary "canon" in mind, one that included classic *zhiguai* writers such as Gan Bao, as well as a medley of iconoclastic literary figures such as Qu Yuan (340 - 278 BCE), the legendary poet/mystic of the Warring States period, and Li He (791-817), a brief flame of a poet who nonetheless achieved posthumous fame as a "ghost poet." Pu's identification with these unorthodox figures indicates that what he had in mind was a private canon based not so much on genre as it was on mode, outlook, and spiritual affinity—one that is perhaps best described by the term Deleuze and Guattari have bestowed on Kafka: "minor literature."[49]

[49] In *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize a "minor literature" that does not designate specific genres but rather the "revolutionary conditions" for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, trans. Dana Polan (1986), pp. 17-24. This revolutionary condition, in a less politicized sense, aptly describes *Liaozhai*'s uneasy relationship with *zhiguai*, and the potential threat that Pu Songling's writing posed to Chinese

While the Qing literary establishment and arbitrators of literary taste such as Ji Yun and Yuan Mei might have prevented the canonization of *Liaozhai* even in the minor category of *xiaoshuo*, another group of nineteenth-century literati, consisting mainly of *Liaozhai* publishers, editors and commentators, sought to promote Pu Songling's work and establish it in a different canon. Through numerous prefaces, introductions, and commentaries, these *Liaozhai* aficionados with different motivations and agendas joined forces to establish *Liaozhai* as a work of art, a literary masterpiece. Often emphasizing the aesthetic and literary qualities of the work, this literary discourse that had been built around *Liaozhai*, perhaps deliberately, distanced itself from the religious debate on belief, the epistemological differentiation between fact and fiction, and the literary classification based on genre conventions. For *Liaozhai* commentators, aesthetics, perhaps dressed up in the trappings of moral didacticism, justified not only the book's dubious subject matter—the ghost—but also the promiscuous manner of its literary execution.

Judith Zeitlin has identified these nineteenth-century *Liaozhai* advocates as the "third wave" of interpreters, who were responsible for the growing recognition of the work as a model of stylistic brilliance and as a great work of fiction. According to Zeitlin, the third wave of writers, mainly commentators on *Liaozhai*, circumvented the debate on content and subject altogether by focusing on literary style and narrative technique. And with the improved status of vernacular literature in the nineteenth century, *Liaozhai* was

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literary conventions. The parallel between Pu Songling and Kafka has been noted in a comparative study in German by Zhou Jianming. Focusing on the functions of animal figures, Zhou argues that Kafka's animal characters personify the alienated man whereas Pu Songling's fox figures symbolize a longing for human identity and relationships. But in both Kafka and Pu Songling, Zhou suggests, the animal figures also represent an affinity with nature which humans have lost, and hence the human longing for a reunion with nature. See Zhou Jianming. *Tiere in der Literatur: Eine komparatistische Undersuchung der Funktion von Tierfiguren bei Franz Kafka und Pu Songling*. Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1996.

increasingly affiliated with an emergent fictional tradition.[50] Zeitlin points out that *Liaozhai* had become so identified with fiction that the commentator Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮巒 (fl. early 19th century) was compelled to remind the reader that the book actually records many historical events and personalities.[51]

However, nineteenth-century commentators, unlike modern twentieth-century scholars, did not speak of *Liaozhai* unambiguously in the context of Ming-Qing vernacular fiction. To them, *Liaozhai*'s departure from *zhiguai* seemed clear, but they had yet to find for it a suitable literary destination. Among the commentators, Feng Zhenluan was especially free and exuberant in his envisioning of a literary canon for *Liaozhai*. In "Miscellaneous Comments on Reading *Liaozhai* (1818)," Feng suggested four methods of reading *Liaozhai*, comparing it to classical historiography such as *Zuozhuan* and *Shiji*, and philosophical works such as *Zhuangzi* as well as the epigrams of Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi.[52] Feng Zhenluan's pairing of *Liaozhai* with historical and philosophical works seems wildly unconventional and promotional on the surface, but it is in fact a flamboyant take on the long tradition of using historiography as the yardstick for measuring literary excellence. At first glance, Feng's vision of a literary canon based mainly on official historiography and Confucian classics seems more conventional when compared with Pu Songling's eclectic and unorthodox list of literary role models (Gan Bao, Su Shi, Qu Yuan, and Li He). But Feng's positioning of *Liaozhai*,

[50] See Zeitlin's discussion in *Historian of the Strange*, Chapter 1, pp. 15-42.

[51] Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, p. 36.

[52] See Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮巒, "Du *Liaozhai* zashuo" 讀聊齋雜說 (Miscellaneous Comments on Reading *Liaozhai*), in Zhang Youhe's "*sanhuiben*" edition, pp. 9-18.

a work from a minor tradition, among the ranks of *Zuozhuan*, *Shiji* and *Zhuangzi* perhaps reveals an even more idiosyncratic, daring, and controversial notion of literary greatness.

Feng Zhenluan's ambiguity about the canon implies that, up to the nineteenth century, a *literary* canon independent of the traditional system of genre was still in the making, and *Liaozhai*'s literary reception testifies to that process of canon formation. While Ji Yun, in the late eighteenth century, rejected *Liaozhai* from the traditional *xiaoshuo* on epistemological grounds, *Liaozhai* discretely bypassed Ji's canon hierarchy and made its way towards another form of *xiaoshuo*, a term that gradually took on the modern connotation of fiction.

Liaozhai Aesthetics and Ghost Connoisseurship

Liaozhai's literary ascension, from its exclusion from the minor historical genre of *zhiguai* to its acceptance into the mainstay of classical Chinese fiction, is seen as one of the greatest triumphs in Chinese literary history. But such distinction was not achieved without compromises. Much like the tamed *Liaozhai* ghosts, the book has now gone through a similar process of taming and domestication. The three waves of critical and editorial intervention produced two indelible effects on *Liaozhai*: the terse, straightforward records of the strange were further marginalized and obscured, partly by a heavy-handed mechanism of editorial censorship, and partly by a subtle re-interpretation of the tales based on an allegorical reading. Both intervening mechanisms are reductive, moulding *Liaozhai* tales according to a particular literary genre or a certain critical paradigm. Although operating on different premises—be it literary, commercial, personal or ideological—the editors, publishers and commentators of *Liaozhai* each by

necessity eliminated some disparity or unevenness of the collection, creating the accumulative effect of homogenizing what seemed to be an unwieldy body of work.[53] While this process of critical, interpretative, and commercial intervention has helped establish *Liaozhai* as a *major* work, it has also erased many of its qualities of minor discourse. Like the ghost that is dismissed as allegorical, thus losing its own ontological ground, *Liaozhai* is now clearly marked as fiction, and loses the abilities of a "minor literature" to potentially undo the patterns of dominance within a major tradition, be it historiography, cosmography, or fiction.

The commentary editions that elevated *Liaozhai* from the lowly status of *zhiguai* to the realm of fine literature contributed greatly to Pu Songling's fame and posterity, but it further prevented *Liaozhai* from participating in the *zhiguai* tradition as a minor but vigorous cultural discourse. In this sense, the promotion of *Liaozhai* in the realm of literature is itself a form of taming. The rise of its aesthetic mode is followed by the demise of its discursive rigour. By the time *Liaozhai* became a staple in the late Qing literary press, ghost story writing acquired a drastically different cultural function from that of Six Dynasties *zhiguai*, which Campany has described as an alternative cosmography that satisfied anti-locative urges and expressions from the margins. From the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century, ghost story writing and collecting have gradually changed from an open-ended, dialogic discourse driven by argument and persuasion into an evaluative, hierarchical literary enterprise based on merit and performance.

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[53] Judith Zeitlin has also taken note of the homogenizing effect of the overwhelmingly allegorical interpretation of *Liaozhai*. See *Historian of the Strange*. p. 31.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, one of the important features of a "minor literature" is that it allows for the "collective enunciation" of multiple voices rather than being dominated by the voices of one or two great masters.[54] Once *Liaozhai* was established as the quintessential ghost story collection, other Qing *zhiguai* collections were, perhaps unfairly, treated and marketed as sequels, imitations, but no serious contenders. With the exception of Ji Yun's *Close Scrutiny*, most mid to late Qing classical tale collections were considered by critics as imitators of *Liaozhai*, or packaged by publishers as *Liaozhai* "sequels." In the late Qing critical writings on the classical tale, there was an overwhelming tendency to measure the various nineteenth century *biji* collections against Pu Songling's characteristic stylistic features.[55] Yu Hongjian 俞鴻漸 (1781-1864), after declaring his preference of Ji Yun's *Close Scrutiny* over Pu Songling's *Liaozhai*, nevertheless acknowledges *Liaozhai*'s supremacy in terms of influence:

> As for *Xieduo*, *Yetan suilu*, and other such books, they are all but followers of Pu Songling's footsteps, which may be suitable for killing boredom after tea or a meal. When it became as degraded as Yuan Mei's *Zibuyu*, one might as well set it all on fire.
> 至若諧鐸，夜談隨錄等書，皆欲步武留仙者。飯後茶餘，尚可資以解悶，降而至於袁隨園之子不語，則直付之一炬可矣。[56]

[54] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, p. 31.

[55] See Leo Chan's discussion in *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, p. 160.

[56] Yu Hongjian, *Yinxuexuan suibi* 印雪軒隨筆; quoted and translated from Zhu Yixuan, *Liaozhai zhiyi ziliao huibian* 聊齋志異資料彙編, p. 503-4.

On the surface, Yu Hongjian's criticism is directed toward the frivolity of what he considers to be *Liaozhai* imitations; what is embedded in his criticism is a not-so-subtle disdain for the success of the "*Liaozhai*-style." Indeed, critical opinion on the proliferation of *Liaozhai*-style publications was generally low, even among critics sufficiently distanced from the Ji Yun-Pu Songling rivalry. Lu Xun, for example, not only thought poorly of Yuan Mei's 34-volume *Zibuyu*, (also known as *New Qixie* 新齊諧), judging it "too careless, bawdy, and rambling; indeed a 'playful compilation' as the author himself suggests!" (過於率意, 亦多蕪穢, 與自題"戲編"名實相符). He also criticized Shen Qifeng's 10-volume *Xieduo* 諧鐸 for being "feeble and arcane" (意過俳諧, 文亦纖仄), and He Bang'e's 12-volume *Yetan suilu* 夜譚隨錄 for its many borrowings, and lack of originality and refinement (借材他書, 不盡己出, 詞氣亦失之粗暴).[57]

Not all critics consider *Liaozhai* flawless and unsurpassed or see the other late Qing collections as merely "*Liaozhai* imitations." The early twentieth-century critic Ming Fei 冥飛, who considers the Tang tales to be supreme, ranks *Liaozhai* as "passable" and criticizes it for being "stagnant and lacking suppleness in texture and contour" 微嫌其膚廓，且有極滯不靈之病. In contrast, he rates *Xieduo* "excellent," but also points out that, "it, too, suffers from stickiness and a lack of transcendental freedom" 只是筆墨亦嫌粘滯，不超脫.[58] Ming Fei's evaluation is typical among critics who, even when

[57] Lu Xun 魯迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略. Dongfang chubanshe, 1996, p. 25.

[58] Ming Fei, *Gujin xiaoshuo pinglin* 古今小說評林 (1919); quoted and translated from Zhu Yixuan, pp. 506-7.

praising another late Qing *zhiguai* collection, cannot refrain from framing their evaluation within the literary discourse on *Liaozhai*.

Commercial interests also fuelled the *Liaozhai* publishing industry of the late Qing. Expanding and redefining the notion of "sequel," many publishers, eager to turn a quick profit, scrambled to come up with new *Liaozhai* products. Some mixed and matched tales by culling the *Tangping guangji,* and published them haphazardly as anthologies that claimed to be "amendments to *Liaozhai*." There were several amendments bearing the title, *Lost Liaozhai Tales Recollected* 聊齋志異拾遺. It was unclear whether such amendments were from the hands of Pu Songling. One version, according to Lun Xun, contains twenty-seven tales supposedly discarded by Pu Songling, but they could have been forgeries.[59] Others collected old and new tales and republished them as *Liaozhai* sequels. According to Qiu Weiyuan 邱煒爰, there were at least two sequels to *Liaozhai*:

> There are two sequels to *Liaozhai zhiyi*— there is one whose authorship is unclear, and the writing so shoddy that it makes one want to vomit; the other one is from the hands of Wang Guangwen (Wang Tao) of Changzhou, whose use of language is picturesque, with a style of his own. Its original title is *Songyin manlu* (Rambling records of a reclusive by the Song river), but its later retitling as *Sequel to Liaozhai* was the doing of the book merchants, not the intent of the author.

[59] Lu Xun 魯迅, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略, p. 149; also see Liu Jieping, p. 3.

> 後聊齋志異有二：其一不知誰氏創稿，筆墨庸劣，令人欲嘔；其一為長洲王廣文（韜）手筆，遣詞旖旎，亦自成家，惟名淞隱漫錄，其曰後聊齋志異者，乃書賈翻印更名，非廣文本意也。[60]

Even in the murky waters of the late Qing publishing world driven by commercial interests, *Liaozhai* sequels or imitations are promoted and received with regard to aesthetic quality. Whether that regard is genuine or is itself commercially driven cannot be easily ascertained.

