THE PROPHECY TALES IN PU SONGLING'S *LIAOZHAI ZHIYI:*

A STUDY IN GENERIC INNOVATION

by

CHUNYI YU

(Under the Direction of Yuanfei Wang)

ABSTRACT

Many critics point out a generic mix in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*, a collection of zhiguai tales written in chuanqi mode. This thesis takes it as a generic innovation, denominating it "zhiyi genre" and probing into the relationship between its nature and the serious intention it bears. After an exploration of the generic relationship between xiaoshuo, zhiguai and chuanqi in the Introduction, the first part conducts a theoretical discussion of the features of this generic innovation. The second part makes a case study of several typical stories, asking questions such as "what are the distinctive generic features of 'zhiyi genre'?" and "what is the relationship between genre and content?" Through close reading and analysis of several tales, it relates the creation of "zhiyi genre" to the expression of a contradiction between traditional social values and the changing ones of the Qing Dynasty.

INDEX WORDS: Pu Songling, Xiaoshuo, Chuanqi, Zhiguai, Prophecy, Genre

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DEDICATION

To my family, thank you for your unfailing love and unconditional support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) witnessed a revival of zhiguai tales after a long decline since the Six Dynasties period. It was kindled by Pu Songling's 蒲松龄 (1640-1715) *Liaozhai Zhiyi* 《聊斋志异》, or "*Strange Tales from the Liaozhai Studio.*"[1] This book, as the title indicates, is indeed a master work of strange stories. A collection of 494 tales assembled over around forty years, it includes materials from lengthy narratives with complex plots and twists to concise anecdotes and accounts, covering a great diversity of extraordinary occurrences ranging from supernatural forces—ghosts, deities and non-human transfigurations—to ordinary humans in various social backgrounds, creating a fantastic and peculiar world with great imagination and invention.

Liaozhai played a significant role in this resurgence. Its publication caused a great sensation. According to Allan Barr, this book was circulated in manuscript during the period from 1675 to 1705, and was first published in the year 1766.[2] After its formal publication, it gained popularity—zhiguai tales were published in such a large quantity that generation writing was immediately formed in the second half of the eighteenth century.[3] Almost all of the main works in the subsequent periods were under the impact

[1] The term "LiaoZhai" 聊斋 is the name of Pu's study, "zhi" 志 means "to record" and "Yi" 异 means the strange, unordinary, freakish or unusual. Any errors that remain in the thesis are my sole responsibility.
[2] See Huntingon. *Alien Kind*, pp. 27.
[3] See Leo Chan, *The Discourse of Foxes and Ghosts*, pp. 11-17. Chan makes a figure entitled *Important Collections of Qing Zhiguai (up to 1850)* which displays the framework of classical tales in the Qing Dynasty. *Liaozhai* is listed at the position of 12/34. We can see that 7 out of the 11 works before *Liaozhai* have only one chapter, *Liaozhai* has 12 chapters, and after it, works at least 4 chapters, 12/22 have over 10 chapters.

of Pu's influence—they could be roughly divided into two groups: either imitators of *Liaozhai* to a certain extent or backlashes against it.

Such a huge success can be mainly attributed to Pu Songling's generic innovation in *Liaozhai*—he writes zhiguai tales in the mode of chuanqi. Huntington in *Alien Kind* points out that *Liaozhai* is written in an unprecedented way and endorses the great impact on the following generations,

> "Pu Songling stands apart from his contemporaries. Although his collection contains both zhiguai and chuanqi, it was the latter that made him famous. He combined highly elegant and allusive language, vivid description more typical of vernacular fiction, intricate plots, and fantastic content in an unprecedented way. Liaozhai zhiyi has received more scholarly attention than all other works of the Qing classical tale tradition put together, and the history of late imperial zhiguai is often framed in terms of its predecessors and imitators." (Huntington, 27)

This comment confirms the uniqueness of *Liaozhai* and roughly puts that such uniqueness is an outgrowth of a generic mix in this work. Leo Chan in the book *The Discourse of Foxes and Ghosts* goes further and argues that,

> "It is doubtless for this reason that the chuanqi 传奇 (stories of marvels), with their better-rounded characters and fuller exploitation of narrative plots, have for long been held by Western-trained scholars in higher regard than the majority of the zhiguai. *Studio of Leisure*[4], generally considered to be the masterpiece of Chinese short-story collections, happens to be, as Ji Yun would have put it, zhiguai in the chuanqi mode." (Chan, 6)

Here, he gives a brief description of the features of chuanqi mode. Also, he mentions the zhiguai genre and the name of a critic, Ji Yun 纪昀 (1724 - 1805). His comment is important in that he speaks directly to the generic issue, and the three terms, chuanqi mode, zhiguai genre, and Ji Yun, are significant in understanding this generic innovation. In the discussion below, I will go through the three terms by examining three important questions.

[4] This is another translation for *Liaozhai zhiyi*.

First, what is chuanqi mode? Though many critics talk about this term, they have not given any specific definition to it. The answer to this question is related to the next question, "what is zhiguai genre?"

In brief, both zhiguai and chuanqi are subgenres of xiaoshuo. In order to answer the above two questions, we may need to first answer the question, "what is xiaoshuo?"

What is Xiaoshuo?

The Chinese concept of xiaoshuo 小说, literally translated as "small talks" and usually translated as "fiction" or "the novel" for convenience, is in fact deeply rooted in Chinese history with a much broader implication. According to Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), the earliest usage of the term "xiaoshuo" is in Zhuangzi's 庄子 (369-286) *Waiwu pian* 外物篇, "seeking reputation and honor by embellishing trivialities is far away from great achievement" 饰小说以干县令，其于大达亦远矣.[5] However, here xiaoshuo merely means petty talks of no great significance and has nothing to do with literature.

It is from Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 C.E.), the author of *Hanshu* 汉书 (History of the Han Dynasty), that the term xiaoshuo gets its bibliographic implication. *Hanshu* is an official historical record of the Han Dynasty, which records important events, emperors' behaviors, famous figures, government policies, and so on. One section entitled *Yiwenzhi* 艺文志 (Bibliography of Arts and Letters) mentions the term xiaoshuo under the entry entitled xiaoshuojia 小说家 (the school of xiaoshuo),[6] that

[5] *Zhuangzi jishi* 庄子集释 (Annotated Collected Edition of Zhuangzi). Ed. Guo Qingfan. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, 1961, chapter 26, pp.15.

[6] Ban Gu lists the school of xiaoshuo in the Bibliography section as one of the ten philosophical schools of learning, but it is the last and least noteworthy among them. To Ban Gu, "Only nine of the ten philosophical schools are worth reading" and the school of xiaoshuo is excluded from them. See Chan, 162.

> “小说家者流，盖出于稗官。街谈巷语，道听途说者之所造也。孔子曰：‘虽小道，必有可观者焉，致远恐泥，是以君子弗为也。’然亦弗灭也。”
> “The school of xiaoshuo is comprised of quasi-historians who collected hearsays and gossips on the street for government ruling. Confucius once said, ‘Even in inferior studies and employments there is something worth being looked at; but if it be attempted to carry them out to what is remote, there is a danger of their proving inapplicable. Therefore, the superior man does not practice them.’ yet it neither disappears. ” [7]

In this quotation Ban talks about the origin and social status of xiaoshuo. At that point, xiaoshuo was regarded no more than gossips collecting from the street, and xiaoshuojia, who recorded these gossips, were mainly composed of Baiguan 稗官—minor officials or quasi-historians, in comparison with orthodox historians such as Ban himself. He also cites a remark from *The Analects of Confucius* to evaluate xiaoshuo—though there may be certain values in xiaoshuo, it is still considered an inferior study that cannot be used to record high-value contents, and it may be even dangerous for the superior men to read and write xiaoshuo, because they may be distracted from achieving soaring ambition. In this light, Ban, the orthodox historian, not only depreciates the value of xiaoshuo, but the social status of people who collect and record them.

In addition, Ban implies that xiaoshuo shares some traits with other writings. Right after the entry of xiaoshuojia, Ban comments that “although there are ten philosophical schools, only nine of them are of great importance” 诸子十家，其可观者九家而已. Zi 子, here refers to philosophical schools including Confucianism and Taoism, later becoming a category of traditional bibliography.[8] This comment on the one hand strengthens Ban’s disapproval of the orthodox value of xiaoshuo, but on the other,

[7] Hanshu, vol.6, pp. 1745. The translation of Confucius is from Lei Jin, “Erotic Enclaves and Contested Beds: Gardens in Pu Songling’s Chuanqi Tales”. *ASIA Network Exchange*, fall 2014, Vol. 22.1; Jin gives a brief description on the development of xiaoshuo, zhiguai and chuanqi.
[8] See Hu, Yingling. *Shaoshi Shanfang Bicong* (Notes from a Studio in Shaoshi Mountain). Shanghai Shudian. 2001.

nevertheless, by listing xiaoshuojia as one philosophical school together with the other nine, it acknowledges the didactic values and argumentative trait of xiaoshuo shared by other philosophical writings. By closely examining the list of fifteen xiaoshuo works under the entry of xiaoshuojia, Kenneth Dewoskin goes further pointing out the discursive nature of the genre xiaoshuo that none of them are pure narratives.[9] By exploring the boundaries between xiaoshuo and other philosophies, the Ming Dynasty literary critic Hu Yinlin 胡应麟 (1551-1602), also indicates the amorphous nature of this genre. Although xiaoshuo belongs to the category of zi, it displays features that are prevalent in other categories.[10]

In summary, the Chinese concept of xiaoshuo has a much broader meaning than the modern concept of fiction. Based on its original definition as petty talk, the form of xiaoshuo is brief, the content assorted, the style argumentative, and the purpose didactic. Collected rather than created by quasi-historians from street-talk for the purpose of government ruling, it on the one hand reflects public voices and emphasizes factuality and credibility, and on the other is considered an inferior study that cannot be used to record orthodoxies. Therefore, the generic nature of xiaoshuo is amorphous, as Huntington argues, "The boundaries between the tale and philosopher's anecdotes invented for didactic purposes and between the tale and historiography were particularly blurry" (Huntington, 15). Such a blurry generic boundary makes xiaoshuo a specific genre rooted in the ground of Chinese history and literature. Chan goes further pointing out that, "both the post-Six Dynasties understanding of xiaoshuo as, simply, 'tales' and

[9] Kenneth DeWoskin. "The Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the Birth of Fiction". *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays.* Ed. Andrew H. Plak. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, 21-52.
[10] Hu, Yingling. *Shaoshi Shanfang Bicong* 少室山房笔丛 (Notes from a Studio in Shaoshi Mountain). Shanghai Shudian. 2000, pp.374. For more discussion, see Huntington's *Alien Kind*, pp.15.

the twentieth century identification of xiaoshuo with 'fiction' can be misleading," because neither of them takes into account the ambiguous nature, narrative as well as argumentative (Chan, 7). Chan's argument marks the distinct and particular traits of xiaoshuo as a traditional Chinese literature genre. Compared with the modern concept of fiction, the genre of xiaoshuo emphasizes more on the value of objectiveness, factuality, and didactic associations.

