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In their Own Words:

British Sinologists' Studies on Chinese Literature, 1807–1901

Lingjie Ji



Thesis Submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Asian Studies (Chinese)

School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures

The University of Edinburgh

2017

Declaration

I hereby affirm that all work in this thesis is my own work and has been composed by me solely. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Abstract of Thesis

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Adopting a narrow sense of “literature” as the umbrella term for poetry, drama, and fiction, this research examines the British sinologists’ studies on Chinese literature from 1807 to 1901, and addresses the specific question of how both the knowledge about, as well as the collective discourse on, Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction were gradually constructed, narrated, accumulated, and standardized in the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century. This study brings together, for the first time, a wide range of little studied sinologists’ writings on Chinese literature, including monographs, journal articles, prefaces and introductions to translations, and chapters on Chinese literature in books surveying different aspects of China. Based on extensive archival investigations, this thesis reconstructs a panoramic view of how these diverse sinological texts acted collectively to create a body of knowledge about Chinese literature.

Considering sinological literary studies within the historical and literary contexts which are sketched out in Chapter 2, the remaining three chapters of this thesis examine the three narrative forms I have identified in the sinologists’ writings on Chinese literature: the expository, or, direct description and explanation of the characteristics of Chinese literature, the comparative studies between Chinese and English or European literatures, and the historical accounts of Chinese literature. With systematic discourse analysis of these writings, this research aims to unfold the vocabulary and rhetoric, the frameworks and perspectives, and the narrative strategies employed by the sinologists in the discursive

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formation of the knowledge about Chinese literature. I argue that such knowledge and discourse produced in the sinologists' studies must be understood as the result of the complex dynamics among multiple literary and cultural factors including the English and Chinese literary concepts and criticism, the ambivalent cultural attitudes towards China, the implied influence of British imperial power in China, and the varied purposes and criteria of individual sinologists. A study on the nineteenth-century British sinologists' studies on Chinese literature enables us to trace and explain the historical origins of studies on Chinese literature in the English scholarship.

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Acknowledgements

In writing this thesis, I have been fortunate in receiving the kind support and advice from many people. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor Professor Natascha Gentz, whose expert guidance and generous support had always kept me motivated and focused on this tough project. Without her constant encouragement during the course of my PhD work, I would not have been able to complete the thesis as it is now.

My appreciation also goes to Dr. Julian Ward and Dr. Christopher Rosenmeier for their constructive comments on my work in progress. I am also thankful to Julian for his helpful suggestions for revision on my Introduction chapter.

I am grateful to the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, University of Edinburgh, for offering me a three-year PhD scholarship, conference grants, and other forms of research support. The Chinese Student Award from the Great Britain-China Educational Trust was also a timely financial help in my final year.

A special word of gratitude is due to my colleagues and friends at the University of Edinburgh, Dr. Tian Gu, Jing Jing, Hiu Man Keung, Stephanie Wong, and Jing Zhu. I have thoroughly enjoyed their companion as well as helpful conversations in our regular gatherings, afternoon Meadows walks, and late-night talks. I also thank Su Hu for her critical interest in my research and valuable comments on the Introduction chapter. I wish to thank other friends who had offered their help, Professor Wendong Cui for downloading a few copies of primary materials; Dr. Liangliang Chen and Dr. Guangming Hu for sharing their knowledge about traditional Chinese drama; and Dr. Huimin Wu for sharing her findings on John Francis Davis. The kindness of my dear friends of our global “*Haitang Huaxi*” Group—Yu Fu and Chunhong Jiang in Beijing, and Ziran Ma and Xin Yu in Germany—has always been precious to me.

I wish to express my gratefulness to Elizabeth Leith who proofread my thesis under time pressure and added that necessary finishing touch to make this work more readable. I would like to thank my external examiner Dr. Susan Daruvala and internal examiner Dr. Xuelei Huang for carefully reading through this thesis, for a most enjoyable exchange of ideas at the viva, and for the very constructive suggestions on exciting further research directions.

Finally, I wish to give my heartfelt thanks to my loving family whose unconditional understanding, patience, love, and financial support have made my academic journey so far possible.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The British sinologist Herbert Allen Giles (1845–1935) published his remarkable *A History of Chinese Literature* in 1901. In this 448-page long monograph, Giles sketched the history of Chinese literature from about 600 BC to 1900, covering a wide range of literary writings including the Confucian classical canons, historical works, belles-lettres, and religious classics. *A History of Chinese Literature* scrutinises the historical development and the literary principles and characteristics of Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction in each dynasty, with extensive English translation of representative literary works as specimens of Chinese literature. This monograph was considered the first history of Chinese literature in the world when it was published: “This is the first attempt made in any language, including Chinese, to produce a history of Chinese literature,”¹ as Giles himself also proudly announced in the preface to the book. One of the reasons for the lack of prominent comprehensive history of Chinese literature before the twentieth century probably lies in the difficulty of such a project. Writing a history of Chinese literature can be an extremely challenging task because of its sheer scale. As Giles explained in the same preface, “the voluminous character of a literature which was already in existence some six centuries before the Christian era” in China may frighten scholars away from launching a complete historical survey of Chinese literature. Though Giles humbly acknowledged that his *History* was only “an introduction into the great field [of Chinese literature] which lies beyond,”² many English readers and reviewers have nonetheless been impressed by his achievement. For example, one reviewer remarked that, considering “the history of a literature that extends over some thousands of years,” it was a wonder that Giles “should be able to tell it at all.”³

The success of Giles’s *A History of Chinese Literature* in such a challenging task raises the obvious question of how this book was made possible at the beginning of the twentieth century. In other words, from the emergence of British sinology in the early nineteenth century to the publication of the *History* in 1901, what made such a complete knowledge

¹ Herbert A. Giles, preface to *A History of Chinese Literature* (London: William Heinemann, 1901), v.

² *Ibid.*

³ Review of *A History of Chinese Literature*, by Herbert A. Giles, *The Academy* 60 (1901): 99.

about Chinese literature possible? When and where did the British knowledge on Chinese literature come from? How did the British sinologists understand and represent the characteristics and the history of Chinese literature to the English-speaking world? How was such knowledge about Chinese literature generated, accumulated, and standardised during the course of the nineteenth century and eventually produced in the form of a general literary history?

With its increasing contact with Britain since the seventeenth century, China had emerged as an important referent in British intellectual and cultural history. The formation and the function of the idea of China in British cultural, aesthetic, and literary imagination have been adequately explored in works by David Porter, Elizabeth Hope Chang, and Peter Kitson.⁴ While their research focuses on the impact of Chinese aesthetics and material culture and of British sinology to the English knowledge of China, Chinese literature as a form of knowledge—that is, how the principles, characteristics, styles, and values, for example, of Chinese literature were understood by English readers—in this process was understudied. Moreover, these researches highlight China's constructive role in the formation and transformation of British modernity instead of how Western knowledge about China was systematically produced in the first place. To reconstruct the history of how the knowledge of Chinese literature was established in the English-speaking world, this study examines the British sinologists' writings on Chinese literature in the nineteenth century. With systematic discourse analysis of their explanatory, comparative, and historical writings, this study addresses the specific question of how the knowledge about, as well as the collective discourse on, Chinese literature was gradually constructed, narrated, accumulated, and standardised in the nineteenth century.

1.1 Discourse on Chinese Literature

The English term “literature” assumes multiple meanings in history and now. A crucial conceptual and semantic change of the word occurred from the late eighteenth century and

⁴ David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Peter Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

during the nineteenth century, in which “literature” retreated from its broad meaning of all kinds of written texts to the narrower sense as the umbrella term for imaginative writings. Things become even more complicated when we try to apply “literature” to the Chinese conception of *wenxue* 文學 (literature) which refers to a very different scope and order of texts. The conceptual development of the English “literature,” as well as the British sinologists’ understanding and classification of “Chinese literature” in the nineteenth century, will be examined in Chapter 2. Suffice it to say here that this research mainly adopts the modern and narrow sense of “literature,” defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the result or product of literary activity,”⁵ or, in the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* as “imaginative writing *per se*, that is, the genres of poetry, fictional narrative, and drama.”⁶ Therefore, by “Chinese literature,” this study mainly considers the British sinologists’ writings on traditional Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction, but not on philosophical or religious texts such as the Confucian or Daoist classics. This is why James Legge (1815–1897), one of the most important British sinologists in the nineteenth century, will be conspicuously absent in my study, as he mainly dedicated himself to the study and translation of the Chinese classics—even the most literary *Book of Poetry* was purposely translated by Legge “as a portion of the Chinese classics.”⁷

This study focuses on the nineteenth century because this was the foundational phase in the formation of modern knowledge about Chinese literature in the English-speaking world, in which the British sinologists played an important part. Chinese literature had been known to the English readers since the seventeenth century, particularly with the translation of two Chinese literary works in the eighteenth century—the French translation of the Chinese play *Zhaoshi gu'er* 趙氏孤兒 (The Orphan of the House of Zhao) and its various English adaptations, and the English translation of the Chinese novel *Hao qiu zhuan* 好逑傳 (The Fortunate Union).⁸ While these two pieces of literary works enjoyed

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “literature,” accessed July 4, 2017, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/Entry/109080?redirectedFrom=literature#eid>

⁶ Vincent P. Pecora, “Literature,” in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, vol. 3 (New York: C. Scribner’s, 2005), 1306.

⁷ James Legge, “The Prolegomena,” in *The Chinese Classics: with Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, trans. James Legge, vol. 4, part. 1, *The First Part of the Sheking* (Hong Kong: Lane, Crawford & co., 1871), 114. On James Legge and his sinological studies, see Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge’s Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁸ Joseph-Henri de Prémare, trans., “Tchao Chi Cou Ell: or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao,” in *The General History of China, Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological . . . of the Empire of China. . . .*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, trans. Richard Brookes, Vol. 3, 3rd ed (London: J.

wide popularity in Europe, only fragmentary information and knowledge about the general characteristics of Chinese literature was transmitted to Europe through the Jesuit missionaries' writings.

It is in the nineteenth century that more comprehensive and detailed studies of Chinese literature was carried out with the rise of British sinology. The beginning of the academic discipline of “Sinology” (or “Sinologue”) is often attributed to the appointment of French sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832) as the first professor of Chinese at Collège de France in 1814.⁹ In my research, however, I do not take “British sinology” as the academic discipline since, as I will argue below, that it was mainly outside the universities—it was in China, to be more precise—that the British studies of China first developed. The British “sinologists” I look at in this study are not university professors of Chinese like Rémusat, but the Protestant missionaries, East India Company employees, translators and interpreters, British Consuls, and staff to the Imperial Maritime Customs Service in China, who understood the Chinese language and devoted to the studies of China.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, British sinology developed in the nineteenth century as a response to the changing socio-political relations between Qing China and the British Empire.¹⁰ Both the Lord Macartney Embassy to China in 1792 and the Lord Amherst Embassy in 1816 failed to accomplish their mission to persuade China into free trade, which fuelled the tension between the two countries.¹¹ The first three decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the failure of the “old Canton system” and of the East India Company's monopoly in China, while pressure and conflicts over trade were building up at the same time between the British Empire and the Chinese government. The two Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860) further intensified the collision and resulted in a treaty

Watts, 1741), 197–237; Thomas Percy, ed., *Hau Kiou Chooan; or, The Pleasing History* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761).

⁹ Knud Lundbæk, “The Establishment of European Sinology 1801–1815,” in *Cultural Encounters: China, Japan and the West*, ed. Søren Clausen, Roy Starrs, and Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995), 15.

¹⁰ On Sino-British relations in the nineteenth century, see Gungwu Wang, *Anglo-Chinese Encounter since 1800: War, Trade, Science, and Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jürgen Osterhammer, “Britain and China, 1842–1914,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Vol. 3. *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter and William Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 146–168.

¹¹ Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1900), 53–58.

system that represents the imbalanced power relation in China. The cession of Hong Kong in 1842, along with the institutional instruments such as the Consular Service and the British-oriented Imperial Maritime Customs Service (1854–1911) marked the British imperial presence in nineteenth-century China. Concomitant with political upheavals, as Shunhong Zhang has shown in his research,¹² the eighteenth-century European vogue for Chinese material and intellectual imports gave way to varied and more critical attitudes towards China in the early nineteenth century. The changing Sino-British relations and cultural attitudes require a renewed understanding of China.

As a rejection of and correction to the Jesuit missionaries' interpretation of China which began to be considered as biased and overly sympathetic, British sinology emerged in the early nineteenth century with the China-based British sinologists engaging in more empirical and self-claimed "objective" study of China based on their personal experience in the country and their Chinese language skills.¹³ In an attempt to provide more "authentic" and "impartial" knowledge about Chinese literature, these expatriate British sinologists in China began to read, translate, and study Chinese literary works directly from the original texts. They also published extensively to describe and explain the unique characteristics of Chinese literature, to compare Chinese and English literature, and to trace the origins and development of Chinese literature. My research looks at these writings on Chinese literature, which mainly appeared in four forms: monographs on an individual genre or on Chinese literature as a whole, chapters on Chinese literature in the general survey books on China, prefaces or introductions prefixed to the English translations of Chinese literary texts, and articles on any topic concerning Chinese literature published in English sinological or literary journals. In these detailed, systematic, even semi-academic English

¹² Shunhong Zhang, *British Views on China at the Dawn of the 19th Century* (Reading: Paths International, 2013).

¹³ On the history of British sinology, see Timothy Barrett, *Singular Listlessness: A Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars* (London: Wellswep, 1989); Xiong Wenhua 熊文華, *Yingguo hanxue shi* 英國漢學史 (History of British sinology) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2007); Hu Youjing 胡優靜, *Yingguo shiji de hanxue shi yanjiu* 英國 19 世紀的漢學史研究 (History of nineteenth-century British sinology) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2009); Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 26–125. See, also, Uganda Sze Pui Kwan 關詩珮, "Fanyi zhengzhi yu hanxue zhishi de shengchan: Wei Tuoma yu Yingguo waijiaobu de Zhongguo xuesheng yiyuan jihua (1843–1870)" 翻譯政治及漢學知識的生產：威妥瑪與英國外交部的中國學生譯員計劃 (1843–1870) (The politics of translation and the production of sinology: Sir Thomas Francis Wade and the Student Interpreter Program, 1843–1870), *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica* 近代史研究所集刊 81 (2013): 1–52; Uganda Sze Pui Kwan, "Translation and the British Colonial Mission: The Career of Samuel Turner Fearon and the Establishment of Chinese Studies at King's College, London," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no.4 (2014): 623–642.

writings, the characteristics, principles, and history of the originally unintelligible Chinese literature have been translated into manageable forms of knowledge, into a set of discourse that is accessible to English readers. Together these sinological texts act collectively to create a general body of knowledge about and discourse on Chinese literature that began to establish itself in the English-speaking world.

My study starts with the year 1807 which is commonly acknowledged as the beginning of British sinology with the arrival of the first British Protestant missionary Robert Morrison (1782–1834) in China.¹⁴ As will be discussed in the following chapters, though they claimed to reject the Jesuit missionaries' scholarship, the nineteenth-century British sinologists' writings were in fact occasionally based on, or bore resemblance to, the eighteenth-century knowledge about China. I will also include, therefore, some important eighteenth-century sinological writings such as *The General History of China* compiled by Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (1674–1747) and *Hau Kiou Choaan; or, The Pleasing History* (1761) edited by Thomas Percy (1729–1811) in order to compare and measure the continuity and differences in the British sinologists' understanding of Chinese literature in the nineteenth century.

My study ends with the publication of Herbert Allen Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature* in 1901, which represents a relatively comprehensive knowledge of Chinese literature being finally established. The twentieth century differs substantially from the nineteenth century in Sino-British relations and in British sinology. With the collapse of the Qing Empire and the retreating British imperial power from China, the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the dramatic change in Chinese political and social structures which in turn altered Sino-British cultural relations and British attitudes towards China.¹⁵ The ways in which Chinese studies were carried out are also different. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the development of Chinese studies as a discipline in British universities, the studies on Chinese literature became increasingly professional and institutionalised, and different from the "amateur sinologists" in the nineteenth century. According to D. E. Pollard, great progress was made in Western sinology in the twentieth century, which "was of course made possible by the revolution in native Chinese scholarship in the May Fourth era, and the access to Japanese sinology which the new

¹⁴ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 63.

¹⁵ On Britain's policies and attitudes towards China in the early twentieth century, see Phoebe Chow, *Britain's Imperial Retreat from China, 1900–1931* (London: Routledge, 2016).

university-trained Western sinologists had gained. Within two generations the face of sinology had completely changed.”¹⁶ The nineteenth century, therefore, presents a consistent and particular history of the formative stage of the studies of Chinese literature in English scholarship.

Alongside writings on Chinese literature, English translations of Chinese literary texts were equally important in creating and disseminating knowledge about Chinese literature. There are already many studies on the translation of Chinese literature in the Anglophone world, mainly in the form of case studies of the sinologists’ translations of individual Chinese literary works and genres. For example, two collections, *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1998) and *One into Many: Translation and the Dissemination of Classical Chinese Literature* (2003), contain a number of articles on the European translation of Chinese literary works such as *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* and the novel *The Fortunate Union*.¹⁷ Abundant Chinese research also explores the nineteenth-century British sinologists and their translation of Chinese literature.¹⁸ It will, however, require another monograph to fully investigate the nineteenth-century English translation of Chinese literature. I choose to first examine the sinologists’ informative and interpretive writings on Chinese literature, instead of translation, because, in my view, they could tell us more directly and explicitly about the sinologists’ understanding and interpretation of Chinese literature which would in turn influence and shape their translation. In order to reconstruct a panoramic view of how the knowledge about Chinese literature was produced in the nineteenth century, in this thesis I focus on the sinologists’ writings on Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction.

¹⁶ D. E. Pollard, “H. A. Giles and His Translations,” *Renditions*, no. 40 (1993): 103.

¹⁷ Adrian Hsia, ed., *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1998); Tak-hung Leo Chan, ed., *One into Many: Translation and the Dissemination of Classical Chinese Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

¹⁸ For example, Wang Yan 王燕, “Yingguo hanxuejia Mei Huili *Liaozhai zhiyi yijie chuyi*” 英國漢學家梅輝立《聊齋誌異》譯介芻議 (A study of the British sinologist William Frederick Mayers’s translation and introduction of the *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*), *Study on Pu Songling* 蒲松齡研究, no. 3 (2011): 85–95; Wang Yan 王燕, “Huajian ji: di yi bu Zhongguo ‘shishi’ de xixing zhilü” 《花箋記》：第一部中國“史詩”的西行之旅 (Huajian ji: the first Chinese “epic”’s journey to the West), *Literary Criticism* 文學評論, no. 5 (2014): 205–213; Song Lijuan 宋麗娟 and Sun Xun 孫遜, “Jindai yingwen qikan yu Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo de zaoqi fanyi” 近代英文期刊與中國古典小說的早期翻譯 (Modern English periodicals and early translations of Chinese classical fiction), *Literary Heritage* 文學遺產, no. 4 (2011): 125–132.

1.2 Literature Review: Understanding Literature, Understanding China

While Chinese literature itself has always been an important research area, the knowledge about, as well as the writings and discourses on, Chinese literature seem to have fallen into the cracks between literary studies and cultural studies. Apart from the research on the translation of Chinese literary works, since the last two decades of the twentieth century, there has been a growing interest in Chinese scholarship in the history of the reception and influence of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world.¹⁹ Such histories are mostly chronological compilations of the historical records and facts about the overseas circulation of Chinese literary works. However, they are often concerned less with the discourse or knowledge about Chinese literature and lacking critical analysis of the knowledge-making process. There are also occasional mistakes due to the long time period usually covered in these studies. Nevertheless, these research sketch the general history of Chinese literature's presence in Britain and serve as useful guides to relevant primary materials for my study.

It is during the past two decades that sinological writings on Chinese literature have begun to draw academic attention. In addition to some case studies of sinologists' individual works,²⁰ two Chinese books overlap with my research on the sinological collective discourse on Chinese literature in the nineteenth century. The *Zhongguo Pinglun yu wanqing zhongying wenxue jiaoliu* 《中國評論》與晚清中英文學交流

¹⁹ For example, Wang Lina 王麗娜, *Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo xiqu mingzhu zai guowai* 中國古典小說戲曲名著在國外 (Classical Chinese fiction and drama in foreign countries) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1988); Fan Cunzhong 范存忠, *Zhongguo wenhua zai qimeng shiqi de Yingguo* 中國文化在啟蒙時期的英國 (Chinese culture in Britain during the Enlightenment period) (Shanghai: Shanghai waiyu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991); Zhang Hong 張宏, *Zhongguo wenxue zai Yingguo* 中國文學在英國 (Chinese literature in England) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1992); Song Bonian 宋柏年, ed., *Zhongguo gudian wenxue zai guowai* 中國古典文學在國外 (Classical Chinese literature in foreign countries) (Beijing: Beijing yuyan xueyuan chubanshe, 1994); Huang Mingfen 黃鳴奮, *Yingyu shijie Zhongguo gudian wenxue zhi chuanbo* 英語世界中國古典文學之傳播 (The reception of classical Chinese literature in the English-speaking world) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1997); Zhou Faxiang 周發祥 and Li You 李岫, *Zhongwai wenxue jiaoliu shi* 中外文學交流史 (History of Chinese and foreign literary exchange) (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999).

²⁰ For example, Wang Yan 王燕 and Fang Yan 房燕, “*Hanwen shijie yu Zhongguo gudian shige de zaoqi haiwai chuanbo*” 《漢文詩解》與中國古典詩歌的早期海外傳播 (*Poetry of the Chinese and the early overseas transmission of Chinese classical poetry*), *Literary Theory Studies* 文藝理論研究, no. 3 (2013): 45–52.

(*China Review* and Sino-British literary exchange in late-Qing period) (2006) edited by Duan Huaiqing 段懷清 and Zhou Liling 周俐玲 explores the sinological literary studies published in the English periodical the *China Review* (Hong Kong, 1872–1901), probably the most important journal devoted to sinology in the nineteenth century. This book examines the Victorian sinologists' motivation in studying China and Chinese literature and summarises their writings on Chinese fiction, poetry, folklore, and drama published in the *China Review*. It also includes case studies on the translation of and the writings on Chinese literary works by British sinologists such as John Chalmers (1825–1899) and Herbert Allen Giles. While the book attempts to provide a comprehensive picture of the sinological literary studies in the *China Review*, it is largely descriptive and lacking in analytical depth, with little mention of the relevant literary and cultural factors that shape the sinological writings. Also, it looks only at the *China Review* and does not consider its relation to other British sinologists' studies of Chinese literature.

Sun Yimin 孫軼旻's *Jindai Shanghai yingwen chuban yu Zhongguo gudian wenxue de kuawenhua chuanbo* (1867–1941) 近代上海英文出版與中國古典文學的跨文化傳播 (1867–1941) (English publishing in Modern Shanghai and the cross-cultural transmission of Chinese classical literature) (2014) investigates the function of English publishing in Shanghai as the medium in the formation and transmission of knowledge about Chinese classical literature. It addresses a central question—similar to mine—of how the knowledge about Chinese literature and culture was produced in the English-language publications in Shanghai. The study differs from mine, however, as it focuses more on the material culture in the knowledge production process. The author adopts concepts such as *urban public space* and *field* to depict and discuss the cultural relations in the publishing industry in Shanghai, focusing mainly on the publishing houses, forms of publications, and the community of sinologists, translators, and publishers, while my study primarily focuses on the discursive strategies in the sinologists' writings on Chinese literature.

To understand the production of sinological knowledge about Chinese literature as a cultural activity in its historical context, this study is also cognate with the recent scholarship on the history of cultural exchange between China and Britain. There is a constellation of publications on China's presence in the British literary, cultural, and intellectual imagination, particularly on the role of China in the making of British modernity from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. These studies explore the

production of knowledge about China from various aspects—though Chinese literature is seldom the object of research—which shed important light on Sino-British cultural relations and establish the context for my study. Among this body of research, two books look at the vogue for Chinese objects, decorative arts, gardens, and literary culture in Britain in the eighteenth century. David Porter’s *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (2010) examines the reception of Chinese and Chinese-style goods in the eighteenth century and argues that this “domestication”²¹ of Chinese aesthetics involves profound transformation in the British conceptions of gender, nation, and desire. Chi-ming Yang’s *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-century England* (2011) discusses the mechanism of China acting as the exemplar that “mediates and performs”²² the ideas of virtue and commerce in the conceptualization of modern British values. Focusing on literary, material, and commercial cultures, both Yang and Porter highlight and delineate the complexity in the reception of China in eighteenth-century England, emphasising particularly an ambivalent attitude of simultaneous admiration and denial towards the idea and image of China in the British public discourse.

On the Sino-British encounter in the nineteenth century, Ulrike Hillemann’s *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion* (2009) takes a broad survey of the formation of knowledge about China in relation to British imperial expansion in Asia. Adopting Mary Louise Pratt’s analytic category “contact zone,” Hillemann examines the Sino-British cultural encounters that took place in the inter-connected contact zones—mainly Guangzhou, India, Southeast Asia, and London—and investigates “how the networks of imperial expansion shaped diverse British imagination of China.”²³ She also brings peripheral locations such as India and Southeast Asia into discussion, stressing their geographical significance to the construction of the British knowledge of China. This ambitious project covers the knowledge production process of a wide range of categories including Chinese philosophy, aesthetics, law, language, and religion, demonstrating that the construction of systematic knowledge about China was intertwined with the British imperial project in Asia.

²¹ Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*, 4.

²² Chi-ming Yang, *Performing China, Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 23.

²³ Ulrike Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

Close to my research question and methodology, Georg Lehner's *China in European Encyclopaedias, 1700-1850* (2011) presents an excellent study on the production and transmission of the collective knowledge about China in the English, French, and German encyclopaedias during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The encyclopaedia serves as an important medium in organizing and disseminating knowledge. Examining the condensed narratives about China in these encyclopaedias as the "indicator for the state of European perceptions of and knowledge on China,"²⁴ this book is focused on analysing the origins, formation, and evolution of European knowledge and discourse on China. Chapter 8 of Lehner's book deals with information on Chinese language, writing, and literature as recorded in the encyclopaedias, which indicates the general level and the focus of interests of European knowledge about Chinese literature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Lehner also spends great effort in identifying both the Chinese and European sources for encyclopaedia entries, including how the European sinologists' writings on Chinese literature might be used in these encyclopaedias and transformed into common knowledge in Europe. Due to its wide range of materials and topics, there is only very brief discussion on the British knowledge about Chinese literature.

On a smaller scale, Shunhong Zhang looks at the British views on China from the 1790s to the 1820s, the time period approximately between the Lord Macartney Embassy in 1792 and the Amherst Embassy in 1816. Reading and comparing the travel writings by the members of the two embassies and the general writings on China by contemporary Britons who had never been to China, Zhang provides an organised and detailed analysis of these British writers' diverse views on the Chinese government, national character, social conditions, religion, and so on. These writings at the turn of the century are generally critical of China, but vary case by case with sporadic sympathetic accounts. Zhang also outlines the reasons for the differences in the British assessment of China and the reasons for the increasing criticism of China in Britain from the early nineteenth century. A main point made by Zhang is that, in addition to some common influences such as the general social movements and cultural developments in Britain, in writings about China, the British writers all adopted their own individual standards informed by the writer's own social position, personal experience, ideology, conflict of interests, and so on. This

²⁴ Georg Lehner, *China in European Encyclopaedias, 1700-1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), xviii.

practice of what Zhang describes as “self-criterion”²⁵ also helps, in my study, to explain the sinologists’ diverse understanding of and discourse on Chinese literature.

Focusing on British sinology during the Romantic period, Peter Kitson’s *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760-1840* (2013) draws attention to the function of the knowledge about China in the British Romantic culture. By exploring the complex process of how the British knowledge of China was first constructed, or “forged,” and then transmitted back to Britain, Kitson argues that China was “a central, though problematic, referent in the culture and literature of what we know as the British Romantic period.”²⁶ *Forging Romantic China* overlaps with my study in the discussion of early nineteenth-century British sinology, especially the works by Robert Morrison, George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859), and John Francis Davis (1795–1890). While Kitson analyses these sinologists’ most representative studies of China and mainly tries to link them to British Romanticism, I focus more specifically on their writings on Chinese literature and how it was formed with both Chinese and English sources and experience.

Apart from these studies on the British general knowledge about China in the nineteenth century, there is also research on the formation of knowledge in specific categories or disciplines, offering more focused analysis of the working of the knowledge-making process in and about China. Fa-ti Fan’s *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire, and Cultural Encounter* (2004) tells fascinating stories of how the British naturalists’ scientific explorations in China are closely related to their imperial privileges. Fan points out that the British naturalists’ research on Chinese botany and zoology was carried out jointly with, and in turn supported by, the practice of trade, art, textual sinology, and material culture in China in the nineteenth century. Explaining how the British naturalists in China “negotiated their identities and the boundaries between different cultural traditions,”²⁷ Fan’s research provides more nuanced understanding of the power relation at play in the “science imperialism,” or, in the relation between scientific research and imperial project. He particularly brings to our attention the cooperation between British naturalists and indigenous Chinese people and reminds us of negotiation between cultural identities in the imperial knowledge production process. Though literary studies is

²⁵ Zhang, *British Views on China*, 203.

²⁶ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 1.

²⁷ Fa-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire, and Cultural Encounter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.

distinctly different from natural science in their research objects and methods, a certain analogy might be drawn between the naturalist expedition investigated in *British Naturalists in Qing China* and the sinologists' literary "discovery" in my study, in the sense that both are knowledge-making projects taking place in similar historical contexts, and that the British sinologists could also benefit from their presence in China in their studies of Chinese literature.

From more cultural and literary aspects, in her *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2010), Elizabeth Chang turns to visual culture and demonstrates how the Chinese visual difference as perceived by the British reshaped their conceptions of China and of themselves. This book examines four types of British pictorial imagination of China in the nineteenth century: "garden," "plate," "display case and den," and "photograph." Like Chi-ming Yang and David Porter, Chang notices the ambivalent reaction to the Chinese visual presence and difference in British culture in what she describes as the "familiar exotic": "a sense of unbridgeable cultural and aesthetic difference that is amplified, not diffused, by increased circulation and reproduction."²⁸ Dealing with China's role in the development of visibility in Britain, Chang extends the discussion of power relationships in knowledge production to the epistemological level, and considers nineteenth-century China as the informal empire in the sense of "epistemological engagement rather than systemic control."²⁹ This emphasis on the intellectual power in the British "dominant"³⁰ mode of comprehending China also helps to explain the sinologists' understanding of Chinese literature.

Recent years have also seen an increasing scholarly interest in Britain's literary and theatrical engagement with China, particularly in the image of China in English imaginative literature and theatrical performances. Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins's *A Taste of China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (2013) explores the literary appropriation of the idea of China in constructing the English selfhood in eighteenth-century English literature. Ross G. Forman's *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (2013) reinterprets British imperialism and its relation to literary production, by reading English fiction about China from 1840 to 1911. Two recent works investigate the transcultural representation of China in English theatres. In *Representing*

²⁸ Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye*, 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

China on the Historical London Stage (2015), Dongshin Chang puts forth the concept of *interculturalization* to describe “the act of creating a relationship between elements that belong to disparate cultures.”³¹ Exploring the performance of plays with Chinese themes in London from 1644 to 1911, Chang argues that “the Chinese identities represented in the historical London production . . . were inherently interculturalized, being informed by English (British) knowledge about China, Anglo-Chinese relations, English (British) dramatic and theatrical practices and individual creative choices.”³² As an extension to Chang’s study, Ashley Thorpe’s *Performing China on the London Stage* (2016) looks at Chinese opera and Chinese opera-inspired performances in London from 1759 until 2008 to show how these performances “asserted both British and Chinese identities and desires on the London stage, and how they were variously manipulated to influence trade, foreign policy and even perceptions of ethnicity.”³³ In chapters on the translation of Chinese plays in Europe and the Chinese opera-inspired performances in London before the twentieth century, Thorpe argues that these performances “reflect more of the British historical and cultural context that produced them, and much less of the Chinese theatrical practices that supposedly inspired them.”³⁴ These research provide historical insight into and critical interpretation of the literary and cultural relationship between Britain and China in the imperial context, which presents the wider context relevant to my study.

Though few works have directly examined the formation of knowledge about Chinese literature, my research attempts to combine, and build on, existing scholarship on both the circulation of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world and Sino-British cultural relations, for they not only provide basic historical materials but also remind us of the complexity and the uneasy relations in the British cultural and literary understanding and representation of China, which is also a central theme in my research.

1.3 Methodological Considerations

As is the case with many studies on transcultural knowledge production, my research

³¹ Dongshin Chang, *Representing China on the Historical London Stage: From Orientalism to Intercultural Performance* (London: Routledge, 2015), 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ Ashley Thorpe, *Performing China on the London Stage: Chinese Opera and Global Power, 1759–2008* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

begins with Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* (1978) and its relevance to sinology. Examining what he views as "the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient,"³⁵ Said argues in his polemic theorization that the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Western representation of the Orient is a system of constructed imagination and discourse, "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."³⁶ As Said mainly deals with the Middle East as the "Orient," scholars in Chinese studies are generally concerned with, and question, the applicability of Orientalism to China. They often argue for more complex and subtle understanding of the history of Western representations of China. For example, Nicholas Clifford argues that China "does not fit well into the categories of Orientalism"³⁷ because China was never formally a Western colony and, different from the Western encounter with Islam, the history of sinology gives rise to a kind of "sympathetic Orientalism, which needs to be set against the imagination of Orientalism as a system of control."³⁸ Norman Girardot also proposes to "distinguish different types of Orientalism (e.g., Sinological, Indological, Islamic, Semitic, and so on, as well as important national variations) and the extent to which the process of cross-cultural intercourse can be reduced to some monolithic scheme of Western domination."³⁹ In a review of the recent scholarship in Sino-British cultural relations,⁴⁰ Shanyn Fiske finds that there is a critical neglect of the nineteenth-century Sino-British literary exchange in academic studies, and argues that the overlook is partly due to the fact that the theoretical framework of Orientalism fails to "account for the cultural and historical nuances"⁴¹ in China's interaction with the West in the nineteenth century. Besides Chinese studies, scholars in South Asian studies also put Orientalism into a more contextualised examination. In a study of the Western orientalists' writings on Indian literature from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, Vinay Dharwadker convincingly demonstrates that the orientalists "developed an apparently coherent, yet changing, heterogeneous, and curiously inconsistent discourse about the

³⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr. London: Penguin Books, 2003), 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁷ Nicholas Clifford, *"A Truthful Impression of the Country": British and American Travel Writing in China, 1880-1949* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 14.

⁴⁰ Shanyn Fiske, "Orientalism Reconsidered: China and the Chinese in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Victorian Studies," *Literature Compass* 8, no. 4 (2011): 214-226.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

various literatures of India,”⁴² which indicates that “a simple one-directional alignment between knowledge and power”⁴³ was impossible.

In line with these revised discussions on Orientalism, it is not my intention to position the mechanism of “Orientalism” in nineteenth-century British sinology. However, I do accept the rationale of Said’s theory that knowledge can hardly be purely “neutral” or “objective” without political implications but is always a systemic construction inflected by power relations. By “power relation,” I also agree with Said that it does not only refer to the straightforward display of political or military power but consists of, as he argues, “various kinds of power” including “power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, value), power moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).”⁴⁴ Taking into consideration a widening range of power forms, I am mainly concerned with the working of intellectual and cultural powers at play in literary studies as knowledge-making process, by looking at how the sinologists made sense of Chinese literature with their own methodologies and criteria. My study also focuses on what Said describes as the “textual attitude”⁴⁵ of Orientalist writings. Writing about the Orient is the process of consolidating lived experience into texts fashioned by a certain set of terminology and figures of speech, by which the Orient assumed its “discursive identity”⁴⁶ and the Orientalist texts exercise their “schematic authority”⁴⁷ on the Orient. Therefore, the textualization, or the textuality, of the writings on Chinese literature and the knowledge produced should be noticed and addressed.

In order to convey a panoramic view of how the knowledge was constructed, my study covers a wide range of nineteenth-century sinological writings on Chinese literature, most of which have never been studied previously. Since it is impossible to cover each and every piece of such writing, I have chosen those which contain the sinologists’ own in-depth research and interpretation rather than only simple plot summary or paraphrasing of

⁴² Vinay Dharwadker, “Orientalism and the Study of Indian Literatures,” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol A Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 159.

⁴³ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 92–93.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 93.

the original Chinese literary works. I also remain attentive to keep a balanced combination of texts of different forms (monographs, journal articles, introduction or prefaces to translations, and chapters in survey books on China), of different years of publication, and by sinologists from different career backgrounds. This study includes the writings by British sinologists major and minor, not only those acclaimed names such as Robert Morrison, John Francis Davis, and Herbert Giles, but also those less-known and little studied today, including the British consul William Frederick Mayers (1831–1878), the Imperial Maritime Customs staff member George Carter Stent (1833–1884), and the Hong Kong government civil servant Alfred Lister (?–1890), who also published extensively and contributed equally to the studies of Chinese literature in the nineteenth century.

It is one contention of my study that the sinologists' writings on Chinese literature were neither objective, "scientific" enquiries as they had claimed to be, nor simple appropriation and distortion of Chinese sources controlled by imperial or colonial power, but a more complex and sophisticated process that was always invested with literary, cultural, and ideological premises and prejudices, and realised through textual devices. In the close reading and discourse analysis of these primary materials, I am interested not in the accuracy or faithfulness of their writings to the "reality" of Chinese literature, but, rather, with the vocabulary, perspectives, frameworks, rhetorical devices, narrative strategies, and classification systems employed by the British sinologists in the discursive formation of the knowledge about Chinese literature. In other words, my aim is not to question or correct their writings but to unfold the textual features, the literary and cultural elements involved, and the ways in which the discourses were formed and represented in the nineteenth-century literary and historical contexts. I argue that the knowledge about and the discourses on Chinese literature produced in the sinologists' writings must be understood as being the result of the complex dynamics among multiple literary and cultural factors including the English and Chinese literary concepts and criticism, the Chinese local sources and agency, the implied influence of British imperial power in China, the ambivalent cultural attitudes towards China, and the varied purposes and criteria of individual sinologists. In particular, my discussion on the sinologists' writings on Chinese literature follows three lines of inquiry.

First, I am primarily concerned with the literary dialogue and encounter in the sinological writings. To ensure the English readers' comprehension, British sinologists'

studies on Chinese literature were carried out fundamentally from a Western, or European, literary perspective. The unknown and the exotic Chinese poetry, plays, and novels have to be described in familiar language and understood in familiar ways. The framework, rhetoric, standards, and discourse employed are commonly derived from the repository available in nineteenth-century English and European literary criticism. In this sense, the work of the nineteenth-century British sinologists was probably the first attempt to employ European literary concepts and theories in describing and explaining Chinese literature. As Peter Kitson convincingly points out in his study, British sinologists' writings on China during the Romantic period were in fact profoundly influenced by Romantic ideas.⁴⁸ A major task of my research, therefore, is to first identify and analyse what, and how, British Romantic and Victorian literary criticism and discourse were appointed in forming the British sinologists' understanding and representation of Chinese literature.

Apart from the specific literary ideas and thoughts which I will analyse in the following chapters, it is important to understand the ideas of *national literature* and *world literature* that have developed since the late eighteenth century as the informative and interpretive models for the British sinologists and their readers to imagine and understand a foreign literature such as the Chinese. With the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth century,⁴⁹ national literature became an increasingly important analytic category in thinking about literature by its country or culture of origin. According to Raymond Williams, the idea of national literature, or the term *Nationalliteratur*, first appeared in Germany in the 1780s,⁵⁰ while Elizabeth Sauer and Julia M. Wright point out that phrases like "national literature" and "national poetry" were already used in Britain as early as the 1770s.⁵¹ One of the important and influential assumptions that the idea of national literature entails is that literature is seen as the expression of the national character. Research on the history of nationalism shows that the idea that the people of a nation share a common *character* and can be imagined as a uniform and predictable whole underlines the conceptualization of nationalism in Europe.⁵² In the Romantic age, national character was viewed as something intrinsic and static, so that "the literature expresses an identity rather than a moment in the

⁴⁸ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 108, 110–111, 113.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Sauer and Julia M. Wright, eds., *Reading the Nation in English Literature: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010), 9.

⁵⁰ Raymond Williams, "Marxism Structuralism and Literary Analysis," *New Left Review* 1, no. 129 (1981): 53.

⁵¹ Sauer and Wright, *Reading the Nation in English Literature*, 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

development of that identity,” an identity and state that “transcends historical progress.”⁵³ It is according to such perception that the author of an article published in the *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1818 remarked, “it would appear that the pleasure we receive from making ourselves acquainted with the literature of a people, and more especially with their literature of imagination, is intimately connected with an impression, that in their literature we see the picture of their minds.”⁵⁴ The British critic Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) also commented that the literature of a nation is “the truest emblem of the national spirit and manner of existence.”⁵⁵ As *national literature* presents itself as a central, overall concept by which to perceive the literature of a nation in the nineteenth century, it is, therefore, necessary to ask how the idea of national literature (or, a *national* interpretation of literature) has informed the sinologists’ understanding of, as well as their discourse on, Chinese literature; or, alternatively, in what ways Chinese literature was constructed as (a certain kind of) national literature.

While thinking about Chinese literature as being distinctively on its own, the sinologists also considered Chinese literature in relation to other, especially English and European, literatures. Some sinologists, such as the British missionary George Thomas Candlin (1853–1924), held a rather cosmopolitan view. Candlin commented in the late nineteenth century that “one of the most salient characteristics of modern life is its tendency to a cosmopolitan comprehensiveness,”⁵⁶ and that “so deeply has the modern mind been imbued with the cosmopolitan spirit, . . . that while national schools of art and science are formed, their attainments immediately become the common property of all.”⁵⁷ Such cosmopolitan spirit in the nineteenth century can also be seen from the idea of *world literature* as a supplement to the limitations of national literature.

It is commonly known that the concept of world literature, or, *Weltliteratur*, was expressly advocated by the German critic Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) during the 1820s and the 1830s.⁵⁸ The idea describes the process of literary works, themes,

⁵³ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁴ John Wilson, “Of a National Character in Literature,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 3 (September 1818), quoted from Sauer and Wright, *Reading the Nation in English Literature*, 108.

⁵⁵ Quoted from René Wellek, “The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature,” in *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 30.

⁵⁶ George Thomas Candlin, *Chinese Fiction* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1898), 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ John Pizer, “Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe: Origins and Relevance of *Weltliteratur*,” in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds, Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir

and ideas circulating and interchanging among nations first in Europe and possibly beyond, whereby the literati in different nations would be able to understand, learn from, and cooperate with each other. Goethe's conception of the ideal of world literature also involves Chinese literature. In one of his conversations with Johann Peter Eckermann (1792–1854) in 1827, Goethe talked about the advent of an epoch of world literature with an observation of his reading of the French translation of the Chinese novel *Yu jiao li* 玉嬌梨 (The Two Fair Cousins), in which he found that the Chinese novel and characters, instead of appearing odd and strange, were actually similar and equal to the European fiction.⁵⁹ This episode suggests the importance of an emerging knowledge about Chinese literature to the growing awareness of a world literature beyond Europe. In this sense, my study aims to explore to what extent the British sinologists' studies of Chinese literature were informed by, and in turn contributed to, the idea of world literature, and in what ways their comparative studies of Chinese and European literature were carried out as an effort to challenge or justify the legitimacy and the overall position of Chinese literature on a still Eurocentric but increasingly global stage. A study of the nineteenth-century sinological writings on Chinese literature sheds lights on thinking about Chinese literature from a global perspective, which remained an important topic in comparative literature studies in the twentieth century and still does even today.⁶⁰

In addition to literary factors, another point of concern in my research is the significance of the Chinese local knowledge and agency in shaping the British understanding of Chinese literature. Built on Said's critical insight into Orientalism, recent studies on transcultural knowledge production, however, retreat from viewing the knowledge-making process as a simple and straightforward display of hegemonic colonial powers; instead, they shift to a more contextualised analysis that is concerned with the diverse, including the local, knowledge systems involved in the production of colonial knowledge. For example, arguing that "no single theory of colonial knowledge is possible,"⁶¹ *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Institutions in Colonial India* (2011) aims to

(London: Routledge, 2011), 3–11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁰ See, for example, James Robert Hightower, "Chinese Literature in the Context of World Literature," *Comparative Literature* 2 (1953): 117–124; Shunqing Cao, ed., "The Study of Chinese Literature in the Anglophone World," special issue, *Comparative Literature and Culture* 17, no. 1 (March 2015).

⁶¹ Indra Sengupta and Daud Ali, eds., *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Institutions in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

reconstruct “an entangled history”⁶² of the production of colonial knowledge in South Asia, in which a major concern is to explore “the importance of Indian elites and their agency.”⁶³ In recent Sino-British studies, the use of Chinese local sources has not been adequately explored except, perhaps, for Fa-ti Fan’s studies on British naturalists in China, in which he describes the assistance of Chinese merchants, artists, servants, gardeners, and Chinese books to the British exploration of the Chinese natural world.

This modified interpreting model focusing on indigenous knowledge is particularly conducive to thinking about British sinology and the studies of Chinese literature. While the sinologists’ writings on Chinese literature stemmed undoubtedly from Western literary conceptions, this need not lead us to conclude that they are the unilateral application of Western literary thought on Chinese literature. Traditional Chinese literary ideas were also consulted and incorporated into the sinologists’ narratives. Patricia Sieber has recently emphasised the Chinese elements and the localist point of view in her study of the British sinologist Peter Perring Thoms’s (1790–1855) translation and sinology, leading to a more nuanced understanding of early British sinology.⁶⁴ It is, therefore, equally important to look at how and why the British sinologists employed Chinese literary sources as parallel to, and in combination with, the European sources in their writings. Focusing on the sinologists’ adoption of Chinese literary concepts and criticism, this study aims to draw attention to the involvement of indigenous agents and sources, as well as their interplay with English literary ideas, to unfold the dialogical character of knowledge production in nineteenth-century China.

In addition to Chinese literary sources, this research also highlights the constructive role of the sinologists’ personal experience in China in the formation of the knowledge about Chinese literature. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the British sinologists’ residence in China and their interaction with Chinese people contributed greatly to their studies of China. The British Consuls, translators, and missionaries were able to make discoveries from their first-hand observation, to ask native scholars for information, and to discuss their understanding of Chinese literature with their Chinese friends or language teachers.

⁶² Ibid., 5.

⁶³ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁴ Patricia Sieber, “Location, Location, Location: Peter Perring Thoms (1790–1855), Chinese Localism, and the Genesis of Literary Translation from the Chinese,” in *Sinologists as Translators in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Lawrence Wang-chi Wong and Bernhard Fuehrer (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, Research Centre for Translation, 2015), 127–167.

They had more convenient access to Chinese books and manuscripts from local bookstores and libraries than their “arm-chair” colleagues in European universities. The nineteenth-century British sinologists in fact highly valued their residence in China as being both of great advantageous and also the source of authority for British sinology. While the sinologists’ personal experiences were largely realised or supported by the British imperial presence in China, they do not always comply with the agenda of the imperialist “English lessons.”⁶⁵ Taking the sinologists’ local experience into consideration, my research intends to restore a more balanced and contextualised history of the knowledge production of Chinese literature.

Finally, my study maintains awareness of the diverseness in the knowledge-making process. This thesis aims to demonstrate that the British sinologists’ writings on Chinese literature are hardly a *consistent* body of texts and discourse as Said described; instead, the sinologists understood and represented Chinese literature for various purposes and in different ways. As the research by David Porter, Elizabeth Chang, and Peter Kitson suggests, the British public generally had a very ambivalent view and mixed attitudes towards China from the eighteenth century. Shunhong Zhang also distinguishes the individual narratives on China based on their “self-criterion” by the members of the Macartney and the Amherst Embassies. In line with these studies, I also argue that, with their different social backgrounds, education, careers, and relationships to the British imperial project, as well as over the changing course of Sino-British relationships in the nineteenth century, the British sinologists held diverse understanding and interpretation of Chinese literature. What I intend to achieve is to recognise the multiple voices in the sinologists’ writings on Chinese literature. As an attempt to recover this diversity, I distinguish and explain each sinologists’ individual interpretation, rhetoric, ideology, and attitude adopted in representing Chinese literature, and to reveal the similarities, continuities, contrasts, appropriation, and debates among them. The awareness of the heterogeneity of literary discourse also encourages a more nuanced understanding of the different levels and ways of power at play in the sinological literary discourses.

This study brings together, for the first time, the scattered British sinologists’ writings on Chinese literature in the nineteenth century, and explores the ways in which an

⁶⁵ James Hevia interprets the European imperialism in China as a form of colonial “pedagogical project” which he describes as “English lessons.” See, James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-century China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

increasingly comprehensive knowledge about Chinese literature was produced, framed, represented, and standardised. Reading the British sinologists' writings on Chinese literature as a collective body of knowledge, I choose not to arrange my thesis by case studies of prominent sinologists and their writings. Instead, I adopt a thematic organization and analyse the sinologists' writings from the three forms, or levels, of narrative I have identified: expository writings consisting of direct description and explanation of the typical characteristics of Chinese literature, comparative observations of the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western literature, and historical accounts of Chinese literature. Generally, this thesis is structured according to these three forms of narrative to draw attention to the different modes of representation in sinological literary writings. Examining these three forms of narrative respectively, we can have a more encompassing understanding of how the British sinologists represented, explained, and interpreted the uniqueness of Chinese literature, its relationship to Western literature, and its origins and developments in history. In the discussion of each of the three narrative forms, I will look at the British sinologists' writings on the aspects of Chinese literature that they were most concerned with, and analyse why these diverse discourses were formed and the implications they bring. Positioning this collective body of texts in the nineteenth-century cultural and historical context, this thesis aims to analyse the dynamics and the interaction of the literary and cultural forces underneath this knowledge formation. A study of the nineteenth-century British sinologists' writings on Chinese literature enables us to trace the historical origins of the studies on Chinese literature in English scholarship.

1.4 Chapter Outline

Before detailed analysis of the British sinologists' writings is given, Chapter 2, "British Sinology and Studies on Chinese Literature," lays the foundation for this study by first sketching out the history of British sinology in the nineteenth-century historical contexts. It then prepares for further discussion on the sinologists' literary studies by clarifying the meaning of *literature* used in their writings on Chinese literature. It also explains the guiding principles, conceptions, and methodologies adopted in the British sinologists' studies of Chinese literature and the influence of external intellectual and institutional developments.

In the remaining three chapters, I examine the above-mentioned three forms of narrative in the British sinologists' discourse on Chinese literature. Chapters 3 and 4 are further divided roughly by literary genres of poetry, drama, and fiction, while all three chapters follow a chronological order in an attempt to trace how the sinologists' understanding changes and develops throughout the nineteenth century. Chapter 3, "The Anatomy of Chinese Literature: Expository Studies," surveys the sinologists' narratives of the features and the classification of Chinese literature, focusing on the explicit and underlying perspectives, frameworks, and assumptions employed in their writings. In other words, this chapter illustrates how the sinologists reassembled Chinese literature into a body of orderly knowledge about its compositional rules, structural features, and literary stylistic characteristics. With such detailed, anatomical description of Chinese literature in the sinologists' own words and frameworks, the originally incomprehensible Chinese literary texts and principles are made accessible and manageable to the English readers. This chapter also suggests that the sinologist's expository writings on Chinese literature were informed by, and in turn consolidated, the notion of a national literature.

The sinologists' endeavour to render the unknown Chinese literature knowable, however, is not intended to fully assimilate it into English or European frameworks. The nineteenth-century British sinologists remained equally aware of the salient difference between Chinese and European literature. Chapter 4, "Through a Different Lens: Comparative Studies," turns to the second level of narrative: comparative studies between Chinese and European literature. In their writings, the British sinologists debated over the correspondence between Chinese and English literary terms and genres, evaluated the similarities and contrasts in literary tastes and styles, and correlated Chinese literary works and figures with English ones. Examining their comparative observations, this chapter aims to explain the criteria adopted in, and the implication of, their interpretation of the relationships between Chinese and European literature. This chapter seeks to show that the comparative studies were employed both to define the boundary of a "national" Chinese literature and also as an attempt to incorporate Chinese literature into the realm of world literature.

Moving on to the third level of narrative, Chapter 5, "Towards a History of Chinese Literature: Historical Studies," examines the historical accounts of Chinese literature constructed by the British sinologists. Although Herbert Giles's *A History of Chinese*

Literature is the first complete history of Chinese literature in the English language, there had already been, before the publication of his book, short chronological narratives, dynastic accounts, and historical anthologies of Chinese literature by previous and contemporary British sinologists. This chapter concentrates on these historical writings to see how the sinologists combined the evolutionary thought popular in Europe at the time with traditional Chinese ideas on the development of literature to make their own versions of Chinese literary history.

Chapter 2

British Sinology and Studies on Chinese Literature

The nineteenth-century British sinologists' studies on Chinese literature were a product of their time—a cultural practice performed in, as well as shaped by, the broader intellectual and socio-cultural context. The nineteenth century witnessed British imperial expansion in China through difficult negotiations, military invasions and punishment, and “unequal” treaties. The stressful Sino-British encounter nevertheless necessitated cross-cultural knowledge transfer between the two empires. Under such circumstances, the British sinologists' studies of Chinese literature were closely related to the British imperial project in that it was made possible and was supported by the British imperial presence in China; at the same time, it also contributed to the formation of the imperial discourse.

In order to provide the context in which sinological studies of Chinese literature were carried out, this chapter first sketches the history of the rise and progress of British sinology in the nineteenth century. It looks at how the British sinologists in the early nineteenth century, as newcomers in the field of sinology, endeavoured to establish their own discourse and authority by competing with their predecessor and with contemporary European sinologists. This chapter also discusses the link between the British imperial project in China and the practice of knowledge production. It outlines how the expanding British institutions in China further facilitated the “professionalisation” of British sinology, especially after the 1840s.

After tracing the history of nineteenth-century British sinology, this chapter then focuses on the sinologists' studies of Chinese literature and, specifically, explores the general guiding principles, conceptions, and methodologies adopted. It first examines the British sinologists' general conception of Chinese “literature” at a time when the idea of “literature” in Europe was in transition and was different from traditional Chinese literary thoughts. This chapter also surveys the multifold values attached to Chinese literature which, at the same time, became the main focus of the sinologists' studies of Chinese literature. By contextualising the development of British sinology in its greater historical background, this chapter contends that the British sinologists' studies on Chinese literature

as a form of knowledge production were closely intertwined with the British imperial project and ideology in nineteenth-century China. Though the link might not appear obvious in all their writings, it is the necessary presupposition of analysing and understanding the sinological literary studies.

2.1 In Search of Authority

Great Britain made its first commercial contact with China as early as 1637.¹ After several ill-fated trading attempts in the seventeenth century, in 1715 the British East India Company (hereafter as EIC) was finally able to set up their first factory with permanent staff at Guangzhou.² Although the British Empire maintained regular trading relations with Qing China during the eighteenth century, studies of the Chinese language were almost completely neglected in Britain.³ Very few British people could understand or were willing to learn the Chinese language. The EIC had to rely on the Chinese “linguists” (*tongshi* 通事), the Catholic missionaries, or interpreters of other nationalities to communicate with Chinese officials.⁴ In 1792, when George Macartney (1737–1806) was designated to lead a diplomatic embassy to China, they were simply unable to find any British people who understood the Chinese language, and the embassy had to employ two native Chinese students from the Catholic College in Naples as their interpreters.⁵ As research suggests, the Macartney Embassy failed to accomplish their expected mission in China partly due to the lack of capable British interpreters.⁶ Despite their failure in primary objectives, the embassy nevertheless aroused a general curiosity about China in Britain. The linguistic predicament was also noticed and addressed. The EIC encouraged its staff

¹ Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, 51.

² *Ibid.*, 53.

³ As Susan Reed Stifler notes, “it is one of the anomalies of Great Britain’s relation with the Chinese Empire that for more than a century after the East India Company had opened trade with China the language of the Chinese was practically unknown among the Britons.” Susan Reed Stifler, “The Language Students of the East India Company’s Canton Factory,” *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 69 (1938): 46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47–51. On the Chinese “linguists” and their use of pidgin English, see Ji Yaxi 季壓西 and Chen Weimin 陳偉民, *Zhongguo jindai tongshi* 中國近代通事 (Linguists in modern China) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2007), 91–310.

⁵ Stifler, “Language Students,” 51–52.

⁶ Lawrence Wang-chi Wong 王宏志, “Maga’erni shihua de fanyi wenti” 馬戛爾尼使華的翻譯問題 (Translation in the Macartney Embassy to China), *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica* 近代史研究所集刊 63 (2009): 97–145.

to learn the Chinese language;⁷ mastering the Chinese language was also considered an advantage when the British Protestant missionary societies began to send missionaries to China in 1807. All together, these incidents urged the British residents in China to learn the Chinese language, and consequently to engage in pursuing Chinese knowledge.

As a result, British sinology gradually developed from the early nineteenth century, and was mainly driven by practical—commercial, diplomatic, and religious—motives.⁸ Since propagation of Christianity was discouraged by the Qing court, sinological studies were almost under the exclusive influence and support of the EIC until its monopoly over trade with China ended in 1833.⁹ The first three decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the effort and achievement of only a few leading figures in Chinese studies. They were all permanently or temporarily in the service of the EIC. One of the early British sinologists is George Thomas Staunton.¹⁰ Staunton first went to China at age eleven as the page boy in the Macartney Embassy, and later served at the EIC from 1800 to 1816. He published two influential translations in the early nineteenth century: the *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* (大清律例, Penal Code of the Great Qing) in 1810 and the *Narrative of the Chinese Embassy to the Khan of the Tourgouth Tartars* (*Yi yu lu* 異域錄) in 1821. He also published two volumes of *Miscellaneous Notices Relating to China* in 1822 and in 1828, covering a wide range of topics from Chinese language and literature to commercial relations. Staunton's contemporary and teacher John Barrow (1764–1848), also a member of the Macartney Embassy, acknowledged him as “unquestionably the first who opened to Europeans any of the *useful* treasures of Chinese literature.”¹¹ Staunton was also recognised by modern

⁷ Stifler, “Language Students,” 53–54.

⁸ In an article on the history of British sinology, the nineteenth-century sinologist John Francis Davis remarked that “Chinese literature among us is almost entirely the growth of the present century.” John Francis Davis, “The Rise and Progress of Chinese Literature in England,” in *Chinese Miscellanies: A Collection of Essays and Notes* (London: John Murray, 1865), 50; Contemporary historian Timothy Barrett dates “the year following Morrison’s arrival in Canton in 1807” as “to mark the first true flowering of British sinology.” Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 63. For a brief account of early nineteenth-century British sinology, see also Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 74–75. Peter Kitson points out that the early nineteenth-century British sinology was “created almost entirely within the worlds of global commerce.” *Ibid.*, 76.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰ Studies on George Thomas Staunton, see You Boqing [Yu, Po-ching] 游博清, “Xiao Sidangdong—19 shiji de Yingguo chashang, shizhe, yu zhongguotong” 小斯當東 (George Thomas Staunton, 1781–1859)—19 世紀的英國茶商、使者與中國通 (George Thomas Staunton—nineteenth-century British tea merchant, diplomat, and China expert), (Master’s thesis, National Tsing Hua University, 2004); Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 99–106.

¹¹ John Barrow, review of *Translations from the Original Chinese: With Notes*, trans. Robert Morrison, *Quarterly Review* 13, no. 26 (July 1815): 409. John Barrow was young George Staunton’s mathematics

researcher as “Great Britain’s first real Chinese scholar.”¹² Another key figure in early nineteenth-century British sinology is the renowned Protestant missionary Robert Morrison.¹³ Arriving in China in 1807 when missionary practice was generally prohibited by the Qing government, Morrison had to work for the EIC as Chinese Secretary and Translator in order to stay in China. In addition to his voluminous translation of Chinese texts and his studies of China and of the Chinese language in particular, one of his most prominent work is the three-volume *Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (1815–1823), which remained “the greatest monument of literary labour in the cause of the Chinese language”¹⁴ for later sinologists. John Francis Davis was another important British sinologist in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ He worked at the EIC in Guangzhou from 1813 to 1833, and was later appointed the second governor of Hong Kong (1844–1848). Davis was particularly interested in Chinese literature, and translated several Chinese novels and plays into English, which makes him “one of the pioneers of China’s presence in world literature.”¹⁶ Also sharing an interest in Chinese literature, Peter Perring Thoms, a skilled printer working for the EIC’s press in Macau since 1814 and a self-taught Chinese scholar, published a full translation of the Chinese narrative ballad *Huajian ji* 花箋記 as *The Chinese Courtship* in 1824.¹⁷ Thomas, according to Patricia Sieber, pioneered a “Chinacentric sinology” in his studies and translation of Chinese literature. These are some of the outstanding British sinologists, especially in Chinese literature or literary culture, in the early nineteenth century.

On the institutional side, the Anglo-Chinese College, the first British school offering a Chinese language course, was established in 1818 at the missionary station of Malacca by the London Missionary Society members Robert Morrison and William Milne (1785–

teacher. He also joined the Macartney Embassy to China in 1792 and acquired his knowledge about China during the journey. His *Travels in China* (1804) was very popular in Britain at the turn of the century.

¹² Stifler, “Language Students,” 69.

¹³ Studies on Robert Morrison, see Eliza Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labour of Robert Morrison* (London: Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1839); Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 80–97.

¹⁴ Davis, “Rise and Progress of Chinese Literature,” 52.

¹⁵ Studies on John Francis Davis, see G. B. Endacott, *A Biographical Sketch-Book of Early Hong Kong* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1962), 23–29; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 106–125.