The development of a brand of "*Liaozhai* aesthetics" has inevitably had an impact on the interpretation and perception of *Liaozhai* ghosts. The ghost discourse that surrounded *Liaozhai* during its early reception, when the issues of belief and genre were still hotly debated, fizzled out after *Liaozhai* became aestheticized. The subject of ghosts and foxes still resurfaces from time to time, but then it is quickly dismissed or explained away. In *Changtan* 常談 (Common conversation), the late Qing writer Liu Yushu 劉玉書 provides a summary of his assessment of various approaches to the ghost story from *Zuozhuan* to *Liaozhai*:

> There has never been a lack of ghost-story tellers from generation to generation, but there are only a handful of ghost-tale virtuosos—Master Zuo, Huiweng, Dongpo, and in this dynasty, Pu Liuxian [Songling] and Ji Xiaolan [Yun]. However, these authors are quite different in their interests and intent. Master Zuo tells of events that involve ghosts, but his

[60] Qiu Weiyuan, *Shuyuan zhuitan* 菽園贅談; quoted and translated from Zhu Yixuan, p. 532.

> intent is not on ghosts; Huiweng's ghost discourse is long on theorizing, and short on detailed description; Dongpo, disillusioned with the world in his old age, turns to ghosts, but he uses ghosts to reflect on himself; Pu Songling writes about ghosts with great interest and literary flair—he uses ghosts as amusement; Ji Xiaolan is the only one who investigates deeply and quotes broadly in his writing, using ghosts to foster virtue and admonish evil—thus he used the ways of the ghosts for moral teaching, complementing where common rituals are deficient, and where the imperial laws could not reach. It is a noble thing indeed.
>
> 說鬼者代不乏人。其善說者，惟左氏，晦翁，東坡及國朝蒲留仙，紀曉嵐耳。地靠起旨趣，頗不相類。蓋左氏因事以及鬼，其意不在鬼；晦翁說之以理，略其情狀；東坡晚年，厭聞時事，強人說鬼，以鬼自晦者也；蒲留仙文致多辭，殊生鬼趣，以鬼為戲者也；惟紀曉嵐旁征遠引，勸善警惡，所謂以鬼道設教，以補禮法所不足，王法所不及者，可謂善矣。[61]

Liu Yushu's judgment that Pu Songling employed the motif of the ghost mainly as a literary game became almost a critical platitude in late Qing literary circles. As I have illustrated in Chapters One and Two, all of the cultural functions of the ghost tale that Liu mentioned above—the allegorical, the personal, the aesthetic, and the didactic— have

[61] Liu Yushu, *Changtan, juan* 1; quoted and translated from Zhu Yixuan, p. 504.

been operative, in varying degrees, in Pu Songling's writing and in the reception of his work. However, in *Liaozhai*'s reception towards the late Qing, the vitality of the ghost tale as a minor discourse became diminished, or at least dormant. The more contentious aspects of *Liaozhai* ghosts were gradually smoothed over with a somewhat facile and flippant application of *Liaozhai* aesthetics.

It is now not uncommon for scholars to compare *Liaozhai* with *Dream of the Red Chamber*, especially in respect to their portrayal of female beauty. Pu Songling's unconventional female ghosts are considered a precursor to Cao Xueqin's free-spirited maidens and maidservants in the Grandview Garden.[62] Jie Tao 解弢 has noted that "*Honglongmeng* and *Liaozhai* both excel in their portrayal of beauties; however, if we compare the two, *Liaozhai*, in terms of its sheer bounty of physical beauty, is even superior to *Honglongmeng*." 寫美人以紅樓聊齋為最擅長，然二者相較， 紅樓尚不及聊齋色相之夥.[63] Jie Tao's taste for beauty is symptomatic of the trend to aestheticize the ghost tale, whereby *Liaozhai* ghosts are reduced to objects of connoisseurship. Not doubt this connoisseurship privileged the *chuanqi*-style romances, whereas the short *zhiguai* anecdotes linking the ghost with its psychological and ontological foundations were neglected or forgotten. Without these foundations, it is easy to show appreciation for the ghost as the female other, but impossible to genuinely sympathize and identify with the ghost's needs and desires.

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[62] There have been book-length studies devoted to comparing these two stylistically very different works. See Ma Ruifang 馬瑞芳, *Cong Liaozhai dao Hongloumeng* 從聊齋到紅樓夢 (From *Liaozhai* to *Hongloumeng*).

[63] See Jie Tao 解弢, *Xiaoshuohua* 小說話, Zhonghua shuju, 1919, translated from Zhu Yixuan, p. 516.

The dominance of aesthetics and ghost connoisseurship in the literary discourse on *Liaozhai* also prevents the ghost tale from acquiring new "minor" positions and forging new visions of alternative identities, especially female identities. One interesting example is *Nǚ Liaozhai* 女聊齋 (The female *Liaozhai*), a late Qing compilation of stories about a roster of prominent female characters, both historical and fictional, by a female author named Jia Ming 賈茗. The book, consisting of four *juan* and a total of eighty-nine tales, are not ostensibly concerned with ghosts; nor are the tales all original compositions. Collecting tales from Tang *chuanqi* and Ming-Qing *biji*, including long tales such as "The Story of Liu Cuicui" 劉翠翠傳 from Qu You's 瞿佑 (1341-1427) *Jiandeng xinhua* 剪燈新話 and "Jiaohong ji" 嬌紅記, a Ming tale attributed to Li Xu 李詡 (1506-1593), *The Female Liaozhai* clearly reflected the prevailing taste for *chuanqi*-style romance. In spite of its tenuous connection with Pu Songling's *Liaozhai*, *The Female Liaozhai* would have been intimately related to the author's experience of reading *Liaozhai*, and such experience and exposure would have also helped to shape the female reader's subjectivity. Eventually the female reader would be transformed into a capable agent that creates and tells stories of her own. Jia Ming's *Nǚ Liaozhai* thus offers an opportunity to expand the discourse on *Liaozhai* beyond its narrow aesthetic mode, and invigorate it with questions of female identity and subjectivity.

In a preface to Jia Ming's work, Fei Huang 匪遑 (who apparently edited the book) begins with such a premise, praising the outstanding features that are unique to women: "Since ancient times, the numinous and exquisite spirit of mountains and rivers has been bestowed not on men, but on women" 古今山川靈秀之氣，往往不鍾于鬚眉 丈夫，而

鍾于婦女. But in the end, Fei Huang cannot but shift to the aesthetic mode and provide a more or less conventional explanation as to why the collection is worthy of the name "Female *Liaozhai*":

> The woman scholar Jia Ming (Liangfen) has always been an admirer of Pu Songling's work, especially his *Liaozhai*. She once named the place where she studied "A Woman's *Liaozhai*," as her homage to Pu Songling. Now the compilation of this book has been finished. With a fresh and elegant style, a vocabulary evoking the beauty of antiquity and a concise yet gripping narrative, [the book] gathers momentum with a taut structure, enabling a perfect union of words and feeling. Such literary execution in brush and ink can truly be placed in the same chamber with *Liaozhai*. The events all concern womenfolk, and the name of her study is "A Woman's *Liaozhai*," hence the name of this book.

> 靚芬賈女史者，素崇拜蒲留仙之著作者也，而尤傾倒於聊齋志異一書。故其居恒讀書之處，嘗自顏其齋曰"女聊齋"，蓋所以志慕也。既而輯是編既竟，以其筆致之雋穎，詞藻之古豔，敍事之簡曲，而能達結構之緊峭而得勢，情文兼至。其筆墨直足登"聊齋"之堂，而入

其室。而其事蹟又均系之於女子，因亦以齋居之名名其書曰女聊齋。[64]

According to Fei Huang, the fact that both the author and the subject matter are of the female gender contributed to the uniqueness and novelty of the work, but it is the author's emulation of *Liaozhai*'s literary refinement and narrative technique that entitled her work to be called "*Liaozhai*." By focusing on "*Liaozhai*" instead of on "female," Fei Huang turns a work of considerable cultural interest into yet another sequel to *Liaozhai*. *The Female Liaozhai* presented a dialogic moment to engage with the nascent awareness of female consciousness in some of Pu Songling's ghost tales, but that possibility became engulfed by an increasingly monologic interpretation of *Liaozhai*.

It is evident that the discourse on *Liaozhai* diverged from the discourse on ghosts as the dynastic period came to an end. It became a primarily literary phenomenon guided by commercial interests, with a liberal smattering of *Liaozhai* poetics. By the late Qing, the *Liaozhai* discourse, though still active, was no longer a rigorously contested discourse centred on the legitimacy of *zhiguai* and its attendant issues of genre and popular belief, but rather a discourse of literary arbitration with *Liaozhai* as the main yardstick.

Conclusion

Critical and editorial interventions in *Liaozhai*'s reception, both negative and positive, are reflective of the complexity of Pu Songling's work. In contrast with the enthusiasm that *Liaozhai* generated among publishers and the general readership,

[64] See Fei Huang's preface to *Nǚ Liaozhai*. Zhonghua tushuguan, 1913 reprint.

dissatisfaction was expressed by members of the literary elite, culminating in its rejection from *Siku quanshu*. The hostility stemmed from a variety of reasons—the ambiguous, suspect qualities of *Liaozhai* within the already lowly position of *zhiguai* in classical Chinese literature; and the perceived political sensitivity presented by some of the *Liaozhai* tales—but the general pattern of these critical conflicts seems to be characterized by the tension between orthodox, official discourse and unorthodox, private discourse.

This tension hearkens back to the uneasy relationship between the Confucian worldview and the popular belief in ghosts, a tension that is embedded within the textual framework of *Liaozhai*. As evidenced by the unresolved state of ghost taming, Pu Songling never completely eradicated the world of the ghost by cleansing it or allegorizing it. Instead, he accommodated it and incorporated it into his own literary vision. *Liaozhai*'s blending of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* was not simply the blending of two literary genres, but two modes of thinking, two sets of values, and two worldviews. The mixing of literary modes are crucial for Pu Songling to explore the full potential of the ghost, not just as a source for critiquing the centre, but as a means of forging new identities on the margins.

In the nineteenth century, publishers, editors, and commentators successfully elevated the literary status of *Liaozhai* on the strengths of its aesthetic sophistication and its affinity with fiction. But *Liaozhai*'s ascension as a major work of fiction to some extent diminished the work's textual diversity and the varied cultural functions of the ghost. The connoisseurship that fetishized *Liaozhai* ghosts as the ultimate embodiments of feminine beauty prevented the ghost tale from asserting its own independent and

alternative voice. This astheticization removed much of *Liaozhai*'s critical edge so that *Liaozhai* ghosts existed in a beautiful vacuum. It then became difficult, if not impossible, to identity *with* the plight of the ghost. The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of *Liaozhai* from the lowly status of *xiaoshuo* to the rarefied realm of literary fiction. But *Liaozhai*'s increasing identification with fiction proved to be a disservice not only to the generic and stylistic diversity of the classical tale but also to *Liaozhai*'s own vitality as a minor discourse. In the wake of *Liaozhai*'s literary ascension, the ghost tale ceased to be an active participant in the larger discourse on ghosts and issues of belief. But *Liaozhai*'s cultural function as a minor discourse, or as an active agent of alternative value and unorthodox worldview, was dormant but not completely lost. The afterlife of *Liaozhai*, as we shall see in the reception of the book in the twentieth century, continues to create new cultural space for the ghost discourse to renew itself.

Chapter Four

Minor Discourses in New Peripheries

Chinese ghost discourse both presented and encountered new challenges as the dynastic period ended and various modernization projects emerged in twentieth-century China. While the literati practice of ghost story writing may have waned with the winding down of the classical tradition, the sense of unease with ghosts and superstitions resurged in the twentieth century with a vengeance. A significant rhetorical shift in Chinese ghost discourse took place in the early twentieth century. Ghost tale collections such as *Liaozhai* were no longer seen as a minor discourse to be defended or promoted, but as a body of writing that became symbolic, or perhaps symptomatic, of an entire cultural tradition that was backward, superstitious, and "feudalistic," and therefore need to be debunked and eradicated. This was the May Fourth rhetoric on ghosts. In this cultural climate, the ghost tale again became "minor" in the sense that it was once again marginalized vis-à-vis a powerful discourse of modernization and anti-feudalism that was becoming increasingly central and dominant. But the underlying ideology of this dominant discourse was no longer Confucian, but the newly minted May Fourth ideal of science and democracy.

How might this May Fourth anti-ghost discourse have affected the literary status and cultural functions of *Liaozhai*? In the first half of the twentieth century, *Liaozhai* had both its detractors and defenders. May Fourth intellectuals such as Zhou Zuoren debunked it along with other works of "inhumane literature." The cultural conservatives defended *Liaozhai* on the basis of its literary status and cultural importance. Traditional

literary scholarship continued to serve as a haven for *Liaozhai* to survive in as a major work of classical Chinese fiction. In the second half of the twentieth century, the anti-ghost rhetoric of May Fourth was replaced by the anti-ghost campaigns of the Maoist era. Ghosts and ghost tales were politicized, exorcized, and banned. These violent fluctuations in the fate of the ghost again placed the literary and cultural status of *Liaozhai* under scrutiny. *Liaozhai*, now pulled down from its canonical status, must be re-examined in the volatile cultural and ideological climate of the twentieth-century.

The dichotomy that has long existed within Chinese ghost discourse persists in the new century. On the one hand, intellectuals and writers of the modern era are determined to shake off the ghosts of the old world; on the other hand, Chinese ghost culture continues to manifest itself in various forms and guises, first in the traditional arenas of popular entertainment such as teahouses and regional theatres, and then in modern media such as film, television, and most recently, cyberspace.

Rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of the post-dynastic reception of *Liaozhai*, this chapter focuses on three key moments of rupture in twentieth-century Chinese ghost discourse in which *Liaozhai* was prominently involved: the tension in May Fourth anti-ghost rhetoric, the ambiguity of the publication of *Do Not Fear Ghosts* as a precursor to Mao's anti-ghost campaigns, and finally, the re-emergence of *Liaozhai* ghosts in Hong Kong and Mainland cinema. One common feature of these three moments of rupture is the highly public and political nature of the ensuing discourse on ghosts. A main objective of my analysis is to uncover the personal dimensions of the ghost discourse when overwhelmingly ideological considerations threaten to drown out voices that are personal, marginal, and minor. In tune with the cultural and political

dislocations of twentieth-century China, modern ghost discourse also manifests itself in increasingly destabilized forms, as old centres become new peripheries and new mediums compete with old ones. It is when the ghost tale enters a new cultural space, a different mentality, or a different medium that many of its dormant cultural functions become reactivated and renewed.