What is Zhiguai? What is Chuanqi?

Zhiguai 志怪 (records of the strange) and chuanqi 传奇 (tales of the marvelous) are two subgenres of xiaoshuo, both traditions of which have a lengthy history, with the former flourishing in the Six Dynasties (220-588) and the later in the Tang Dynasty (618-960). They are first used in book titles before being generic terms. It is Hu Yinglin who first uses them in his literary critical work *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* as subgenres referring to literary works with certain distinctive traits.[11]

As subdivisions of xiaoshuo, zhiguai and chuanqi share some common traits mainly displayed on their contents—both of them deal with the subject of "guai" 怪 (bizarreness) and "qi" 奇 (marvel) disapproved of by Confucius. A famous statement of Confucius in *The Analects of Confucius* shapes the general understanding of writing zhiguai and chuanqi through the history of Chinese literature: "The subjects on which the Master did not talk were: extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings" 子不语：怪、力、乱、神.[12] The highest forms of literature under the dominance of Confucian ideology are poetry, prose, and history. These orthodox genres

[11] See Huntington, *Alien Kind*, pp 16.
[12] Confucius. *Lunyu. Daxue. Zhongyong* (the Analects, the Great Digest, the Unwobbling Pivot). Ed. Guoxuan Wang. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju. 2010.

promote humans to focus on their proper goals, such as public concerns and social service, in the human society. On the contrary, writings of the strange or the marvelous are potentially dangerous, because they scatter human strength from the real world onto things uncontrollable or even untrustworthy. Moreover, the content of zhiguai and chuanqi goes directly against Confucian functions of literature: we can often observe that non-human transfigurations disobey human moral rules and lure Confucian scholars from their proper duties. Also, Confucian scholars could think and talk about love and sex in ways impossible in orthodox literary genres. In this light, literati devoted to writing these stories are regarded as ignoring their professions, and both zhiguai and chuanqi are considered inferior to Confucian orthodoxy and become the marginal genres in the history of Chinese literature.

The second most distinct similarity they share is the factuality of the records. Stories of zhiguai and chuanqi are often set in a factual frame, with prefaces asserting them as credible accounts of things that have actually happened,[13] or the authorial personae at the end of stories affirming the original resources of accounts, claiming that they are transmitting instead of creating these events.[14]

Though it may be difficult to draw a clear and absolute line between zhiguai and chuanqi in the perspective of content, they are very different in consideration of stylistic features. The length of each chuanqi tale is basically longer than that of zhiguai. This makes chuanqi able to develop more complex and twisted plots, more rounded characters, and more ornamental language, in comparison with brief accounts in zhiguai genre. In

[13] See Huntington, *Alien Kind*, pp.16.
[14] Hammond makes a further analysis of factuality in Pu Songling's work. See Charles E. Hammond, "Factual Framing in *Liaozhai zhiyi*", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung*. Vol. 59(2), 205-230 (2006).

addition, due to its lengthy size, tales in chuanqi genre are able to represent stories with elaboration on details as well as authorial emotional involvement and inevitably have to confront the issue of fictionality. Because of this significant change in format and style, the main concern of zhiguai writers on the factuality of events is gradually replaced by the concern on fictionality: how to represent events in a more genuine way in chuanqi tales. Hu Yinglin points out this change that,

> “变异之谈，盛于六朝，然多是传录舛讹，未必尽幻设语。至唐人乃作意好奇，假小说以寄笔端。” “Though the pursuit of the strange and unusual flourished in the Six Dynasties, most were recorded as factual accounts of hearsays and gossips, not necessarily out of imagination. When it came to the Tang dynasty, literati began to pursue the strange intentionally, creating stories in the form of *xiaoshuo.*” (Hu, 371)

Hu differentiates the genre of zhiguai from chuanqi by examining the intentionally fictional invention in writing stories. Writers of zhiguai stick more to the original rules deriving from the genre of xiaoshuo, collecting and transmitting what have been witnessed and heard about by themselves or from other people. In contrast, chuanqi writers adopt a narrative standard much closer to the concept of modern fiction. Their concerns are not so much on the question of whether stories are true or not, but how to represent stories in a more genuine way.

Such stylistic differences lead to a difference in emphasis between the term “guai” 怪 (bizarreness), as part of the compound word “zhiguai”, and “qi”奇(marvel), as that of “chuanqi”, respectively. Huntington points out that the main concern of zhiguai is “guai” 怪 (bizarreness), focusing on something that is extraordinary, bizarre, otherworldly, and anomalous with reference to supernatural force, while chuanqi emphasizes “marvels of

character and relations between characters" that appeal to a sense of wonder. [15] Such a generic difference has a significant impact on texts as well as contents of stories. For example, zhiguai stories tend to treat non-human transfigurations as strange phenomena, focusing on the object features before their transformation, while chuanqi stories treat them as characters that share more human features. Chan claims the relationship between genre and content, arguing the different concerns of these two genres,

> "The emphasis on human events in the chuanqi and on the supernatural in the zhiguai further illuminates the difference between the forms: any event that gives rise to feelings of wonder or marvel can be stuff of the chuanqi, but only uncanny phenomena not explicable with reference to natural laws are the proper domain of the zhiguai." (Chan, 11)

Here Chan points out a significant difference between zhiguai and chuanqi. Zhiguai, with regards to supernatural things beyond normal human experiences, denotes the inexplicable aspects of things by natural laws. While chuanqi, with the purpose of "giving rise to feelings of wonder or marvel," tends to deal with human events that can be fully understood in human logic.

In summary, though zhiguai and chuanqi to a certain extent are under the influence of xiaoshuo genre and thus share some similarities, the differences between the two subgenres are significant. Zhiguai is more derivative from the original meaning of xiaoshuo, while chuanqi is close to the modern emphasis on representation. Moreover, "guai" refers to bizarre and anomalous things beyond normal human experiences that often refuse to be understood. "Qi", on the contrary, accentuates the marvels that usually happen within characters, appealing to a sense of wonder. For this purpose, to narrate events in a more genuine way with elaborations on details and sentiments makes it easier to arouse emotional resonance in readers. Also, even if chuanqi handles the same non-

[15] Huntington, *Alien Kind*, pp. 18.

human subjects as zhiguai, it more emphasizes their human features. They think and behave entirely like humans. They are understandable and can be taken as humans, though they may share some extraordinary powers that the ordinary do not possess.

How to Evaluate Ji Yun's Comments on *Liaozhai*?

As is mentioned above, Pu Songling makes a generic innovation in *Liaozhai* where he writes zhiguai tales in the chuanqi mode. However, it is also because of this generic mix that is a contested issue among post-*Liaozhai* scholars. Ji Yun, always regarded as the second most representative author of zhiguai tale after Pu Songling in the Qing Dynasty, opposes this generic innovation right after the publication of *Liaozhai*. His opinion is cited by his disciple Sheng Shiyan 盛时彦 in a postscript to the book *Guwang tingzhi* 姑妄听之 (Just listen to it),

> "《聊斋志异》盛行一时，然才子之笔，非著书者之笔也。…… 今一书而兼二体，所未解也。小说既述见闻，即属叙事，不比戏场关目，随意装点。…… 今燕昵之词，媟狎之态，细微曲折，摹绘如生。便出自言，似无此理；使出作者代言，则何从而闻见之？又未所解也。" "*Liaozhai zhiyi* enjoyed great popularity, but it came under the brush of a genius, not just that of a writer. …… Now for one book to blend two genres is incomprehensible to me. Xiaoshuo, being an account of what one has seen or heard, is a narrative of events; it is not like the plot of a play, which one can freely embellish. ……This book contains whispers between lovers, lust of the flesh, implicit and twisted, as real as imaginary. It is unreasonable that these words are directly from the author's mouth. However, it is also unconscionable if the author simply speaks for others – how did he hear every sentence or see every detail in these scenes? It is rather confusing. " [16]

Ji Yun here clearly raises an issue of generic confusion. Though he affirms the individual talent of Pu Songling for writing *Liaozhai*, he considers it a defect in this book displaying emotional involvement and subjective feelings that are prevalent in other genres. Also, he

[16] See Sheng Shiyan's colophon, in which Ji Yun is cited, at the end of *Guwang tingzhi*. *Yuewei caotang biji* 阅微草堂笔记 pp.471-473. Part of the translation is in reference to Chan, *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, pp. 165.

negates the values of fictional invention, such as literary representation of private conversations, in writing zhiguai tales. What he emphasizes here is the value of authenticity, underscoring the importance of writing tales based on authorial experiences in the genre of xiaoshuo.

However, though Ji Yun points out the generic heterogeneity in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai*, he simply regards it a defect that makes readers confused. His comments are closely connected to his understanding of zhiguai genre. Ji considers *Liaozhai* a collection of zhiguai tales and evaluates it based on pure generic standards of zhiguai. A literary theoretician as well as an author, Ji himself writes a collection of zhiguai stories entitled *Yuewei caotang biji* 阅微草堂笔记 (Notebook from the cottage of close scrutiny). This work, placing more emphasis on records of the strange without authorial emotional involvement, indeed imitates the zhiguai mode of the Six Dynasties. His comments are therefore partial in consideration that his argument is simply out of his purpose—he attempts to shape a clear and general theory of zhiguai genre by repeatedly referring to the predecessors in the Six Dynasties as illustrations, while the generic innovation in *Liaozhai*, nonetheless, goes directly against this purpose.

To make an impartial evaluation of this anthology and further explore its innovative features, this thesis takes the generic innovation—writing zhiguai tales in the chuanqi mode—as a new genre. Though an outgrowth of zhiguai and chuanqi, it is not a rough combination of them. To fully understand this genre, it is necessary first to examine the differences in the connotations of the character "yi" 异 (as in Liaozhai zhiyi) and its precursors: "guai" 怪 (as in zhiguai) and "qi" 奇 (as in chuanqi), pointing out that

Pu deliberately adopts “yi” to differentiate this new genre from zhiguai and chuanqi. The thesis denominates the new genre as “zhiyi genre.”

Right after the theoretical discussion, the second part explores the relationship between the nature of “zhiyi genre” and the content it bears. A case study of several typical stories will be conducted, asking questions such as “what are the distinctive generic features of ‘zhiyi genre’” and “what is the relationship between this new genre and the contents it bears as well as between the genre and social values it handles?” Through close reading and analysis of prophecy tales, it relates the creation of “zhiyi genre” to the expression of a contradiction between the traditional social values and the changed ones in the Qing Dynasty.