¹⁶ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 106.

¹⁷ Studies on Peter Perring Thoms and his translation, see Patricia Sieber, “Universal Brotherhood Revisited: Peter Perring Thoms (1790–1855), Artisan Practices, and the Genesis of a Chinacentric Sinology,” *Representations* 130, no. 1 (2015): 28–59; Sieber, “Peter Perring Thoms (1790–1855), Chinese Localism, and the Genesis of Literary Translation from the Chinese,” 127–167.

1822).¹⁸ The school also published a number of sinological works, including the English quarterly *Indo-Chinese Gleaner* (1817–1822), a journal focusing primarily on religious content and missionary reports in Asia, but also with articles, translations, and notes about China and Chinese culture. In London, George Staunton helped to found the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1823, with his personal donation of 136 Chinese books.¹⁹ The affiliated *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* was first published in 1824. The first professorship of Chinese in Britain was created at the University of London in 1837, taken by the missionary-sinologist Samuel Kidd (1804–1843), previously a member of the Anglo-Chinese College.²⁰ The first English-language sinological periodical, the *Chinese Repository*, was published in Guangzhou from 1838 to 1851.²¹ The editor and contributors were mainly American missionaries and traders in China,²² but the British sinologists and the German missionary Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) also frequently published their studies on China in this periodical.

Compared with the Jesuit missionaries and the French sinologists, the British sinologists were late-comers to the field of Chinese studies. With vigorous and self-reliant spirit, however, they strived to demonstrate their own authority in representing a “real” China to the European readers. They sought to do so by competing with, or rather by delegitimizing the authority of, the Jesuits and the French sinologists. Ever since the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci’s (1552–1610) arrival in China in 1583, Catholic missionaries, mostly the Jesuits, embarked on the task of transmitting knowledge about China back to Europe.²³ With their substantial effort, Chinese-Latin dictionaries, Chinese grammar books, Latin or French translations of Chinese classics, and studies on various aspects of China were published and became available to European readers.²⁴ In the Jesuit writing, China was

¹⁸ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 75.

¹⁹ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 67; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 100, 253.

²⁰ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 69–71.

²¹ Studies on the *Chinese Repository*, see Elizabeth L. Malcolm, “The *Chinese Repository* and Western Literature on China 1800 to 1850,” *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no.2 (1973): 165–178.

²² *Ibid.*, 168.

²³ On the Jesuit sinology, see David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart : F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1985); on the history of European sinology, see Ming Wilson and John Cayley, eds., *Europe Studies China: Papers from an International Conference on the History of European Sinology* (London : Han-Shan Tang Books, 1995); Davis B. Honey, *Incense at the Altar: Pioneering Sinologists and the Development of Classical Chinese Philology* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2001).

²⁴ For a bibliography of Jesuits’ works, see Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les jésuites de l’ancienne mission de Chine (1552–1773)* (Shanghai: Impr. de la Mission catholique, 1897).

depicted as an ancient, powerful, and highly cultured empire, ruled by a wise and benevolent king through his well-organised government, where Confucian morality and philosophy was highly valued and observed.²⁵ Such a portrait of China and Chinese culture evoked keen intellectual interest in Chinese philosophy and religion throughout Europe in the seventeenth century. The missionaries' panegyrics of the Chinese ethics and government were appropriated by some Sinophile Enlightenment philosophers as the ideal model to support their own socio-political theories and agendas.²⁶ For example, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) sympathised with Confucian theism and Neo-Confucian thought, and Voltaire (1694–1778) viewed China as an example of a politically stable and culturally prosperous country guided by reason and morality, instead of Christianity.²⁷

However, not all the eighteenth-century European intellectuals acknowledged the validity of the Jesuit account of China. They challenged and criticised the missionaries for exaggerating the stability of the Chinese government, the virtues of the Chinese people, and the similarity between Chinese philosophical ideas and the Catholic monotheist belief. For instance, Montesquieu (1689–1755) argued that the missionaries had been misled by the pretence of political and social order in China;²⁸ the French critic Baron von Grimm (1723–1807) was also sceptical of the accuracy of the Jesuit depiction of China, as he observed that “the missionaries first fascinated public opinion by rose-coloured reports from that distant land, too distant to be able to contradict their falsehoods.”²⁹

The British sinologists expressed the same scepticism towards the Jesuit writings. As Shunhong Zhang and Peter Kitson both point out,³⁰ one of the main characteristics of the early nineteenth-century British sinology is their explicit rejection of the Jesuit scholarship. To the British sinologists, a central problem of the Jesuit representation of China is the lack of objectivity. George Staunton claimed in the preface to his translation of the *Penal*

²⁵ On the Jesuit representation of China, see Zhang Guogang 張國剛, et al., *Mingqing chuanjiaoshi yu Ouzhou hanxue* 明清傳教士與歐洲漢學 (Missionaries during Ming and Qing dynasties and European Sinology) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001), 86–118.

²⁶ David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 87–90.

²⁷ Donald F. Lach, “Leibniz and China,” in *Discovering China, European Interpretations in the Enlightenment*, ed. Julia Ching and Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1992), 97–116; Mungello, *Great Encounter*, 89.

²⁸ Mungello, *Great Encounter*, 91.

²⁹ Baron Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, Sept. 15, 1766, quoted in A. Reichwein, *China and Europe, Intellectual and Artistic Contacts in the 18th Century* (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1925), 96.

³⁰ Zhang, *British Views on China*, 2; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 14.

Code of the Great Qing that it was the Jesuits' overwhelmingly religious motivation, together with their limited contact with only middle-class Chinese officials and scholars, that created "an extreme anxiety" to place China "in the most favourable and pleasing light."³¹ Staunton criticised the Jesuit works on China for their lack of "substantial impartiality and discriminating judgment," for "a false colouring on many of the objects which they delineate," and for the "errors and misrepresentations" which led to "inconsistencies" in their writings.³² In a word, Staunton explicitly challenged the validity of the Jesuit sinological works, and insisted that the Jesuits were unqualified to represent China in a disinterested and impartial manner.

John Francis Davis also made similar derogatory comments on the Jesuit writings. Referring to Staunton's "elegant preface to the Penal Code," he accused the Jesuits for modifying "their most authentic accounts of China in such a way, as tended rather to mislead, than to inform."³³ He was particularly disappointed that the Jesuits overstated the excellence of the Chinese classics and ignored the more "general" literature in China. While negating the Jesuit scholarship, Davis announced that "it remained for the English to give the first correct account"³⁴ of China and Chinese culture to European readers. He was convinced that the British sinologists' first task was to remove the "false colouring" in the Jesuit image of China. With such inspiring confidence, Davis expressly advocated the British sinologists replacing the Jesuits as the new and more reliable source for generating knowledge about China for Europe. Despite this apparent total rejection of the Jesuit "misrepresentation" of China, however, as Peter Kitson reminds us, the British sinologists in the early nineteenth century in fact still depended on the Jesuit scholarship and "silently assimilated many of the assumptions [from the Jesuit scholarship] and constructed categories on which it was based."³⁵ As will be discussed in the following chapters, some of the ideas in the British sinologists' discourse on Chinese literature were inherited, or at least developed, from Jesuit writings, especially Du Halde's *The General History of China*. Though the link between the nineteenth-century British sinology and the Jesuit studies of China might be closer than George Staunton and John Francis Davis

³¹ George Staunton, preface to *Ta Tsing Leu Lee; being the fundamental laws . . . of the Penal Code of China*, trans. George Staunton (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1810), vi.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ John Francis Davis, "Observations on the Language and Literature of China," in *Chinese Novels, translated from the Originals* (London: John Murray, 1822), 5–6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 74.

considered them to be, with their firm antagonistic gesture and discourse, a clear distinction was created, from which a different kind of authority emphasising “objectivity” in research was formed and bestowed upon the nineteenth-century British sinology.

Apart from their attempts to diminish the influence of the early Jesuit scholarship, the British sinologists also contested with their contemporary French academics. From the eighteenth century, France gradually became the centre of European sinology.³⁶ With the dismissal of the Jesuit Society in 1773,³⁷ the key figures in the development of French sinology shifted from missionaries living in China to professors in European universities. The first professorship of Chinese, *la Chaire de langue et littérature Chinoises et Tartares-mandchoues* (Chair of Chinese and Tartar-Manchu Languages and Literature), was created at the Collège de France in 1814.³⁸ Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832), probably the most prominent French sinologist in the early nineteenth century, took the position.³⁹ He was also the founding member and first secretary of the French Société Asiatique (Asiatic Society) founded in 1822. Rémusat published widely in Chinese grammar, history, philosophy, religion, and literature. His French translation of the Chinese novel *Yu jiao li* 玉嬌梨 (*The Two Fair Cousins*, 1826) enjoyed immediate popularity in Europe.⁴⁰ In 1832, Stanislas Julien (1797–1873), a student of Rémusat and also an eminent French sinologist, succeeded Rémusat in the Chair of Chinese at the Collège de France—five years before the first Chair of Chinese was established in Great Britain. In 1843, another Chair of Chinese was created at the Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes (National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisation).⁴¹

The British sinologists were fully aware of their French colleagues’ achievement and also the disparity between British and French sinology. John Francis Davis remarked in 1822 that “[the British] advancement in subjects connected with the Chinese empire, and its literature, has been very inconsiderable . . . while the French, for nearly a century before,

³⁶ Honey, *Incense at the Altar*, 19; Anne Cheng, “Philosophy and the French Invention of Sinology: Mapping Academic Discipline in Nineteenth Century Europe,” *China Report* 50, no.1 (2014): 25.

³⁷ Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China*, vol. 1, 1635–1800 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 318.

³⁸ Lundbæk, “The Establishment of European Sinology 1801–1815,” 39.

³⁹ Studies on Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, see Lundbæk, “The Establishment of European Sinology,” 36–54; Honey, *Incense at the Altar*, 26–29.

⁴⁰ Daniel Purdy, “Goethe, Rémusat, and the Chinese Novel: Translation and the Circulation of World Literature,” in *German Literature as World Literature*, ed. Thomas Oliver Beebee (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 56–57.

⁴¹ Cheng, “Philosophy and the French Invention of Sinology,” 25.

had been pursuing their research with diligence and success.”⁴² In order to compete with the French for academic authority, the British sinologists emphasised their first-hand experience in China and access to Chinese sources as the most valid means for producing authentic knowledge of China. In his study of European sinological translations, James St André observes that it is “the main distinction between French and English translations [of Chinese texts]” that “the British saw themselves as having direct, unmediated contact with China, which gave them a practical, realistic knowledge of the Chinese people.”⁴³ As a result, in the nineteenth century, the author’s practical knowledge of the Chinese language and his/her length of residence in China have become the common standards to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of any sinological work.⁴⁴ For example, George Staunton commented that Robert Morrison’s “long residence in the country, and familiar acquaintance with the language” had made him “probably the highest living authority”⁴⁵ in Chinese studies. It was also according to the same standards that Staunton discredited the validity of the British orientalist William Jones’s (1746–1794) work on Chinese language, “as he never was actually in that country, or placed in a situation to associate at all with the *people* of China, he never in fact possessed any fair opportunity of knowing either them or their language.”⁴⁶ By the same logic, John Francis Davis asserted his authority in sinology by emphasising his length of residence in China, “a residence of more than twenty years . . . has perhaps been calculated to mature and correct those opinions of the country and people which he had formed.”⁴⁷ Even in the late nineteenth century, Herbert Giles also promoted himself as a qualified translator by explaining that “I possessed two of the requisite qualifications: an accurate knowledge of the grammatical structure of the language, and an extensive insight into the manners, customs, superstitions,

⁴² Davis, “Observations on the Language and Literature of China,” 1–2.

⁴³ James St. André, “The Development of British Sinology and Changes in Translation Practice,” *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 7.

⁴⁴ J. A. G. Roberts, “Introduction: Western Sources on China in the Nineteenth Century,” in *China through Western Eyes: The Nineteenth Century* (Phoenix Hill: A. Sutton, 1991), 3–6.

⁴⁵ George Staunton, “Essay on the Literary Habits and Character of Chinese,” in *Miscellaneous Notices Relating to China, Part the Second* (private circulation, 1828), 12.

⁴⁶ George Staunton, “Notices on Chinese Literature,” in *Miscellaneous Notices Relating to China, Part the Second*, 278. William Jones was a philologist and scholar in ancient Indian languages and cultures, who also took an interest in the Chinese language. He had translated two poems from the Chinese *Book of Poetry* and passages from the Confucian classic *Daxue* (Great Learning) and *Lunyu* (Analects). On William Jones and his Chinese studies, see Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 45–59.

⁴⁷ John Francis Davis, introduction to *The Chinese: a General Description of the Empire of China and its Inhabitants* (London: Charles Knight, 1836), 1: 1.

and general social life of the Chinese.”⁴⁸ In their actual writings on Chinese literature, the British sinologists frequently resorted to their empirical research in China as the ultimate evidence for the accuracy and reliability of the discovery and argument they were making. In his work on Chinese poetry, John Francis Davis disagreed with the common idea that the Chinese language was strictly monosyllabic. Based on practical observation of oral Chinese, he argued that “any person who has been in the habit of hearing the Chinese pronounce their own language, knows that *lëen, sëen*, etc., are quite as dissyllabic as *lion, fluid*, and such other words.”⁴⁹ He also observed that “nothing but the mouth of a native”⁵⁰ can illustrate the difference between the four tones and the even and deflected tones (*pingze* 平仄) used in Chinese poetry.

Native Chinese scholars played an important role in British sinologists’ acquisition of the knowledge about Chinese literature. Though the Qing government strictly discouraged contact between Chinese people and foreigners in China in the early nineteenth century,⁵¹ the British sinologists still managed to hire the so-called “Sen-seng” (*xiansheng* 先生; the title used to address teachers) to help with their language learning and translation. Robert Morrison studied the Chinese language and Confucian classics with a number of Chinese teachers since 1805, when he was in London, until his death in 1834 in China.⁵² John Francis Davis also received help from Chinese scholars in his studies of Chinese poetry; for example, in order to test his hypothesis about the existence of a “marked *caesural* pause near the middle of the lines”⁵³ in Chinese poems, Davis invited a Chinese scholar “whose profound knowledge of the language renders him a very competent judge”⁵⁴ on this matter to “read out the longer measures of verse in a slow and deliberate manner.”⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Herbert Giles, introduction to *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, trans. Herbert Giles (London: Thos. DE, 1880), 1: xiv.

⁴⁹ John Francis Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese* (London: J. L. Cox, 1829), 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵¹ Morrison wrote in his diary on 11 January 1814 that his Chinese tutor “*Kō Sëen-säng*” and his son “are obliged to flee from my home, and think it prudent to retire from their own” because they were informed that “the police-officers are endeavouring to apprehend them.” He also mentioned in a letter that he was “debarred from free intercourse with the natives.” Eliza A. Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, 1: 377, 378.

⁵² On Morrison’s Chinese teachers, see Su Jing 蘇精, “Ma Lixun he ta de zhongwen jiaoshi” 馬禮遜和他的中文教師 (Robert Morrison and his Chinese teachers), in *Ma Lixun yu zhongwen yinshua chubanshu* 馬禮遜與中文印刷出版 (Robert Morrison and printing and publishing in China) (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2000), 55–78.

⁵³ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

From the Chinese scholar's reading, Davis observed and determined the location of the *caesural*, which was also verified by the Chinese scholar himself. The limited yet sometimes "long personal acquaintance"⁵⁶ with the Chinese people enabled the British sinologists to declare that their information on Chinese literature was "derived in China from native authorities."⁵⁷ Such intimacy with, and appropriation of, the "native authorities" empowered the British sinologists with the same privilege and unarguable authority in producing knowledge about Chinese literature.

Compared with the "arm-chair" French sinologists who had never visited China, such as Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat and Stanislas Julien, the expatriate British sinologists always made use of their first-hand experience in China to defend the accuracy, and thus authority, of their sinological studies. The competitive mood is evident in John Francis Davis's review of Rémusat's translation of the Chinese novel *The Two Fair Cousins*. Davis argued that the main difficulty of translating Chinese poetry into European languages lay in those Chinese "figurative allusions" that "cannot sometimes be discovered without the assistance of a well-informed native."⁵⁸ He believed that those allusions would appear particularly difficult to those who were unfamiliar with the popular tales and traditions in China and without access to Chinese sources and the help of Chinese people.⁵⁹ Rémusat was more likely to make mistakes in translating Chinese poems in the French translation of *The Two Fair Cousins*, Davis claimed, because the French professor-sinologist was deprived of these two forms of assistance.⁶⁰

A more bitter polemic is seen in the dispute between Davis and the Paris-based German orientalist Julius Klaproth (1783–1835).⁶¹ Klaproth was very critical of the British sinologists' works, attacking Robert Morrison's *Dictionary of the Chinese Language* as

⁵⁶ John Francis Davis, preface to *The Fortunate Union, a Chinese Romance, Translated from the Chinese Original, with Notes and Illustrations, to which added a Chinese Tragedy*, trans. John Francis Davis (London: John Murray, 1829), vii.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 48.

⁵⁹ Davis, preface to *The Fortunate Union*, xvii.

⁶⁰ Ibid., xviii.

⁶¹ On this dispute between Davis and Klaproth, also see Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 119–120. Julius Klaproth was made Associate Member of the Asiatic Language and Literature at the Academy of St. Petersburg in 1804. Moving to Paris in 1815, he was also the founding member of the Asiatic Society, and the co-editor, as well as main contributor, of the *Journal Asiatique*. He was made the unaffiliated Professor of Asian Languages at the new University of Bonn in 1816, but continued to live in Paris until his death in 1835. On the life and work of Klaproth, see Hartmut Walravens, "Julius Klaproth, His Life and Works with Special Emphasis on Japan," *Japonica Humboldtiana* 10 (2006): 177–191.

being “full of faults” and “troublesome in use,”⁶² and spotting errors in Davis’s translation of the Chinese play *Han gong qiu* 漢宮秋 (The Sorrows of Han).⁶³ In defence of Morrison and of himself, Davis refuted that Klaproth’s criticism was in fact due to his own lack of practical knowledge of the Chinese language.⁶⁴ For example, Klaproth found that the name and title of the Xiongnu (匈奴) ruler “*Huhanyé chanyu*” 呼韓耶單于—which should be translated precisely as, according to Klaproth, “*Je suis Houhanyé le tchhenyu*” (I am *Huhanyé*, the *chanyu*)—was translated by Davis as “*Je suis Han tchenyu*,” (I am *Han chanyu*) in which the characters *hu* 呼 and *ye* 耶 in the original were omitted.⁶⁵ Davis dismissed this criticism and explained that “had he [Klaproth] a practical acquaintance with the [Chinese] people, he would have known that Hanchenyu [Han chanyu] and Chenyu [chanyu] are the appellations which the Chinese . . . constantly apply to that person in their frequent repetitions of the story, whether in drawings, conversation, poetry, or prose.”⁶⁶ The shortened translation, Davis added, was not a mistake, but was deliberately made according to the Chinese way of addressing foreign names as well as to avoid “a string of harsh-sounding words,” and was “in accordance with the popular Chinese version of the story.”⁶⁷ In Davis’s response to Klaproth’s criticism, discussion on the accuracy of translation involves assessment of the sinologists’ practical expertise in the Chinese language, in which Davis keenly wielded his direct contact with the Chinese people as a decisive advantage. This dispute vividly revealed the British sinologists’ acute anxiety to establish themselves in the scholarship: even such a small case could turn into the site in which the British sinologists asserted their authority based on first-hand experience in China.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, by proclaiming their objective spirit, access to Chinese sources, and empirical research methodology in China, the British sinologists had distinguished themselves from the Jesuits and the French sinologists, and confirmed their authority as an important player in the field of European sinology. The advantage of

⁶² George Timkowski, *Travels of the Russian Mission Through Mongolia to China, And Residence in Peking, in the Years 1820–1821*, with corrections and notes by Julius von Klaproth, trans. H. E. Lloyd (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1827) 1: 350n†.

⁶³ Julius von Klaproth, “Observations Critiques sur la traduction anglaise d’un drame chinois, publiée par M. Davis,” *Journal Asiatique* 4 (1829): 3–21.

⁶⁴ Davis, preface to *The Fortunate Union*, xix–xxii.

⁶⁵ Klaproth, “Observations Critiques,” 8–9.

⁶⁶ Davis, preface to *The Fortunate Union*, xx–xxi.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xxi.

direct contact with China continued to be cherished and emphasised by the British sinologists in later years. The Australian-born British consular officer William Frederick Mayers once argued in a modest yet assured way that, though he had no intention to “enter into competition” with contemporary French sinologists, it was a matter of fact that “the humblest student in China has often better means of ascertaining than are within the reach of the distinguished professors whose sphere is confined to European libraries.”⁶⁸ In this direct comparison between European libraries and first-hand experience in China, Mayers transferred, once again, the British sinologists’ privilege by way of location into academic advantage.

2.2 Informal Empire and the “Professionalisation” of British Sinology

In a brief review of the history of British sinology, Norman J. Girardot rightly points out that “it is not until the 1870s that the study of Chinese texts became the professionalised Oriental science of sinology embracing Anglo-American tradition and the rest of the Western world.”⁶⁹ While the British sinologists were mainly restricted to Guangzhou and Macao before the 1840s, from the second half of the nineteenth century, British sinology gathered momentum partly from the increasing British imperial engagement in China. As the result of the First and Second Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860), a treaty system was formed to secure British legal and economic advantages in China.⁷⁰ Free trade regimes, equal diplomatic relations, consular jurisdiction over British nationals, and most-favoured-nation clauses were imposed on China by the “gunboat diplomacy.”⁷¹ After the 1840s, as John K. Fairbank puts it, “a new foreign society-cum-power-structure gradually found lodgement and grew up on the China coast.”⁷² This kind of British imperial presence in China is sometimes described as a form

⁶⁸ William Frederick Mayers, “Bibliographical. Chinese Works of Fiction. IV. Romantic Novels,” *Notes and Queries on China and Japan* 1, no. 10 (1867): 137.

⁶⁹ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 140–141. Girardot traces the history of British sinology during the second half of the nineteenth century mainly within the context of intellectual development of the time rather than the influence of British imperial power in China.

⁷⁰ John K. Fairbank, “The Creation of the Treaty System,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, Late Ch’ing 1800-1911, part 1, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 213–263.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 217.

of “informal empire,”⁷³ a situation in which China became the “uncolonized extension of Empire.”⁷⁴ Imperial control and interference were implemented through institutions such as the British consular service and the Imperial Maritime Customs Service (hereafter as IMC) established in China. The British consuls assumed both civil and diplomatic duties in China, and acted as co-ordinators between British residents and the Chinese authority to ensure that the treaty rules were duly observed.⁷⁵ The IMC was organised in 1861 and led by Inspector General Robert Hart (1835–1911).⁷⁶ Though officially a Chinese agency operated under the Bureau of Foreign Affairs (*Zongli yamen* 總理衙門), the IMC was also a strong supporter of the treaty system for British interests, where British nationals made up more than half of the total personnel of its international employees up until 1905.⁷⁷

The “opening” of China and the establishment of British imperial institutions were instrumental to the development of British sinology. Fa-ti Fan in his book has already given a detailed description of the close relationship between British naturalist research in China and the British imperial institutions—mainly the consulates, the IMC, missionary organizations, and the Hong Kong Botanic Garden—during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ According to Fan, both the British consular service and the IMC facilitated the British naturalist studies in China by providing young talents who would become future naturalists and by forming semi-academic networks through staff mobility and interaction.⁷⁹ Similarly to what Fan has described, the British institutions in China encouraged the development of sinology in two ways. Firstly, these organizations prepared future researchers in sinological studies, particularly as the result of their primary concern

⁷³ According to Jüurgen Osterhammer, “informal empire” can be defined as “a historical situation of some stability and permanence in which overt foreign rule is avoided while economic advantages are secured by ‘unequal’ legal and institutional arrangements, and also by the constant threat of political meddling and military coercion that would be intolerable in relations between fully sovereign states.” Osterhammer, “Britain and China, 1842–1914,” 149.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁷⁵ Fairbank, “The Creation of the Treaty System,” 231–232; Osterhammer, “Britain and China, 1842–1914,” 156. Studies on the British Consuls in China, see P. D. Coates, *China Consuls: British Consular Officers, 1843–1943* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷⁶ The IMC was initially founded in 1854 as the Foreign Inspectorate of Customs. On the history of IMC, see H. B. Morse, “The Inspectorate of Customs,” in *The Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire* (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1908), 352–376; on the IMC staff, see Catherine Ladds, *Empire Careers: Working for the Chinese Customs Service 1854–1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁷⁷ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, 55, table 3.1. Also, see H. B. Morse, “The Inspectorate of Customs,” 363–364.

⁷⁸ Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China*, 61–90.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 73–80.

over their staff's proficiency in the Chinese language. As these institutions were set up to make regular contact with the Chinese people, their employees were required to obtain sufficient knowledge of the Chinese language and of China in general. From the recruitment period, the consular service and the IMC were intentionally looking for promising young candidates with proper training of, or the talent to master, the Chinese language. It was for this purpose that the Student Interpreter Programme of China was introduced in 1854.⁸⁰ According to Uganda Sze Pui Kwan's study, young students in top British universities were recommended by the universities and selected by the Foreign Office for the programme, and qualified applicants would complete their Chinese courses at King's College, London. When the student interpreters had passed general selection examinations, they would be sent to Hong Kong before being appointed to inland treaty port cities.⁸¹ In China, in addition to performing interpreting, translating, or civil service tasks, these British student interpreters also continued their training in the Chinese language. They had to pass at least four examinations within two years on both general knowledge of China and on language and interpreting skills before they could obtain their qualification as civil interpreter.⁸² According to the official name list, at least 81 student interpreters were sent to China from 1847 to 1872,⁸³ including many later renowned British sinologists: Robert Kennaway Douglas (1838–1913) came to China as a student-interpreter in 1858,⁸⁴ William Frederick Mayers in 1859,⁸⁵ and Herbert Giles in 1867.⁸⁶ Another similar yet independent programme—the Hong Kong Interpreter Cadetship—was launched under the Colonial Office in 1861,⁸⁷ through which Alfred Lister entered the

⁸⁰ The following description of the Student Interpreter Program is mainly based on this article, Kwan "Fanyi zhengzhi yu hanxue zhishi de shengchan," 1–52.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 37–42.

⁸³ Great Britain, *Return of the names, dates of appointment, salaries, pensions, causes of retirement, and other information respecting those who have been appointed student interpreters in China, Japan, and Siam: 1847–72* (House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1872), 1–6.

⁸⁴ F. Legge, "Obituary Notices: Sir Robert Kennaway Douglas," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 45 (1913): 1095.

⁸⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885–1900*, s.v. "Mayers, William Frederick."

⁸⁶ Wang Shaoxiang 王紹祥, "Xifang hanxuejie de 'gongdi': Yingguo hanxuejia Zhai Lisi (1845–1935) yanjiu" 西方漢學界的「公敵」：英國漢學家翟理斯（1845–1935）研究（"Ishmael of Sinology": A study of Herbert Allen Giles), (PhD diss., Fujian Normal University, 2004), 39.

⁸⁷ On the history of the Hong Kong Interpreter Cadetship, see H. J. Lethbridge, "Hong Kong Cadet, 1862–1941," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 10 (1970): 36–56; Uganda Sze Pui Kwan 關詩珮, "Da Ying diguo, hanxue ji fanyi: Li Yage yu Xianggang fanyi guanxuesheng jihua (1860–1900)" 大英帝國、漢學及翻譯：理雅各與香港翻譯官學生計劃（1860–1900）(British Empire, sinology, and translation: James Legge and the interpreter cadetship in Hong Kong (1860–1900)), *Studies of Translation History* 翻譯史研究, no.2 (2012): 59–101.

colonial service in Hong Kong in 1865.⁸⁸ In addition to the attempts from government institutions, the IMC also played an important role in producing Chinese knowledge in the nineteenth century.⁸⁹ The Inspector General Robert Hart required British and other foreign employees to take regular examinations in Chinese proficiency. British sinologists who emerged from the IMC include Edward Charles Bowra (1841–1874),⁹⁰ George Carter Stent,⁹¹ and Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor (1857–1938).⁹² Compared with the scarcity of qualified British interpreters and translators in the early nineteenth century, these programmes and institutions marked a huge improvement and progress in the teaching and learning of the Chinese language, opening up the possibility for development in British sinology.

Moreover, as these institutions had attracted young British talents to the studies of the Chinese language and of China in the first place, social and academic networks were gradually formed among them, which promoted academic exchange in their research of China. As Fa-ti Fan points out in his book, both the British consular service and the IMC were characterised by the high mobility of their employees.⁹³ Officers, interpreters, and IMC staff were often transferred from place to place in a short period of time. For example, shortly after he had arrived in Hong Kong in 1858, Robert Kennaway Douglas was moved to Guangzhou in 1859, and was then transferred to Peking in 1861. He was again appointed assistant and then Vice-Consul in the Consulate at Tianjin in 1862.⁹⁴ Frequent transfers within the institution among different Chinese treaty ports enabled their employees not only to get access to different cultural communities in China but also to meet and work with their fellow colleagues to build private connections and social contacts which created the opportunity for information exchange and discussion of their sinological studies.

Unlike the naturalist research described in Fa-ti Fan's book, in which mobility means new fieldwork sites and access to a wider range of natural specimens, for the studies of

⁸⁸ Anonymous, "Obituary," *The Times*, Aug 21, 1890.

⁸⁹ Ladds, *Empire Careers*, 31–35.

⁹⁰ On the life and work of Edward Charles Bowra, see Charles Drage, *Servants of the Dragon Throne: Being the Lives of Edward and Cecil Bowra* (London: Peter Dawnay, 1966), 1–203.

⁹¹ On George Carter Stent's biography, see <http://www.takaoclub.com/personalities/Stent/index.htm>

⁹² On the life and work of Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor, see Isidore Cyril Cannon, *Public Success, Private Sorrow: The Life and Times of Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor (1857–1938)*, *China Customs Commissioner and Pioneer Translator* (Hong Kong : Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

⁹³ Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China*, 76.

⁹⁴ Legge, "Obituary Notices: Sir Robert Kennaway Douglas," 1096.

Chinese literature, social networks and collaboration among sinologists created a more literary and textual public space formed with academic societies, regular activities, and journals devoted to sinology. It was only because of the increasing number of sinologists in China and their connections and interactions that such academic communities were made possible. Some of the most important societies include: the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society established in 1847,⁹⁵ the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society founded in Shanghai in 1857,⁹⁶ and the Peking Oriental Society founded in 1885.⁹⁷ These scholarly societies built libraries of Chinese books, published academic journals, and regularly organised lectures and other research activities, creating intellectual centres that brought British sinologists in Chinese treaty ports together. The North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society held 340 public lectures in Shanghai from 1857 to 1900, that is, 8 lectures per year on average;⁹⁸ many of the lectures were also published in its affiliated *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1859–1948). The Peking Oriental Society made it one of their primary objects to “hold general meetings for the reading of papers and the discussion of the subjects to which they relate,”⁹⁹ and they also published the *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* from 1885.

Apart from the academic societies’ journals, a number of English periodicals devoted to Asian and Chinese studies were also published in London, Hong Kong, and in Chinese treaty port cities since the 1860s. Two monthly journals were published in London: the *Chinese and Japanese Repository of Facts and Events in Science, History, and Art, Relating to Eastern Asia* (1863–1865), which was intended to be a continuation and reprint of the earlier influential *Chinese Repository*, and the *Phoenix, A Monthly Magazine for India, Burma, Siam, China, Japan & Eastern Asia* (1870–1873?), both edited by the missionary-sinologist James Summers (1828–1891).¹⁰⁰ Three important periodicals were

⁹⁵ “The Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1961): 1.

⁹⁶ Studies on the North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, see Wang Yi 王毅, *Huangjia Yazhou xuehui bei Zhongguo zhihui yanjiu* 皇家亞洲學會北中國支會研究 (A study of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2005).

⁹⁷ The Peking Oriental Society was founded by the American missionary W. A. P. Martin (1827–1916), see Wang Wenbing 王文兵, *Ding Weiliang yu Zhongguo* 丁韞良與中國 (W. A. P. Martin and China) (Beijing: Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe, 2008), 368.

⁹⁸ Wang, *Huangjia Yazhou xuehui bei Zhongguo zhihui yanjiu*, 182–194, “Index 1.”

⁹⁹ “Rules of the Peking Oriental Society, as adopted in the public meeting of the 3rd of March, 1885,” *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 4 (1898): 152.

¹⁰⁰ Studies on James Summers, see Uganda Sze Pui Kwan 關詩珮, “Fanyi yu diguo guanliao: Yingguo hanxue jiaoshou Zuomaxu yu shiji shiji Dongya (Zhong Ri) zhishi de chansheng” 翻譯與帝國官僚 :

published in Hong Kong. The *Notes and Queries on China and Japan* (1867–1870) was an all-inclusive monthly periodical edited by Nicholas Belfield Dennys (1840–1900). The subtitle, also a proper description, of *Notes and Queries* is “a monthly medium of inter-communication for professional and literary men, missionaries and residents in the East generally, etc.,” suggesting its academic and professional pursuit. The *China Magazine: a Weekly Miscellany* (1868–1870?) was more focused on leisure reading in which translation of Chinese novels and poetry were published. The most influential sinological journal in nineteenth-century China is probably *The China Review or Notes and Queries on the Far East* (1872–1901).¹⁰¹ Its first editor, Nicholas Belfield Dennys, was succeeded by the former German missionary Ernst Johann Eitel (1838–1908) in 1876. As its introductory notice shows, the *China Review* undertook an ambitious task to cover a wide range of fields of studies including “the Arts and Sciences, Ethnology, Folklore, Geography, History, Literature, Mythology, Manners and Customs, Natural History, Religion” of “China, Japan, Mongolia, Tibet, The Eastern Archipelago and the ‘Far East’ generally,”¹⁰² indicating the broad scholarly vision and ability of the nineteenth-century sinology and Oriental studies. These journals attract contributions of academic articles, translation of Chinese texts, and book reviews of sinological works, mainly from the expatriate sinologists in China. There are also notes on random facts and information about China, questions or queries about the Chinese language and culture, and answers to those queries from other readers of the journal. With all the contributions and correspondences, these sinological periodicals have created an open and lively forum for all British sinologists in China to share information, exchange knowledge, and engage in discussion and debate on Chinese studies.

The increasing interest in China and the growing sinological scholarship had stimulated the institutionalization of the discipline of Sinology in British universities. Professorships of Chinese were created, and the professors appointed in the nineteenth century were all

英國漢學教授佐麻須 (James Summers; 1828–91) 與十九世紀東亞 (中日) 知識的產生 (Translation and imperial bureaucrat: the British Professor of Sinology James Summers and the knowledge production of East Asia (China and Japan)), *Studies of Translation and Interpretation* 翻譯學研究集刊 17 (2014): 23–58.

¹⁰¹ Studies on the *China Review*, see Duan Huaqing 段懷清 and Zhou Liling 周俐玲, eds., “*Zhongguo Pinglun*” *yu wanqing zhongying wenxue jiaoliu* 《中國評論》與晚清中英文學交流 (*China Review* and Sino-British literary exchange in late-Qing period) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2006); Wang Guoqiang 王國強, “*Zhongguo Pinglun*” *yu xifang hanxue* 《中國評論》與西方漢學 (*China Review* and Western Sinology) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2010).

¹⁰² [Nicholas Belfield Dennys], “Introductory,” *The China Review* 1, no. 1 (1872): 1.

British sinologists who had stayed and worked in China before. The first chair of Chinese in Britain was established at University College, London in 1837. This position was taken by the missionary-sinologist Samuel Kidd (1804–1843), but was discontinued after he died.¹⁰³ George Staunton managed to create another chair of Chinese at King’s College, London in 1845. Diplomat Samuel Fearon (1819–1854) was appointed to this position, followed by James Summers in 1853 and by Robert Kennaway Douglas in 1873.¹⁰⁴ In 1875, missionary-sinologist James Legge (1815–1897) was appointed as the first professor of Chinese at the University of Oxford. Diplomat Thomas Wade (1818–1895) was nominated as the first professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge in 1888,¹⁰⁵ succeeded by Herbert Giles in 1897.¹⁰⁶ Concomitant with the expanding professorship, libraries of Chinese books were being built up in these universities as well. The University of Oxford acquired the missionary-sinologist Alexander Wylie’s (1815–1887) collection of 429 titles of Chinese books, and the University of Cambridge received the donation of over 650 titles of Chinese books from Thomas Wade.¹⁰⁷ With growing professorship and Chinese library, Sinology was gradually recognised in Britain as an independent field of study.

The professionalisation of British sinology also reflects the influence of the Victorian intellectual fascination with the scientific spirit and methodology. Nineteenth-century England saw the growing interest in, as well as development of, science both as a discipline and as an epistemological frame of mind.¹⁰⁸ Obsession with science and the scientific attitude contributed to the “professionalisation” of many academic disciplines.¹⁰⁹ At the peak of this scientific culture in the 1860s and 1870s, discussion on whether sinology was, or should be, a science was raised among sinologists in China, revealing their anxiety in an intellectual context dominated by scientific discourse. In the second volume of the *China Review*, Ernst Johann Eitel warned his readers of the danger of what he called “sinological dilettantism”¹¹⁰ of amateur sinologists making false assimilation

¹⁰³ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Studies on Samuel Fearon and his appointment at King’s college, London, see Kwan, “Translation and the British Colonial Mission,” 623–642.

¹⁰⁵ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰⁸ Bernard Lightman, “Science and Culture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O’Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12–42.

¹⁰⁹ T. W. Heyck, “The Impact of Science on Victorian Intellectual Life,” in *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 81–119.

¹¹⁰ Ernst Johann Eitel, “Amateur Sinology,” *The China Review* 2, no. 1 (1873): 1.

and farfetched conclusions based on their superficial knowledge of the Chinese language and literature. To tackle this pseudo sinology, Eitel proposed adopting more scientific methods in sinological research:

To arrive therefore at a scientific knowledge of Confucianism we require a detailed exposition of the state of literature, politics and civilisation before Confucius, a genetic history of his own philosophical system and a systematic digest of all those doctrines which were actually taught first by Confucius himself.¹¹¹

In this way, he expected that the foreign scholars would “be able to stand up before native scholars without blushing.”¹¹² The Westerners were superior to the Chinese, Eitel argued, not only in military power or engineering skill, but also “with the more subtle weapons of Western science, on the battle field of practical, speculative and critical philosophy.”¹¹³ In a later issue of the *China Review*, an author, under the name of J. C. (possibly the Scottish missionary John Chalmers), published an article “Is Sinology a Science?” The author agreed with Eitel that “the foundation of a scientific study of Chinese have never been firmly laid.”¹¹⁴ With particular concern with the romanization of Chinese pronunciations, the author called for “unity of purpose” and “system and cooperation”¹¹⁵ among sinologists to design a standard romanised system of the Chinese language and dialects to facilitate current and further researchers. These two articles expressed the shared enthusiasm for the scientific mentality and methodology of the time, and can also be seen as a continuation of the objective and empirical research proposed by British sinologists before the 1840s. By the end of the nineteenth century, British sinology had advanced significantly. With a large group of sinologists in China and in Britain and the accumulation of knowledge about China appearing in publications, sinology was finally established as a “self-conscious academic discourse”¹¹⁶ and a discipline, as Norman J. Girardot puts it, for the first time.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ J. C., “Is Sinology a Science?” *The China Review* 2, no. 3 (1873): 170.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 141.

2.3 The Idea of “Literature”

Before we look at the British sinologists’ perception of Chinese literature, it is necessary to first examine the changing meaning and idea of “literature” in the English language. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and studies in conceptual history,¹¹⁷ the word “literature”, originated from the Latin *litteratura* (writing and grammar), came into the English language in the fourteenth century, meaning “both an ability to read and a condition of being well-read.”¹¹⁸ From the mid-eighteenth century, the semantic gravitation of “literature” gradually shifted from literacy and learning towards a more specific reference to the “practice and profession of writing.”¹¹⁹ The products—writings and books—of such a profession were also described as literature.¹²⁰ René Wellek points out that, “no later than the thirties of the eighteenth century,” the word “literature” began to be used generally as “a designation of a body of writing”¹²¹ including various different areas of study such as history, theology, politics, and so on. For example, the English writer John Berkenhout’s (1726–1791) *Biographia Literaria, A Biographical History of Literature* (1777) contains biographies of not only poets but also historians, theologians, lawyers, and politicians.

From the late eighteenth century, an idea gradually emerged that imaginative works with aesthetic value—now usually poetry, drama, and the novel—should be classified as an individual group in the whole body of writing. Some researchers attribute the formation of this idea to the emergence of the modern concept of “aesthetics” in which art began to be defined and judged by the “internal sense of beauty” and “taste” rather than understanding or cognitive experience.¹²² As a result, intellectual works were separated from aesthetic ones, and the political, historical, and travel writings were excluded from “literature” proper. Other researchers emphasise the role of print culture in bringing “a

¹¹⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “literature,” accessed February 03, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/109080?redirectedFrom=literature>; René Wellek, “Literature and its Cognates,” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968–1974), 81–89; Raymond Williams, “Literature,” in *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976), 150–154.

¹¹⁸ Williams, “Literature,” 151.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152. Raymond Williams explains that this change of focus was closely related to the predominance of printing and printed books, the burgeoning bookselling market, and also the self-consciousness of the profession of authorship.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Wellek, “Literature and its Cognates,” 82.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 85; Douglas Lane Patey, “The Eighteenth Century Invents the Canon,” *Modern Language Studies* 18, no. 1 (1988): 17–37.

change in how literary value was perceived, a change from production to consumption, invention to reception, writing to reading”¹²³ in the emergence of this new idea. Either way, as this new idea was taking shape, it required a collective term. Raymond Williams notes that “poetry,” or “poesy,” was previously used as the term for artistic writing.¹²⁴ With the specialization of “poetry” to indicate only metrical composition and the increasing importance of prose forms such as the novel in the eighteenth century, “literature” was considered as “the most available general word”¹²⁵ for this new idea of imaginative writing. The term “literature,” therefore, began to retrieve from its comprehensive meaning of all kinds of writing to assume a more restricted sense of the imaginative, aesthetic works *per se*, generally comprised of the genres of poetry, drama, and fiction.

However, the narrowing down of the meaning of “literature” could be a very long and slow process. In fact, studies show that, though the new idea of “imaginative literary works” appeared in the late eighteenth century, it might not be the primary meaning of the word “literature” in the nineteenth century.¹²⁶ In the *New English Dictionary* (the original *Oxford English Dictionary*) published in 1908, there are three main definitions to the word “literature.” The first two definitions are “polite learning” and the profession of literary production. The third definition explains the word “literature” in relation to books and writing:

Literary productions as a whole; the body of writings produced in a particular country or period, or in the world in general. Now [1908] also in a more restricted sense, applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect.¹²⁷

An explanatory note is added to this definition: “this sense is of very recent emergence both in Eng. [English] and Fr. [French].”¹²⁸ The juxtaposition of both the broad sense of “literary productions as a whole” and the “more restricted sense” of aesthetic writings in

¹²³ Trevor Ross, “The Emergence of ‘Literature’: Making and Reading the English Canon in the Eighteenth Century,” *ELH* 63, no. 2 (1996): 397–416.

¹²⁴ Williams, “Literature,” 153.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Lionel Gossman, “Literature and Education,” *New Literary History* 13, no. 2, “Narrative Analysis and Interpretation” (1982): 341–371.

¹²⁷ *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol. 6, part 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), s.v. “literature.”

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

the same definition may suggest the co-existence of the two in the actual use of the word “literature” in the nineteenth century, even the early twentieth century.

In its actual use in the nineteenth century, the word “literature” was still commonly considered as the general term to indicate all kinds of writing and books. Lionel Gossman quotes the English critic Matthew Arnold’s (1822–1888) words that “all knowledge that reaches us through books is literature,”¹²⁹ as an example to show the “comprehensive notion”¹³⁰ of “literature” at the time. Gossman also mentions that in both Hohann Gottfried Eichhorn’s (1752–1827) German *History of Literature from its Origin to the Most Recent Times* (1805–1812) and Henry Hallam’s (1777–1859) *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries* (1837–1839), the word “literature” in their titles actually “covers every conceivable branch of learning.”¹³¹ The broad meaning of “literature” is also evident in Robert Chambers’s (1802–1871) *History of the English Language and Literature* (1837), the first complete English literary history that surveys a wider range of English literary works including histories, travel accounts, and theological writings, in addition to English poetry, drama, and fiction.¹³²

The nineteenth-century British sinologists also used the word “literature” generally in its broad sense when describing Chinese literature. Phrases like “Chinese literature” or “literature of the Chinese” always refer to almost the entire range of Chinese books, in both the sinologists’ works of systematic survey of China, such as John Francis Davis’s *The Chinese: a General Description of the Empire of China and its Inhabitants* (1836) and Robert Kennaway Douglas’s *China* (1882),¹³³ and in their works specifically on, and entitled, “Chinese literature,” such as Alexander Wylie’s (1815–1887) *Notes on Chinese Literature* (1867). In Davis’s *The Chinese*, the author introduced the Confucian classics, moral essays, histories, biographies, statistical works, criminal laws, science writings, and finally Chinese poetry, drama, and novels.¹³⁴ Wylie’s *Notes on Chinese Literature*, based on the Chinese *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Annotated Catalogue of

¹²⁹ Matthew Arnold, “Literature and Science,” in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling, quoted in Lionel Gossman, “Literature and Education,” 342.

¹³⁰ Gossman, “Literature and Education,” 342.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 343.

¹³² Robert Chambers, contents to *History of the English Language and Literature* (London: Edward Hopkins, 1837).

¹³³ Davis, *The Chinese*; Robert K. Douglas, *China* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1882).

¹³⁴ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 172–212.

the Complete Imperial Library), is an annotated bibliography of Chinese books of all the four branches (*sibu* 四部) in the Chinese classification scheme—classics (*jing* 經), history (*shi* 史), philosophy (*zi* 子), and literature, or, literally, collection (*ji* 集).¹³⁵ Even Herbert Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature* written at the end of the nineteenth century covers the Confucian classics, historical writings, encyclopaedias, and medical jurisprudence, in addition to Chinese poetry, drama, and novels.

While the sinologists generally used the term “literature” in the all-inclusive way, they seemed to be also aware of the emerging narrow sense of “literature” as the umbrella term for imaginative, aesthetic writings. Accordingly, they classified, explicitly or implicitly, Chinese poetry, drama, and novels as a specific department within the whole body of Chinese works. John Francis Davis made a very obvious classification in his *The Chinese* by separating Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction in an individual chapter from the description of Chinese classics and histories in the previous one. He defined this group of the three genres of “drama, poetry, and romances or novels” as “the circle of their [Chinese] *Belles Lettres*.”¹³⁶ The phrase “belles lettres” was considered a “vaguely-used term” in the nineteenth century, meaning “elegant or polite literature or literary studies.”¹³⁷ The term is now understood as being “originally used (as in ‘fine art’) to distinguish artistic literature from scientific or philosophical writing,”¹³⁸ very close to the narrow meaning of “literature” developed in the nineteenth century. The term “belles lettres” was regularly employed in other sinological writings in the nineteenth century, which indicates a common understanding, as well as the practice, of classifying poetry, drama, and the novel as a distinctive department within general Chinese literature. In an article on Chinese drama and theatre, the China expert John Barrow argued that the Europeans were ignorant of the nature of Chinese lyric poetry and “the actual state of the drama, and indeed of that

¹³⁵ Alexander Wylie, *Notes on Chinese Literature* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1867). Wylie translated the four branches as “classics,” “history,” “philosophers,” and “belles-lettres.” On the “four branches” division, see Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), 938–939.

¹³⁶ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 184.

¹³⁷ *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), s.v. “belles-lettres.”

¹³⁸ Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2015), s.v. “belles-lettres,” accessed July 6, 2017, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-126?rskey=8JcTNf&result=1>.

department of literature in general which is usually known by the name of *belles lettres*.”¹³⁹ In this statement, while the word “literature” refers to the whole body of Chinese writing, “*belles lettres*” suggests a distinct part which includes lyric composition and drama. In a similar manner, in the *Notes on Chinese Literature*, Alexander Wylie translated the Chinese *ji* 集 (literally “collection”), the last head title of the four branches, as “*belles lettres*,” and explained that this division included “various classes of polite literature, poetry, and analytical works.”¹⁴⁰ In other sinological writings on Chinese literature, although without using the term “*belles lettres*,” it was still common to discuss Chinese poetry, drama, and prose fiction together in this consecutive order. For example, Robert Kennaway Douglas introduced Chinese poetry, drama and theatre, and works of fiction as the last part of his lecture on Chinese literature.¹⁴¹ In Herbert Giles’s *A History of Chinese Literature*, the fact that the major part of work focuses on Chinese poetry, novels, drama, and prose writing shows that the author had almost constructed a Chinese “literature” in its narrow sense as we understand it today.

In summary, the nineteenth-century British sinologists had adopted the idea of “literature” within the European literary framework, though the frequent citing of the four-branch division suggests that they had also tried to convey the Chinese literary notion to their European readers. The sinologists used the word “literature” in its broad sense, but at the same time also accepted the emerging, narrow idea of imaginative and aesthetic writing and accordingly classified poetry, drama, and fiction as an individual department of the general literature. This classification scheme is obviously not a Chinese indigenous one. In Chinese literary tradition, it was always the classical prose (*guwen* 古文) and poetry (*shi* 詩) that were generally considered as works of art with literary and aesthetic value, while the narrative fiction work, especially the vernacular novel (*xiaoshuo* 小說) and drama (*xiqu* 戲曲), only occupied a relatively peripheral literary position. The novel

¹³⁹ [John Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama, and of their Theatrical Exhibitions,” in *Laou-seng-urh, or, “An Heir in his Old Age.” A Chinese Drama*, trans. John Francis Davis (London: John Murray, 1817), iii–iv. This article prefixed to John Francis Davis’s translation was not signed when it was published. Davis later quoted from this article and attributed the quotation as “observes the editor of the *Heir in Old Age*,” suggesting that the article was written by the editor of his translation. Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 187; Davis also mentioned at another place that the editor of *An Heir in his Old Age* was John Barrow. Davis, “Rise and Progress of Chinese Literature in England,” 68. Therefore, it is very likely that John Barrow was the author of this article on Chinese drama.

¹⁴⁰ Wylie, *Notes on Chinese Literature*, 181.

¹⁴¹ Robert Kennaway Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China: Two Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in May and June, 1875* (London: Trübner & Co., 1875), 95–117.

and drama in China never comprised literature proper; instead, they were normally despised as trivial, fictive, and even morally destructive writings that a Confucian scholar should never engage with.¹⁴² By classifying poetry, drama, and the novel as a whole, thus raising the Chinese novel and drama from their marginal position to a central place as imaginative and aesthetic works, the British sinologists had constructed a very different overall image of Chinese literature from what it originally was. Despite the possible ambiguity of the word “literature,” this thesis sticks to its modern and narrow meaning, and concentrates on the sinologists’ writings on Chinese poetry, drama, and the novel.

2.4 Values of Chinese Literature and Aims of Literary Studies

Why is Chinese literature worth reading and being known to non-Chinese readers? What is the value of the study of Chinese literature? To the nineteenth-century British sinologists, four different aims—literary inspiration, knowledge accumulation, language learning, and information gathering—were commonly mentioned, individually or collectively, in their writings on Chinese literature. They were not entirely new to the nineteenth-century readers, but were a continuation of the eighteenth-century British reception of Chinese culture and literature, pursued in a different socio-cultural context with changing British views on China and different Sino-British relations.

Chinese literary works were first translated into Latin, French, and English languages, and circulated in Europe from the eighteenth century, when the European fascination for Chinese things reached its peak around the 1750s.¹⁴³ The best known pieces of Chinese literature in translation were the fourteenth-century Chinese play *Zhaoshi gu'er* 趙氏孤兒 (The Orphan of the House of Zhao) and the vernacular novel *Haoqiu zhuan* 好逑傳 (The Fortunate Union). *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* was first translated into French by

¹⁴² On the traditional Chinese thoughts on fiction, see Fang Zhengyao 方正耀, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo piping shilue* 中國小說批評史略 (A short history of Chinese fiction criticism) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1990); Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

¹⁴³ On the *Chinoiserie* in Great Britain, see William Worthen Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay: the Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951); Fan, *Zhongguo wenhua zai qimeng shiqi de Yingguo*. On the circulation and reception of Chinese literature in Europe, particularly in England, see Zhang, *Zhongguo wenxue zai Yingguo*; Zhou Faxiang 周發祥, “Zhongguo wenxue xibo de fazhan” 中國文學西播的發展 (The circulation of Chinese literature in the West), in Zhou and Li, *Zhongwai wenxue jiaoliu shi*, 156–195.

the French missionary Joseph-Henri de Prémare (1666–1735).¹⁴⁴ His translation, together with some other translations of Chinese poems and short stories, was included in *The General History of China*, the encyclopaedic work on China edited by Du Halde which enjoyed immediate popularity in Europe. Based on Prémare’s translation, various adaptations appeared in England and in France, in script and on stage: the English playwright William Hatchett (1701–1760s?) composed his adapted version *The Chinese Orphan: An Historical Tragedy* in 1741; the French philosopher Voltaire also rewrote the story into the play *L’Orphelin de la Chine* in 1753; the Irish playwright Arthur Murphy (1727–1805) published another English version *Orphan of China* in 1755.¹⁴⁵ The Chinese novel *The Fortunate Union* was first introduced in Europe through an English translation, the *Hau Kiou Choaan; or, The Pleasing History* (1761), edited by Thomas Percy.¹⁴⁶ Percy explained that this translation was revised and edited from a partly-English, partly-Portuguese manuscript he had discovered which was directly translated from the Chinese.¹⁴⁷ The *Pleasing History* also enjoyed great fame in Europe since its publication, and even attracted the attention of the German writers Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832).

In the eighteenth century, the imported Chinese literature was welcomed in Europe for its oriental novelty and for the possibility that it might provide inspiration for European literature. The Chinese literary devices, imageries, morals, and themes were warmly embraced in the hope that it could enrich the Western literary repository. William Hatchett celebrated the introduction of Chinese literature to Europe with a simile to the import of Chinese goods: “China has furnished us long with her manufactures; . . . the importation of her poetry will serve to regale in its turn.”¹⁴⁸ The Poet Laureate William Whitehead (1715–1785) anticipated, in the prologue to Arthur Murphy’s *Orphan of China*, that Chinese literature could bring “fresh virtues” to the “exhausted store” of ancient Greek

¹⁴⁴ On the history of the translation and reception of *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* in Europe, see Chen Shouyi 陳受頤, “The Chinese Orphan: A Yuan Play, its Influence on European Drama of the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Adrian Hsia (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1998), 359–382; originally published in *T’ien Hsia Monthly* 4 (1936): 89–115.

¹⁴⁵ Chen, “The Chinese Orphan,” 366, 368, 373.

¹⁴⁶ For the history of the translation and reception of the *Pleasing History*, see T. C. Fan, “Percy’s *Hau Kiou Choaan*,” *Review of English Studies* 22, no. 86 (1946): 117–125; Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-century England*, 155–168; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 30–41.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Percy, preface to *Hau Kiou Choaan or, The Pleasing History*, ed. and trans. Thomas Percy (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), ix.

¹⁴⁸ William Hatchett, *The Chinese Orphan*, vi, quoted in Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 216.

and Roman literature.¹⁴⁹ The orientalist William Jones also encouraged the translation and studies of oriental poems because “our European poetry has subsisted too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images and incessant allusions to the same fables,” and, by importing oriental poems to the Western literary world, “we should be furnished with a new set of images and similarities; and a number of excellent compositions would be brought to light, which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate.”¹⁵⁰

Such rhetoric advocating the novel imageries and techniques of Chinese literature were also found in the nineteenth-century British sinologists’ writings on Chinese literature, only not as enthusiastic as their predecessors in the eighteenth century. In the concluding paragraph of his treatise on Chinese poetry, John Francis Davis envisaged the prospect with a horticultural analogy that, because “ordinary topics of poetry will at last grow threadbare, and become tiresome through much use,”¹⁵¹ he expected that Chinese poetry could provide new inspiration to revive English poetry:

Fruits of the highest culture may be improved and varied by foreign grafts; and as our garden have already been indebted to China for a few choice flowers, who knows but our poetry may someday lie under a similar obligation? However small the prospect of advantage, every scrap of novelty may turn out to be a real gain.¹⁵²

A similar expectation and analogy was adopted by Walter Henry Medhurst (1822–1885)—son of the famous Protestant missionary also named Walter Henry Medhurst (1796–1857)—in his lecture on Chinese poetry delivered in Shanghai in 1875. In the concluding remarks, Medhurst encouraged his audience to pursue the study of Chinese poetry because

they [Chinese poetry] may perhaps prove the fortunate means of suggesting new thoughts and novel imagery to the minds of our Western writers, which, like the many acquisitions which we have already derived from the floral world of this little known country, may in the end prove to be treasures indeed.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ The whole quotation is “enough of Greece and Rome. The exhausted store / of either nation now can charm no more: . . . On eagle wings the poet of to-night / Soars for fresh virtues to the source of light, / To China’s eastern realms: and boldly bears / Confucius’ morals to Britannia’s ears.” William Whitehead, prologue to *The Orphan of China: A Tragedy*, by Arthur Murphy (London: P. Vaillant, 1759), quoted in Chen Shouyi 陳受頤, “Oliver Goldsmith and His *Chinese Letters*,” in *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, 285.

¹⁵⁰ William Jones, “An Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations,” quoted in Saree Makdisi, “Literature, National Identity, and Empire,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740–1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 62–63.

¹⁵³ Walter Henry Medhurst, “Chinese Poetry,” *The China Review* 4, no. 1 (1875), 56.

Compared to the excitement in the eighteenth-century reception of Chinese literature, the nineteenth-century British sinologists' remarks sound dubious; Davis's rhetorical question beginning with "who knows" and the "may perhaps" in Medhurst's lecture seem to suggest that the attraction of Chinese literature as literary inspiration was undermined. This ebb of Chinese literary vogue reveals the changing British views on China from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. As Shunhong Zhang's study shows, the second half of the eighteenth century saw a decline in the esteem of China in the British mind, from generally favourable admiration to a negative disdain at the turn of the century. Zhang summarises some of the outstanding reasons for the increasingly critical attitude towards China.¹⁵⁴ He argues that the British idea of progress led to the evaluation of Chinese society as being stagnant and backward; the liberal ideas had prompted British writers to condemn the despotic Chinese government; the growing British national pride and nationalism gave rise to the announcement of their identity and superiority and to the British imperial sentiments towards Asian countries; and the commercial conflicts and deteriorating relations between Britain and the Qing government also evoked general negative estimation of China. Once praised by the Jesuits as the ideal model of society and of ethical philosophy, China now began to be described by British intellectuals as "cruel," "artificial," "inferior and servile," and "Barbarian."¹⁵⁵ As China was generally believed to be inferior to the European nations, it was inevitable for the British to come to the conclusion that "there are certainly not many things in which the Chinese are worthy of imitation."¹⁵⁶ The enthusiasm for the literary merit of Chinese literature receded. The purposes of studying Chinese literature gradually moved away from pure literary value to more practical aims. Chinese literature was studied, the sinologists claimed, to increase the British knowledge about Chinese literature *per se*, to facilitate learning the Chinese language, and to gather practical information about China. These three goals often overlapped with each other in the sinologists' writings on Chinese literature.

Chinese literature constitutes a necessary part of the system of knowledge of China. Western books giving a general introduction to China often contain chapters or paragraphs explaining the characteristics of Chinese poetry, drama, and novels. In the eighteenth

¹⁵⁴ Zhang, *British Views on China*, 154–179.

¹⁵⁵ These words and phrases were used respectively by the *Gentleman's Magazine* (London, 1731–1922), Tomas Percy, Johann Reinhold Forster (1729–1798), and Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), all quoted in Zhang, *British Views on China*, 13.

¹⁵⁶ Robert Morrison, *A View of China, for Philological Purposes* (Macao: East India Company Press, 1817), 124.

century, a preliminary attempt to describe the features of Chinese literature was already made in the works by Du Halde and by Thomas Percy, based largely on the Jesuits' writings, particularly those by Joseph-Henri de Prémare.¹⁵⁷ Those descriptions, however, were considered rustic and inadequate by the nineteenth-century British sinologists. The sinologists, therefore, embarked on the project to describe, translate, and study Chinese literature to improve the British knowledge about Chinese literature. For example, noticing that “though much has been written respecting the Chinese, their poetry has remained almost unnoticed,”¹⁵⁸ Peter Perring Thoms translated the Chinese poem *Huajian ji* 花箋記 (The Chinese Courtship) and produced a preface explaining the history and the characteristics of Chinese poetry, so that European readers could “form a correct opinion”¹⁵⁹ of it. John Barrow also found that the Europeans were not well-equipped with sufficient knowledge of Chinese drama to make a sound judgement on the subject, therefore he wrote an introductory article on Chinese drama and theatre, which was attached to John Francis Davis's translation of the Chinese play *Lao sheng' er* 老生兒 (*Laou-seng-urh, or, “An Heir in his Old Age.” A Chinese Drama*, 1817).¹⁶⁰ Davis also revealed his intellectual interest in writing *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and its Inhabitants* as, quoting from a French writer, “*le désir de tout connaître, en étant obligé de le décrire*” (the desire to know all, and being obliged to describe).¹⁶¹ Even by the end of the nineteenth century, the missionary-sinologist George Thomas Candlin believed that the Western readers' knowledge about Chinese novels was “almost a complete blank,” and that “our knowledge of this interest people [Chinese] and of their bibliothecal treasures cannot be said to be exhaustive.”¹⁶² So he published *Chinese Fiction* (1898) as an introduction to the characteristics and the important works of Chinese novels. Though not always explicitly expressed, such scholarly curiosity about Chinese literature was a common reason behind the British sinologists' literary studies.