Each rupture mentioned above will be examined in relation to the renewal of the ghost tale as a minor discourse, and each discussion will be anchored by one question: 1) How might the anti-ghost ideology of May Fourth have accentuated the ghost's identification with the disenfranchised and the underprivileged? 2) In what sense does Mao Zedong's "ghost politics" constitute a "major" use of a minor discourse? 3) To what extent do Hong Kong film adaptations of *Liaozhai* reflect a creative use of the ghost tale as a minor discourse on a new periphery, and what happens when that minor discourse returns to the centre when the reclaiming of the *Liaozhai* legacy begins in Mainland China?

May Fourth Ghost Discourse

Literary representations of ghosts, in terms of the scale of production, have not diminished in the twentieth century. What has changed is the way in which ghosts manifest themselves in literature. With the arrival of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, an inverted form of ghost story writing, or what one might call an anti-ghost literature, became the new imperative for May Fourth literature and much of the Chinese literary mainstream that followed.

Anti-ghost literature can be clarified and defined in relation to another literary concept—"humane literature" 人的文學—a May Fourth term Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) made famous in his 1918 article in *New Youth* 新青年. Lamenting the unfortunate fact that for centuries, humanity failed to walk its own path and "strayed on the paths of animals and ghosts," Zhou Zuoren puts forth a brave new proposal: "The New Literature that we must now promote may be expressed in one simple term, 'humane literature,' and what we must reject is its opposite, 'inhumane literature.'"[1] Therefore, Zhou Zuoren's conception of "humane literature" is coined in opposition to "inhumane literature"—a term with ghostly and beastly connotations. He then provides a list of examples of "inhumane literature" taken from the Chinese literary tradition:

1. Profligate, pornographic books
2. Books on demons and gods (Investiture of the Gods/*Fengshen yanyi*, Journey to the West/*Xiyouji*, etc.)
3. Books on immortals (*Lüye xianzong*, etc.)
4. Books on supernatural appearances (Strange Tales from the Studio/*Liaozhai zhiyi*, The Master Speaks Not/*Zibuyu*, etc.)
5. Books about slavery (group A themes: emperors, first-rank scholars, prime ministers; group B themes: sacred fathers and husbands)
6. Books on banditry (Water Margin/*Shuihu zhuan*, *Qixia wuyi*, Cases of Judge Shi/*Shigong an*, etc.)

[1] Zhou Zuoren, "Rende wenxue" 人的文學, *Xin qingnian* 新青年 5, no. 6 (Dec. 1918); translation quoted from Kirk Denton, p.151-2.

7. Books on men of talent and beautiful women (Destiny of the Three Smiles/*Sanxiao yinyuan*, etc.)[2]

Although not quite an official proscription, Zhou Zuoren's list of undesirable books, works that are considered a "hindrance to the growth of human nature," almost amounts to a May Fourth literary manifesto. In another essay, "Our Enemies" 我們的敵人 (1924), Zhou Zuoren spells out his position more explicitly: "Who are our enemies? Not living people, but wild beasts and dead ghosts—wild beasts and dead ghosts attached to the bodies of many living human beings."[3]

In the striving for a Chinese renaissance of humanistic culture, the word "ghost" is again invoked to refer to both a body of literary works on ghostly themes and a haunting sense of an entire cultural tradition that has become ghostly. But unlike the ghost sensibility of the seventeenth-century literati that was marked by loss and nostalgia, May Fourth rhetoric on ghosts is decidedly resolute and unsentimental.

It is not surprising that *Liaozhai* is on this blacklist, lumped together with other types of "inhumane literature." The broad stroke of Zhou's critical thrust suggests that the May Fourth debate on ghosts would not longer be centred on the finer points of *Liaozhai*'s literary pedigree or aesthetic subtleties, nor on its political sensitivity within a particular dynastic period, but rather on its suspicious association with the old, the superstitious, and the unenlightened aspects of the Chinese tradition.

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[2] Ibid., p. 156.

[3] Quoted and translated from *Zhou Zuoren sanwen* 周作人散文, Taipei: Taibai wenyi chubanshe, 2005, p. 173.

The May Fourth ethos of science and democracy, and its opposition to the feudal and the superstitious, did not go uncontested. Cultural conservatives and critics of May Fourth would employ the same terms and turn them around to criticize cultural radicals who promoted social and political theories imported from the West. The late Qing-early Republican scholar Ming Fei 冥飛, who writes in defence of *Liaozhai*'s obsession with ghosts and spirits, diverts the criticism to his contemporaries who are deemed equally obsessed with foreign superstitions:

> Recently there are people who belittle *Liaozhai*. However their criticism is directed against the fact that *Liaozhai* stories involve ghosts and foxes, which are superstitions—this is mistaken. There are ghosts and foxes in this world; such things do exist. So such things are taken and embellished into stories. What's the difference between this and creating a human figure and embellishing it into a story? As for the term blind belief (superstition), it covers a broad spectrum—blind belief in science, blind belief in religion, and even the latest fad of blind belief in foreign theories; the pros and cons of such beliefs cannot be generalized. If one insists that blind belief in religious authority is misguided, then one has to bear in mind that ghosts and foxes are quite different from the religious establishment. We cannot fault the ancients with such accusations.
>
> 近人有鄙薄聊齋者。然所指摘之點，謂不應說鬼談狐，涉及迷信，此又誤意。鬼狐之在世界中，實在確有此一物，則此物而裝點之，亦何

> 異假託一人名以裝點之也？至於迷信二字，範圍甚廣，迷信科學，迷信宗教，以至近日新式人物迷信外國人之論調，其間有利有弊，不可概論。若必謂迷信神權為不當，則神權之與鬼狐，大有分別，未能執此訾古人也。[4]

Ming Fei's defence implies that, once again, the subject matter of *Liaozhai* becomes an issue, although in a drastically different context. Against the background of May Fourth, it is the cultural conservatives who seek to defend *Liaozhai*, mainly on the basis of its literary status and cultural importance. And it is the cultural radicals who criticize it, from a predominately ideological point of view. Ming Fei is compelled to point out the difference between ghosts and foxes 鬼狐 and the religious establishment 神權. However, in the eyes of the May Fourth reformers, the two terms represent one and the same thing—a backward, superstitious, and ghost-obsessed China. The May Fourth alignment of *Liaozhai* ghosts with religious power is a far cry from the early days of the book's reception, when *Liaozhai* ghosts had to be defended because they were perceived as a potential threat to the human-centred Confucian worldview. In the May Fourth ideology, it is works such as *Liaozhai* and their evocation of the ghost of old China that present the greatest obstacle to enlightenment and modernization. To a large extent, the May Fourth discourse is an anti-ghost discourse.

In his survey of twentieth-century Chinese literature, Li Jikai 李繼凱 attempts to categorize literary movements and modes of writing in terms of their position vis-à-vis

[4] Ming Fei 冥飛, *Gujin xiaoshuo pinglin* 古今小說評林 (1919); quoted and translated from Zhu Yixuan, p. 507.

the anti-ghost discourse of May Fourth. He writes: "First, there is the literature that seeks to battle with ghosts and eradicate them. In this type of writing, all sorts of ghosts are identified, exposed, and criticized. This is the mainstream of anti-ghost writing. Second, there is a small stream of ghost literature that trickled down from the old ghost story tradition. It resides with the ghosts, and social political forces that are harmful and reactionary. Third, there is a type that is in between, straddling both the human and the ghostly realms. In this type of writing, human life is entangled with ghostly existence, creating a morphing state where light and darkness, progress and regression, optimism and pessimism, enlightenment and ignorance, coexist."[5]

Zhou Zuoren and Li Jikai, one writing in anticipation of a new Chinese literature at the beginning of the century, the other looking at twentieth century literature in retrospect, both choose to examine modern Chinese literature against the tradition of ghost tale. While they are both candid about their stance against ghosts and the ghost tale, they are equally cognizant of the drastically different views on that tradition, and the varying degrees of engagement with that tradition as Chinese writers find themselves caught in that moment of transition. Once again, the ghost tale finds itself in a cultural environment that is reminiscent of the earlier phase of *Liaozhai*'s reception in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when writing on ghosts and anomalies attracted as many practitioners and advocates as detractors and sceptics.

In spite of the nineteenth-century formulation of a largely non-ideological "*Liaozhai* aesthetics" that encouraged an uncritical ghost connoisseurship, the anti-ghost

[5] Quoted and translated from Li Jikai 李繼凱, "Rengui tongxing: ershi shiji zhongguo wenxue yimianguan" 人鬼同行：20 世紀中國文學一面觀. *Sanxia xuekan* 三峽學刊, 1996, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp 7-9.

environment of May Fourth stimulated a re-examination of ghost literature that paradoxically unleashed some of its dormant function as a minor discourse. However, the renewing of the ghost tale's minor function did not initially manifest itself in new interpretations of *Liaozhai* outside the nineteenth-century aesthetic paradigm. The classical tale as a whole faded in the wake of the May Fourth vernacular literary movement (*baihua yundong* 白話運動). Early twentieth-century *Liaozhai* scholarship continued in the familiar aesthetic vein, and the prevailing sense that it belonged to a tradition that was "on the way out" did not stimulate any new debate on this body of work. However, the ghost sensibility lingered even in May Fourth writing, and it was in the "new fiction" of this period that the ghost motif was re-evaluated for its cultural significance. This private interest in ghosts strikes a sharp contrast with the high-profile anti-ghost rhetoric in public discourse, suggesting that the May Fourth stance of enlightenment and anti-feudalism was itself fraught with tensions and ambiguities. The disparity between private interest and public renouncement is also reminiscent of the early development of Chinese ghost discourse, when *zhiguai* writers' obsession with the non-ancestral ghost contrasted starkly with the Confucian emphasis on ancestral worship and general reticence about ghosts.

Lu Xun's 魯迅 (pen name of Zhou Shuren 周樹人, 1881-1936) work is the most exemplary of the tensions and disparities within the May Fourth ghost discourse. His critical study of traditional Chinese fiction set the tone for *Liaozhai*'s reception in the twentieth century. His own experimentation with new fiction provided critical and yet ambivalent meditations on the legacy of Chinese ghost culture. Both Lu Xun's personal views and his writing challenge conventional wisdom about May Fourth and serve as a

vital link between age-old ghost discourse and its modern manifestations. The Communist reinterpretation and appropriation of Lu Xun's work added yet another level of complexity to his position in the cultural battle on ghosts. Lu Xun is often considered to be in the vanguard of anti-ghost and anti-feudalist writing in official literary discourse. But the ambivalence of Lu Xun's ghost sensibility has been overlooked, or denied, especially in the socialist realist reinterpretation of Lu Xun's work after his death. In "After Hitting the Wall" 碰壁之後, he writes: "China may not resemble hell, however, as 'vision rises out of the mind,' I always see in front of my own eyes, thick dark clouds—among them are old ghosts, new ghosts, wandering ghosts, monsters, beasts, strange and bizarre things of all sorts. I could hardly bear to listen to or look at them."[6]

There is no denying that Lu Xun's writing shows a strong interest in ghosts and demons, including the ghosts and demons of his own psyche. He is deeply aware of his own ghostly spirit 鬼氣. In a letter to a student, Li Bingzhong, dated September 24, 1924, Lu Xun wrote: "I always feel that in the depths of my soul, there is a venomous, ghostly spirit. I detest it, and want to banish it, but I could not."[7] This ghostly spirit is perhaps the most prevalent in *Wild Grass* 野草, a collection of essays that demonstrates Lu Xun's heroic effort at self-dissection, and the ensuing loneliness, bitterness, struggle and despair.

If Zhou Zuoren's call for a "humane literature" is to eschew ghosts and all things ghostly, Lu Xun's work confronts the ghostly aspects of human life by detailing the

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[6] Quoted from Maruo Tsuneki 九尾常喜. *Ren yu gui de jiuge: Lu Xun xiaoshuo lunxi* 人與鬼的糾葛：魯迅小說論析, trans. Qin Gong 秦弓, Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2006, p. 230. Qin Gong's Chinese translation of this pioneering work by the Japanese scholar Maruo Tsuneki, published in Beijing in 1995 (reprint 2006), generated widespread interest in the "ghostly" aspect of Lu Xun's writing and triggered lively discussions among Chinese academics.

[7] See *Lu Xun shuxin ji (shang juan)* 魯迅書信集（上卷）, Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1976, p. 61.

difficult process of "a ghost becoming human." In *A Call to Arms* 吶喊 and *Wandering* 彷徨, Lu Xun's stories depict a series of memorable "ghostly" characters such as Kong Yiji (a poor traditional scholar desperately holding on to his literati status, when socio-economic realities have rendered his Confucian ideals ineffectual and obsolete), Ah Q (a naïve underdog whose gullibility and distorted sense of reality made him an easy victim of the ruthless political machinations during the revolution), and Sister Xianglin (a long suffering peasant woman reduced to a ghostly existence after her young child was devoured by wolves). Portraying characters that seem incapable of advancing with the movement of their times, as if long ghostly shadows are trailing behind them, holding them back, Lu Xun critiques the blindly optimistic rhetoric of enlightenment and revolution.