CHAPTER 2

THE THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

A collection of zhiguai tales in chuanqi mode, *Liaozhai* does not simply belong to the genre zhiguai or chuanqi alone. Its title adopts neither of the two terms. Rather, Pu Songling chooses the term "yi" 异 (as part of the compound word "zhiyi", recording "yi") to denote his innovation. To understand the distinctive feature of this generic mix, it is helpful to delve into the exploration of meanings of "yi" and examine the differences between "yi" and its precursors "guai" and "qi" from the semantic perspective.[17]

The semantic exploration of the three terms helps clarify their relationship. First, it is notable that originally both of the terms "guai" and "qi" shared the same meanings as that of "yi". In *Shuowen jiezi*, under the entries of "guai" and "qi", Xu Shen annotates "異也" (equaling "yi"), referring both to the term "yi"; and under the entry of "yi", he elaborates on the semantic history of this character. It seems that meanings of "qi" and "guai" are covered by those of "yi", that is, the term "yi" contains a broader range of meanings than that of "qi" or "guai". The only exception is, "qi" contains a meaning of "single", or "alone", and in *Hanyu dacidian*, we can see that this meaning develops into an emphasis on "rare" or "worth", indicating an evaluation upon something. Secondly, the original meaning of "yi" is "to give", from which it derives "separation", for one has to separate things first before giving. From *Hanyu dacidian*, we notice that this term has

[17] For the possible meanings of the three terms, please refer to Xu Shen's 许慎 (58-147) *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 (Interpretation of Chinese characters), an ancient dictionary interpreting Chinese characters and tracing their original meanings based on the pictograph forms. Also see *Hanyu dacidian* (The Great Dictionary of Chinese), which collects Chinese characters from both ancient and modern sources with possible meanings and usages.

developed a dichotomous connotation accentuating something that is dissimilar from the other. This connotation echoes the main concern of the zhiguai genre—focusing on bizarreness or strangeness that distinguishes "others" from humans. Also, we observe that "yi" has meanings indicating human emotions—appealing to sentiments such as "surprised" or "astonished", which corresponds to the main concern of the chuanqi genre—to give rise to a sense of wonder.

From the semantic perspective, the term "yi" denotes a much wider scope of meanings covering that of "qi" and "guai". From the generic perspective, "yi" reveals the generic features of *Liaozhai*: it is not simply a rough jumble of the two genres, but as the relationship of the terms "yi", "qi", and "guai" indicates, it goes further to create a new genre in which its generic precursors, zhiguai and chuanqi, are merged into each other so naturally and perfectly. In this light, it must be a deliberate choice for Pu Songling to use "yi" to mark his generic innovation in *Liaozhai*.

The above discussion, through a horizontal comparison of generic distinctions between zhiguai and chuanqi, defines *Liaozhai* as a collection of zhiguai tales written in chuanqi mode. It demonstrates that the term "yi" contains connotations of both "guai" (strangeness) and "qi" (marvel). However, it is worth pointing out that, through a historical comparison, the connotation of strangeness in "yi" in the Qing Dynasty differs considerably from the conception of strangeness in the traditional zhiguai genre.

Karl S. Y. Kao in the article "Projection, Displacement, Introjection: The Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi*" claims that Pu Songling establishes a new type of strangeness aesthetics in *Liaozhai*.[18] This article mainly focuses on the exploration of

[18] Karl S. Y. Kao, "Projection, Dispacement, Introjection: The Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi"*. *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature,* Ed. Eva Hung. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press. 1994.

changes in the conception of "yi" itself. He argues that "there is an epistemological, perceptual shift from the strange as the transcription of reality to the strange as mental associations" (*Paradoxes*, 199). Then he goes further to examine the newly-added connotations of "yi" with regards to the spirit and social values of the time in the Qing Dynasty. He argues that, "This new conception of the strange seems to reflect a general Ming-Qing intellectual concern usually posed in terms of the relations between self and society or the personal aspirations and changing values of the time" (*Paradoxes*, 200). In this sense, it constitutes a paradox in *Liaozhai* that Pu uses "non-orthodox fiction to convey the orthodox values of social concerns and personal feeling" (*Paradoxes*, 200).

Kao's paper is indeed a good beginning for identifying the values of Pu Songling's generic innovation. He raises a very interesting topic that deserves full attention: when a genre becomes obsolete and is no longer appropriate to match updated contents or to reflect changing social values, a new genre with better formats and styles is imperative. Based on Kao's research, we may go further and ask: in what ways do the changed social contents or values affect the formats and styles of a genre used to record them?

The subgenres zhiguai and chuanqi have long been taken as unorthodox in comparison with the dominant Confucian literature. However, according to Chan, such an embarrassing situation is changed in the eighteenth century. With the revival of zhiguai, Ji Yun and his contemporary literary theorists began to think about the generic issue. Chan argues that Ji Yun's emphasizing on the didactic purpose in zhiguai genre acknowledges and affirms the canonical values of this genre—zhiguai can be used to

deliver orthodox values and handle serious social concerns as other canonical genres.[19] By comparing Ji Yun with Liu Zhiji 刘知几 (661 - 721) and Hu Yinglin, Chan points out three representative generic descriptions of zhiguai: values as pseudo-historical materials, supernatural contents, and didactic functions (Chan 150). It is the didactic purpose that directly confronts the issue of canonicity and changes the social status of zhiguai genre, because it echoes the didactic value of literature that emerged as early as the time of Confucius,

> "As Chow Tse-tsung 周策纵 has shown, the principle of using 'literature as a vehicle for conveying the Dao' (文以载道) is one of the two basic doctrines regarding the role of literature. The other role is that of 'Poetry expressing intentions in words' (诗言志)." (Chan, 153)

This emphasis on using literature as a means of expressing the Dao 道 has been developed over centuries, and though there may have been some slight modifications in different periods, the dominance of the didactic imperative remained unchanged in different genres throughout history. Such a didactic intent added to zhiguai genre did affect the way it treated the strange. The supernatural beings in traditional zhiguai tales, for example, were simply seen as uncanny phenomena.[20] However, the supernatural forces in zhiguai tales in the Qing dynasties were treated as "agents of punishment and reward which they mete out in proportion to an individual's deeds" (Chan, 149). The concern of this genre changed from the issue of factuality to that of didactic intention.

Such serious intention was also conveyed in *Liaozhai*. It was first shown in a format of authorial comments attached to the text made by the "Yishishi"异史氏

[19] See Chan, *Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts*, Chapter 5. "Didacticism and the Zhiguai Genre", pp. 149.
[20] As in the preface of *Soushenji* 搜神记 (In search of the spirits), an exemplary collection of zhiguai tales in the Six Dynasties, Gan Bao 干宝 (286-336) claims that his purpose of writing the work is to "prove the spirits are actually existent 证明神道之不诬",[20] focusing on the factuality of the record and taking supernatural forces as an objective existent though they may be unexplainable by the natural law.

(Chronicler of Wonders). This format was directly modeled on Sima Qian's 司马迁 (145-86 BC) *Shiji* 史记 (Records of the Grand Historian), in which Sima Qian made comments as "Taishigong" 太史公 (Chronicler of the Grand History) at the end of each story. By adopting these meta-text comments in *Liaozhai*, Pu allegorized the tales, imposing strong moralistic and didactic implications on the text.

Also, Pu claimed that the tales of the strange are used as a way to express his isolation and indignation in the preface of the anthology,

> "浮白载笔，仅成孤愤之书；寄托如此，亦足悲矣！嗟乎！惊霜寒雀，抱树无温；吊月秋虫，偎阑自热。知我者，其在青林黑塞间乎！" "I drink to propel my pen but succeed only in venting my spleen, my lonely anguish. Is it not a sad thing to find expression thus? Alas! I am but a bird trembling at the winter frost, vainly seeking shelter in the tree; an insect crying at the autumn moon, feebly hugging the door for warmth. Those who know me are in the green grove, they are at the dark frontier." [21]

Here Pu compared himself to a bird seeking shelter and only finding a place in the wood—the place where "others" reside. He anchored his ideals and hopes in the alien land.

The strong isolated and indignant feelings were directly related to his own unfortunate fate as well as social conditions in his time. On the one hand, it had to do with Pu Songling's personal experience. A member of a gentry family, he "passed the regional examinations for the Bachelor of Letters degree at age nineteen, but was repeatedly rejected in numerous subsequent provincial examinations, well into his seventies",[22] and "had to content himself with the degree of senior licentiate, granted to

[21] *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Trans. John Minford, 2006, pp. 457.
[22] *The Shorter Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*. Ed. Victor H. Mair; New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

him just five years before his death."[23] On the other hand, because of his repeated failures, he had to live on teaching as a private tutor far away from home. Living at a time of dynastic transition, he "no doubt also witnessed much social instability, abuses of power by the ruling class and corrupt officials, the savagery of the rebellion, the hardships of the farmers caused by natural calamities as well as harsh government" (*Paradoxes*, 201). All of these experiences made his work teem with social concerns and moral satire.

How does the claim of serious intention affect the formats and styles of a genre? Pu Songling's generic innovation in *Liaozhai* was a remarkable attempt at answering this question. Kao, intending to deal with the issue, denominated such innovation with the term "zhiyi fantasy" and explored the changes in the conception of the "yi" itself. However, though he acknowledged this generic innovation, pointing out that "it transforms the strange items into a new mode of fantasy" (*Paradoxes*, 200) and enquired into its nature and the claim of serious intention, he did not explore further the features of this genre, especially from the generic perspective.

Based on Kao's research, this thesis goes ahead probing into the generic features of this innovation. By denominating it "zhiyi genre", a generic orientation in this investigation is highlighted; by inquiring questions such as "what are the distinctive features of 'zhiyi genre'" and "what is the relationship between genre and content", it attempts to reveal the unique values of "zhiyi genre".

Next chapter makes a further discussion through close reading and analysis of the text, by taking prophecy tales as examples. I will start by some general observations and

[23] *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*. Ed. Victor H. Mair; New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

then turn to close reading of the text, examining the impact of using “zhiyi genre” on stories and how didacticism is conveyed in narration. Meanwhile, I will also explore the possible factors contributing to the conception of “yi” in *Liaozhai*.

CHAPTER 3

THE TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Some General Observations

This chapter mainly looks at prophecy tales as examples to illustrate the generic innovations in *Liaozhai*.

The reasons that I use prophecy tales are as follows. First, since I aim to examine the features of "zhiyi genre", particularly the impact of chuanqi mode on recording the strange, I argue that prophecy tales are representative of strangeness either from the perspective of stories or that of narration. Prophecies are greatly used in the process of creating a peculiar world and strengthening the phenomena of strangeness. On the one hand, the gift of prophecy is a sign of supernatural power. It is extremely hard for the ordinary to acquire and always remains exclusive to monks, Taoist priests, immortals, ghosts, or nonhuman transfigurations, and thus adds fantastic elements to the secular world. On the other, in terms of narration, prophecies often break the limits of time and space and happen in various forms, such as predictions of future events in real life or in foreshadowing dreams, which cause twists of time and space in narration, giving rise to peculiar and fantastic phenomena. Moreover, interactions between prophecies, fate and freewill—the ambiguity of prophecies, the unpredictability of fate, and the obedience or resistance of freewill—all contribute to twists in plots and dramatic suspense in these stories.