¹⁵⁷ Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, “Of the Taste of the Chinese for Poetry, History, and Plays,” in *The General History of China, Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological . . . of the Empire of China . . .*, trans. Richard Brookes, vol. 3 (London: J. Watts, 1741), 110–111, 195–196; Thomas Percy, “A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese, Extracted from a *Memoir of M. Freret*,” in *The Pleasing History* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), 4: 203–224.

¹⁵⁸ Peter Perring Thoms, preface to *花箋 Chinese Courtship, in Verse*, trans. Peter Perring Thoms (London: Parbury, Allen and Kingsbury, 1824), iii.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ [Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama,” xxxi.

¹⁶¹ Davis, introduction to *The Chinese*, 1: v.

¹⁶² Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 2.

From a more practical dimension, Chinese literary texts, especially vernacular novels and plays, were often employed as language-learning materials to assist foreign residents in their study of the Chinese language. This practice can be traced back to the eighteenth century as well. Thomas Percy's *Pleasing History* was revised from a manuscript of English translation of the Chinese novel made by an EIC employee as an exercise in his Chinese lessons.¹⁶³ In the early nineteenth century, George Staunton also recommended the foreign students of the Chinese language to read this novel, *Haoqiu zhuan* 好逑傳 (The Fortunate Union), in its original text for its “polite conversation in the upper classes of society” which was “much easier of access, and is more practically useful to the learner, than the regular Chinese classics.”¹⁶⁴ Another Chinese novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber) was also often adapted as language-learning material throughout the nineteenth century. Research on the history of its English translation shows that extracts from this novel were frequently used by the British sinologists in dictionaries and textbooks as specimens of Chinese vernacular language, especially the Mandarin dialect.¹⁶⁵ Robert Morrison quoted many words and phrases from the *Dream of the Red Chamber* in his *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*.¹⁶⁶ He also adopted passages from the novel, with his English translation, in the textbook *Dialogues and Detached Sentences in the Chinese Language* (1816).¹⁶⁷ The British consul Robert Thom (1807–1846) also translated one chapter from the novel, and juxtaposed the Chinese original texts with English translation in the appendix to his *The Chinese Speaker, Part I* (1846).¹⁶⁸ The

¹⁶³ Percy, preface to *The Pleasing History*, ix–x.

¹⁶⁴ George Staunton, “Note on the Pleasing History, a Translation of a Chinese Novel,” in *Miscellaneous Notices relating to China*, 103.

¹⁶⁵ On the *Dream of the Red Chamber* used as language-learning materials, see Song Lihua 宋莉華, “19 shiji xiren hanyu duben zhong de xiaoshuo” 19 世紀西人漢語讀本中的小說 (Chinese novels in Western textbooks of the Chinese language in the nineteenth century), *The Research on Ming and Qing Dynasties' Novels* 明清小說研究 79 (2006): 126–140; Wang Yan 王燕, “Zuowei haiwai hanyu jiaocai de Honglou meng—ping Honglou meng zai xifang de zaoqi chuanbo” 作為海外漢語教材的《紅樓夢》——評《紅樓夢》在西方的早期傳播 (*Dream of the Red Chamber* as textbook of the Chinese language in foreign countries: on the early circulation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the West), *Studies on “Dream of the Red Chamber”* 紅樓夢學刊 31, no. 6 (2009): 310–315.

¹⁶⁶ Wang Xuejiao 王雪嬌, “Cong Ma Lixun de Huaying zidian kan Honglou meng zai yingyu shijie de zaoqi chuanbo” 從馬禮遜的《華英字典》看《紅樓夢》在英語世界的早期傳播 (The early circulation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the English-speaking world: the case of Morrison's *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*) *Studies on “Dream of the Red Chamber”* 紅樓夢學刊 35, no. 4 (2013): 309–325.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Morrison, ed. and trans., “Dialogue 25,” in *Dialogues and Detached Sentences in the Chinese Language, with Free and Verbal Translation in English* (Macao: East India Company's Press, 1816), 194–200.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Thom, trans., “Extract from *Hung-Low-Mung*, Chapter VI,” in *The Chinese Speaker, Part I* (Ningpo: Presythrion Mission Press, 1846), 62–89.

missionary-sinologist Joseph Edkins (1823–1905) also translated a 455-word extract from the novel into an interlinear passage with each Chinese sentence followed by the English translation in the appendix to his *A Grammar of the Chinese Colloquial Language, Commonly Called the Mandarin Dialect* (1857).¹⁶⁹ Novel-reading was recognised as such an effective approach in acquiring the Chinese language that the author of one Chinese-English dictionary even claimed that the dictionary “almost entirely owed its origin to novel reading.”¹⁷⁰

Apart from language-learning materials, Chinese literary works, especially novels, were also commonly read as repositories of faithful description of the customs, manners, national characters, and everyday lives of the Chinese. This idea, again, was hardly a novel concept in the nineteenth century. Thomas Percy had already suggested that his *Pleasing History* presented “a faithful picture of Chinese manners, wherein the domestic and political economy of that vast people is displayed with an exactness and accuracy to which none but a native could be capable of attaining.”¹⁷¹ Literature as the representation of social reality was also a popular notion in European literary thought in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In analysing the underlying conceptions in literary historian Thomas Warton’s (1728–1790) *History of English Poetry* (1774–1781), René Wellek points out Warton’s guiding perception to view literature as “merely a series of documents for the illustration of social history”¹⁷² and his “uses of the literature for the illustration of ancient costumes and customs.”¹⁷³ This presumed corresponding relationship between literature and social condition contributes to the idea of national literature. As literature began to be defined by national origins, they were also understood as the records of the nation’s particular customs and manners as well as the expression of the national character and minds.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Wang Jinbo 王金波, “*Honglou meng* zaoqi yingyi buyi zhi yi: Ai Yuese dui *Honglou meng* de yijie” 紅樓夢早期英譯補遺之一——艾約瑟對紅樓夢的譯介 (One of the neglected early English translations of *Dream of the Red Chamber*: Edkin’s translation and introduction of *Dream of the Red Chamber*), *Studies on “Dream of the Red Chamber”* 紅樓夢學刊 35, no. 4 (2013): 243–269.

¹⁷⁰ George Carter Stent, preface to *A Chinese and English Vocabulary in the Pekinese Dialect* (Shanghai: Customs Press, 1871), v.

¹⁷¹ Percy, preface to *The Pleasing History*, xv.

¹⁷² René Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 196.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ See also, Wellek, “Literature and Its Cognates,” 83; Julia M. Wright, “Literature and Nationalism,” in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 6, *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830-1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 105-110.

In the early nineteenth century, British residents in China had only very limited contact with Chinese people. From 1760 to 1842, foreigners were only allowed to live in Macao and to trade and work in Guangzhou during the trading season.¹⁷⁵ They had little chance to venture into interior China for first-hand observation of the people and culture outside Guangzhou and Macao. Therefore, British sinologists turned to Chinese literature, especially novels and plays, as expedient sources from which to obtain practical information and knowledge of China. John Francis Davis was the first British sinologist in China to translate Chinese novels and plays directly into English. He translated the Chinese play *Lao sheng' er* 老生兒 as *An Heir in his Old Age* in 1817, three short stories from the Chinese novelist Li Yu 李漁's (1610–1680) *Shi'er lou* 十二樓 (The Twelve Towers) in 1822, and the Chinese novel *Fortunate Union* in 1829. He believed that “one of the most effectual means of gaining an intimate knowledge of China is by translating from its popular literature, consisting principally of drama and novels.”¹⁷⁶ He attributed the chief value of his translation to the information contained in these novels, rather than “a correspondence of feeling” between the Chinese and Western readers.¹⁷⁷ He also preferred studies of modern, rather than ancient, Chinese literary works because, according to him, modern literature “serve as better models of the style of the present day” and “convey far more information with regard to the present state of the Empire, and the character of the people.”¹⁷⁸ Davis explained that his belief in Chinese novels’ representational power lies primarily in the fact that the Chinese authors were more honest when they “address themselves solely to their own countrymen” and, as a result, were free from the “misrepresentation, prejudice, and exaggeration, with which the Chinese are known to speak of themselves to strangers.”¹⁷⁹ Therefore, he was convinced that, “under the existing system of exclusion from the interior of the country, to which all Europeans are subject,”¹⁸⁰ Chinese literary works “are perhaps the best sources to which we can address ourselves in order to obtain a knowledge of the every-day habits of the people.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Frederic Wakeman Jr., “The Canton Trade and the Opium War,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, Late Ch’ing 1800–1911, part 1, 163–164.

¹⁷⁶ Davis, “Observations on the Language and Literature of China,” 9.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁷⁹ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 210.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Various kinds of information might be obtained from Chinese literary works. In addition to his informative footnotes in the *Fortunate Union*, Davis also pointed out in the preface that the novel could be read “as a more faithful picture of Chinese manners, inasmuch as the hero espouses but *one* wife.”¹⁸² Here he referred to the problem that had perplexed foreigners for a long time: the fact that some Chinese men were married to more than one women. Davis used this novel as an example to illustrate the difference between the Chinese concepts of *qi* 妻 (wife) and *qie* 妾 (concubine), explaining that every Chinese man was allowed to marry only one legitimate wife and the other women were in fact permitted concubinage, rather than the practice of polygamy as often misunderstood by foreign readers at that time.¹⁸³ In another case, a foreign reader described how, after reading the Chinese play *Jinqian ji* 金錢記 (The Golden Coins), he completely changed his previous impression that “the youth of this country [China] are modest, obedient, and studious, and that they are not so forward as our young people.”¹⁸⁴ From this play, he had discovered that the Chinese young people could be just as rude and impolite as those in Western countries. This finding had taught him to appreciate the value of Chinese plays as faithful representation of the real Chinese character: “we learn more of the manners of the Chinese from their plays, than from all their books put together.”¹⁸⁵

After the First Opium War (1839–1842), five Chinese cities (Shanghai, Guangzhou, Ningbo, Fuzhou, and Xiamen) were opened as treaty ports to foreign residents.¹⁸⁶ British traders, consular officers, interpreters, missionaries, and visitors were able to stay in Chinese inland cities and thus were provided with a better chance to make direct observation and contact with Chinese people and society. Yet, even with the possibility of more empirical means to acquire the knowledge about China, British sinologists had not completely abandoned the idea and the practice of obtaining information from Chinese literary works. A reminder of the practical value of Chinese literature almost became the standard rhetorics to justify the sinologists’ literary studies. In 1895, the missionary-sinologist Thomas G. Selby (1846–1910) published a collection of English translations of Chinese short stories as *The Chinaman in His Own Stories*. According to the translator,

¹⁸² Davis, preface to *Fortunate Union*, xiv.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Anonymous, “The Chinese Drama. An Extract from the ‘*Siècle des Youen*’ of the late Professor Bazin: being an analysis of the *Kin-ts’ien-ki* 金錢記, or ‘The Love Token,’ with passage translated,” *The Chinese and Japanese Repository* 1, no. 10 (1864): 439.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ John K. Fairbank, “The Creation of the Treaty System,” 224.

this book was published with the sole purpose of “giving a brief glance at Chinese life through Chinese fiction,”¹⁸⁷ since, even in the late nineteenth century, the translator still believed that novel-reading was “perhaps one of the quickest and most accurate methods of picking up a knowledge of the manners, family and social habits and traditions, philosophies and religions of a foreign nation.”¹⁸⁸ Similarly, when explaining his motives in studying Chinese fiction, the missionary George Thomas Candlin argued that religion and novels were closely related and that fiction was considered as the “strong mirror”¹⁸⁹ that reflects how religious beliefs and supernatural concepts worked in the Chinese mind. Therefore, Candlin believed that, if Western readers wanted to find out how Chinese religion and popular beliefs had shaped the Chinese mind, they “shall find in the historical and mythical novels of China the chief material of our study.”¹⁹⁰

Language-learning and information-gathering were probably the two most important purposes of reading and studying Chinese novels, as Alexander Wylie and William Frederick Mayers asserted respectively in 1867. Wylie added a short bibliography of Chinese novels in his *Notes on Chinese Literature*, explaining that the main reasons that make the knowledge of Chinese novels necessary were

the insight they [Chinese novels] give into the national manners and customs of various ages, the specimens which they furnish of an ever-changing language, the fact that this being the only channel through which a large portion of the people gain their knowledge of history, and the influence which they must consequently exercise in the formation of character.¹⁹¹

Mayers also advised his European readers to read and study Chinese historical novels “as an introduction to historical study and as the best means of gaining familiarity with the written language.”¹⁹² Likewise, he attributed the “usefulness” of the Chinese romantic novels written in Pekingese to the “insight which it affords into the domestic life and

¹⁸⁷ Thomas G. Selby, *The Chinaman in His Own Stories* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1895), 7. For a general study of the book, see Song Lijuan 宋麗娟, “Ziwo touying yu tazhe shenshi—lun Tuomasi Sai'erbi de Zhongguo xiaoshuo zhong de Zhongguoren” 自我投影與他者審視——論托馬斯·塞爾比的《中國小說中的中國人》(Self-reflection and Others' observation: on Thomas G. Selby's *The Chinaman in His Own Stories*), *Journal of Shanghai Normal University* 上海師範大學學報 40, no. 4 (2011): 61–67.

¹⁸⁸ Selby, *Chinaman in His Own Stories*, 8.

¹⁸⁹ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 3.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹¹ Wylie, *Notes on Chinese Literature*, 161.

¹⁹² William Frederick Mayers, “Bibliographical. Chinese Works of Fiction. I. Historical Romances,” *Notes and Queries on China and Japan* 1, no.7 (1867): 86.

everyday customs of the Chinese” which were “so jealously concealed . . . from foreign observation” and also to their styles as “the only instances of writings couched for the most part in the spoken language”¹⁹³ of the Northern Chinese dialect.

On the whole, these four kinds of objectives—literary inspiration, accumulation of knowledge, language learning, and information gathering—indicate the sinologists’ diverse and complex assumptions and expectations towards Chinese literature. The different positions of the sinologists’ attitudes in this spectrum from pure literary to pure practical values would also affect their focus and interpretation in sinological literary studies.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated in general how the British sinologists’ studies of Chinese literature operated within the nineteenth-century cross-cultural literary and social-historical contexts. Chinese literature was not studied in a vacuum; instead, the sinological literary studies stemmed from, and in turn contributed to, the British imperial ideologies and practices in nineteenth-century China. This interrelation renders the process of knowledge production, as well as the knowledge of Chinese literature produced, into a complex dynamics involving both the British conceptions and the Chinese experience.

In the development of British sinology in the nineteenth century, the sinologists’ residence in China loomed large as one of the most important advantages to their Chinese studies. The British presence in China not only provided their sinologists with direct access to the subjects for study, but also, through a sense of unmediated intimacy equipped with self-alleged objectivity, empowered them to be the most appropriate and the most capable to represent the *real* China to European readers. In their most general representations of Chinese literature, the British sinologists re-defined and re-mapped the territory of Chinese literature within the basic framework of contemporary European concept of “literature.” Such appropriation of European notions on the construction of Chinese literature implies a fundamental belief in the often Eurocentric universalism in their

¹⁹³ William Frederick Mayers, “Bibliographical. Chinese Works of Fiction. V. Romantic Novels (continued),” *Notes and Queries on China and Japan* 1, no.11 (1867): 154.

literary studies. To the nineteenth-century British sinologists, Chinese literature was commonly studied for multiple and mainly practical aims such as language learning and information gathering. This perception corresponds to a shift in the British attitudes towards China and their increasingly economic and political relations with China. The assumed relation between literature and the Chinese social reality also suggests the idea of understanding Chinese literature from the perspective of national literature. The practical use of Chinese literature was gradually regulated by the professionalisation of British sinology, fuelled by the development of British imperial institutions in China, from the second half of the nineteenth century.

The cultural significance of the nineteenth-century British sinologists' literary studies is not to be understood by the accuracy of their descriptions or conclusions about Chinese literature, but rather should be interpreted in relation to the multi-faceted origins and nuanced implications of the discourse constructed in the literary, intellectual, and historical contexts of the time. As we will come to more detailed analysis of the nineteenth-century British sinologists' literary studies in the following chapters, the mechanism behind this cultural practice of knowledge production will be more thoroughly revealed and discussed

Chapter 3

The Anatomy of Chinese Literature: Expository Studies

“A Chinese poem is at best a hard nut to crack,”¹ Herbert Giles thus claimed in a brief introduction to Chinese poetry of the Tang dynasty (618–907) in his *History of Chinese Literature*. For the majority of the nineteenth-century English-speaking readers who were either ignorant of the Chinese language or knew very little about Chinese literature, a Chinese poem, or a play, or a novel, could be something unintelligible due not only to the language barrier but also to the different literary techniques, rules, forms, and styles used in Chinese literature. To crack this hard nut, the nineteenth-century British sinologists embarked on the task of decoding the mystery of Chinese literature by describing and explaining the fundamental characteristics and principles of Chinese poetry, drama, and the novel. This chapter investigates such expository studies that aimed to provide nineteenth-century English readers with ready-made, accessible, and manageable knowledge about Chinese literature. It examines the sinologists’ narratives of the features and classification of Chinese literature, focusing on the explicit and underlying perspectives, frameworks, and assumptions adopted in their narratives. It addresses specific questions such as: what were the basic characteristics of Chinese poetry, drama, and novels identified by the sinologists as being unique to Chinese literature? How were these features described or evaluated, and according to what reference system? What were the implications and discourse on Chinese literature formed collectively from their writings?

Edward Said observed in his *Orientalism* that “rhetorically speaking, Orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative: to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularizing and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts.”² Here the nineteenth-century British sinologists adopted a similar manner of breaking Chinese literature into various representative components, rules, and kinds, and remoulding it into a body of manageable knowledge. In this sense, without identifying the British sinologists

¹ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 144.

² Said, *Orientalism*, 72.

as Orientalists in the Saidian sense of the term, this chapter aims to explain that the sinologists' expository writings on Chinese literature are also anatomical in nature.

3.1 Writings on Chinese Poetry

The first systematic description of the nature and characteristics of Chinese poetry in the English language is probably "A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese," attached as an appendix in the fourth volume of Thomas Percy's *Pleasant History* (1761).³ This "Dissertation" was in fact compiled by Percy based on three key writings on Chinese poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: "De La Poésie des Chinois" (Of Chinese poetry) by the French scholar Nicolas Fréret (1688–1749),⁴ *The History of that Great and Renowned Monarchy of China* by the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Álvaro de Semedo (1585 or 1586–1658),⁵ and "On the Taste of the Chinese for Poetry, History, and Plays" in Du Halde's *The General History of China*.⁶ Percy quoted from Fréret's article on the use of tones, syllables, rhymes, and stanzas in Chinese poetry, and from Semedo and Du Halde on the use of antithesis. Like Percy himself, neither Fréret nor Du Halde understood the Chinese language. Fréret probably obtained his knowledge of Chinese poetry from Arcade Huang 黃嘉略 (1679–1716), a Chinese man living in Paris in the early eighteenth century;⁷ Du Halde's account of Chinese poetry was based on reports and writings by the Jesuits in China.⁸ These early writings are brief and not always accurate—only "an imperfect notion"⁹ of Chinese poetry, as Du Halde put it. Despite its rudimentary quality, Percy's "Dissertation" managed to integrate the prominent writings on Chinese poetry available in Europe in the eighteenth century.

³ Thomas Percy, "A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese. Extracted from a *Memoir of M. Freret*," in *The Pleasant History*, 4: 203–224.

⁴ [Nicolas Fréret], "De La Poésie des Chinois" (Of Chinese poetry), *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 3 (1723): 289–291.

⁵ F. Alvarez Semedo, *The History of that Great and Renowned Monarchy of China* (London: E. Tyler, 1655), 55–56.

⁶ Du Halde, "Taste of the Chinese for Poetry," 110.

⁷ Xu Minglong 許明龍, *Huang Jialüe yu zaoqi Faguo hanxue* 黃嘉略與早期法國漢學 (Arcade Huang and early French sinology) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 226–229.

⁸ On the source materials for Du Halde's *The General History of China*, see Isabelle Landry-Deron, *Qing Zhongguo zuozheng: Du Hede de Zhonghua Digu Quanzhi* 請中國作證: 杜赫德的《中華帝國全誌》 (*La Preuve par la Chine : la Description de J.-B. Du Halde, jésuite, 1735*), trans. Xu Minglong 許明龍 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2015), 125–129.

⁹ Du Halde, "Taste of the Chinese for Poetry," 110.

The keen interest in Chinese poetry continued in the nineteenth century among British sinologists. In Robert Morrison's introductory handbook *A Grammar of the Chinese Language* (1815),¹⁰ one chapter is devoted to Chinese prosody. According to Su Jing's research on Morrison's Chinese teachers, it is likely that this chapter was produced by Morrison in collaboration with his native Chinese tutor Ge Maohe 葛茂和 (?).¹¹ In this chapter, Morrison introduced the history, the rules of versification, and the classifications of Chinese poetry. He also provided four Chinese poems, together with his English translation, as specimens of four different poetic forms. It is a brief yet all-inclusive account of Chinese prosody in the early nineteenth century.

Another important sinological work on Chinese poetry in the early nineteenth century is Peter Perring Thoms's *Chinese Courtship, in Verse* (1824), an English translation of the Chinese narrative ballad *Huajian ji* 花箋記. This East India Company printer and self-taught sinologist inserted an introduction to Chinese poetry in the preface to this translation. In the preface, Thoms concisely elaborated on the structure, the arrangement of tones, the antithesis, and the history of Chinese poetry. This preface on Chinese poetry was also extensively quoted in a review of Thoms's translation in the English periodical *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* (London, 1827–1847).¹² Patricia Sieber argues that Thoms's translation and studies lay the foundation for literary translation from the Chinese to European languages. She also notices Thoms's possible collaboration with educated Chinese in this translation.¹³

Perhaps the most extensive and authoritative writing on Chinese poetry in the nineteenth century is the *Poeseos Sinicae commentarii. On the Poetry of the Chinese* (with the

¹⁰ The manuscript of this book was probably finished on or before 1811. Morrison's preface to the book was dated "Macao, April 2nd, 1811." According to Su Jing's research, the manuscript was brought to India for publication by John F. Elphinstone in 1811. See Su Jing 蘇精, *Zhu yi dai ke: chuanjiaoshi yu zhongwen yinshua de bianju* 鑄以代刻: 傳教士與中文印刷的變局 (From xylography to Western typography: Protestant missionaries and the transformation of Chinese printing in the 19th century) (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2014), 31.

¹¹ Su, "Ma Lixun he ta de zhongwen jiaoshi," 72. In the "Note" attached at the end of the chapter on Chinese prosody, Morrison explained that the original texts of the Chinese poems were provided by "a [Chinese] native of good parts, and who has taught the language to his own countrymen for twenty years," see Robert Morrison, "Of Prosody," in *A Grammar of the Chinese Language* (Serampore: Mission Press, 1815), 280. On the Chinese teacher Ge Maohe, see Su, "Ma Lixun he ta de zhongwen jiaoshi," 69–75.

¹² Review of *Chinese Courtship*, by P. P. Thoms, *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* 22, no. 44 (1839): 390–406.

¹³ Sieber, "Peter Perring Thoms (1790–1855), Cantonese Localism, and the genesis of Literary Translation from the Chinese," 127–167.

Chinese title 漢文詩解) by John Francis Davis. This lengthy treatise was first read in two parts at the Royal Asiatic Society meetings in London on 2 May 1829 and on 25 July 1829.¹⁴ It was then published in book form in 1829 and also in the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* the following year. This book is neatly divided into two parts: the first part addressing the versification rules, and the second part focusing on “the style and spirit,”¹⁵ or, the imagery, sentiment, and classification, of Chinese poetry. The book was then republished with Davis’s other China-related translations and articles in 1834. In 1864, the book was reprinted in the sinological journal *The Chinese and Japanese Repository*.¹⁶ A revised version was again published in 1870, with a new introduction by the author. The number of editions attests to the popularity and value of *On the Poetry of the Chinese* in the nineteenth century. Peter Kitson observes that Davis’s *On the Poetry of the Chinese* is “remarkably sympathetic and accurate for its period”¹⁷ and indicates strong influence of the English Romantic literary ideas.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were not many important sinological works offering extensive description of Chinese poetry. One such work is a public lecture delivered by the British consular officer in Shanghai, Walter Henry Medhurst, in 1875.¹⁸ The transcript of the lecture was also published in the *China Review*. This fairly comprehensive and detailed introduction to Chinese poetry was partly based on, or, in Medhurst’s own words, “indebted to,”¹⁹ John Francis Davis’s *On the Poetry of the Chinese*. Medhurst not only adopted the same two-part structure of the versification and spirit of Chinese poetry but directly cited long paragraphs from Davis’s work. Nonetheless, Medhurst also managed to provide additional information, as well as his own understanding and evaluation, of Chinese poetry.

¹⁴ “Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland,” *The Asiatic Journal* 162 (June 01, 1829): 725; *The Asiatic Journal* 164 (August 01, 1829): 198.

¹⁵ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 3.

¹⁶ John Francis Davis, “The Poetry of the Chinese,” *Chinese and Japanese Repository*, no.7 (January 1864): 291–307; no. 8 (February 1864): 323–342.

¹⁷ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 116.

¹⁸ Walter Henry Medhurst was the son of the Protestant missionary also named Walter Henry Medhurst. He acted as British consular officer in Shanghai from 1868 to 1877, see C. A. Harris, “Medhurst, Sir Walter Henry (1822–1885),” rev. T. G. Otte, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18495> (accessed 21 Feb 2017).

¹⁹ Medhurst, “Chinese Poetry,” 50.

Apart from in these monographs, chapters, and lectures, the characteristics of Chinese poetry were also commonly described in the general systemic writings on China and on Chinese literature. For example, in *A History of Chinese Literature*, Herbert Giles inserted a few pages of explanatory account of the features of Chinese poetry before examining the poetry and poets of the Tang dynasty.²⁰

In their observation of Chinese poetry, the first thing that the nineteenth-century British sinologists had noticed was probably poetry's superior position in the Chinese literary hierarchy. The art of poetry is highly valued in Chinese literary culture and poetry writing is widely practised among Chinese literati and scholars. In the eighteenth century, Thomas Percy had already noted that poetry "has been nowhere in higher request, than in *China* . . . where it has always been regarded with peculiar reverence and esteem."²¹ Likewise, Peter Perring Thoms mentioned that poetry in China "is thought a great accomplishment" and every educated Chinese man "indulges himself in writing verses."²² The high prestige of Chinese poetry makes a telling contrast with the derogative Western discourse on China and Chinese people in the nineteenth century. For example, Walter Henry Medhurst found it "appears at first simply impossible" that "so cold-blooded, phlegmatic, and sensual a being as a Chinese, should possess sufficient taste or sentiment in his composition, wherein to generate or to keep alive the spirit of poetry."²³ In spite of his strong prejudice, however, Medhurst admitted that "nevertheless poets and poetry will be found to occupy fully as important a place in Chinese literature as they do in foreign," and that "metrical composition is in China regarded as an essential acquirement of the educated man."²⁴ The esteem for poetry in China also encouraged the sinologists' sustained and detailed study of Chinese poetry.

3.2 On Chinese Versification

Since Chinese poetry differs fundamentally from English or European poetry in its forms and rules of versification, a considerable portion of the nineteenth-century British

²⁰ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 143–146.

²¹ Percy, "A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese," 214.

²² Thoms, preface to *Chinese Courtship*, iii.

²³ Medhurst, "Chinese Poetry," 46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

sinologists' writings on Chinese poetry are devoted to describing and explaining the basic structural features such as the use of syllables, arrangement of tones, measures, pauses, rhymes, and antithesis of lines. When illustrating Chinese prosody, the British sinologists were in fact primarily concerned with, though they did not specify it in their writings, the Chinese modern style verse (*jinti shi* 近體詩)—the kind of Chinese poetry with fixed tone arrangement and antithesis pattern—rather than the irregular poetic forms such as ancient verse (*guti shi* 古體詩) or lyrics (*ci* 詞). Among all the poetic rules explained, the arrangement of tones (*pingze* 平仄) and the antitheses of lines (*duizhang* 對仗) have perhaps attracted the greatest attention, as both were considered the essential poetic devices unique to Chinese poetry. The following discussion will focus on the sinologists' writings on these two aspects, as examples of their attempts to convey the Chinese poetic ideas to English readers and how they did so with increasingly effective methods and sufficient knowledge of the subject.

The arrangement of tones in Chinese poetry is based on the singular phonetic nature of the Chinese language—the four tones. The Chinese versification generally requires that the tones of the second, fourth, and sixth characters in each line of a Chinese poem should alternate strictly between the flat tone (*pingsheng* 平聲, the first of the four tones) and the deflected tone (*zesheng* 仄聲, the other three of the four tones: rising, departing, and checked), while violation may be allowed to the tones of the first, third, and fifth characters. The corresponding words in the two lines of a couplet should also adopt opposite tones.²⁵ In his *A Grammar of the Chinese Language*, Robert Morrison elaborated on the exact arrangement of alternating and contrasting tones in couplet lines, based on his previous discussion of the four tones in China:

The difference between *pîng-shîng* 平聲 [flat tone], and *tsě-shîng* 仄聲 [deflected tone], has been already explained on page 19. If there be five words in a line, and the second word be *pîng-shîng*, it is required that the fourth be *tsě-shîng*; and vice versa . . . It is also required, that the second and fourth characters of every pair of lines, shall be in the one line *pîng-shîng* and in the other *tsě-shîng*. Similar rules are observed in those verses which contain seven characters in each line. In these it is required, that the second, fourth, and sixth words in each line should be varied.²⁶

²⁵ For an introduction to the tone patterns in Chinese poetry, see James J. Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 26.

²⁶ Morrison, "Of Prosody," 275.

Morrison had translated *pīng-shīng* as “direct” and *tsě-shīng* as “oblique” in his previous discussion of the four tones in the same book,²⁷ whereas in this paragraph he left these two Chinese terms untranslated. As a result, though the idea was communicated that there was certain kind of tonal alteration in Chinese poems, the explanation here might seem esoteric and perhaps exotic to ordinary English readers who were unfamiliar with the Chinese language and terms.

Peter Perring Thoms also provided a similar brief description of the arrangement of tones in Chinese poetry:

There are also verses of five and seven characters, of which every other character rhymes; i.e. allowing the second character to be Ping-shing, ‘Even sound,’ the third would be Tseih, ‘Oblique sound,’ either of the three sounds Shang [rising tone], Kew [departing tone], Jüh [checked tone]; and the fourth character would be Ping, as the second character of the same line. This rhyming of characters or words, is carried through the verse, so that the first and third line, second and fourth line, rhyme character for character.²⁸

While Thoms had correctly pointed out the difference between the flat and deflected tones and the pattern of each line, the term “rhyme” or “rhyming of characters” used to describe the regularity of tones in a Chinese poem may not be exactly appropriate. Though it suggests his effort to explain Chinese poetic rules by familiar English terms, the word itself might be confused with the meaning of “rhyme” in English poetry which refers to the correspondence of sounds rather than tones.

In his treatise on Chinese poetry, John Francis Davis not only described the features of the four tones, but also tried to explain their significance in the Chinese language. Davis assumed that the different tones were adopted for the purpose of distinguishing Chinese words of the same sound, which simultaneously also increased the “fitness for metrical composition”²⁹ of the Chinese language. As to the rules of arranging tones in a Chinese poem, Davis concisely summarised that

the words . . . which answer to the *even* numbers in each line,—the second, fourth, sixth . . . —together with the last word of all, are, in regular poetry, the subjects of

²⁷ Robert Morrison, “Of the Tones,” in *A Grammar of the Chinese Language*, 19.

²⁸ Thoms, preface to *Chinese Courtship*, viii.

²⁹ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 7.

attention with regard to the *alternate* position of the tones called “natural,” and “deflected.”³⁰

Unlike Morrison’s or Thoms’s elaborate description of the tones assigned to every character in each poetic line, Davis precisely grasped the key point in the principle of tonal arrangement in Chinese modern style poetry—that priority should be placed on the even number, or the second, fourth, and sixth, characters in a line. In addition to a general description of the basic rules, Davis further explained that the aesthetic purpose of such tone patterns was “to have variety, or the avoiding of a too frequent recurrence of the same tone, for its principal object.”³¹ Davis’s account suggests a more thorough understanding than Morrison and Thoms of the principle of tonal arrangement in Chinese poetry. With his precise description, he also corrected the “great error” of the eighteenth-century French scholar Nicolas Fréret who claimed that Chinese poetry was never “regulated by the arrangement or disposition of their musical tones.”³²

The effectiveness of Davis’s narrative of the Chinese poetic tone patterns, however, seemed to be impaired by the fact that, as Davis himself admitted, the phonetic difference between the four tones was so subtle that “nothing but the mouth of a native can illustrate them properly.”³³ Plain prose descriptions such as those in the writings by Morrison, Thomas, and Davis can never precisely convey the phonetic feature of the four tones, which only renders a narrative of the tone patterns in Chinese poetry as intelligible knowledge, rather than as an actual aesthetic experience, knowledge that can be understood in theory but not fully appreciated by the English-speaking readers who were ignorant of the pronunciation of the Chinese language.

Also aware of the difficulty to demonstrate the tone patterns in Chinese poetry, Walter Henry Medhurst introduced his own original method of illustrating the arrangement of tones. He used the English words “yes” and “no” to represent the Chinese flat and deflected tones respectively, and made up a four-line verse with only “yes” and “no” to

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

³¹ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 8.

³² The English translation is from Percy, “A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese,” 204. Davis quoted Fréret’s French original in his book without indicating its source nor providing an English translation. This remark is originally from [Nicolas Fréret], “De La Poésie des Chinois,” 289.

³³ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 7.

indicate the proper position that the flat and deflected tones were assigned in a poem.³⁴ Medhurst made two “poems” of this kind; the first represented a verse of five characters:³⁵

- 1, No, no, —yes, yes, no.
- 2, Yes, yes, —no, no, yes.
- 3, Yes, yes, —yes, no, no.
- 4, No, no, —no, yes, yes.

The other “verse” is one of seven-syllabic lines, in the same style. From the published transcript, we can tell that, in the lecture, Medhurst actually wrote these lines down on a board to offer more visual illustration. With these simulated verses illustrative of the tone arrangement, Medhurst introduced the basic principle of the tone patterns in Chinese poetry, in the same manner as Davis, that the second, fourth, and sixth characters of a line should strictly alternate between flat and deflected tones while the tones of the other characters may violate the rule.³⁶ He also explained that opposite tones should occur at corresponding places in a couplet. Medhurst’s invention of employing English words to indicate Chinese tones offers a more direct representation than previous prose description. Though the words “yes” and “no” *per se* do not reproduce the phonetic nature of flat and deflected tones in the Chinese language, they adequately imitate the pattern of tonal variation and opposition in a Chinese poem. Medhurst’s method proves to be an effective way of demonstrating tone patterns, which remains a standard practice even until now. Herbert Giles also adopted a similar approach of using the words “sharp” and “flat,” instead of “yes” and “no,” to represent the deflected and flat tones in five-syllable verses.³⁷ Even modern introductory writings on Chinese poetry and poetics still adopt the same method, using different kinds of symbols such as “+” and “—” to represent flat and deflected tones and arranging them in the form of a Chinese poem.³⁸

The other Chinese poetic device that attracted the sinologists’ attention is the use of antithesis. The key principle is that, in an antithesis couplet, each word in the first line should contrast in tone as well as in meaning with the corresponding word in the second line. Each pair of the contrasting words, according to James J. Y. Liu, should also be “of the same grammatical category,” and “refer to the same category of things” that are either

³⁴ Medhurst, “Chinese Poetry,” 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 144.

³⁸ Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, 26–27.

“objects of the same kind” or things “often mentioned together.”³⁹ The eighteenth-century European missionary-sinologists had already noticed and described the use of antithesis in Chinese poetry. For example, in his “Dissertation,” Thomas Percy quoted and translated from Álvaro de Semedo that “the *Chinese* verses ought to have a particular relation . . . in their signification and meaning: thus if one verse signify a mountain, fire, water, or whatever else, the correspondent verse . . . must likewise correspond in its meaning.”⁴⁰ Percy also quoted from Du Halde on the Chinese antithesis that “if the first thought relates to the spring, the second shall turn upon the autumn; or if the first mentions fire, the other shall express water.”⁴¹ These simple and preliminary descriptions gave a vague idea of the basic rules of Chinese poetic antithesis, and Semedo and Du Halde both noted that the technique of antithesis was very difficult and demanding.⁴²

The nineteenth-century British sinologists elaborated on the rules of antithesis in greater detail and with greater accuracy. Peter Perring Thoms meticulously described the parallel structure of antithesis lines:

In the eight line verses, while causing every other line to rhyme, they frequently make the four middle lines to agree still more; i.e. if the two first characters of the third line contain a single meaning, or express two distinct actions, the two first characters of the fourth line must also convey one or two meanings; the same attention is also paid to the last three characters of the middle lines; i.e. if they contain one, two, or three significations, the third line must also contain the same number of distinct ideas, and so through the other two lines.⁴³

Thoms noticed the syntactic correspondence in a couplet—that the two lines should contain the same number of distinct ideas—but failed to further clarify that the corresponding words should be of the same category and related or opposite in their meanings. Though he only introduced one requirement of Chinese antithesis, Thoms still pointed out the difficulty of this poetic technique that it was “considered the most difficult of Chinese poetry, and is greatly admired.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid., 148–149.

⁴⁰ Percy, “A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese,” 213. The original is from Semedo, *History of that Great Monarchy of China*, 56.

⁴¹ Ibid. The original is from Du Halde, “Taste of the Chinese for Poetry,” 110.

⁴² Semedo, *History of that Great Monarchy of China*, 56; Du Halde, “Taste of the Chinese for Poetry,” 110.

⁴³ Thoms, preface to *Chinese Courtship*, ix.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

John Francis Davis employed a different approach to describing the nature and characteristics of antithesis in Chinese poetry. He found antithesis “the most interesting” element of Chinese poetry because it “presents a striking coincidence” with the use of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. He then developed his explanation of the Chinese antithesis entirely based on the definition and classification of Hebrew parallelism proposed by Robert Lowth (1710–1787) who was Professor of Poetry at Oxford University and an expert in Hebrew poetry.⁴⁵ Davis directly applied Lowth’s trichotomous classification of Hebrew parallelism to divide the various forms of Chinese antithesis into three kinds: parallels *synonymous*, or a couplet of which the two lines express the same meaning; parallels *antithetic*, or a couplet of which the two lines express opposite meaning; and parallels *synthetic*, or a couplet of which the two lines are of the same construction, regardless of their meaning. Davis quoted Lowth’s definition of Hebrew parallels in further explaining the three kinds of parallelism in Chinese poetry. For example, for parallels *synonymous*, Davis quoted Lowth’s definition that this kind of antithesis were those “which correspond one to another by expressing the same sense in different, but equivalent terms: when a proposition is delivered, and is immediately repeated, in the whole or in part, the expression being varied, but the sense entirely or nearly the same.”⁴⁶ The Chinese antithesis of this kind, Davis added, while they “answer to the above description of the Hebrews,” were “more exact, and therefore much more striking and obvious—as it is usually *word for word*, the one written opposite to the other.”⁴⁷

More importantly, for each kind of antithesis, Davis also gave a few Chinese couplets as examples, together with transliteration and his English translation deliberately designed to imitate the structure and meaning of the Chinese original texts, which further assisted the readers’ understanding of the form of antithesis. He also explained the purpose and value of Chinese antithesis as “to heighten the peculiar rythmus of the poetry . . . to increase its difficulties, and enhance the merit of the composition.”⁴⁸ In this scheme, Davis has provided probably the most detailed narrative about the rules of antithesis in Chinese poetry in the nineteenth century.

⁴⁵ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 20. Davis informed his reader that his main reference for the Hebrew antithesis here is Lowth’s “The Preliminary Dissertation” on Hebrew poetry prefixed to his *Isaiah: A New Translation*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

Davis's comparison between Chinese and Hebrew parallelisms was acknowledged by Walter Henry Medhurst as "a most apt illustration of the particular feature" of antithesis in Chinese poetry.⁴⁹ In his lecture, Medhurst quoted extensively from Davis in his description of the principles and forms of Chinese antithesis. He also underscored the importance of antithesis by pointing out that this poetic device was indispensable to making a good Chinese poem.⁵⁰

While the majority of the nineteenth-century British sinologists focused on the formal rules of Chinese versification, Herbert Giles identified another principle of Chinese prosody—"the very essence of real poetry,"⁵¹ according to him. Giles described what he termed as the "suggestion" of thought and sense in Chinese poetry:

Brevity is indeed the soul of a Chinese poem, which is valued not so much for what it says as for what it suggests. As in painting, so in poetry suggestion is the end and aim of the artist . . . the four-line epigram [*jueju* 絕句], or 'stop-short,' so called because of its abruptness, though, as the critics explain, 'it is only the words which stop, the sense goes on,' some train of thought having been suggested to the reader.⁵²

Suggestion is the technique to restrain from full exposure of thought and emotion in order to create a lingering charm in a Chinese poem. Giles further explained that, to achieve this effect of suggestion, the third line was the key to a four-line epigram, and the last line should contain a "'surprise' or *dénouement*."⁵³ He clearly consider the technique of suggestion as the most important aesthetic merit of Chinese poetry, and constantly reminded his readers to notice the use and the effect of suggestion in the Chinese poems he introduced. From structural rules of tone patterns and antithesis to the abstract "suggestion," Giles's finding offers an enhanced and more comprehensive understanding of the nature of Chinese poetry than the earlier generations of sinologists.

⁴⁹ Medhurst, "Chinese Poetry," 49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵¹ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 155.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 145–146.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 146.

3.3 Classification of Chinese Poetry

Apart from the versification rules, the nineteenth-century British sinologists were equally concerned with the classification of Chinese poetry. For example, after describing the prosody of the regular poem, or *shi* (詩), Robert Morrison briefly mentioned other poetic forms in China:

Another species of poem more irregular than the *she*, and generally extended to a greater length, is denominated *foó* 賦. Beside these, there are small pieces which are intended to be sung, and which are called *kō* 歌; *keō* 曲; and *tseě* 辭, or, *tseě* 詞.⁵⁴

Though he did not elaborate on the characteristics of each kind, Morrison provided specimen poems in the form of the ode (*shi*, 詩), the lyrics (*ci*, 辭), and the song (*qu*, 曲), both in the Chinese original text and in English translation, to demonstrate the features of each category. Morrison's classification was based on the Chinese poetic forms and presumably derived from the Chinese poetic tradition. However, as in his earlier discussion of the tone arrangement, the lack of corresponding English translation and description of the terms for each category (*foó* 賦 [*fu*, rhapsody], *kō* 歌 [*ge*, song], *keō* 曲, and *tseě* 辭) is likely to create a sense of estrangement and unintelligibility to ordinary English-speaking readers.

In the second part of his *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, John Francis Davis aimed to describe the “style and spirit” of Chinese poetry and, specifically, to employ “a precise classification, relatively to the division and nomenclature adopted in European literature”⁵⁵ to organise Chinese poetry. With this notion in mind, Davis divided Chinese poetry into three kinds: “1. Odes and Songs.—2. Moral and Didactic Pieces.—3. Descriptive and Sentimental.”⁵⁶ Though he did not mention if this categorization was based on any particular European model, it is perhaps a commonly accepted taxonomy of English and European poetry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, the Scottish rhetorician Hugh Blair (1718–1800) adopted a similar classification scheme of English poetry in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783): Chapter 39 of his book talks about “Pastoral poetry, lyric poetry” (lyric poetry was also termed as

⁵⁴ Morrison, “Of Prosody,” 275.

⁵⁵ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

ode in the book) and Chapter 40 is devoted to “Didactic poetry, Descriptive poetry.”⁵⁷ Davis’s categorization corresponds to Blair’s writing not only in the name of each category but also in the same “lyric, didactic, descriptive” order.

According to Hugh Blair, the “peculiar character” of the ode is that “it is intended to be sung, or accompanied by music.”⁵⁸ Likewise, Davis also described Chinese odes as “intended occasionally to be accompanied by music.”⁵⁹ Davis’s category of “Odes and Songs” was not defined by any one specific poetic form; instead, he incorporated a variety of poetic forms including the *Book of Poetry*, the *Keǒ* (曲, song), and the modern style poems of the Tang dynasty. Davis commented that the poems from the *Book of Poetry* “do not rise beyond the most primitive simplicity, and their style and language . . . would not be always intelligible at the present day.” (32) The *Keǒ*, translated as “Song, or Rhapsody” by Davis, was the verse of irregular form with recurring rhymes, which included popular songs, ballads, and the irregular verse in Chinese plays. (36) As an example, he cited a piece of dramatic song from the Chinese play *Changsheng dian* 長生殿 (The Palace of Eternal Life). In describing the Tang poetry, Davis first briefly introduced the life and work of Li Bai 李白 (701–762), “the most celebrated poet” (38) of the Tang dynasty. One of three Chinese poems provided by Davis as specimens of Tang poetry is “Chunye xi yu” 春夜喜雨 (Welcome rain on a spring night) by another important Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), while the other two, though both in the form of modern style verse like most Tang poems, are in fact not written by Tang poets.⁶⁰ Perhaps Davis confused the idea of “Tang poetry” with the poetic form of modern style verse established in the Tang dynasty.

In the category of moral and didactic poetry, Davis mainly surveyed the verse-form Confucian proverbs, the popular maxims, and the moral inflections from Chinese novels

⁵⁷ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Boston, I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1802), 2: 225, 231. Blair’s book covers a wide range of topics in rhetoric, composition, and literature, and enjoyed great popularity in Europe after its publication. For the reception history of *Lectures*, see Stephen L. Carr, “The Circulation of Blair’s ‘Lectures’,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2002): 75–104.

⁵⁸ Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2: 225.

⁵⁹ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 32. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

⁶⁰ One poem is probably written by Fan Qifeng 范起鳳 (?) of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), see Jiang Lan 江嵐 and Luo Shijin 羅時進, “Tangshi yingyi faren qi zhuyao wenben bianxi” 唐詩英譯發軔期主要文本辨析 (An examination of early English translations of Tang poetry), *Journal of Nanjing Normal University* 南京師大學報, no. 1 (2009): 122. The other poem is “Song Mao Bowen” 送毛伯溫 (To General Mao) by Emperor Jiajing 嘉靖 (1507–1567) of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

and plays, which seemed to suggest that this category was defined, again, not by the poetic form but by the subject and purpose of such poems. Also in this category, Davis attempted to locate the genre of satire in China, as Hugh Blair also talked about satire in the class of didactic poetry in his *Lectures*. Davis noted that, while lampoons were very common in Chinese poetry, “satire, viewed as a means of recommending virtue by discrediting vice, cannot be said to exist in any regular form, or to constitute a particular branch of literature” (46) in China.

Davis obviously most appreciated Chinese descriptive poetry among the three categories. He asserted that Chinese descriptive poetry “really possesses some attractive features” and was the “most agreeable of all” to foreign readers. (48) He examined the typical figurative expressions, allusions, mythological elements, and the various language styles of Chinese descriptive poetry. Apart from quoting one Chinese verse from the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* and another one from *The Fortunate Union* as specimens of descriptive poetry, Davis cited an unusual series of ten Chinese poems in the title “蘭塾十咏 (London, in *Ten Stanzas*)” written by “a Chinese who visited England about the year 1813,” (53) which depict the scenery and custom in London.⁶¹ Davis seemed to believe that these poems were more effective illustrations of the features of Chinese descriptive poetry because the English readers, already familiar with the scenery portrayed in the poems, might be able to better perceive and understand the ways in which the landscape and the manners were described in a Chinese descriptive poem.

Davis’s application of the European literary model—odes, moral and didactic, and descriptive and sentimental poems—to classify Chinese poetry is an interesting yet not entirely successful attempt. The primary purpose was, perhaps, to make the very distinctive forms and features of Chinese poetry comprehensible to his English readers. On the one hand, by fitting Chinese poetry into a European framework, it attests, probably for the first time, the commensurability between Chinese and European poetic genres and traditions. On the other hand, however, the unmodified application of a European poetic

⁶¹ The title was printed in Davis’s book as 蘭塾十咏, which is probably meant to be 蘭敦十咏. In the 1870 version of *The Poetry of the Chinese*, this Chinese title was omitted. See John Francis Davis, *The Poetry of the Chinese* (London: Asher and Co., 1870), 59. Peter Kitson shows that, according to accounts by John Francis Davis and John Barrow, this anonymous Chinese visitor in London was probably a Chinese merchant, see Peter Kitson, “‘The Kindness of my Friends in England’: Chinese Visitors to Britain in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” *European Romantic Review* 27, no.1 (2016): 66–68.

classification scheme to Chinese poetry can be problematic. In Davis's classification, the three kinds were apparently not mutually exclusive to each other since a Tang poem can be both an ode and a descriptive poem. Davis himself also admitted that "these different kinds are, however, so blended together occasionally, and run so much into one another, that it is not always very easy, nor indeed perhaps is it of much consequence, to separate them."⁶² While each of the three kinds—ode, didactic poetry, and descriptive poetry—might have their own origins and linear development as either a subgenre or an established kind of poetry in Europe,⁶³ when they are transported to China, there is a lack of exact correspondence between Chinese poetry to the three kinds.

Walter Henry Medhurst apparently knew very well of the Chinese ways of classification of poetry as he noted in his lecture that "Chinese themselves are accustomed to classify their various forms of poetry under four general heads,"⁶⁴ namely poetry (*shi* 詩), lyrics (*ci* 詞), song (*ge* 歌), and rhymed prose (*fu* 賦). He elaborated on the features of each kind:

There is the 'She,' [poetry] or regular verse, which is characterised by definite rules as regards rhyme, number of feet, and rhythmical adjustment of tones. Then there is the "Tsze," [lyrics] a species of composition which partakes of the natures of both prose and poetry, and in which the lines are of indeterminate length, but yet terminated by regularly recurring rhymes. . . . The third kind is "Ko," [song] which is a vulgar form of "She," and is intended to be recited or sung. . . . Lastly, there is the "Foo," [rhymed prose] which may be described as a kind of impassioned prose. The number of feet in each line is irregular, and rhyme recurs at intervals. (51)

This account, though still very concise, indicates an evident progress, compared with Robert Morrison's simple listing of only the name of each kind, in introducing the Chinese classification system of poetry and the main characteristics of each poetic subgenre to the English-speaking world. In the next paragraph, however, Medhurst abruptly withdrew from further explanation of this traditional Chinese classification method. He was reluctant to provide any Chinese poem in the original text or in English translation as specimens of each category, for reasons that not all his audience understood the Chinese language and that, he believed, the distinctive characteristics of a Chinese poem would

⁶² Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 61.

⁶³ See, Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan eds, *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), s.vv. "ode," by Stephen F. Fogle and Paul H. Fry; "description poetry," by Ruth Helen Webb and Philip Weller; "didactic poetry," by T. V. F. Brogan and Sholom J. Kahn.

⁶⁴ Medhurst, "Chinese Poetry," 51. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

necessarily disappear when it was translated into English. (54, 55) Therefore, in order to secure an “intelligent comprehension” (52) of Chinese poetry among his audience, Medhurst abandoned the above-mentioned Chinese way of categorization, and, as an enthusiastic advocate of John Francis Davis, once again slipped back to Davis’s studies for reference. Medhurst adopted Davis’s classification to “range all Chinese Poetry under the general heads of Odes, Moral and Didactic Pieces, and Descriptive and Sentimental Rhymes.” (52) He also quoted, paraphrased, and borrowed Davis’s comments and evaluations to explain the features of each category.

What is interesting in Medhurst’s representation of Chinese poetry is his choice between the two possible ways of classification: either to introduce the Chinese way of dividing poetry by their forms or to re-arrange Chinese poetry within the European poetic framework. Medhurst’s decision to adhere to the latter clearly suggests that what is important and desirable is not so much the indigenous knowledge about Chinese poetry as what makes sense, what is intelligible to the English-speaking audience. The original Chinese texts and Chinese poetics, in Medhurst’s view, seem too remote to be comprehended and would still remain enigmatic to a foreign audience and readers even explained or translated in the English language. Thus, the only possible way to make them understandable would be to discard the Chinese original texts and poetic classification altogether and remodel Chinese poetry by the British or European poetic framework.

3.4 Writings on Chinese Drama

Chinese drama was already known in Europe before the nineteenth century with the Jesuit-sinologists’ translations and reports. The eighteenth-century French translation of the Chinese play *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* in Du Halde’s *General History of China* was prefixed with an introductory preface describing and explaining the basic characteristics of Chinese drama.⁶⁵ Similar writings on the Chinese theatre and theatrical performances were also seen in the writings by the eighteenth-century missionaries and foreign travellers to China. In the article “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama, and of their Theatrical Exhibitions” (1817), John Barrow reviewed some of those pre-nineteenth-

⁶⁵ Du Halde, advertisement to “Tchao Chi Cou Ell: or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao,” in *The General History of China*, vol. 3, 195–196.

century accounts of the Chinese theatrical arts, including the writings by the French Jesuit Pierre-Martial Cibot (1727–1780), the reports from a Russian ambassador in 1692, the reports by John Bell (1691–1780) who went to Beijing accompanying the Russian diplomatic mission in 1719, and the accounts by Lord Macartney, John Barrow himself, and Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes (1759–1845) respectively describing the court theatrical performance they had seen during their mission to China in 1792. Some of the common observations in these writings include the lack of scenery in the Chinese theatre, the low status of Chinese actors, the theatre troupes and their tours, and the plots and performances of a few Chinese plays. In Barrow’s view, these records were “tolerably correct,”⁶⁶ yet often narrated “with great contempt” (xxii) or “as a very puerile and ludicrous representation.” (xxvi) Barrow argued that most, if not all, of the early travellers to China were incapable of “forming a sound judgment” (xxxix) of Chinese drama because of their lack of sufficient knowledge of the Chinese language to fully understand the dialogue or probably the story of the play. He also criticised Joseph-Henri de Prémare’s translation of *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* for omitting “most of the poetry” which were “the very best parts of the play,” (xxxiii) and, therefore, failing to fully represent the Chinese play to European readers. As a summary and review of the previous writings on Chinese drama and theatre, Barrow’s article was primarily aimed to expose the inadequacy and the problems in these pre-nineteenth-century writings, in order to establish the authority of British sinology displayed in John Francis Davis’s translation of the Chinese play *An Heir in His Old Age* to which this article was attached.

Strictly speaking, “Chinese drama” is only a loosely inclusive category of various forms of play scripts and regional theatrical performance in China. In today’s categorization, *zaju* 雜劇 (literally “variety show”) and *chuanqi* 傳奇 (literally “legend”) are the two major forms of Chinese play scripts.⁶⁷ *Zaju* is the short form comprising usually of four acts and an introductory wedge and adopting the northern tunes; while *chuanqi*, derived

⁶⁶ [Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama,” xviii. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

⁶⁷ For the characteristics and historical development of *zaju* and *chuanqi* in China, see Wilt L. Idema, “Traditional Dramatic Literature,” in *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 785–847. For early European translations of Chinese drama, mostly *zaju*, see Patricia Sieber, *Theatres of Desire: Authors, Readers, and the Reproduction of Early Chinese Song-Drama, 1300–2000* (New York: Springer, 2003), 7–15. Studies on the Peking opera, see A. C. Scott, *The Classical Theatre of China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957); studies on the Cantonese opera, see Wing Chung Ng, *The Rise of Cantonese Opera* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2015).

from the *nanxi* 南戲 (southern drama), is more flexible in its length, usually longer than the *zaju*, and adopts the southern tunes. Historically, *zaju* dominated the Chinese stage during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and the early years of Ming dynasty (1368–1644). *Chuanqi* became popular among the Chinese elite literati in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, particularly in the form of *kunqu* opera 崑曲 which originated from the lower Yangtze River. The nineteenth century saw the flourishing of a number of local style plays, among which the Peking opera was perhaps the most successful. In Guangzhou and Hong Kong areas, the Cantonese opera was especially in vogue since the sixteenth century. Though the nineteenth-century British sinologists endeavoured to describe both the textual features and the theatrical practice of Chinese plays with greater accuracy than their predecessors, it is possible that, as they seldom specified which kind or kinds of Chinese drama they were talking about, the sinologists may in fact have referred to very different kinds of plays and theatrical practice under the same and general name “Chinese drama.”

John Francis Davis translated two Chinese plays into English—both were *zaju* from the Yuan dynasty: *Laou-Seng-Urh, or “An Heir in His Old Age.” A Chinese Drama* (老生兒 Lao sheng’ er, 1817), and *Han Koong Tsew, or the Sorrows of Han: A Chinese Tragedy* (漢宮秋 *Han gong qiu*, 1829).⁶⁸ He outlined the characteristics of Chinese drama in the introductions to these two translations and also in his systematic survey books *The Chinese* (1836) and *Chinese Miscellanies* (1865). By “Chinese drama,” especially when describing the Chinese play scripts, Davis was almost certainly referring to the *zaju* of the Yuan dynasty. The Chinese plays he had translated and mentioned, including a bibliography of 32 Chinese plays he had compiled and attached to the translation of *The Sorrows of Han*,⁶⁹ were all *zaju* plays selected from one of the most important Chinese collections of the Yuan *zaju*: the *Yuan ren bai zhong qu* 元人百種曲 (One Hundred Yuan Plays), also known as the *Yuanqu xuan* 元曲選 (Anthology of Yuan Plays), compiled and edited by Zang Maoxun 臧懋循 (1550–1620). The *One Hundred Yuan Plays* clearly became the main reference for the nineteenth-century sinologists in their writings on Chinese drama.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ On Davis’s translation *An Heir in His Old Age*, see A. Owen Aldridge, “The First Chinese Drama in English Translation,” in *Studies in Chinese-Western Comparative Drama*, ed. Yun-Tong Luk (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990), 185–191.

⁶⁹ John Francis Davis, preface to *Han Koong Tsew, or the Sorrows of Han: A Chinese Tragedy*, trans. John Francis Davis (London: The Oriental Translation Fund, 1829), vii–viii.

⁷⁰ It was the same among the nineteenth-century French sinologists. For example, Antoine-Pierre-Louis Bazin (1799–1863), a nineteenth-century French sinologist well-known for his study of Chinese drama,

Robert Kennaway Douglas, like Davis, also primarily referred to *zaju* when he talked about Chinese drama. In his *Language and Literature of China* (1875) and *China* (1887), Douglas acknowledged the *One Hundred Yuan Plays* as the best collection of Chinese drama, and outlined the *Orphan of the House of Zhao* and *An Heir in his Old Age*—both *zaju*—as specimens of Chinese drama.⁷¹ He mentioned that a Chinese play was “divided in the playbooks into acts, generally four or five,”⁷² which is a typical characteristic of the Yuan *zaju*. In *A History of Chinese Literature*, Herbert Giles also marked the *One Hundred Yuan Plays* as one of the best collections of Chinese plays.⁷³ Generally speaking, the nineteenth-century British sinologists normally regarded the Yuan *zaju*, rather than the longer form *chuanqi*, as the most representative form of Chinese play script. This is probably due to *zaju*’s formal features. Patricia Sieber explains that the *Orphan of the House of Zhao* was selected for translation among other plays partly because it “has five rather than the standard four acts, a number that made it more readily assimilable to the five-act structure common in French theatre.”⁷⁴ The other *zaju* plays, normally consisting of four acts and an introductory wedge, were also viewed as having five acts by the nineteenth-century British sinologists. For example, John Francis Davis explains that the Chinese play *An Heir in His Old Age* “consists in reality of just five acts” including the introductory part, and “this peculiar division is common to the *hundred plays* [*One Hundred Yuan Plays*] from which this, and the other translated specimens have been taken.”⁷⁵ The similarity in formal structure between Yuan *zaju* and European plays perhaps contributes to the sinologists’ recognition of *zaju* as the representative genre of Chinese drama.

In addition to play scripts, there were also writings focusing mainly on the theatrical performances in nineteenth-century China, often based on the sinologists’ empirical knowledge of the contemporary dramatic profession. George Carter Stent, an employee of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service, delivered a lecture on Chinese theatricals on 1 May 1874 in Shanghai. Stent was noted for his research on Chinese popular culture,

translated and studied Yuan *zaju* from the *One Hundred Yuan Plays* in his *Théâtre chinois* (Chinese theatre) (1838) and *Le Siècle des Youên* (The century of Yuan) (1850). See Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 13.

⁷¹ Douglas, *China*, 431.

⁷² Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 109.

⁷³ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 268.

⁷⁴ Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 9.

⁷⁵ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 197.

with publications of English translations and studies of Chinese ballads, street songs, and legends.⁷⁶ A study in Chinese drama and theatre was probably also part of his interest in Chinese popular culture in general. Stent's knowledge of the Chinese theatre was derived not only from his reading of the play scripts and of second-hand research but also from his empirical field work which includes visits to the back stage in Chinese theatres and conversations with Chinese actors. Evidence in his lecture shows that the "Chinese theatricals" Stent talked about is the performance of Peking opera in Shanghai. For example, Stent introduced the five different styles of Chinese theatrical music that were "used by all Pekinese or Northern companies."⁷⁷ He also mentioned one famous Peking opera actor Yang Yuelou 楊月樓 (1844–1890).⁷⁸ The theatre he had visited and described was the famous *Dangui chayuan* (丹桂茶園, Osmanthus Tea House) in Shanghai, a Chinese teahouse and theatre where "most of the performers being Pekinese, and the playing in that dialect."⁷⁹ The transcript of Stent's lecture was published in the English periodical *The Far East* (Shanghai, 1876–1878) in 1876.