In Pu Songling's compassionate imagination, the ghosts are transformed from creatures that signal power and instil fear to an emerging community that inspires sympathy and identification. Lu Xun, too, recognizes the parallel between the disenfranchised ghosts and the disenfranchised segments of the human population. But instead of portraying humanized ghosts, Lu Xun depicts "ghostified" humans who also need to be accommodated within the power structure of the new cultural elite. Thus, Lu Xun's position is not entirely counter to the May Fourth project of humanizing the people, but is distrustful of easy solutions. While Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) optimistically declares, "Old society turned people into ghosts, and new society turned ghosts into humans," Lu Xun reminds us of the Herculean, if not impossible, task of liberating many of his Chinese compatriots who still lived lives of bondage, slavery, cannibalism, and all manner of sub-human states.

Lu Xun's internal progression from being pro-May Fourth to being critical of May Fourth is also evident in his writing. In "Hometown" 故鄉, he writes:

> As my thoughts turned toward hope, a feeling of anxiety suddenly possessed me. When Runtu took the censer and candlesticks, I had laughed at him behind his back. "Can't let go of that superstitious idol-worship of his for a single minute!" But what was this thing called "hope" if not an idol that I had fashioned with my own hands. The things he hoped for were immediate, while what I wanted was somewhere far off in the murky distance—that was the only difference.[8]

> 我想到希望，忽然害怕起來了。閏土要香爐和燭臺的時候，我還暗地裏笑他，以為他總是崇拜偶像，什麼時候都不忘卻。現在我所謂希望，不也是我自己手制的偶像麼？只是他的願望切近，我的願望茫遠罷了。

Lu Xun's self-criticism of his own idol worship echoes Ming Fei's critique of the May Fourth duplication of superstition in new, borrowed clothes. While Ming Fei criticizes the May Fourth ethos and its attendant hypocrisy from the point of view of a cultural conservative, Lu Xun criticizes from within the May Fourth camp after he has experienced much of the movement in person. No longer blaming China's backwardness

[8] Trans. William A. Lyell, in *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*. University of Hawaii Press, 1990, p. 99.

on people's inherited superstitions, Lu Xun now turns to dissect himself and members of his own class. In an essay written during his Tokyo days, Lu Xun asserts that the accusation of superstition was only a convenient slogan for hypocritical gentlemen scholars to absolve themselves of responsibility for the current national crisis and lay the blame for China's unfortunate plight at the doorstep of the ordinary Chinese.[9] For Lu Xun, ghosts represented the average Chinese person's last resort to obtain some measure of justice and happiness in an imagined world, when the same was not attainable in this world. Thus, the cultural elite who advocated the eradication of ghosts in the name of "science" without laying a firm foundation for any real "democracy" was a hypocrite, if not a hoodwinker.

Perhaps one such "gentleman scholar" Lu Xun had in mind was Zhou Zuoren, his own estranged brother. In contrast with Lu Xun's radical spirit, Zhou Zuoren adopted the philosophy of the "Great Mean" (中庸) and advocated the non-partisan stance of the liberal intellectual.[10] In "Two Ghosts" ("*Liangge gui*" 兩個鬼), Zhou writes: "At the bottom of our hearts live *du daimone*, in other words, two ghosts—one is a 'gentleman ghost,' the other a 'hooligan ghost.' These two ghosts dictate all my words and actions."[11] Zhou's confessional self-portrait sums up the characteristic ambiguity of his state of mind and worldview, a combination of engagement and renunciation, a double-

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[9] The essay was originally prepared for the abortive magazine *Xinsheng* 新生 (New life). It later appeared in *Henan* 河南, a magazine published in Japan by the association of Chinese students from that province. See William Lyell's introduction to *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, University of Hawaii Press, 1990. p. xiii.

[10] See Sun Junjie 孫俊傑. "*Zhou Zuoren de liangge gui*" 周作人的"兩個鬼" (Zhou Zuoren's "Two Ghosts"). *Journal of Jiangsu Institute of Education* (Social Science) January 2004, Vol. 20, No. 1: 94-96.

[11] Zhou Zuoren, *Tanhuji* 談虎集. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002, p. 277.

headed hermit/traitor. Loving "the attitude of a gentleman and the spirit of a hooligan," Zhou Zuoren hoped to strike a balance or a compromise between these two philosophical and political extremities, at a time when no such balance or compromise was to be entertained.[12]

If the Zhou brothers represented the pessimistic view of a people or a nation condemned to carry the burden of its ghostly past, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), a prominent May Fourth figure known for his optimistic pragmatism, advocated the replacement of an old, ailing, ghost-ridden Chinese culture with a brand new one. In a poem dedicated to his friend Mei Guangdi, Hu Shi writes: "Whip and drive away a cartload of ghosts; then bow and usher in a new century."[13] The "cartload of ghosts" playfully alludes to the eighteenth century ghost story writer Yuan Mei's line, "returning with a cartload of ghosts from Hangzhou." But their difference is clear. While Yuan Mei fondly collected ghost tales as curiosity items, Hu Shi banished them as remnants of old-world superstition and corruption. In a 1930 article, Hu Shi famously expounded his "Five Ghosts" theory, citing "poverty," "disease," "ignorance," "corruption," and "disorder" as the five metaphorical ghosts. [14]

It is worth noting that in his naming of the "Five Ghosts"—the perceived obstacles on China's path towards modernization—Hu Shi did not mention feudalism and imperialism, the two other familiar targets of the May Fourth Movement. According to

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[12] Although an accomplished writer and intellectual in his own right, Zhou Zuoren's reputation was marred by his collaboration with the puppet government during the Japanese invasion of the 1930s.

[13] Quoted from Maruo Tsuneki, *Ren yu gui de jiuge*, p. 231.

[14] Hu Shi, "Women zoude natiaolu" 我們走的那條路 (The Road We Are Walking On) 1930. See Maruo Tsuneki, *Ren yu gui de jiuge*, p. 232. Hu's "Five Ghosts Theory" (*wugui lun* 五鬼論) was probably meant as a pun on "No Ghost Theory" (*wugui lun* 無鬼論).

Hu, feudalism collapsed two thousand years ago, and imperialism could not have penetrated a country without the epidemic of the "five ghosts."[15] Hu's eschewing of isms in his "Five Ghost" theory betrayed an ideological stance decidedly opposed to that of the burgeoning Communist movement of the same period. Ironically, in a fashion that mimics the May Fourth rhetoric, ghostly terms, images, and metaphors would later enter the lingo of Communism during its nation-building projects and various political campaigns. The anti-ghost sentiment that swiftly traversed from May Fourth to Communism brings to mind what Milena Dolezelova calls "the double bind of the May Fourth legacy": while the May Fourth thinkers contributed to a period of intellectual pluralism, they nonetheless "sowed the seeds of monologic hegemony that eventually dominated the literary, cultural, and political discourse of modern China."[16] Against the background of this powerful monologic discourse, the minor status of the ghost offered an important counter-point. However, in a highly political environment, the minor discourse itself can be appropriated to serve ruling regimes and dominant ideologies.

Mao Zedong's Ghost Politics

It was in the anti-ghost milieu of May Fourth that the ghost tale regained its minor status, but it was Mao Zedong毛澤東 (1893-1976), the mastermind of Chinese Communism, who rediscovered the discursive potential of *Liaozhai* and tapped it in the most surprising and ironic ways. In a conversation with Xiao San 蕭三 (1896-1983) at the Lu Xun Art Academy in May 1939, Mao Zedong reportedly said: "*Liaozhai zhiyi* is a

[15] Ibid., p. 232.

[16] Milena Dolezelova, Oldrich Kral, and Graham Sanders, eds. *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China's May Fourth Projects*, p. 23.

work of sentimentalism rooted in feudal China... Pu Songling resorted to ghosts and foxes because he couldn't express these views openly. *Liaozhai*, in fact, is a fiction of social problems. Lu Xun mistakenly classified *Liaozhai* under the genre of *zhiguai*, but that was his view before he accepted Marxism."[17] Mao's interest in *Liaozhai* proved to be a lasting and deepening one. In April 1942, during a meeting with a group of teachers at the Lu Xun Art Academy, Mao again mentioned *Liaozhai*: "*Liaozhai* could be a valuable source of Qing history. The story 'Xi Fangping' 席方平, for example, is an excellent exposé of the corrupt bureaucratic system of the Qing dynasty." He then suggested that "Xi Fangping" be included in high-school textbooks.[18]

In spite of his dismissal of *zhiguai* in general, Mao made an exception for *Liaozhai*. And in spite of his objection to Pu Songling's feudalistic tendencies, Mao placed great value on the historical and social aspects of Pu's work. This highly selective and utilitarian approach nevertheless brought out the discursive qualities of *Liaozhai* that had been obscured by May Fourth ideology as well as by traditional *Liaozhai* aesthetics. It is in this sense that Mao rediscovered *Liaozhai* as a "minor discourse." The most important part of this discovery is Mao's recognition of Pu Songling's use of ghosts and foxes as a powerful means of expression, a function that he would later put to use in politics.

Mao's interest in *Liaozhai* was renewed after the founding of the People's Republic, but in a much more politicized context and with a specific focus on ghosts. On

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[17] See Xiao San 蕭三. "*Yaodong cheng*" 窯洞城 (The Cave City). In *Shidai de baogao* 時代的報告 (Reportage Time). 1981, vol. 3. As referenced in Sun Xiangzhong 孫向忠, "Mao Zedong on *Liaozhai*." Journal of Binzhou Teachers College, Vol. 10, No. 3, September 1994.

[18] Quoted and translated from He Qifang 何其芳, "Mao Zedong zhige" 毛澤東之歌 (Song of Mao Zedong). In *He Qifang wenji* 何其芳文集: 94-99.

April 15, 1959, at the Sixteenth Meeting of the National Congress, Mao made another reference to *Liaozhai*, this time in connection with two political crises the Chinese government was facing at the moment—Taiwan and Tibet. He cited the *Liaozhai* story "Qingfeng" 青鳳 to illustrate the point that "The author of *Liaozhai zhiyi* taught us not to be afraid of ghosts. The more we fear ghosts, the less likely we will survive. The ghosts we fear will come to devour us. We know we should not fear ghosts, and that is why our army attacked Jinmen and Mazu [key Nationalist military bases in the Taiwan Strait]."[19] This was the first time Mao used *Liaozhai* to make an explicit political analogy, comparing political enemies and foreign powers to ghosts. A month later, during a meeting with ambassadors and diplomatic missions from eleven different countries, Mao reiterated his comparison of political opponents to ghosts, expanding the analogy to the arena of foreign relations: "Our world today has many ghosts. There are a large number of ghosts in the West, and that is called imperialism. There are many ghosts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well—those are the reactionaries and the running dogs of imperialism."[20]

Mao's appropriation of the ghost as a metaphor for powerful political enemies at home and abroad calls to mind the representation of the ghost in the dangerous and grotesque *zhiguai* mode. It is not surprising that this vision of the ghost particularly appealed to Mao as the leader of a young nation, a new Communist regime that faced great political uncertainty and ideological challenges. Perhaps in this historical context, Mao's appropriation of the ghost as a "minor discourse" was justifiable. The country was

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

weak, and the perceived enemies strong. Even though Mao advocated fearlessness, there was a strong element of fear in Mao's rhetoric.

This admission of fear and the desire to conquer it are amply illustrated in the compilation of a collection of "stories portraying people who are not afraid of ghosts" 不怕鬼的故事. Mao expressed his intention to make a pamphlet out of such stories at the same meeting with ambassadors and diplomats in 1959.[21] He assigned the task to the Literature Department of the Chinese Academy, but he was personally involved in the selecting, editing and publishing process.[22] In February 1961, *Do Not Fear Ghosts* 不怕鬼的故事 was officially published by the People's Literary Press.[23]

It was a scholarly book. The editors spared no effort and tapped into the entire classical tale tradition from the Six Dynasties to the Qing. The book begins with the famous story "Song Dingbo Catches the Ghost" 宋定伯捉鬼 from Gan Bao's 干寶 *Soushenji*. Among the seventy stories collected there are selections from Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 *Youminglu* 幽冥錄, Niu Sengru's 牛僧孺 *Xuanguailu* 玄怪錄, Duan Chengshi's 段成式 *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎, Zhang Du's 張讀 *Xuanshizhi* 宣室志, Hong Mai's 洪邁 *Yijianzhi* 夷堅志, and Zhu Guozhen's 朱國禎 (1557-1632) *Yongchuang xiaopin* 湧幢小

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[21] Ibid.

[22] See He Qifang's 何其芳 introduction to *Bupa gui de gushu* 不怕鬼的故事 (Stories about those who are not afraid of ghosts). Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1999 reprint. I loosely translate the title into *Do Not Fear Ghosts*.

[23] *Do Not Fear Ghosts* quickly went through a second printing in October 1961. (In the second edition, the number of stories is reduced from seventy to sixty-six, and there are minor changes in the annotations.) The People's Literary Press reprinted the book twice in 1978 and 1982. (In this new edition, the line orientation of the text is changed from vertical to horizontal, and the print-run is as high as 235,000.) See "Chongwen bupagui de jingdian: bupagui de gushi gaiban shuoming" 重溫不怕鬼的經典: 不怕鬼的故事改版說明 (Revisiting a classic—notes on the new edition of *Do Not Fear Ghosts*), in *Do Not Fear Ghosts*, Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1999.

品. But most of the entries are from Qing *zhiguai* collections, including relatively obscure works (Gao Jiyan's 高繼衍 *Diejie waishi* 蝶階外史 and Cheng Lin's 程麟 *Cizhong renyu* 此中人語) as well as those by the best-known authors (Pu Songling, Ji Yun, Yuan Mei). Three *Liaozhai* tales are included—"Black Magic" 妖術, "Geng Qubing" 耿去病 (an excerpt from "Qing Feng" 青鳳), and "Catching Ghosts and Shooting Foxes" 捉鬼射狐.

