

The Prosperity of Modern Chinese Detective Novels and Reasons Behind

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Abstract—In the late Qing and the early Republic period, detective novels came on the stage of literature and stood high in the public's favor. *Zhili jingcha zazhi* (Chihli Police Magazine) cast positive influence on the dissemination of western police theory and the creation of detective novels in China. The prosperity of detective novels was closely related to such factors as the political thought, the cultural tradition and the reading habit of the period. The value detective novels reflected was the scientific spirit. Being embodiment of justice, the positive characters of these novels were heroes adored and expected by the people.

Keywords- *modern times; detective novels; prosperity; reasons*

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The largest amount of Gong An stories (the earliest known genre of Chinese detective stories) was created in late Qing with sequels to classic stories produced continuously. For example, *Xin sanxia wuyi* (New Three Heroes and Five Gallants), *Xu sanxia wuyi* (Sequel to Three Heroes and Five Gallants), *Xu yugong an* (Sequel to Case Records of Judge Yu) and *Xu shigong an* (Sequel to Case Records of Judge Shi) were kept on repeating at length. A series of bizarre cases were introduced to the public followed by lots of publications of free rendering and editing. In the Gong An stories prior to late Qing, greedy, stupid and cruel officials were depicted to give prominence to the honest and upright ones. In late Qing, however, the greedy, stupid and cruel officials became the protagonists as the novels focused on the collusion of these officials and the corrupt juridical system. Besides, the settlement of the complicated cases in these stories more often than not relied on supernatural elements like dream indication and ghosts' guide. Sometimes, to crack a case, the judge depended on *Youxian zhen* (the Drifting Deity Pillow) to reach the Yama's Palace. Generally speaking, most of the Gong An stories followed the same pattern and were written roughly. Very few of them had great influence.

In the late Qing and the early Republic period, detective novels came on the stage of literature and won the public's favor.

II. RUNNING JOURNALS

In 1902, Yuan Shih-kai proposed to establish police school in a memorial to the emperor. In July of the same year, he authorized Zhao Bingjun to build a police school in Baoding, Hebei Province to train policeman according to Chinese and

western established laws. Many provinces, while advocating police education, also published their own police journals. The columns of these journals consisted of Imperial Edict, Memorials to the Emperor, Laws and Decrees, Official Documents and Correspondence, Provincial Police Information, Police Information of Peking and other Provinces, Charts and Figures, Argumentation and Comment, Translation and Speech. Some Journals included novels. Among various police journals, *Zhili jingcha zazhi* (Chihli Police Magazine) achieved the greatest accomplishment and was imitated by its counterparts. Written in both classical and vernacular Chinese, this magazine not only released imperial edict, memorials and laws but also collected police information from place to place and translated articles on police system and theory from various countries. It regularly issued papers and speech on police and published novels in vernacular Chinese "with the purpose to encourage and inspire the policeman through stories about the witty detectives and policeman". [1] Rich in content and lively in style, the magazine helped to spread police knowledge, which cast positive influence on the dissemination of western police theory and the creation of detective novels in China.

As the first comprehensive literature magazine of China, *Xin xiaoshuo* (New Novels) started publication in 1902 with detective novels its major column. Among columns of various journals, the most popular was *Zhentan zhiyou* (Fans of Detective) of *Banyue* (Half Month) and its renewal *Ziluolan* (Violet) under the general editorship of Zhou Shoujuan. In 1917, Cheng Xiaoqing established magazine *Zhentan shijie* (The Detective World) and began to publish detective novels with Chinese characteristics. Focusing on detective novels, *Zhentan shijie* also contained martial art and adventure stories. In 1923, Lu Dan'an, Cheng Xiaoqing and Shi Jiqun co edited the semimonthly of *Zhentan shijie* which only published detective novels. In addition to specialized detective novel journals like *Zhentan shijie* and *Da zhentan* (Great Detective), daily columns of *Shenbao* (Shanghai News) and *Xinwen bao* also serialized detective novels which drew large readers. Major popular literature journals such as *Hong meigui* (Red Roses), *Hong zazhi* (Red Magazine), *Kuaihuo* (Happiness), *Jingangzuan* (Diamonds), *Wanxiang* (All Nature), *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn) and *Ziluolan* (Violet) all issued specials of detective novels. Containing original writings and translation works, full-length novels and short stories these specials were perfect places for writers to play with their detective legends.