Also in Shanghai, a discussion group was formed by the members of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1885. In one of their regular meetings, some members presented short sketches of the plot of "a number of Chinese plays now on the stage,"⁸⁰ in order to familiarise the foreign audience and readers with the basic characteristics of contemporary Chinese drama. The plots of nine Chinese plays of different styles and subjects were reported in the meeting,⁸¹ which, together with a follow-

⁷⁶ Some of Stent's works include: George Carter Stent, comp. and trans., *The Jade Chaplet in Twenty-four Beads; a Collection of Songs, Ballads, &c. (from the Chinese)* (London: Trübner & co., 1874); George Carter Stent, "Chinese Lyrics," *Journal of North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* 7 (1872): 93–135; George Carter Stent, "Chinese Legends," *Journal of North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* 7 (1872): 183–195.

⁷⁷ George Carter Stent, "Chinese Theatricals," *The Far East* 1. no.4 (1876): 91.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 95. *Dangui chayuan* was the teahouse and theatre established by the Chinese merchant Liu Weizhong 劉維忠 (?) in Shanghai in 1867. Liu recruited famous Peking opera actors and companies from Beijing to perform at his theatre, and achieved immediate success in Shanghai. See *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Shanghai juan* 中國戲曲誌·上海卷 (Gazetteer of Chinese opera, Shanghai volume), comp. Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui 中國戲曲誌編輯委員會 (editorial committee for *Gazetteer of Chinese opera*) (Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1996), s.v. "丹桂茶園."

⁸⁰ Frederic Henry Balfour et al., "Chinese Theatricals and Theatrical plots," *Journal of North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* 20 (1885): 193.

⁸¹ The nine plays are "The Beating of a Golden Branch" 打金枝 reported by Frederic Henry Balfour, "The Widow No Widow" 寡婦上墳 by G. M. H. Playfair, "Tattooing" 刺字 by Joseph Edkins, "The Three Suspicions" 三疑 by Herbert A. Giles, "The Sheepfold" 牧羊圈 by Herbert J. Allen, "A Dutiful and Unselfish Heart" 孝廉心 by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor, "The Miser" 看財奴 by J. Rhein, "The Two

up discussion, were later printed in the *Journal of North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society*.

A book titled *The Chinese Drama* was published in 1899 by an author named William Stanton, probably a Hong Kong resident.⁸² This book contains English translations of three Chinese plays and two Chinese narrative poems, with an introductory article, also entitled “The Chinese Drama,” which provides a “fairly full description of the Chinese stage and everything connected with it.”⁸³ Judging by the terms used, the routine described, and the Chinese plays translated, Stanton’s “Chinese drama” mainly refers to the Cantonese opera.⁸⁴ Like Stent’s research on the performance of Peking opera in Shanghai, Stanton’s work was also built on his first-hand observation of the local theatres, troupes, and performances in the areas of Hong Kong and Canton, demonstrating again the importance of British sinologists’ residence in China and their empirical research to literary studies.

While their writings focused on different forms and kinds of Chinese drama, the British sinologists all spotted the rather ambivalent attitude that the Chinese people had towards their drama. On the one hand, the dramatic arts were apparently widely enjoyed by Chinese people of all classes, as Robert Kennaway Douglas noted that “love for the drama is one of the most noticeable features of the Chinese character.”⁸⁵ Herbert Giles also observed that drama had become the “ideal pastime of the cultured, reflective scholar, and of the laughter-loving masses of the Chinese people.”⁸⁶ On the other hand, however, the sinologists also noticed the public’s disparaging view on Chinese plays and theatres, which

Soles, or Becoming an Actor from Love” 比目魚 by the French sinologist C. Imbault-Huart, and “Imperial Troubles Settled” 定王難 reported by the American missionary D. J. Macgowan.

⁸² It is very likely that the author of *The Chinese Drama* lived in Hong Kong, as he described the performance routine “in the permanent theatres in Hong Kong.” See William Stanton, “The Chinese Drama,” in *The Chinese Drama* (Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1899), 5. There was one man also named William Stanton who was the Detective Inspector and Head of Detective Division of Hong Kong police before he was suspended in 1897. He published a book titled *The Triads Society or Heaven and Earth Association*, also by the publisher Kelly and Walsh in 1900. See J. Dyer Ball, “Mr. William Stanton on The Triad Society, or Heaven and Earth Association, the White Lotus and other Secret Societies,” *The China Review* 25, no. 1 (1900): 21. It is not clear if he was the author of *The Chinese Drama*.

⁸³ William Stanton, preface to *The Chinese Drama*.

⁸⁴ The three Chinese plays Stanton translated—*Liu si qin* 柳絲琴 (*The Willow Lute*), *Jin ye ju* 金葉菊 (*The Golden Leafed Chrysanthemum*), and *Fujian He Wenxiu* 附荐何文秀 (*The Sacrifice for the Soul of Ho Man-sau*)—are all popular Cantonese plays, see *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Guangdong juan* 中國戲曲誌·廣東卷 (Gazetteer of Chinese opera, Guangdong volume), comp. Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui 中國戲曲誌編輯委員會 (editorial committee for *Gazetteer of Chinese opera*) (Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 2000), s.vv. “附荐何文秀,” “金葉菊.”

⁸⁵ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 108–109.

⁸⁶ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 325.

was most evident in the low social rank of actors in China. From his contacts with Chinese actors, George Carter Stent found that, though the actors were “all very civil and obliging,” still, “no matter how well conducted and respectable they may be in their private or public lives, they are branded by Chinese law as disreputable” and are not allowed to take the national examinations.⁸⁷ William Stanton perceived a historical change in the actors’ social status: though they had “fairly good positions” in the Tang dynasty, “the social standing of actors gradually deteriorated until it sank to the lowest level,”⁸⁸ which, he added, was very different from the life of actors in ancient Greece.⁸⁹

3.5 Play Script and Theatrical Performance

Of the literary features of Chinese play scripts, mainly the *zaju*, the characteristics of dramatic language were frequently discussed, especially the distinction between the aria lyrics (*changci* 唱詞) and the prose dialogue (*nianbai* 念白). Du Halde had already noticed the peculiarity of Chinese dramatic lyrics in his *General History of China*. He noted that the Chinese drama consisted of a mixture of songs and dialogue, and found that “it seems very odd to us that an actor should fall a-singing in the middle of a dialogue.”⁹⁰ He tried to explain the function of lyrics in Chinese plays as that “the singing is to express some great emotion of the soul, such as joy, grief, anger, or despair.”⁹¹ Du Halde also remarked that some of the songs in Chinese drama can be “difficult to be understood, because they are full of allusions to things unknown to us, and figures of speech very difficult for us to observe.”⁹²

Though the nineteenth-century British sinologists were eager to challenge the earlier European missionary-sinologists, in fact, they still shared with, or even borrowed, their predecessors’ observations and opinions on Chinese literature. The two points made by Du Halde on the Chinese dramatic lyrics—that the lyrics were used to express intense emotions and that they were difficult to understand—also appeared in John Francis Davis’s writings. Davis described the lyrical parts in Chinese plays as “a sort of irregular

⁸⁷ Stent, “Chinese Theatricals,” 94.

⁸⁸ Stanton, “The Chinese Drama,” 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁰ Du Halde, advertisement to “Tchao Chi Cou Ell: or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao,” 196.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

verse, which is sung or chanted with music.”⁹³ He explained that the primary function of lyrics in a play was to express, in a language similar to Du Halde’s, “the most passionate parts.”⁹⁴ He also explained that the meaning of lyrics could be “very obscure,”⁹⁵ not only because they were usually full of allusions and figures of speech unknown to the foreign audience but also because the primary value of aria lyrics lay not in its sense but in its musicality: “(according to the Chinese themselves) the gratification of the ear is its main object, sense itself appears sometimes to be neglected for the sake of a pleasing sound.”⁹⁶ This speculation was used as an excuse for the omission of all lyrics in Davis’s translation of the Chinese play *The Sorrows of Han*, which was justified by the fact that, in Davis’s words, the lyrical parts “are frequently, moreover, mere repetitions or amplifications of the prose parts; and being intended more for the ear than for the eye, are rather adapted to the stage than to the closet.”⁹⁷ This idea that the lyrics were valued for its musicality than sense, according to Davis, was only limited to the “*musical, or operatic portions of the drama*” and cannot be extended to Chinese poetry, as he disagreed with Rémusat’s appropriation of this theory to explain the obscurity of Chinese verses in the novel *The Two Fair Cousins*.⁹⁸ Robert Kennaway Douglas also noticed that Chinese plays contained “short lyrical pieces, which are introduced to break the monotony of the dialogue;”⁹⁹ but poetical drama, or “dramas in verse,” were unknown in China, “except in the case of low plays written in vulgar rhythm.”¹⁰⁰ It is perhaps worth pointing out that, although the sinologists had noticed the lyrical parts that were sung to music in Chinese plays, they had never referred to Chinese play scripts or theatrical performance as “opera” as we do today.¹⁰¹

Compared to the lyrics, the dialogue parts of Chinese plays are relatively easier to understand and to explain. Davis noted that the dramatic dialogue is “merely spoken . . .

⁹³ John Francis Davis, preface to *Laou-seng-urh, or, “An Heir in his Old Age.” A Chinese Drama*, trans. John Francis Davis (London: John Murray, 1817), xlvii-xlviii.

⁹⁴ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 197–198.

⁹⁵ Davis, preface to *An Heir in his Old Age*, xlviii.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Davis, preface to *The Sorrows of Han*, vii.

⁹⁸ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 62.

⁹⁹ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 108.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ “Opera” was translated as *xiqu* 戲曲 (play, song) in some English-Chinese dictionaries compiled by the British sinologists, see, for example, Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, Part III* (Macau: East India Company Press, 1822), s.v. “opera.” But it seems that the term “opera” was never used to translate Chinese terms such as *xi* 戲 or *ju* 劇, or to describe Chinese dramatic arts as a whole in the nineteenth century.

in the language of common conversation,” and “in most cases as intelligible, as the other [the lyrics] is sometimes obscure.”¹⁰² He also made an interesting distinction between the styles of dialogue in tragic and comic Chinese plays. According to Davis, the dialogue in historical and tragic plays was strongly marked “by the historical or mythological character of the personages, the grandeur and gravity of the subject, and the tragic drift of the play, and the strict award of what is called poetical justice,” while in the comedy, the dialogue is marked “by the more ordinary or domestic grade of the *dramatis personae*, the display of ludicrous characters and incidents, and the interweaving of jests into the dialogue.”¹⁰³

Apart from the dramatic language, the plot and character of Chinese drama were also critically examined by the sinologists. The plot of Chinese plays was generally considered very simple in design, especially judged by Western standards. Robert Kennaway Douglas noted that in Chinese drama “plots are for the most part simply and well sustained,”¹⁰⁴ that the Chinese plays lacked the “touches of fancy and that play of imagination which we look for in the works of European playwrights.”¹⁰⁵ Herbert Giles likewise observed that “most Chinese plays are simple in construction and weak in plot.”¹⁰⁶ In the group meeting of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, it was also raised that “there was plainly an absence of involved plot in Chinese plays as a rule—in great contrast with the intricate situations and puzzling relationships between the characters, which pervade the generality of modern European pieces.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the portrayal of characters in Chinese plays was criticised as plain and lifeless. For example, Robert Kennaway Douglas found that the Chinese playwrights had “no psychological interest”¹⁰⁸ in the characters. They were unable to analyse the motives of their characters, and were “content to make their characters move, act, and converse at will, without troubling themselves to make a psychological study of the thoughts which influence them.”¹⁰⁹ As a result, Douglas commented, even the characters in the best Chinese plays “are moved about in a somewhat

¹⁰² Davis, preface to *An Heir in his Old Age*, xlvi.

¹⁰³ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 190–191.

¹⁰⁴ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 110.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Kennaway Douglas, “The Chinese Drama,” *The Contemporary Review* 37 (1880): 127. Also, Douglas, *China*, 397.

¹⁰⁶ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 261.

¹⁰⁷ Balfour et al., “Chinese Theatricals and Theatrical plots,” 204.

¹⁰⁸ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 116.

¹⁰⁹ Douglas, “The Chinese Drama,” 127.

disconnected and arbitrary way to suit the designs of the author, too often in defiance of the probabilities, and with a total disregard of the old-fashioned unities.”¹¹⁰

In an introductory article on Chinese drama published in the English periodical the *Contemporary Review* (London, 1866–), Douglas analysed the problem in plot design and character portrayal of Chinese drama in close relation to the Chinese national character. He first explained that “in criticising the substance and style of Chinese dramas it is necessary to member the tone of the national mind in its leading characteristics, and in its sympathies and prejudices.”¹¹¹ Though the Chinese people might excel, Douglas argued, in philosophy, history, mathematics, and many other disciplines, they were “essentially a stolid and prosaic people,” and the ability of imagination was not among their excellent qualities, especially when assessed by their literature.¹¹² Douglas further attributed this lack of imagination among Chinese people to the learning of Confucianism in China. The monopoly of Confucian teachings and classics in Chinese education, he explained, “has served to dwarf the imagination and destroy all freshness of thought, and to elevate mere memory and repetition above genius and originality.”¹¹³ The fact, as well as the discourse, that literary characteristics were explained and justified by the assumed national mind and national character suggests the widely accepted notion in the nineteenth century that literature was defined by its national origin. Douglas’s discourse confirmed and reinforced the conception of Chinese literature as distinctively *Chinese*.

To the nineteenth-century British sinologists in China, the actual performance of Chinese drama appeared to be more peculiar than the play scripts. Foreign audiences without proper knowledge of Chinese theatrical arts often found themselves confused, even shocked, by the loud music, high-pitched voices, the absence of stage scenery, and the symbolic acting. Among these curious elements, the almost total lack of scenery is probably the one that was immediately noticed and most frequently commented on by the British sinologists in China. In European theatres, the theory and technique of scenery developed long before the nineteenth century. According to research, in England, theatrical scenery was first set up on public stages in the second half of the seventeenth

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 126.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 127.

century.¹¹⁴ From the late eighteenth century, English theatres developed with increasing innovations in, as well as varieties of, theatrical scenes.¹¹⁵ New devices and designs such as the drop scene and the built-up set were introduced. The late eighteenth century also witnessed “movements towards realism of setting and towards a certain historical accuracy.”¹¹⁶ These movements, or tendencies, continued in the early nineteenth century that precluded “the detailed ‘accuracy’ of later producers.”¹¹⁷ The British sinologists, perhaps accustomed to the realistic theatrical sceneries in nineteenth-century Europe, would surely find the minimal scenery and property on the Chinese stage too abstract and obscure to understand.

In an article published in the English *Quarterly Review* (1809–1967), John Francis Davis noted that, in Chinese drama, “the Chinese leave more to the imagination than we do; for they neither contrive that the action should all proceed on one spot, as in the Greek tragedy, nor do they make use of shifting scenes.”¹¹⁸ He tried to justify the lack of scenery in Chinese theatre by arguing that the extremely simple scenery was not a major defect, but rather was designed to stimulate the audience’s imagination into full play in appreciating the drama:

The truth, however, on this subject seems to be, that though scenery and other adventitious aids of the kind no doubt tend to aid the illusion, they are by no means absolutely necessary to it; and in fact it is better to trust altogether to the imagination of the beholder. . . . The best scenic preparation that ever was devised must still call largely on the imagination for assistance.¹¹⁹

He also quoted a passage from Shakespeare’s *Henry V* to illustrate the philosophy of how the aid of imagination should always be required in appreciating dramatic performance.¹²⁰

Despite Davis’s effort to justify it, however, the absence of scenery in the Chinese theatre was generally considered as one obvious defect of Chinese drama by later

¹¹⁴ Allardyce Nicoll, “The Theatre,” in *A History of English Drama, 1660–1900*, vol. 1, *Restoration Drama, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 28–31.

¹¹⁵ Allardyce Nicoll, “The Theatre,” in *A History of English Drama, 1660–1900*, vol. 3, *Late Eighteenth Century Drama 1750–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 33.

¹¹⁶ Allardyce Nicoll, “The Theatre,” in *A History of English Drama, 1660–1900*, vol.4, *Early Nineteenth Century Drama 1800–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 37.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹⁸ [John Francis Davis], “Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance,” *Quarterly Review* 41, no. 81 (1829): 88.

¹¹⁹ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 188.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

generations of sinologists according to European standards. It was viewed as concrete proof of the superiority of European theatre over the Chinese in the nineteenth century. For example, George Carter Stent claimed that Chinese drama was “infinitely behind ours in regard to scenery and mechanical appliances,” and that some Chinese plays might be “compared favourably” with British plays only “in spite of want of scenery.”¹²¹ William Stanton also considered the representational manner of the Chinese scenery singular—that “mountains, mountain passes . . . and other objects are represented by an arrangement of chairs and benches”—even “inferior to what ours was at the Blackfrais and Globe theatres in Shakespeare’s time.”¹²²

In addition to the mystery of the minimal scenery, the symbolic acting was another peculiarity of Chinese drama that the British sinologists found unintelligible and flawed, mainly because of its violation of realistic imitation of life. George Carter Stent found such acting bewildering, or even ridiculous, when “a defunct hero—just slain after a severe fight—gravely pick himself up and walk off; or another, quietly sitting in what is intended to represent a room, and an army fighting in front of him, of which he is not supposed to have the least knowledge.”¹²³ He admitted that “it requires a strong imagination” to make sense of this kind of acting, and it requires “a clear head with much knowledge of the piece to thoroughly understand and appreciate it.”¹²⁴ Herbert Giles was also amazed at “how utterly the Chinese disregarded realism” when he saw “dead men get up and walk off the stage. . . . Or a servant will step across to a leading performer and hand him a cup of tea to clear his voice.”¹²⁵

To the actual acting quality itself, however, there were more positive, or at least mixed, opinions regarding the Chinese actors’ performances. In a description of his personal experience in a Chinese theatre, the missionary and diplomat George Tradescant Lay (1799–1845) commented that “the acting throughout was so perfect in its kind, that the eye could not detect a single fault.”¹²⁶ William Stanton noted that “in their gestures and motions, and in the manner in which these agree with their utterances, whether in speaking

¹²¹ Stent, “Chinese Theatricals,” 90.

¹²² Stanton, “The Chinese Drama,” 4.

¹²³ Stent, “Chinese Theatricals,” 90.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 260–261.

¹²⁶ George Tradescant Lay, *The Chinese as They Are* (London: William Ball & co., 1841), 113.

or in singing, the actors are nearly perfect.”¹²⁷ Herbert Giles assumed that the Chinese actors were supreme in idealization in their acting, particularly as the result of the lack of realistic scenery that might assist the acting.¹²⁸ He concluded that the merit of a Chinese play lay, in fact, in the “skill of the performer” that “a Chinese audience does not go to hear the play, but to see the actor.”¹²⁹

Focusing on the lack of scenery and on the symbolic acting, the nineteenth-century British sinologists’ criticism of the Chinese theatre and performance reveals not only the great difference between Chinese and British theatrical conventions, but also more fundamental divergence on the ideas of imitation and realism in Chinese and European aesthetics. According to Jingsong Chen’s comparative study of a key concept in traditional Chinese theatre, the Chinese idea *mo* (roughly equivalent to “mimesis” or “imitation” in English) associates more with the expression and revelation of inner emotion,¹³⁰ and differs from the Western idea of “imitation” which aims to create the illusion of reality and a sense of verisimilitude.¹³¹ In Chinese dramatic criticism, Chen argues, the aesthetic truth “is not empirical” and “lies beyond mere superficial likeness.”¹³² Chinese theatre, like many other Chinese art forms, adopted the idea of *chuanshen* 傳神 which means to convey the true internal spirit as its principal aesthetic objective.¹³³ According to research, it is believed in Chinese theatrical theory that the dramatic characters’ internal spirit and emotion are to be best expressed chiefly by their outer forms (*xing* 形), or, through a set of highly stylised appearances, gestures, and movements of perfect elegance.¹³⁴ In the Chinese theatrical logic, realism in both the scenery design and the acting style is violated and sacrificed for the more fundamental aim of expressing the true spirit or sentiment

¹²⁷ Stanton, “The Chinese Drama,” 12.

¹²⁸ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 260.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹³⁰ Jingsong Chen, “To Make People Happy, Drama Imitates Joy: the Chinese Theatrical Concept of *Mo*,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 14, no. 1 (1997): 39–43.

¹³¹ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, trans. Christin Shantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), s.v. “imitation.”

¹³² Chen, “Chinese Theatrical Concept of *Mo*,” 43.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 43–44. On the idea of *chuanshen* 傳神 in the Chinese aesthetics and its application in Chinese drama, see Tan Fan 譚帆 and Lu Wei 陸煒, *Zhongguo gudian xiju lilun shi* 中國古典戲劇理論史 (History of traditional Chinese theatrical theories) (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 220–226.

¹³⁴ Tan and Lu, *Zhongguo gudian xiju lilun shi*, 225–226.

rather than faithfully representing external reality. This aesthetic difference perhaps led to the British sinologists' unfavourable evaluation of Chinese theatrical performance.

3.6 Classification of Chinese Drama

When it comes to the classification of Chinese drama, it is a long-established and widely accepted opinion among the European sinologists that Chinese drama cannot be classified in terms of tragedy and comedy in their European senses. Joseph-Henri de Prémare had already announced his discovery in the eighteenth century that “the Chinese . . . make no distinction between tragedies and comedies.”¹³⁵ John Francis Davis also repeated this idea several times in his various works on Chinese literature.¹³⁶ The key point in the applicability of this tragedy-comedy division to Chinese drama lies in the question of whether or not the genre of tragedy exists in China. As will be further examined in Chapter 4, it was commonly assumed by the European sinologists that tragedy is not to be found in China. Du Halde explained that he used the term “tragedy” to describe the Chinese play *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* only because of its “tragical incidents”¹³⁷ rather than for its generic affinity to European tragedies. Even until the late nineteenth century, Herbert Giles still noted, “tragedy proper being quite unknown in China.”¹³⁸

Since Chinese drama did not fit in the tragedy-comedy paradigm, the nineteenth-century British sinologists offered alternative classification schemes. The most common approach is to divide Chinese drama into civil and military plays, or roughly *wen* (文, literary, cultural) and *wu* 武 (martial, military) plays. George Carter Stent concisely summarised the distinction between these two kinds from aspects of the subject, the character type, and the common plot.¹³⁹ The civil drama was “devoted chiefly to plays representing Chinese human nature, officially: the principal characters being monarchs, statesmen, magistrates, eminent persons of ancient history, and minor official personages; and the plot of the piece describing phases in the public or private life of these worthies; or their adventures, which

¹³⁵ Du Halde, advertisement to “Tchao Chi Cou Ell: or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao,” 196.

¹³⁶ Davis, preface to *The Sorrows of Han*, vi; [Davis,] “Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance,” 86; Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 190.

¹³⁷ Du Halde, advertisement to “Tchao Chi Cou Ell: or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao,” 196.

¹³⁸ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 261.

¹³⁹ Stent, “Chinese Theatricals,” 91. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

consist in ministerial intriguing, love affairs.” (91) These plays, Stent added, were usually performed with “showy dresses and paraphernalia, with some good singing and declamation.” (91) The military plays were more exciting, and their key merit was to “present upon the mimic stage, the pomp and circumstance of war as conceived of by the Chinese.” (91) Stent also noticed that, generally speaking, the “refined Chinaman” preferred civil plays to military plays. (91) Herbert Giles adopted the same classification, and made the division also according to the subject and character of the play: the military plays, according to him, “usually deal with historical episodes and heroic or filial acts by historical characters; and Emperors and Generals and small armies rush widely about the stage, sometimes engaged in single combat,” while the civil plays were “concerned with the entanglements of every-day life, and are usually of a farcical character.”¹⁴⁰ Giles also noticed that the terms “military” and “civil” “had often been wrongly taken for tragedy and comedy,”¹⁴¹ which seems to suggest that the two kinds were also often perceived as different in their emotion and atmosphere. This civil-military, or *wen* and *wu* division is still recognised as a valid classification of Chinese Peking opera nowadays.¹⁴² According to research, *wen* and *wu* are the fundamental binary concepts that conceptualise Chinese masculinity, presumably developed from the different governing styles of King Wen (1152–1056 BC) and King Wu (? –1043 BC) of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC).¹⁴³ Du Peng’s research shows that the Chinese martial or military plays, commonly known as *wuxi* 武戲, were gradually developed into a distinct form of performance during the Tang and Song dynasties, and flourished in the Qing dynasty.¹⁴⁴

William Stanton introduced another classification system popular in the Guangzhou and Hong Kong areas, in which the plays were divided by their subject matter as well as according to the theatrical performance routine. Stanton noted that “the drama is divided into the Cheng-pan, or historical plays, the Chu-tou, which embraces domestic pieces of all kinds from tragedy to comedy, and the Ku-wei, or farces.”¹⁴⁵ The Cheng-pan, or

¹⁴⁰ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 261.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Scott, *The Classical Theatre of China*, 185.

¹⁴³ Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, “Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing *Wen* and *Wu*,” *East Asian History* 8 (1994): 139–148.

¹⁴⁴ On the martial plays in Chinese Peking opera, see Du Peng 杜鵬, “Jingju wuxi yanjiu” 京劇武戲研究 (A study of martial plays in Chinese Peking opera), (PhD dissertation, Chinese Art Academe, 2014), 37–46.

¹⁴⁵ Stanton, “The Chinese Drama,” 11. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

zhengben 正本 (literary “formal script”), he explained, “strongly resemble some of Shakespeare’s historical dramas” for their “alternation of the comic and tragic . . . the appearance of great princes and grave ministers with humble and clownish persons, and . . . the marching of armies and battle scenes.” (11) The *Chu-tou*, or *chutou* 齣頭 (highlights from opera), was “a mingling of the grave with the gay, in true serio-comic style,” in which “mirth and drollery alternate with grief and solemnity.” (12) The *Ku-wei*, or *guwei* 鼓尾 (literally, “drum tail”), was a kind of simple comic play, in which “actors are allowed a great latitude in introducing old gags and new hits at passing events.” (12) In the traditional Cantonese theatre, these three kinds of plays are also conventionally performed at fixed hours of the day in a typical schedule of Cantonese opera performances: *zhengben* are played during the daytime; *chutou* are the main night pieces; and *guwei* are the last few pieces of an overnight performance.¹⁴⁶ Though Stanton only emphasised the subject and the style of each kind, his description of this classification system suggests his intimate empirical knowledge of Cantonese theatrical customs, and provides more pragmatic information about the actual performance of Cantonese opera.

A particular kind of Chinese plays seems to have attracted the British sinologists’ attention. Farce, the term used by the sinologists for a kind of short and simple Chinese comic play, appears to be very popular in nineteenth-century China and among the foreign audience as well. Alfred Lister, who worked as the acting registrar-general for the Hong Kong government at the time, published his translation of the play script of a Chinese farce called *A-Lan’s Pig* (*A Lan mai zhu* 阿蘭賣豬, [A Lan sells his pig]) which he had seen on 12 November 1869 in Hong Kong.¹⁴⁷ In the introduction to his translation, Lister explained the main plot and the cultural specific jokes of the farce, as well as his translation strategies, to assist the readers’ comprehension. Nicholas Belfield Dennys, the editor of the *China Review*, observed that farce was a “very large class” of theatrical performance in China, and such performances often achieve their popularity by the amusing or explicit dialogues “rather than from any intrinsic merit in the plot.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, the Chinese

¹⁴⁶ For the Chinese meanings of “*zhengben*,” “*chutou*,” and “*guwei*,” see *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Guangdong juan* 中國戲曲誌·廣東卷 (Gazetteer of Chinese opera, Guangdong volume), s.vv. “開臺例戲,” and “古尾.”

¹⁴⁷ Alfred Lister, “A Chinese Farce. A-Lan’s Pig,” *The China Magazine* 4 (1869): 113–121; Alfred Lister, “A Chinese Farce,” *The China Review* 1, no. 1 (1872): 26–31.

¹⁴⁸ Nicholas Belfield Dennys, introductory notice to “借靴 The Borrowed Boots, translated from the *P’i-P’a-Ke* 琵琶記, A Chinese Farce,” trans. Lydia Mary Fay, *The China Review* 2, no. 6 (1874): 325.

farce in his mind was not a refined or serious, but purely entertaining, genre of drama. George Carter Stent also noted that the Chinese farce was simple and diverting, and the foreigners in China actually preferred farce because it was both easier to comprehend and instructively amusing.¹⁴⁹ The Chinese “farce” in these writings most likely refers to what was generally known as *xiaoxi* 小戲 (literally “little play”) in China—a kind of simple comedy often depicting domestic life and performed by two or three actors.¹⁵⁰ Stent once mentioned the “great” and the “little” plays in China: “plays are also named ‘great’ and ‘little’ according to the length of, or number of performers engaged in the piece, no matter whether it be civil or military—much as we use the words ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ to answer a similar purpose.”¹⁵¹ In addition to its popularity, the British sinologists’ particular interest in Chinese farce was probably also generated by the popularity of farce in contemporary European theatres.¹⁵² For example, Robert Kennaway Douglas noted that the Chinese and European farces shared a certain affinity between their plots, and that the titles of some Chinese farces were in fact “counterparts”¹⁵³ to those in Paris or in London. Yet he also commented that the scenes in the Chinese farce, and in almost all Eastern nations, would definitely not be allowed in English theatre,¹⁵⁴ implying the indecent or vulgar aspects of the Chinese or Eastern “farce.”

¹⁴⁹ Stent, “Chinese Theatricals,” 93.

¹⁵⁰ *Zhongguo xiqu quyi cidian* 中國戲曲曲藝詞典 (Dictionary of Chinese drama and folk art), comp. and ed. Shanghai yishu yanjiusuo 上海藝術研究所 (Shanghai Research Institute of Arts) and Zhongguo xijujia xiehui Shanghai fenhui 中國戲劇家協會上海分會 (Shanghai Branch of the Association of Chinese Dramatists) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1981), s.v. “小戲.” In the nineteenth century, *xiaoxi* was probably known to some foreigners as an established subgenre of Chinese drama. In his book *La Chine familière et galante* (China familiar and gallant, 1876), the French sinologist Jules Arène (1850–1903) recalled how he once ordered some “*shiaoshi*” (small play) at a Chinese theatre in Beijing. See Luo Shih-lung 羅仕龍, “Cong *Bu gang dao Ba lanhua*: shiji shiji liangchu Zhongguo xiaoxi zai Faguo de chuanbo yu jieshou” 從《補缸》到《拔蘭花》：十九世紀兩出中國小戲在法國的傳播與接受 (The Mender of Cracked Chinaware and *La Fleur enlevée*: dissemination and acceptance of two Chinese folklore plays in the nineteenth century in France), *Theatre Arts* 戲劇藝術 no. 3 (2015): 106–114.

¹⁵¹ Stent, “Chinese Theatricals,” 91.

¹⁵² Michael R. Booth, “Comedy and Farce,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139–143.

¹⁵³ Robert Kennaway Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and sons, 1893), xxxv.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

3.7 Writings on the Chinese Novel

Eighteenth-century Europe had already had a taste of Chinese fiction from the early sinologists' translations. In his *General History of China*, Du Halde included three Chinese short stories translated by the French Jesuit François Xavier d'Entrecolles (1664–1741) from a collection of Chinese vernacular short stories named *Jingu qiguan* 今古奇觀 (Marvels New and Old).¹⁵⁵ Du Halde compared European and Chinese romances, and concluded, echoing the Enlightenment passion for the Chinese philosophy of virtues, that the European romances were morally dangerous to readers while the Chinese stories were “generally full of instruction . . . and always recommending the practice of some virtues.”¹⁵⁶ The most popular Chinese novel in Europe before the nineteenth century is perhaps *The Pleasing History*. In the preface to this translation, the editor Thomas Percy marked down his impression on this Chinese novel. He found that the narrative of *The Pleasing History* was “dry and tedious,”¹⁵⁷ replete with trivial details while lack of passion and imagination. He further observed that the lack of imagination was due to the “servile submission and dread of novelty”¹⁵⁸ in the nature of the Chinese people. Though Percy acknowledged that *The Pleasing History* was more artful than average Eastern literature, he nonetheless denied the literary value of this Chinese novel, as he explicitly declared that the purpose of this English translation was to present the Chinese novel to English-speaking readers “not as a piece to be admired for the beauties of its composition, but as a curious specimen of Chinese literature,”¹⁵⁹ and as “a faithful picture of Chinese manners.”¹⁶⁰

John Francis Davis was perhaps the first British sinologist to translate Chinese stories directly from the original texts.¹⁶¹ He translated three short stories from Li Yu's *The*

¹⁵⁵ [François Xavier d'Entrecolles] trans., Du Halde ed., “Novel the First,” “Another Novel,” “Two Pieces of History,” in *The General History of China*, vol. 3, 114–133, 134–155, 155–192. The three stories are “Lü Dalang huan jin wan gurou” 呂大郎還金完骨肉 (Lü Dalang returns the gold and reunions with his son), “Zhuang Zixiu gu pen cheng da dao” 莊子休鼓盆成大道 (Zhuang Zixiu achieves Great Dao), and “Huai siyuan hen pu gaozhu” 懷私怨狠僕告主 (The resentful servant reports his master).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁵⁷ Percy, preface to *The Pleasing History*, 1: xii.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁶¹ On Davis's translation activities and his motivation, see Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, “‘Objects of Curiosity’: John Francis Davis as a Translator of Chinese Literature,” in *Sinologists as Translators in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, 169–203.

Twelve Towers into English, published together as *Chinese Novels, translated from the Originals* in 1822. Davis also published his translation of the Chinese novel *Haoqiu zhuan* 好逑傳 as *The Fortunate Union, a Chinese Romance Translated from the Chinese Original* in 1829. In the preface or introduction to his translations, Davis always provided long description and explanation of the plots and merits of these translated works of Chinese fiction, focusing more on the practical information contained in the novels, rather than on their literary features.

A series of English review articles on Chinese novels was published in the journal *Chinese Repository* (Guangzhou, 1832–1851) by the German missionary Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) during the 1830s and 1840s. He summarised the plots and assessed the values of Chinese novels such as *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio), and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Yet his articles were biased and notoriously inaccurate, often refuted and corrected by later sinologists.¹⁶²

In 1867, William Frederick Meyers, who was the British vice-consul in Guangzhou at the time,¹⁶³ published his comprehensive and semi-academic bibliographical study of Chinese novels in a series of seven articles, first in the sinological periodical *Notes and Queries on China and Japan*, and then reprinted in *The Phoenix*. In these articles, Meyers discussed the origins of the Chinese historical and romantic fiction, the historical backgrounds and the different editions of some important Chinese novels, the practice of commentary, and the general features of plot and character portrayal in Chinese novels. These articles are arguably the first serious and systematic study of the Chinese novel in British sinology, and Meyers was therefore acknowledged as “perhaps the highest authority on the subject [Chinese fiction]”¹⁶⁴ by his contemporary British sinologists. At least two English translations of Chinese novels were inspired by Meyers’s study: Edward Charles Bowra started to translate the *Dream of the Red Chamber* in 1868, and Alfred Lister began his translation of a vernacular Chinese novel *Qun ying jie* 群英傑 (The Three

¹⁶² For example, Gützlaff had mistaken the hero of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 as a lady. William Frederick Meyers pointed out that Gützlaff had made a “grotesque blunder” in his review, see William Frederick Meyers, “Bibliographical. Chinese Works of Fiction. VI. Romantic Novels (concluded),” *Notes and Queries* 1, no. 12 (1867): 169.

¹⁶³ “Foreign Residents in China,” *China Directory for 1867* (Hong Kong, A. Shortrede & co., 1867), 41.

¹⁶⁴ Alfred Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance,” *The China Review* 1, no. 5 (1873): 287.

Brothers) the same year,¹⁶⁵ though neither was completed. Important as Mayers's study was, unfortunately, these articles were never published in book form, and since periodicals can be difficult to get hold of years after their publication, the influence of Mayers's study on Chinese fiction seemed to have been on the wane among sinologists over time.

On 7 January 1873, Alfred Lister, now the Hong Kong government interpreter and Superintendent of Chinese Studies,¹⁶⁶ gave a lecture in Hong Kong on the topic of the Chinese romantic novel. The transcript of his lecture was later published in the *China Review*.¹⁶⁷ The lecture was divided into two sections, the first focusing on the general features of Chinese romantic fiction, with particular emphasis on Lister's favourite Chinese novel *The Two Fair Cousins*, and the second half being a closer examination of this novel. In his lecture, Lister summarised the characters and plot types commonly seen in Chinese novels, compared the literary quality of Chinese and English novels, and also commented on the literary tastes of the two countries.

In the late nineteenth century, two monographs on Chinese fiction were published. Robert Kennaway Douglas, by that time having become the first Keeper of the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts of the British Museum,¹⁶⁸ published his translation of twelve Chinese short stories from the Chinese collection *Marvels New and Old*.¹⁶⁹ In the introduction to this translation titled *Chinese Stories* (1893), Douglas elaborated on the typical subjects and characters of Chinese novels, as well as its classification. In 1898, George Thomas Candlin, a missionary from the British United

¹⁶⁵ According to his biographer, while in Guangzhou, Edward Charles Bowra "had studied under the famous Sinologue, W. F. Mayers . . ." Drage, *Servants of the Dragon Throne*, 176. Bowra translated the first eight chapters of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, see E. C. Bowra, trans., "The Dream of the Red Chamber," *The China Magazine* 2 "Christmas volume" (1868): 1–17, 33–43, 65–79, 97–106, 129–152; *The China Magazine* 3 (1868?): 1–11, 33–45, 65–75. Alfred Lister admitted that *The Three Brothers* was "recommended for translation" by Mayers, see Lister, "An Hour with a Chinese Romance," 287. Lister translated the first four volumes of *The Three Brothers*, also published in *The China Magazine*, before he found that the interest of the story "suddenly collapsed like a soup-bubble" in the middle of the book, see [Alfred Lister], trans., "群英傑 The Three Brothers," *The China Magazine* 4 (1869?): 1–24, 41–64, 81–113, 123–?.

¹⁶⁶ The Superintendent of Chinese Studies was connected to the Board for Examiners whose duty was to direct and examine the study of the Chinese language by the Hong Kong government officers, see Ernest John Eitel, *Europe in China: The History of Hong Kong from the Beginning to the Year 1882* (Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1895), 481.

¹⁶⁷ Alfred Lister, "An Hour with a Chinese Romance," *The China Review* 1, no. 5 (1873), 284–293; no. 6 (1873): 352–362.

¹⁶⁸ Legge, "Obituary Notices: Sir Robert Kennaway Douglas," 1098.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Kennaway Douglas, trans., *Chinese Stories* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and sons, 1893).

Methodist Free Church,¹⁷⁰ published a short introductory book on the Chinese novel, entitled *Chinese Fiction*. This book revealed his strong religious motivation in reading and studying the Chinese novel as he intended to explore, through novels, how Chinese religions functioned in the Chinese people's minds.¹⁷¹ Compared to the other nineteenth-century British sinologists, Candlin offered exceptionally sympathetic understanding of the Chinese novel, or perhaps of China in general. As he proclaimed in the book, one of the aims of *Chinese Fiction* was to correct the sinologists' disparaging attitude towards Chinese fiction, and to demonstrate that there were in fact a large number of excellent imaginative narratives in China.¹⁷²

Apart from these articles and monographs, writings on Chinese fiction are also seen in the systematic survey books on China, such as John Francis Davis's *The Chinese* and Robert Kennaway Douglas's *China*. The nineteenth-century British sinologists also translated quite a few Chinese short stories and novels into English, either in extracts or of the full length works. These translations were mostly published in the English periodicals such as the *Chinese and Japanese Repository*, *The China Magazine*, *The Phoenix*, *The Far East*, and *The China Review*. Research shows that there were altogether fifty three Chinese short stories and novels translated and published in English periodicals from 1800 to 1911.¹⁷³ Translations of Chinese novels published in book form include Herbert Giles's translation *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* in 1880 and Henry Bencraft Joly's (1857–1898) translation of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* in 1893.

3.8 Style, Characterisation, and Narrative Techniques

In these writings on the Chinese novel, the nineteenth-century British sinologists had invariably noticed the fact that, in the traditional Chinese Confucian view, fiction was not regarded as literature proper but only as a vulgar genre. William Frederick Mayers observed that "the Chinese themselves . . . as has often been remarked, affect to treat with contempt the imaginative department of their literature, viewing it, in the words of Mr.

¹⁷⁰ Frank B. Turner, "In Remembrance: Rev. G. T. Candlin, D. D.," *The Chinese Recorder* 55 (October, 1924): 674.

¹⁷¹ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 3.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷³ Song and Sun, "Jindai yingwen qikan yu Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo de zaoqi fanyi," 126–127. They also provide a full list of Chinese fictions translated and published in English periodicals.

Edkins, ‘as not worthy of the study of scholars’.”¹⁷⁴ Mayers pointed out that the Chinese term for novel—“*Siao Shwo Shu*, or Trivial Works”—had already revealed such a contemptuous view toward the genre.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, Robert Kennaway Douglas suggested that the Chinese term for fiction, “Siao hwa, or ‘small-talk’,” had sufficiently conveyed the Chinese people’s derogatory opinion towards fiction.¹⁷⁶ Herbert Giles also noted that the Chinese “place classical scholarship at the very summit of human ambitions, and rank the playwright and the novelist as mere parasites of literature.”¹⁷⁷ This deprecating view was still prevalent in China in the late nineteenth century. Joseph Edkins made a note of a short article recently published in a Chinese newspaper in Shanghai by some Chinese Confucianists protesting against the publication and selling of novels and other similar kinds of “vicious” literature because of their corrupting influence on Chinese people,¹⁷⁸ which, Edkins believed, clearly manifested the prevailing Chinese view of the novels.

Despite this ostensible denial of the value of the novel in Chinese literary culture, British sinologists had also discovered, from their personal contacts with the Chinese, that novels—like plays—were in fact widely read, and enjoyed, by Chinese literate men. For example, Alfred Lister found that on the one hand the Chinese scholars were so “ashamed” of being found reading or writing novels that “most authors have not cared to put their names”¹⁷⁹ on the novels they wrote; on the other hand, the Confucian scholars would read a novel “on the sly,” and “doubtless derive great pleasure from their perusal.”¹⁸⁰ Robert Kennaway Douglas commented that Chinese scholars were not as prudish and honest as they alleged to be, and even “the most pedantic scholar” would sometimes indulge themselves in reading fiction.¹⁸¹ George Thomas Candlin also remarked that his Chinese Confucianist teacher, “this highly proper individual,” in fact “knows more about novels than is consistent with his virtuous professions,”¹⁸² which was considered by Candlin amusingly as “a charming study in masculine prudery.”¹⁸³

¹⁷⁴ Mayers, “IV. Romantic Novels,” 137.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xii.

¹⁷⁷ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 297.

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Edkins, “Chinese Views on Novels,” in *Modern China* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1891), 30–32.

¹⁷⁹ Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance,” 285.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xii.

¹⁸² Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 9.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

If a Chinese Confucian scholar was caught reading the novel, Alfred Lister explained, he would argue that he was reading “not for the story, but for the admirable style in which many Romances are written.”¹⁸⁴ The “style” of Chinese fiction, frequently given as a decent excuse by the Chinese scholars for enjoying reading the “trivial writings,” also attracted the interest of the British sinologists. They were aware of the idea in Chinese novel criticism that, though fiction was generally considered as an inferior genre, the individual novel’s value could be elevated by its literary style. Among all the stylistic traits, the sinologists particularly noticed the practice of inserting poetry or poetical compositions in Chinese fiction, especially romantic novels, and its importance in enhancing the literary reputation of the novel. William Frederick Mayers noted that Chinese novelists always equipped their main characters, male and female alike, with the highly valued skill of poetry writing so that the novelist himself would be exalted as first-rate in his profession.¹⁸⁵ On the contrary, if a novel failed to display the author’s literary accomplishment in “*Wên-chang* or ‘classical composition’ style,” Mayers explained, it was more likely to be despised as “trivial if not as insufferably vulgar.”¹⁸⁶ The style of the novel was attached with such importance that plot arrangement and character development would be yielded as, in Mayers’s view, “secondary considerations.”¹⁸⁷ George Thomas Candlin also pointed out that most Chinese novels were “thickly interspersed with poems of all orders of merit” and the main character “must be prepared to extemporise by the ream in inimitable poetry.”¹⁸⁸ He saw this manner of writing “a proof of the high degree of elaboration to which fiction literature in China has been carried.”¹⁸⁹ The eighteenth-century Chinese fictional work *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio) particularly illustrates the importance of “style” to the Chinese novel. The British sinologists noticed the native Chinese literati’s general admiration for this fictional work’s style that contributes to its literary reputation. William Frederick Mayers informed his reader that “the author’s reputation rests less upon the matter of his work than on the manner of his writing,” and that the stories were written in a style “singularly concise and pure, recalling that of the ancient historians.”¹⁹⁰ The British consul Clement Francis

¹⁸⁴ Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance,” 285.

¹⁸⁵ Mayers, “IV. Romantic Novels,” 138.

¹⁸⁶ Mayers, “V. Romantic Novels (continued),” 154.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁸⁸ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 43.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Mayers, “Bibliographical. The Record of Marvels; Or Tales of the Genii,” *Notes and Queries on China and Japan* 1, no.3 (1867): 25.

Romilly Allen (1844–1920), who had translated nineteen stories from the *Strange Stories*, also noted that this collection of Chinese short stories was “well-known to all native students, and the beauty of its style is much admired by them.”¹⁹¹ Herbert Giles also explained that it was because of the “incomparable style” of the *Strange Stories* that this fictional work—and this book only—was considered by the Chinese scholars as qualified to ascend to the “domain of pure literature” in China.¹⁹²

Despite the excellent literary styles of some fictional works, the British sinologists held relatively low estimation of the Chinese novel. To start with, the exhaustive narrative style and consequently the length of Chinese novels was frequently considered a major problem. Robert Kennaway Douglas asserted that “one fault which is observable in all Chinese novels is the want of conciseness in the style,”¹⁹³ and that the “prolixity and minuteness of detail” common in Chinese novels “would be the ruin of any work of the kind published in Europe.”¹⁹⁴ Herbert Giles also observed that “the ordinary Chinaman likes his novel long, and does not mind plenty of repetitions after the style of Homer.”¹⁹⁵ Giles explained that the Chinese novel was repetitive and lengthy because it was, at its origin, “told by word of mouth and written down later on.”¹⁹⁶ This comment revealed a biased view as it suggests that the Chinese novel was not improving through history, while Western narrative works, also derived from an oral tradition, had already developed beyond the same problem. It is also due to this “flaw” of repetitiveness that the Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, though known to many British sinologists as the best romantic novel in China, failed to win wild popularity among them. Alfred Lister ascribed the “bulk” of *Dream of the Red Chamber* as its “great disadvantage.”¹⁹⁷ He also believed that it would be extremely difficult to translate this Chinese novel into any European language with “its tremendous length . . . the vast number of persons involved in the story; and the complicatedly mysterious character of the introductory chapters.”¹⁹⁸

Perhaps with the nineteenth-century English novel as the model in mind, the British sinologists also found fault in other aspects of the Chinese novel. For example, William

¹⁹¹ C. F. R. Allen, “Tales from the Liao Chai Chih Yi,” *The China Review* 2, no. 6 (1874): 364.

¹⁹² Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 342.

¹⁹³ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xviii.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xix.

¹⁹⁵ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 309.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹⁹⁷ Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance,” 287.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Frederick Mayers noted that, in Chinese novels, descriptive passages were usually absent and the dialogue was also generally deficient.¹⁹⁹ Robert Kennaway Douglas found that Chinese works of fiction were replete with the “same crude narration of facts, without any just representation of nature” and the “exaggerated sentiments, which always precede correct reasoning and refined simplicity.”²⁰⁰ He asserted that the Chinese novel can only be appreciated by the Chinese themselves,²⁰¹ implying that the Chinese novels failed to meet the standard expected in Europe.

The more focused criticism of the Chinese novel was on the narrative techniques of characterisation, which was in the same critical vein as that of Chinese drama. The sinologists found that the character portrayal in Chinese fiction was equally stereotyped and showed a lack of psychological development. For example, William Frederick Mayers listed the “one unfailing and unvarying round of personages”²⁰² in “every [Chinese] historical novel (it may be said, without any exception)”:

the wily and favoured counsellor, the plain spoken but unvalued minister, the sovereign, either founding a dynasty by martial virtues or losing a throne by effeminacy and weakness, the priest with flowing robes concealing a repertory of magic arts, and finally the truculent champion, a compound of Hercules and Bombastes, who brandishes sword and lance and club, all of enormous size and weight.²⁰³

Robert Kennaway Douglas also found a universal, idealised male protagonist in any Chinese romantic novel as a young man “who takes the highest degree at the examinations, and quotes the classics with the greatest fluency.”²⁰⁴ The hero should possess strength and power to defeat his enemies or even to challenge higher authorities for righteous cause,²⁰⁵ and “must be clothed with virtue as with a garment” and acting in all circumstances “in accordance with the ‘rules of propriety’.”²⁰⁶

Moreover, the sinologists also found that these standard characters were depicted flatly and with a lack of psychological complexity or development throughout the novel, as

¹⁹⁹ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 87.

²⁰⁰ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 116.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 87.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xvii.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. xvii-xviii.

Mayers concisely put it that in Chinese novels “the bad are always bad, the good invariably supremely virtuous.”²⁰⁷ Douglas was particularly critical of this problem, as he reiterated in his writings that “a Chinese novelist never attempts to make an analysis of his characters, and there is no interweaving of a subtle plot in his pages,”²⁰⁸ that “there is no close analysis of motive, and no gradations in their [the characters’] good and evil qualities,”²⁰⁹ and therefore the characters “are all either very black or very white.”²¹⁰ The only different opinion on the characterisation in Chinese novels came from George Thomas Candlin. He exalted the writer of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* for depicting his characters as “living and distinct, each has his individuality and separate portraiture,”²¹¹ expressing a more favourable opinion on the Chinese novel.

In terms of literary criticism, the British sinologists’ particular attention to the character portrayal in Chinese novels was probably derived from the growing concern with the effect of “psychological realism”²¹² in nineteenth-century English novel criticism. With psychology emerging as a scientific discipline in the nineteenth century in Europe, the exploration of the human mind and character provided the novelists with sophisticated concepts, theories, and case studies that might be employed to create rich, complex, and also realistic characters in their novels.²¹³ With this literary theory of “psychological realism” that assumed a seemingly “modern” and “scientific” connotation, the British sinologists were thus granted the intellectual power to judge and criticise the characterisation in Chinese fiction.

Similar to his discourse on Chinese drama, the inadequate character portrayal in Chinese novels was also attributed by Robert Kennaway Douglas to the “poverty of imagination”²¹⁴ of Chinese people, associating once again literature with the Western discourse on the Chinese national character. This link between the Chinese novel and the national character was evident in the British sinologists’ evaluation of the disposition of the main characters

²⁰⁷ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 87.

²⁰⁸ Douglas, *China*, 431.

²⁰⁹ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xviii.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 22.

²¹² Michael Davis, “Psychology and the Idea of Character,” in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Volume 3: The Nineteenth-Century Novel 1820–1880*, ed. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 497.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 497.

²¹⁴ Douglas, *China*, 431.

in Chinese fiction, especially in contrast to that in the European novel. For example, Robert Kennaway Douglas remarked that, while in the West, soldiers and wars were popular subjects for novels, the Chinese viewed military activity as “an uncultured accomplishment.”²¹⁵ The hero of Chinese non-historical novels, though he could be physically strong and valiant, should not be “a soldier by profession,” because that would “degrade him at once in the eyes of all the cultured classes.”²¹⁶ Alfred Lister observed more bluntly that the good protagonists in Chinese novels were always “supremely cowardly,” and this cowardice of Chinese heroes “marks very strongly an essential difference” between China and Britain as well as in their novels.²¹⁷ Likewise, Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor, the Imperial Maritime Customs Service staff member who later translated the Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* into English, also commented that Liu Bei 劉備, one of the main characters in the novel, though admirably impartial and righteous, was “selfish and careless of his friends,” judged “from a European stand-point.”²¹⁸ As Chinese novels were perceived as an important source for information about China, such comments on the fictional personage will inevitably also point to the character of the Chinese people in reality as the opposite to the Victorian concept of masculinity that emphasises courage, resolution, and physical strength,²¹⁹ which confirms with the accepted Western view that the people of China were a “weak and timid people.”²²⁰ In this manner, the nineteenth-century sinological writings on the Chinese novel extend beyond an autonomous field of literary study, but was deeply intertwined with discourse on the Chinese national character, which, again, reinforces the idea of a consistent Chinese *national* literature that forms an integral part of the larger representational system of knowledge about China.

²¹⁵ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xvii.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance,” 286.

²¹⁸ C. H. Brewitt-Taylor, “The San-Kuo,” *The China Review* 19, no.3 (1890): 173.

²¹⁹ On the Victorian conception of manliness and masculinities, see John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005), particularly “Gentlemen Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England,” 83–102.

²²⁰ Roberts, *China through Western Eyes, the Nineteenth Century*, 146.

3.9 Classification of the Chinese Novel

In all the nineteenth-century British sinologists' writings on Chinese novels, William Frederick Mayers provided the most comprehensive and detailed account of the classification as well as the features of each class of the Chinese novel. He divided the Chinese novels into three kinds: "the historical romance or *Chwan* [*zhuan* 傳, records]," "the tale of adventure, *chwan k'i* [*chuanqi* 傳奇, legend]," and "the genuine romantic fiction . . . *Ts'ai-tz' Shu* [*caizi shu* 才子書, work of genius]."²²¹ On the Chinese historical novel, Mayers first introduced the Chinese term for historical novels, 志傳演義 (*zhizhuan yanyi*, records and elaborated stories), and translated it as "paraphrases of History."²²² He explained that the Chinese historical novel was written "in a style of romantic narrative of the chronicles of the rise, heroic achievements, and eventual downfall, of successive dynasties."²²³ He identified the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as "the earliest of its class and the model which succeeding authors have followed with servile fidelity,"²²⁴ to which the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin) was "ranking next in celebrity"²²⁵ in the class of historical novel. He also mentioned the role of the Chinese critic Jin Shengtān 金聖嘆 (1608–1661) in improving the literary status of these two novels in China with his editorial work and the "eulogium of the work and profuse annotation."²²⁶ In addition to the elaborate introduction of these two most important historical novels, Mayers also gave a bibliographical description of fourteen more historical novels, arranged according to the historical period in which the stories happened from the Xia dynasty (c. 2070–c. 1600 BC) to the Ming dynasty.²²⁷ Spending only a few lines on the main story of each novel, Mayers

²²¹ Mayers, "IV. Romantic Novels," 137.

²²² Mayers, "I. Historical Romances," 86.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Mayers, "Bibliographical. Chinese Works of Fiction. II. Historical Romances (continued)," *Notes and Queries on China and Japan* 1, no. 8 (1867): 102.

²²⁵ Mayers, "Bibliographical. Chinese Works of Fiction. III. Historical Romances (concluded)," *Notes and Queries on China and Japan* 1, no. 9 (1867): 119.

²²⁶ Mayers, "II. Historical Romances (continued)," 103. As David Rolston observes, Jin Shengtān was one of the most important editors, commentators, and critics of Chinese vernacular literature. However, the commentary and the preface to the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was perhaps not made by Jin Shengtān. His name was appropriated as the author only in an attempt to capitalise on this famous critic's influence. For a study on Jin Shengtān's commentary on fiction, see, David L. Rolston, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing between the Lines* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 25-50.

²²⁷ The fourteen historical novels are the *Xia Shang zhuan* 夏商傳 (Chronicles of the Xia and Shang dynasties), the *Chunqiu lieguo zhuan* 春秋列國傳 (Chronicles of the Contending States during the Spring and Autumn period), the *Dong Zhou lieguo zhuan* 東周列國傳 (Chronicles of the Contending States of the Eastern Zhou dynasty), the *Zhaojun zhuan* 昭君傳 (The history of Zhaojun), the *Sui Tang*

did not mention any traits of literary development among these historical novels. Yet the extensive range has clearly indicated the strong tradition of the historical novel in China. He also emphasised the practical value of Chinese historical novels, observing that most Chinese people acquired their historical knowledge from reading these novels, thus the English readers could also turn to Chinese historical novels for “an introduction to historical study”²²⁸ of China.

The second kind of Chinese novels, the “tale of adventure,” or “legendary tales” as Mayers later termed them, was the fiction “filled with the wildest imaginings of gods and genii, ghosts, demons, and fairy-foxes.”²²⁹ Mayers assumed that this kind of mythical tales was the earliest form of narrative stories in China for the purpose of popular entertainment.²³⁰ He had drawn a brief outline of the historical development of Chinese legendary tales, which shows that this kind of story first flourished during the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC), evolved up until the present day, and reached its climax with the “polished inventions” of the famous *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* in the eighteenth century.²³¹ Mayers did not elaborate on the general characteristics and the representative works of Chinese legendary tales, only with a full and detailed study of the *Strange Stories*. In this article entitled “The Record of Marvels,” Mayers described and evaluated certain features of Chinese legendary tales from the *Strange Stories*, and commented that the abundance of legendary tales in China seemed to indicate that superstition, especially the “fairy-foxes” kind, was “deeply rooted in the Chinese mind.”²³²

The third kind of Chinese novels, the romantic novel, was in Mayers’s view a “more modern division of Chinese fiction,” and could be considered as the “novel” proper in its English meaning.²³³ This class was defined less by its subject matter than by its similarity

zhuàn 隋唐傳 (Chronicles of the Sui and Tang dynasties), the *Shuo Tang san zhuàn* 說唐三傳 (The third instalment of the stories of the Tang dynasty), the *Fan Tang yanyi* 反唐演義 (Romance of the rebellion against the Tang), the *Can Tang Wudai zhuàn* 殘唐五代傳 (Chronicles of the late Tang and the Five Dynasties), the *Wuhu ping xi zhuàn* 五虎平西傳 (The five tigers pacify the West), the *Wuhu ping nan hou zhuàn* 五虎平南後傳 (The latter romance of the five tigers pacifying the South), the *Wan hua lou* 萬花樓 (Tower of ten thousand flowers), the *Shuo Yue* 說岳 (Stories of Yue Fei), the *Hongwu zhuàn* 洪武傳 (History of Emperor Hongwu), and the *Yinglie zhuàn* 英烈傳 (Romance of the Ming dynasty heroes).

²²⁸ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 86.

²²⁹ Mayers, “IV. Romantic Novels,” 138.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Mayers, “The Record of Marvels,” 25.

²³³ Mayers, “IV. Romantic Novels,” 138.

to English novels in its form and in the ways “a plot is unfolded, scenes and manners are described, and character is depicted.”²³⁴ Mayers provided an annotated bibliography of some of the “leading productions”²³⁵ of the Chinese romantic novel: *The Fortunate Union*, the *Ping shan leng yan* 平山冷燕 (The two couples), the *Two Fair Cousins*, *The Three Brothers*, the *Da hongpao zhuan* 大紅袍傳 (Cases of Judge Hai), and the *Er du mei* 二度梅 (Second blossom).²³⁶ Mayers noted that all these novels “date for the most part from the 17th and 18th centuries, and appear to have been written chiefly by natives of Shantung [Shandong] and the adjacent Provinces.” (156) It is not clear from which sources Mayers had identified the novelists’ birthplaces, but by providing this information he distinguished these romantic novels from the ones he was going to review in the next article, which he classified as “the Pekingese school”²³⁷ of Chinese romantic novels.

The so-called “Pekingese school” was identified, according to Mayers, not only because its novels were all written “in the colloquial dialect of the Capital [Peking]” but also, more importantly, for their realistic description of the characters and daily manners that enabled them to “assimilate to the standard of modern European romances.” (165) The first in this kind is the *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (The Golden Lotus). Mayers highlighted the incomparable use of colloquial Pekingese in the novel and the style that “may be considered no less a master-piece in Chinese than Boccaccio’s Tales are in the Italian language.” (165) Mayers then briefly introduced the second work of this school, the *Pin hua bao jian* 品花寶鑒 (A Precious Mirror for Judging Flowers). (166) Space had been reserved for a lengthy introductory review—perhaps the longest in all his articles—of the last novel of the Pekingese school, the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Mayers spoke highly of this Chinese novel for its excellent portrayal of the “human character in its complex variety of shades, the intricacies of family relations, the force of passion and the torture of disappointed yearnings after love” that was comparable to those by the successful Victorian novelists William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863) and Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–1873). (166) After a summary of the plot and the characters of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Mayers, “V. Romantic Novels (continued),” 154.

²³⁶ Ibid., 154–156.