Secondly, since I intend to explore how Pu Songling uses the unorthodox genre to deal with the serious concern, I argue that prophecy tales serve the best in achieving didactic purposes—certain criteria are used for the purpose of judging the fulfillment of prophecies. These criteria are clearly and systematically established on Buddhist conceptions, such as samsara and karma, as well as traditional virtues advocated by Confucianism. Analyses below will demonstrate more details on this point.

Thirdly, prophecy tales form a great proportion of the whole collection, roughly covering about 20% of the total amount and are thus very representative. *Liaozhai* is composed of 494 tales,[24] 101 of which contain prophecies.[25] Hence, the analysis of these stories will give us a general picture of the features of "zhiyi genre" in *Liaozhai*.

Before textual analysis, it is helpful to first classify the prophecy stories into three main categories and then select several representative ones in each category for close reading and exposition.

Usually in a prophecy tales, there are two plot lines interwoven. One is a sense of doom—after a prophecy is told, the rest of the story is haunted by the prediction. Such a prophecy of fate itself forms a story line and often points to a clear result. The other is a story line developing under the influence of characters' freewill—actions taken by main characters in subsequent plots. Mostly, freewill obeys prophecies and goes in the

[24] The Chinese edition I use is *Strange Tales from the Liaozhai Studio*, 3 vols. from People's China Publishing House, 1989, (《*聊斋志异 全本新注*》朱其铠主编 (上、中、下册) 人民文学出版社 1989 年). This is the most authoritative and complete edition that contains the whole 494 tales. For English, I use three editions for cross-reference and complement. They are: *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* by John Minford from Penguin Classis, 2006, which includes 104 tales; *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* by Herbert Giles, 2 vols. from London Press, 1880, which includes 164 tales; *Selections from Strange Tales from the Liaozhai Studio*, 4 vols. Edited by Zhang Youhe, from Beijing: Foreigh Languages Press, 2007, (《聊斋志异选：汉英对照》，张友鹤编，北京外文出版社). This is a Chinese-English version consisting of 193 tales. Excluding the overlapping tales, 339 out of the total 494 are translated in English, and for the rest used in the thesis, I translate them by myself.

[25] I get this number from my own statistics on the whole anthology. There are 101 tales contain prophecies in various forms, such as direct prophecies, foreshadowing dreams and otherworldly experiences.

direction pointed out by prophecies. In these cases, the two story lines often coincide with prophecies coming true. In this way, the mystery of prophecies is highlighted to strengthen the strangeness of the stories. But in some other cases, freewill defies results alleged by prophecies and seeks to escape from a predestined fate. Such resistance sometimes succeeds while other times it is in vain. In order to examine the relationships between prophecies, fate, and freewill, this paper classifies the prophecy stories into several categories according to different "prophecy—action—result" patterns.

It should be noted that some stories belong to a brief "prophecy—result" type. A story in this type only contains a prophecy and its fulfillment without a process (or a gap) between them. In these stories, prophecies come true but only serve as records to highlight the supernatural power. For example, in the short story of "Fenzhou Hu" 汾州狐 (The Fox of Fenzhou), the fox concubine tells Judge Zhu one day that,

> 忽谓曰："君秩当迁，别有日矣。" 问："何时？"答曰："目前。但贺者在门，吊者即在闾，不能官也。" 三日，迁报果至。次日，即得太夫人讣音。公解任。One day, she said to the Judge out of blue, 'You will soon be promoted to a new post. The day of our parting is at hand.' 'When will that be?' asked Zhu. 'Any day now. But even as men come to your door to congratulate you, others will arrive in the alley to offer their condolences, and you will be prevented from taking up the new post'. Three days later, he indeed received notification of his promotion; and the day after, this was followed by news of his mother's death. He was obliged to resign his post in order to observe the three-year mourning period. " (*Liaozhai* 249)

Here, though the fox prophet foreshadows some future events, her prophecy is fulfilled quickly. There is no temporal gaps or plot developments between the giving and fulfilling of the prophecy. Prophesying ability is simply used to display the supernatural power of the fox fairy and to highlight the strangeness of the story. Therefore, stories of this type will be left out of discussion in this paper.

Another type of story is also excluded from this study: stories in which a prophet uses a prophecy for the purpose of deception. As prophecies in such stories are nothing but lies, they are devoid of value as prophecy: the foresight in the whole narration. In this sense, there is no point in studying these stories because it helps little in examining the relationship between fate and freewill. For example, in the story of “Yaoshu” 妖术 (Magical Arts), a fortune teller gentleman Yu meets in the marketplace prophesies that he is fated to die three days later. However, if he pays some money, the fortune teller would intervene in this tragedy. Gentleman Yu does not believe it and turns away. In the late night of the third day, three monsters are sent against him to his bedroom. However, they are all killed by gentleman Yu. It turns out that they are all sent by the fortune-teller, who decides to prove his clairvoyant powers even if it means killing people. In this story, though a prophecy is used, it is hard to say whether such a prophecy can still be called a prophecy, because it is no more than a trick and does not help reveal the true fate at all. Hence, this kind of tale is not in the scope of the investigation.

In other types of stories, a temporal gap and plot development exist between a prophecy and its result. In other words, stories are comprised of three parts, namely, prophecy, action and result. Based on different contents, prophecies can be grouped into two categories, including those that forebode disasters and those that forebode good fortune. "Action" here refers to corresponding behaviors of main characters after they receive prophecies. Freewill functions in the process of their actions. There are two kinds of results for a prophecy, namely, fulfillment and unfulfillment.

1. good fortune—action—unfulfillment (caused by a character’s bad deeds)
2. good fortune—action—fulfillment

3. disaster—action—unfulfillment (attributed to a character's good deeds)

4. disaster—action—fulfillment (unavoidable)

In Type I stories, although prophecies forebode good fortune, they never come true. In most cases, it is because the main character's bad words or deeds in subsequent actions dispel the good fortune and disrupt the predestined fate.

Prophecies in Type II stories forebode good fortune at the beginning and come true after a process of actions. This is the most common type of prophecy stories. Usually, the main characters in these stories follow the instructions given by prophets. In this way, their actions comply with the guidance of prophecies.

In Type III stories, prophecies forebode disasters, but are not fulfilled in the end. There are mainly two reasons for this inconsistency. One is that characters avoid these disasters with their virtues and good deeds in the process. The other is that characters follow the instructions given by prophets and take actions in advance to avoid them. Therefore, in this type, virtues and good deeds play an important role in deciding whether prophecies will come true.

In Type IV stories, prophecies suggest disasters and come true. In these stories, as prophecies forebode disasters, main characters tend to take actions to escape from the predestined misfortune. However, the fulfillment of these prophecies means their efforts are doomed to failure from the outset. In each story, the struggle against a fated result contributes to a dramatic tension in narration.

The four types of stories mentioned above almost cover all prophecy tales in *Liaozhai*. In the analysis below, I will group them into three main categories. In Type I and III stories, virtues and good deeds are critical factors in deciding whether prophecies

will be fulfilled. Stories of these two types are mainly written to serve the didactic purpose. Therefore, they will be grouped into one category in the subsequent analysis. Type II is an extended type of the brief "prophecy—result" one, taken as one category. Characters in Type IV stories, in order to escape from their unfortunate fates, show stronger freewill. This would help us better evaluate the impact of chuanqi mode on zhiguai tales. Therefore, more attention will be given to the analysis of Type IV stories.

A Case Study of Prophecy Tales

This section makes close reading and analysis of the text. Three categories mentioned above will be examined with several typical tales for illustration.

Category I

Type I and III are grouped to form the first main category, because they share strong didactic intention, placing an emphasis on the significance of virtue and good deed upon the result of a prophecy. It is safe to say that Type I and III are complementary—good fortune can come to naught by bad behavior while disaster is dispelled by virtue. In this context, the significance of the process is highlighted.

"Wang Cheng" 王成 is a typical one in which Type I and III are combined into the same story. In this example, the hero follows the instruction of a prophecy and leaves for the purpose of gaining some profits, however, when twists and turns arise in the journey, he has to face unexpected situations and make choices. His character is displayed and further developed in this process, accompanying with which the didactic implication is delivered.

Wang Cheng, the hero of this story, is a descendant of an old and honorable family. On the one hand, he inherits some virtue from his honorable ancestors and is very upright and honest, but on the other, he is very lazy. Because of his idleness, the family is gradually reduced to poverty. One day, he happens to find a gold hair-pin on the road, and returns it to an old woman. It turns out that the owner, a fox-fairy, is a concubine of his grandfather. Wang trusts her and invites her home. He asks his wife to treat the lady as their mother and earnestly asks the lady to stay with them. The old lady is very appreciative of his honesty and filial piety, offering him some money and asking him to buy summer cloth and resell them at the capital. Making him get ready and calculating that in six or seven days he would reach the capital, the fox lady prophesies that, "be neither lazy nor slow—for if a day too long you wait, repentance comes a day too late" 宜勤勿懒, 宜急勿缓, 迟之一日, 悔之已晚 (*Liaozhai*, 111).

Wang Cheng obeys. However, something unexpected happens on the road—it starts raining and Wang's cloth, as well as shoes, gets wet. Wang has never been out in such bad weather. Though it is just a sprinkle, he at once seeks a shelter in an inn, hoping the rain ceases quickly. To his disappointment, the weather grows to be even worse so that it pours in torrents for the whole day and the roads are completely slushy. Watching others slipping about in the slush, he feels it unbearable and decides to stay another night. When he arrives at the capital, he is told by a landlord in another inn that he has missed the market. After several persuasions of the landlord, he has to sell the product at a great loss. More unfortunately, the second morning he finds that all his money is stolen. He rushes away to tell the landlord, who, nonetheless, could not help. Someone suggests that he sue at the court and make the landlord reimburse him, but he

thinks his misfortune is because of his own destiny and not the landlord's fault. The landlord is touched by his honesty and offers him some money to go back.