III. TRANSLATION

Zhang Kunde, English editor of *Shiwubao* (Current Affairs Newspaper), was the first to translate foreign detective novels. His translation works included Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Naval Treaty*, *The Adventure of the Crooked Man*, *A Case of Identity*, and *The Adventure of the Final Problem* which were published in installments from No.6 to No.12 and from No.24 to No.30 in *Shiwubao* in 1986 and 1987. Writer and translator Lin Qinnan translated Conan Doyle's *The Refugees*. From 1903 to 1904 Chen Lengxue translated foreign detective novels and published them under the title of *Zhentan tan* (*The Anthology of Detective Novels*). Comprising four books with the first two published by Zhonghua Book Company (*Zhonghua shuju*) in 1903 and the latter two by Kaiming Bookstore (*Kaiming shudian*) in 1904, *Zhentan tan* contained ten detective novels created by French, Japanese and English writers. In 1905, Zhou Zuoren translated Edgar Allan Poe's *The Gold Bug* under the title *Yuchong yuan* (*A Story about Jewel Beetle*) and published it in the May issue of *Nüzi shijie* (*Women's World*). From then on, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter* were translated into Chinese in succession. Zhou Guisheng translated French novelist Fortune de Boisgobey's *Margot la Balafra* (*In the Serpent's Coils*) under the title of *Dushe quan*. Besides, he translated two novels still unidentified of another French writer (translated name Jishan, but the original name is unidentified) as *Dufu moufu an* (*A Case of Jealous Wife Murdering Her Husband*) and *Hongzhi an* (*A Case of Port-wine Stain*). Zhou Guisheng's translation also covered English Writer Conan Doyle's *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (containing only part of the cases) and an American writer's *Shinü an* (*A Case of Daughter Lost*). 1915 saw Sherlock Holmes story translated by Cheng Xiaoqing as *Fuermosi tan'an*. Of all the foreign detective novels, Sherlock Holmes books were the most translated and influential. In 1925 Dadong Publishing House (*Dadong shuju*) published *Fuermosi tan'an quanji* (*Complete works of Sherlock Holmes*) which comprised four books and included nine new works of Conan Doyle. At the same time, the publishing house launched Maurice Leblanc's *Arsene Lupin* story *Yasenluoping an quanji* (*Complete works of Arsene Lupin*) consisting of 10 novels and 18 short stories. Translators working on it included Zhou Shoujuan, Shen Yuzhong and Sun Liaohong. They put the original into vernacular Chinese and Zhou Shoujuan wrote the preface. Two years later, in 1927, the newly-founded World Book Company (*Shijie shuju*) asked Cheng Xiaoqing, together with other translators, to retranslate Conan Doyle's works into vernacular Chinese under the title of *Fuermosi Tan'an Daquanji* (*The Most Complete Works of Sherlock Holmes*) and published it in succession afterwards. Prominent translators working on detective novels of the time included Cheng Xiaoqing, Sun Liaohong, Zhou Gui, Chen Lengxue, Zhou Shoujuan, Lu Dan'an, Yu Tianfen, Wang Jianming, Zhao Zhaokuang and Zhang Biwu. [2]

IV. CREATION

During the late Qing and early Republic Period, there were not short of detective novelists of whom Cheng Xiaoqing, Lu Dan'an, Zhang Biwu and Sun Liaohong were the most famous.

Cheng Xiaoqing had a poverty-stricken childhood and used to work as a clockmaker's shop apprentice. He learnt foreign languages by himself and then took correspondence English courses on criminal psychology and detective studies. He started writing at 18 and achieved instant fame with *Huosang tan'an* (*Cases Investigated by Huo Sang*). The following years witnessed the production of more than 30 detective stories including: *Jiangnan yan* (*The South-China Swallow*), *Zhuxiang quan* (*Beads Ring*), *Huangpujiang zhong* (*On the Huangpu*), *Bashisi* (*Eighty-four*), *Lunxia xue* (*Blood under the Wheel*), *Guomian dao* (*Knife Wrapped in Cotton*), *Kongbu dehuaju* (*Horrible Drama*), *Yuye qiangsheng* (*Gunshot in a Rainy Night*), *Baiyi guan* (*Monster in White*), *Cuiming fu* (*Summons to Death*), *Suoming Qian* (*Money the Killer*), *Xinhun jie* (*Abducting the Bride*), *Huoshi* (*The Living Corpse*), *Taofan* (*Escaped Prisoner*), *Xueshouyin* (*Bloody Fingerprint*), *Heidilao* (*Dark Dungeon*) and *Wutou an* (*Unsolved Mystery*). In his novels, Cheng Xiaoqing created the *Shorlock Holms* of Shanghai, *Huo Sang*, and his secretary *Bao Lang*, the Eastern Dr. Watson. Giving priority to character's psychological analysis, he integrated murder case with real life. Furthermore, Cheng taught people to believe in science rather than superstition by emphasizing scientific methodology in cracking cases. The greatest charm of his novels lied in winding yet well-organized plot and clear narrating.