²³⁷ Mayers, “VI. Romantic Novels (concluded),” 165. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

and some English translations made in the nineteenth century, Mayers concluded that “in China, no work is more universally popular.” (169)

Robert Kennaway Douglas simply divided Chinese novels into two kinds: historical and social.²³⁸ He attributed the large number of historical novels in China to the fact that Chinese history, full of “rebellions, wars, and dynastic changes,” had already furnished ample materials and “plots ready-made” for the novelists. (xiv) He also credited the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as the most “celebrated” (xv) Chinese historical novel. The social novels were those depicted the stories of young Chinese scholars, whose value lay, Douglas remarked, only in their non-literary merit as “being descriptive of certain and curious phases of Chinese life, and as accurately reflecting the sentiments of the people under many and varying circumstances.” (xviii)

George Thomas Candlin came up with a “three-fold classification” of the Chinese novel: “the historic, the mythic, and the sentimental,”²³⁹ which is virtually the same as that proposed by William Frederick Mayers. The only difference is that Candlin argued that the three kinds were not distinctively separated from each other; rather, the mythic and the sentimental novels were somehow derived, or developed, from historical novels:

History, under the potent spell of that mighty magician, the imaginative faculty, shades off on the spiritual side into the formless region of myth, where man vainly tries to express the mysterious and inexpressible side of his nature, and on the other side melts into the sentimental, where he finds happy play for its human side. (30)

The most representative works of Chinese historical novels selected by Candlin include the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin*, and the *Dong Zhou lieguo zhi* 東周列國志 (Chronicles of the Contending States of the Eastern Zhou dynasty). The second kind, the mythical lore and novels, Candlin believed, embodied the influence of Chinese religious thought on the readers’ mind, and therefore served as perfect materials for the study of the Chinese religion and superstition. (30) He introduced the *Ping gui zhuan* 平鬼傳 (The exorcising of the devils), the *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, the *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 (Investiture of the Gods), and the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Journey to the West) as the best specimens of the Chinese mythic novel. (30) The last, but certainly

²³⁸ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xiv. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

²³⁹ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 30. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

not the least, kind of Chinese fiction in Candlin's taxonomy, the sentimental novel, was “very extensive,” varied in their literary merit and moral standards but shared the common theme of love. (42) While he acknowledged that the *Dream of the Red Chamber* was the best-known of this kind, Candlin's favourite was the *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 (Tale of the Pipa). *The Fortunate Union* and the *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (The Story of the Western Wing) were also considered typical works of the sentimental novel. Candlin explained that *Tale of the Pipa* and *The Story of the Western Wing* “are called novels, but are dramas of the operative kind.” (41) This view in fact conforms with the traditional Chinese concept, or category, of “*xiaoshuo* 小說” (small talk, now the equivalent translation of the English term “novel” and/or “fiction”) in its broad sense of “fictional narrative” which includes both the novel and drama.

In the British sinologists' studies of Chinese novels, the Chinese concept and also a group of works known as the *caizi shu* 才子書 (work of genius) serve as an important reference to the well-known novels in China, as the French sinologist Stanislas Julien once observed, this Chinese concept had become the guide to Chinese novels worth translating.²⁴⁰ The idea of the “work of genius” was initially invented by the critic and the promoter of Chinese vernacular literature Jin Shengtan. He selected and ranked six literary works, both classical and popular texts, as the “six works of genius” (六才子書): the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the poem *Li sao* 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow), the *Shi ji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), Du Fu's poems, *The Water Margin*, and *The Story of the Western Wing*.²⁴¹ In the Qing dynasty, this idea of the work of genius was commonly used as the collective term, a brand even, for the vernacular novels, especially the scholar-beauty romantic novels. Other works began to assume the title and were added to the list. A group of ten vernacular novels came to be widely known as the “ten works of genius” (十才子書) in Qing China. The works included in the “ten works of genius” were not universally agreed, and one of the versions consists, in order of ranking, of the *Romance of the Three*

²⁴⁰ Julien, Stanislas (Rulian 儒蓮), “Ping shan leng yan fayiben xu” 《平山冷燕》法譯本序 (Preface to *Les deux jeunes filles lettrées*), trans. Qiu Haiying 邱海嬰, in *Fanguo hanxue jia lun Zhongguo wenxue: gudian xiju he xiaoshuo* 法國漢學家論中國文學. 古典戲劇和小說 (French sinologists on Chinese literature: traditional drama and fiction), ed. Qian Linsen 錢林森 (Beijing: Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe, 2007), 93.

²⁴¹ *Zhongguo wenxue da cidian* 中國文學大辭典 (Dictionary of Chinese literature), comp. Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1997), s.v. “才子書.”

Kingdoms, The Fortunate Union, The Two Fair Cousins, The Two Couples, The Water Margin, The Story of the Western Wing, the Tale of the Pipa, the Bai gui zhi 白圭志 (Tale of the white jade sceptre), the *Zhan gui zhuan* 斬鬼傳 (Story of slaying demons), and the *Zhu chun yuan* 駐春園 (The garden of everlasting spring).²⁴² The title of the “work of genius” was almost understood as a synonym for the “most popular novels” in China, and therefore very likely served as the starting point for the sinologists in their exploration of Chinese fiction, manifested in the fact that the first seven of the “ten works of genius” were frequently introduced and translated by the sinologists as the representative works among Chinese novels.

The British sinologists had noticed this concept and collection of work of genius for a long time. In 1820, Peter Perring Thoms published his translation of extracts from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in *The Asiatic Journal* (London, 1816–1829), together with a translation of the preface allegedly written by Jin Shengtan in which the Chinese author elevated the novel as “Te-yeh-tsae-tsze [*di yi caizi* 第一才子, the first (work of) genius] (the work which evinces the highest literary talent).”²⁴³ John Francis Davis observed that some Chinese novels “have of course grown more famous and popular than others, and a very few are ranked under the title of *Tsae-tsze*, or ‘work of genius.’”²⁴⁴ In explaining the title “*Ti Yi Ts’ai-tz’ Shu*,” or, “The work of the first of the Writers of Genius”²⁴⁵ that was often associated with the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, William Frederick Mayers noted that the term “had grown to be a generic designation for other standard romances, which are classified as the works of the second, third, or fourth *ts’ai-tz’* [*caizi* 才子, genius], as the case may be.”²⁴⁶ He also explained that “although the term *ts’ai-tz’* 才子 was not confined by Kin Shêng-t’an [Jin Shengtan] to the writers of romance alone, it has grown to be used as their distinctive appellation, and a series of ten celebrated works of this description, among which four were edited by Kin Shêng-t’an, and are familiarly called the ‘Ten *Ts’ai-tz’*.”²⁴⁷ In his *Chinese Fiction*, George Thomas Candlin also mentioned that “a certain number of these books [Chinese novels] are known as

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Peter Perring Thoms, trans., “The Death of the Celebrated Minister Tung-cho,” *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany* 10 (1820): 527.

²⁴⁴ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 209.

²⁴⁵ Mayers, “II. Historical Romances (continued),” 104.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

‘works of genius’.”²⁴⁸ In a list of “fourteen of the most famous of Chinese novels”²⁴⁹ he had given, nine were from the group of the “ten works of genius.”

Herbert Giles attempted to introduce the classification system of novels from the Chinese source. He noted that “the Chinese range their novels under four heads, as dealing (1) with usurpation and plotting, (2) with love and intrigue, (3) with superstition, and (4) with brigandage or lawless characters generally.”²⁵⁰ However, Giles only listed the names of the four classes without further explanation of the general features of each kind. Though he promised that “examples of each class will be given,”²⁵¹ in the following passages, he described some Chinese novels in a chronological order rather than in the order of these four classes, nor did he specify the class to which each novel belonged, which makes his classification end up as an abortive attempt to fully convey the Chinese classification system of novels to the English readers.

3.10 Conclusion

In a study of the eighteenth-century European *Chinoiserie*, David Porter argues that, if the intellectual interpretation of the Chinese language and philosophy by the Jesuit-missionaries provides “reassuring images of the possibility of stability and legitimacy”²⁵² for the European Enlightenment debates on the issues of language, religion, and government, the eighteenth-century European material and aesthetic interest in China follows the counter logic of illegitimacy: the Chinese goods and signs were adored exactly for their “unremitting exoticism of total illegibility,” resulting in a “glamorization” of Chinese things and images as “the unknown and unknowable for its own sake.”²⁵³ While the illegibility of China added to its charm in eighteenth-century Europe, in the nineteenth century, the British sinologists reversed the trend and expressed great willingness as well as anxiety to render the Chinese texts and culture intelligible again.

²⁴⁸ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 10.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁵⁰ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 276.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² David Porter, “Chinoiserie and the Aesthetics of Illegitimacy,” *Studies in Eighteenth-century Culture* 28 (1999): 28.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

This chapter examines the nineteenth-century British sinologists' efforts to describe and explain the basic characteristics of Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction. Their primary aim was to make the principles and forms of Chinese literature comprehensible to English readers. To unveil the mystery, the British sinologists studied and represented Chinese literature in an orderly, anatomical method: they identified and described the fundamental literary features and rules, explained their function and effect, evaluated the literary merits and faults, and classified each genre into different kinds. As a result, the sinologists have disintegrated the extensive and diverse Chinese literature into a manageable size of key facts, transcribing Chinese literary works, ideas, and conventions that are linguistically and aesthetically unintelligible to Western readers into a body of knowledge which was well organised and readily accessible. With accumulated knowledge and increasingly appropriate rhetoric of and approaches to representation, the nineteenth-century British sinologists have gradually built their standard collective discourse on Chinese literature throughout the course of the nineteenth century.

An aspect worthy noticing in the sinologists' studies of Chinese literature is the involvement of Chinese local knowledge. In their writings, there was evident reference to the Chinese sources, either from native Chinese people and books, or from the sinologists' empirical investigation, especially in the classification of Chinese poetry, drama, and novels. The sinologists evaluated and treated the local knowledge differently: some seemed to prefer a more familiar referential system, such as Walter Henry Medhurst's choice to give up the Chinese classification scheme of poetry for the Western literary framework, while many others chose to convey the indigenous picture, such as the studies of Chinese drama by George Carter Stent and by William Stanton. The sinologists' engagement with Chinese sources suggests the complexity in transcultural knowledge production, which was not invariably a process of domesticating, nor a functional representation of, Oriental knowledge, as Said has suggested in his *Orientalism*.

The sinologists' description and explanation of Chinese literature was also informed by the notion of national literature. By singling out and examining the unique peculiarities of Chinese literature, such as the tonal arrangement in Chinese poetry or the lyrical parts in Chinese plays, the sinologists had presented Chinese literature as inherently consistent and fundamentally distinctive from the European literatures. Moreover, a certain ethnographic and essentialising perspective was occasionally adopted when the sinologists tried to

explain literary characteristics in relation to generic natural talent, or the lack of it, such as the limitation in imagination, which interprets Chinese literature as the product of its people that could faithfully reflect their national character. In this manner, the sinologists' anatomical narratives that highlighted the national attributes have sketched out the knowledge about Chinese literature as unmistakably *Chinese*.

Chapter 4

Through a Different Lens: Comparative Studies

Comparatism as a research method prevailed in Europe in the nineteenth century. Studies of academic history show that the “comparative method” was employed widely in various humanistic disciplines: in philology, the comparative paradigm was inspired by William Jones’s discovery of the relation between Sanskrit and European languages in 1786 and developed in Germany;¹ in anthropology, the comparative method was adopted by the evolutionists to assess the level of civilisation of different cultures and to reconstruct the evolutionary history of human society as a whole;² in sociological studies and religious studies, the comparative mode was also popular in exploring the relationships and the differences between cultures.³ In such a comparativist mood, the nineteenth century also witnessed the emergence of comparative literature as a field of study. According to René Wellek, the principal idea of comparative literature had been “fully formulated” in the early nineteenth century, while the exact term “comparative literature” was only established in 1886 with the publication of *Comparative Literature* by the Irish scholar Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett (c. 1855–1927).⁴ In a close examination of the historical context in which Posnett’s work came into being, Joep Leerssen argues that Posnett’s “comparative literature” was developed under the influence of relevant disciplines such as comparative linguistics, comparative anthropology, and even comparative politics.⁵

¹ Laura Daniliuc, “Comparative Method,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, ed. Philipp Strasny (London: Routledge, 2005)

http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-

[2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:ref:R04432979:0](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:ref:R04432979:0)

² Keith F. Otterbein, “Comparative Method,” in *Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology: An Encyclopedia*, ed. R. Jon McGee and Richard L. Warms (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publication, 2013), 134-135. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452276311.n45>

³ For the application of “comparative method” in nineteenth-century sociology, see J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 10-16. For the application of “comparative method” in religious studies, see Joseph M. Kitagawa and John S. Strong, “Friedrich Max Müller and the Comparative Study of Religion,” in *Nineteenth-century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. Ninian Smart et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3: 179-214.

⁴ Wellek, “The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature,” 2-3.

⁵ Joep Leerssen, “Comparing What, Precisely? H. M. Posnett and the Conceptual History of ‘Comparative Literature’,” *Comparative Critical Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 197–212.

The comparative method was also widely adopted in the British sinologists' studies on Chinese literature. The second half of John Francis Davis's *On the Poetry of the Chinese* began with a note of justification for his comparative studies of Chinese poetry. Davis informed his readers that the task of Part Two of his book was to view Chinese poetry through the lens of European criticism.⁶ The aim of this comparative method, he explained, was not "discovering any great correspondence or resemblance" between Chinese and European poetic traditions, "but the process of comparison to whatever result it may lead, is always useful on such occasions." (29) To Davis, the comparative approach serves two practical purposes. Methodologically, it "gives clearness" to Chinese poetry by situating it in the reference system of European literary criticism, and therefore could facilitate English readers' understanding of Chinese poetic arts. It would also effectively attract English readers' interest in things Chinese: "by bringing it [Chinese poetry] in contact with objects nearer home, and thus allowing it to derive, from association, its fair share of advantage." (30) Davis also urged his readers not to rush into a quick dismissal of Chinese poetry when scrutinised by European taste, but to duly acknowledge the difference between Chinese and European literatures that resulted from the "national" particularity: "national taste is the most conventional and capricious thing in the world; that it is determined by the infinite varieties of national character, national models and national associations." (30) To support this point, Davis referred to the literary diversity in Europe that "even with the same old copies to refer to, and with a general similarity of institutions and customs, the different nations of the great European community vary, on such points, not a little among themselves," (30) suggesting that it was predictable that Chinese literature should differ still more from European standards.

Four decades after the publication of the book in 1829, in a review of the reprint of *On the Poetry of the Chinese* in 1870, the reviewer—probably James Summers,⁷ sinologist and editor of the sinological journal *The Phoenix* in which the review was published—applauded the "importance of candid comparison between Chinese and European taste"⁸

⁶ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 29. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

⁷ The reviewer was probably the editor of *The Phoenix* because, in the review, he particularly mentioned a Chinese ballad on tea-picking in the 1870 reprint of Davis's work, and promised to "reproduce" this ballad in the journal later. See [James Summers], review of *The Poetry of the Chinese*, by John Francis Davis, *The Phoenix* 1, no.2 (1870): 19. This Chinese *Ballad on Tea-picking* was later published in issue 8 of volume 1 of *The Phoenix*.

⁸ [James Summers], review of *The Poetry of the Chinese*, 18.

in Davis's work. The reviewer considered the function of such comparative study of Chinese poetry to be more than simply facilitating understanding and attracting interest, but also providing "valuable advice to translators and critics of this peculiar literature."⁹

While the comparativist method was much valued by Davis and the reviewer, other sinologists, however, were equally alerted to the potential danger of hasty comparative study. For example, the German Protestant missionary Ernst Johann Eitel had warned his fellow sinologists of the problem of the superficial, even ridiculous, comparison between Chinese and other cultures drawn randomly by the "amateur sinologists" and passed off as novel and stunning scholarly discoveries of the time.¹⁰ Speaking from different viewpoints, both Eitel's concern about the risk and Davis's recognition of the value of comparative studies have indicated the importance of the comparative mode in nineteenth-century sinological studies of Chinese literature and of China in general.

This chapter explores the British sinologists' comparative studies of Chinese literature in the historical context when the "comparative method" was popular and comparative literature was developing into a discipline. It looks at the sinologists' attempts to compare the literary terms, genres, devices, styles, values, and particular works of Chinese and European literatures. It sets out to address questions concerning how and why the comparison was made: what literary and extra-literary criteria were adopted to assess Chinese literature's comparability to the European counterparts? How were the similarities or differences between Chinese and European literatures explained and interpreted? What is the significance of the sinologists' comparative studies to British knowledge of Chinese literature and of China in general? By examining the ways in which the comparison unfolded, this chapter seeks to show that the comparative studies were employed both to define the boundary of a "national" Chinese literature and to incorporate Chinese literature into the realm of world literature.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Eitel, "Amateur Sinologist," 3-4.

4.1 Terms, Poetics, and the “Artificiality” of Chinese Poetry

The correspondence between Chinese and English terms for poetry seems to have been quickly established in the nineteenth century. In the English-Chinese dictionaries compiled by the British sinologists, English words such as “poem,” “poetry,” and “verse” were frequently translated by the Chinese character *shi* 詩 (poem or poetry). For example, in Robert Morrison’s *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (1815–1823)—the first English-Chinese dictionary ever published—both “poem” and “verse” are translated as *shi* 詩;¹¹ the missionary-sinologist Walter Henry Medhurst also translated the English words “poem,” “poetry,” and “verse” all as *shi* 詩 in his *English and Chinese Dictionary* (1847–1848).¹²

While it seems that a terminological equivalence has been established, Medhurst’s son, the British consul also named Walter Henry Medhurst, further justified the conceptual correspondence between the Chinese and the English definition of the nature of poetry. At the very beginning of his lecture on Chinese poetry in 1875, Medhurst pointed out that there was a Chinese word—though he did not specify which—that “precisely corresponds to the English word ‘verse,’ *i.e.* words arranged in metrical order, according to certain recognised rules.”¹³ After introducing this Chinese concept for “verse,” he asked a more fundamental question of “how far our notions and those of the Chinese coincide as to what constitutes poetry.” (47) To answer this question, Medhurst provided a “lexicographical definition” of this unnamed Chinese word for “verse” which was

described to be the spontaneous expression in language of the sentiments of the heart, and it is declared to be prompted by the perception of whatever attracts either the admiration or the sympathy and to include within its range of subjects all phases and conditions of life, form, and scenery. (47)

This “lexicographical definition” of Chinese poetry, he found, was in fact a “simple reflex” (47) of the contemporary English poetics on the nature of poetry. To indicate the similarity, Medhurst referred to the poetic ideas of the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822):

¹¹ Robert Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, Part III*, s.vv. “poem,” “verse.”

¹² William Henry Medhurst, *English and Chinese Dictionary*, vol. 2 (Shanghai: Mission Press, 1848), s.vv. “poem,” “poetry.”

¹³ Medhurst, “Chinese Poetry,” 46. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

Shelley, who in his ‘Defence of Poetry’ tells us that poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds; that in a general sense it may be defined to be the expression of the imagination; . . . that a poem is the very image of life, expressed in its eternal truth; and so on. (47)

Though Medhurst did not cite his source of the Chinese “lexicographical definition,” it bears resemblance to an important idea in traditional Chinese poetry criticism which finds the origin of a poem in the poet’s sentiment and emotion. This idea that “poetry follows from sentiment” (*shi yuan qing*, 詩緣情) first appeared in the Chinese critic Lu Ji’s 陸機 (261–303) “Wen fu” 文賦 (The Poetic Exposition on Literature).¹⁴ It was then elaborated by the literary theorist Liu Xie 劉勰 (c.a. 465–c.a. 522) who explained that “man is endowed with seven emotions. When stimulated by external objects, these emotions rise in response. In responding to objects one sings to express his sentiments.”¹⁵ This Chinese poetic notion is comparable to Shelley’s idea in the sense that they both define poetry in psychological terms as interaction between the inner and the outer worlds. In both definitions, poetry is understood as the spontaneous expression of the poet’s emotion and imagination stimulated by external perception. By juxtaposing the two conceptions, Medhurst proposed an analogy between the Chinese and the English Romantic poetics on the nature of poetry. In a like manner, Herbert Giles also identified such affinity as he observed that “poetry has been defined by the Chinese as ‘emotion expressed in words,’ a definition perhaps not more inadequate than Wordsworth’s ‘impassioned expression.’”¹⁶

Though acknowledging the conceptual equipollence between the Chinese and the English terms for poetry and the ideas of poetry, Medhurst was equally conscious of the limit to such correspondence. In the next sentence, he immediately switched the focus and denied any further resemblance between Chinese and European poetry in their characteristics and styles:

When relative character and style come to be taken into consideration, many indications of divergence attract the attention, and it becomes difficult, nay impossible, to apply to the Chinese arts the nomenclature or criticism which are usually brought to bear in reference to European composition. (47)

¹⁴ On Lu Ji’s work and particularly this expression, see Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 130.

¹⁵ Liu Xie 劉勰, *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diao long* 文心雕龍), trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 32. The Chinese original text is as follows: 人稟七情，應物斯感；感物吟志，莫非自然。

¹⁶ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 50.

Medhurst went on to explain that the difference between the Chinese and the English poetic arts was not because there was any “lack of conceptions essentially poetic” in the Chinese poets, but because Chinese poetry was in general

so hampered by their rigid and complex rules of prosody and metrical construction, that the spirit of poetry has not had that free play which it has enjoyed amongst other peoples, and consequently fertility of subject and breadth of treatment have had to give place to artificial structure and rhythmical effect, the result being that poetry in China, is but a cramped and stunted representative of the sister art in other countries.
(47)

Explicitly labelling Chinese poetry as “rigid” and “artificial,” Medhurst considered Chinese poetry as not merely different from, but in fact inferior to (“a cramped and stunted representative”) the poetic art of other cultures. Medhurst’s perception of Chinese poetry as excessively rigid in its construction was not unique at the time, but has its roots in the eighteenth-century view of the “artificiality” of Chinese poetry. This view, mainly informed by the English poetry criticism of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, foregrounds a sense of contrast constructed by the British sinologists and critics between the English and the Chinese poetic ideals.

The idea of the “artificial” nature of Chinese poetry was probably first elaborated by Thomas Percy. In the “Advertisement” to the collection of Chinese poems included in *The Pleasing History*, Percy adopted progressive thinking and roughly distinguished between two stages of human civilisation: one is “a state of wild nature” in which the “customs and notions are few and simple,” and the other is a more civilised society “long trained up in a state of civil policy.”¹⁷ Poetry in these two kinds of civilisation, Percy explained, was accordingly different: in the more “natural” state, poetry was “easy and intelligible to other nations, because it will contain descriptions of the most obvious scenes, and will be animated by such images as are fetched from the first and most striking views of nature,” while poetry of the more developed society was likely to “abound with such constant allusions to their own peculiarities, as will seem harsh and obscure to other nations.”¹⁸ Distinguishing the “natural” and the “civilised” societies indicates Percy’s “primitivist” view of the development of human civilisation in general and of poetry in particular. Primitivism was a historical view developed in eighteenth-century Europe which assumes

¹⁷ Thomas Percy, “Advertisement,” in *The Pleasing History*, 4: 200.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

that “civilisation corrupts the virtues of simplicity and nobility, which can only be rediscovered in remote, undeveloped cultures.”¹⁹ In literary studies, in an attempt to recover the original poetic genius, the Primitivists devoted themselves to re-discovering and preserving the “primitive” literature of ancient times through antiquarian research. Percy himself was an influential advocator for primitivist thinking, especially in his study of English poetry—“the first to entertain the explicit conception of primitive poetry as a whole,”²⁰ according to René Wellek.

In the “Advertisement,” Percy undoubtedly classified China as a highly “civilised” society, and hence commented that the sophisticated “artificial” customs and ideas developed in China had inevitably rendered its poetry very difficult and culturally loaded—the exact opposite of his ideal of the “primitive,” simple poetry:

It is upwards of four thousand years since they [the Chinese] began to form a civilised policed state: their civil and religious ceremonies have in this time become infinitely complicated and numerous: and hence their customs, manners, and notions are the most artificial in the world. It will follow that the beauties of the Chinese poetry must of all other be the most incapable of transfusion into other language, and especially into those whose idioms are so remote and unsuitable as are all those of Europe.²¹

In the “A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese” that follows the “Advertisement,” Percy further noted that artificial poetry was not only commonly seen, but in fact much valued, in China: “in short the more difficult and artificial their compositions [Chinese poetry] are, the more highly are they valued.”²² As a concluding remark to the “Dissertation,” Percy reiterated his conviction that Chinese poetry was the most artificial, or the farthest from the natural, “artless beauties”:

In almost all their [Chinese] poetical productions appears a quaintness and affection; a fondness for little conceits; and a want of that noble simplicity, which is only to be attained by the genuine study of nature, and of its artless beauties: a study to which the Chinese seem to pay the least attention of any people in the world.²³

¹⁹ Dinah Birch and Katy Hooper, eds, *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4th ed., s.v. “primitivism,” <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199608218.001.0001/acref-9780199608218-e-6146>.

²⁰ René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1950*, vol. 1, *The Later Eighteenth Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 126.

²¹ Percy, “Advertisement,” 201.

²² Percy, “A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese,” 213–214.

²³ *Ibid.*, 217.

In 1765, four years after the publication of the “Advertisement” and the “Dissertation” in *The Pleasing History*, Percy compiled and published the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a collection of ancient English ballads and lyrics, in an effort to trace the origin and the history of English poetry. Reading this book in relation to Percy’s sinological research, David Porter points out that China looms large in the *Reliques* as the “model” and, at the same time, also the “convenient antithesis”²⁴ against which Percy had constructed his history of English poetry. Chinese poetry in particular, according to Porter, provides Percy “with a more familiar example of the dangers posed by an excess of refinement.”²⁵ Percy’s worry about the poetic “refinement” was already evident in his critique of the artificiality of Chinese poetry articulated in both the “Advertisement” and the “Dissertation” published four years before the *Reliques*. In this sense, Percy’s discourse on the “artificial” Chinese poetry not only affirmed his primitivist poetic view but also anticipated and prepared for his later work on the history of English poetry.

The early nineteenth-century English Romanticists, influenced by the eighteenth-century primitivist view on poetry,²⁶ also perceived an opposition between the natural and the artificial, between the original, spontaneous expression of passion and the overly refined artistic construction.²⁷ Like the Primitivists, the Romantic poets valued “naturalness” over artificial poetic models. For example, William Wordsworth (1770–1850) advocated for poems written in the “natural language” of men as against the eighteenth-century Neoclassical poetic diction.²⁸ It comes as no surprise that, informed by this general poetic view, the nineteenth-century British sinologists also found Chinese poetry “artificial” as a result of its rigid versification rules and the difficult structure which we have discussed in Chapter 3. Peter Perring Thoms commented that Chinese poetry was “deficient in invention, variety of imagery, sublimity of thought, as well as of boldness of metaphor”²⁹ because the Chinese people and its culture have not been exposed to Christian ideas. Like Percy, Thoms also pointed out the Chinese preference for artificiality in that a poem using parallelism “is considered the most difficult of Chinese poetry, and is greatly

²⁴ Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-century England*, 175.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁶ Seamus Perry, “Romantic Literary Criticism,” in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 371–374.

²⁷ “The Age of Romanticism,” in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, vol. 4, *The Age of Romanticism*, ed. Joseph Black et al. (London: Broadview Press, 2010), liv.

²⁸ René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950*, vol. 2, *The Romantic Age* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 130–134.

²⁹ Thoms, preface to *Chinese Courtship*, v.

admired.”³⁰ Likewise, John Francis Davis also observed that the “parallelism *synthetic*,” one of the three kinds of Chinese parallelism, “pervades their poetry universally, forms its chief characteristic feature, and is the source of a great deal of its artificial beauty.”³¹ By “artificial beauty,” Davis seems to speak from the Chinese perspective of the aesthetic value of this complex prosody.

The harshest criticism of the “artificiality” of Chinese poetry, however, came from Davis’s follower, the young Walter Henry Medhurst. In spite of his discovery of the resemblance between Chinese and English notions of poetry, it was in fact one of his main contentions in the lecture to reveal the laboured and unnatural Chinese poetic composition to the English audience and readers. After a detailed description of the Chinese versification rules, Medhurst restated the idea that “artificiality” was the defining feature of Chinese poetry:

I have thus attempted to describe the principal rules by which Chinese metrical construction is guided, and what I have advanced . . . gives force to the remark with which I commenced, namely, that their laws of versification are of too artificial and rigid a character to afford that scope to the fancy, in giving itself expression, without which it can hardly soar into those higher regions of imagery, where the genius of the poet finds the fittest materials for his art.³²

In Medhurst’s view, the rigid rules had hampered Chinese poetry from evolving into a higher artistic level. His standards that centre on the “imagery” and the “genius of the poet” suggest, again, the influence of Romantic poetics. Almost at the end of his lecture, Medhurst again stressed the predominance of structural consideration in Chinese poems and poetics, and placed it in direct contrast with the English poetics. While the Chinese, as most other cultures, also attributed the essence of poetry to the “justness of the sentiment or metaphor, the beauty of the imagery, and the harmony of the structure,” (53) Medhurst argued, “owing to the singular construction of the [Chinese] language, a certain amount of prominence is accorded” (53) to the “harmony of structure” as against the other two elements. “With us foreigners on the other hand,” he remarked, “measure, rhythm, and rhyme, also form indispensable adjuncts to properly constructed verse; but these are subordinated in importance to design, style, and language. (53)

³⁰ Ibid., ix.

³¹ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 25.

³² Medhurst, “Chinese Poetry,” 51. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

To support the idea that formal elements only came as a secondary concern in English poetry, Medhurst cited the English poet William Cowper's (1731–1800) well-quoted poetic ideal that a poet should “make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic” and make this natural speech “harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme.”³³ In this sense, Medhurst brought the Chinese and the English poetics into a conclusively simplified dichotomy, emphasising the distinction that the English always gave priority to emotional effect in their poetry while the Chinese were obsessed with artificial structures:

The emotional element in fact is what we foreigners lay stress on, as contrasted with the artificial, and herein lies to my mind the difference between our composition and that of the Chinese, and, as a consequence, the difficulty of judging of their verse from our stand-point. (53)

With such definitive conclusion, it seems that Medhurst attempted to draw a marked distinction between the Chinese and English poetic ideals. Though he acknowledged that “taste and imagination, in the sense that we attach to these terms” were also to be found in some Chinese poems, such works, he added, were only “observable now and then, leaving the remainder of the composition only the more rugged and bald by contrast.” (54) With this contrast in mind, Medhurst also questioned the translatability of Chinese poems into the English language, asserting that “as regards translations, there can be little hope of their ever becoming a vehicle for presenting Chinese poetry in an effective form to the foreign reader” because “the rules of prosody and construction are so diametrically opposed to any with which we foreigners are familiar,” so that any literal translation of Chinese poetry into English will end up as “nonsense,” while a “more presentable” versified translation will sacrifice the characteristics of the original. (55) Medhurst's disbelief in the translatability further reinforced the impression of Chinese poetry's singularity, and seemed to deny any possibility of literary communication between Chinese and English poetic traditions.

While Medhurst appeared to be a qualified expert in Chinese poetry to give a lecture on the subject, what is interesting is that he also admitted, near the end of his lecture, that “my reading of Chinese poetry, I must confess, has been but limited.” (55) Whether or not

³³ Ibid., 53. This quotation of William Cowper can be found in his letter to Rev. William Unwin of 17 January 1782, see William Keach, “Poetry, after 1740,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 4, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 140.

this confession was only a gesture of Victorian modesty, it did not stop him, however, from assuring his audience that “but judging from analogy, which one can safely do with a people of stereotyped ideas like the Chinese,” he could confidently assert that Chinese poetry would not interest Western readers as much as the English or American poetry could. (55) Medhurst’s easy confidence that it was possible to “safely” make a generalization of the quality Chinese poetry with his “limited knowledge” was perhaps drawn on two premises: the idea of national literature that the quality and value of a nation’s literature was intrinsically determined by the national character, and the view that Chinese people were unquestionably “stereotyped” and lacking in imaginative power. The fact that Medhurst assumed his confession of “limited knowledge” on Chinese poetry would not undermine his authority on the subject demonstrates the exercise of a form of colonial intellectual power over the assumingly “stereotyped” Chinese people whose literature was seen as inferior to the British literature as well as to the imperialist mind and could be easily understood, evaluated, and managed. His unreserved use of such rhetoric indicates how commonly accepted and shared such imperial intellectual power was in the British views on China at the time. The idea of the “artificiality” of Chinese poetry as the major contrast to English poetry and poetics was thus emphasised, if not constructed, by the British sinologists.

The discourse on the “artificiality” of Chinese poetry remained even until the turn of the nineteenth century. When introducing the basic characteristics of Chinese poetry in his *A History of Chinese Literature*, Herbert Giles remarked that “there is as much artificiality about a stanza of Chinese verse as there is about an Alcaic stanza in Latin.”³⁴ “But in the hands of the most gifted,” he continued to explain, “this artificiality is altogether concealed by art, and the very trammels of tone and rhyme become transfigured, and seem to be necessary aids and adjuncts to success.”³⁵ While the transitional “but” in Giles’s remarks implies that “artificiality” was still considered as a defect of Chinese poetry that needed to be “concealed,” his emphasis on the “gifted hands” of Chinese poets that were able to make use of the complex versification rules in producing artistic poems indicates a more positive and optimistic evaluation of the achievement of Chinese poetry.

³⁴ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 145.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

4.2 Identifying Similarities

While Chinese poetry was considered as being profoundly different from English poetry because of its “artificial” prosody, there were also attempts to discover and emphasise similarities between the two. In an essay on the Chinese language and poetry, George Thomas Staunton pointed out that the difficulty of Chinese poetry “seems to have been imputed to wrong causes.”³⁶ Staunton explained that Chinese and English poetry, though essentially different, shared more common ground than one would expect. He addressed one particular misconception by the Europeans in the early nineteenth century that Chinese poets chose the Chinese characters for a poem because of their shape rather than sound, as John Barrow noted in his *Travels in China* (1804) that “in the Chinese, the beauty of an expression depends entirely on the choice of the character, and not on any selection or arrangement of the monosyllabic sounds.”³⁷ Staunton rejected this idea and explained that the characters of a Chinese poem were not selected for their “component parts,” but, like the English poems, “poetical words are chosen with a special reference to their supposed etymology, or to the meaning which some of their syllables may possess, taken individually.” (66–67) In addition to word choice, Staunton also reminded his readers that the structure of Chinese poetry was “much the same in principle as that of ours.” (67) He described the Chinese versification rules in close comparison to the English poetic forms:

[Chinese] stanzas are *measured* as with us; and the *order* of the characters, that is, of the words, is regulated by what we term their accent or intonation, just as our syllables or words, when monosyllabic, are chosen and placed according to accent or quantity. (67)

To further accentuate the similarity, Staunton argued that Chinese and English poetry were governed by the same rules which brought about poetic beauty as well as difficulty:

The beauty, as well as the difficulty, in these compositions, arising likewise from much the same causes as in ours—namely, the use of images, metaphors, and allusions and sometimes of individual poetical words, which though not trite or

³⁶ George Staunton, “Note on the Chinese Language and Literature,” in *Miscellaneous Notices Related to China* . . . (London: John Murray, 1822), 66. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

³⁷ John Barrow, *Travels in China, containing Descriptions, Observations, and Comparisons . . . from Peking to Canton* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1804), 281.

universally obvious, at once strike the intelligent and well educated reader as happy and appropriate. (67–68)

Staunton's insistence on the affinity between Chinese and English poetry is not simply a change in literary taste, but can be understood, together with his other sinological studies, as a collective effort both to assert the authority of the recently developed British sinology and to improve Anglo-Chinese relations in the early nineteenth century. Staunton, as Peter Kitson notes, held a "comparatively sympathetic response to Chinese culture"³⁸ at the time when criticism of China increased in Britain due to the growing British imperial sentiment and, in particular, to the failure of both the Macartney Embassy to China in 1792 and the Amherst Embassy in 1816.³⁹ As one of the few British sinologists who had a knowledge of the Chinese language and first-hand experience in China in the early nineteenth century, Staunton was devoted to providing more "authentic" representation of the country as against those biased and often unfavourable perceptions commonly seen in travel writings about China. In his influential English translation of the Qing legal code, the *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* (1810), Staunton offered counterarguments to the negative account of the Chinese justice system such as those in John Barrow's *Travels in China*, arguing, for example, that infanticide was not as prevalent in China as Barrow had described.⁴⁰ In his collection of articles on China, Staunton also pointed out that the Chinese moral and education level was, in fact, higher than the foreigners generally assumed.⁴¹ A more sympathetic and positive depiction of China that emphasises the similarities between Chinese and English culture would help to remove the doubts and hostility towards China arising in the early nineteenth-century British public discourse. This would in turn, presumably, strengthen a stable commercial relationship between Britain and Qing China, which was a major concern for Staunton who served as a senior member at the East India Company in Guangzhou.⁴² In this sense, Staunton's comparative study of the Chinese versification rules constitutes an integral part of his general understanding of, as well as attitude towards, China and the early nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relationship.

³⁸ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 105.

³⁹ Zhang, *British Views on China*, 19.

⁴⁰ James St. André, "'But do they have a notion of Justice?' Staunton's 1810 Translation of the Great Qing Code," *The Translator* 10, no. 1 (2004): 18–22; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 102–104.

⁴¹ Staunton, "Essay on the Literary Habits and Character of the Chinese," 8, 12–13.

⁴² Staunton's concern with the Sino-British commercial relations is evident in the fact that half of his *Miscellaneous Notices Related to China* (1822) is devoted to "Commercial Notices." For Staunton's opinion on trade in China and particularly his defence for the East India Company's monopoly in China, see You, "Xiao Sidangdong," 56–63.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Joseph Edkins, the British Protestant missionary who later worked for the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service as a translator from 1880, was also eager to identify similarity between Chinese and English poetic traditions. Edkins was a prolific scholar and translator, primarily renowned for his studies of the Chinese language and grammar as well as his Chinese translation of Western mathematical and scientific works.⁴³ In 1888, he published three articles on Chinese poetry: two on the great Chinese poet Li Bai and one about Chinese poetry during the Warring States period (403–221 BC) and the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220). Unlike Staunton, Edkins discovered resemblance between Chinese and English poetry in their poetic devices and styles rather than in structural features.

In his short article “Li Tai-po as a Poet” published in the *China Review* in 1888, Edkins mainly introduced the poetic styles of the Chinese poet Li Tai-po, or Li Bai.⁴⁴ He pointed out that the Chinese poet’s intuitive genius, deep passion, and a consciousness of power had enabled him to break the versification norms. Edkins explained, for example, that Li Bai wrote short lines and irregular lines whenever he pleased, and he did not spend much time polishing the “roughnesses” of his poems yet was always able to “write brilliant sentences and deal in the pathetic and the sublime.”⁴⁵ In highlighting Li Bai’s poetic genius and free style, Edkins depicted the image of a passionate and imaginative Chinese poet, implicitly challenging the prevailing idea of the “rigidness” or “artificiality” of Chinese poetry. In this article, Edkins compared Li Bai to two prominent British Romantic poets: Robert Burns (1759–1796) and William Wordsworth. Edkins noticed that Li Bai and Burns both reworked and improved old verses into new poems with their literary genius and skill. He remarked that the Chinese poet “acted just as Burns did” in improving an ancient four-character poem “Konghou yin” 箜篌引 (Edkins translated this as “The guitar story”) into his own poem “Gong wu du he” 公無渡河 (Edkins translated the title as “You have no means to cross the river”), and “that class of western poets, of whom Burns is a shining example, would be the fit companions of Li Tai-po whose poems are often filled up with lines gathered from the wide range of early song literature.”⁴⁶ Edkins also observed that Li Bai’s poems were often inspired by, and in turn excellently conveyed,

⁴³ For Edkins’s Chinese translation of Western scientific works, see Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 323–332.

⁴⁴ Joseph Edkins, “Li Tai-po as a Poet,” *The China Review* 17, no.1 (1888): 35–37.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the beauty of nature. After translating and explaining two poems on the local scenery that Li Bai wrote during his visits, Edkins argued that the Chinese poet was comparable to William Wordsworth for their love of nature: “Here he [Li Bai] seems to resemble Wordsworth, who with Coleridge passionately loved every wild and sublime scene in nature but was not less moved by quiet landscapes.”⁴⁷ He also pointed out that Li Bai “greatly exceeds Wordsworth in popularity, having a whole nation at his feet, and there is to the present time no diminution of his fame.”⁴⁸

Edkins’s second, more extensive article on Li Bai and his works—“On Li Tai-po, with Examples of his Poetry”—was published in the *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society*, also in 1888.⁴⁹ This essay was basically comprised of Edkins’s English translation and criticism of twenty-four Chinese poems by Li Bai. In his analytical introduction to each poem, Edkins frequently pointed out the affinity between Li Bai’s poem with those of the English poets including William Shakespeare (1564–1616), John Dryden (1631–1700), William Wordsworth, Lord Byron (1788–1824), and Thomas Gray (1716–1771). For example, Edkins translated Li Bai’s poem “Du zuo Jingting shan” 獨坐敬亭山 (Edkins translated the title as “Still alone on the hill of the arbour of reverence”), which depicts the poet sitting alone and gazing at the Jingting Mountain, imagining that the mountain was, like a man, gazing back at the poet too. In analysing this poem, Edkins noticed “an idealistic element” in Li Bai’s imagination of his communication with the mountain, and observed that the Chinese poet “has something of the communion with nature which is found in Wordsworth and Byron.” (332) Edkins also referred to Thomas Gray’s famous “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” to indicate Li Bai’s comparable skills in describing natural scenery vividly in landscape poems. (340) More often Edkins found coincidence between Li Bai and Shakespeare in their poetic devices of unfolding meaning and feeling from natural objects, (326) of incorporating historical elements in their poems, (327) of enumerating individual objects and sceneries to create the sense of wholeness in description, (338) and of their brief and energetic rhetoric style. (350) These comparisons were mostly intuitive and mentioned by Edkins only in passing; however, collectively they placed the Chinese poet and his poems in an equivalent and comparable position to the important English poets. Contrary to Walter Henry Medhurst’s intention to distinguish the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Joseph Edkins, “On Li Tai-po, with Examples of his Poetry,” *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 2, no. 5 (1888): 317–364. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

Chinese from the European poetic tradition, Edkins situated the Chinese poet in the frame of reference of the history of English poetry, and championed the common poetic minds between Chinese and English literary figures.

In these two articles about Li Bai, Edkins particularly noticed the inspirational role of nature for the poet. The idea of nature's effect on poetry was also elaborated in his essay "Of the Poets of China, during the Period of the Contending States and of the Han Dynasty," in which Edkins discovered a striking resemblance between Chinese and English poetry in this aspect.⁵⁰ In this long article, Edkins introduced twelve Chinese poets and literary figures, including Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340–278 BC), Song Yu 宋玉 (298–222 BC), Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), and many others. Edkins notably emphasised the relation between nature and poetry in a case study of Song Yu, who, as he noted, was "moved" to compose charming poetry by the "impressive grandeur of wild scenery." (213) Nature acted on the imaginative mind of Song Yu, Edkins added, in the way similar to that once described by Wordsworth in his poem "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey." (213) To fully elaborate his view, Edkins analysed Song Yu's "Gaotang fu" (高唐賦, "A descriptive poem of Gaotang"), a rhymed prose text describing the striking scenery of the Wu Gorge on the Yangtze River at the border of Sichuan (now Chongqing) and Hubei provinces. Edkins first briefly introduced the background of this piece of work, arguing that "one of the most potent influences that drew out the Spirit of poetry in him [Song Yu] was the sight of the gorges on the Yang tsi kiang [Yangtze River] at Kau tang [Gaotang]." (213) Then he inserted a description, quoted from the work by an English traveller named Cooper, of the landform and the scenery of the Three Gorges to give the reader a general impression. With this background information, Edkins translated extracts from Song Yu's rhymed prose, followed by an explanation of its meaning with particular interest in showing how the poetic passage was inspired by, and extraordinarily depicted, the geography and the landscape of the Wu Gorge area. (213–216) In an appreciative tone, Edkins remarked that the rich and striking scenery of southwest China "had much to do with the education of the Chinese nation leading to an increased love of poetry, and

⁵⁰ Joseph Edkins, "Of the Poets of China, during the Period of the Contending States and of the Han Dynasty," *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 2, no. 4 (1888): 201–239. In this article, Edkins considered the Chinese *fu* 賦 (rhymed prose) genre as a form of poetry, or, "descriptive poetry" as he translated, see Edkins, "Of the Poets of China," 218. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

devotion to it as a beautiful art to be cultivated.” (216) He imagined that Song Yu “drank at the fountain of natural beauty” at the palace of the King of Chu “as Greek poets were said to drink of the Castalian Spring at the foot of Parnassus,” and the nature “fills the mind with pleasing images gratifying the taste and the imagination, and producing a recreative effect.” (216) This effect of nature on the mind was “much heightened,” he added, by the “sublime in nature” from the magnificent landscape of Sichuan, which stimulated Song Yu to finish his masterpiece. (216)

To adequately convey the sense of close relation between nature and poetry in this Chinese poet, Edkins turned to English poetry for similar cases. He quoted a stanza from the Scottish poet James Beattie’s (1735–1803) *The Minstrel* (1771, 1773) which depicts the poet recalling his emotions being stirred up at an early age by the view of nature. He also quoted a few lines from Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–1818) which expresses the poet’s love for nature. (217) From both the Chinese and the English examples, Edkins concluded that “nature in its sublime and lovely aspects excites high thoughts in the soul,” awakens the imaginative powers, and assists the poet to express these higher thoughts into poetry. (217) He believed that Wordsworth “developed this idea to its fullest extent,” and of which he also saw “an excellent example in Sung Yu, the Chinese poet of two thousand years ago.” (217)

Edkins’ enthusiasm in identifying correspondence between the Chinese and English poets as well as their poetic styles through comparative studies is perhaps derived from his deep-rooted belief in the historical ties between China and the West. Edkins is known for his philological study of the Chinese language, especially for his controversial argument which is already articulated in the title of his *China’s Place in Philology: An Attempt to Show that the Languages of Europe and Asia have a Common Origin* (1871). This idea of the common origin of Chinese and European languages was in turn informed and motivated by his religious understanding. Taking his cue from the biblical notions of the original unity of the human race and the common language, Edkins engaged in extensive comparative philological studies to show that “the languages of Europe and Asia may be conveniently referred to one origin in the Mesopotamian and Armenian region.”⁵¹

⁵¹ Joseph Edkins, introduction to *China’s Place in Philology: an Attempt to Show that the Languages of Europe and Asia have a Common Origin* (London: Trübner & co., 1871), xi. For Edkins’s comparative study of the Chinese and other languages, see Zhang Haiying 張海英, “Yingguo lai hua chuanjiaoshi

To establish the basis for this theory, Edkins advocated the idea of ancient Chinese civilisation originating from the “West,” proven by the remarkable resemblance in agriculture, astrology, government, and customs between ancient Chinese civilisation and that of the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians.⁵² As Benjamin Penny and Norman Girardot respectively show in their studies, Edkins, as a Protestant missionary in China, developed his comparativist philological study from a “religiously committed perspective,”⁵³ which is “buttressed on the one hand by his firm belief in the literal truth of Scripture, and on the other by an ethic of the common brotherhood of all peoples.”⁵⁴ Edkins’s belief and discourse on the shared history between China and the West in turn provide evidence for the existence of common human nature in the East and the West alike, which serves to justify his missionary work in China. In a similar manner, his comparative discourse on Chinese poetry which highlights the universal literary mind and poetic inspiration from nature was also derived from, as well as confirms, the same underlying world view and religious expectation.

4.3 Question of the Epic

In their studies of Chinese poetry, one thing generally noticed and discussed by the nineteenth-century sinologists is whether or not epic poetry exists in China. The epic genre becomes an important point of inquiry to the sinologists probably because it has been generally related to the status and the legitimacy of a culture and its literature. According to Paul Innes, epic, “once considered to be the highest literary form,” “is an identifiable literary form with a crucial cultural prominence” that, through grand narratives of the myths of origin, defines the culture or society in which it exists.⁵⁵ Pauline Yu also views the epic as “an extended narrative that can provide origins, structure, and meaning to a

Ai Yuese de hanyu yanjiu” 英國來華傳教士艾約瑟的漢語研究 (On Joseph Edkins’s Chinese language studies) (PhD dissertation, Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2014), 91–100.

⁵² Edkins, *China’s Place in Philology*, 1–30. For Edkins’s idea of the Western origin of the Chinese civilisation, see Chen Zhe 陳喆, “Jiedu shenmi de dongfang—Lundunhui chuanjiaoshi Ai Yuese de Zhongguo wenming xi lai shuo yanjiu” 解讀神秘的東方——倫敦會傳教士艾約瑟的中國文明西來說研究 (Interpreting the mystic Orient—Joseph Edkins’s theory of the Western origin of the Chinese civilisation) (PhD dissertation, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2008).

⁵³ Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*, 154.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Penny, “More than One Adam? Revelation and Philology in Nineteenth-century China,” *Humanities Research* 14, no. 1 (2007): 46.

⁵⁵ Paul Innes, *Epic* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.

culture,”⁵⁶ when she argues that the Chinese commentators’ interpretation of the Chinese *Book of Poetry* is the “functional equivalent”⁵⁷ to the Western epic. To the British poets and critics in the nineteenth century, epic poetry is still culturally meaningful, for example, in thinking about ideas of modernity as opposed to the classical civilisation,⁵⁸ or in the conception of empire.⁵⁹ Epic’s literary and cultural significance perhaps explains the sinologists’ preoccupation with the question of epic in China. They tend to illustrate, explain, and evaluate the nature and value of Chinese poetry and of Chinese culture through this particular example. What is illuminating here, therefore, is not the validity of such claims about whether or not the epic genre exists in China, but the attitudes and the discourses revealed from the sinologists’ interpretation, explanation, and evaluation that are associated with their answers to the “epic question.”

It was generally acknowledged among the British sinologists that epic poetry in its strict Homeric form did not exist in China, which was already noticed before the nineteenth century. For example, Thomas Percy remarked in his “Dissertation of the Poetry of the Chinese” that Chinese poetry was generally of an “epigrammatic kind” which consists of trivial difficulties (“*difficiles nugae*”) that “good taste and sound criticism have taught Europeans to neglect.”⁶⁰ “It does not appear that they [the Chinese] have ever attempted any of the greater kinds of Poesy,” observed Percy, “this at least is true of the Epic.”⁶¹ In a slightly contemptuous tone, Percy seems to consider the lack of epic poetry in China as evidence for the opposite and inferior position of Chinese poetry to that of the European poetic tradition.

The nineteenth-century British sinologists held more varied interpretations to the question. Peter Perring Thoms observed that “though the Chinese are fond of poetry, they have no Epic poems.”⁶² He explained that because the Chinese poets were confined by the “ancient laws laid down,” (iv) even the most genius and imaginative poet failed to break

⁵⁶ Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Richard Jenkyns, “The Idea of Epic in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Epic Interactions: Perspectives on Homer, Virgil, and the Epic Tradition Presented to Jasper Griffin by Former Pupils*, ed. M. J. Clarke, B. G. F. Currie, and R. O. A. M. Lyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 302–330.

⁵⁹ Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ Percy, “A Dissertation on the Poetry of the Chinese,” 216.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶² Thoms, preface to *Chinese Courtship*, iii.

the rules to write anything other than “short description.” (iv) However, length was certainly not the only criteria Thoms had in mind for epic poetry, since the Chinese poem he had translated, the *Chinese Courtship*, was itself a long narrative one. Thoms attributed the absence of epic to the key idea in Chinese poetics that “the Chinese prefer a slight allusion to a subject, rather than amplify it,” (iv) which was similar to the idea of “suggestion” later explained by Herbert Giles. Thoms seemed to have a rather balanced view as he mentioned both the disadvantages and the benefits of the lack of epic in China: “while they [the Chinese] are wanting of those beauties which distinguish the works of the Roman and Grecian Poets, they have nothing that resembles the extravagances of their Gods and Goddesses.”⁶³

John Francis Davis likewise noted that, in Chinese poetry, there was “no composition, however, to which the name of Epic could properly be applied.”⁶⁴ Then, as if to reduce the sense of disparity between Chinese and European poetry, he immediately questioned the assumed universality of the epic genre in all cultures. He argued that “there seem to be no absolute necessity for supposing that it [the Homeric epic] must have arisen, or at least been so frequent, in our western literature,” (41) and the subsequent epics in Europe had always been the imitation of epics in previous ages. Davis also cited an anecdote that Voltaire was once told by a friend that “les Français n’ont pas la tête épique,” (the French do not have the mindset for the epic) (42) to support the idea that the epic was not a universal genre. In explaining why the epic does not exist in China, Davis turned to the unique characteristics of Chinese versification rules. He believed that the complex structural rules of Chinese prosody had deterred Chinese poets from composing excessively long poems:

The first part of this treatise may perhaps have served to demonstrate, that the turn and construction of Chinese verse unfits for such sustained compositions. To be esteemed good, it must be so highly elaborated, that the costliness of the material may place limits to the size of the structure. It would be a tremendous attempt to preserve such nicely balanced couplets through the slow length of an epic poem; not to mention, that when the task had been completed, it might weary the reader as much as it had disquieted the author, and bestow upon the first all the sleep of which it had deprived the second. (42)

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 41. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

Later sinologists also considered the incompatibility between Chinese prosody and the long epic form as a valid reason for the absence of epic in China, but they referred to this explanation with different emphasis and implications. In his lecture on Chinese poetry, Walter Henry Medhurst basically paraphrased Davis's wording and remarked that "there is no style of verse to which the name of Epic can properly be applied, nor need this be a matter of surprise, when it is remembered how unsuited the laboured construction of Chinese poetry would be for such long-sustained compositions."⁶⁵ Medhurst seemed to deliberately omit the part in which Davis tried to justify the lack of epic in China by explaining that the epic genre was neither universal nor deep-rooted in the Western poetic tradition. Instead, Medhurst highlighted the complexity of Chinese prosody as the only reason that impeded Chinese poets from making epic poetry, which reinforced his argument of the "artificial" and "rigid" Chinese poetic rules. In a lecture on Chinese language and literature delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in the same year as Medhurst's lecture on Chinese poetry, Robert Kennaway Douglas also informed his audience that "of epic poetry the Chinese know nothing."⁶⁶ Unlike Medhurst, Douglas adopted Davis's view that the epic genre did not appear ubiquitously in all cultures, as he stated that the absence of epic in China "need not surprise us when we remember how entirely that style of writing was an importation from Greece into Western Europe."⁶⁷ He also copied the remark of Voltaire's friend quoted by Davis, and commented that the Chinese did not have the "mindset for epic" either. Douglas attributed the lack of epic in China not only to the complex versification rules but also, more importantly, to the limited imaginative power of the Chinese people: "a sustained effort of imagination is difficult to them, and the strict laws of rhyme and metre which hamper the poet would make a lengthened poem in Chinese the work of a lifetime."⁶⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, Douglas has criticised Chinese drama and novels for their deficiency of imagination; here the idea was reinforced once again in the case of epic poetry.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Herbert Giles explained the epic question from yet another perspective. The epic genre was no longer regarded as something "missing" from Chinese poetry, something that rendered Chinese poetry incomplete when judged by European standards. Instead, similar to Thoms's view, Giles explained the absence of epic

⁶⁵ Medhurst, "Chinese poetry," 53.

⁶⁶ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 108.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

in China simply as the result of “difference” between Chinese and English poetic tastes that “a long poem does not appeal to the Chinese mind.”⁶⁹ He disagreed with the idea to attribute the lack of epic poetry to the difficulty of Chinese prosody or the deficient imaginative power of Chinese people, because apparently “there are many pieces extending to several hundred lines”⁷⁰ in Chinese poetry. It was not that their versification rules were unsuitable, nor that the Chinese poets were incapable of writing long poems, Giles argued, but because “brevity is indeed the soul of a Chinese poem, which is valued not so much for what it says as for what it suggests.”⁷¹ This explanation was consistent with his basic understanding and description of the Chinese poetics, in which “suggestion” was regarded as the core spirit.

The sinologists’ particular attention on the epic question seems to suggest a general preoccupation with the universality of European literature and literary history as the framework of reference in thinking about foreign literature. The lack of epic poetry in China, therefore, marks a notable difference between Chinese and European poetry and thus excludes China from the scope and history of the European model of poetry development. With the same discovery that epic poetry does not exist in China, however, the sinologists approached the epic question with different interpretations ranging from rather neutral justification in the writings by Thoms, Davis, and Giles, to the more derogatory comments by Douglas pointing to the deficiency of Chinese poets’ imaginative power. Their answers to the epic question were inevitably embedded with their own perception of, and attitudes towards, Chinese poetry, literature, and China in general.

The nineteenth-century sinologists’ writings on the epic question also laid the ground for further investigation carried out in both Chinese and English scholarship after the nineteenth century. According to Lin Gang’s analytical review, Chinese intellectuals and scholars in the early twentieth century noticed the problem of epic’s place in Chinese literature in their attempt to re-evaluate traditional Chinese literature, partly as the result of the introduction of Western literature and literary criticism to China at the time.⁷² Perhaps influenced by foreign scholars’ research—not necessarily those by the British

⁶⁹ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Lin Gang 林崗, “Ershi shiji hanyu shishi wenti tanlun” 二十世紀漢語史詩問題探論 (A study on the exploration of the “epic question” in twentieth-century China), *Chinese Social Science* 中國社會科學, no.1 (2007): 131–142.

sinologists though—the Chinese intellectuals came to a similar conclusion that epic poetry in the Western sense was nowhere to be found in Chinese literature—though some also argued that certain narrative poems from the *Book of Poetry* could be considered as the equivalent form. More recent academic research, such as those by Pauline Yu and C. H. Wang, seek to identify elements of the Western epic genre in traditional Chinese poetry, particularly in the *Book of Poetry*, or in other literary forms.⁷³ Though, as it is announced, “the ‘epic question’ in early Chinese literature is perhaps a dead issue”⁷⁴ now, the constant attempts to address this question in the East and the West since the nineteenth century could tell us more about the changing concerns, anxieties, and conceptions in Chinese and European poetics, as well as the relation between the two.

4.4 Chinese Drama and the Classical Models

As mentioned in Chapter 3, throughout the nineteenth century, the English word “drama” was used by the British sinologists as the umbrella term for various forms of Chinese dramatic arts. By “Chinese drama,” the sinologists primarily referred to the written form of *zaju* scripts, and also included—sometimes used interchangeably with “theatre” or “theatricals”—the theatrical performances which we today normally call “opera” as in the Peking opera, the Kunqu opera, and the Cantonese opera. That the term and the idea of “drama” was readily and widely adopted in sinological writings to describe Chinese dramatic arts was probably for the purpose of identifying a “poetry, drama, novel” trinity in Chinese literature that parallels the Western prototype.

It was possible that, when describing Chinese drama, the British sinologists always had in mind the classical Greek drama with its chorus singing. Since the eighteenth century, the European sinologists and critics had frequently discussed Chinese drama in relation to

⁷³ For a brief review of the twentieth-century research on the epic question, see C. H. Wang, “Towards Defining a Chinese Heroism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95, no.2 (1975): 25–26. On reading the *Book of Poetry* as epic, see Yu, *The Reading of Imagery*, 79–80; C. H. Wang, *From Ritual to Allegory: Seven Essays in Early Chinese Poetry* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988), 73–114. Scholars from mainland China also identify lengthy oral narrative poems in the ethnic minority cultures as epics, see Feng Wenkai 馮文開, “20 shijie Zhongguo shishixue yanjiu de quanshi yu sikao” 20 世紀中國史詩學研究的詮釋與思考 (A review of epic studies in China in the twentieth century), *Ethnic Arts Quarterly* 民族藝術, no. 3 (2011): 73–76.

⁷⁴ Joseph Roe Allen III, “The End and the Beginning of Narrative Poetry in China,” *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 2, no. 1 (1989): 1

the classical dramatic models, either to evaluate Chinese plays according to the classical theories or to assess the similarities between Chinese and Greek drama. Patricia Sieber in her *Theatres of Desire* traces briefly the reception of Chinese drama in Europe during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. She found that the French criticism of Chinese drama in the eighteenth century was “centered around formal criteria,”⁷⁵ notably the Neoclassical rule of unities.⁷⁶ For example, in the “Advertisement” to Joseph-Henri de Prémare’s translation of *The Orphan of the House of Zhao*, Du Halde observed that in this Chinese play “the three unities of time, place, and action are not to be expected, nor yet the other rules observed by us to give regularity to works of this sort.”⁷⁷ Instead of judging the violation of the unities as a “defect” of Chinese drama, Du Halde took a relativist view and explained that, since the Chinese “lived as it were in a world by themselves,” the European readers should “not to be surprised if the rules of our drama are unknown to the Chinese.”⁷⁸ In spite of Du Halde’s sympathetic justification, however, *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* was still frequently criticised for breaching the rule of the unities by other French critics. For example, after reading Prémare’s translation, Voltaire commented that the Chinese play lacked unity of time and action.⁷⁹ In his own adaptation, the *L’Orphelin de la Chine* (The Orphan of China, 1753), Voltaire altered the setting and the structure of the original story to make it observe the rule of the three unities.⁸⁰ Marquis d’Argens (1704–1771), a friend of Voltaire’s, also found fault in this Chinese play because of its violation of the laws of the unities, of decorum, and of probability.⁸¹

Apart from differences, the eighteenth-century European critics also noticed similarities between the Chinese and the Greek drama. Unlike the French, Sieber finds that “English critics tended to be more generous” and “less formalist” in their writings on Chinese drama.⁸² For example, the English critic Richard Hurd (1720–1808) analysed the structure

⁷⁵ Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 17.

⁷⁶ The rule of the three unities, derived from Aristotelian poetics on drama and developed during the neoclassical period, requires a play to take place at a single place during twenty-four hours around the main story. It is one of the fundamental structural principles proposed by critics and dramatists, especially in France, during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, see Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. “unities, the,” <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1185>

⁷⁷ Du Halde, advertisement to “Tchao Chi Cou Ell: or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao,” 195.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Chen, “The Chinese Orphan,” 369; Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 17.

⁸⁰ Chen, “The Chinese Orphan,” 371.

⁸¹ Fan, *Zhongguo wenhua zai qimeng shiqi de Yingguo*, 129–132.