It was also a political book. In his introduction to the book, He Qifang 何其芳, quoting Mao Zedong several times, dexterously relayed Mao's idea of turning the ghost into a political metaphor: "We compiled this pamphlet not because we wanted to use these stories about "do not fear ghosts" to illustrate ancient Chinese materialist thought. We wanted to introduce these stories to our readers as allegories, metaphors and satires. If we are cowardly and our thinking is not liberated, then we would be fearful of ghosts and spirits that do not even exist. But if we raise our awareness, eradicate superstition, and liberate our minds, then not only will ghosts and spirits no longer be fearsome, but imperialism, reactionaries, revisionism, and all other existing natural and man-made disasters will also cease to be fearsome to the Marxist-Leninists. All will be conquered; all will be overcome."[24]

The political message is loud and clear. However, to convey this atheistic message through ghost tales, the editors draw a fine distinction between the ghost as a token of belief and the ghost as allegory. The former is downplayed, even though the

[24] Translated from "Chongwen bupagui de jingdian: bupagui de gushi gaiban shuoming" 重溫不怕鬼的經典: 不怕鬼的故事改版說明 (Revisiting a classic—notes on the new edition of *Do Not Fear Ghosts*), in *Do Not Fear Ghosts*, Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1999.

editors recognize that the tales could be read as concrete examples of "ancient materialist thought." It is the allegorical function of the ghost that they want to emphasize. To highlight the spirit of "eradicating superstition and conquering ghosts," the editors naturally turn to tales about exorcising ghosts or dealing with ghosts by force, tales that are more likely to be in the *zhiguai* mode. Tales in the romantic *chuanqi* mode, in which ghosts are portrayed as already tamed or in intimate relationship with humans, would not have suited this zeitgeist.

Liaozhai, due to its mixed literary modes and its ambiguous take on ghosts, again had to go through a series of editorial changes in order to fit into the anti-ghost rhetoric of *Do Not Fear Ghosts*. Of the three *Liaozhai* tales, the most heavily edited one is the *chuanqi*-style "Qing Feng" 青鳳. It is mainly a love story between Geng Qubing, the male protagonist, and Qing Feng, a fox spirit. The part about Geng staring at a grotesque-looking ghost and scaring him away is only a brief subplot. The editors simply kept the first half of the story that contained the subplot, cut the entire second half, and re-titled it "Geng Qubing" 耿去病.

The other two tales are in the *zhiguai* mode, and editorial interventions, though not drastic, are still present. "Black Magic" 妖術 tells the story of Master Yu 于公, who refuses a soothsayer's offer of service. The soothsayer, slighted and left without a business opportunity, takes revenge by repeatedly attacking Master Yu with black magic. Yu heroically defeats each one of the ghosts sent by the soothsayer. Pu Songling ends the story with a postscript in which he dismisses the preposterous practice of paying for

fortune telling and criticizes the soothsayer's unethical use of black magic.[25] In the *Do No Fear Ghost* version, Pu Songling's comment is deleted, likely for several reasons: The editors probably wanted to present the tales as unmediated examples of folklore, and the comment by the "Historian of the Strange," implying authorial intervention, would have defeated that purpose. Furthermore, Pu's comment shifts the focus from Master Yu's fearless fight against ghosts to the dubious merits of divination, a shift that would have distracted from the book's thematic focus.

The editors of *Do Not Fear Ghosts* obviously had to walk a fine line. On one hand, they would have wanted to present ghosts convincingly as real threats, rather than merely the products of black magic, in order to accentuate the emotional impact of fearlessness. On the other hand, since the ultimate editorial goal is to use ghosts as political allegories, the editors also needed to avoid creating the impression that many encounters with ghosts were presented as actual experiences and were believed to be true in their original contexts. Such editorial subtlety is reflected in the treatment of the third *Liaozhai* entry, "Catching Ghosts and Shooting Foxes" 捉鬼射狐. As the title suggests, this is also a story about a man who fearlessly confronts ghosts and foxes and drives them away from haunted households. The man in question, a certain Master Li 李公, is apparently a distant relative of Pu Songling's.[26] In the *Do No Fear Ghosts* version, the editors not only deleted Pu Songling's authorial comment at the end, but also carefully

[25] *Liaozhai, juan* 1.

[26] *Liaozhai, juan* 4.

excised a line, which is embedded in the main narrative, that verifies the identity of Master Li and the truthfulness of the accounts of his experience.[27]

Liaozhai's appearance in *Do Not Fear Ghosts* is both appropriation and censorship. Recognizing the cultural resonance and the allegorical potential of the ghost, Mao cleverly created a catchy political slogan by injecting fresh meaning into an old phrase. Mao used the term "ghost" metaphorically, but derogatively, to refer to the enemies of a newly founded Communist China. This analogy later proved to be the prelude to his famous political campaign, with the slogan "Beating the Ghosts" 打鬼. *Do Not Fear Ghosts*, which germinated from what seemed like a casual remark from Mao's conversation, thus became a guidebook during many "rectification sessions" within the Chinese Communist Party in the early 1960s.[28]

In December 1962, the Cultural Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued an official notice that blacklisted a number of traditional "ghost plays" 鬼戲, many of which were *Liaozhai* adaptations. In May 1963, Shanghai's

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[27] The deleted line suggests that Master Li has a brother who was related to the author by marriage, and the brother eye-witnessed Master Li's deeds. (公長公友三, 為余姻家, 其所目睹.) Pu's authorial comment begins with a tribute to this great ancestor, but ends with his customary ambiguity about ghosts and foxes: "I was born too late to pay my respects to the Master or to serve him in person. Yet even judging from what the relatives told me, I dare say that he was a man of great strength, courage and generosity. These two incidents about him prove it more than sufficiently. Such greatness does exist in the universe—what can ghosts and foxes do about it!" 予生也晚，未得奉公杖履。然聞之父老，大約慷慨剛毅丈夫也。觀此二事，大概可睹。浩然中存，鬼狐何為之哉！The last line, "what can ghosts and foxes do about it" (in the face of such human valour), implies praise for the brave man, but it also suggests a note of sympathy for the ghosts. This sympathy would have conflicted with the editorial agenda and the need for thematic coherence.

[28] See Pang Peifa 龐培法. "Mao Zedong yu bupagui de gushi" 毛澤東與不怕鬼的故事 (Mao Zedong and Do Not Fear Ghosts). *Dangshi wenhui* 黨史文彙 (Materials from CPC History). 2000, vol. 2; and Gao Qirong 高其榮. "Mao Zedong 'bupagui' sixiang lunshu" 毛澤東"不怕鬼"思想述論 A Review of Mao Zedong's thought of "Do Not Fear Ghosts". *Journal of Xiangnan College* 湘南學院學報. 2004, vol. 4. According to Pang Peifa and Gao Qirong, the gist of this particular political theory is 1) do not fear ghosts; 2) ghosts are not fearsome; 3) adopt a proactive strategy to fight with ghosts; and 4) reform those who are "half-ghost, half-human."

Culture Gazette 文匯報 published the essay, "*Yougui wuhai lun*" 有鬼無害論 (There is no harm in speaking of ghosts), condemning the ghost play "Li Huiniang" 李慧娘 and triggering off a nationwide purging of ghost plays from the stage.[29] In the wake of the purging movement in 1963, the Cultural Bureau of Sichuan Province alone issued bans on thirty-five ghost plays. Of the thirty-five ghost plays, nineteen were based on *Liaozhai*.[30] What can be inferred from this situation is a) *Liaozhai* adaptations had been frequently produced in regional theatres up until the early 1960s; b) the purging of ghost plays revealed an increasing discomfort with cultural products that were considered remnants of a superstitious old China on the part of the new Communist government. Ghost plays were not the only victims of the purging movement that began in 1963. In the following decade, all traditional plays, viewed as the vestiges of the old world, were banished from the Chinese stage. Only Madam Mao's revolutionary *yangbanxi* 樣板戲 remained, in a theatrical space that was eerily hollow and ghost-ridden.

It is doubly ironic that ghost stories such as *Liaozhai* should be appropriated to feed a political propaganda whose aim is to annihilate the very culture that has produced such stories. The earlier efforts at taming the ghost—the subtle manipulations of the ghosts within the text or the intricate critical and editorial interventions—have never completely ignored the legitimacy of the text, or the legitimacy of the ghost. The publication of *Do Not Fear Ghosts*, in conjunction with Mao's "Beating the Ghosts"

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[29] "A Report on the Agenda of Improving and Enhancing Theatrical Repertoire" was issued in November 1962. In December, a follow-up "Notice on the Implementation of the 'Report on the Agenda of Improving and Enhancing Theatrical Repertoire'" was issued. See Du Jianhua 杜建華. *Liaozhai zhiyi yu chuanju Liaozhaixi* 聊齋志異與川劇聊齋戲 (*Liaozhai zhiyi* and *Liaozhai* adaptations into Sichuan opera). Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 2004, pp. 101-102.

[30] Ibid.

campaign, suggests an attempt to finally put the dialogic discourse on ghosts to an end, by radically reinterpreting it and replacing it with a monologic anti-ghost discourse. If Mao's appropriation of the ghost as a metaphor for the political enemies of new China still constituted a "minor discourse" against perceived international powers, the subsequent use of ghosts during the Cultural Revolution as means to identify and eradicate those who were politically undesirable would have been a violent departure from the minor tradition of the ghost tale. The minor discourse of the ghost was thus ironically and heavy-handedly appropriated to serve a major ideology.[31]

In *Words Well Put*, Graham Sanders observes that poetry, when strategically deployed, can transform the threat of physical violence into symbolic violence.[32] In the realm of politics, it would seem that the reverse could also be true. If the May Fourth suppression of "inhumane literature" constituted a form of symbolic violence, Mao's campaign of beating the ghosts and banning the ghost play were acts of symbolic violence with deadly consequences. During the Cultural Revolution, the denunciation of ghosts also meant the symbolic execution of certain segments of the Chinese population—the "right-wing" writers, intellectuals and political dissidents who were labelled "oxen, ghosts, snakes and demons" 牛鬼蛇神. And indeed, the symbolic

[31] The "major" use of the minor discourse of ghosts proves to be a particularly appealing ideological tool in contemporary China. In a 1999 reprint of *Do Not Fear Ghosts*, the editors apply the ideological uses of the book to a new political context: "It has been thirty-eight years since Do Not Fear Ghosts was first published. There have been great changes in and outside China during these years. As we get ready to usher in a new century, there has been a resurgence of the 'ghostly practices' and 'demonic ways' that the May Fourth figures such as Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun had long condemned—sham *qigong* and pseudo-medical sciences are being promoted in the name of reviving traditional Chinese culture; superstitions and heresies, such as Falun Gong, have resurfaced. They have crept into people's lives, disturbing people's minds, poisoning people's beliefs, and harming the reform, the development, and the stability of the construction of Socialism with Chinese characteristics." See the Preface, in *Do Not Fear Ghosts*, 1999 edition.

[32] Sanders, *Words Well Put*, p. 116.

violence took its toll and was turned into physical violence during those tumultuous years.

Ghosts on a New Periphery

In the 1940s, many left-wing writers and artists who fled war and Communism decamped to Hong Kong and Taiwan. The exodus continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s via Hong Kong. Mainland cultural workers brought with them the progressive thought of May Fourth and wartime patriotism as they crossed over into new political territories. A similar exodus took place symbolically in the ghostly realm. When Mao's "beating the ghost" campaigns threatened to eradicate the ghost and its cultural production in the Mainland, the cultural production of ghost stories found a way to re-emerge in Hong Kong, most prominently in Hong Kong cinema.

In spite of Hong Kong's "minor" position geo-politically, Hong Kong cinema of the 1950s and 1960s was de facto the headquarters of a burgeoning overseas Chinese cinema. The films were made in Hong Kong under its successful studio system. The audience spanned across Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the larger Chinese diaspora. But most importantly, Hong Kong's fledgling film industry absorbed a great influx of creative talents from the Mainland, including directors, actors and writers. Hong Kong cinema of this period occupied a geographical and political periphery, but its heart yearned for home, for a "centre" from which it was separated by politics and ideology. It is not surprising that the ghost would become a powerful metaphor for this cultural condition: a state of exile, a falling away from the ancestral roots, a feeling of nostalgia and a desire to return.

When ghost plays, including *Liaozhai* plays, were banned in Communist China in the 1960s, this was also when adaptations of *Liaozhai* reached iconic status in Hong Kong films. The 1960s produced two influential ghost films based on *Liaozhai*: Li Hanxiang's 李翰祥 *Enchanted Spirits* 倩女幽魂 (1960), adapted from "Nie Xiaoqian," and Bao Fung's 鮑方 *Painted Skin* 畫皮 (1965), based on "Hua Pi." The filmic ghost of Hong Kong created the possibility to continue or to renew the Chinese tradition of the ghost tale. But, as with all previous receptions of *Liaozhai*, the renewal of the ghost discourse in a different cultural-historical context entailed various kinds of editorial and critical interventions. How did Hong Kong filmmakers make use of Pu Songling's ghost tale to express their own personal and cultural concerns? In what sense did Hong Kong constitute a new cultural and political periphery from which the ghost discourse could resume its critical and minor function? And, in the context of 1960s Hong Kong, how did the Communist-Nationalist standoff complicate or compromise the filmmakers' "minor" stance?