Learning Tongcheng classical Chinese in his early years, Lu Dan'an had good command of ancient style poetry. His *Baiqiren zhuan* (*Biography of One Hundred Strange Persons*) written in classical Chinese made his fame widespread in South China. He joined Nanshe (South Association) in 1915 and was admitted to Law School, Hainan College. Well versed in law, he adapted movie *Dushou* (*Murderous Means*) to novels which became a best seller. He wrote several screenplays like *Heiyi dao* (*Thief in Black*), *Laohu dang* (*Party of Tigers*) and *Hongyitao* (*Red Coat*) successively and published five detective novels including *Mianlizhen* (*Needle in the Cotton*), *Guta guqiu* (*Lonely Prisoner in Ancient Pagoda*), *Gegiang renmian* (*The Wall has Face*), *Yeban Husheng* (*Cry in Middle Night*) and *Guaihan* (*Strange Letter*). Set on shady deal of the old society, his stories gained the readers' favor with complicated plot and rigorous planning.

Yu Tianfen was born into a scholarly family. His father Yu Zhong was a person with literary reputation in late Qing. When he was young, he enjoyed writing late at night and created many novels like *Jing zhong ren* (*Man in the Mirror*), *Boming bei* (*Ill-fated Tablet*), *Zhongguo zhentan tan* (*A Talk on Chinese Detective*), *Jiandan qinxin* (*The Gall-bladder of a Sword and the Heart of a Lute*). *Zhongguo zhentan tan* contained 12 short stories, such as *Shuanglü yin* (*Double Shoeprints*), *Gui lüguan* (*Hotel of Ghost*), *Fengjing hua* (*Landscape Painting*), *Sanleng jing* (*A prism*), *Heimu* (*Shady Deal*), *Huaping* (*A Vase*), *Gui yizhu* (*A valuable Will*) and *Bairi huo* (*Misfortune in daylight*). Clever in designing and novel in reasoning, his stories were attractive like mysterious magic. It's worth pointing out that Yu's detective novels were profound in ideas by describing the ugly fact of life and criticizing darkness and corruption of the old society.

Zhang Biwu published two detective novels namely *Shuangxiong douzhi ji* (*A Battle of Wits*) and *Jiating zhentan*

songwuqi xintan'sn (New Cases investigated by Private Detective Song Wuqi). This set of novels contained 22 volumes, of which Xiang zhong nüshi (Female Corpse in the Case) and Jiehou yusheng (Aftermath) were the most famous. These stories did not merely describe fighting, robbery and murder, but focus on tricks and the skills to solve a case with the theme of poetical justice.

Sun Liaohong created five detective novels: Xiadao luoping qian (Mystery of Rogue Luo Ping), Yelie ji (A Story of Hunting in Night), Zise youyongyi (Purple Swimming Suit), Lanse xiangweishe (Blue Rattle Snake) and Buye cheng (Sleepless Town). Closely relating cases to shady deals, his works revealed the darkness and corruption of the old society. With skillful conception and winding plot, Sun's books were both critical and easy to read. [3]

V. REASONS FOR PROSPERITY OF DETECTIVE NOVELS IN LATE QING AND EARLY REPUBLIC

The popularity and prosperity of detective novels in late Qing and early Republic were closely related to such factors as the political thought, the cultural tradition and the reading habit of the period. [4]Firstly, the dark house and the waste land, the robbery and the murder, together with those odd persons were so mysterious and full of tension that readers were drawn to a brand-new world. It stirred their rigid and ordinary life, stimulated their poor spiritual life and satisfied their curiosity. Secondly, detective novels transformed such archetypes in Gong An stories as magic power, loyal official and servant. Qingtian dalaoye ("Master of Clear Sky") who used to be

responsible for weeding out the wicked and pacifying the good people was then replaced by the private detectives with high intellect and great bravery. They became new forces to maintain social security and order. Thirdly, detective novels pursued human right rather than imperial power, advocated rule of law rather than rule of man, praised democracy rather than autocracy. These novels advertised western juridical system which were representative of western civilization and needed by the times. Fourthly, what the detective novels presented were scientific spirits. Detective novels were marvelous combination of literature and science. Cases were cracked by scientific evidence instead of subjective assume. Investigating cases by means of scientific thinking and scientific development became a new choice. The last but not the least, the positive characters were distinct in personality. They pursued the truth and stuck to principle, they helped the weak and respected the law, they were witty and resourceful, knowledgeable and patient. All in all, they were embodiment of justice, and heroes adored and expected by the people.

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