⁸² Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 17.

and the plot of *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* in 1751,⁸³ and argued that this Chinese play had unexpectedly observed the two essential rules—the unity and concentration of action—of classical dramatic poetry “with a degree of exactness.”⁸⁴ He remarked that “the general plan or structure” of the Chinese *Orphan* “agrees very well to the Greek form,” (231) in addition to other “several lesser marks of coincidence between this Chinese and the Grecian models” (230) in their plots, expressions, and the use of songs. Hurd attributed this “identity of composition” between Chinese and Greek drama to the “common sense” (231) and “common principles” (232) in artistic creation. According to Chen Shouyi’s research, Hurd’s comparative analysis was chiefly drawn to illustrate his poetic belief in a universal principle of imitation in different cultures.⁸⁵ Hurd deleted this comparative discourse on the Chinese play, however, in the third and the fourth editions of his book, perhaps because, as Thomas Percy suggested, the author felt he had excessively praised the Chinese play and exaggerated its resemblances to Greek drama.⁸⁶

In the nineteenth century, the British sinologists also adopted a similar mode to read Chinese plays with classical drama criticism. The rule of unities must still have maintained its prescriptive power until the early nineteenth century as it continued to act as an important criterion in the sinologists’ writings on Chinese drama. John Barrow found that, in the Chinese play *An Heir in His Old Age* translated by John Francis Davis, “the unity and integrity of action and design are strictly adhered to, and all the incidents are closely connected with the story.”⁸⁷ Though it was obvious that the unity of time was violated since the play covered a period of three years, it does not seem a serious problem to Barrow because “the events follow each other in so natural a manner, and with such uninterrupted rapidity, that the time elapsed would not be perceived.”⁸⁸ Contrary to his usual negative

⁸³ The analysis of this Chinese play was part of Hurd’s article “On the Poetic Imitation,” originally published in his *Commentary on Horace’s Epistle to Augustus* (1751). Thomas Percy extracted this part and titled it as “On the Chinese Drama, from Mr. Hurd’s Discourse on Poetical Imitation” in his *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the Chinese*. For a study of Hurd’s criticism of this Chinese play, also see Chen, “The Chinese Orphan,” 364–365.

⁸⁴ Richard Hurd, “On the Chinese Drama, from Mr. Hurd’s Discourse on Poetical Imitation,” in *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the Chinese*, ed. Thomas Percy (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1762) 1: 227. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

⁸⁵ Chen, “The Chinese Orphan,” 364.

⁸⁶ Percy, “Advertisement,” 217. Chen Shouyi also notes that Hurd’s analysis of *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* is “not justifiable,” and the resemblance Hurd had observed between Chinese and Greek drama is “exaggeration.” See Chen, “The Chinese Orphan,” 365.

⁸⁷ [Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama,” xli.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Davis must have agreed with Barrow on this point, as he copied Barrow’s words later in his own work, see Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 196–197.

evaluation of China, Barrow's justification for *An Heir in His Old Age's* violation of the Western standards was probably his strategy to endorse and advertise the value of John Francis Davis's English translation to which Barrow's article was attached as an introduction.

Davis himself likewise advocated the structural legitimacy of other Chinese plays he had translated. When introducing the Chinese play *The Sorrows of Han*, he argued that in this Chinese play "the unity of action is complete, and the unities of time and place much less violated than they frequently are on our own stage."⁸⁹ The tension over the difference between Chinese plays and the classical rules was further resolved as Davis questioned more thoroughly the appropriateness of judging Chinese drama by the rule of unities. In his *The Chinese* (1836), he brought Greek drama into discussion and argued that "the occasional, though not very frequent or outrageous, violation of the *unities* in the Chinese drama may easily be matched in most other languages, and examples of the same occur even in some of the thirty-three Greek tragedies that remain to us."⁹⁰ He then gave a list of the Greek plays that he considered to breach the rule of unities: "for the unity of *action* is not observed in the *Hercules Furens* of Euripides; nor that of *time* in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, the *Trachynians* of Sophocles, and the *Suppliants* of Euripides; nor that of *place* in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus."⁹¹ Suggesting that the violation of the unities was far more common than the European critics would have imagined, Davis expressed his post-Neoclassical belief in the invalidity of the rule of unities:

The unimportance, however, of a rigid attention to these famous unities has long since been determined, and it is admitted that even Aristotle, to whom they have all been attributed, mentions only that of action at any length, merely hints at that of time, and of place says nothing whatever.⁹²

With the declining power of the Neoclassical dramatic theories in the course of the nineteenth century, the later generations of British sinologists very seldom assessed Chinese drama by the criterion of the unities, except, perhaps, for Robert Kennaway Douglas who notably held a critical attitude towards Chinese literature in general. In his lecture on Chinese literature, he mentioned in passing that, in Chinese drama, "the unities,

⁸⁹ Davis, preface to *The Sorrows of Han*, vi. The same argument also appeared in an article by Davis published in the *Quarterly Review*, see [Davis], "Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance," 86.

⁹⁰ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 192.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹² *Ibid.*

though sometimes observed, are more often disregarded, especially that of place, the characters being frequently sent to different parts of the country in the same act.”⁹³ Apart from Douglas, it never seems to have been a concern for George Carter Stent, William Stanton, or Herbert Giles to evaluate Chinese drama by the rule of the unities.

Apart from being measured by the classical theories, Chinese drama was also often compared with Greek drama on various aspects by the nineteenth-century British sinologists. One of the most obvious resemblances noticed between the two was the way in which the actors introduced their names, roles, and the opening plots to the audience when they first entered the stage. John Barrow noted that this practice “bears a strong resemblance to the prologues of Greek drama, and particularly to those of Euripides.”⁹⁴ John Francis Davis also observed that the Chinese characters introduced themselves “very much after the fashion of the Greek tragedy.”⁹⁵ This, and the fact that both the Chinese and Greek drama frequently violated the rule of the unities were considered by Davis as evidence indicating that “the management of the Chinese plays assimilates them very remarkably to that of the Greek drama.”⁹⁶ Another possible link was the use of songs in Chinese plays and the chorus in Greek drama. John Barrow found that “the lyrical composition” of Chinese drama “certainly bear a strong resemblance to the chorus of the old Greek tragedy; like the chorus too, they are sung with an accompaniment of music.”⁹⁷ Davis, however, disagreed with Barrow on this point, arguing that the Chinese songs and the Greek chorus played very different roles in plays:

The musical portions, in accordance with the Chinese theory of poetry, express the most passionate parts, and therefore belong only to the principal characters. In this respect there is no resemblance to the Greek theatre, where the chorus, as a distinct body, sang together, or in responsive parts called strophe and antistrophe.⁹⁸

After Davis, again, there was hardly any specific, detailed comparison between Chinese and Greek drama in later sinological writings, though it still seemed common to relate the two. In his brief description of the Chinese theatrical performance, Robert Kennaway Douglas claimed that “by the rules of the Chinese, as was the case also in the Greek drama,

⁹³ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 110.

⁹⁴ [Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama,” xliii–xliv.

⁹⁵ [Davis], “Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance,” 94.

⁹⁶ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 192.

⁹⁷ [Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama”, xlii.

⁹⁸ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 197–198.

only two players are allowed to have possession of the stage at any one time.”⁹⁹ He also remarked that “the theatre is in China, as it was in Greece, national and religious,” because the Chinese drama was “under the direct control of the law” and also “plays a prominent part at all the yearly religious festivals.”¹⁰⁰ Regardless of the validity of such simple analogy, the comparison itself has indicated, and in turn reinforced, Douglas’s general intention to adopt Greek dramatic tradition as the frame of reference in describing and explaining Chinese drama.

As classical Greek drama was generally perceived as the touchstone for dramatic art, it was probably just natural to measure Chinese drama by the yardstick of classical theatre when it first came to the sinologists’ notice. Despite the prestige of Greek drama, however, there may be a more fundamental reason for the comparison, which reveals the sinologists’ conception of Chinese drama in general. As mentioned, “Chinese drama” was used indiscriminately by the sinologists for not only the various forms but also the different stages of Chinese theatrical arts—from the *zaju* which flourished in the fourteenth century to contemporary local plays in the nineteenth century. To assert that this (false) aggregation of “Chinese drama” was comparable to the ancient Greek plays was to suggest that Chinese drama was likewise antique and had not progressed since its origins. William Frederick Mayers stressed the unchanging nature of Chinese drama as he commented that “we may confidently presume that very slight difference exist between the gorgeously-appointed representations [of Chinese plays] of the present day and those placed on stage a thousand years ago.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, the two aspects by which the Chinese theatre was considered similar to the ancient Greek drama—the actors’ self-introduction and the use of songs—were devices no longer to be found in European drama long before the nineteenth century. The fact that Chinese drama was compared with Greek drama particularly in these two aspects speaks precisely of the sinologists’ perception of the “backwardness” of Chinese drama.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 109–110. It might often be the case that only two players were seen on the stage in a Chinese theatrical performance, but it was never a prescriptive rule in Chinese theatre as it was in early Greek drama.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁰¹ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 87.

¹⁰² The nineteenth-century French critic J-J Ampère also observed that the practice of Chinese actors’ self-introduction indicated that Chinese dramatic art was at “a simple and elementary stage” (*un degré de simplicité tout élémentaire*), see J-J Ampère, “Du théâtre chinois,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Tome Quinzième, Quatrième Série (1838): 744. For the nineteenth-century French sinologists’ studies of

This perception was also evident in the fact that Chinese drama was never compared with contemporary European drama in the sinologists' writings. On the contrary, it was universally acknowledged that Chinese drama, in both its play scripts and theatrical performances, was not as good—or, advanced—as nineteenth-century European dramatic art. George Carter Stent clarified at the beginning of his lecture on Chinese theatre that “it is not my intention to hold up Chinese theatres as models for us to imitate; for they are infinitely behind ours in regard to scenery and mechanical appliances.”¹⁰³ Robert Kennaway Douglas was also fully convinced that “even in the most finished works [of Chinese drama] of the best period [the Yuan dynasty] there is a want of those touches of fancy and that play of imagination which we look for in the works of European playwrights.”¹⁰⁴ Many stories in the *One Hundred Yuan Plays*, the collection of best Chinese plays, would appear “coarse” “if judged by a European standard,”¹⁰⁵ according to Douglas. He also described the stagnant, even declining, state of Chinese drama saying that “unhappily the dramatic art has not advanced in China as in Europe, and the plays of later ages, so far from improving in matter and manner on those of the twelfth century, have rather retrograded.”¹⁰⁶ Herbert Giles likewise informed his reader, after translating a piece of a short Chinese play which he dismissed as “doggerel,”¹⁰⁷ that “even the longer and more elaborate [Chinese] plays are proportionately wanting in all that makes the drama piquant to a European.”¹⁰⁸ While the nineteenth-century sinologists varied in their understanding and evaluation of Chinese poetry, they were relatively uniform in their discourse on Chinese drama. Perceived as archaic and inferior, this is perhaps why the Chinese drama receives less attention from the nineteenth-century British sinologists than Chinese poetry and the novel.

Chinese drama, see Li Shengfeng 李聲鳳, *Zhongguo xiqu zai Faguo de fanyi yu jieshou, 1789–1870* 中國戲曲在法國的翻譯與接受, 1789–1870 (Translation and reception of Chinese drama in France) (Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015).

¹⁰³ Stent, “Chinese Theatrical,” 90.

¹⁰⁴ Douglas, *China*, 430.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 431.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xxxi.

¹⁰⁷ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 263.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 268.

4.5 Question of the Tragedy

In line with their intention to draw parallels between Chinese and Greek drama, the sinologists and critics asked a more specific question about whether the Chinese people distinguished between comedy and tragedy, or whether the genre of tragedy also existed in China. Though Du Halde entitled *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* as a “Chinese tragedy” in his *General History*, he also clarified that “the Chinese, says P. de Prémare, make no distinction between tragedies and comedies, and I have only called this [*The Orphan of the House of Zhao*] a tragedy on account of the tragical incidents.”¹⁰⁹ An almost identical remark also appeared in Thomas Percy’s English translation of the French version of this Chinese play in *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the Chinese*.¹¹⁰ Though Du Halde had explained that the Chinese had no “tragedy” proper, Patricia Sieber notices in her research that the term was still subsequently employed in the titles of “all mid-eighteenth-century adaptations of Prémare’s *Orphan*,”¹¹¹ including those by Hatchett, Voltaire, Murphy, and Percy.

Perhaps in response to this dubious use of the term “tragedy” applied to Chinese drama, John Francis Davis repeatedly argued that, while the genre of tragedy as a whole was absent in China, some Chinese plays, especially those he had translated, nonetheless met the generic criteria and deserved the title “tragedy.” In the preface to his English translation *The Sorrows of Han*, Davis explained that his choice of the original Chinese play was “influenced by the consideration of its remarkable accordance” with the Western “canons of criticism.”¹¹² He explained that though “the Chinese themselves make no regular classification of comedy and tragedy,” the term “tragedy” was still applicable to this particular Chinese play “which so completely answers to the European definition.” (vi) He then gave a list of all the formal and stylistic elements in *The Sorrows of Han* that he presumed comparable to the Greek tragedy:

The unity of action is complete, and the unities of time and place much less violated than they frequently are on our own stage. The grandeur and gravity of the subject,

¹⁰⁹ Du Halde, advertisement to “Tchao Chi Cou Ell: or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao,” 195–196.

¹¹⁰ Percy translated Du Halde’s remark as “P. Prémare tells us that the Chinese make no distinction between tragedy and comedy. This is called a tragedy only because its catastrophe is tragical,” see, Percy, trans., “The Introduction of the French Editor to the Little Orphan of the House of Chao: A Chinese Tragedy,” in Percy, *Miscellaneous Pieces relating to the Chinese*, 1: 108.

¹¹¹ Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 16.

¹¹² Davis, preface to *The Sorrows of Han*, vi.

the rank and dignity of the personages, the tragical catastrophe, and the strict award of poetical justice, might satisfy the most rigid admirer of Grecian rules.¹¹³

Like John Barrow's justification of *An Heir in His Old Age*'s violation of the rule of unities, a practical motivation behind Davis's assertion of the tragic nature of *The Sorrows of Han* was probably also to confirm and promote the value of his translation. By describing the Chinese play according to the rules of tragedy, Davis endeavoured to elevate the literary position of this Chinese work, and to make it appear more familiar to the English readers. Apart from the promotional purpose, Davis also tried to provide renewed insight into the artistic value of Chinese drama, in order to establish his authority as a nineteenth-century British sinologist. The very same argument repeatedly appeared in his *On the Poetry of the Chinese* (1829), in the article "Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance" published in *Quarterly Review* (1829), and in "The Drama, Novels, and Romances" in his *Chinese Miscellanies* (1865).¹¹⁴ In his *The Chinese* (1836), Davis provided another slightly different response to the tragedy question in which he suggested one could distinguish comedy and tragedy in Chinese drama by the subject theme depicted and the dialogue style used:

As the Chinese make no regular distinction between tragedy and comedy in their stage pieces, the claims of these to either title must be determined by the subject, and the dialogue. The line is in general pretty strongly marked; in the former by the historical or mythological character of the personages, the grandeur and gravity of the subject, the tragical drift of the play, and the strict award of what is called poetical justice; in the latter, by the more ordinary or domestic grade of the dramatis personae, the display of ludicrous characters and incidents, and the interweaving of jests into the dialogue.¹¹⁵

Though he did not bring any of these assertions on the characteristics of the Chinese "tragedy" into further analysis, by adopting a more flexible notion and qualifying certain Chinese plays as tragedy, Davis tried to revise the simple conclusion that tragedy did not exist in China drawn by the eighteenth-century sinologists and critics; instead, he provided a different perspective of reading Chinese plays, and constructed new and seemingly more profound insight into the nature of Chinese drama.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 38; [Davis], "Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance," 86; Davis, "The Drama, Novels, and Romances," in *Chinese Miscellanies: A Collection of Essays and Notes*, 92.

¹¹⁵ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 190–191.

Davis's categorization of *The Sorrows of Han* as a tragedy is coincidentally shared by Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927), the Chinese expert who tried to explain the art and history of Chinese drama according to Western literary theories in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁶ It was denied, however, by many European sinologists in the nineteenth century. According to Patricia Sieber, the German critics such as J. L. Klein (1810–1876) and Rudolf von Gottschall (1832–1909) opposed the idea of the Chinese “tragedy,” arguing from more literary and philosophical aspects that the typical elements for a tragedy such as individual destiny, dramatic conflict, and the historical spirit were absent in Chinese plays.¹¹⁷ Neither was Davis's interpretation accepted by later generations of British sinologists, except, perhaps, by the young Walter Henry Medhurst who remarked in a rhetoric similar to Davis's that the Chinese “do not recognise the distinction which we understand to exist between tragedy and comedy, although it is always possible of course for a translator to apply these terms according to the character of the composition which he selects.”¹¹⁸ In introducing the Chinese play *The Sorrows of Han* and Davis's English translation, Robert Kennaway Douglas seemed to think it unnecessary to justify whether or not this Chinese play was a tragedy; instead, he considered *The Sorrows of Han* as a historical play, a completely different class from tragedy, when he categorised Chinese drama according to their topics: “historical events are very commonly selected as topics for the legitimate drama; while the materials for tragedies, comedies, and farces are found in the events of daily life.”¹¹⁹ Herbert Giles also denied the existence of tragedy in China. When explaining the difference between military and civil plays in China, Giles found that these two kinds of plays “have often been wrongly taken in the senses of tragedy and comedy.”¹²⁰ He reminded his reader that “tragedy proper being quite unknown in China,” while *The Orphan of the House of Zhao* was “the nearest approach which the Chinese have made to genuine tragedy.”¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Wang Guowei argued in 1915 that “there are tragedies (*beiju* 悲劇) among extant Yuan plays, such as *Han gong qiu* 漢宮秋 (The Sorrows of Han) and *Wutong yu* 梧桐雨 (Rain on the parasol trees).” Wang Guowei 王國維, *Song Yuan xiqu shi* 宋元戲曲史 (History of drama during the Song and Yuan dynasties) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996), 102.

¹¹⁷ Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 18.

¹¹⁸ Medhurst, “Chinese poetry,” 53.

¹¹⁹ Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xxiv.

¹²⁰ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 261.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Reviewing the European discourse of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries on the applicability of “tragedy” to Chinese plays, Patricia Sieber points out that the history of the reception of Chinese drama in Europe “illustrates how changing definitions of tragedy and the increasingly national, if not civilisational, dimension of this reception progressively marginalised Chinese theatre in the eyes of European critics.”¹²² Like epic poetry, the “tragedy question” was still widely debated and discussed in the twentieth century. Studies aiming to explain the reason for the lack of tragedy in China¹²³ or proposing to establish the Chinese “tragedy” model continue to appear,¹²⁴ indicating the enduring prestige of the tragedy genre in European literary tradition and the significance of this tragedy question to transcultural understanding of Chinese drama.

4.6 Novel, Romance, and the Chinese *Xiaoshuo*

Though increasingly popular among an expanding readership, the legitimacy of the English novel as a literary genre was still under debate among English critics and literary historians in the nineteenth century. The genre of the novel began to be recognised as significant in the literary realm in the 1830s and 1840s,¹²⁵ and was incorporated into the history of English literature with the development of a new sense of literary history writing.¹²⁶ In such a transitional context, the British sinologists’ comparative writings on the Chinese novel were also shaped by their knowledge of the emerging notions concerning the novel genre, which is most obvious, first of all, in their examination of the adaptability of the English terms “novel” and “romance” to the Chinese prose fiction and of the equivalence between the Chinese and the English terms for fiction.

According to Raymond Williams, the English term “novel” could be used interchangeably with “romance” for prose fiction in the seventeenth and early eighteenth

¹²² Sieber, *Theatres of Desire*, 16.

¹²³ See, for example, Qian Zhongshu [Ch’ien Chung-shu 錢鍾書], “Tragedy in Old Chinese Drama,” *T’ien Hsia Monthly* 1 (1935): 37–46.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Yun-tong Luk, “The Concept of Tragedy as Genre and Its Applicability to Classical Chinese Drama,” in *The Chinese Text: Studies in Comparative Literature*, ed. Ying-Hsiung Chou (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1986), 15–27.

¹²⁵ Rebecca Edwards Newman, “Genre, Criticism, and the Early Victorian Novel,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. Lisa Rodensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 65–82.

¹²⁶ William McKelvy, “New Histories of English Literature and the Rise of the Novel, 1835–1859,” in Rodensky, *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, 41–63.

centuries; “though,” he adds, “it was generally held that the novel could be distinguished by being shorter (more like a *tale*) and by being more often related to real life.”¹²⁷ In the early nineteenth century, “novel” began to be commonly accepted as “the standard term for a work of prose fiction.”¹²⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, with the victory of Realism as the dominating theory in fictional writing, works of “novel” and “romance” were separated by the content described and the narrative methods used. In the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* published in 1908, “novel” was defined as both “short stories” and a long prose narrative or tale that portrays real life,¹²⁹ while “romance” was “a fictitious narrative in prose of which the scene and incidents are very remote from those of ordinary life” and “a romantic novel or narrative.”¹³⁰

Though the Chinese term *xiaoshuo* 小說 has now been adopted as the standard translation of the English “novel” and “fiction,” and sometimes of “romance” as well, the validity of such correspondence is often challenged for reasons that *xiaoshuo* was originally used in the Chinese as an inclusive term not only for prose fiction but also for miscellaneous writings such as notes and short essays, and that the fictitious prose narratives were hardly recognised as a literary genre by Chinese critics.¹³¹ Regardless of the conceptual discrepancy, the equivalence between *xiaoshuo* and the English terms “fiction,” “novel,” and “romance” in translation was, however, established as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century in various English-Chinese and Chinese-English dictionaries compiled by the British sinologists. For example, in Robert Morrison’s *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (1815–1823), “novel” was translated as 小說書 (*xiaoshuo shu*, literally “novel book”).¹³² In Walter Henry Medhurst’s *English and Chinese Dictionary* (1847–1848), the English words and phrases “works of fiction,” “novel,” and “romance” were all translated as *xiaoshuo*.¹³³

In addition to the terminological equivalence, the British sinologists also attempted to label and define Chinese narrative fiction with “novel,” “romance,” or “fiction,”

¹²⁷ Williams, *Keywords*, 112.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹²⁹ *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, s.v. “novel.”

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, s.v. “romance.”

¹³¹ See, for example, Andrew H. Plaks, “Full-length *Hsiao-shuo* and the Western Novel: A Generic Reappraisal,” *New Asia Academic Bulletin* 1 (1978): 163–176. In this article, Plaks tries to justify the use of the term “novel” to define the classical long vernacular Chinese fiction.

¹³² Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language. Part III*, s.v. “novel.”

¹³³ Medhurst, *English and Chinese Dictionary*, vol. 2, s.vv. “fiction,” “novel,” “romance.”

occasionally with brief discussion on the adaptability of these English terms to Chinese fiction. John Francis Davis employed both “romance” and “novel” to refer to Chinese narrative fiction in general. In the article “Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romances” (1829), he classified the three divisions of Chinese literature as “1. The Drama. 2. Poetry. 3. Romances and Novels;”¹³⁴ or, alternatively, he adopted “fiction” as the umbrella term, as he described Chinese novels as “prose fiction”¹³⁵ or “works of fiction, in the shape of moral tales, novels, and romances”¹³⁶ in his *The Chinese* (1836). Though Davis did not specify the difference between “romance” and “novel” in his usage of both terms, we could infer their meanings from the kinds of Chinese works he assigned to these terms. In 1822, Davis applied the title *Chinese Novels* to his English translation of three short stories from the Chinese novelist Li Yu’s *The Twelve Towers*, which probably suggests that he used “novel” in its old sense of “short story.” “Romance,” on the other hand, was perhaps used to indicate the full-length fiction such as *The Fortunate Union* which was subtitled *A Chinese Romance* in Davis’s translation. In *Chinese Miscellanies* (1865), Davis again referred to this Chinese fiction as “this novel, or rather romance,”¹³⁷ and explained that the term “romance” was an appropriate title for this Chinese work because of its extraordinary hero:

The term ‘romance’ may be properly applied to any fiction, of which the personages and incidents are above the level of ordinary life. The orthodox rule used to be, that the hero should sally forth, and fight with everything either bigger or stronger than himself.¹³⁸

The hero of *The Fortunate Union*, he argued, fitted this description. Davis must have realised that his identification of *The Fortunate Union* as a romance seemed to contradict the common European perception that Chinese novels differed greatly from the European model, as he admitted that “it may appear strange that any fiction on so legitimate a plan should be met with in China.”¹³⁹ Nevertheless, he assured his reader that the romance-like *The Fortunate Union* was exactly one of those cases, and it was one of the reasons why he decided to translate this Chinese work into English.¹⁴⁰ It is, therefore, probably safe to assume that Davis distinguished the Chinese realistic short stories as “novel” and the more

¹³⁴ [Davis], “Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance,” 86.

¹³⁵ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 185.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹³⁷ Davis, “The Drama, Novels, and Romances,” 111.

¹³⁸ [Davis], “Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romances,” 114.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

idealised long prose fiction as “romance,” which is consistent with the conceptual difference between the two terms recorded in the 1908 *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*.

William Frederick Mayers, the expert on Chinese novels, seemed to have a more profound understanding on this issue. He was clearly aware of the difference between the Chinese *xiaoshuo* and the English “novel” or “romance” in their respective meaning and scope. Mayers pointed out that the term *xiaoshuo* had long been used as the name of one of the bibliographical categories in China. He found that initially “the numerous works of fiction comprised under the characteristic title *Siao Shwo* [*xiaoshuo*] or ‘Trifling Sayings’” were mainly “collections of wild legends of genii and magicians, the production doubtless of the Taoist philosophers”¹⁴¹ who flourished during the Tang dynasty; in other words, not novel proper. From a Chinese “catalogue of a private library of the 12th century,” Mayers noticed that the *xiaoshuo* category began to include tales based on historical records which, he explained, were “rather abridgements of history than romantic narratives.”¹⁴² Mayers observed that the Chinese term “*Siao Shwo Shu* [*xiaoshuo shu* 小說書, literally “novel book”], or “Trivial Works” was in fact the collective term for three different kinds of writings: “novels in general,” “puerile storybooks,” and “compendia of miscellaneous jottings,”¹⁴³ suggesting that the Chinese term actually referred to a wider range of works than the English term “novel.”

In further distinguishing the different kinds of Chinese fiction, Mayers adopted the term “romance” to refer to Chinese historical novels which “present in a style of romantic narrative,”¹⁴⁴ and the term “novel” to Chinese fictions involving love stories and depicting ordinary or domestic lives such as *Dream of the Red Chamber*. As discussed earlier, according to Mayers, these Chinese “romantic novels,” especially those written in the Pekingese dialect, were very similar to modern English novels because of their realistic narrative of “delineation of existing manners [rather] than the mere description of adventure or pedantic display of scholarcraft” and because of the novelists’ capacity to bring the “sentiments or passions of his characters into play.”¹⁴⁵ Mayers’s particular

¹⁴¹ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 86.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Mayers, “IV. Romantic Novels,” 137.

¹⁴⁴ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 86.

¹⁴⁵ Mayers, “VI. Romantic Novels (concluded),” 165.

attention to the “delineation of existing manners” and the vivid description of the characters’ sentiments seem to suggest that, in describing and assessing Chinese fiction, he had applied the contemporary English novel theory that emphasises realistic effects, and that “novel,” rather than “romance,” had become the more standard term for the genre.

A more extensive discussion on the applicability of English terms to Chinese works of fiction was delivered by Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor, translator of the first full English translation of the Chinese historical novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (hereafter as *Three Kingdoms*).¹⁴⁶ In an introductory article on the *Three Kingdoms* probably published before he began to translate the novel, Brewitt-Taylor spent great effort to locate the most appropriate English term to define the generic nature of this Chinese fiction.¹⁴⁷ Though the Chinese title *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 was normally translated as “History of the Three Kingdoms”¹⁴⁸ by the nineteenth-century British sinologists, in their writings, the *Three Kingdoms* itself was generally considered as a fictional creation and discussed under the category of Chinese fiction, rather than history. Brewitt-Taylor argued, however, that it was imprecise to describe the *Three Kingdoms* either as a romance or a novel; instead, he argued that the work “has more the character of a long historic drama than of a novel or romance.”¹⁴⁹ He agreed with Mayers’s translation of the Chinese term for historical novels *yanyi* 演義 (literally “an amplified and popularised version,” now commonly translated as “romance”) as “Paraphrases of Histories”¹⁵⁰ rather than “romance,” for the

¹⁴⁶ Brewitt-Taylor had completed the translation of the *Three Kingdoms* by 1900, but unfortunately the draft was destroyed during the Boxer Uprising (1899–1901), and the full translation was finally published in 1925, see Cannon, *Public Success, Private Sorrow*, 80, 85.

¹⁴⁷ Brewitt-Taylor, “The San-Kuo,” 168–178. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Mayers, “II. Historical Romances (continued),” 102; Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance,” 286.

¹⁴⁹ This claim, however, was apparently paradoxical to the fact that he later used “romance” in the title of his translation (*The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*), of which Brewitt-Taylor offered no justification or explanation. In a new English translation of the *Three Kingdoms* by Moss Roberts in 1991, the translator disagrees with the use of “romance” in Brewitt-Taylor’s translation because he thinks that the term “romance” “denotes a world removed from reality.” Roberts preferred “historical novel,” and accordingly entitled his translation as “*Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel*”. See Cannon, *Public Success, Private Sorrow*, 159.

¹⁵⁰ Mayers’s translation of the term is in Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 86. On the nineteenth-century English translators’ understanding of the Chinese genre *yanyi* and their paradoxical appropriation of *yanyi* to historical romance, see Lu Pan and Dan Yi, “From ‘yanyi’ to ‘romance’: Early English Translations of *Sanguozhi Yanyi* and Translators’ Identity Crisis,” *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 82–93.

reason that, in his view, the term “romance” particularly referred to the legends of key mythological figures, a prototypical folklore commonly found in all cultures:

The term Paraphrase seems to me more fitting than that of romance, for the romantic portion consists almost entirely of legends that have grown up and wreathed themselves round the figures of two or three of the more important characters. These are of the same class as those relating to King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table; those that the myth-finders tell us belong no more to Arthur than to Joshua, as they are sun and nature myths common to all the world and cropping up in all sorts of places in all sorts of disguises. They have assumed the dress with which the common people of every time and every country have clothed their heroes. (169)

Brewitt-Taylor also denied the applicability of “novel” to the *Three Kingdoms*, arguing that the work “cannot be considered a novel in the common sense of the term, not even a historic novel like Scott’s.” (169) His contention was based on two reasons: first, “there is historic basis and authority for all the more striking events and the book itself bears witness to this,” (169) and presumably the work was not fictional enough to be considered as “novel;” second, the number of characters in the *Three Kingdoms* was much greater than that normally expected in a novel, and “it would be unnecessary and a serious defect for any novelist to burden his pages with such an enormous number of characters.” (169)

Instead, Brewitt-Taylor argued that this Chinese fiction was written in a very similar manner to that of a stage play:

The characters speak as if on the stage, the battles seem stage battles, the actors almost smell of paint. They talk much compared with what they do, their emotions are described like the instructions to the players, and the book abounds with strong contrasts and dramatic situation. (170)

It was possible that Brewitt-Taylor’s recognition of the *Three Kingdoms* as “historical drama” was derived from William Frederick Mayers. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, in his article on the general feature and the history of Chinese historical novels, Mayers proposed his “somewhat bold hypothesis” that Chinese historical romances, including the *Three Kingdoms*, “having sprung directly from the stage.”¹⁵¹ This hypothesis was drawn by Mayers based on the “striking coincidences” he had discovered between Chinese plays and romances, including the stereotypical characters, the scarcity of descriptive passages,

¹⁵¹ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 86.

and the sudden change of scene and narrative.¹⁵² To further support his argument that *Three Kingdoms* was a historical drama, Brewitt-Taylor reiterated that this Chinese fiction lacked “some very important particulars” of the “novel” genre:

In the first place there is an absence of plot. . . . Then again the whole narrative is too clearly historical, to allow the necessary freedom to the plot of a story. . . . Another objection to the term novel is the very great prominence given to the rival houses of Wu and Wei, although Liu Pei is *the* hero of the book. (170)

On account of these reasons, he concluded that “on the whole I should prefer to call the San-Kuo [*Three Kingdoms*] neither a romance nor a novel but rather a history, a historical drama not written for the stage.” (170)

At the turn of the twentieth century, when “novel” gradually became the standard term for long prose fiction in English literary criticism, it was generally used to refer to Chinese works of fiction, with “romance” having fallen out of favour. In Herbert Giles’s *A History of Chinese Literature*, the two chapters devoted to Chinese prose fiction of the Yuan and the Ming dynasties were respectively entitled “The Novel” and “Novels and Plays.” In his discussion, “novel” was universally employed as the term for Chinese fiction including the *Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*,¹⁵³ while the term “romance” was never used. It was the same in George Thomas Candlin’s *Chinese Fiction*, in which the author frequently adopted “fiction” and “novel,” but never “romance,” to describe Chinese prose fiction.

From Davis’s combined use of “novel” and “romance” to Mayers’s distinction between the historical *romance* and romantic *novels*, to Brewitt-Taylor’s discriminating analysis of the features of “romance,” “novel,” and “historical drama,” and finally to the exclusive use of “novel” in Giles’s and Candlin’s works, the British sinologists made an effort in searching for the most appropriate English term for Chinese prose fiction. Their comparative discourse on the name and nature of the Chinese novel changed constantly throughout the nineteenth century, which indicate not only their increasing understanding of the nature of Chinese fiction but also how the conceptual development of these English terms in nineteenth-century English novel criticism has determined their applicability to

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 87. Brewitt-Taylor must have read Mayers’s hypothesis on the origin of the Chinese historical novel, as he had quoted Mayers’s translation of *yanyi* as “paraphrase of History” from the same article.

¹⁵³ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 277, 281, 355.

Chinese prose fiction. It is with this dynamic understanding that the outline of the genre of the Chinese novel has been gradually shaped.

4.7 The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and the Iliad

In addition to the comparability of terms for prose fiction, the sinologists also noticed the similarity between Chinese and English novel-writing and novels. These analogies were often only mentioned in passing without detailed explanation or interpretation. For example, John Francis Davis and Alfred Lister both noted that the chapters in Chinese novels were normally headed by a verse, as some English novelists would do;¹⁵⁴ William Frederick Mayers commented that the Chinese novel *The Golden Lotus* was written in a style similar to that of the Italian writer Boccaccio;¹⁵⁵ George Thomas Candlin observed that the Chinese novel *Journey to the West* was “a *Pilgrim’s Progress* and a *Faerie Queene* all in one.”¹⁵⁶

There is, however, one elaborate comparison made by the sinologists between the Chinese novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and, not an English novel, but the Greek epic the *Iliad*. Known as the “first book of genius” (*di yi caizi shu* 第一才子書) in Qing China, the *Three Kingdoms* tops a list of canonised vernacular novels and was undoubtedly understood by the sinologists as the most popular and important historical novel in China. For example, Peter Perring Thoms remarked that the *Three Kingdoms* was “a Chinese history of the most celebrated of their civil wars;”¹⁵⁷ Karl Gützlaff observed that “amongst all the works of Chinese literature none is so popular as the *San Kwo* [*Three Kingdoms*]. . . . All classes agree that it is the most interesting book ever written;”¹⁵⁸ Mayers also noted that the novel was “praised by Chinese critics as embodying the *ne plus ultra* of perfection in style.”¹⁵⁹ Perhaps because of its supreme literary status in China, plus the military and historical theme of the story, this Chinese novel was often associated

¹⁵⁴ Davis, preface to *The Fortunate Union*, xv-xvi; Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance,” 289.

¹⁵⁵ Mayers, “VI. Romantic Novels (concluded),” 165.

¹⁵⁶ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 32.

¹⁵⁷ Thoms, trans., “The Death of the Celebrated Minister Tung-cho,” 527.

¹⁵⁸ [Karl Gützlaff], “Notice of the San Kwö Che, or History of the Three Kingdoms, during a period of one hundred and forty-seven years, from A.D. 170 to 317. From a correspondent,” *Chinese Repository* 7, no. 5 (1838): 233.

¹⁵⁹ Mayers, “II. Historical Romances (continued),” 102.

with the Greek epic *Iliad* in the sinological writings. As research reminds us, since the late eighteenth century, epic has been “seen primarily as synonymous with narrative” in English literary criticism.¹⁶⁰ It is perhaps by this extended definition of the epic genre that the sinologists juxtaposed the *Three Kingdoms* with the *Iliad* as two great narrative works in their own cultures, rather than for any generic concern of whether or not the *Three Kingdoms* was an epic. The comparison was first mentioned by John Francis Davis, and then was reconsidered by Brewitt-Taylor and by Thomas George Candlin. Their different perceptions and conclusions on this analogy reveal their particular purposes and different understanding towards this Chinese novel.

In a reprint of his *On the Poetry of the Chinese* published in 1834, Davis added two passages of his English translation of extracts from the *Three Kingdoms* together with the original Chinese texts. In an introductory passage to the translation, Davis observed that the *Three Kingdoms* bears resemblance to the *Iliad* in its vulgar languages of the heroes, its extraordinary “strength and prowess,” the ways in which it “makes exchanges after the fashion of Glaucus and Diomed, Ajax and Hector,” and the similar social conditions when China during that time “was split into something like feudal principalities, hanging loosely together under the questionable authority of one head.”¹⁶¹ The similarities Davis had spotted seem both superficial and random. The author focused only on the language, the images of the characters, and the social facts described, showing no intention to explore more systematically from formal or generic aspects such as the heroic motif or the narrative pattern. Davis’s comparison was probably made as a convenient means to familiarise the English readers with the theme and the language style of the *Three Kingdoms*.

Charles Henry Brewitt-Taylor disagreed with Davis on this analogy. As discussed above, he argued that the *Three Kingdoms* was “neither a romance nor a novel but rather a history, a historical drama not written for the stage.”¹⁶² He also contended that “nor do I think the *San-kuo* can be fitly compared with the *Iliad* as Sir John Davis says.”(170) Though he admitted that there were resemblances “here and there” in details between the two works,

¹⁶⁰ Adeline Johns-Putra, *History of the Epic* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 117.

¹⁶¹ John Francis Davis, “Extracts from the History of the Three States,” in *Poeseos Sinensis commentarii. On the Poetry of the Chinese, to which are added, Translations & Detached Pieces* (Macao: East India Company's Press, 1834), 155.

¹⁶² Brewitt-Taylor, “The San-Kuo,” 170. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

such as that “the leaders abuse each other before the battle and their language is often ‘porter-house’,” (170) Brewitt-Taylor argued for the difference between the two works from more fundamental aspects. Above all, he argued that the heroes in the *Three Kingdoms* were essentially different from those in the *Iliad* in that the Chinese characters “lay no claim to goddess-birth,” (170) but were portrayed as earthly, perhaps vulgar, simple human beings, without any form of engagement of the mythological gods. As a result, the Chinese characters in the *Three Kingdoms* “never aim at the god-like sublimity of the Greek, nor are they marvels and models of manly beauty and strength” (170) as in the *Iliad*. The characters in the Chinese novel are, according to Brewitt-Taylor, “of the earth, earthy, and one is inclined to think a Homer could not have sung in the land of *I* and *Li* and *Tao* [probably *Yi* (*Book of Change*), *Li* (Confucian rites), and *Dao* (the Taoist “way”), referring to the three main Chinese philosophical thoughts].” (170) Even if the *Three Kingdoms* could have been written in the verse form as the *Iliad*, he believed that these three kinds of fundamental, secular philosophical base on which the characters in the *Three Kingdoms* were derived “could not have been offended” (170), which marked the essential difference between the two works. In asserting that the Chinese heroes were secular and realistic men and thus different from the more mythical characters in the *Iliad*, Brewitt-Taylor was referring back to his argument that the *Three Kingdoms* was a history or historical drama rather than a legendary romance, and therefore more realistic than the *Iliad*.

Eight years after Brewitt-Taylor’s article, George Thomas Candlin again juxtaposed the *Three Kingdoms* and the *Iliad* in his discussion of this Chinese novel. Unlike Brewitt-Taylor, Candlin pushed John Francis Davis’s comparison to a greater extent, claiming that “the *San Kuo Tzu* [*Three Kingdoms*] . . . is the *Iliad* of China.” (my italics)¹⁶³ Acknowledging that this idea was “first pointed out by Sir John Davis,” (22) Candlin listed all the common elements he had identified between the *Three Kingdoms* and the *Iliad*:

Many of the qualities of old Homer are in it [*Three Kingdoms*], consummate dramatic art (which alone redeems the Greek epic from insufferable dullness), supreme love of battle, extravagant admiration of bravery and feats of arms, wide and universal sympathy which puts him in touch with all his characters, fondness for detail, and copiousness, which leads him to pour into it the most miscellaneous facts, lists, names; skill in blending the supernatural with the ordinary course of events (for the *San Kuo*

¹⁶³ Candlin, *Chinese Fiction*, 22. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

Tzu has its machinery as much as the *Iliad*), consuming patriotism that makes everything interesting which affects his country. (22, 24)

In addition to these common elements, Candlin also remarked that the *Three Kingdoms* “scarcely yields to the *Iliad* in fire and spirit and descriptive power,” (24) indicating that the Chinese novel was of equal literary power and status in Chinese national literature as was the Greek epic in Europe. He then produced a succession of rhetorical parallel sentences all starting with the phrase “like the *Iliad*” to reinforce the connection between the two works:

Like the *Iliad*, it [*Three Kingdoms*] makes its heroes utter bragging speeches on the battle-field and do singly-handed deeds of ‘derring-do.’ Like the *Iliad*, it mingles strategy with force and makes the sage the companion of the hero. Like the *Iliad*, it is the darling of a nation’s heart because it has best imaged forth what they most love and admire. For it is immensely popular in China. (24)

To give a specific example of the similarities, Candlin translated a passage from the *Three Kingdoms* in which he found that the repeated and clichéd physical description of Guan Yu 關羽, one of the leading heroes in the novel, was the “same trick” of Homer’s “constant practice of repeating his epithets”—a “remnant of oral epics.” (24) Like Davis, Candlin’s comparative studies mainly focused on the language style, characterisation, description, and literary merit and value of the *Three Kingdoms* and the *Iliad*, rather than a systematic and generic exploration between the two great narrative works.

Enthusiastic as he was to put the *Three Kingdoms* and the *Iliad* together, Candlin was also aware that it could be difficult to make an impartial and critical comparison due to his limited knowledge and also because the English readers would be easily influenced by their presupposed understanding of the novel genre, of the epic, and of the two works in question. (26, 28) He pointed out that the obvious difference between the two were perhaps that the Chinese novel possessed “none of the fineness and delicacy of the old Greek spirit, and it is in prose, not verse.” (28) Nevertheless, Candlin was still fully confident in the literary excellence of the *Three Kingdoms*, arguing that it deserved to be included among the “world’s great books,” (28) along with a number of European literary masterpiece epics:

Where it should stand in the list we will not venture to say, but it is the work of a most gifted artist, and whether we recognise the fact or not, it deserves as much to be ranked with the world’s great books (perhaps in the humblest place) as the *Iliad*, the

Aeneid, the *Jerusalem* [perhaps the *Jerusalem Delivered*, an epic poem by Torquato Tasso (1544–1595)], the *Orlando Furioso* [an influential Italian epic poem by Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533)], the *Nibelungen Lied* [The Song of the Nibelungs], or the *Paradise Lost*. (28)

Before he came to this conclusion, Candlin had already constantly described the *Three Kingdoms* in relation to celebrated British writers and works. For example, he observed that “the story is semi-historical, that is about as historical as the Waverley novels, with which it may be compared,” (16) that “as Shakespeare borrowed his historical facts from the Hollingshead, so this author [of the *Three Kingdoms*] is indebted to an earlier but very dull work by Ch’en Hsou [Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297), historian and author of the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (History of the Three Kingdoms) on which the stories in the *Three Kingdoms* were based],” (16) and that the author of the *Three Kingdoms* is “a writer brilliant and perspicuous as Macaulay, simple as John Bunyan.” (18)

As his primary purpose of writing the *Chinese Fiction* is to remove the prejudice against Chinese novels so as to encourage novel reading among sinologists and foreign readers, Candlin’s favourable comparison of the *Three Kingdoms* to the *Iliad* and to other European literary classics serves to highlight the literary value of this Chinese novel and to raise its literary status in the mind of his readers. His attempt to incorporate the *Three Kingdoms* into this prominent list of the world classics also embodies his cosmopolitan mind and even the idea of “world literature” developed in the nineteenth century. As a Protestant missionary in China, Candlin’s intention to find common ground between Chinese and Western literature was probably also motivated by his missionary objective to promote a more sympathetic Western understanding of China and the Chinese, like Joseph Edkins’s generous comparative identification between Chinese and English poetry.

4.8 Chinese Novel as Exemplar

Apart from terminological and generic comparability, the British sinologists also noticed the socio-moral effect of the Chinese novel in comparison to their English or European counterparts. The attention was partly due to the ongoing controversy over English novels’ socio-moral value in the nineteenth century. With the rise of the English novel since the late eighteenth century, there had been growing concern about the damage

of novel reading to the readers' intellectual capacities and the corruptive effect on their morals.¹⁶⁴ Debates on the moral effect and social usefulness of novel reading continued until about the 1880s.¹⁶⁵ With such concerns in mind, the British sinologists perhaps read Chinese novels for alternative models of how the novel genre could benefit their reader and the society.

In the eighteenth century, Du Halde had already come to the conclusion that the European romance and the Chinese novel differ in their moral values. The romances in Europe, Du Halde observed, "are generally nothing but love-adventures, or ingenious fictions proper to divert the reader, but at the same time that they divert so greatly captivate the passions that they become very dangerous, especially to young persons,"¹⁶⁶ while, on the other hand, the Chinese novels were "full of instructions, containing maxims very proper for the reformation of manners, and almost always recommending the practice of some virtue."¹⁶⁷ As David Porter's study on Thomas Percy's sinology shows, Percy also emphasised the moral advantage of the Chinese novel *Pleasing History* in an attempt "to recommend Chinese fiction as a suitable antidote" to the poisonous effect of the controversial eighteenth-century English novel and to "invoke a Chinese moral perspective for criticizing current English trends."¹⁶⁸ This general appreciation of Chinese novels' moral respectability was probably influenced by the high estimation of Confucian moral teachings depicted by contemporary Jesuit missionaries.

As the eighteenth-century European passion for China faded, the nineteenth-century sinologists became concerned less directly with Chinese novels' moral character, but more generally with its relation with the society. As if anticipating the advent of Realism as the dominant feature of the nineteenth-century English novel, John Francis Davis focused on the relation between fiction and social reality, and argued that the Chinese fiction which developed in the fifteenth century seemed more mature and advanced for its "representations of actual life" than its European counterparts:

¹⁶⁴ Christopher Lane, "The Novel as Immoral, Anti-social Force," in *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 452–456.

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel, 1865–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Du Halde, "Of the Taste of the Chinese for Poetry, History, and Plays," 113.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-century England*, 162.

Many of the Chinese novels and romances which were written in the fifteenth century of our era . . . would contrast very advantageously, either as literary compositions or as pictures of society, with their contemporaries of Europe. The Chinese at that period were long past the stage of civilisation which gives birth only to apologues or extravagant fictions, and could relish representations of actual life, and of the complicated situations into which men are thrown by the contests of interest and of passion in an artificial state of things.¹⁶⁹

As discussed in Chapter 2, Davis suggested that the foreigners could acquire practical information about China from reading Chinese novels. His panegyric on the Chinese novel's realistic representation serves as the necessary premise for such a suggestion—it would make sense only if he could prove that the desired information on China was indeed faithfully represented in Chinese novels. By highlighting the difference between Chinese and European novels in their relationship to society, Davis affirmed his reader that “their [the Chinese's] novels and romances paint Chinese society as it really exists” and thus would be helpful to anyone curious about the “state of civilisation” in China.¹⁷⁰ Complaining about the barriers against foreigners from accessing interior China in the early nineteenth century, Davis recommended the “peculiar value” of Chinese fiction for supplying “information regarding manners, customs, and sentiment” in China.¹⁷¹

As Davis observed that the Chinese novel in the fifteenth century was more advanced than the European romance, the early development of novel writing in China was also noticed by others. The Imperial Maritime Customs Service staff member Edward Charles Bowra published his English translation of eight chapters of the Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the Hong Kong-based English periodical *China Magazine*. In an unsigned short introductory article on Chinese novels and particularly on *Dream of the Red Chamber* prefixed to this translation, the author apparently noted the long history of novel writing in China, observing that “considering how recent a growth they [novels] are in our own country, it may surprise some readers to find that for ages novels have delighted the multitudes of China.”¹⁷² To make the contrast even more obvious, he elaborated that “the Chinese were writing novels and reading them” (1) before Samuel Richardson's (1689–1761) novels *Clarissa* (1748) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), before *The History of Tom Jones* (1749) and the works by British writers Joseph Addison (1672–1719)

¹⁶⁹ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 209.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁷² “Hung Low Meng,” *China Magazine* 2, no. 1(1868): 1. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

and Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774), before Shakespeare’s plays and Sir Thomas Malory’s (c. 1415–1471) *Morte D’Arthur* (1485), and even before William Caxton (c. 1422–c. 1491) first introduced the printing press into England and set up his press in Westminster in 1476. (1) Apart from the remarkably long history, the author of this prefatory piece also believed that Chinese novels could be socio-morally instructive in the contemporary world. The author found that in Chinese novels the “wealthy ignorance” was constantly the target for satire, while the talented “poor bachelor of arts” was always praised and rewarded. (2) Such plot arrangement, the author argued, was “refreshing” in the “money-worshipping age” (2) of the Victorian period. By this brief comment, the author seemed to recommend Chinese novels as an alternative remedy for the overwhelming materialism and the obsession with money in both the Victorian society and the Victorian novel.¹⁷³

If the contrast between Chinese and English novels was somewhat implied in this introductory article, a more explicit comparison was drawn by Alfred Lister, the civil servant in Hong Kong, and was used to criticise the mass-production of contemporary English novels in Britain. In the nineteenth century, novel writing and publishing flourished and soon turned into a profitable business, resulting in a large number of mediocre, and sometimes even immoral, English novels produced as a popular commodity every year. Facing such a situation, the English critics launched “endless attacks on the carelessness and mass-production of contemporary novels which is so remarkable a feature of the period’s criticism.”¹⁷⁴ Lister took part in the campaign from a comparatist perspective in his 1873 lecture on the Chinese novel delivered in Hong Kong. He began the lecture by asking the audience to think about a fundamental question of whether or not novel reading was wrong, which was probably raised, according to Lister, by “the almost national calamity” of “so stupendous and appalling a flood of rubbish—too often very nasty and immoral rubbish—of three-volume novels, written, apparently, only to sell”¹⁷⁵ in Britain. Nonetheless, he believed that reading a good novel was a “good thing.” (284) While enumerating some of the “good” European novels including those by Walter Scott (1771–1832), Thackeray, Charles Dickens (1812–1870), and Victor Hugo (1802–1885), Lister assured his audience that the Chinese novel he was about to introduce in this

¹⁷³ For the Victorian novel’s preoccupation with money, see George Levine, “The Protestant Ethic and the ‘Spirit’ of Money: Max Weber, Silas Marner, and the Victorian Novel,” in Rodensky, *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, 376–396.

¹⁷⁴ Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel*, 14.

¹⁷⁵ Lister, “An Hour with a Chinese Romance”, 284. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

lecture—the *Yu jiao li* 玉嬌梨 (*The Two Fair Cousins*)—was undoubtedly qualified to be included into this list of “good novels” as well.

Before giving a detailed introduction to *The Two Fair Cousins*, Lister assessed the general characteristics of the Chinese novel. He pointed out that though the number of novels published in China was smaller than that in Britain, the Chinese novels were more worthwhile to read than the short-lived English novels in an overcrowded market:

The element of prose fiction in Chinese literature, though represented by a sufficiently numerous class of books, is not nearly so voluminous as with us, nor is there any thing at all corresponding to the portentous outburst of new novels which each successive English season calls into existence. But if the Chinese have fewer and older novels, what they have are more generally read, and more thoroughly appreciated than the ephemeral production which cometh up like a flower at Mudie’s [Charles Edward Mudie’s (1818–1890) circulating lending library business that was extremely popular and influential among the Victorian readers], only, ere long, to wither as the grass, and to sink into utter oblivion. (284–285)

In addition to the number of novels produced, when explaining Chinese people’s attitudes towards the novel genre, Lister again seized the opportunity to criticise English novels’ moral quality, commenting sharply that, while “the Chinese are rather ashamed of their novels . . . only because they are trifling,” the British people should be ashamed of theirs “because the bulk of them [English novels] are degradingly silly and very insidiously immoral.” (285) In both instances, it is obvious that Lister’s comparative evaluation of Chinese and English novels was deliberately constructed to allow him to voice his harsh criticism of the inundation of English novels in nineteenth-century Britain.

In spite of his relatively favourable comments on Chinese novels’ average quality, Lister was not, however, an admirer of the Chinese *taste* for novels. He observed that there was a huge difference between Chinese and foreign readers in their literary taste for Chinese novels: what the Western reader recognised as “genuine works of art” (286) in the Chinese novel were often neglected by the Chinese, whereas those “insufferably tedious and lengthy historical novels” preferred by the Chinese—the works “with their absurd marvels, servile repetitions, everlasting fights described each time exactly in the same words, and intolerable spinning out of volume after volume”—would “drive the foreign reader to despair.” (286) In fairly abstract terms, Lister described what he considered “genuine works of art” of the Chinese novel as those “which are quick with the one touch of nature that makes the whole world kin, and seem to glow with something not

entirely alien to the divine fire of genius.” (286) By emphasizing “nature” and “genius” as his—also the “foreigners”—criteria, Lister seemed to value the novelist’s originality and realistic description in the novel. According to such criteria, he belittled the Chinese historical novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* while celebrating the excellence of *The Two Fair Cousins* as “the best Chinese novel yet brought to the notice of foreigners,” (287) in his own words. While the Chinese novel was used, because of its socio-moral value and general quality, as an exemplar to criticise the problems of nineteenth-century English novels, Lister’s denial of the Chinese literary taste for novels otherwise revealed and confirmed the prestige of the “foreign” literary standards. Like Lister, the British sinologists’ comparative writings on the moral and social values of the Chinese novel provide them with the opportunity to enter the debate and discussion, with the example of Chinese novels, on the various English novel criticisms and theories developed in the nineteenth century.

4.9 Conclusion

The nineteenth-century British sinologists’ comparative studies of Chinese literature have eventually achieved more than John Francis Davis’s dual objectives of assisting understanding and attracting interest. The sinologists’ attempt to examine generic correspondences and similarities entails studies on the nature of Chinese and English literary genres. Important issues have been addressed that are still relevant to Chinese-English comparative literature studies today. By demonstrating the conceptual equivalence between the Chinese *shi* 詩 and the English “verse,” by searching for the Chinese “epic” and “tragedy,” or by justifying the applicability of the English “novel” to Chinese fiction, the sinologists have conducted pioneering comparative research into Chinese and English genre theories.

Yet, the sinologists’ comparative studies of Chinese literature make no pretence to be exhaustive or systematic. There was hardly any shared agenda or established methodology. Different literary standards were adopted as reference systems in assessing the Chinese poetry, drama, and novel respectively, resulting in very different discourse on each genre as well as on their relations to the English counterparts. The English Romantic poetics were primarily employed as the analytical framework by which to explain both the

differences and the similarities between Chinese and English poetry, as seen in Walter Henry Medhurst's criticism of the "artificiality" of Chinese poetry and in Joseph Edkins's emphasis on the relationship between poetry and nature in both Chinese and English Romantic poetry. The sinologists have examined Chinese drama mainly with the Neoclassical rule of unities and the model of Greek drama, which implies the antiquity and obsolescence of Chinese drama. Unlike Chinese poetry and drama being generally examined by established European literary standards, Chinese fiction, however, was measured with the recently developed literary notions on the novel genre. Whether to consider the applicability of the term "novel" to Chinese fiction or to select the "best" Chinese novels according to the English standards, the sinological discourse on Chinese fiction articulated the nineteenth-century concepts and ideas of the novel genre, and therefore participated circuitously in the formation of such notions.

The sinologists' individual interpretation of the comparative relation between Chinese and European literatures was also influenced by extra-literary factors, such as the development of British sinology, the Sino-British relationship, and the sinologists' different careers and positions in China. This is very much the same as what Shunhong Zhang summarises as "self-criterion" in his study of the British perception of China during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁷⁶ George Staunton and John Francis Davis, both senior members of the East India Company in Guangzhou and early leading British sinologists, tended to produce sympathetic comparative discourse focusing more on the similarities between Chinese and Western literatures. Their emphasis on the closeness in literature between China and Europe aimed to both establish their authority against the previous or contemporary "inaccurate" accounts of China that often stressed the differences of China, and to sustain the delicate Sino-British commercial relations before the outbreak of the First Opium War. From the 1860s, however, the British imperial advantage in China seemed to have greater influence on some sinologists such as Walter Henry Medhurst and Robert Kennaway Douglas than on others such as William Frederick Meyers and Herbert Giles, despite the fact that they all worked as British consuls in China. Medhurst and Douglas tend to produce more dismissive discourse on Chinese literature than Meyers and Giles who appeared to be more literary-minded and less informed by political factors. For Protestant missionaries like Joseph Edkins and George Thomas

¹⁷⁶ Zhang, *British Views on China*, 203-212.

Candlin, their favourable accounts of Chinese literature and of its similarities with European literature were probably made to enhance cross-cultural communication and to justify and facilitate their missionary work in China.

The varied criteria taken and the diverse discourse produced enable the sinologists to delineate Chinese literature in terms of both national literature and world literature. Chinese literature was perceived as “national” in two ways. The difference, even contrast, spotted by the sinologists between Chinese and European literature, such as the “artificiality” of Chinese poetry and the absence of the epic and the tragedy genres, has determined the particularities of Chinese literature, and clearly distinguished and excluded Chinese literature from the European model of literature and literary history. Moreover, Chinese literature was portrayed as “national” in the sinologists’ attempts to explain literary features by the peculiarities of Chinese national character, most notably the imaginative power, creativity, and taste of Chinese people. With such “national” association, the sinological comparative writings on Chinese literature also involve more general assessment of China, and thus forms an important part of the systematic knowledge about China. Meanwhile, the sinologists’ comments that focus on literary analogies seek to place Chinese literature in the realm of a “world” literature—though still largely Europe-dominated—which began to emerge in the nineteenth century. Johann Wolfgang Goethe had famously promoted the idea of “world literature” as the circulation of literary works, ideas, forms, and themes across nations first in Europe and then worldwide, the purpose of which, he explained, was “not that the nations shall think alike, but that they shall learn how to understand each other . . . learn to tolerate one another.”¹⁷⁷ Modern scholar David Damrosch also defines “world literature” as “a mode of circulation and of reading”¹⁷⁸ literary works that interact and engage one another beyond their original cultures. In this sense, the sinologists’ studies that took an inclusive approach and emphasised the comparability between the Chinese and the English literary mind, technique, status, and value—such as the similarities between Chinese and English poetry perceived by George Staunton and Joseph Edkins, the possible social and moral benefits of the Chinese novel to English and European readers, and the attempts to relate and

¹⁷⁷ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Über Kunst und Altertum*, vol. 6, part 2 (1828), quoted from Theo D’haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, eds., *World Literature: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013), 13.

¹⁷⁸ David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (2003), quoted from D’haen, Domínguez, and Thomsen, eds., *World Literature: A Reader*, 200.

incorporate certain Chinese literary works with a body of English or European literary canons by Edkins and George Thomas Candlin—also suggest ways of reading Chinese literature beyond its national limits to build a transcultural, universal literary understanding. Such comparative writings have made Chinese literature visible and important, perhaps for the first time, on a global stage.

Chapter 5

Towards a History of Chinese Literature: Historical Studies

Though both English and Chinese literary traditions are abundant in historical views and narratives on the development of literature, full literary history is, in fact, a recent invention only of the modern age. Tracing the “origins and growth of English literary history from its beginnings during the Renaissance,”¹ René Wellek finds that, with the ideas of literary historiography elaborated and the materials accumulated in various forms, the eighteenth century “completed the process” of the rise of English literary history. The completion is particularly marked by the publication of Thomas Warton’s (1728–1790) *The History of English Poetry* (1774–1781), which Wellek credits as the “first narrative history to cover any long period and most literary types systematically and fully.”² A more comprehensive literary history is Robert Chambers’s (1802–1871) *History of the English Language and Literature* published in 1836, acknowledged by Wellek as “the first book to cover, however inadequately, all periods and genres of English literature.”³

The first complete history of Chinese literature came even later and was written not by a Chinese scholar, but by an Italian missionary in China. This early attempt to compose a Chinese literary history is seen in the Italian Jesuit Angelo Zottoli’s (1826–1902) remarkable four-thousand-page *Course in Chinese Literature* (*Cursus litteraturæ sinicæ*; 1878–1882), a course book covering a wide range of Chinese texts from the Confucian classics to examination essays complete with Latin translation and explanation.⁴ About the same time, a more historical account appeared as the *Outline of the History of Chinese Literature* (Очерк истории китайской литературы; 1880) by the Russian sinologist Vasily Vasilyev (1818–1900), in which he introduced the Chinese language, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Chinese scientific works, linguistics and criticism,

¹ Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History*, v.

² *Ibid.*, 47.

³ René Wellek, “English Literary Historiography during the Nineteenth Century,” in *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 144–145.