Li Hanxiang's *Enchanted Spirits* is an especially illuminating text on which different major and minor positions—cultural, geographical, and political—negotiated, shifted, and reconfigured. Li Hanxiang (1926-1996) had been an art student in Beijing before he went to Hong Kong in 1948. There he rose to prominence in the late 1950s as a filmmaker at the prestigious studio, Shaw Brothers. Due to his Mainland background, Li specialized in films of "northern" themes, especially historical drama. The 1960 *Liaozhai* film, *Enchanted Spirits*, reveals Li's Mainland complex on many levels. It was filmed in Mandarin, obviously aiming at an audience much larger than the Cantonese-speaking communities. Taiwan was a major target market. The film opens with an image showing

the cover of Pu Songling's book, *Liaozhai zhiyi*, next to a burning candle, the quintessential prop for a ghost scene. The film closes with the same image, the candle burned out and extinguished. Such a narrative frame indicates Li's homage to Pu Songling, the author of the original story, as the presence of the book reveals Li's recognition of *Liaozhai*'s status as a Chinese classic. Placing the film between the book covers also seems to suggest that the film is intended as a faithful rendition of the source tale.

What comes in between the covers is anything but faithful. The source tale, "Nie Xiaoqian," begins with Ning Caichen, an honest and righteous man who sojourns at a haunted temple. Also present at the temple is Yan, a ghost-catching Daoist hermit. There, Caichen encounters Xiaoqian, a beautiful ghost who is forced to lure and kill men for the consumption of her bloodsucking master. But Caichen's innocence saves him from Xiaoqian, his unwilling predator. He promises to free her from the control of the demon and help her reincarnate. After the Daoist kills the bloodsucking demon, Caichen goes to find Xiaoqian's grave. This is the first half of the *Liaozhai* story, but it is roughly where Li's film ends. The second half of the story continues with the graveyard scene, where Xiaoqian emerges, vowing to repay her debts to Caichen. She follows him home, and proves herself to be a filial, virtuous, and talented ghost/woman who dutifully serves the entire household. After Caichen's wife dies, Xiaoqian is finally accepted into the family as the new wife. She bears him two sons, both growing up to be degree-holders.

Li Hanxiang's omission of the second half of the story from the film clearly shows his disinterest in the domestication of the ghost and her integration into human society. For someone who grew up under the influence of May Fourth, a domesticated

ghost-human relationship would probably seem ludicrous and pointless. Keeping only the first half of the source tale, Li Hanxiang embellishes it into a romantic love story between Caichen and Xiaoqian and sets it against an epic battle between good and evil forces. This war-and-love formula is reminiscent of the patriotic "leftist" filmmaking in Shanghai during the period of the Sino-Japanese war. In spite of the film's ghost theme, Li Hanxiang's main interest lies not in the ghost itself, but in using the ghost as an allegorical vehicle. This allegorical approach is reflected in the other changes Li made to the narrative. While the source tale makes no specific historical reference, Li's film is set against the background of the Ming-Qing dynastic change, and Ning Caichen, the male protagonist, is recast as a Ming loyalist longing for the restoration of the Ming court.

In an essay on film adaptations of "Nie Xiaoqian," Wu Youneng 吳有能 points out the obvious analogous overtones between the Ming loyalism in Li's film and the anti-Communist stance in 1960s Taiwan.[33] Wu's interpretation is certainly valid in light of the historical antagonism between Communist Mainland China and the KMT-controlled Taiwan around the time the film was made. Hong Kong, as a main destination and a mediating ground for Mainland refugees since the Sino-Japanese war broke out, felt the pressure from both the pro-China and pro-Taiwan camps. However, many cultural workers who fled Communism in the late 1940s, including Li Hanxiang, chose to stay in Hong Kong. The fact that they did not follow the Nationalists to Taiwan indicated an

[33] Wu Youneng 吳有能, "Fanghun bumie: cong Nie Xiaoqian dao Qiannü youhun—yige jieshou shiyexiao de quanshi." 芳魂不滅：從聶小倩到倩女幽魂—一個接受視野下的詮釋 (Conference article presented at the Mingdao Seminar 明道講座, Taiwan, April 2004): p. 14.

ambivalent political stance and probably a certain degree of distrust toward the KMT.[34] An overtly political interpretation of Li Hanxiang's film that connects it with anti-Communist Taiwan therefore does not allow room to account for such political ambivalence and individual choices. Similar to the interpretation of *Liaozhai* in a strictly anti-Manchu context, this anti-Communist framework again threatens to subsume the minor function of the ghost into a major ideology that was prevalent at the time, even though it was an ideology peripherally situated in Taiwan.

If we refrain from imposing an overarching political framework upon the film, does Li's ghost film then constitute a minor discourse? The ghost tale in the *zhiguai* tradition, as discussed in Chapter One, derives its critical potential as a minor discourse mainly from its marginal position within the dominant Confucian ideology. In this sense, Li's film is clearly "minor" as it is situated on a geographical and political periphery vis-à-vis the Chinese Mainland. While there must have been a certain degree of personal identification between Li's filmic ghost and the filmmaker as an artist-in-exile, Li's "minor" geo-political position could also paradoxically imply a "major" cultural position that competed with Communist China for the claim on cultural authenticity. Li's political ambivalence might have prevented him from fully identifying with Taiwan's military ambition to "reclaim the Mainland." But, as one of the many Mainland cultural workers sojourning in Hong Kong, Li's work clearly suggests a strong desire to reclaim China culturally by creating a vision of "Chineseness" that would somehow prevent the perceived loss of cultural roots in the aftermath of war and cultural dislocation.

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[34] For a discussion of Taiwan's influence on Hong Kong and the political allegiances of Hong Kong filmmakers in the post-war period, see Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-cultural View*, pp. 154-157.

This “major” take on the Chinese cultural tradition is reflected in Li Hanxiang’s devotion to northern themes and historical epics during this period of his filmmaking. The opening and closing shots of *Enchanted Spirits*, which focus on Pu Songling’s original work, reveals an understanding of Pu’s work not as a minor discourse, but part of a major tradition. It is a tradition that Li desired to claim, a desire that was heightened by his lost contact with a physical cultural centre—the northern Mainland. This notion of cultural authenticity is best illustrated by the aesthetics of Li’s film adaptation of *Liaozhai*. In Pu’s original story, although there is brief mention of Xiaoqian’s physical beauty and her artist talent, the main narrative interest is in the ghost’s domestication as a result of Caichen’s steadfast morality and Xiaoqian’s womanly virtue. In Li’s film, Caichen and Xiaoqian are portrayed as a pair of romantic lovers who immerse themselves in poetry, calligraphy, music, and painting, very much modeled after the traditional scholar-and-beauty (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) ideal. Li’s early training in art is reflected in his meticulous attention to cinematography, as each frame is composed like a classical Chinese painting.

In light of Li’s vying for Chinese cultural authenticity, his recasting of Caichen as a Ming loyalist longing for the restoration of a former dynasty could also be interpreted as reflective of Li’s longing for his cultural roots in Mainland China. From the perspective of an artist-in-exile, this longing was predicated on the political situation of his time, but it might not necessarily constitute a clear political stance. Thus Li’s ghost film creates an ambiguous discourse that was marginally situated but central at heart. His take on the ghost story implies an identification with the ghost on the emotional level. But on the intellectual level, the film assumes an identification with the patriotic and

politically-aware male protagonist. Indeed, Li Hanxiang's film suggests the forming of a strategic alliance between human and ghost to address a common problem of historical trauma and cultural dislocation. In terms of the claim of cultural authenticity, Li's highly successful adaptation of *Liaozhai* signalled a symbolic triumph over Communist China, at a time when Mao's "beating the ghost" campaign ruthlessly destroyed the legacies of the ghost tale.[35]

Li's *Enchanted Spirits* also anticipated the allegorical take on the ghost story in Hong Kong film productions in the 1980s, when the colonial city witnessed the resurgence of the ghost film as a distinct cinematic genre.[36] That decade of intense ghost film production has had significant cultural and political implications. Embedding culturally sensitive themes such as spirituality, sexuality, and politics in a highly entertaining genre that blends horror, martial arts, comedy, and melodrama, the ghost films manage to address serious cultural issues to a mass audience without resorting to overt didacticism. The film that best embodies the 1980s Hong Kong cinema's ghost sensibility is Tsui Hark 徐克 and Ching Siu-tung's 程小東 film, *A Chinese Ghost Story* 倩女幽魂 (1987), a remake of Li Hanxiang's 1960 film based on the same *Liaozhai* story, "Nie Xiaoqian." In contrast with the muted lyricism of Li Hanxiang's version, Tsui and Ching's collaboration is a lavishly produced box-office hit with dazzling special effects.

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[35] In a larger cultural context, it was presumably the "exotic" flavour of the ghost theme and the aesthetic appeal of Li's cinematic style that helped the film woo the international art-house audience and garner prizes at Cannes. In this sense, Li's claim for cinematic "Chineseness" internationally also anticipated the issues of Hong Kong/Chinese cinema in the era of global production and consumption toward the late twentieth century. I discuss the issue of Chinese images in global circulation in the context of Chinese "theatrical films" in the essay, "Theatricality and Cultural Critique in Chinese Cinema," *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 122-37.

[36] For a comprehensive survey of Hong Kong ghost films, see *The 13th Hong Kong International Film Festival: Phantoms of the Hong Kong Cinema.*

The film was so successful that the producer Tsui Hark followed up with two sequels and a cartoon version for the younger audience.

As Hong Kong was confronted with its return to Mainland control in 1997, it is not surprising that ghosts, often associated with death and terminality, should become such a fertile metaphor for the city's political and psychic state. The film critic Shi Qi has given an insightful explanation of why the ghost film became popular in Hong Kong in the 1980s: "In the 1980s, China was Hong Kong's greatest source of anxiety, while at the same time, the ghost film was an unusually popular sub-genre of Hong Kong cinema. The ghost film mirrored Hong Kong's psychological mood. It was a time of gloom, anxiety, and uncertainty. For Hong Kong, ghosts hail from under the soil of the Mainland. The cadavers wearing Qing dynasty court clothes became an especially potent symbol of that kind of haunting—something from the past, from underground, that must be vehemently resisted."[37]

Shi Qi's insight on the Hong Kong ghost film offers a unique vantage point from which to examine the cultural and political relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China. The intricacy of that relationship can be illustrated in the two polarized and yet complementary attitudes towards the subject of ghosts. Both ideologies are acutely sensitive to the political signification of the ghost. Whereas the Communist Party first exploited the symbolism of the ghost in political campaigns and then bluntly exorcised *Liaozhai* and other "ghosts" from its cultural stage, Hong Kong filmmakers picked up discarded ghost material such as *Liaozhai*, and used it to express their anxiety

[37] Shi Qi 石淇, "Bashi niandai Xianggang dianying de chengjiugan he weijigan" 八十年代香港電影的成就感和危機感. Li Tianduo 李天鐸, ed. *Dangdai huayu dianying lunshu* 當代華語電影論述. Taipei: Shibao wenhua 臺北時報文化, 1996, pp. 139-145.

over political and cultural uncertainty. This historical moment of Hong Kong before 1997 anachronistically resembles the cultural-political uncertainties during the Six Dynasties, when marginal literati figures turned to the non-ancestral ghost to forge a minor discourse as the three major moral-religious ideologies vied for dominance.

But the minor discourse of the ghost, as exemplified by Pu Songling's tales, does not only tap into the critical, allegorical capabilities of the non-ancestral ghost; it draws its creative potential from human identification with the ghost, whereby the ghost's quest for her identity moves beyond the allegorical and enters the social and the ontological. Tsui Hark and Ching Siu-tung's *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987), their version of "Nie Xiaoqian," precisely focuses on such a quest for the ghost's identity. Like Li Hanxiang's 1960 version, Tsui/Ching's film only deals with the first half of the source tale, showing a similar disinterest in domestication or the "return" of the ghost to human society. Yet Tsui/Ching's film highlights Xiaoqian's dilemma and the difficulty of her reincarnation by creating a larger-than-life tree-demon based on Xiaoqian's bloodsucking master and by adding an all-powerful Black Mountain Monster who seeks to permanently lock Xiaoqian in the underworld by taking her as his ghost bride. The audience's subjectivity is thus anchored and aligned with that of the female ghost.

A serious-minded allegorical mode is unmistakable in Tsui/Ching's film, but the commercial imperative of Hong Kong cinema has also prompted the producer and director to lace the film with an extravaganza of fast action and special effects, thus creating a random and gleeful nihilism that has become characteristic of commercial Hong Kong cinema. Trying to decipher a coherent political allegory out of this sensationalist blockbuster has become an engrossing academic exercise for many film

critics. Who represents which side of Hong Kong's pre-1997 dilemma? Do we identify with the female ghost or her human lover? Where hides Communist China? Who embodies the colonizer? And who is the *real* colonizer? Each interpreter offers a slightly different line-up of the relevant cultural and political positions variously represented by Xiaoqian (the ghost), Caichen (the male protagonist), Yan (the Daoist sorcerer), Lao Lao (the tree demon), Black Mountain Monster, and the presumed audience.

In Stephen Teo's analysis of *A Chinese Ghost Story* and its sequels, he places the allegorical significance not so much on the figure of Xiaoqian, the ghost, but on the terrifying tree demon that controls her. A minimal presence in the source tale, the tree demon in the film is fully amplified into a gender-bending and man-devouring mega-monster that surfaces from the underworld when a country or dynasty is near collapse. Stephen Teo points out that in *A Chinese Ghost Story III*, as the demon turns into the image of a golden Buddha, the opening bars of the Internationale are heard as a short pastiche in the music score. According to Teo, "[The] allusion is, of course, to the collapse of Communism."[38] This highly explicit political reading shifts the allegorical thrust from the quest for rebirth and new identity to the resistance against Communist take-over. It suggests a pro-British ideological stance. This interpretation seems to be supported by the narrative shift in *A Chinese Ghost Story* II & III, with the new focus on Caichen's encounters with monstrous enemies both human and demonic. In the two sequels, the original ghost figure of Xiaoqian is also joined by several other forgettable ghosts whose functions are nearly interchangeable. However, the two sequels are so far

[38] Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimension*, p. 228.

removed from the ghost story mode that they are best considered narrative spin-offs. As such, they are reflective more of the "major" interests of commercial exploitation than of the "minor" functions of the ghost.