The story of the prophecy made by the fox lady comes to an end here. On the one hand, the foreshadowing good fortune at the beginning of the story ends up with nothing. Wang pays off his laziness—because of his fear of hardship, he misses the market and even worse, loses all his money. The didactic implication that "idleness causes one to lose everything" is thus illustrated. Here we may wonder whether the fox lady has already known that Wang would fail the task in the first place. It seems that if she was able to foretell the temporary shortage of summer cloth in the capital, she may also know of the rainstorm on the journey. However, the story itself does not reveal it—the fox lady only gives Wang a warning, expressing her worry implicitly that "repentance comes a day too late." In this sense, in the process of following her instruction, Wang possesses the freewill in terms of either rushing against time in the rain or staying in shelter and waiting. His personal choices function during the process and directly affect the consequence of the prophecy. The inconsistent result goes directly against the expectation of the prophecy, highlighting the function of freewill in the process, in which the didactic purpose is strengthened.

On the other hand, as the story goes, the other side of Wang's characteristics is exposed—he is very upright, honest, and unselfish. All of his virtue constitutes another theme of the story that "one good deed deserves another." In the second part of the story, the didactic theme is showed in the way that Wang gains huge rewards because of his good deeds. Hesitating to go home empty-handed, Wang decides to invest all his money in quail fighting, a risky form of gambling. This decision gets the landlord's support and

finally wins him tens of hundreds of profits in a quail-fighting contest in the palace. This is not only a reward for his diligent work as a quail trainer, but more for his virtue. As Yishishi comments at the end,

> “富皆得于勤，此独得于惰，亦创闻也。不知一贫彻骨，而至性不移，此天所以始弃之而终怜之也。懒中岂果有富贵乎哉！” “Richness is usually obtained from diligent works, yet in this story it is from laziness – isn’t it strange? However, we should not forget that as impoverished as Wang is, he does not change the virtue and morality. In this way, the heaven first punishes and then rewards him. Surely richness and prestige could not be the outgrowth of laziness.” (*Liaozhai* 114)

Yishishi emphasizes that it is because of his integrity and beneficence that he is repaid by the heaven. It echoes the plot in the first part of Wang’s returning the gold hair-pin to the owner and his filial piety to the old lady. Also, it is vividly displayed in the relationship between Wang and the landlord, both of who are unselfish and benevolent. When Wang is back at the inn and asks the landlord to take whatever he likes, the landlord, only after some pressing accepts payment for Wang’s board. Here, what the behavior of the landlord represents is the value of “seeking no requite when giving.”

Wang Cheng’s journey teems with twists and possibilities—he first misses the market because of his own laziness and then gains a lot of rewards due to his hard work as a quail trainer. Though the prophecy implies certain consequence at the beginning, Wang’s own character and actions play a significant role. Suspense is produced in the process, making a simple allegory that “idleness causes one to lose everything” develop into a story in which ostensibly “a lazy man gets rewarded and becomes rich.” The strangeness, or “yi”, is generated by this satire. However, through elaboration on details, the other side of Wang’s personality—virtue and good doings—is shown and becomes the key to making the satire explainable and reasonable. The strangeness itself also turns

out to be a sort of didactic carrier, no longer simply focusing on its own bizarre quality as in the pure zhiguai genre. In this way, Type I and III are combined naturally into one story.

"Bu Ke" 布客 (A cloth dealer) is another typical story in which the strangeness is used to achieve a didactic purpose. It begins with a prophecy, which indicates a bad fortune, but as the story goes, the disaster is dispelled because of a charitable deed made in the process, and finally the hero enjoys a happy ending.

A cloth dealer, whose name is unknown, does business in Tai'an, a place far away from his hometown Changqing. He hears of a famous prophet there, who makes predictions by casting nativities and observing celestial positions 星命之学, and goes off to consult him. The prophet reckons on his fortune, telling him that, "your destiny is bad, you had better hurry home" 运数大恶，可速归 (*Liaozhai* 625). At this the dealer is frightened and obeys the instruction without any hesitation. On the way home, he meets a man who looks like a clerk from the government. The two hit it off right from the very beginning, and whenever the dealer has dinner, he invites the man to join him. Deeply appreciating his friendship, the clerk shows him a warrant, on the top of which the dealer finds his name. The clerk tells him that he is actually not a human, but in the employ of the infernal authorities, and he is going to arrest people whose names are on the list. Though he could not save the dealer, whose term of life has expired, he would arrest him the last, allowing him to go home and settle up everything before his turn.

Above is the first part of the story, in which a prophecy is given and then comes true. The meaning of the prophecy is very unclear – though we are aware that there is something unpleasant waiting for the dealer, we do not know what it is, or when and

how it will happen. Nevertheless, the dealer obeys the instruction at once and tries to avoid the disaster. As the story goes, the non-human clerk gives a further explanation of the disaster, echoing the prophecy and pointing out that it is simply because the dealer's term of life has expired. In this way, though the prophecy at the very beginning looks a bit obscure and groundless, its meaning is further clarified in the story through conversations between an ordinary human and a non-human. It is not merely a supernatural power adding some fantastic phenomena in the story, but it constitutes a part of the plot that pushes the development of the story towards a new situation.

In addition, according to the explanation given by the clerk, the prophecy becomes understandable—the cloth dealer is going to die because his life-span is due. In this way, the strangeness—one's ostensibly accidental but actually fated death—is no longer unexplainable as that of the traditional zhiguai genre; rather, it is systematically established on the samsara and karma theories in Buddhism.

Samsara and karma, the two main theories in Buddhism, are greatly applied to and allegorized in most stories in *Liaozhai*. On the one hand, they help achieve the didactic purpose in each story.[26] Generally, these theories encompass the immortality and transmigration of a soul as well as the principle of causation in the cosmos. For example, it holds that not only is one's life-span fated, as is shown in the story of Bu Ke, but that one's good fortune is also preset. In the story of "Lu Shu" 禄数 (Years to live), a local despot is told that only after he has eaten two thousand kilograms of rice and the same amount of wheat flour his days would come to an end. He thinks about the prophecy, does some calculations, and believes that he can live for another twenty years.

[26] For more discussion on the impact of Buddhist conceptions on Liaozhai stories, please refers to Cai, Bin. The Buddhist Conceptions in Pu Songling's Liaozhai zhiyi. A Master thesis from Shandong Normal University. 2007.

However, because of his evil deeds, a year later he is afflicted by diabetes and cannot help eating compulsively. As retribution, he dies in less than a year. In this story, the food that one eats, the amount of which is preset, represents one's good fortune. Because of his evil deeds, he consumes the fortune at a much quicker rate and his life-span is shortened. In this way, the evil deed is punished in the end. Another example "Sishi Qian" 四十千 (The forty strings of cash) connects the concept of karma with that of samsara, in which a son dies because in his previous incarnation the father owed him some money. Right after the money is paid off, the son dies. In this case, one's current fortune is directly in relation to what has been done in one's previous incarnations, and one's current actions—either good or evil deeds—will affect one's fortune in future.

On the other hand, the Buddhist concepts of samsara and karma provide a theoretical foundation to make the strangeness explainable based on human experience. In the story of "He Xian" 何仙 (The fairy He or the crane fairy), for example, the crane fairy's responses to mortals who seek solutions for dilemmas are always "remarkable for their reasonableness, and matters of mere good or bad fortune he does not care to enter into" 为人决疑难事，多凭理，不甚言休咎 (*Liaozhai*, 1305). In the story, the crane fairy foretells that scholar Li's destiny is dark and he would fail the coming exam, though his essay-writing skill is the best among all the candidates. Referring to the Buddhist theories, he goes further and explains that Li's adversity is caused by the ignorance of the examiners. He says,

> "……一切置付幕客六七人，粟生。例监，都 在其中，前世全无根气，大半饿鬼道中游魂，乞食于四方者也。曾 在黑暗狱中八百年，损其目之精气，如人久在洞中，乍出则天地异色， 无正明也。中有一二为人身所化者，阅卷分曹，恐不能适相值耳。" "…the essays are assessed by six or seven clerks, including those who purchased their own degrees, and others, in their previous

> incarnations, had no status or talents at all—most of them are hungry ghosts begging their bread in all directions; and who, after eight hundred years passed in the murky gloom of the infernal regions, have lost all discrimination, just as men long buried in a cave and suddenly transferred to the light of day. Among them may be one or two who have risen above their former selves—their previous existences are human, but the odds are against an essay falling into the hands of one of these". (Liaozhai 1350)

Here, the explanation of the prophecy disintegrates the mysterious operation mechanism of the supernatural force—it is more like a reasoning process, on the basis of matters in the human world. With the help of Buddhist concepts, it connects the strange—the other world—naturally to the human society, making the former an extended part of the latter. In this way, the serious social concern is merged into the supernatural one.

In addition, with reference to Buddhist theories, strange stories provide readers a new kind of perspective to reexamine and understand human society. Conceptions of samsara and karma are never a denial or escape from reality, but where morality is held and a belief beyond reality; a new kind of logic to understand life and seek inner peace and comfort. In "Xu Huang Liang" 续黄梁 (Zeng's dream), Pu Songling uses dreams to make the character experience all vicissitudes of life. Falling from glory and being utterly defeated in official circles, the character is reborn as a woman who suffers from grievances, and finally awakes. Realizing the emptiness of what he has sought before, he decides to retire into the hills. Here, with reference to Buddhist concepts, the concern of the story changes from the strangeness of an extraordinary dream to a philosophical enlightenment upon the true meaning of human life. Fame, wealth, and power are transient, while peace of mind, a clean conscience, and an unpolluted character are vital. In this sense, the didactic purpose is achieved. In "Lu Pan" 陆判 (Judge Lu), death is not the end of one's life. The scholar Zhu dies, but because of thinking so much about

the widow and orphan he leaves behind, he comes back as a spirit and stays with them as if he were still alive. He tells his wife that though he is a disembodied spirit, he is not different from what he had been when alive. He is even appointed to be an official in the infernal government. When the two worlds are connected into a complete unit, the serious sense of death is decomposed. Fame, wealth, and social achievements become less significant than virtue and noble character when a mortal gains the longevity to be immortal. Zhu is very ambitious when he is alive, and though he is foretold that he would fail the provincial exam, he does not believe it, and takes the exams three times to try his luck. In contrast, after death, he becomes much disinterested. When he finally has to leave the family, his wife and son cling to him, sobbing bitterly, but he consoles them saying, “Do not act thus. The boy is now a man, and can look after your affairs. The dearest friends must part someday” (*Liaozhai* 145). He shows no sadness in parting. Through the comparison of the same character in different worlds, the story reexamines the social values in the human world from a new and much detached perspective.

In summary, the introduction of Buddhist concepts, samsara and karma, provides a systematical and theoretical support for prophecies in stories, making the strangeness in traditional zhiguai tales not only explainable, but also a kind of fact extending from human reality. In other words, the strange characteristics—the prophecies, non-human others, and transmigration of the souls—are no longer objects that are opposite to human experience and against natural law, but elements that constitute a part of the real world. They serve as means through which the moral didacticism is allegorized, highlighting the significance of benevolence in stories.