⁴ For an overview of this book, see, Nicolas Morrow Williams, “Angelo Zottoli’s *Cursus litteraturæ sinicæ* as Propaedeutic to Chinese Classical Tradition,” *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* 62, issue 2 (2015): 327–359.

polite literature, and the vernacular literature of novels and plays.⁵ From 1883 to 1912, according to Lin Shaoyang's research, fourteen histories of Chinese literature were written by Japanese sinologists,⁶ some of which had exerted great influence on the modern Chinese literary historiography; for example, the first literary history written by a Chinese scholar, Lin Chuanjia 林傳甲's (1877–1922) *Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史 (A history of Chinese literature; 1904), was claimed to be inspired by the Japanese sinologist Sasakawa Rinpū 笹川臨風's (1870–1949) *History of Chinese Literature* 支那文學史 (1895).⁷ Though the British sinologist Herbert Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature* (1901) is technically not “the first attempt made in any language, including Chinese, to produce a history of Chinese literature”⁸ as he declared, he was the first to complete a history of Chinese literature in the English language.

As research show, literary history writing is closely related to nationalism, particularly so in the nineteenth century. Making a coherent literary history is an effective way to prove the internal continuity of the literature distinct to a nation, thus justifies the independence and legitimacy of a unique national literature that is believed to reveal the national mind. René Wellek points out that, in the English literary historiography during the nineteenth century, “the idea that literature is the expression of a national spirit and, in some vague way, the creation of a national mind” has assumed “a central position in the programmes for the writing of literary history.”⁹ Margit Sichert also demonstrates the “instrumentalization of literary history for the construction of national identity”¹⁰ in Britain from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. In a like manner, literary

⁵ Wang Xili 王西里 (Vasily Vasilyev), *Zhongguo wenxue shi gangyao* 中國文學史綱要 (Очерк истории китайской литературы; Outline of the History of Chinese Literature), ed. Алексей Алексеевич Родионов, trans. Yan Guodong 閔國棟 (St Petersburg: Confucius Institute at Saint-Petersburg State University, 2013) <http://ci.spbu.ru/archive/Book/Vasiliev-ocherki/files/assets/basic-html/page1.html>

⁶ Lin, Shaoyang, “Making National History with Literary History: Hegel's Influence via Taine on Meiji Japan and the Late Qing and Early Republican China,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 9, no.2 (2015): 178–179.

⁷ Ibid., 182–183; see also, Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, “Literary Historiography in Early Twentieth-century China (1904–1928): Constructions of Cultural Memory,” in *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China's May Fourth Project*, ed. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, Oldřich Král, and Graham Martin Sanders (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2001), 130.

⁸ Giles, preface to *A History of Chinese Literature*, v.

⁹ Wellek, “English Literary Historiography during the Nineteenth Century,” 151.

¹⁰ Margit Sichert, “Functionalizing Cultural Memory: Foundational British Literary History and the Construction of National Identity,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2003): 216. See also, Margit Sichert, “Prominent Values in Nineteenth-century Histories of English Literature,” in *Ethics in Culture: the Dissemination of Values through Literature and Other Media*, ed. Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes, and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 279–283;

history writing is also considered pertinent to nationalism and nation-building in Japan and in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lin Shaoyang's research shows that "the history of Japanese literature figures centrally in the enterprise of modern Japanese nation building"¹¹ during the Meiji era. In her study of the four pre-May Fourth Chinese literary histories, Milena Doleželová-Velingerová finds that "all authors of the early Chinese literary histories readily acknowledged in their prefaces, their aim was to raise Chinese national consciousness,"¹² and their primary goal was "the education of the nation."¹³

The British sinologists' historical study of Chinese literature in the nineteenth century was carried out within the same paradigm of understanding literary history in relation to the national imagination. In the introduction to his *Notes on Chinese Literature* (1867), Alexander Wylie proposed to understand the history of the "Chinese mind" by studying the history of its literature: "the mind of China has a history, and in order rightly to apprehend it, we must trace it from its source, and mark its progress for milleniums of years past."¹⁴ For Wylie, a historical study of the Chinese mind through its literature was not only to understand its past, but also to offer the possibility to "discover an element of progress, and much to encourage hope for the future."¹⁵ If literary history was understood in relation to nationalism and national history, it is worth asking in what ways the British sinologists produced and presented a Chinese national literature with historical narratives; in other words, how the sinologists reconstructed and assigned meanings to the origins and development of Chinese literature as a continuous and consistent course of its own. There are, in fact, only a few of British sinologists' writings on the history of Chinese literature. To address this question, this chapter looks at these writings on both the history of individual genres of poetry, drama, and fiction and also the complete history of Chinese literature throughout dynasties. It explores how they employed the concepts, methods, and materials in both English and Chinese literary historiography to construct narratives and discourse on the history of Chinese literature, and how their preliminary knowledge about

¹¹ Lin, "Making National History with Literary History," 176.

¹² Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, "Literary Historiography in Early Twentieth-century China," 127.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁴ Alexander Wylie, introduction to *Notes on Chinese Literature*, xii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Chinese literary history gradually accumulated and improved into a complete history as in Herbert Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature*.

5.1 The History of Chinese Poetry in a “Tree Metaphor”

When the British sinologists tried to describe the history of Chinese poetry, they frequently referred to a metaphor quoted from a Chinese source which compares the development of Chinese poetry to the growth of a tree. In his *Grammar of the Chinese Language* (1815), Robert Morrison first brought up this Chinese analogy, as follows:

A Chinese writer in his preface to a collection of poems, compares the progress of poetry in China to the gradual growth of a tree. The celebrated *Shē-kīng* 詩經 [*The Book of Poetry*], he compares to the roots; when *Soo-le* [Su Wu 蘇武 (140–60 BC) and Li Ling 李陵 (?–74 BC), both poets of the Han dynasty] flourished, the buds appeared; in the time of *Keen-ngan* [建安, Jian'an period (196–220) of the Han dynasty] there were abundance of leaves, but during the dynasty *Tang*, many reposed under the shade of this tree, and there were rich supplies of flowers and fruits.¹⁶

Morrison's account was noticed by John Barrow and quoted in his “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama” prefixed to John Francis Davis's translation *An Heir in his Old Age* (1817). Barrow spoke favourably of Morrison's discovery of this Chinese quotation, particularly in comparison with the earlier Jesuits' writings:

It is true, some of the [Jesuits] missionaries make a reserve in favour of *ancient* poetry: ‘the good old times’ are praised in more countries than in China, and with as little knowledge of what their ‘goodness’ consisted in; but Mr. Morrison, in his Chinese Grammar, quotes a Chinese author who seems to have sounder notions on the subject than either Père Cibot [Pierre-Martial Cibot, 1727–1780, a French Jesuit missionary to China] or the Abbé Grozier [Jean-Baptiste Gabriel Alexandre Grosier, 1743–1823]: he compares the progress of poetry among his countrymen to the gradual growth of a tree.¹⁷

Barrow then cited Morrison's paraphrase of the Chinese “tree metaphor.” Asserting that Morrison's quotation from the authentic Chinese source provided a more accurate account of the history of Chinese poetry than the Jesuit missionaries' archaist, general comments,

¹⁶ Morrison, “Of Prosody,” 273–274.

¹⁷ [Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama,” vii.

Barrow proclaimed the authority of the newly developed British sinology in the early nineteenth century.

This metaphor was also later repeatedly adopted in the writings on Chinese poetry by Peter Perring Thoms, John Francis Davis, and Robert Kennaway Douglas from 1824 to 1875:¹⁸

When the Tang dynasty was in its splendour, poetry was very generally cultivated, and may be compared to a tree. The three hundred odes (the She-king) [*The Book of Poetry*] its roots; the poetical productions of Loo [*sic.*] and Le [Su Wu and Li Ling], its tender sprouts; the compositions during the reign of Hëen-te, its branches; during the Six Dynasties, its leaves; when, from Tang and downwards, its pendant branches bore delicate and beautiful flowers.¹⁹

They compare its progress, themselves, to the growth of a tree—‘the ancient Book of Odes [*The Book of Poetry*] may be likened to the roots; when *Soolo* [*sic.*; Su Wu and Li Ling] flourished, the buds appeared; in the time of Kien-gân [Jian’an] there was abundance of foliage; but during the Tâng dynasty many reposed under the shadow of the tree, and it yielded rich supplies of flowers and fruit.’²⁰

The Chinese say of poetry that the Book of Odes [*The Book of Poetry*] may be likened to its roots, that during the Han and Wei Dynasties it burst into foliage, and that during the Tang dynasty (620–907) it came into full bloom.²¹

This metaphor, as Peter Perring Thoms explained in the preface to his translation *Chinese Courtship*, was taken from the preface to a Chinese book named “Tang-she-hǒ-keae.”²² This is *Gu Tang shi hejie* 古唐詩合解 (Anthology of ancient and Tang poems with notes and commentary; hereafter as *Anthology*), an anthology of Chinese poems compiled by the Qing scholar Wang Yaoqu 王堯衢. It consists of four volumes of ancient poems and twelve volumes of Tang poems, altogether 625 poems by 132 poets,²³ and is

¹⁸ The analogy was also mentioned by the French sinologist Hervey de Saint-Denis (1823–1892) in his introduction to *Poésies de l’époque des Thangs* (Poetry of the Age of Tang, 1862), see, Ai’erwei sheng deni 埃爾維·聖·德尼 (Hervey de Saint-Denis), “Zhongguo de shige yishu” 中國的詩歌藝術 (introduction to *Poésies de l’époque des Thangs*), trans. Qiu Haiying 邱海嬰, in *Faguo hanxuejia lun Zhongguo wenxue: Gudian shici* 法國漢學家論中國文學·古典詩詞 (French sinologists on Chinese literature: traditional poetry), ed. Qian Linsen 錢林森 (Beijing: Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe, 2007), 18.

¹⁹ Thoms, preface to *Chinese Courtship*, xi.

²⁰ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 202.

²¹ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 104.

²² Thoms, preface to *Chinese Courtship*, x–xi.

²³ Zhan Furui 詹福瑞, preface to *Tangshi hejie jianzhu* 唐詩合解箋注 (Anthology of the Tang Poetry with Notes and Commentary), comp. Wang Yaoqu 王堯衢, ed. Shan Xiaoqing 單小青 and Zhan Furui (Baoding: Heibeidaxue chubanshe, 2000), 7.

designed and compiled to be a primer of Chinese poetry for children and common readers in China.²⁴ According to research, the *Anthology* is one of the most read poetry anthologies in the Qing dynasty due to its careful selection of Tang poems which are “plain and clear” (明白曉暢) and “widely and commonly read and recited by the mass” (人所常誦習者).²⁵ Alexander Wylie also noted in his bibliographical *Notes on Chinese Literature* (1867) that the *Anthology* is “one of the most popular” of the “smaller compendiums”²⁶ of Tang poetry in China. Probably because of its popularity and easy access, the *Anthology* was widely received by the sinologists as an appropriate beginner’s reading of Chinese poetry—a copy of the book is to be found in many nineteenth-century British sinologists’ collections of Chinese books.²⁷ In the “Fanli” 凡例 (Editorial Guidelines) to the *Anthology*, we can find the Chinese original text of the “tree metaphor” that the sinologists have frequently quoted in their writings:

If we compare [Chinese poetry] to a tree, with *The Book of Poetry* it takes its root, the poems by Su [Su Wu] and Li [Li Ling] are the buds, during the Jian’an period it grows into a young tree, and during the Six Dynasties (220 or 222–589) it grows leaves, while in the Tang dynasty it finally becomes exuberant and begins to flower and grow fruit.²⁸

This succinct and interesting analogy, however, is not Wang Yaoqu’s own invention. As research shows, it is originally from the Qing critic Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627–1703),²⁹ and first

²⁴ Han Sheng 韓勝, “Qingdai tangshi xuanben yanjiu” 清代唐詩選本研究 (Study of Tang poetry anthologies in the Qing dynasty), (PhD diss., Nankai University, 2005), 96–103.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 96–98, 100–101.

²⁶ Wylie, *Notes on Chinese Literature*, 195.

²⁷ Among Robert Morrison’s Chinese collection brought back to England in 1823, now stored in the library of School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, there is a copy of the Chinese *Anthology* published by Sheng de tang 聖德堂 (RM C. 361. k. 5). A copy also published by Sheng de tang is among the Chinese books donated to the Royal Asiatic Society by George Staunton and Thomas Manning (1772–1840), now stored in the University of Leeds library (Chinese R.A.S. 214); two different copies published respectively in 1732 and in 1821 are in the Thomas Wade Collection of Chinese books in the Cambridge University library (FC.557.12, 13).

²⁸ The original Chinese is as follows: 譬之於木，《三百篇》根也，蘇、李發萌芽，建安成拱把，六朝生枝葉，至唐而枝葉垂陰，始花始實矣。Wang Yaoqu 王堯衢, “Fanli” 凡例 (Editorial guidelines), in *Tangshi hejie jianzhu*, 10. Unless otherwise specified, all English translations are mine.

²⁹ Zhan Furui 詹福瑞, “Wang Yaoqu *Gu Tang shi hejie de zongtang qingxiang ji xuanshi biao zhun*” 王堯衢古唐詩合解的宗唐傾向及選詩標準 (The pro-Tang inclination and the criteria of selection in Wang Yaoqu’s *Anthology of Ancient and Tang Poetry with Notes and Commentary*), *Literary Heritage 文學遺產*, no. 1 (2001): 94–95. For a general study of Ye Xie’s *The Origins of Poetry* and his poetic ideas, see Karl-Heinz Pohl, “Ye Xie’s ‘On the Origin of Poetry’ ‘(Yuan Shi)’”. A Poetic of the Early Qing,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series, 78, Livr. 1/3 (1992): 1–32.

appears in his *Yuan shi* 原詩 (The Origins of Poetry; 1686), a theoretical, systematic discussion of Chinese poetics:

Compare it to the way in which a tree grows out of the earth. *The Book of Songs* is its roots; the poetry of Li Ling and Su Wu are its first sprouting; the poetry of the Jian-an is its growth into something an armspan in girth; the poetry of the Six Dynasties are its boughs and foliage; the poetry of the T'ang is the shadow cast by its boughs and foliage; in the poetry of the Song, it is able to flower and all the capacities of the tree are complete.³⁰

The metaphor in Ye Xie's book differs from Wang Yaoqu's version in that Ye considered the Chinese poetry completed its life cycle in the Song dynasty, while Wang ascribed the Tang poetry as the ultimate end, perhaps, as research indicates, influenced by the contemporary admiration of the Tang poetry in the Qing dynasty.³¹

The overall popularity of this tree metaphor among the nineteenth-century British sinologists is probably because of its unexpected affinity with the biological analogy commonly used in English literary criticism to compare the evolutionary history of literature with a living organism. René Wellek points out that the notion of circular progress of literature described as the "growth and decay of an animal or vegetable"³² was widely seen in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historical narratives. According to Wellek, this idea can be traced back to Aristotle's analogy between the history of Greek tragedy and "the life-cycle of a living organism"³³ in his *Poetics*. In the eighteenth century, the concept of evolutionary development of literature was most commonly expressed, as Wellek summarises, in terms of "the analogy with the flowering of a fruit or vegetable or the aging of a man, an idea that easily led to the concept of a closed cycle of evolution, repeating itself over and over again."³⁴ It was repeatedly seen in the works by prominent British critics such as Hugh Blair, David Hume (1711–1776), and Oliver Goldsmith

³⁰ The original Chinese is as follows: 譬諸地之生木然，三百篇則其根，蘇李詩則其萌芽由蘖，建安詩則生長至於拱把，六朝詩則有枝葉，唐詩則枝葉垂陰，宋詩則能開花，而木之能事方畢。Ye Xie 葉燮, "The Origins of Poetry," trans. Stephen Owen, in *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 571. Here I think the Chinese "唐詩則枝葉垂陰" should be translated as "the poetry of the Tang is the luxuriant foliage that casts shadows," rather than "the poetry of the T'ang is the shadow cast by its boughs and foliage."

³¹ Zhan, "Wang Yaoqu *Gu Tang shi hejie*," 95.

³² Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History*, 39.

³³ René Wellek, "The Concept of Evolution in Literary History," in his *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 37–38.

³⁴ Wellek, *The Rise of English Literary History*, 72.

(1728–1774).³⁵ The nineteenth-century literary historians also applied the idea of “biological evolutionism” to literature. For example, the idea that “a genre runs a well-defined course of germination, expansion, efflorescence, and decay”³⁶ was found in a history of English drama by the literary critic John Addington Symonds (1840–1893).

Perhaps with such an evolutionary notion of literary history in mind, the British sinologists were likely to use the tree metaphor to illustrate a process of *improvement* in Chinese versification and poetic style from the primitive state to perfection. For example, Robert Kennaway Douglas observed that the poems in *The Book of Poetry*—“the earliest specimens of poetry”—were “crude in their measure and are wanting in that harmony which is begotten of study and cultivation.”³⁷ He then quoted the tree analogy to describe an advancement in the quality of the Chinese poetic art. The sense of improvement is most expressly highlighted by John Francis Davis. In his *On the Poetry of the Chinese* (1829), when explaining the use of poetical numbers—the Chinese characters used in a line, Davis saw an advancement in Chinese versification from the three-word-line poetry to the four-word lines in *The Book of Poetry*, then to the “improved system of versification” that “consists in lines of *five* words or feet, as well as in the longer and still superior measure of *seven*.”³⁸ He also noted the artistic refinement in the “polish of modern versification,” improved from “the earliest Chinese poetry, as we find it in the Sheeking [*The Book of Poetry*]” which was crude and irregular in its rhythms and metres.³⁹ In his linear progressive view, Davis considered the advancement of poetic art as a universal rule in China and in the West alike:

For the same reason that Pope is more harmonious than Chaucer or Donne, Boileau [the French poet Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, 1636–1711] or Racine [the French dramatist Jean Racine, 1639–1699] than Ronsard [the French poet Pierre de Ronsard, 1524–1585], Virgil or Tibullus [the Latin poet Albius Tibullus, c. 55–19 BC] than old Ennius [the Roman poet Quintus Ennius, 239–169 BC], . . . so the poetry of China, from the Tang dynasty (when this art attained its highest perfection) down to the present time, is in point of mere versification a vast improvement on the Sheeking.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid., 72–73.

³⁶ Wellek, “English Literary Historiography during the Nineteenth Century,” 156–157.

³⁷ Douglas, *The Language and Literature of China*, 104.

³⁸ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, 11.

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The progress of poetry is inevitable in China, not only because it is “a rule so general” but also because the Chinese people “took so much delight” in poetry that the poetic art must have “improved by cultivation.”⁴¹ Though Davis did not mention the tree metaphor in his 1829 version of *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, he added it in his later works, apparently assuming that this analogy corresponded to his progressive historical view. In his *The Chinese* (1836), Davis used the tree metaphor to explain and support his theory of poetic improvement in China:

In later times the structure of their [Chinese] verse has undergone considerable improvement, and there have been particular periods or eras of their history, when the art of poetry has been especially cultivated. They compare its progress, themselves, to the growth of a tree. . . .⁴²

In the slightly revised 1870 edition of *On the Poetry of the Chinese*, Davis also inserted the tree metaphor into the paragraph on the advancement of Chinese versification mentioned above.⁴³

While the metaphor itself looks comparable to the European evolutionary historical model and the sinologists hence employed the metaphor accordingly, it might be worth pointing out that the theoretical contexts in which the tree analogy was originally conceived by Ye Xie and used by Wang Yaoqu are not identical to the progressive historical view and the emphasis may not be placed on the improvement of versification. Ye Xie’s *The Origins of Poetry* which contains the metaphor is particularly written to refute the archaist view (*fugu* 復古) on the history of poetry popular in the Ming dynasty, and, at the same time, also to reconcile its difference with the progressive view (*xinbian* 新變).⁴⁴ The disagreement between these two polarised views lies mainly in their different evaluation on a pair of key poetic concepts: the “correctness” (*zheng* 正) which means the norm or proper form of poetry, and the “mutation” (*bian* 變) which refers to the change and deviation from the norm in poetry’s later development.⁴⁵ Adhering to ancient orthodox norms, the archaists believe that subsequent changes in Chinese poetry cause the decline

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 202.

⁴³ Davis, *On the Poetry of the Chinese* (1870), 10.

⁴⁴ Pohl, “Ye Xie’s ‘On the Origin of Poetry’ (Yuan Shi),” 4–6; Zhang Jian 張健, *Qingdai shixue yanjiu* 清代詩學研究 (Studies of the poetics of the Qing dynasty) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 330–333.

⁴⁵ On the concepts of *zheng* and *bian* as well as their historical implications, see Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 47–48;

of the art from its normative style, while the progressive view advocates changes and advancement in poetry.⁴⁶ Opposing the archaist view, Ye Xie argued in his book that the normative style would inevitably and eventually ossify and decay after many years of imitation, while mutation is the only way to save poetry from decline and lead it to flourish again.⁴⁷ Ye Xie thus emphasised the value of mutation as the key momentum in Chinese poetry's development. He elaborated a cyclical pattern of the history of poetry with alternating stages of "norm-flourish-decline-mutation-norm"⁴⁸ by which "the source and streams, the roots and branches, the normative and mutated, and flourishing and decline all operate in cycles" (源流本末正變盛衰互為循環).⁴⁹ To Ye Xie, mutation or change means *innovation* in forms and styles, and does not necessarily indicate *improvement* in the versification or poetic merit. Meanwhile, Ye was also cautious of the progressive view which prefers modern poems over ancient ones. Instead, he explained the history of Chinese poetry as an organic whole and a process of "continuity and completion" (相承相成) in which the predecessors and the successors were equally important.⁵⁰ The tree analogy was used here to illustrate that although "each stage appearing out of the mutation of the preceding stage, the life always comes from the root."⁵¹ This is how it differs slightly from the sinologists' understanding of the tree analogy as indicating the improvement of Chinese poetry. *The Book of Poetry* was still regarded by Ye as the normative form and the source of Chinese poetry, as important as, if not superior to, the poetry in the Wei and Jin dynasties or the Tang poems, and was certainly not considered "crude" as John Francis Davis and Robert Kennaway Douglas claimed. Wang Yaoqu expressed a similar poetic view in the Preface and the Editorial Guidelines to his *Anthology*, attributing equal value

⁴⁶ On the archivist and progressive views on literature in the Ming dynasty, see, Xia Xianchun 夏咸淳, "Chuantong wenxue shixue de tuozhan (Ming dai)" 傳統文學史學的拓展 (明代) (The expansion of traditional literary historiography, Ming dynasty), in *Zhongguo wenxue shixue shi* 中國文學史學史 (History of Chinese literary historiography), vol. 1, ed. Chen Bohai 陳伯海 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2001), 370–383, 394–406; 406–414.

⁴⁷ Ye Xie argued that "If we make a historical survey of poetry since the Han and Wei, tracing the movement from source to stream, along with poetry's periods of rise and fall, we cannot correlate the two antithetical movements, claiming that norm is the source and always flourishing, while mutation is the stream and the point where poetry passes into decline. Rather there are times when the norm suffers a gradual decline, at which point a mutation is able to reinitiate flourishing." The Chinese original is as follows: 歷考漢魏以來之詩，循其源流升降，不得謂正為源而長盛，變為流而始衰，惟正有漸衰，故變能啟盛。Ye, "The Origins of Poetry," trans. Stephen Owen, 554.

⁴⁸ Zhang, *Qingdai shixue yanjiu*, 339–340.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁵⁰ Ye, "The Origins of Poetry," trans. Stephen Owen, 569–573.

⁵¹ The original Chinese is as follows: 其節次雖層層積累，變化而出，而必不能不從根柢而生者也。Ye, "The Origins of Poetry," trans. Stephen Owen, 571.

and importance to both the ancient poetry and the Tang poetry.⁵² The tree metaphor was employed by Wang to illustrate the fact that “poetic forms change constantly” (詩體多變),⁵³ and not necessarily a history of progress and improvement.

The British sinologists’ appropriation of the tree analogy here serves as an interesting example of the encounter between Chinese and English literary theory. Prompted by a coincidence between the rhetoric of the Chinese tree metaphor and the English evolutionary biological parallel, the British sinologists constantly employed the Chinese analogy to describe the history of Chinese poetry. It seems, however, that the different theoretical contexts were little noticed or considered. Picked out from its immediate context and used as a simplistic parallel of the history of Chinese poetry, the tree metaphor is invested with the sense of improvement under the sinologists’ pen to represent the history of Chinese poetry as a linear progressive development.

5.2 The History of Chinese Drama

Compared to Chinese poetry, the sinologists’ writings on Chinese drama seldom involve an account of its history. Most of the sinological writings on Chinese drama, such as John Barrow’s “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama, and of their Theatrical Exhibitions” (1817), John Francis Davis’s “Chinese Drama, Poetry, and Romance” (1829), and George Carter Stent’s “Chinese Theatricals” (1876), are primarily an introduction to the general characteristics of play scripts and theatrical performances, with little information on the history of Chinese drama. This is probably because of the sinologists’ critical evaluation of Chinese drama, as well as the lack of Chinese research on the history of drama due to the genre’s inferior literary status in China. As mentioned in the previous discussion, the main reference source of Chinese drama for the nineteenth-century European sinologists is the Chinese anthology *One Hundred Yuan Plays*, which provides a fine selection of *zaju* plays as well as an introduction to the characteristics and principles of playwriting and performance, but no historical narrative on Chinese dramatic arts.

⁵² Wang, “Fanli,” 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

A fragmentary writing with a certain historical sense first appears as early as in Robert Morrison's English-Chinese dictionary published in 1822. In the entry "drama," Morrison provided an elaborate description of the names, roles, and divisions of Chinese drama, completely based on the information from the *One Hundred Yuan Plays*. The entry begins with an outline of the different Chinese terms used for dramatic arts throughout dynasties, which was roughly translated from one of the prefaces to the *One Hundred Yuan Plays*, with the Chinese terms and phrases freely inserted in the English translation:

The origin of the drama in China, is attributed to 元宗 Yuen-tsung [Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762); reign 712–756], an emperor of the Tang dynasty, about A.D. 740; it was then called 傳奇 chuen ke: Sung dynasty called the drama 戲曲 he keũh; the Kin dynasty, 院本雜劇 Yuen pun tsă keĩh. The terms now made use for the several performers originated with the emperor 徽宗 Hwuy-tsung (A.D. 1120) [Emperor Huizong (1082–1135) of the Song dynasty; reign 1100–1126], who 見鬻國人來朝衣裝舉動可笑使優人效之以為戲 on seeing the persons of an embassy from Tswan kwō, whose dress and gestures were laughable; he ordered the musicians to imitate them, and get up a play.⁵⁴

Morrison then translated parts of another Chinese preface to the *One Hundred Yuan Plays*, also on the terms of drama in China:

Another authority says, 戲曲至隋始盛 the drama began to prevail in the time of Suy [Sui dynasty], (A. D. 610). It was then called 康衢戲 Kung Keu he; the Tang dynasty called the drama 梨園樂 le yuen lö; Sung called it, 華林戲 hwa lin he; and the Tartar dynasty Yuen [Yuan dynasty] called it 昇平樂 shing ping lö, 'the joy of peace and prosperity.'⁵⁵

Though these two paragraphs do not count as a proper history of Chinese drama, Morrison's listing of the different terms for drama in each dynasty indicates a course of development of the drama genre in China.

In later writings, while there was no full and detailed narrative of the history of Chinese drama from its origins to the Qing dynasty, the British sinologists managed to draw a

⁵⁴ Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, Part III*, s.v. "drama." The original Chinese is as follow: 唐有傳奇。宋有戲曲。金有院本雜劇。 . . . 或云宋徽宗見鬻國人來朝。其衣裝鞵履巾裏傅粉墨。舉動可笑。使優人效之以為戲。 Tao Jiucheng 陶九成, "Tiantai Tao Jiucheng lunqu" 天台陶九成論曲 (On the song, by Tao Jiucheng from Tiantai), in *Yuanqu xuan* 元曲選 (One hundred Yuan plays), ed. Zang Maoxun 臧懋循 (1615; repr., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 9.

⁵⁵ Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, Part III*, s.v. "drama." The original Chinese is as follow: 戲曲至隋始盛。在隋謂之康衢戲。唐謂之梨園樂。宋謂之華林戲。元謂之昇平樂。 Hanxuzi 涵虛子, "Hanxuzi lunqu" 涵虛子論曲 (On the song, by Hanxuzi), in *Yuanqu xuan*, 21.

rough timeline of its history: drama was described as appearing relatively late in China and the early history of when and how drama first developed in China was considered unclear; the Tang dynasty and the Yuan dynasty were identified as two decisive periods in the development of Chinese drama; drama was then believed to stagnate after the Yuan dynasty till the present age. Among all the sinologists' writings on Chinese drama, Robert Kennaway Douglas gave a relatively elaborated account of its history in an article published in *The Contemporary Review* in 1880.⁵⁶ In his article, Douglas claimed that China "lagged a considerable distance behind the people of western nations"⁵⁷ in the development of drama. When Greek drama was well-established, he explained, "the Chinese were ignorant even of the name of a theatre."⁵⁸ This idea of the late development of Chinese drama was also adopted by William Stanton, who observed at the beginning of his *Chinese Drama* that, while drama flourished in ancient Greece, it had "remained unknown [in China] twelve centuries longer, until the reign of the Tang Emperor Huan Tsung [Emperor Xuanzong]."⁵⁹

Though the early history of how Chinese drama was taking shape remained unknown, Douglas noticed the foreign influence on the emergence of Chinese drama. He explained that "it was not until the sixth century (A.D.) that some travelling gymnasts from India initiated the [Chinese] people into the delights of the rude pantomimic dances and aerobatic performances of their native land."⁶⁰ Such Indian performances, according to Douglas, were not drama proper, but entertainment by dancers disguised as wild animals. The exact historical facts described in this anecdote seem obscure; it probably refers to the influence of Indian or Western Regions' performing arts in China.⁶¹ It echoes, nevertheless, the comparative study of Chinese and Sanskrit drama, or of the latter's possible influence on the former, by the British sinologists in the nineteenth century.⁶² India, Ulrike

⁵⁶ A summarised version of the history of Chinese drama in this article also appears in Douglas's *China* (1882) and in the introduction to his *Chinese Stories* (1893). Douglas, *China*, 397; Douglas, introduction to *Chinese Stories*, xxiii.

⁵⁷ Douglas, "The Chinese Drama," 123.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Stanton, "The Chinese Drama," 1.

⁶⁰ Douglas, "The Chinese Drama," 123.

⁶¹ On the influence of the performing arts from the Western Regions on Chinese drama, see, Liao Ben 廖奔 and Liu Yanjun 劉彥君, *Zhongguo xiqu fazhan shi* 中國戲曲發展史 (History of Chinese drama) (Taiyuan: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 118–134.

⁶² It is commonly acknowledged today that the Chinese scholars Xu Dishan 許地山 (1894–1941) and Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958) were the first to raise and advocate the idea in the 1920s and the 1930s that Chinese drama originated from Sanskrit drama. See, Sun Mei 孫玫, "Zhongguo xiqu yuanyu

Hillemann reminds us, in fact acts as a “main point of reference”⁶³ in the formation of British knowledge about China in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Indologists and the sinologists were keen to explore, for example, the Indian influence on Chinese language and Buddhism.⁶⁴ In like manner, a comparison between Chinese and Sanskrit drama also became a point of interest to them in the nineteenth century. An early mention of the connection between the two was seen in the British historian James Mill’s (1773–1836) *The History of British India* (1817). Describing Hindu drama, Mill observed that “the Chinese, too, are excessively fond of dramatic performances; and they excel in poetry as well as the Hindus.”⁶⁵ A reviewer of Mill’s book, however, strongly opposed this parallelisation and argued that Hindu drama was far superior to the Chinese drama.⁶⁶

John Barrow provided a more extended discussion in his “Brief View of the Chinese Drama” (1817). Remarking that “whatever may be the merits and the defects of Chinese drama, it is unquestionably their own invention,”⁶⁷ he ruled out the possibility of any Indian influence on Chinese drama. Based on the only translation of a Hindu play by the orientalist William Jones, Barrow argued that this specimen “differs more from the Chinese than the latter from the Greek, Roman, English, or Italian” and “there is not the slightest grounds for supposing that the one was borrowed from the other.”⁶⁸ He further pointed out the difference between Chinese and Indian plays as “the one adhering strictly to nature, and describing human manners and human feelings; the other soaring beyond nature, into the labyrinth of an intricate and inexplicable mythology.”⁶⁹ The French sinologist, and an expert in Chinese drama, Antoine-Pierre-Louis Bazin also argued for the distinct difference between the two as he observed that Hindu drama built largely on

Yindu fanju shuo’ kaobian” “中國戲曲源於印度梵劇說” 考辨 (A study on the theory of “Chinese drama originating from Sanskrit Drama”), *Hundred Schools in Art* 文藝百家, no. 2 (1997): 10–17; Sun Mei 孫玫, “Zhongguo xiqu yuanyu Yindu fanju shuo’ zai tantao” “中國戲曲源於印度梵劇說” 再探討 (The theory of “Chinese drama originating from Sanskrit Drama” revisited), *Literary Heritage* 文學遺產, no. 2 (2006): 75–83.

⁶³ Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge*, 161.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 161–162.

⁶⁵ James Mill, *The History of British India* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817), 1: 368.

⁶⁶ “On Mr. Mill’s ‘History of British India’, no. V,” *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and its Dependencies* 28 (November, 1829): 521.

⁶⁷ [Barrow], “A Brief View of the Chinese Drama,” xlv.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xlv-xlv.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xlv.

the caste system while Chinese playwrights enjoyed freedom in their characterisation.⁷⁰ The interest in the historical relation between Chinese and Sanskrit drama, however, seems to become less popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is seldom seen in other sinologists' writings.

In addition to the Indian influence, Douglas also adopted a comparative perspective to parallel the delayed emergence of drama in both Chinese and Jewish cultures. He argued that “probably the same cause which acted as a bar to the invention of the drama among the early Jews, served a similar purpose in China.”⁷¹ The early Chinese and Jewish people, according to Douglas, were monotheistic and, therefore, were unable to cultivate drama from religious ceremonies as the polytheistic nations did. In addition, he also believed that the existence of a perfect literature at an early stage of culture in China—probably the Confucian classics—would impede the growth of national imagination and thus the development of lighter literature such as drama.

No matter what the theory for the late development of drama in China might be, the idea that Chinese dramatic arts were established with Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty was widely adopted by the British sinologists. For example, William Frederick Mayers noted, “it is well known that the Chinese theatre of the present day dates its origin at the performances ‘by the youths of the Pear Garden’ which were instituted during the magnificent though chequered reign of Yüan Tsung (Ming Hwang) of the T’ang dynasty (A.D. 713 to 756).”⁷² Robert Kennaway Douglas also acknowledged that

it was not until the latter end of the T’ang Dynasty—618–907—that a Chinese Thespis [Thespis of Icaria, known as the first actor and the Father of Tragedy] arranged the wild dances and songs of the precursors of the drama into connected and orderly plays. This period was the Augustan age of Chinese poetry, and it was then that the verses of Le Tai-pih [Li Bai], Pih Keu-e [Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846)], and others, found an echo in the plays of inventive but less celebrated authors.⁷³

William Stanton elaborated on the story of the Emperor Xuanzong and how he founded the first training institution, the “Imperial Dramatic College in a pear garden.”⁷⁴ As will

⁷⁰ Antuowan Bazan 安托萬·巴贊 (Antoine-Pierre-Louis Bazin), “*Zhongguo xiju xuan daoyan*” 《中國戲劇選》導言 (Introduction to *Théâtre Chinois*), trans., Zhao Songxian 趙頌賢, in *Faguo hanxuejia lun Zhongguo wenxue: Gudian xiju he xiaoshuo*, 33–50.

⁷¹ Douglas, “The Chinese Drama,” 124.

⁷² Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 86–87.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Stanton, “The Chinese Drama,” 2.

be discussed later, Herbert Giles also mentioned the “Pear Garden” but questioned its function as an actor training institution.⁷⁵ From the French sinologist Bazin’s writing on the origin of Chinese drama, it seems that this idea—the importance of Emperor Xuanzong and his pear garden to the development of Chinese drama—was taken from Chinese sources—the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (New Book of Tang), for example.⁷⁶

The Yuan dynasty was considered as another important stage in the history of Chinese drama—another finding commonly accepted by the sinologists. Alexander Wylie remarked that “the plays of the Yuen [Yuan] dynasty have attained a lasting celebrity, and form a useful thesaurus of the dialect.”⁷⁷ Robert Kennaway Douglas observed that “from this period [the Tang dynasty] to the time of the Yuen Dynasty, founded by Jenghiz Khan [Genghis Khan] three hundred years later, the art of dramatic writing improved and flourished; and under the patronage bestowed upon it by the Mongol emperors, it may be said to have reached its highest excellence.”⁷⁸ “The tone of the plays was sound,” he added, “though many of the incidents introduced, if measured by European taste, would be considered decidedly coarse.”⁷⁹ From the Ming dynasty, Douglas explained, the Chinese people returned to classical literature and “dramatic writing fell into the hands of inferior authors” who could only introduce the “grossest indecencies into both speech and action” which “continued to be the characteristics of Chinese playwrights down to the present time.”⁸⁰

This brief outline of Chinese drama’s history summarised above is consistent with the British sinologists’ general understanding of Chinese drama as discussed in the previous two chapters. It focuses mostly on the Yuan *zaju* plays and excludes the *chuanqi* drama in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The lack of history of Chinese drama in sinological writings suggests an underlying negative estimation of Chinese drama, and in turn reinforces the idea that Chinese drama was ancient, stagnant, and not as advanced as its European counterpart.

⁷⁵ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 257.

⁷⁶ Bazin, “*Zhongguo xiju xuan daoyan*,” 34.

⁷⁷ Wylie, introduction to *Notes on Chinese Literature*, x.

⁷⁸ Douglas, “The Chinese Drama,” 124.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

5.3 The Origins of the Chinese Novel

As with drama, there are notably very few writings by the British sinologists on the history of Chinese fiction, probably also because such studies were not abundant in Chinese literary criticism due to the genre's low literary status. One of the narratives on the history of Chinese fiction is drawn by the Chinese novelist and publisher Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646). He noted that works of *xiaoshuo* (novel, story) first appeared in China by the end of the Zhou dynasty. The Tang dynasty saw the flourishing of short stories written by Chinese literati. The vernacular *yanyi* 演義 (romance), probably originated from the art of *shuohua* 說話 (storytelling) in the Song dynasty, gradually developed into the vernacular novels of the Ming dynasty, which were less literary than the short stories of the Tang, but more popular and widely received by general Chinese readers.⁸¹

For the nineteenth-century sinologists, bibliographical writing becomes a common form by which to introduce Chinese novels to foreign readers. The German sinologist Karl Gützlaff made perhaps the first attempt to introduce three Chinese novels—*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*—in the periodical *Chinese Repository* from 1838 to 1842. Pioneering as they were, Gützlaff's writings turned out to be replete with inaccurate information and explanation. In 1867, the British sinologist William Frederick Mayers published a series of more accurate and detailed bibliographical accounts of Chinese novels in the English sinological periodical *Notes and Queries on China and Japan*. Mayers's study, under the general title "Bibliographical," was originally intended to cover a wider range of Chinese books than just the novel. In his first five articles, Mayers introduced five Chinese books, each of a different kind, from state papers to historical novels, from travel writings to a

⁸¹ Lütianguan zhuren 綠天館主人 [Feng Menglong 馮夢龍], "Gujin xiaoshuo xu" 古今小說序 (preface to *Stories Ancient and New*), in *Mingqing xiaoshuo ziliao xuanbian* 明清小說資料選編 (Selected collection of materials about novels in the Ming and Qing dynasties), ed. Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 2006), 2: 900.

biographical dictionary.⁸² From the sixth article on, he decided to concentrate on Chinese fiction, and the next six articles are all devoted to Chinese historical and romantic novels.

In addition to the general description and explanation of the characteristics of the Chinese novel (some of which we have discussed in previous chapters), a significant merit of Mayers's articles lies in his effort to trace the origins of the Chinese novel. It seems, however, that Mayers did not refer to any Chinese source about the history of Chinese fiction such as the narrative by Feng Menglong, but raised his own theory. As Chinese drama, the origin of Chinese fiction was considered somewhat a mystery. In his first article on Chinese historical romances, Mayers noted that it was not easy to locate the exact time when the genre romance emerged in China, except that "works of fiction constructed with a regard to fixity of scope and coherency of plan" first appeared undoubtedly during the Song dynasty.⁸³ He apparently did not acknowledge the short stories in the Tang dynasty as "works of fiction" proper, but only as "wild legends of genii and magicians." (86) He also observed that some of the tales based on historical records in a twelfth-century Chinese private library catalogue were "rather abridgements of history than romantic narratives," but were probably the "indirect progenitors of the true historical novel." (86) Speculating on the origins of the Chinese historical novel, Mayers proposed his "somewhat bold hypothesis" that, based on "strong internal evidence," Chinese historical novels had "sprung directly *from the stage*," or, from Chinese drama, as an amplified form of the theatrical scenes that had been popular among Chinese people for centuries. (86) Though it seemed a wild guess, Mayers asserted that his hypothesis is evident from "reflection upon the striking coincidences" between the Chinese novel and drama in their characters, stories, and description. (86)

He then endeavoured to explain and prove his theory by first discussing the origin of theatrical performance in China. Drawing upon the well-accepted idea that Chinese drama developed from the "Pear Garden" institution during the reign of the Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty, Mayers assumed that the subjects of those earliest plays were

⁸² William Frederick Mayers, "Bibliographical. State Papers Relating to Tibet," *Notes and Queries* 1, no. 1 (1867): 6; "Bibliographical. Chronicle of the Fall of the T'ang dynasty," *Notes and Queries* 1, no. 2 (1867): 14–15; "Bibliographical. The Record of Marvels; or Tales of the Genii," *Notes and Queries* 1, no. 3 (1867): 24–26; "Bibliographical. Works of Travel," *Notes and Queries* 1, no. 4 (1867): 41–42; "Bibliographical. Chinese Biographical Dictionaries," *Notes and Queries* 1, no. 6 (1867): 72–74.

⁸³ Mayers, "I. Historical Romances," 86. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

“naturally based upon the legends orally current among the people, among whom printed books must still have been scarce.” (87) In these early plays, the “personages and events” of the oral legends were “adapted in accordance with dramatic exigencies to a limited set of characters.” (87) Then, turning to the novel, he argued that these Chinese plays provided the only repertoire from which Chinese novelists borrowed not only familiar characters and plots but also ways of description for their romances:

Now it seems not too much to say that these characters, and these only, form the lay figures upon which the romance-writer dresses the representation of his heroes, who stalk through his work with the identical gestures, costume, and astounding feats of arms that are allotted to the corresponding performers on the stage. (87)

Mayers went on enumerating the standard characters—the “one unflinching and unvarying round of personage”—in “every historical novel” which suggested their common inheritance from Chinese plays. (87) He also observed that the narrative style of the historical novel was “so essentially dramatic” as “wherever personal action on the part of one of the characters ceases, the narrative is as sharply interrupted as the course of a play at the change of scene, and the reader passes on as a matter of course to the action ascribed to the next character.” (87)

Overall, based on the similarities he had discovered between historical novels and dramatic performances, Mayers concluded that the Chinese historical novel was produced to be the continuation and expansion of the dramatic entertainment enjoyed by the Chinese people:

Hence it seems most probable that as in the course of centuries both the art of dramatic representation grew more and more widely diffused and the circulation of printed books . . . became enlarged, the historical romance was invented as a means of further satisfying the national craving for dramatic entertainment reproducing literally the scenes already long familiar to the theatre-goer’s eye. (87)

Mayers obviously held a firm belief in this theory that, in his later discussion of individual historical novels, he reminded his readers to notice that these novels “have been plentifully illustrated in the semi-dramatic manner described in previous Notes.”⁸⁴ After explaining his hypothesis of its origins, Mayers also briefly outlined the development of historical novels in China as he explained that they “undoubtedly existed during the Song dynasty,” but the presently extant works seem to “date from the succeeding (Yuan) dynasty, since

⁸⁴ Mayers, “III. Historical Romances (continued),” 120.

which period all the romances pertaining to the current literature of China have been produced.”⁸⁵

In the next three articles, Mayers continued his survey of the other sub-class of Chinese fiction: the romantic novel. Just as he traced the origins of the Chinese historical novel to Chinese drama from the Tang dynasty, so he made the assumption that the Chinese romantic novel “may be deemed the lineal descendant of the metrical dramas in which the Chinese ‘Middle Ages’ delighted.”⁸⁶ Mayers particularly pointed out the possible foreign influence from the Mongolian, even Central Asian, languages and narrative arts on the Chinese Mandarin language and arts of drama and novel during the thirteenth century. He believed that the Chinese vernacular language, or, the “cultivated colloquial language,” first “found its way in China into the dramatic form.” (138) Thus, in the same manner that the “Mandarin language was undoubtedly formed under the influence of the Kin [Jin dynasty 金, 1115–1234] and Yuan Tartars,” Mayers explained, “the art of story-telling which is so highly cherished among the nations of Central Asia may have gained a footing from abroad to leaven the ponderous mass of Chinese literature.” (138) Based on this historical understanding, Mayers argued that “the rise of the romantic novel certainly dates from the era of the Mongols, where it takes up the thread of fiction from the simpler machinery of the dramatist.” (138) To give an example, he brought into discussion the Chinese play *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (The Story of the Western Wing) of the Yuan dynasty, as he believed that in this work “the transition from the dramatic to the narrative style of romantic fiction may be traced.” (138) After describing and discussing the play’s plot, its authorship, and the commentaries from Chinese critics Jin Shengtian and Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623–1716) on this play’s literary excellence, Mayers concluded that “from the chanted narrative of this famous drama to a tale in prose was but a step, and the novel-writer, displacing the dramatist, takes love and learning in lieu of love and music as the guiding principle of his composition.” (138) However, Mayers did not provide any concrete example nor further explanation of how exactly this “step” from drama to the novel was taken. Moreover, he seemed to be ignorant of the fact that the play *The Story of the Western Wing* was, in fact, based on an earlier short story *Yingying zhuan* 鶯鶯傳 (The

⁸⁵ Mayers, “I. Historical Romances,” 87.

⁸⁶ Mayers, “IV. Romantic Novels,” 138. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

Story of Yingying) by the Tang poet Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), rather than the other way round. We can only assume that the purpose of Mayers’s particular attention to *The Story of the Western Wing* is perhaps to demonstrate how the “love and learning,” or, the scholar and beauty theme and the emphasis on literary excellence, both manifested in this play, were also commonly adopted in the Ming and Qing Chinese romantic novels such as *The Fortunate Union* and *The Two Fair Cousins* that he planned to talk about in his next article.

While the nineteenth-century British sinologists mainly read and translated Chinese novels for the information about China contained or as language learning materials, Mayers was perhaps the first to adopt a historical perspective and try to explore the origins of Chinese fiction. Chinese fiction and drama obviously share similarities in aspects of characters, stories, and literary devices, as some scholar also acknowledge the “dramatic factors” in Chinese novels,⁸⁷ or even argue that the two genres are “different branches from the same source.”⁸⁸ It is, however, another thing to argue, as Mayers did, that the Chinese historical and romantic novel derived directly from the drama, based only on their formal and thematic similarities. The presumed continuity from Chinese drama to fiction was perhaps informed by Mayers’s understanding of the novel genre and of the general nature of Chinese narrative art. As we have discussed in Chapter 4 in Mayers’s distinction between the generic concepts “novel,” “romance,” and the Chinese *xiaoshuo*, we find that he seems to hold realism as the deciding standard for the modern novel genre. Mayers disapproved of the stereotypical characters in Chinese historical and romantic novels, while particularly acclaiming the three romantic novels of what he categorised as “the Pekingese school”—*The Golden Lotus*, *A Precious Mirror for Judging Flowers*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*—for their “delineation of existing manners rather than the mere description of adventure or pedantic displays of scholarcraft” and for “bringing the sentiments or passions of his characters into play.”⁸⁹ The differentiation between the “the Pekingese school” from other Chinese novels seems to suggest Mayers’s judgment that all

⁸⁷ See, for example, Pan Jianguo 潘建國, “Gudai xiaoshuo zhong de xiqu yinzi ji qi gongneng” 古代小說中的戲曲因子及其功能 (The dramatic factors in traditional Chinese novels and its function), *Journal of Peking University* 北京大學學報 49, no. 3 (2012): 68–72.

⁸⁸ See, Shen Xinlin 沈新林, *Tongyuan er yipai: Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo xiqu bijiao yanjiu* 同源而異派: 中國古代小說戲曲比較研究 (Different branches from the same source: comparative study of traditional Chinese novels and drama) (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007).

⁸⁹ Mayers, “VI. Romantic Novels. (Concluded.),” 165.

the other Chinese novels fail to provide a realistic depiction of ordinary life and characters. Instead, by arguing that these Chinese novels are the descendants and expanded versions of Chinese drama and theatrical performance, which are considered by the nineteenth-century sinologists as notoriously violating the realistic effect, Mayers has constructed a coherent history of the *unrealistic* narrative vein of Chinese narrative art.

The position of the novel genre is ambiguous in both Chinese and English literary tradition until the mid-nineteenth century. British literary historians in the first half of the nineteenth century were still trying to place the novel into English literary history.⁹⁰ Perhaps because of the novel's unsettled status, and without an established and widely accepted narrative of the history of fiction from Chinese sources, it would be difficult for the British sinologists to construct a history of Chinese fiction from scratch. Knowledge about the Chinese novel is more often provided in the form of bibliographical writings, such as the articles by Mayers and also in Alexander Wylie's *Notes on Chinese Literature* and George Thomas Candlin's *Chinese Fiction*. These bibliographies, though technically not histories of Chinese fiction, act as an important preparatory step to give a panoramic view of the Chinese novel and to choose the representative works for a literary history.

5.4 The Dynastic Narrative

While the sinologists were accumulating their knowledge about the history of individual literary genres, a history of Chinese literature in general only emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. Before that, in many monographs describing different aspects of China, the chapters on Chinese general literature are often arranged by genre categories rather than in historical order. For example, in John Francis Davis's *The Chinese* (1836), he first talked about Chinese general literature roughly according to the four-branch (*sibu* 四部) division of classics, history, and miscellaneous writings, and then focused more specifically on the belles-lettres of poetry, drama, and the novel.⁹¹ James Summers in his *Lecture on the Chinese Language and Literature, delivered in King's College* (1853) also

⁹⁰ See, McKelvy, "New Histories of English Literature and the Rise of the Novel, 1835-1859," 41-63.

⁹¹ Davis, *The Chinese*, 2: 147-212.

described Chinese literature by the “general divisions” of “classical writings,” “historical writings,” “professional writings,” and “miscellanies” or “polite literature.”⁹²

The earliest historical narrative of Chinese literature is provided, perhaps, by Alexander Wylie in his *Notes on Chinese Literature* (1867). In the book’s introduction, entitled “Introductory Remarks on the Progressive Advancement of the Art,” Wylie surveyed the development of Chinese general literature from the invention of the writing system to the Qing dynasty. Though this lengthy introduction focuses primarily on the history of book classification and preservation in China, Wylie briefly mentioned the development of Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction throughout dynasties. For example, he noted that, in the Han dynasty, “poetry began to be cultivated, and the lyric strains of those early ages contain precious and interesting memories of the social and domestic life of the people; while the art kept pace with the secular progress of literature, till its culminating epoch in the Tang.”⁹³ Then, in describing the literary culture of the Tang dynasty, Wylie remarked that “the Tang is specially distinguished in the annals of literature. . . . Poets took a high stand, and the period of Le Tae-pih [Li Bai] and Too Foo [Du Fu] is looked to as the golden age of Chinese bards.” (viii) He also spoke highly of the Song dynasty as “designated a ‘protracted Augustan age of Chinese literature,’ and the language and style of books may be said to have already attained their highest point.” (ix) He pointed out the rise of drama and fiction in the Yuan dynasty:

The plays of the Yuen dynasty have attained a lasting celebrity, and form a useful thesaurus of the dialect. Novels then began to be written, some of which, as the *San kwō ché* [*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*] and *Shwù y hoò chuen* [*The Water Margin*], have secured an unrivalled popularity, and given rise to a very prolific class of literature, though disowned by the literati *par excellence*. (x)

This sketchy outline by Wylie of the history of Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction corresponds to today’s commonplace understanding of Chinese literary history.

A more focused and detailed dynastic narrative of Chinese literature is provided in Robert Kennaway Douglas’s *China* (1882). In the chapter on Chinese literature, Douglas began his historical survey from the pre-Qin era, introducing the five Confucian

⁹² James Summers, *Lecture on the Chinese Language and Literature, delivered in King’s College* (London: John W. Parker and Son., 1853), 31–36.

⁹³ Wylie, introduction to *Notes on Chinese Literature*, v. Further references to this work in this paragraph are cited in the text by page number.

Classics—*Book of Changes*, *Book of Poetry*, *Book of Documents*, *Books of Rites*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*—as the “foundation of a national literature.”⁹⁴ On the literary achievement of the Han dynasty, Douglas mainly described their historical, philosophical, and light literature writings. He particularly underlined the pioneering significance of the light literature of the Han dynasty as “[establishing] a style which has been a model for all future ages,” and that “tales of the imagination then first found their expression on paper, and in the festive poems of the wine-bibber, philosopher, and musician, Ts’ai Yung [Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192)], are foreshadowed the wine-extolling poems of Too Foo [Du Fu] and other poets of the T’ang dynasty.” (375)

What is important about Douglas’s historical narrative of Chinese literature here is that he expressly raised, perhaps for the first time in British sinology, the idea that each dynasty excels in a particular literary genre. Describing the course of Chinese literature after the Han dynasty as a progressive movement with regular interruptions by the changes of dynasties, Douglas noted that, though in China the ancient works were venerated and rules were observed by later generations, “certain prominence has under different dynasties been given to particular branches of letters.” (376) This idea that each dynasty has its representative literary genre was not an invention by Douglas himself, but one familiar in both English and Chinese literary historical thinking. In English literary historiography, for example, as William McKelvy points out, the nineteenth-century British publisher and historian Robert Chambers held the historical view of changing literary modes throughout ages and observed that “the student of English literary history is familiar with the fact, that every successive age has been distinguished by the development of some species of literature distinct in its character from those which delighted the public in the preceding and subsequent ages.”⁹⁵

In Chinese literary historiography from the Song dynasty, the concept of normative style (*ti* 體, or genre) became increasingly important in thinking about the historical development of literature.⁹⁶ Known as the problem of “the correct and mutated normative

⁹⁴ Douglas, *China*, 370. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

⁹⁵ Robert Chambers, “Literary Revolutions,” *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*, 28 May 1842, quoted from McKelvy, “New Histories of English Literature and the Rise of the Novel, 1835-1859,” 52.

⁹⁶ Luo Ligang 羅立剛 and Nie Qiaoping 聶巧平, “Chuantong wenxue shixue de zhuanxing (Song, Jin, Yuan)” 傳統文學史學的轉型（宋金元）(The transition of traditional literary historiography, the Song, Jin, and Yuan dynasties), in *Zhongguo wenxue shixue shi*, vol. 1, ed. Chen, 300–313.

styles of literature” (*wen ti zheng bian* 文體正變), the continuity and change in not only the development of individual genres but also the succession of different genres including poetry (*shi* 詩), prose (*wen* 文), and the newly emerged lyric poetry (*ci* 詞) throughout history are examined by literary historians.⁹⁷ Building on this idea, and with the flourish of yet another literary genre—song (*qu* 曲), Chinese scholars in the Yuan dynasty formed the influential historical view that “each dynasty, or generation (*dai* 代), has its dominant and representative literary style, or genre” (一代之文有一代之體).⁹⁸ The Yuan scholar Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348) articulated the notion and identified the most representative kinds of writing of each dynasty:

With the rise and prosperity of each dynasty, there must be a unique and representative form of art of the age that would be appreciated thereafter. The prose of the Han dynasty, the regulated poems of the Tang dynasty, the neo-Confucianism of the Song dynasty, and the modern *yuefu* poetry [今樂府] of the present dynasty [Yuan dynasty] are all established with the prosperity of fortune destiny and the vigour of sound and rhythm [氣數音律之盛].⁹⁹

While Yu looked at the different forms of “art” (*yi*, 藝) that include neo-Confucianism, a more “literary” version was provided by the Qing scholar Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820). In a note on Chinese literature, probably made between 1802 and 1819, Jiao observed that “a certain literary genre excels among others in each dynasty” (一代有一代之所勝).¹⁰⁰ He clearly identified the “*Chu ci* [verses of Chu], the *fu* [rhymed prose] of the Han dynasty, the Tang poetry, the *ci* [lyric poetry] of the Song dynasty, the *qu* [song] of the Yuan dynasty” (楚騷漢賦唐詩宋詞元曲) and the *bagu* (eight-legged essays) of the Ming

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 328–331. For the development of this idea and its significance in both traditional and modern Chinese literary historiography, see also, Wang Qizhou 王齊洲, “‘Yidai you yidai zhi wenxue’: wenxue shiguan de xiandai yiyi” “一代有一代之文學”：文學史觀的現代意義 (The contemporary significance of the literary historical conception that “each generation has its own literature”), *Literature & Art Studies* 文藝研究, no. 6 (2002): 51–58.

⁹⁹ The Chinese original is as follows: 一代之興，必有一代之絕藝，足稱于後世者。漢之文章，唐之律詩，宋之道學，國朝之今樂府，亦開于氣數音律之盛，quoted from Luo and Nie, “Chuantong wenxue shixue de zhuanxing (Song, Jin, Yuan),” 330.

¹⁰⁰ Jiao Xun 焦循, *Yi yu yue lu* 易餘籥錄 (Collection of notes besides reading the *Book of Change*), in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編 (Supplement to the comprehensive collection of Chinese books), vol. 91, “zibu” 子部 (Masters and philosophers) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1994), 463. In the preface to his *Collection of Notes*, Jiao Xun explained that all the notes were made after he returned home in 1802, and the manuscript was ready for publication in 1819.

dynasty as the prominent literary genres of their age.¹⁰¹ Apart from Yu and Jiao, according to research, similar observations were also seen in the writings of Ming and Qing scholars and writers such as Hu Yingling 胡應麟 (1551–1602), Wang Siren 王思任 (1574–1646), Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), and Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682).¹⁰²

Probably informed by such historical ideas and discourse from both English and Chinese literary historiography, Douglas gave a historical account of Chinese literature that particularly emphasises the representative literary genres of each dynasty:

Historical and philosophical research marked the Han period; under the T'ang dynasty there arose generations of elegant prose and brilliant verse writers, at the bidding of whose pencils the angularity of the language yielded to their well-turned periods, and the short, formal lines of the earlier poetry were exchanged for more musical and plastic verse. Under the Sung [Song] dynasty philosophy [the neo-Confucianism] again held sway, while dramatic writings distinguished the succeeding Mongol dynasty, and during the Ming dynasty arose that desire to compile encyclopaedias which has been so marked during the last four centuries. Of late years, however, there has been displayed a keenness of research and power of independent criticism which will give the present period a prominent place in Chinese literature. (376)

Including both philosophical and encyclopaedia works into his historical narrative, Douglas obviously adopted a broad notion of “literature” similar to that in Yu Ji’s writing. He attributed the historical writings of the Han dynasty, the poetry of the Tang, the neo-Confucianism of the Song, the Yuan drama, the encyclopaedias of the Ming, and the research and criticism—probably the *kaoju* (evidential scholarship)—of the Qing dynasty as the representative category of literature in each age. This straightforward statement established a correspondence between the dominant literary genre and its time, thus producing a schematic and well-organised history of Chinese literature. This dynastic periodization plan that is attentive to the representative genre of each dynasty has become not only a standard narrative format in later sinological writings on Chinese literary history but is also valid in the literary histories made today.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Wang, “‘yidai you yidai zhi wenxue’,” 51–53.

5.5 Literary Anthology as a Prototype History

Only two years after Douglas's dynastic narrative, Herbert Giles published a translated anthology of Chinese prose writings titled *Gems of Chinese Literature* (hereafter as *Gems*) in 1884. This collection represents a notably important preparatory step towards a full history of Chinese literature in at least three aspects. First, it re-defines the scope of Chinese *literature* as independent from Confucian Classics and practical writings but primarily around the Chinese category *guwen* 古文 (classical prose) for its cultural and aesthetic values. Secondly, it provides a narrative of Chinese literary history according to the dynastic order which is more detailed than the one compiled by Douglas. Finally, the chronological anthology form not only prepares the first-hand materials but also builds the prototype of a comprehensive history of Chinese literature.

Gems is distinctive, first of all, in the kind of Chinese texts it manages to bring to the notice of English readers. Different from James Legge's effort in translating Chinese philosophical and religious works or John Francis Davis's practical interest in translating Chinese fiction or drama for the useful information it yielded about China,¹⁰³ *Gems* is the first English translation of Chinese polite literature that highlights the literary value of the original texts. The translated anthology consists of 112 pieces of Chinese prose essays and 6 Chinese poems. Though Giles did not specify, the Chinese original texts were very likely chosen from one or more Chinese anthologies of classical prose writings compiled in the Qing dynasty. Such anthologies were very popular at the time, mainly serving as textbooks to help Chinese students and scholars improve their eight-legged essay writing skills for the national examination.¹⁰⁴ These anthologies, such as the *Guwen xi yi* 古文析義 (Analysis and explanation of classical prose) and the *Guwen guan zhi* 古文觀止 (The ultimate anthology of ancient prose), are normally arranged in the dynastic order. This is probably why the *Gems* was also structured according to dynasties. It is probably also because these anthologies do not include any classical prose from the Qing dynasty that the *Gems* ends with the Ming dynasty. According to my primary research, it is highly

¹⁰³ On James Legge's translation, see Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*. On John Francis Davis's translation of Chinese literature and his motivation, see Wong, "'Objects of Curiosity': John Francis Davis as a Translator of Chinese Literature," 169–203.