In "*A Chinese Ghost Story*: Ghostly Counsel and Innocent Man," John Zou offers a perceptive reading of the original 1987 version of Tsui/Ching's "Nie Xiaoqian" in the context of colonialism and gender. Arguing that "ghosts are us," Zou points out the affect of "the self-feminization of the colonized" resulting from the audience's identification with the female ghost. He further argues that this identification implies a "homoerotic" desire for the male colonizer—the innocent Caichen that Xiaoqian tries to manipulate. According to Zou, "[what] stands out within the framing narrative of Xiaoqian's interest in Caichen is that unique desire for, and the attendance techniques to manipulate and victimizes, the intruding conqueror."[39] But to assuage the audience's feeling of complicity with the manipulative ghost, Zou adds a positive spin on the feminine power of the ghost: "Through the masks of death, the colonized subject does come forth, but only to tantalize and castrate the living presence of the colonizing forces." He then concludes the essay with a reference to China, suggesting that the "castration" of the male colonizer's power could be the film's "ghostly counsel," an ambiguous message of warning for the prospective conqueror "as Hong Kong cinema of the late 1980s foresaw another strange conqueror at the gate."[40]

John Zou's allegorical reading of the film is both subtler and more optimistic than Stephen Teo's vision of a dire confrontation with a demonized Communist China. The

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[39] John Zou, "*A Chinese Ghost Story*: Ghostly Counsel and Innocent Man," p. 45.

[40] Ibid.

identification of Caichen as the feared and yet desired colonizer is refreshing. But, this interpretation of Caichen raises questions about the allegorical significance of Yan, the Daoist sorcerer, a character that is under-read in Zou's essay and perhaps one that would have proved inconvenient for his interpretive scheme. The main caveat to Zou's interpretation, however, is that while he focuses on the viewer's identification with the female ghost, he portrays a ghostly agency so autonomous and a "minor discourse" so triumphant that it contradicts sharply with the precarious and helpless situation of the ghost in the film. This optimism about the ghost, by allegorical extension, also presupposes a sure-footed Hong Kong rather than a Hong Kong of uncertainty circa 1997.

Political allegory is but one mode of Hong Kong ghost film production. Hong Kong cinema, notoriously commercial and market-driven, often requires that the filmmakers spice up the weightiness of political allegory with martial arts, comedy, sex and violence. Thus Tsui Hark and Ching Siu-tung's ghost films, in their pursuit of commercial success, have diluted the allegorical message and made it far from coherent. Meanwhile, their flamboyant filmmaking has helped to unleash two particularly suppressed and dormant functions of *Liaozhai* ghosts—the erotic and the horrific. By Hong Kong cinematic standards, the *Liaozhai* adaptations of Tsui Hark and Ching Siu-tung are rather tame in their depiction of sex, but they fully tap into the horror mode of Hong Kong B-movies, to the extent that it is acceptable in a mainstream film.

Film scholars have often maintained that horror has always been a minor or underdeveloped genre in Chinese cinema. When horror does emerge in a *Liaozhai* film, as in the case of *A Chinese Ghost Story*, the source of terror rarely comes from the ghost herself, but from a dark, dangerous and anthropomorphic monster figure that controls her.

Judith Zeitlin has noted that the film's source tale, "Nie Xiaoqian," does not describe the monster in any detail, "an omission that is not explained simply by the predilection for brevity in classical Chinese narrative." She further points out that the literary ghost tradition is singularly uninterested in horror, and is instead marked by a tendency to displace fear back onto the timid, abject image of the ghost.[41]

But the full-fledged realization of the tree monster in the film does signal the return of fear in the form of a monstrous body that is too visceral to be dispelled as political allegory. The anthropomorphic nature of the monster's body also commands a towering presence that the Freudian mechanism of projection alone cannot explain. It is reminiscent of the grotesque and dangerous ghosts in the *Liaozhai* tales in the *zhiguai* mode—a "body-without-organs" before the mechanism of taming sets in. In the film, the Daoist sorcerer's sword alone cannot kill it; the Buddhist scripture can only temporarily destroy it; and the undying love between human and ghost narrowly escapes its rapacious tongue. And the monster always comes back, in a different guise, in another sequel. Perhaps the horror of the ghost film is not to be measured by the intensity of its horror imagery, but by the spectral quality of the medium itself. A ghost film is the ghost of a ghost, and its ability to seep into the public unconscious has meant that the main cultural function of *Liaozhai* films is no longer to revive the ghost that has already been tamed, but to generate new forms of spectrality.

In contrast with Li Hanxiang's Mainland complex in *Enchanted Spirits*, the ghost films of Tsui Hark and Ching Siu-tung are no longer driven by the nostalgia for the loss of cultural roots due to political, historical, and geographical dislocation. Nor are they

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[41] Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, p. 3.

overly concerned with claiming an authentic "Chineseness" via the aesthetic revival of the Chinese ghost tale. In fact, the younger generation of Hong Kong filmmakers relish in their hybrid culture and their growing sense of a Hong Kong identity that originated from China but is also distinct from it. This truly "minor" position informs Tsui/Ching's ghost films. The films are politically aware, but there is a playfulness about them that rejects a sentimental longing for the ancestral home. Their identification with the non-ancestral ghost does not necessarily constitute a desire to "return." This filmic ghost, similar to the ghosts in early *zhiguai*, resorts to a powerful "body-without-organs" to shake up existing order and create opportunities to forge alternative identities. It is thus understandable why *A Chinese Ghost Story* is singularly uninterested in the domestication of the ghost, the main focus of Pu Songling's original story. Forsaking the safety of domestication in favour of rebirth into the unfamiliar, the films suggest a feeling of uncertainty about Hong Kong's future, but they also project a sense of hope for a future that is as unpredictable as it is free, one that is not bound up with the organizing structures of either the demonic or the domestic worlds.

The Rehabilitation of *Liaozhai* Ghosts

In 1985, three young women in Jiangxi Province carried out a suicide pact after having watched the film *Ghost Sisters* 鬼妹 (based on the *Liaozhai* story "Xiaoxie" 小謝) twice. The film critic Wang Fucong links the tragedy with certain problems in the film adaptation. She identifies three problematic aspects of this particular *Liaozhai* adaptation: 1) a negative portrayal of both the underworld and the world of the living; 2) a failure to sublimate or tone down certain superstitions; 3) and an over-emphasis on the ghost-

human love triangle without a broadening of the story's social meaning.[42] Although Wang Fucong refrains from establishing a causative link between the film and the suicides, she faults the filmmakers for not portraying the world of the living in a more positive light, implying that the filmmakers must be more socially responsible in their own work. The tragedy prompted another publication, *Chinese Cinema* 中國電影, to conduct an interview with the film's screenwriter, Fang Yihua 方義華. In the interview, Fang attributed the cause of the tragedy to inadequate education and a lack of awareness on the part of the audience. He urged the media to take the responsibility to educate the public about the differences between life and art in order to prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future.[43] The controversy over this tragedy, the perceived dangers of the *Liaozhai* film, and the debate on the role of the filmmaker, combine to make a strong case for a programmatic, state-controlled re-adaptation of *Liaozhai* for moral education.

Such were the moral and ideological imperatives during a period of intense production of *Liaozhai* films and TV series in Mainland China from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, during which forty-eight *Liaozhai* stories were adapted for television, and at least a dozen made into films.[44] From 1987 to 1990, Fujian Television Station alone produced a series of seventy-eight TV episodes based on *Liaozhai*, an ambitious adaptation project that took several directors and production teams four years to complete.

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[42] Original news reported in *China Women's Daily*, as referenced in Wang Fucong 王富聰. *Liaozhai yingshi pinglun* 聊齋影視評論 (On screen adaptations of *Liaozhai*), pp. 234-7.

[43] Ibid.

[44] For details on twentieth-century Chinese screen adaptations of *Liaozhai*, see Wang Fucong, *Liaozhai yingshi pinglun* 聊齋影視評論, Shandong wenyi chubanshe, 1993.

Although the 1980s adaptations of *Liaozhai* were artistically hindered by overwhelming moral and didactic concerns, they performed the important function of bringing *Liaozhai* out of its limbo and reviving it for the contemporary Chinese audience. These adaptations also offer textual proof that *Liaozhai* ghosts could still generate a highly contested cultural discourse.

But this discourse could not have been "minor" in the same way the filmic ghost was in the 1980s Hong Kong. Ever since it emerged, the filmic ghost of Mainland China has been the property of the state-controlled mass media. In the Mainland, the movie theatre had been designated as an important venue for political propaganda and ideological control, a legacy from the Cultural Revolution. That policy had not fundamentally changed during the 1980s. Although significantly liberalized after the thaw that followed the Cultural Revolution, the cultural climate of the 1980s was still very much a continuation of the politically conscious climate of the 1950s, and to some extent, an equally political conscious reaction, or remedial response, to the ideology of 1970s.

Why revive *Liaozhai* at all, if the work had been long considered incompatible with the zeitgeist of a new socialist China? After the thaw, the cultural overseers of the state went about the task of rehabilitating many of the literary classics that were banned during the Cultural Revolution, in much the same way the state rehabilitated writers and intellectuals who were silenced or persecuted. The rehabilitation was not so much a gesture of recompense as it was a measure of reclamation. The 1980s was the era during which the Chinese media hectically turned out high volumes of TV and film adaptations of literary classics.

Liaozhai, like other treasures that were locked away and sealed off by the cultural police, did not fade with time, and therefore was considered too valuable, and too dangerous, to be left unclaimed without the new stamp of official approval. Thus the *Liaozhai* dramas of the 1980s, adapted for television—clearly the most influential and the most popular cultural medium of the time—carried much ideological weight and moral responsibility. They were not as critically well received as other TV dramatizations of masterpieces of the same period such as *Hongloumeng* and *Shuihuzhuan*. Yuan Shishuo 袁世碩 has suggested that *Liaozhai* presents special difficulties for screen adaptation because the original stories are not representational but suggestive, not realistic but lyrical.[45] In spite of such misgivings, *Liaozhai* screen adaptations continued to thrive well into the twenty-first century. Perhaps to a contemporary Chinese audience, the real appeal of *Liaozhai* lies not so much in its lyricism but in its ability to open up imaginative realms and thus reactivate spiritual urges and cultural sensibilities that had been long denied by socialist realism. And that ability remains with the ghost.

In his essay "Second Haunting," David Wang sees the revival of ghosts in late twentieth-century Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Mainland Chinese fiction as a post-modern project to challenge Chinese realism as the dominant twentieth-century literary and cultural discourse. He argues that, "the ghostly narrative has introduced a

[45] According to Yuan Shishuo, "Pu Songling's classical tales are not based so much on realism as they are on lyricism expressed through symbols, metaphors and allegory. The narrative is essentially poetic in nature. When too much emphasis is placed on plot, the story loses its poetic flavour and becomes prosaic. One might say that *Liaozhai*, at least some of the tales, defy dramatization. Nevertheless, the trend toward television and film adaptations of *Liaozhai* cannot be reversed. Successful adaptations must be based on a thorough understanding of the literary qualities of the original and the particular strengths of the film medium. The process must not be mechanical but creative." Quoted and translated from Yuan Shishuo's preface in Wang Fucong, *Liaozhai yingshi pinglun*, pp. 1-4.

phantasmagoric dimension to the Chinese fin-de-siècle discourse of the real."[46] David Wang's positioning of realism and phantasmagoria as two competing literary paradigms echoes the rivalry between Ji Yun and Pu Songling in the eighteenth century, when the fictionality of *Liaozhai* was perceived as a severe challenge to the integrity of unofficial historiography. However, in rehabilitation of *Liaozhai* in post-Mao China, we do not see a paradigm-shifting cultural landscape where a dominant discourse of the real is challenged by the return of phantasmagoria. What we have instead are different cultural interests—ideological, personal, literary, and commercial—representing the competing forces in the reclamation of a common literary legacy. Therefore the proliferation of the ghost narrative in contemporary China is no so much the product of alternative cultural visions as that of constant negotiations and compromises.[47]

To illustrate that ghosts are still a controversial topic in contemporary China, I have earlier alluded to the media coverage of censorship issues related to the 2003 Taiwan-sponsored TV adaptation of the *Liaozhai* story, "Nie Xiaoqian" 聶小倩. According the newspaper reports, the producers of the series compromised by "de-ghosting" the story in order to pass Mainland censorship because the Mainland market

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[46] David Der-wei Wang, "Second Haunting." In *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation From the Late Ming to the Late Qing and Beyond*, pp. 575.

[47] One literary example that illustrates this process of negotiation and compromise is Wang Zengqi's 汪曾祺 rewriting of a series of *Liaozhai* tales from 1987 to 1991, at around the same time *Liaozhai* was adapted for Chinese television and film. Through editing, adding, deleting, stylistic innovation, and recasting the tales in modern vernacular Chinese, Wang Zengqi produced thirteen stories entitled "New Perceptions on *Liaozhai*" (*Liaozhai xinyi* 聊齋新義). In the context of a nationwide project to rehabilitate *Liaozhai* after the Cultural Revolution, Wang Zengqi's efforts, emphasizing literary and artistic value, are refreshingly free from weighty political and ideological concerns. Though sharing to a degree the same zeitgeist that guided the *Liaozhai* screen adaptations in China in 1980s, Wang's rewriting could be seen as a one man's battle to challenge and compete with state-engineered appropriations of *Liaozhai*. The tales are collected in *Wang Zengqi quanji* 汪曾祺全集 (The Complete Works of Wang Zengqi, Vol. 4). Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe: 1998.

was too lucrative to lose.[48] This story generated much buzz in Chinese media. Those cynical might dismiss the flurry of newspaper articles as nothing but media hype. But such ambiguities indeed sum up the current status of the ghost tale in contemporary China: on one hand, the issue of belief related to ghosts remains a subject of genuine ideological concern; on the other hand, the production of ghost narratives is widely allowed due to popular demand and commercial incentives.