The second part of the story is established on the basis of the Buddhist concepts—it allegorizes the principle of causation: everything that happens has a cause and an effect; benevolence will be rewarded, while evil actions will bring retribution. Before long, they reach a river where the bridge is in ruins and people have to wade through the river laboriously. The clerk suggests the dealer to repair the bridge for the benefit of the public. He says,

> “子行死矣，一文亦将不去。请即建桥利行人，虽颇烦费，然于子未必无小益。” “You are now on the road to death, and not a single amount of cash can you carry away with you. Repair this bridge and benefit the public, and thus from a great outlay you may possibly yourself derive some small advantage.” (*Liaozhai* 625)

The clerk indeed implies some possible benefits the dealer may get from this good deed, but he does not show it explicitly. The dealer agrees. As soon as he reaches home, he hires people to repair the bridge. To his surprise, this benevolence exempts him from the death—the clerk, after a long time, arrives and tells him that he has reported the dealer’s charitable deed to the government. As a return for his benevolence, his life span has been lengthened.

The benevolence of the dealer, however, seems to be cheating the infernal government or the karma system—his benevolence is out of the suggestion by the clerk, rather than of his own sense of charity towards the public. The story actually addresses this implication. In the last part of the story, the dealer visits the Heavenly Mountain where the ghost clerk works, making libations to him and murmuring his name. The clerk suddenly appears, stopping him and warning him not to let anyone else know this affair, otherwise, both of them will be in trouble. On the one hand, by indicating that the clerk violates the rule to save the dealer as a return for their friendship, it makes the

image of the ghost clerk, who is from the “other” world, more humane and compassionate. On the other hand, it also marks the priceless value of benevolence—it is a secret he is forbidden to reveal to the mortals, because it can make a significant impact on their lives, even saving them from death. In this context, the didacticism is highlighted.

Before we move to the next point, let us take a look at the prophecy again. We may wonder if the prophet has already known that the dealer would be saved in the first place. Or, to what extent does the dealer’s freewill function in the process in changing the doomed fate? Since the prophecy is very ambiguous, there is no clear answer to the question. The prophet does not explain any reason why he suggests the dealer to go back—his suggestion is to “hurry home”, and it is notable that the clerk tells the dealer at the very beginning that he is on his way to Changqing, the hometown of the dealer. It seems that wherever the dealer runs, he is in control of the destiny, and the clerk here is exactly the personification of his destiny. The most bizarre part of this story is shown in the dealer’s encounter with the ghost clerk: he meets his death directly through the way that he attempts to escape it. Such a paradox moves the story to the climax—there is no way for the dealer to escape, even the clerk himself cannot help, and he has to face his fate. It is at this critical point that the benevolence functions, serving as a final solution to resolve the conflict and makes the second part of the story all about “one good deed deserves another”.

In this category, we mainly discuss two complementary types, in which good fortune can come to naught by evil deeds while disaster is dispelled by virtue. The inconsistence between prophecies and consequences strengthens the significance of

actions in the process. With the help of chuanqi mode, and by using the Buddhist concepts as theoretical supports, the strangeness not only serves as a means to achieving the didactic purpose, but also serves to make the moral more understandable and help explain what constitutes an extending part of human society.

Category II

Type II is an extended type of the brief "prophecy—result" and is taken as one category. It helps less in discussion of the relationship upon fate, freewill, and prophecies, because in this type of story, freewill basically follows instructions foretold by prophecies. In other words, the whole process is a continuation of prophecies—the two lines share the same purpose and direction in narration. In this type of story, results are revealed at the beginning accurately. In this way, the suspense of results disappears. However, by elaborating on twists and complexity of plot, as well as more depictions of details and rounded characters, Pu successfully turns the suspense of results to that of process. That is, while reading *Liaozhai*, readers would posit a question like "how is the result developed from the beginning?" instead of asking, "what is the end of a story?"

"Hu Siniang" 胡四娘 (Hu the fourth daughter) is a story about inconstancy of human relationships. Cheng Xiaosi, a talented scholar from a poor family, wins recognition from a Mr. Hu, a high official of the Interior Ministry. Mr. Hu marries his fourth daughter born of a concubine to Cheng and provides him with a good environment for studies. For Cheng, the good fortune is accompanied by tremendous pressure. The sons of Mr. Hu all look down upon him and make fun of him. The couple mere puts up with it quietly. In the year when Mr. Hu passes away, Cheng goes to attend the imperial exam. Before he leaves, his wife tells him: "You must win honor. Only if

you pass the examination, probably we still have home here" (*Liaozhai* 960). Cheng, nevertheless, fails the exam. Fortunately, he still has some money left. So he goes to the capital under an alias, hoping to gain confidence from a high official to get an opportunity to take the provincial examination. Fortunately, he becomes favored by Governor Li who finances him in taking more exams. Soon, he passes the intermediate and advanced imperial examinations and then is given an official position. He is planning to go home and picks up his wife. At that time, one son of Mr. Hu is having his wedding. He has invited all the relatives except for his youngest sister Siniang. Learning the news about Cheng, he gets upset and immediately sends an invitation to his youngest sister, who arrives without showing any dissatisfying moods. Later, when the Hu family gradually becomes poorer and poorer, Cheng Xiaosi helps them again and again.

From the story, we can see the expansion of the concept of "yi" by using chuanqi mode in writing zhiguai stories. The story is largely realistic and depicts ordinary daily scenes of human society. The story is set in a big family where family members keep bickering with each other over small matters. The only supernatural element in the story—the source of strangeness—is the prediction of a witch at the very beginning. Compared with the subsequent domestic trivialities, the prediction occupies only a small part, but its effects could be traced throughout the whole story. The prediction intensifies the conflicts between family members and divides them into two groups. One group is led by Ms. Li and the third sister who supports the fourth sister while the other group includes all the other family members who tease the fourth sister. Without the prediction, the story would inevitably be reduced to an ordinary one about how a lowly

scholar fights his way up to the rank of a high official. However, the prediction foreshadows the ending from the onset to create a sharp contrast between Cheng's future success and his present circumstances, implying huge difficulties in the process. Meanwhile, as the story develops, the witch's prediction is continuously confirmed through the contrast between the characters of the main figure and other figures. All events in the story seem to be governed by the prediction.

There is no authorial commentary at the end of the story. But the story in itself preaches lots and includes several themes. The first theme surrounding the sons of Mr. Hu is that one should never discriminate against a poor young man or look down upon others. The second theme is obtained from the fourth sister's experience, which indicates one should remain calm and graceful whether in adversity or in comfort. The third theme centers on the course of Cheng's life, pointing out the importance of "zhiji". The poor scholar's great success should be attributed to Mr. Hu, his wife and Governor Li, a high official in the capital. The former two support Cheng in his studies, and Governor Li finances him in taking more exams after his failure. The fourth theme is that one should repay a debt of gratitude and that the good will be rewarded. For example, Cheng, after becoming an official, holds a grand funeral for Mr. Hu and helps Ms. Li again and again. These themes reveal themselves along with the development of Cheng's success. In this process, as Cheng's life changes, people around him show different characteristics and responses. Though Cheng's success is predestined in the very beginning, there are twists and turns as well as suspense and conflicts along the way.

The above discussion shows a typical story in a category of stories in which several themes are displayed in one narrative. The main concern of the story changes

from focusing on strangeness to representation of how the strange—the supernatural power shown as a prophecy—affects, and echoes in, reality. Chuanqi mode helps this orientation and makes the concept of yi more realistically based. In the following story, “Chen Yunqi” 陈云栖, likewise the result of the story is foretold at the very beginning and is fulfilled after some twists and turns. There are two narrative lines in the story that correspond to each other: one is predicted in the prophecy and the other is developed through the reality. Because the protagonist is fated, coincidences are greatly used to weave the two lines into one.

The story begins with a strange prophecy. A young Confucian scholar named Zhen Yu, a son of a Confucian graduate, is given at a young age a prediction by a physiognomist that someday he will marry a Taoist nun. The prediction is so absurd that no one in the family takes it seriously. One day he visits his maternal grandmother, who lives in a neighboring city named Huanggang. There he hears that in a local temple live four nuns and the youngest, whose name is Chen Yunqi, is the most beautiful. He secretly sets off to see them and accordingly is startled by Yunqi’s beauty. He teases her that his surname is Pan. They fall in love with each other soon, Zhen Yu promises her that he will be back with enough money to purchase her freedom, and Yunqi says she will wait for him for three years. However, Zhen Yu fails to tell her his real name, because his father has fallen deathly ill and he has to go back promptly.

When his father passes away, his mother rules the household and is so severe that he dares not to tell her of the affair. Meanwhile, he scrapes together all the money he can and rejects all proposals of marriage on the excuse that he is mourning his father. His mother gradually becomes unsatisfied and urges him to take a wife, but he lies to

her that his grandmother has already found him a girl in Huanggang. However, when he gets there, Yunqi has already gone because of the abbess's death. He returns home disappointed.

Half a year later, his mother, returning from a temple, meets Yunqi accidentally in an inn. Learning that she is from the same place as Pan, Yunqi begs her to send some messages him. When home, the mother tells Zhen Yu, and the latter admits that he is Pan. Since the mother is extremely angry, he cannot add anything more. Shortly when he is out for examinations, he searches for Yunqi again, yet she has already gone. This time when he returns home he falls ill.

Later his grandmother dies and his mother sets off to Huangguang. On the way back she visits her cousin's home. There she meets a beautiful woman named Wang. The mother likes her very much and asks her to be her daughter-in-law. Wang assents to this happily. When a servant tells Zhen Yu this news, he cannot believe it. However, on peeping through the window and beholding the young lady, he feels this girl is much prettier than Yunqi and accepts it. It finally turns out that Miss Wang is Yunqi herself. Zhen Yu's mother is overjoyed at all this coincidence and they get married soon.

The story is almost done here. However, though Yunqi is good, she does not make an ideal housewife in Zhen's family. She is not good at keeping a household. Though Zhen's mother likes Yunqi, she hopes her son can take another concubine to deal with the household. On a trip out, the couple finds Yunmian, another nun who is like a sister to Yunqi and who is homeless. She is pleased to accompany Yunqi and agrees to live with them. Yunmian then marries Zhen Yu too and the three live a happy life.

The story ends with Zhen Yu marrying two nuns, the prophecy at the beginning of the story, which is very absurd, finally coming true. Ostensibly, the marriage of a Confucian scholar to two Taoist nuns is very absurd. When the first time Zhen Yu's mother knows of his son's affair with a nun, she is in rage, saying, "You undutiful boy! Defiling the consecrated religious place, how will you face your relations with a nun as a wife?" 不肖儿！宣淫寺观，以道士为妇，何颜见亲宾乎 (*Liaozhai* 1479). On the one hand, a Taoist nun is supposed to be chaste and ascetic; on the other, a Confucian scholar should focus on reality and stay away from "extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings." However, in this story the situation is changed and the boundary between Confucianism and Religion is broken. They are combined in a romantic connection, represented by a marriage of a Confucian scholar with two Taoist nuns. The change is quite subtle here.