¹⁰⁴ Meng Wei 孟偉, "Qingdai guwen xuanben de bianxuan, pingdian, ji qi wenxue piping yiyi" 清代古文選本的編選評點及其文學批評意義 (A study of the compilation, commentary, and literary criticism of classical prose anthologies of the Qing dynasty), *The Northern Forum* 北方論叢, no. 1 (2015): 43.

likely that the main source text for the *Gems* is the *Guwen xi yi* 古文析義 (Analysis and explanation of classical prose), a sixteen-volume anthology of classical essays with explanation and commentaries by the compiler Lin Yunming 林雲銘 (1628–1697). Giles quoted six of Lin’s commentaries on the Chinese texts in the *Gems*.¹⁰⁵ In addition, a majority of the prose essays in the *Gems* are to be found in the *Analysis and Explanation of Classical Prose*, sometimes even in the exact order, while some are not included in other anthologies such as *The Ultimate Anthology of Ancient Prose*.¹⁰⁶

The texts Giles had selected in the anthology are mostly discursive and literary prose essays, including, but certainly not limited to, philosophical texts by Confucius, Zhuangzi 莊子 (c. 369–c. 286 BC), and Mencius 孟子 (c. 372–c. 289 BC); historical anecdotes from the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Commentary of Zuo on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*) and the *Li ji* 禮記 (Book of Rites); historical writings by the Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (?–c. 86 BC); poetic writings by Qu Yuan, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (c. 365–427), and Li Bai; poems by the Han poetess Consort Ban 班婕妤 (c. 48–c. 6 BC), the Tang poets Du Fu, Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698–757), and Bai Juyi; discursive or descriptive essays by the Tang and Song prose masters Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101). Altogether, these writings which may be best described as Chinese *belles-lettres* make a collection of “short extracts from the works of the most famous writers of all ages,”¹⁰⁷ as Giles claimed. The classical prose genre, occupying a central position in the Chinese idea of literature (*wenxue*), had been scarcely noticed, as Giles stated, by the British sinologists so far. As the classical prose was much venerated for its literary value in China, Giles’s collection

¹⁰⁵ For example, in a footnote to his translation of the Chinese essay “Qi dai fu qiu shu” 乞代夫囚疏 (Begging to substitute my husband in prison), entitled “The Lady Chang” in the *Gems*, Giles noted that “‘For every word we read,’ says a commentator, ‘we shed a tear of blood,’” which is a quotation of Lin Yunming’s commentary to the Chinese writing that “every word is a drop of blood” (讀之但覺滴字滴血). See Herbert Giles, trans. “The Lady Chang,” in *Gems of Chinese Literature*, trans. and ed. Herbert Giles (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1884), 234. Lin Yunming, ed., *Guwen xi yi* 古文析義 (Analysis and Explanation of Classical Prose) (Wenxuanlou, [1716?]), vol. 16, 39.

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/49911018?n=1231&imagesize=1200&jp2Res=.25&printThumbnail=no&oldpds>

¹⁰⁶ The comparison was made between *Gems of Chinese Literature* with the edition of the *Analysis and Explanation of Classical Prose* (FC.527.8–11) in the Thomas Wade Collection stored in Cambridge University library.

¹⁰⁷ Herbert Giles, preface to *Gems of Chinese Literature*, iii.

marked the fact that the artistic merit of Chinese literary writing began to be taken into consideration.

Gems is the product of Giles's conscious choice to explore this little-studied field of Chinese classical prose, which is evident from a minor dispute when he first arranged for the book to be published. According to Giles's "Autobiographical"—the autobiographical account of his writings and publications, in 1883 he had "translated, for the first time, a number of 'elegant extracts,' chiefly in prose, from eminent Chinese writers of light literature of various dates,"¹⁰⁸ and sent a copy to the famous publisher Alexander Macmillan (1818–1896). In a response to Giles dated 2 October 1883, however, Macmillan politely declined his proposal for publication on the grounds that, according to Macmillan, there was already "other book of the kind in the market," such as "Mr. Legge's volume on the Sacred Books of China in Professor Max Müller's series of Sacred Books of the East" and "Professor Douglas's little volume on Confucius published by the Christian Knowledge Society."¹⁰⁹ These two books "cover the same field of thought as your volume," Macmillan concluded in his letter, "and there is hardly room for a third book."¹¹⁰ The two books that Macmillan referred to are James Legge's well-known translation of Chinese Confucian Classics, and Robert Kennaway Douglas's introductory book *Confucianism and Taouism*, both published in 1879. They are, basically, translations and description of the Confucian and Daoist texts and teachings, and are substantially different from Giles's translation of the classical prose of Chinese *belles-lettres*. Fully aware of the difference, Giles wrote back to Macmillan and reiterated the originality of his choices of Chinese texts and translation: "I told you in conversation on the 26th ult. [last month] that *Gems of Chinese Literature* was the first and sole existing work of its kind. You have since had an opportunity of seeing that it is to contain 118 extracts from 59 Chinese authors, covering a period of 2,000 years."¹¹¹ In his slightly aggressive manner, Giles even challenged Macmillan to verify with James Legge and Robert Douglas, and "if these gentlemen say that their works and mine overlap in the smallest degree, I will hand you a full apology for my mis-statement; otherwise I should be glad to receive a similar

¹⁰⁸ Herbert Giles, "Autobiographical, etc.," GBR/0012/MS Add. 8964 (1), Cambridge University Library, p. 36.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36–37.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

amende from you.”¹¹² Giles did not receive any reply from Macmillan, and he finally published the book through his friend Bernard Quaritch.¹¹³

This interesting dispute between Giles and Macmillan arose chiefly from their different identification of the category and the value of *Gems* against existing sinological works. If Macmillan’s reason for his refusal was his genuine understanding rather than convenient excuse, then he seemed to fail to recognise the particular types of the Chinese texts in Giles’s anthology. His confusion of the philosophical texts in Legge’s and Douglas’s books with the *belles-lettres* writings in Giles’s translation indicates precisely the lack, rather than the abundance, of anthologies and translations of Chinese polite literature, as well as the incomplete knowledge about Chinese literature in Britain. Perhaps in response to Macmillan’s rejection, in the preface dated 15 October 1883 to his *Gems*, Giles again highlighted the pioneering significance of this translated anthology of Chinese classical prose as the first of its kind. The preface opens with a straightforward statement that “the present volume is a venture in a new direction.”¹¹⁴ Giles remarked that there was no such work available to the English readers which could lead to “an acquaintanceship . . . with the general literature of China.” (iii) While James Legge’s impressive translations only dealt with Confucian Classics, he explained, a vast number of Chinese authors and texts other than Confucianism still remained “to be efficiently explored.” (iii) This is precisely the gap that *Gems* intended to fill—“to supply a small handbook of Chinese literature, as complete as circumstances would permit.” (iv) As in his letter to Macmillan, Giles emphasised, here again, the impressive time range covered by his anthology: “these are chronologically arranged, and cover a period extending from B.C. 550 to A.D. 1650—two thousand two hundred years. Short biographical and dynastic notices will be found scattered through the volume in their proper places.” (iii-iv) Differentiating his *Gems* from other sinological translations and studies of Chinese philosophical texts, Giles has re-presented a notion of Chinese literature re-defined in terms of cultural and aesthetic merit. Giles’s friend, the Chinese scholar Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘 (1857–1928) also remarked in a review of the book that “the interest of the book is a purely literary one.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Giles, preface to *Gems of Chinese Literature*, iii. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

¹¹⁵ Hong-beng Kaw [Gu, Hongming 辜鴻銘], review of *Gems of Chinese Literature*, by Herbert Giles, *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, June 6, 1884.

Although *Gems* is mainly a translated anthology, what makes it different from the Chinese original is perhaps a strong historical sense most evidently expressed in a four-page “Note on Chinese Literature” prefixed to the translation. This brief Note sketches out the outline of the history of Chinese literature in each dynasty from the late Zhou to the Qing. Since *Gems* is an anthology of translated Chinese classical proses and poetry, the “Note” focuses mainly on the history of prose writings, poetry, and the philosophy in each dynasty, and does not take Chinese drama and fiction into consideration. It gives a clear idea of the development and decline of Chinese literature as well as its characteristics in each dynasty. Imagination and originality are vital criteria of literary success to Giles. It also provides the historical context to the translated works, which makes the collection not just a display of an array of masterpiece writings but one infused with a sense of historical continuity. Holding a linear, progressive historical view, Giles traced the origins and the genealogically defined advancement and decline, and noticed the relationship between literature and social history.

The Note is divided by dynasties. The writings of the Zhou and Qin dynasties, Giles explained, “may be described as rude and rugged in style, but full of vigorous expression, and unmatched in dramatic power.”¹¹⁶ The literature of the Han dynasty “reflects the stateliness of the age,” (vii) and “is further distinguished by a tone of practical common sense, strikingly and logically expressed.” (vii) The Han dynasty was considered an early stage of Chinese literature, as Giles observed that “the meanings of words were still however by no means accurately fixed, neither had the written language reached that degree of grammatical polish it was ultimately destined to acquire.” (vii–viii) He also seemed to suggest that true poetry was not yet fully developed in the Han dynasty due to the lack of an essential quality—though he did not specify what—“which differentiates poetry from verse.” (viii) The period of the Six Dynasties was described as “virtually an interregnum, an age of literary stagnation,” (viii) mainly because “the disturbed and unsatisfactory state of public affairs” was “unfavourable to the development of literary talent.” (viii) The Tang dynasty was pictured as a time when “authorship rapidly revived” (viii) and various literary arts flourished. Giles noted the advancement in the craft and refinement of Chinese literature in the Tang dynasty that “imagination began to come more freely into play, and the language to flow more easily and more musically, as though

¹¹⁶ Herbert Giles, “Note on Chinese Literature,” in *Gems of Chinese Literature*, vii. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

responsive to the demands of art.” (viii) Yet it was in the Song dynasty that he found the summit of Chinese literary achievement:

This was admittedly the Elizabethan age of Chinese literature. More great writers in all branches flourished under this than under any other dynasty before or since. Their styles are massive and grand, without grammatical flaw, exquisitely cadenced, and thrilling the reader with an inexpressible thrill . . . the poetry of the age is second only to that of the T’angs. (viii–ix)

From this high point, Giles found that in the Yuan and Ming dynasties “literary execution remained stationary as regards accuracy of structure and balance of sentence.” (ix) The age saw a decline in the literary originality and vitality, as “the imaginative power became visibly weaker, to decline later on to a still lower level of rule-and-line mediocrity.” (ix) He had drawn this conclusion primarily based on the literary achievement in prose essays and poetry, without considering the development of the genres of drama and the novel in the Yuan and Ming dynasties. Giles did not include any writings from the Qing dynasty in the anthology. Nevertheless, he commented that the literature of the Qing “has hardly passed beyond the limits of essayism and artificial verse” and is “wanting in the chief feature of the work of genius—originality of thought.” (ix) With just enough details and explanation, this brief “Note on Chinese Literature” maps out Chinese literary history as a continuous and complete evolutionary process of clearly defined origins, improvement, perfection, and decline, serving not only as a guide to the translated anthology that follows but also as a historical narrative of its own.

Perhaps adhering to the Chinese original anthology, the translated Chinese texts in the *Gems* are also arranged in a chronological order from the Zhou dynasty to the Ming dynasty. In each dynasty, the texts are further grouped according to their authors, with short biographies attached before the translation. The biographies normally outline the writer’s life story and his/her literary accomplishment, which serve to explain the writer’s status in Chinese literature and to give a general idea of the historical context of the works translated. For example, noting that “Confucius was the Socrates of China,” Giles summarised Confucius’s philosophy, his political career, and his works in the short biography.¹¹⁷ Or, he observed that the poet Li Bai was “famous for his exquisite imagery, his wealth of words, his telling allusions to the past, and for the musical cadence of his

¹¹⁷ Giles, trans. and ed., *Gems of Chinese Literature*, 1.

verse.”¹¹⁸ Apart from maintaining the structure of the original Chinese anthology, this chronological organization of Chinese texts with collective biography was also probably influenced by the chronological anthologies of English literature developed since the late eighteenth century. Literary anthologies, as Julia M. Wright reminds us, is a development “coincident with the establishment of national literatures.”¹¹⁹ Adopting the national history model in literature, the chronological anthology form in turn validates the national identity and genealogy, as well as facilitates the formation of a national literature. With its chronological anthology format, *Gems* likewise represents Chinese literature in the form of coherent and consistent national literature, for the first time in the English language.

Overall, in *Gems*, Giles re-constructed a Chinese literature centred on the classical prose genre, directing the purpose of reading Chinese literature from moral or practical values to literary appreciation. He kept the periodisation plan of dynastic division in the Chinese original anthology, and accordingly produced an explanatory narrative of the history of Chinese literature. The combined use of collective biography and chronological anthology jointly presents a broad overview of Chinese literary works within their historical contexts. These three elements were retained and developed in his later *A History of Chinese Literature*, making *Gems* the immediate forerunner and the prototype of the first comprehensive history of Chinese literature in the English language.

5.6 A History of Chinese Literature

Herbert Giles’s *A History of Chinese Literature* (hereafter as *History*) is not only the first complete history of Chinese literature in the English language but also the only notable one in English scholarship for a long time after its publication in 1901. According to Min Wang’s research, the next prominent history is perhaps *The Anthology of Chinese Literature* compiled and edited by the American scholar Cyril Birch and published in 1965 and 1972.¹²⁰ This important work by Giles, however, has received surprisingly little

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 112.

¹¹⁹ Julia M. Wright, “‘The Order of Time’: Nationalism and Literary Anthologies, 1774–1831,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 33, no. 4 (1997): 344.

¹²⁰ Min Wang, *The Alter Ego Perspectives of Literary Historiography: A Comparative Study of Literary Histories by Stephen Owen and Chinese Scholars* (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 35. One German and two French histories of Chinese literature were published in the first half of the twentieth century: Wilhelm Grube’s *Geschichte der Chinesischen Literatur* (Chinese literary history, 1902), Georges Margouliés’s

academic attention.¹²¹ To understand the significance of *History* as a pinnacle of nineteenth-century British sinological studies on Chinese literature and literary history, in the following discussion I will examine the concept of literature, the periodisation scheme, the historiography, and the narrative on the history of poetry, drama, and fiction produced in Giles's work.¹²² I will also discuss how it is related to his own work and to that of the other sinologists in constructing the knowledge about the history of Chinese literature.

The *History* is a study that Giles was especially pleased with and proud of: "no work had (or has) given me greater pleasure,"¹²³ as he put it. He also proudly recalled later that "this book brought out a shower of flattering reviews" from America to the Continent, and that he was "unable to discover a dissentient voice."¹²⁴ Indeed, one reviewer of the *History* proclaimed that "Professor Giles has fairly accomplished a task in which few, if any, would have succeeded so well" and the reviewer "warmly recommend a study of this sympathetic sketch of an alien literature."¹²⁵ In another review, George Thomas Candlin commented that the book "appears at a favourable time," not only because China had become increasingly prominent in the world at the turn of the century but also, more specifically, it would "serve as a corrective and counter-balance to certain erroneous and unfavourable impressions" about China developed in the West since the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.¹²⁶ Candlin also observed that Giles's *History* was more interesting and readable than the literary translations and studies by other sinologists such as James Legge, John Chalmers, Alexander Wylie, Joseph Edkins, and Robert Kennaway Douglas.¹²⁷

Histoire de la littérature Chinoise: Prose (History of Chinese literature: prose, 1949) and *Histoire de la littérature Chinoise: Poésie* (History of Chinese literature: poetry, 1951). See, Wang, *The Alter Ego Perspectives of Literary Historiography*, 34.

¹²¹ A very recent study on *A History of Chinese Literature* is Liu Yadi 劉亞迪, "Zhai Lisi Zhongguo wenxue shi de wenxue shiguan he wenti guan" 翟理斯《中國文學史》的文學史觀和文體觀 (Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature*: the conception of literary history and the conception of genre), (master's thesis, Beijing Foreign Language University, 2016). On previous research on the *History*, see Liu, "Zhai Lisi Zhongguo wenxue shi de wenxue shiguan he wenti guan," 2–4.

¹²² On Giles's *History* and historiography, see also, Liu, "Zhai Lisi Zhongguo wenxue shi de wenxue shiguan he wenti guan," 10–22.

¹²³ Giles, "Autobibliographical, etc.," p. 72.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ S. W. B., review of *A History of Chinese Literature*, by Herbert Giles, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (July, 1901): 588, 592.

¹²⁶ George T. Candlin, review of *A History of Chinese Literature*, by Herbert Giles, *The Monist* 11, no. 4 (July, 1901): 616.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 617.

While the *History* had won universal applause from the English reviews, in a Chinese review published in 1934, the Chinese literary historian Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898–1958) found “faults” in the *History* in four aspects: omission of important and representative Chinese writers, inclusion of non-literary Chinese works such as legal, religious, and naturalist writings, disproportionate arrangement, and possible anachronism.¹²⁸ Zheng’s criticism of the extensive scope of literature in the *History* is perhaps due to the discrepancy between Zheng and Giles in their conceptions of literature and of literary history. As research shows, the early twentieth century witnessed the beginning, as well as the surge, of Chinese literary history writing by Chinese scholars,¹²⁹ in which Zheng Zhenduo himself was an active participator and his *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi* 插圖本中國文學史 (Illustrated history of Chinese literature) published in 1932 was an important work.¹³⁰ According to Dai Yan’s research, by the 1930s, the narrow sense of Chinese “literature” (*wenxue*, 文學) was commonly accepted in Chinese literary criticism.¹³¹ Zheng himself believed that “sentiment” and “beauty” were the key criteria for real literature,¹³² and this is why he particularly criticised Giles’s general notion of literature which includes many practical writings in the *History*. Moreover, influenced by French literary historian Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) and Danish critic Georg Brandes (1842–1927), Zheng intended to write a literary history that could trace the change and development of Chinese literature determined by race, milieu, and moment,¹³³ in which popular literature played an important role as the momentum in the progress of Chinese literature.¹³⁴ With this particular historiography for Chinese literary history in mind, Zheng claimed that the dynastic periodisation in Giles’s book was unable to reflect the rise and fall of literary trends in China.¹³⁵ He only acknowledged Giles’s *History* for including

¹²⁸ Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, “Ping Giles de *Zhongguo wenxue shi*” 評 Giles 的中國文學史 (Review of Giles’s *A History of Chinese Literature*), in *Jindai Zhongguo yuwai hanxue pinglun cuibian* 近代中國域外漢學評論萃編 (Collection of modern Chinese criticism of overseas sinology), ed. Li Xiaoqian 李孝遷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), 420–421. Originally published in Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Zhongguo wenxue lunji* 中國文學論集 (Essays on Chinese Literature) (1934).

¹²⁹ Doleželová-Velingerová, “Literary Historiography in Early Twentieth-Century China (1904–1928): Constructions of Cultural Memory,” 123–166; Dai Yan 戴燕, *Wenxue shi de quanli* 文學史的權力 (The power of literary history) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2002).

¹³⁰ Dai, *Wenxue shi de quanli*, 58–65.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³² Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi* 插圖本中國文學史 (Illustrated history of Chinese literature) (1932; repr. Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2013), 6.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

¹³⁵ Zheng, “Ping Giles de *Zhongguo wenxue shi*,” 421.

the novel and drama as well as the influence of Buddhism on Chinese literature in the literary history, because they coincide with Zheng's own agenda of foregrounding the impact of popular literature and foreign influences on Chinese literature. Overall, Zheng held a very low evaluation of Giles's work that he asserted that, apart from these two aspects, "Giles's book has nothing that is worth learning."¹³⁶

It is true that Giles had included a wide range of what we now consider as non-literary writings, in the same manner as his predecessor sinologists did when they talked about "Chinese literature," as discussed in Chapter 2. Comparatively speaking, however, in the *History* the emphasis has been placed more on Chinese poetry, drama, fiction, and prose writings than in the works by his predecessors. More importantly, the *History*'s all-encompassing range, the possible omission of great literary names, and the disproportionate arrangement of descriptions of certain writers and works were the result of the fact that the *History* is not a work systematically designed and accomplished from scratch, but one primarily built on Giles's previous studies and translations of Chinese literature. What to include in the *History* was to a large extent determined by what was available in his earlier studies and translations. Though presented as a "history" of Chinese literature, this book actually consists a fairly large portion of English translations of the original Chinese texts—translations done by Giles in the previous two decades. In the preface, Giles explained that to include translations in the *History* was "acting upon the suggestion of Mr. Gosse,"¹³⁷ when he was invited to write a history of Chinese literature for the series "Short Histories of the Literature of the World" edited by Edmund Gosse (1849–1928) and published by William Heinemann. It was also convenient for Giles, as he credited his previous translations as an advantage in writing the *History*: "I had been translating from all departments of Chinese literature for more than a quarter of a century, and I was well stocked with the necessary materials for such a work."¹³⁸

Indeed, before the *History* was published in 1901, Giles had already published translations of Chinese prose writings and verses in his *Gems of Chinese Literature* (1883) and the *Chinese Poetry in English Verse* (1898), and most of the translations included in the *History* are taken from these two anthologies. Other earlier translations by Giles that are reused in the *History* include *A Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms* (1877), *Strange*

¹³⁶ Ibid., 421.

¹³⁷ Giles, preface to *A History of Chinese Literature*, v.

¹³⁸ Giles, "Autobiographical, etc.," p. 72.

Stories from a Chinese Studio (1878), “洗冤錄 The Hsi Yuan Lu, or instructions to coroners” published in the periodical *China Review* in 1874, and “A Visit to the Country of Gentlemen,”—extract translation from the Chinese novel *Jing hua yuan* 鏡花緣 (Flowers in the Mirror)—also published in the *China Review* in 1877. Besides translation, Giles reused his previous studies of Chinese literature in the *History* as well. For example, the part about the Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the *History* is basically copied from his 23-page-long paper on this Chinese novel first published in the *Journal of North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* in 1885.¹³⁹ This perhaps answers Zheng Zhenduo’s question of why Giles would have such a “disproportionate arrangement” to give an introduction to *Dream of the Red Chamber* for “almost thirty pages” while a description of *The Book of Poetry* for only nine pages and of the poet Li Bai for four pages.¹⁴⁰

The *History* not only showcases Giles’ sinological translations and studies but is also a work that integrates the ideas and forms of literary history writing used in the nineteenth-century British sinologists’ previous attempts, such as the periodisation of Chinese literary history. The *History* adopts a dynastic periodisation, which, as mentioned earlier, is also employed by Robert Kennaway Douglas, Alexander Wylie, and Giles himself. The *History* is divided into eight Books, each covering the literature of one or two dynasties: “the feudal period (B.C. 600–200),” “the Han dynasty (B.C. 200–A.D. 200),” “minor dynasties (A.D. 200–600),” or, the Wei, Jin, and the Northern and Southern dynasties, “the T’ang dynasty (A.D. 600–900),” “the Sung [Song] dynasty (A.D. 900–1200),” “the Mongol [Yuan] dynasty (A.D. 1200–1368),” “the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368–1644),” and “the Manchu [Qing] dynasty (A.D. 1644–1900).” Serving as an “introduction into the great field” of Chinese literature, the *History* adopts the dynastic periodisation for narrative convenience. It also gives more historical sense than the other histories of Chinese literature published at the turn of the nineteenth century which are divided into categories by genre, such as—according to Liu Yadi’s survey—the Russian sinologist Vasily Vasilyev’s *Outline of the History of Chinese Literature* (1880), the Japanese sinologist Suematsu Kenchō 末松謙澄’s (1855–1920) *Brief History of Chinese Ancient*

¹³⁹ Herbert Giles, “The Hung Lou Meng 紅樓夢, commonly called The Dream of the Red Chamber, read before the society 16th April 1885,” *Journal of North China Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* 20 (1885):1–23.

¹⁴⁰ Zheng, “Ping Giles de *Zhongguo wenxue shi*,” 53.

Literature 支那古文學略史 (1882), the Chinese scholar Dou Jingfan 竇警凡's (1844–1909) *Li chao wenxue shi* 歷朝文學史 (Dynastic history of Chinese literature, 1897, 1906), and Lin Chuanjia's *A History of Chinese Literature* (1904).¹⁴¹

The dynastic division of Chinese literary history was, and perhaps still is, a matter of debate. In the review of Giles's *History*, George Thomas Candlin had already questioned “whether the plan of following the line of China's long list of dynasties was the wisest course.”¹⁴² “One of the disadvantages of the present method [in Giles's *History*],” Candlin explained, was repetition; for example, “*poetry* appears and reappears some six or seven times sandwiched in amongst other kinds of literature; history, lexicography, encyclopaedias, religious classics, the drama, the novel, are intermixed with each other under no principle of arrangement save the chronological one.”¹⁴³ As a result, the lines of the historical development of each literary genre were somewhat blurred: “the manner in which one form of literature has grown out of another in an orderly development does not appear under such a plan.”¹⁴⁴ Though acknowledging that the dynastic order was simple and convenient, Candlin instead proposed a historical narrative plan determined by the development of the literature *per se* and marked by literary rather than political figures.¹⁴⁵ As Tak-wai Wong's research shows, theoretical debates on whether to follow the literary or political course in Chinese literary history writing continues in Chinese scholarship even until the twentieth century.¹⁴⁶ It seems that Giles never expressed any critical consideration nor justification for his dynastic periodisation plan. It was to him, perhaps, a natural choice to keep such a division scheme which was already employed by Chinese critics since the Yuan dynasty and also by his predecessor sinologists, particularly in his *Gems of Chinese Literature* which, again, follows a Chinese source of dynastic division. In addition, the dynastic division is compatible to other histories which also organise literary history by political reigns, such as the *A History of Japanese Literature* (1899) by William George Aston, in the “Short Histories of the Literature of the World” series.

¹⁴¹ Liu, “Zhai Lisi *Zhongguo wenxue shi* de wenxue shiguan he wenti guan,” 10–11.

¹⁴² Candlin, review of *A History of Chinese Literature*, 623.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 624.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 623–624.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Tak-wai Wong, “Period Style and Periodization: a Survey of Theory and Practice in the Histories of Chinese and European Literature,” *New Asia Academic Bulletin* 1 (1978): 45–67.

Within this dynastic periodisation, the historical narrative in the *History* centred on the important Chinese literary figures and works of each dynasty, comprising of biographies of the writers and description of the characteristics of their works followed by translations. Describing the literature of each dynasty, perhaps with the idea that “each dynasty has its representative genre” in mind, Giles highlighted the dominant literary genre or kind of writings of each period. He focused on the Confucian classics and the works of other philosophers during the pre-Qin era, the poetry, history, and the influence of Buddhism during the Han dynasty, the poetry and classical scholarship during the Wei, Jin, and the Northern and Southern dynasties, the poetry of the Tang, the classical literature of the Song, and the drama and fiction from the Yuan to Qing dynasties. Though George Thomas Candlin raised his concern that the dynastic periodisation broke the continued narrative of the history of individual literary genres, in his actual writing Giles made connections between his accounts of the same literary genre in different dynasties.

Writings on poetry appear in all his eight Books. In the first three Books, he spent a few pages introducing the Chinese poets Qu Yuan and Song Yu of the pre-Qin era, and the major poets of the Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties. In Book Four of the literature of the Tang dynasty, poetry occupies a prominent position. Giles pointed out that poetry was undoubtedly the most representative genre of the Tang, and was the “finished models for future poets of all generations.”¹⁴⁷ In the chapter about the Tang poetry, he gave a general introduction to the development of Chinese poetry, describing its history as a process of improvement in versification and quality from the origins to the Tang dynasty. Like Robert Morrison, Peter Perring Thoms, John Francis Davis, and Robert Kennaway Douglas, Giles also quoted an unnamed Chinese source—very likely also Wang Yaoqu’s *Anthology of Ancient and Tang Poetry with Notes and Commentary*¹⁴⁸—on the history of poetry:

‘Poetry,’ says a modern Chinese critic, ‘came into being with the Odes [*The Book of Poetry*], developed with the *Li Sao* [*Encountering Sorrow*], burst forth and reached perfection under the Tangs. Some good work was indeed done under the Han and Wei dynasties; the writers of those days seemed to have material in abundance, but language inadequate to its expression.’ (143)

¹⁴⁷ Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 143. Further references to this work are cited in the text by page number.

¹⁴⁸ In introducing the Tang poet Zhang Ji 張籍 (c. 767–c. 830), Giles quoted a piece of commentary that might come from Wang Yaoqu: “. . . his most famous poem, the beauty of which, says a commentator, lies beyond the words,” Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 175. Wang’s original commentary is “卻有餘韻，妙在言外” (the charm lingers beyond actual words) (Zhan, *Tangshi hejie jianzhu*, 104.)

Probably taking his cue from this Chinese quotation, Giles explained how the development of the Chinese language since the Han dynasty had contributed to the improvement of poetry:

Since the age of the Hans the meanings of words had gradually come to be more definitely fixed, and the structural arrangement more uniform and more polished. Imagination began to come more freely into play, and the language to flow more easily and more musically, as though responsive to the demands of art. (144)

After this brief account of the history of Chinese poetry until the Tang dynasty, Giles spent over forty pages on the Tang poetry and introduced more than twenty Tang poets and their works, clearly highlighting the importance of the Tang dynasty in the history of Chinese poetry.

Poetry in the era after the Tang was seen by Giles as gradually declining from perfection. The poetry of the Song dynasty, according to him, “has not attracted so much attention as that of the Tangs.” (232) The inferior status of the Song poetry was because, Giles argued, there were few “professional poets, that is, as writers of verse and of nothing else” (232) in the Song dynasty when poetry writing became the basic skill for literary men. Giles seemed to suggest that poetry and poetry writing became standardised, only as “a department of polite education” rather than being the outpouring of poetic genius. “More regard was paid to form,” he lamented, “and the license which had been accorded to earlier masters was sacrificed to conventionality.” (232) As if to keep the readers on track with the history of Chinese poetry, Giles briefly summarised, again, the development and decline of the artistic quality of Chinese poetry from the beginning to the Qing dynasty:

The Odes collected by Confucius are, as we have seen, rude ballads of love, and war, and tilth, borne by their very simplicity direct to the human heart. The poetry of the Tang dynasty shows a masterly combination, in which art, unseen, is employed to enhance, not to fetter and degrade, thoughts drawn from a veritable communion with nature. With the fall of the Tang dynasty the poetic art suffered a lapse from which it has never recovered; and now, in modern times, although every student ‘can turn a verse’ because he has been ‘duly taught,’ the poems produced disclose a naked artificiality which leaves the reader disappointed and cold. (232–233)

In line with the idea of the poetry’s continuing decline, Giles remarked that in the Yuan dynasty “a considerable amount of poetry was produced under the Mongol sway, though not so much proportionately, nor of such a high order, as under the great native dynasties.” (252) In the Ming dynasty, though poetry “shows little falling off, in point of mere volume,

there are far fewer great poets to be found than under the famous Houses of T'ang and Sung." (329) As to the poetry of the Qing dynasty, Giles commented that "taken together, the poetry of the present dynasty, especially that of the nineteenth century, must be written down as nothing more than artificial verse, with the art not even concealed, but grossly patent to the dullest observer." (416)

With the presumed decline of poetic art since the Yuan dynasty, Giles's narrative began to pay more attention to the development of Chinese drama and fiction during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. In the *Book on the Yuan dynasty*, Giles mainly ascribed the contribution and significance of Yuan literature to the emergence of the drama and novel:

If the Mongol dynasty added little of permanent value to the already vast masses of poetry, of general literature, and of classical exegesis, it will ever be remembered in connection with two important departures in the literary history of the nation. Within the century covered by Mongol rule the Drama and the Novel may be said to have come into existence. (256)

Tracing the origins of Chinese drama, Giles mentioned the ancient rituals of exorcism of evil spirits and the "operatic performance" of dance and singing at festival and ceremonial occasions. But he admitted that their relationship to the rise of Chinese drama was only hypothetical, and that "all we really know is that in very early ages music and song and dance formed an ordinary accompaniment to religious and other ceremonies, and that this continued for many centuries." (257) As shown in earlier discussion, the Tang dynasty is generally understood as a crucial time in the history of Chinese drama. Like Robert Morrison, William Frederick Mayers, and Robert Kennaway Douglas, Giles also introduced the institution known as the "Pear Garden" established by the Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty, as allegedly being the cradle of Chinese drama. Giles doubted, however, whether the youths in the Pear Garden were professional actors; Or, the institution was only intended "to provide instrumentalists, vocalists, and possibly dancers, for Court entertainments." (257) In short, he admitted that his knowledge of the history of Chinese drama was limited, that "it is impossible to say how or why" the Chinese drama suddenly appeared in the thirteenth century in a fully developed form, and "we cannot trace step by step the development of the drama in China from a purely choral performance, as in Greece." (258)

Perhaps because of this lack of knowledge, Giles failed to provide a historical account of the Yuan drama, but, instead, gave a general description of the drama and the theatrical

performance in the Qing dynasty, which was criticised by the Chinese scholar Zheng Zhenduo as anachronism. This substitution was probably based on Giles's belief that "it is certain that the drama as known under the Mongols is to all intents and purposes the drama of to-day," (258) or, in other words, that the Chinese drama remained unchanged since the Yuan dynasty. As we have discussed in Chapter 4, this idea of the stagnated Chinese drama was also a commonly accepted one among the nineteenth-century British sinologists. Nor did Giles introduce many Chinese plays in the *History* but only *The Story of the Western Wing*, the *He han shan* 合汗衫 (Joining the shirt), and the *Tale of the Pipa* of the Ming dynasty which, according to Giles, was ranked "as the very finest of all Chinese plays," and "was regarded as a great advance in the dramatic art upon the early plays of the Mongols." (325–326)

Similar to Chinese drama's mysterious origins, when describing the emergence of the novel in the Yuan dynasty, Giles also declared that "the origin of the Chinese novel is unknown." (276) He offered his theory—the one also mentioned by William Frederick Mayers—that the Chinese novel "probably came from Central Asia, the paradise of story-tellers, in the wake of the Mongol conquest." (276) Although "fables, anecdotes, and even short stories had already been familiar to the Chinese for many centuries," Giles explained, "but between these and the novel proper there is a wide gulf which so far had not been satisfactorily bridged." (276) Giles was equally sceptical about the hypothesis proposed by Mayers that the Chinese novel was derived from drama. He disagreed with Mayers using the Chinese play *The Story of the Western Wing* as an example of the transition from drama to novel, explaining that the presumed similarity between this play and the novel form "simply means that the *Hsi Hsiang Chi* [The Story of the Western Wing] is more suited for private reading than for public representation, as is the case with many Western plays." (276)

The novel genre occupies a central position in Giles's history of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing literatures. In the chapter on the novel of the Yuan dynasty, Giles introduced the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, *The Water Margin*, and the *Journey to the West*, though the last two were most likely produced in the Ming dynasty. In his discussion, Giles laid a particular attention to the "style" of these Chinese novels. He talked about the "easy and fascinating style" (277) of the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, "the graphic and picturesque style" (281) of *The Water Margin*, and the "popular and easy style" (281) of the *Journey*

to the West. On the novels of the Ming dynasty, he also mentioned the “simple, easy style” of *The Golden Lotus* (309), the “easy style” of the *Marvels New and Old* (323), the “high-class literary style” of *The Two Couples* (323), and the “simple style” and “dramatic sense” of the *Second Blossom* (324). In the Book on the Qing dynasty, Giles granted such an important status to the genre of the novel that he remarked that the Qing literature “may be said to begin with” (338) the novelist Pu Songling and his short stories known as the *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. The prominence attributed to this work was probably due to its reputation and popularity among Chinese readers; but also, more importantly, because this is the work that Giles had spent great effort on translating. In 1880, Giles published his translation of 164 stories from the *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, with a detailed introductory study of the biography of its author, the publication and the editions of the Chinese text, and its literary style and merits. Giles inserted an abridged version of this introduction in the *History*. He spoke highly of the “incomparable style” of the *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, stressing that “all the elements of form which make for beauty in Chinese composition” were to be found in this work “in overwhelming force.” (342) The other novel of the Qing dynasty that Giles mentioned is *Dream of the Red Chamber*, which he described as “touching the highest point of development reached by the Chinese novel.” (355) Likewise, Giles’s description of this Chinese novel was taken from his previous study. He pointed out the “easy, almost colloquial, style” (356) of this Chinese novel and commented that the “delineation of character” in it “recalls the best efforts of the greatest novelists of the West.” (356) Like previous bibliographical studies on Chinese fiction by the British sinologists, Giles introduced each of these Chinese novels produced in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties as individual works, without any attempt to explain how the craft or the refinement of novel writing had improved, declined, or changed during these ages.

Taking an inclusive concept and scope of literature and a dynastic periodisation scheme, Giles’s *History* seems not so distinct from the other, previous historical narratives made by British sinologists in the nineteenth century. However, a closer look may suggest a structural change in its understanding and representation of Chinese literary history. The greater proportion of discussion on Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction indicates the influence of the modern and narrow sense of the idea of “literature”, and Giles’s efforts to outline the development of individual genres, especially poetry, as well as to explore the mechanism of development, brings the *History* closer to a literary history proper as we

understand it today. The “Short Histories of the Literature of the World” series, to which Giles’s *History* belongs, is designed, in the words of the chief editor Edmund Gosse, to be “agreeable to read”¹⁴⁹ for general readers. With adequate description and explanation of the historical background, the characteristics and history of literary genres, the important literary figures and their works, and elegant English translations of Chinese literary texts, Giles’s *History* does enjoy lasting popularity among English readers, which is manifested in its many reprinted editions—at least nine, the latest being in 2015—in the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰ In scholarly opinion, however, this work is considered inadequate and problematic in the twentieth century. For example, D. E. Pollard observed that the *History* is “ambitious” but “premature,”¹⁵¹ “consisted of snippets of translation (drawn mostly from *Gems*) backed up by rather trivial, and in some cases rubbishy, anecdotes.”¹⁵² Nevertheless, Pollard acknowledges Giles’s pioneering effort in compiling the *History* particularly since “there was no integrated Chinese history to draw upon.”¹⁵³

5.7 Conclusion

In his preface to *A History of Chinese Literature*, Herbert Giles presumed that the Chinese scholars were prevented by the sheer volume of Chinese literature from making a complete literary history.¹⁵⁴ “The foreign student, however,” he explained, “is on a totally different footing.”¹⁵⁵ Addressing a different audience and for a different purpose, “it may be said without offence that a work which would be inadequate to the requirements of a native public, may properly be submitted to English readers as an introduction into the great field [of Chinese literature].”¹⁵⁶ Indeed, all the nineteenth-century British sinologists’ accounts—not so many, though—on the Chinese literary history, including Giles’s *History*, are only introductory in nature and far from thorough and comprehensive. However, their attempts have touched upon some of the key factors in writing a history of

¹⁴⁹ Edmund Gosse, “Editor’s General Introduction,” in *A History of Ancient Greek Literature*, by Gilbert Murray (London: William Heinemann, 1897), vi.

¹⁵⁰ For a list of the editions, see Liu, “Zhai Lisi *Zhongguo wenxue shi de wenxue shiguan he wenti guan*,” 9.

¹⁵¹ Pollard, “H. A. Giles and His Translations,” 105.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Giles, preface to *A History of Chinese Literature*, v.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Chinese literature. The British sinologists had adopted the ideas and methods in both Chinese and English literary historiography. The Chinese sources, such as the anthologies of poetry and prose, all serve as a convenient starting point and provide useful information about Chinese canonical works. The sinologists usually took a progressive or evolutionary view to identify and explain the origins, developments, and periods of decline of Chinese literature, interpreting Chinese literary history as a process of literary advancement from a simple stage to the culmination of artistic development in the Tang or the Song dynasties. The periodisation scheme of dividing the history by dynasties with an emphasis on the representative literary genre in each dynasty was established as the basic format of writing a Chinese literary history. With the increasing use of the dynastic periodisation plan, Chinese literary history was explained by the sinologists as embedded in the national, socio-political history of China. Their historical narratives provide insight into the mechanism of the cause and effect, rise and decline of Chinese literature whose originality and continuity were hardly interpreted as indebted to, nor interrupted, and certainly not taken over by, notable foreign influence. The sinologists' historical studies had delineated the developmental trajectory of Chinese literature as a naturally occurring, self-explaining process as well as a coherent and cohesive entity of its own legitimacy—a distinctively “national” reality.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis explores how the knowledge of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world was initially produced by the British sinologists' studies in the nineteenth century. Claiming to read and study Chinese literature for practical aims such as increasing their general knowledge about China, learning the Chinese language, or acquiring useful information about Chinese society, the nineteenth-century British sinologists had carried out basic and pioneering work in uncovering the mystery of Chinese literature. They had examined the Chinese literary terms and concepts such as poetry (*shi*) or novel (*xiaoshuo*). They had described and explained the characteristics and principles of different literary genres, including the versification of Chinese poetry and the narrative techniques of Chinese drama and fiction. They had introduced important Chinese literary writers and translated their works. They had classified Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction according to Chinese, English, or their own standards. They had identified similarities and differences between Chinese and English literatures, and had sketched the history of Chinese literature throughout dynasties.

With the assistance of these sinological writings on Chinese literature, the English readers in the nineteenth century would have been able to know that a Chinese poem is arranged according to the variation of the tones of Chinese characters and the rules of parallelism, which makes Chinese versification particularly difficult. They would know that the Chinese have different kinds and forms of poems but no epic poems, that the Chinese poets love and write about nature just as the English Romantic poets do, and that the art of Chinese poetry had improved to perfection in the Tang dynasty and then declined from the Song dynasty afterwards. They would know that Chinese plays are sometimes sung in lyrics and performed with symbolic scenery and acting, that there are military and civil plays but no proper distinction between comedy and tragedy, that Chinese drama as well as theatrical performance shares similarity with Greek drama but is inferior to modern European drama, and that Chinese drama emerged from the Tang dynasty and reached its highest point in the Yuan dynasty. They would also know that the narratives of Chinese novels are repetitive and the characters are stereotyped, that generally there are historical, romantic, and legendary novels in China, that some of the Chinese novels are as good as,

even better than, the English or European ones, and that the Chinese novel first developed in the Yuan dynasty and flourished in the Ming and Qing dynasties. They would also be able to know that each dynasty excels in a particular literary genre and that the Tang or the Song dynasty is the Augustan age in Chinese literature, while recent dynasties have experienced a decline in literary culture.

Though the British sinologists in the nineteenth century proposed to undertake “objective” and “scientific” research on China, knowledge production—as Edward Said and other researchers have reminded us—is always an interpretive and discursive formation process facilitated by various kinds of power. British sinology in the nineteenth century is mainly derived from and supported by the political power of British imperial engagement with China. The way in which sinological writings on Chinese literature were constructed also suggests that there were power relations at play. The British sinologists endeavoured to extract and organise the key facts about Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction in an anatomical manner into a body of accessible and manageable knowledge. Their writings on Chinese literature had always been formed on the conceptual basis of English or European literary ideas and criticism, such as imagination or realism, which were generally presumed to be universal and more advanced than Chinese literary tradition. The comparative studies, combined with the progressive historical view, often involve value judgement by English or European standards on the success of Chinese literature. The language used in the sinologists’ writings is usually assertive and self-confirming. Their personal evaluations and descriptions of facts are freely mingled. The sinologists are not only the agents but also the authority in this cross-cultural knowledge transfer, in which they exercised the intellectual, or epistemological, power of knowing, explaining, and making meaning of Chinese literature, as well as the cultural power that enables them to apply European literary tastes and standards to Chinese literature. To the ordinary English readers in the nineteenth century, the sinologists’ writings seem to send the message that Chinese literature was, and can only be, understood through their, the sinologists’, works.

Throughout the thesis, I have tried to identify the English and Chinese literary ideas and sources employed by the sinologists to form their discourses on Chinese literature. Mainly adopting English or European literary perspectives, the sinologists tend to use established, rather than more contemporary, literary criticism and theories in examining Chinese literature, especially in the discussion on poetry and drama. The sinologists’ writings in

the 1870s and 1880s on Chinese poetry often quote Romantic poetics and poets of the early nineteenth century, and Chinese play scripts are constantly measured by the neo-classical idea of the rule of unities which was influential in the eighteenth century. Only Chinese novels are examined by contemporary theories on the novel, such as realism, and compared with nineteenth-century English novels and novelists. The linear evolutionary historical view plays an important role in shaping the understanding and narrative of Chinese literary history. The histories of both individual literary genres and Chinese literature in general are described in such a way that shows distinct stages of origins, development, perfection, and decline.

The sinologists' residence in China provided them with the unique opportunity to consult Chinese people and books directly. Chinese sources are often employed by the sinologists, obviously to enhance the reliability and authority of their studies. For example, the concept of and the Chinese fiction known as the "work of genius" serve as a quick guide to the most popular novels among Chinese readers. The Chinese critic Jin Shengtan is frequently mentioned for his effort in improving the status of Chinese novels. The sinologists' residence in China also enables them to conduct empirical research such as close observation of local people's interests in literature and investigation of the dramatic profession through personal visits to Chinese theatres. In most cases, however, the indigenous people in the sinologists' writings are anonymous, referred to only as "my Chinese teacher," "Chinese scholars," "a Chinese friend," "the Chinese author," and "the Chinese commentator," which appear as the necessary authentic source but no more than that. Nor were many Chinese works of literary criticism or theories specifically cited: the Chinese anthologies of poetry, plays, and prose, such as the *Gu Tang shi hejie* 古唐詩合解 (Anthology of ancient and Tang poems with notes and commentary), the *Yuan ren bai zhong qu* 元人百種曲 (One hundred Yuan plays), and the *Guwen xi yi* 古文析義 (Analysis and explanation of classical prose), become useful reference to both the classical Chinese literary works and the literary history, but of which only the *One Hundred Yuan Plays* is specifically named in the sinologists' writings. While local knowledge is evidently at work in the background and is constructive in building the sinological knowledge about Chinese literature, it is difficult to identify the specific Chinese sources used or referred to in the sinologists' studies; the indigenous agency involved in the process of knowledge production is often silenced and lost in the history of the cultural and literary encounters between China and Britain in the nineteenth century.

Instead of one consistent, universal imperialist or colonial discourse determined by the unequal power relationship, the sinologists' discourses on Chinese literature are, in fact, diverse, constituting a body of ambivalent, mixed, and varied voices from different sinologists, or even within one person's writings. The sinologists' individual career and purpose in China very likely has an impact on their representation of China and Chinese literature. The East India Company employees George Staunton and John Francis Davis are more sympathetic than the British travellers towards Chinese literature and endeavoured to correct the travellers' inaccurate and often negative accounts in the early nineteenth century. The Protestant missionaries such as Joseph Edkins and George Thomas Candlin also tend to give a more positive account of Chinese literature which foregrounds the similarities between Chinese and European literary elements, probably in an attempt to confirm the universality of human nature in both East and West and hence the possibility of converting Chinese people to Christianity. The British consular or colonial government officials vary more obviously in their attitudes towards Chinese literature. Some of them, Walter Henry Medhurst and Robert Kennaway Douglas, for example, have generally critical and dismissive opinions on the value of Chinese literature, but Medhurst also "admitted," nevertheless, that Chinese poetry may possess the taste, imagination, and imagery that makes it worthy of study by the Western poets.¹ William Frederick Mayers's writings on Chinese fiction seem to be comparatively neutral and academic. Alfred Lister and Herbert Giles hold relatively favourable views on Chinese literature, although this does not stop Giles from pointing out that "most Chinese plays are simple in construction and weak in plot."²

In the sinologists' writings, Chinese literature has been understood and delineated, perhaps for the first time, as a national literature in various ways. The description of the unique characteristics of Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction and of their notable differences from English and European literatures seems to identify the core attributes and to define the limits of Chinese literature as an entity distinct from and independent of European literary traditions. The construction of a coherent history of Chinese literature also acknowledges its autonomous, long-standing integrity and legitimacy. The sinologists explained and interpreted Chinese literature as both determined by and reflecting the Chinese national character and social conditions, which strengthens the conception of

¹ Medhurst, "Chinese Poetry," 53–54.

² Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, 261.

Chinese literature as exclusively its own. In general, the sinologists' "national" reading of Chinese literature gives the impression that China has its ancient and highly-esteemed wealth of literature, which is significantly different from, and sometimes considered inferior to, the English or European literary tradition and achievement. At the same time, the sinologists also occasionally positioned and explained Chinese literature in comparison with European, Hebrew, and Indian literatures, or attempted to incorporate Chinese writers and literary works in a list of European literary classics, thus presenting Chinese literature with a global relevance and contributing to the emerging conception of world literature in the nineteenth century.

Different from previous research that mostly focuses on individual sinologists and their works, my thesis presents a comprehensive view and history of the British sinologists' studies on Chinese literature in the nineteenth century. I have shown that the knowledge about and discourses on Chinese literature are not solely framed by the frequently-mentioned sinologists and their works such as Herbert Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature*; the British sinologists less studied today, such as William Frederick Mayers, Robert Kennaway Douglas, and Alfred Lister, had also published extensively on Chinese literature and participated actively in the formation and dissemination of the knowledge about Chinese literature at the time. By restoring the contribution of these neglected sinologists and their works, my thesis has shown that the studies on Chinese literature are the collective effort of different generations of sinologists with its continuity and development in the nineteenth century. Though the sinologists' writings on Chinese literature are hardly pre-designed, systematic studies, there is notable succession in their perspectives and discourses. For example, Walter Henry Medhurst particularly quoted John Francis Davis's writings on Chinese poetry; Alfred Lister also referred to William Frederick Mayers in the studies of Chinese fiction. There are also, not surprisingly, disagreement and new discoveries, such as the sinologists' different opinions on the parallel between the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and the *Iliad*. Above all, a gradual accumulation of the knowledge about Chinese literature throughout the course of the nineteenth century is evident. From sketchy remarks to detailed and systematic descriptions and explanations of the characteristics of Chinese literature, from brief histories of individual literary genres to a complete history of Chinese literature, the later generations of sinologists are always able to improve on the works of their predecessors in the configuration of the knowledge about Chinese literature.

The gradual advance of the British knowledge about Chinese literature is perhaps most obviously revealed in the English encyclopaedias. As Georg Lehner explains in writing of his research on European knowledge of China in the English, French, and German encyclopaedias in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “encyclopaedias had two functions for the evolution of European images of China. They multiplied and disseminated information contained in early Western books on China, and they standardised noteworthy information on China.”³ Encyclopaedias play a decisive role in making the extensive European knowledge about China into well-organised, condensed, and reliable narratives; they also serve as the indicator for the level of, as well as the developments and changes in, European knowledge of China in their time. The English encyclopaedias published from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, therefore, allow us to see more directly the reception and influence of British sinology in both the accumulation and the standardisation of the knowledge about Chinese literature in the English-speaking world.

The first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* published from 1768 to 1771 only contains a short entry on “China” and a long one on “Chinese” which is mainly about the Chinese ancient history and mythology and without any mention of the Chinese literature.⁴ The second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1777–1784), though equipped with a much-expanded article on “China” which includes narratives on Chinese history, government, national character, general learning, and other aspects,⁵ does not incorporate anything about Chinese literature. From the third edition (1788–1797) to the sixth edition (1820–1823) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, one paragraph on Chinese poetry is added under the entry “China.” This piece of writing is mainly based on the chapter on Chinese poetry from the French writer, the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Gabriel Alexandre Grosier’s (1743–1823) *A General Description of China (Description de la Chine, 1788)*, a synthesis of the European knowledge about China in the late eighteenth century.⁶ The paragraph includes some inaccurate, but presumably popular information, about Chinese poetry at the time, such as that “only the most harmonious, energetic, and picturesque words, are to be

³ Lehner, *China in European Encyclopaedias*, viii.

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (1771), 184–192.

⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (1778), 1907–1921.

⁶ Jean-Baptiste Gabriel Alexandre Grosier, *A General Description of China: containing the Topography of the Fifteen Provinces . . . Arts and Sciences of the Chinese (Description générale de la Chine, ou tableau de l’état actuel de cet empire . . . les Arts & les Sciences des Chinois)*, vol. 2 (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1788), 391–412.

employed”⁷ when writing a Chinese poem; this is the sort of information that the early nineteenth-century British sinologists like George Staunton and John Francis Davis made an effort to correct.

A significant change in the account of Chinese literature took place in the Supplement (1815–1824) to the fourth, fifth, and sixth editions of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in which a greatly enlarged, 5-page article on Chinese literature is included under the entry “China.”⁸ The passage begins with a general introduction to the education, law, and press in China, and the European translation and studies of Chinese texts, followed by two sections on Chinese poetry and drama respectively. The Supplement marks an important development in the knowledge of Chinese literature in English encyclopaedias not only because of its increased length and scope but also because of its adoption of more recent sources by British travellers to China and sinologists at the turn of the eighteenth century. According to the simple reference list attached at the end of this article on Chinese literature in the Supplement, travel writings and sinological works by Lord Macartney, George Staunton, John Barrow, and the French sinologist Joseph De Guignes (1721–1800) began to be taken as main sources alongside the long-time favourite Jesuit Missionary Communications and the works by Du Halde and Grosier.⁹ With more detailed description and first-hand observation, the Supplement provides a very up-to-date compilation of the writings on Chinese literature in the early nineteenth century. This article was also reprinted in both the seventh and the eighth editions of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1830–1842; 1853–1860).¹⁰

Two English encyclopaedias published around the 1820s and 1830s outside the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* system make greater advantage of British sinology in providing knowledge about Chinese literature. A lengthy introduction to Chinese literature appears in the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* (1808–1830). Though it is different in wording and narrative from the article in the Supplement to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, both encyclopaedias use similar reference materials including Grosier’s *A General Description*

⁷*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 3rd ed., vol. 4, part 1 (1797), 688; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 4th ed., vol. 6 (1810), 40; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 6th ed., vol. 6 (1823), 40.

⁸ *Supplement to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 3 (1824), 89–94.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 7th ed., vol. 6 (1842), 567–571; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 8th ed., vol. 6 (1854), 576–580.

of China and the British travel writings. The *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* also records some of the conceptions and discourses commonly held by the British sinologists at the time. For example, it offers a concise summary of the characteristics of Chinese drama that “the Chinese drama possesses none of the requisites of the European stage; observes none of the unities of time, place, or action; makes no distinction between tragedy and comedy . . . They have no scenery . . .”¹¹ Similarly, in the *Penny Cyclopaedia* (1828–1843), more British sinologists and their works, including Robert Morrison, George Staunton, and John Francis Davis and his translations *A Heir in his Old Age* and *The Sorrows of Han*, are mentioned in the article on Chinese language and literature. There is also a very timely quotation of Davis’s writings on the Chinese language from his *The Chinese* published in 1836.¹²

Another important development in the British knowledge about Chinese literature is seen in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* published from 1875 to 1889. This encyclopaedia marks a complete shift in the source of information on Chinese literature from travel writings to contemporary British sinology, since the article on Chinese literature under the entry “China” is completely copied from the sinologist Robert Kennaway Douglas’s *The Language and Literature of China: two Lectures delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in May and June 1875*.¹³ This article adopts a broader concept of literature and is much larger than the previous articles. It is divided into seventeen sub-headings: *Book of Changes*, *Book of History*, *Book of Rites*, *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the four books, doctrine and style of Confucius, wholesale destruction of books, invention of brush-pencil and of paper, historical records, topographical works, encyclopaedias, Taoist literature, *Book of Odes*, later poetry, dramatic literature, abstract of a play, and novels. This article by Douglas provides a history of Chinese poetry with English translations of Chinese specimens. Description of Chinese novels is added for the first time in an English encyclopaedia. The account of Chinese drama is no longer based on foreign travellers’ bewildered observations of Chinese theatrical performances, as Douglas presents more well-informed knowledge about Chinese play scripts and performances based on Chinese sources such as the *One Hundred Yuan Plays* and the

¹¹ David Brewster et al, eds., *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: printed for William Blackwood, 1830), 279.

¹² George Long, ed., *The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, vol. 7 (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1837), 82.

¹³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th ed., vol. 5 (1875), 573–579.

British sinologists' English translation of Chinese plays. Overall, Douglas's scholarship offers a completely new insight into the concept, elements, works, characteristics, and values of Chinese literature for English readers. This article is reprinted in the tenth edition, or the American edition, of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* published in 1902 and 1903.

In the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* published in 1910 and 1911, the section on Chinese literature is written by another British sinologist Herbert Allen Giles,¹⁴ presumably recognised as *the* expert on Chinese literature of his time. Giles presented a still wider scope of Chinese literature in twenty-one sub-headings: poetry, history, biography, geography and travel, philosophy, political economy, military writers, agriculture, medicine and therapeutics, divination, painting, music, miscellaneous writings, collections, individual authors, fiction, drama, dictionaries, the concordance, encyclopaedia, manuscripts and printing. The paragraphs on Chinese poetry, drama, and fiction are rewritten but similar narratives to those in his *A History of Chinese Literature*. He described and explained the basic versification rules, the important Chinese poets, the poetics of suggestiveness, and the history of Chinese poetry from the *Book of Poetry* to the Qing dynasty, emphasising its highest point in the Tang dynasty and the decline of the poetic art from the Song dynasty. On Chinese fiction, Giles introduced three novels: *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. He also provided a brief history of Chinese drama and introduced the Chinese play *The Story of the Western Wing*. Giles's article on Chinese literature was also used in the twelfth (1922) and the thirteenth (1926) editions of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

These English encyclopaedias record the change of authoritative sources of information in Britain about Chinese literature from the European Jesuits' works and British travel writings up to nineteenth-century British sinology. Both the ninth and the eleventh editions of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in which the articles on Chinese literature were written by British sinologists, were particularly celebrated for their high intellectual standards and enjoyed great success in Britain and in the US after their publication,¹⁵ which has facilitated the dissemination of knowledge about Chinese literature produced by British sinologists. Providing more precise, detailed, and comprehensive narratives, the British

¹⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 6 (1910), 222–231.

¹⁵ Herman Kogan, *The Great EB: The Story of the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 62–64, 167–173.

sinologists' writings eventually shaped and standardised the knowledge about Chinese literature in the Anglophone world in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

In the early twentieth century, however, the development of British sinology seems to slow down. "Chinese studies in British universities," T. H. Barrett notes, "presented a very bleak prospect indeed, in spite of Waley's [Arthur Waley, 1889–1966] publications, until almost the eve of the [Second World] war."¹⁶ British sinology was surpassed, again, by European—especially the French—sinology and also by the rise of the disciplinary Chinese Studies in the United States.¹⁷ Though the British sinologists continued to publish writings on Chinese literature and perhaps an increasing number of English translations of Chinese literary works in the early twentieth century, there is hardly anything as significant as Herbert Giles's *A History of Chinese Literature* in integrating the knowledge about Chinese literature.

Meanwhile, both literary and ideological considerations were behind the decline of the validity of British sinology. Studies of literature itself have undergone profound changes and professionalisation as literary study was turned into an academic discipline in British, American, and also Chinese universities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁸ With the efforts of British and American literary critics and university instructors such as I. A. Richards (1893–1979) and F. R. Leavis (1895–1978), new terminologies, analytical techniques, and critical principles like "practical criticism" and "close reading" were developed and promoted, substituting previous impressionistic and subjective "amateur" reading and studies of English literature. Studies of Chinese literature also developed into a new stage when Chinese and Japanese scholars in the early twentieth century began to adopt Western literary theories and the more "scientific" methodologies in their research of Chinese literature.

¹⁶ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89–96.

¹⁸ On the rise of English studies in British and American universities, see D. J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 154–160; Terry Eagleton, "The Rise of English," in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; repr. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 37–44. On the development of Chinese literary studies as an academic discipline, see He Changsheng 賀昌盛, *Wanqing minchu wenxue xueke de xueshu puxi* 晚清民初文學學科的學術譜系 (The genealogy of Chinese "literature" as the academic discipline during the late Qing and early Republican eras), (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2012).

In addition to the paradigm shift in the standards of literary studies, there were also ideological concerns. In the first half of the twentieth century, especially during the 1920s and the 1930s, Chinese scholars introduced French, German, Japanese, and British sinology to China with historical or bibliographical accounts of the development and achievement of these foreign studies of China.¹⁹ With mixed attitudes of both appreciation and competitiveness, the Chinese scholars often discussed foreign sinology's merits and problems in relation to the state of modern Chinese scholars' own research of Chinese history and culture which had only been beginning to develop since the early twentieth century. Growing national pride might prompt Chinese scholars to view Western sinology as problematic. In a brief review of Chinese reception of sinology in the first half of the twentieth century, Li Xiaoqian points out that the Chinese scholars were often critical in their book reviews of sinological works, which seems to suggest their "attempt to challenge the dominating authority of foreign sinologists and to have greater say in the field of Chinese studies at the time."²⁰

With the changing norms in literary studies, the availability of modern Chinese and Japanese scholars' research into Chinese literature, and the Chinese national anxieties, the nineteenth-century sinologists' writings on Chinese literature were soon considered as obsolete and replaced by the more academic Chinese studies in the twentieth century. As shown in this research, however, the nineteenth-century British sinologists' studies are still valuable in that they provided the English-speaking world with basic and relatively comprehensive knowledge about Chinese literature for the first time and in that they addressed some of the topics or ideas in Chinese literature that continue to be relevant today. A reappraisal of the British sinologists' initial interest in Chinese literature and their practice of knowledge production in the nineteenth century gives a historical understanding of the origins and development, as well as the strands of knowledge, in the field of research. An analysis of the studies of Chinese literature in English scholarship in the new era after the nineteenth century deserves another volume of its own.

¹⁹ For reception of sinology in China before 1949, see Li Xiaoqian 李孝遷, ed., *Jindai Zhongguo yuwai hanxue pinglun cuibian* 近代中國域外漢學評論萃編 (Collection of modern Chinese criticism of overseas sinology), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

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