It seems that, on the ideological level, the imperative to eradicate superstitious content and "de-ghost" the films remains high. However, ghostly sentiments tend to crop up outside the visual text, and a sense of haunting nonetheless permeates the production process. For example, the 2003 Taiwanese production of *Nie Xiaoqian* is unabashedly tied in with superstition and folk rituals from the very start. It is reported that the TV crew gathered in Panyu 番禺, Guangdong Province, in an auspicious hour on December 17, 2002, for a kick-off ceremony. The ceremony featured prayers, and human-sized red candlesticks as tall as the producer Mr. Yang, as well-wishing tokens for successful ratings.[49] Newspaper coverage of the production process often sounded sensational. *Shenyang Today* alarmingly reports, "It would be inauspicious to say the film is hexed, but the production was marred by several inexplicable accidents."[50] The article then

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[48] See Introduction of this dissertation, pp. 4-5.

[49] "Qiannü youhun Guangzhou shaoxiang baifo" 倩女幽魂廣州燒香拜佛, on Sina Entertainment News 新浪娛樂: http://ent.sina.com.cn, 2002 (December 18).

[50] Tang Xiaoshi 唐曉詩, "Qiannü youhun paishe xianchang xianxiang huansheng" 倩女幽魂拍攝現場險象環生, *Shenyang Today* 瀋陽今報, 2003 (June 11).

gives a list of seven "eerie" accidents that happened during the shooting, such as actors stumbling, falling, or being hit in the head by various objects.[51]

It is almost comical to see these minor accidents being hyped as anything more than the day-to-day happenings of a TV production with a heavy martial arts component. But, these easily overlooked incidents do become significant, eerie, and ominous when they are presented in the context of a ghost drama. The reporter, probably exhausting all attempts to create a story and having to settle with trivia, has inadvertently triggered the suggestive power of the ghost, still present but largely latent in the public unconscious. Although all things ghostly are supposed to be diligently purged, at least from the main text of the TV drama, the banished, invisible ghost re-emerges in a way that befits the ghost sensibility—on overlooked margins, in new peripheries.

Conclusion

Chinese ghost discourse fluctuated with and survived the cultural and political vicissitudes of the twentieth-century, proving the tenacity of the ghost's hold on the Chinese psyche. The violent break with a superstitious and feudalist "old China" during May Fourth ushered in an anti-ghost "new China" that once again threw the ghost into

[51] Accident 1: A sudden wind took down a high platform on a set. Staff members fell, but no serious injuries. Accident 2: The stuntman for the female lead "Big S" fell from a 12-foot high special effect device, fortunately with no serious injuries. Accident 3: While shooting in Dali 大理, a sandstorm blew off one of the billboards. It barely missed the actress Xuan Xuan's 宣萱 head, thanks to an actor who pushed the board away. Accident 4: Due to a severe sleep deficit, the actor Nie Yuan 聶遠 was nearly stabbed in the left eye by a stuntman. Accident 5: During a blow-up scene featuring Tian Niu 恬妞, a piece of debris hit the cinematographer in the head. He was hospitalized. Accident 6: The actress, Tian Niu, lost her ID card at the airport. In Guangzhou, she had to change her hotel room thrice due to a number of problems, like the mother of Mencius who moved three times to afford her son a better education (Mengmu sanqian 孟母三遷). Accident 7: Most sadly, the actress Tian Niu stumbled on a tree stump while posing for a photo shoot, and injured her toe only a few days before her birthday.

the forefront of ideological struggle and political debate. However, this was the same anti-ghost cultural climate in which *Liaozhai* would regain its "minor" status. Mao's political use of *Liaozhai* also ironically illustrates that the ghost tale as a minor discourse can be easily appropriated by a powerful political machine to reinforce a major ideology.

The unique historical situations of Hong Kong during the 1960s and 1980s created new cultural peripheries from which the minor discourse of *Liaozhai* was recreated through the filmic ghost. However, even cultural products within geographical peripheries, such as Li Hanxiang's 1960 film (*Enchanted Spirits*), do not necessarily entail self-reflectively critical and minor positions. Moreover, idiosyncratic takes on the minor positions of the ghost, such as Tsui Hark and Ching Siu-tung's 1987 film (*A Chinese Ghost Story*), could become subsumed, through interpretation, by the prevailing ideologies. Even more inextricably bound up with ideological and cultural determinants is the re-emergence of *Liaozhai* ghosts in film and television in post-Mao China.

Unlike the literary ghost that is confined to the semi-private setting of a bookstore or enshrined among the literary classics in a library, its modern reincarnation in film and television, owing to its virtual, instantaneous and mass exposure, constitutes a public domain that warrants closer scrutiny from the state. The filmic ghost is therefore as elusive as it is closely watched. In this cultural environment, the state-controlled media may have made it impossible for the filmic ghost to be a truly "minor" discourse that is critical, contemplative, and uncompromising. On the other hand, the mass media returns the ghost into fluid circulation in a public domain that is mediated but nonetheless widely accessible. In this sense, the modern filmic ghost is not dissimilar from the ghost tales that had long ago been orally transmitted in the folklore tradition. There is no telling

when the ghost will again find the right raconteur, the right listener, and the right writer who will put down its story so that its powers can be passed on.

Conclusion

"The Painted Skin" 畫皮 has been a pivotal text for my analysis of Pu Songling's representation of the ghost in *Liaozhai*. To conclude the present study, I again turn to "The Painted Skin" to sum up the main ideas and arguments that I have sought to draw out throughout the four chapters. "The Painted Skin" is one of the rare *Liaozhai* stories that depict both sides of the ghost's image—-the beautiful and the grotesque—and show that both are indispensable. It portrays a ghost/woman hybrid that inspires fear and desire, and intimates that she too fears and desires. It demonstrates human strategies of taming, but cautions that the ghost defies taming when it is dealt with only by force, and when fear is denied and the ghost's desires are not learned and accommodated. In terms of theme, the story inverts and subverts the tropes of the romantic ghost, the talented ghost, conjugal love, and romantic fantasy in general. In terms of genre, it is *chuanqi* in style but *zhiguai* in spirit. It points to a darker source of the ghostly imagination, reminding us of our primordial vulnerability and the ghost's early ontological crisis. It teaches us that a lack of compassion only deepens the alienation between ghosts and humans. It is a story whose textual complexity mirrors the complex psychological, moral-religious, literary, and ideological makeup of Pu Songling's ghost world.

Since this dissertation is also concerned with the ghost of *Liaozhai*, particularly the way in which the work functions as a minor discourse during its reception, it behooves us to examine the modern manifestations of "The Painted Skin," and see how the literary ghost tradition transforms and renews itself upon and underneath the textual "skin" of the story.

In a way similar to Mao's appropriation of the term "ghost," the phrase *huapi* (painted skin) acquired a series of highly politicized connotations during the early struggles of Communist China. In *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, *huapi* has been used in a political context since 1956. The painted skin, in the sense obviously derived from the *Liaozhai* story, has been used as a metaphor for any political force or figure that hides evil, dangerous intentions behind a beguiling, beautiful mask. From 1956-1966, the term was almost exclusively used to refer to American imperialism; from 1966-1976, it was reserved for Soviet revisionism; immediately after the Cultural Revolution, in the late 1970s, the "painted skin" was directed against the Gang of Four.[1] In contrast with Pu Songling's story that functioned as an anomaly within the "minor" tradition of anomalous records, "painted skin," in twentieth-century political discourse, has become a code word that identifies different "major" political movements according to the prevailing wind of each phase of Chinese politics. In more contemporary usage, the "painted skin" could refer to any kind of deception or scam, from quack herbal cures to fake cell-phones. While it is still currently being used in political contexts, the term has become increasingly absorbed by China's thriving commercial culture.

Although the term "painted skin" has been politicized and then generalized in mainstream discourse, the story itself has managed to maintain its capability to inspire fear and generate controversy on the film screen. Indeed, the filming of the story has served as an important link between familiar and new modes of haunting. "The Painted

[1] There have been 78 mentions of the "painted skin" in *The People's Daily* since 1956, none of which refers to the *Liaozhai* story itself. See *The People's Daily*, online database.

Skin" is arguably the only widely known *Liaozhai* story that has a well-developed narrative and yet focuses not on a beautiful ghost, but on a hideous monster—or more precisely, a hideous monster in the disguise of a beautiful ghost. It is, as Lu Xun suggested, *zhiguai* in the *chuanqi* style. This unique thematic and stylistic combination has facilitated an almost seamless transmigration of the story onto the film screen, creating an icon of Chinese horror.

Not surprisingly, "The Painted Skin" as a Chinese horror icon is created and preserved in Hong Kong cinema, in great measure, due to Hong Kong's peripheral geopolitical postion that allowed the minor discourse of the ghost to continue away from the powerful anti-ghost ideology of Mainland China. Bao Fung's 鮑方 1965 film, The Painted Skin 畫皮, was an immediate box-office sensation and became a cult classic. A later version was made by King Hu 胡金銓 (畫皮之陰陽法王 1993), in the wake of the enormously successful *A Chinese Ghost Story* series by Tsui Hark and Ching Siu-tung. Public interest in "The Painted Skin" also reemerged in Mainland China after the Cultural Revolution, and that interest has been unabated. As recently as early 2008, a high-profile new film version of "The Painted Skin" went into production. Directed by Hong Kong filmmaker Chen Jiashang 陳嘉上, the film is a big-budget Hong Kong-Mainland co-production aimed at Chinese as well as international audiences.[2]

There has been much talk about an enigmatic "fourth" version of "The Painted Skin" that was reportedly screened in Mainland China in the late 1970s, whose horror proved so traumatizing to an uninitiated audience that it was allegedly banned shortly

[2] The 2008 film version of "The Painted Skin" was promoted at Cannes earlier in the year, and will be screened in China during the highly commercialized October 1st National Day period.

afterwards. Bao Fung's 1965 version was probably released in Mainland China not long after the Cultural Revolution, as were a small number of Hong Kong films that were carefully selected and screened before being imported to China. The timing, somewhere between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, would have corresponded with the appearance of the "fourth" version. Around that time, the Cultural Revolution had already been officially abandoned, but the spirit of "beating the ghost," which Mao had initiated in the early 1960s, lived on with a new twist that reflected the changes in the cultural-political climate: The Gang of Four, who relentlessly persecuted the "oxen, ghosts, snakes, and demons" 牛鬼蛇神 during the Cultural Revolution, had by now themselves become the ghosts to be exorcised. "The Painted Skin," a famous *Liaozhai* story that explicitly deals with the exorcism of a harmful ghost, would have dovetailed with the zeitgeist of the late 1970s. Therefore, importing a Hong Kong film based on that story would have been within the guidelines of the cultural policies at the time.

Yet many film aficionados claim that the version that wrecked havoc and was subsequently banned in China in the late 1970s was not Bao Fung's 1965 version. On popular Chinese websites, bloggers have cited vivid memories of childhood experiences of watching this horror film, amongst screaming and fainting audience members. Some claim to have read reports of deaths directly resulting from watching this film, while dismissing Bao Fung's version as not being nearly as terrifying. There has been an online drive to search for this mysterious late-1970s version. It is believed to be a Hong

Kong-China co-production, now existing in a few rare original copies on the dark shelves of China Film Archives.[3]

Regardless of the actual existence or the whereabouts of this widely remembered horror film, public speculation about this likely apocryphal version reveals the tensions and anxieties embedded in the modern and contemporary reception of *Liaozhai*. This popular reception reaffirms the idea that *Liaozhai* does not function like most other major classics of Chinese literature. Hence there is a need to critically examine Pu Songling's work beyond a strictly literary and aesthetic framework.

If the much sought-after and ever elusive "fourth" version did exist, it would be interesting to investigate the circumstances of its production, dissemination, censorship, and eventual disappearance. If there was no such co-production of "The Painted Skin," as the lack of media and scholarly reference strongly suggests, the metaphorical existence of this fourth version in ghostly form becomes even more intriguing, as this collectively imagined non-version testifies to the spectral nature of the *Liaozhai* legacy. In the story "The Painted Skin," the ghost/woman eventually evaporates and becomes a phantom threat that lurks in the dark. This ghostly film version, too, looms large in the background and commands a haunting presence regardless of its actual existence. From an ideological point of view, the public search for this supposedly censored horror film could also indicate a reaction against the state control of media—a dissatisfaction with the prescribed images of the ghost and a demand for what is hidden. Such an act of collective resistance, itself a form of "minor discourse," could only be possible in the era

[3] See online discussion on Baidu 百度: http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=164326218. There is a conspicuous lack of evidence as to whether such a late-1970s co-production of "The Painted Skin" actually exists. I have not been able to locate this film in the film archives in China and Hong Kong, nor have I found any specific critical or scholarly reference to it in print.

of the worldwide web, wherein the ghost enters a diffused and as-yet-unorganzied cultural sphere, another "body without organs."

If the fear-inspiring late-1970s version had indeed been Bao Fung's 1965 film, its dismissal as being "tame" in the eyes of a contemporary audience suggests that what counts as horror has changed significantly in the past few decades, as audiences become gradually desensitized to visual depictions of violence and horror. However, this public craving for horror in a ghost film could not be described merely a symptom of the increasingly horror-obssessed modern media. As Pu Songling showed us in his ghost world of *Liaozhai*, to admit fear is to recognize the power of the ghost, and in overcoming fear, human beings can hope to reach a better understanding of ghosts and of themselves. Fear can be morally purifying. Fear is the beginning of human compassion.[4]

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