Jin points out that *Liaozhai* reflects many philosophical and intellectual problems confronted by Ming-Qing literati in a period when commerce and urbanization expanded with an increasing awareness of individuality.

> "Intellectual debates about such questions as how to define the essence of Confucian values, preserve one's fidelity to the essential Confucian tradition, protect one's integrity when confronted by dramatic political intuition and feelings with established principles of rationality and morality are brilliantly captured in Pu's strange stories." [27]

Jin's comments highlight the tension in a changing society where individuals are caught in a conflicting proposition of making choices of either to stick to the traditional ethics or adjust their values and adapt. The story of Chen Yunqi echoes this statement. Though there is no direct didactic implication here, none of Yishishi's comments at the end of

[27] See Jin, Lei. "Erotic Enclaves and Contested Beds: Gardens in Pu Songling's Chuanqi Tales". *ASIA Network Exchange*. Fall 2014, Vol. 22.1.

the story, the story itself, by adopting chuanqi mode to narrate the whole process, reveals a kind of ambivalence in the process of making choices.

On the one hand, we can see that in the whole process, Zhen Yu is in a constant conflict between responsibilities required by his social role and his love toward Yunqi. He understands that his love for a Taoist nun is disagreeable to his family and he has to obey his mother's will filially. Filiality 孝 is the core value of Confucianism. However, he still secretly pursues his personal happiness. He scrapes together every penny that he can in order to save Chen Yunqi from the priesthood, lies to his mother, rejects others' proposals, and searches Yunqi whenever he gets opportunities. In his mind there is the contradiction between traditional social values and his individual desires. The prophecy here, foretelling his final marriage with nuns, though absurd, is to a certain extent in accordance with his personal pursuit. This absurdity is rooted in the unprecedented combination of Confucianism and religion, forming a source of the strangeness in the story.

On the other hand, it is hard to say if it is true love that Zhen Yu has for Yunqi. Though he falls in love with her at the first meeting and promises that he would marry her with the utmost fidelity, he almost breaks the vow when a new option is available.

> 既至，则生病未起。母慰其沉疴，使婢阴告曰："夫人为公子载丽人至矣。"生未信，伏窗窥之，较云栖尤艳绝也。因念：三年之约已过；出游不返，则玉容必已有主。得此佳丽，心怀颇慰。于是輾然动色，病亦寻瘳。
> This invitation she readily accepted, and the next day they went back; Zhen's mother, who wished to see her son free from his present trouble, bids one of the servants to tell him that she had brought home a nice wife for him; Zhen did not believe it; but on peeping through the window beheld a young lady much prettier even than Yunqi herself. He now began to reflect that the three years agreed upon had already expired; that Yunqi had gone no one knew whither, and had probably by this time found another husband. So he had no difficulty in entertaining the thought of marrying this young lady, and soon regained his health. (*Liaozhai* 1479)

Obviously, he can't know Yunqi that well if he does not realize the girl is she. In addition, when he beholds the girl and thinks she is much prettier than Yunqi, he promptly finds two excuses to relieve himself from the guilt of giving up his vow to Yunqi: the three-year promise between he and Yunqi has been expired and Yunqi must have been married by now. He thinks this girl is a comfort for him, so he has no difficulty in entertaining the thought of marrying her. We can see that the traditional topic of a loyalty vow in love between lovers is changed in this story. Although the product of a Confucian family, Zhen Yu, first disobeys his mother's will and misbehaves as a Confucian scholar to pursue a Taoist nun, then gives up the promise to that nun in order to marry another girl. The traditional virtues of filiality to parents and loyalty to love are replaced by a spirit of time that is more flexible and adaptable to the changing environment. Though at last the new girl turns out to be the Yunqi, the two identifications are merged into one to make the prophecy come true, the strangeness affirmed by the prophecy is at risk when he attempts to disregard it and marry a girl who is not a nun. In this sense, though the result has been fated in the first place, there are other intentions and voices raised in the development of the narration through elaboration on details and sentiments that deviate from the preset plot. These deviations are deeply rooted in the changing social values and the spirit of the time, which sometimes deviate from traditional orthodox values.

Also, the image of Chen Yunqi is very different from that of an ideal woman required by traditional society. She is not at all good at dealing with the household, which is the basic requirement for a housewife in a society that dictates family roles as "men managing external affairs while women internal" 男主外，女主内. Though the

author adds Yunmian, an ideal housewife as a complement for the shortage of Yunqi, such a contrast, nevertheless, strengthens their differences. Yunqi belongs to a new group of women who are more independent and self-serving in a changing society. The image of the new female group will be discussed in analysis of the last category.

In summary, the usage of chuanqi mode to represent events in a more vivid way and focus on the description of the process helps reveal changes in social values that contrast with the traditional ones. All of these—the conflicts between one's social role and one's individual intentions, the deviations from traditional social values, and the changes in the image of the female character—are displayed in the process by using chuanqi mode. A new type of strangeness is therefore established and is distinguished from the one that emphasizes supernatural force. Prophesying, which is a kind of supernatural power, is not simply a source of strangeness, but a preset context with which the characters either agree or disagree with. It functions as a narrative line in contrast to the realistic line, strengthening the freewill of characters. This type of strangeness contributes to a new connotation of the conception of "yi" itself. In the analysis of Type IV stories, these deviations and conflicts will be discussed in depth.

Category III

All the prophecies in Type IV stories indicate certain disasters. Though characters attempt to fight against their fates, they fail in the end. In the process of escaping from their unfortunate fate, these characters show stronger freewill. With chuanqi mode in narration, more elaboration on details and sentiments, the text indicates intentions that conflict with the intended didactic purpose. This would help us better evaluate the impact of chuanqi mode on zhiguai tales. In the following analysis, I will focus on two

stories: “Tian Qilang” 田七郎 (The seventh son of Tian family) and “Xiliu” 细柳 to illustrate the features of “zhiyi genre”.

In the story of Tian Qilang, there are two forms of prophecies countering each other. Wu Chengxiu wants to make acquaintance with Tian Qilang because of a prophecy he gets in a dream, while the latter tries to evade the former because of another prophecy. They each follow the guidance of the prophecy. But despite all his efforts, Tian fails to escape his predestined fate. In this story, the prophecies and story lines echo each other. As one’s personal freewill runs counter to one’s destiny, the traditional theme of “zhiji” 知己 (true friends who admire and appreciate each other) is weakened in the story, giving rise to an emphasis on individual values.

In the initial scene of the story, Wu has a very strange dream in which an anonymous person points out his deficiency in social intercourse and implies that he will be in some kind of trouble in the future. Tian Qilang is the only person who can help him pull through. Therefore, he travels everywhere in search of a man called Tian Qilang. Fortunately, he finally finds Tian in East Village, the latter at that point is an upright and honest unknown hunter in the village. He then tries to make friends with Tian.

Unexpectedly, Tian's mother, who knows physiognomy, turns him down because she predicts from some wrinkles on Wu's face that heavy misfortune would befall him in the future. Tian is a dutiful son and absolutely convinced of what his mother says. In the story, Tian's mother forms a force countering the prophecy in Wu's dream. And her words are worth close analysis. She says,

> “我 适睹公子，有晦纹，必罹奇祸。闻之：受人知者分人忧，受人恩者急人难。 富人报人以财，贫人报人以义。无故而得重赂，不祥，恐将取死报于子矣。” “I saw the young man just now. There are wrinkles on his face that forecast bad fortune. He is doomed to suffer some terrible misfortune. It is said

> that one has to share others' woes if one has a debt of gratitude and that one has to help others in trouble, if one has accepted others' favors or bounty. The rich can repay others' with money; the poor have to repay with their loyalty and obligation. If you accept the man's money, I am afraid that you'll have to repay it with your life someday." (*Liaozhai* 477)

On the one hand, her prediction echoes the traditional theme of "zhiji" 知己 in which one should pay a debt of gratitude to another for the appreciation of being faithfully trusted and well treated 知遇之恩. The Tian family is materially poor but spiritually rich, especially in terms of morality and justice. They insist on equality in friendship and pay a debt of gratitude to people who admire them. To a certain extent, it is safe to say that their strict adherence to morality and justice is the basis for the prophecy in Wu's dream. But on the other hand, the mother denies Wu's request to make friends with her son in the very beginning, because such an unequal friendship may involve a potential danger that threatens her son's safety. According to her statement, though it is appreciable that Wu recognizes her son's morality and virtue, it would be too much to sacrifice one's life to pay the gratitude. In this sense, one's own self-preservation is necessary to be considered. Something is different here. The traditional social value of repaying "zhiji" with everything one owns is being threatened by the recognition of self-preservation. The conflicting propositions are set forth through two prophecies at the very beginning—they are not simply a source of strangeness, but generate a certain tension between Wu and Tian in the story, affecting the development of the plot.

At the same time, we may also wonder if Wu Chengxiu is a real "zhiji" to Tian Qilang. His seeming sincerity is quite suspicious. Does Wu know in the first place that he would bring big trouble to Tian? He does. First, he takes a hint from the mysterious voice in the dream that a big misfortune would befall him in the future and there is but one

person, Tian Qilang, who can share weal and woe with him. Second, when his servant reports to him about Tian's mother's prophecy based on his facial features, instead of being angry he, "had to admire the mother's wisdom and therefore appreciated Tian Qilang all the more" 武闻之，深叹母贤；然益倾慕七郎 (*Liaozhai* 477). Why is he even more eager to make friends with Tian? On the one hand, the mother's wisdom and Tian's filial piety indicate that the Tians have a good family tradition of being earnest and plain. Tian Qilang therefore must be a reliable and trustworthy friend. On the other hand, the author's emphasis on the mother's virtues further affirms her judgment on Wu's facial features, which indirectly confirms the credibility of the prophecy in Wu's dream. Even if Wu may not have much belief in the prophecy in his dream at the beginning, at this point he becomes convinced that he will be in big trouble and Tian Qilang would be the only one that could save him. However, Wu knows little about Tian personally. His motivation for making friends with Tian is hardly out of the value of "zhiji", but more of exploitation, especially after he learns about Tian family's adherence to morality and obligation. In this context, the traditional theme of "zhiji" is altered.

The subsequent part of the plot tells us how Wu uses every means to please Tian, while the latter, however, does everything to seek equality in the so-called friendship. During this process, they, for their respective purposes, have several rounds of contact with each other. All of these moments of contact confirm the statement of Tian's mother that the rich could repay others with money while the poor have to repay with their loyalty and obligation. There is almost no equality to speak of between two friends with different social status. These contacts also show Tian's character and his adherence to

paying a debt of gratitude to friends. This part of the story ends with Tian's firm refusal of Wu's friendship.

The balance in the relationship between Tian and Wu is broken by the former's imprisonment and the latter's efforts to rescue. Tian beats someone to death during a leopard hunt and is jailed. According to the *Code of Great Qing* 大清律,[28] Tian would be sentenced to death. However, Wu Chengxiu rescues him after bribing the local magistrate with much money and giving the relatives of the dead one hundred teals of silver. After Tian's acquittal, his mother admits that Wu has given him a second life and therefore she could no longer own Tian as exclusively her son. She says,

> "子发肤受之武公子，非老身所得而爱惜者矣。但祝公子终百年无灾患， 即儿福。"七郎欲诣谢武，母曰："住则往耳，见公子勿谢也。小恩可谢， 大恩不可谢。" "Wu is your parents of rebirth; I can no longer monopolize you as exclusively my son. I wish Master Wu a long life and one free of calamities, which is also my blessing on you." Tian therefore planned to go to thank Wu. The mother said: "You may go as you like. Only you don't have to thank him. One can be thanked for petty favors but not for great ones." (*Liaozhai* 478)

By saying "Wu is your parents of rebirth 子发肤受之武公子," she compares the debt Tian owns to Wu as that he owns to parents. In other words, Tian should repay the debt of gratitude to Wu like a son to his father, and if necessary, Tian should be ready to give up his life for the sake of Wu. In this sense, the balance he tries to keep is altered badly. Tian takes his mother's suggestion that one can be thanked for petty favors but not for great favors. From then on, Tian accepts everything Wu gives to him and no longer seeks to

[28] Tian Qilang's action obviously violated the law. First, he beats someone to death during a leopard hunt. *Criminal Law* •*Assault* stipulates that "whoever beats someone to death should be sentenced to death". According to the law, Tian deserves capital punishment. After his acquittal, Tian kills Lin Er (vicious servant), the brother of the high official (despotic landlord), and county magistrate (corrupt official). Although their behaviors are evil, Tian's action, nevertheless, is undoubtedly a gross violation of the law and Tian should be sentenced to death. The law of the Qing dynasty forbids commoners from killing others on any pretext. Though Tian's killing is to repay Wu's great favors, it is of course not allowed by law. For more discussion, please refer to Deng, Yuying. An Interpretation of Laws in Tian Qilang. *Journal of HuBei Adult Education College*. 2007 (6) 38-39.

repay the debt of gratitude for these small gifts, because he is ready to give up his life for Wu's sake.

From the very beginning when Tian deliberately keeps Wu at a distance from his complete submission, we can feel that it is the irresistible fate that functions in their relationship. However, we may wonder what makes Tian's fate irresistible? Here, the Tian family's adherence to loyalty and obligation plays a significant role in the whole story. It is because of loyalty and obligation that Tian has no choice but to follow the established path, a path characterized by loyalty and obligation as well as a notion that one should repay any favors to "zhiji". Though he to some extent is unwilling to own someone's debt, once the debt is owned, he takes the responsibilities—a moral obligation to "zhiji". Here, the conflicting predicament of making choices at the initial stage of the story is compromised by following the traditional ethic—one should value the friendship of "zhiji" and pay gratitude to that over one's own life.

Then, the subsequent part of the plot is about the fulfillment of the mother's prophecy that Wu would be in trouble and Tian would sacrifice his life to repay Wu's favor. There are two lines twisted throughout the calamity. The overt one is the conflict between Wu Chengxiu and Lin Er, in which things happen objectively and naturally. The covert one is Tian's psychological changes. Tian's mood has been deeply affected by his mother's prophecy—he is aware of his potential death at all times, but he can do nothing to escape from it.

It starts with the rattling of Tian's saber. This saber constitutes another source of strangeness in the story. It goes,

> 会武初度，宾从烦多，夜舍屦满。武偕七郎卧斗室中，三仆即 床下藉刍藁。二更向尽，诸仆皆睡去，两人犹刺刺语。七郎佩刀挂壁间， 忽自腾出匣数寸许，铮铮作响，光闪烁如电，武惊起，七郎亦起，问：“床下卧者何人？”武答：“皆厮仆。”七郎曰：“此中必有恶人。”武问 故，七郎曰：“此刀购诸异国，杀人未尝濡缕。迄今佩三世矣。决首至千计，尚如新发于硎。见恶人则鸣跃，当去杀人不远矣。公子宜亲 君子，远小人，或万一可免。”武颔之。On Wu's birthday there were many guests and servants in the courtyard and shoes spread the places outside the bedrooms. Wu and Tian slept in a small room with three servants sleeping on hay on the floor. Late night, while the servants were fast asleep, Wu and Tian were still talking. Suddenly, Tian's saber, hung on the wall, started rattling with its blade automatically jerking out of the sheath a few inches, its dazzling gleam flashing like a lightning. Wu gave a start and sat up. Tian also sat up and asked, "Who is sleeping on the floor?" Wu answered, "They are all my servants." Tian said, "There must be an evil among them." Wu asked why. Tian explained, "This saber was bought in a foreign country. No one can escape death when the saber cuts. It has been reserved in my family for three generations and a thousand people have fallen victim to it, but the blade is still polished. Wherever there is evil, its blade automatically jumps out of the sheath, indicating the death is near. Wu, please distance yourself from evil and be accompanied with gentlemen. Maybe the calamity could be avoided." Wu nodded. (*Liaozhai* 478)

The plot of the saber echoes the two prophecies at the beginning. It confirms their credibility and indicates that the story has moved into a new stage. A product of a foreign country, the saber represents a source of strangeness—it is rare and unusual in ordinary life. Also, it is a physical form of prophecy predicting that evil people would die soon. In this way, it justifies Tian's later killing in advance—his killing is not simply out of personal revenge but to counteract social injustice. Furthermore, the history of the saber indicates a long adherence to justice in Tian's family. It has been reserved in that family for three generations, killing a thousand people. The unusualness of the saber indeed deifies Tian's family, they are not simply unknown hunters, but heroes who punish the evil and promote justice for the people. In this way, Tian becomes a personage like Jing Ke 荆轲, Nie Zhen 聂政, and other famous assassins known for their great feats in history.

However, in the whole process, Tian's attitude is hesitant and his intentions are opaque to Wu. On the one hand, Tian has concerns about his responsibilities to his own family, as a son to mother, a husband to wife, a father to his son; on the other, he owes a debt to Wu. He has to scarify everything including his life to help Wu. This is an obligation required by his social role. In this context, Tian, again, falls into a conflicting proposition—he has to make choices. The usage of Chuanqi mode helps represent his mental activities vividly indicating his hesitation in the process.

First, when the saber jerks out of the sheath automatically implying that it would kill someone, they have no idea about who would be killed, or when and how the killing would happen. However, Tian at once becomes worried and upset by the foreboding. Wu asks, "Every man has his destiny, good or evil. Why are you so worried?" Tian answers that he has a family to support.

Secondly, Lin Er, one of the three servants sleeping on the floor that night, commits a crime and then joins the household of a high official. The official's brother who maintains the household refuses Wu's request to punish Lin Er, and the county magistrate, afraid of offending the high official family, disregards Wu's appeal. At this point, when Wu tells Tian, "What you said has turned out to be true," Tian's face immediately turns pale, and without uttering a single word, he goes away.

Thirdly, Lin Er is caught by Wu. Fearing that Wu may do something wrong in his rage, Wu's uncle Heng asks Wu to turn Lin Er over to the county hall. The magistrate releases Lin Er immediately. Lin Er spreads rumors to slander Wu. Wu goes to the high official's house and scolds the family loudly at the door. In this round of plot, Tian Qilang kills Lin Er secretly and gets away with it.

Fourthly, the high official's house files a case against Wu and his uncle Heng. The county magistrate beats Wu's uncle to death. Wu protests loudly. He intends to consult Tian Qilang for advice. Tian secretly relocates his family. Later, Tian successfully kills the high official's brother and the county magistrate before killing himself.

Fifthly, Wu bribes the authorities by selling all his assets. He is eventually acquitted but is left impoverished. Tian Qilang's body lies in the wilderness for thirty days and dogs stand guarding it. Wu finally has it buried with a grand funeral. Tian's son changes his name and later joins the army, fighting his way up to the rank of general.

Tian Qilang's final reciprocation is displayed by using romantic imagination, highlighting his fulfillment of obligations to "zhiji" and his adherence to loyalty and obligation. In the last mission, Tian kills the county magistrate and the high official's brother. In fact, his mission fails—he does not kill the magistrate the first time after his killing of the official's brother. The whole reciprocation ends with a romantic device by adding that the corpse of Tian suddenly jumps up and cuts off the magistrate's head. Tian repays the debt of gratitude to Wu through this revenge mission with mythological undertones. Dogs, which represent loyalty, stand guard at Tian's body in the wilderness for thirty days. Hence, with this depiction, the author successfully deifies Tian and associates him with famous assassins of history.

Many critics point out that the story of Tian Qilang is very similar to that of Nie Zheng 聂政 in *Shiji*. Nie Zheng is a famous historical assassin. His assassination work is considered to be a great feat supporting traditional social values. The Qing critic Liang Yusheng 梁玉绳 praises him that,

> “政母在，不以身许人，孝也。直入上阶刺杀侠累，勇也。不忍累其姊，仁也。为知己而死，义也。” “With his mother alive, he does not promise anyone: this is filial piety. Entering directly into the palace to kill Xia Lei, he is brave. Bearing not to implicate his sister, he is virtuous. Dying for the best friend, he is righteous.” [29]

The overall plots of these two stories are very similar. In the story of Nie Zheng, Yan Zhongzi 严仲子 plans to get revenge upon Xia Lei 侠累, the prime minister of the Han country, and resorts to enlisting Nie Zheng, who is a butcher working in the market place at that point. Nie refuses his request at first, because he needs to support his mother. After his mother passes away, he goes directly to assassinate Xia Lei and then kills himself. However, since no one wants to be implicated in this murder, his corpse lies in wilderness several days. When his sister hears about this, she goes to identify the body, buries it, and dies accompanying him.

In this story, there are two themes present. The first and foremost one is about an absolutely moral obligation to repay the debt of gratitude to “zhiji”. The other is a conflict between this obligation and one’s responsibilities to one’s own family. In Shiji, nevertheless, the second theme completely yields to the first one, which echoes the Confucian ethic that “a gentleman should die for people who admire and appreciate his true values” 士为知己者死. Though in fact the friendship between Yan Zhongzi and Nie Zheng is very unequal, Sima Qian praises their friendship by affirming Yan Zhongzi’s ability to recognize the virtue of Nie Zheng. The value of Nie Zheng’s life, nevertheless, is simply reflected in his sacrifice for “zhiji”. The story is told from the view of Yan Zhongzi as a way to promote certain Confucian ethics, while the conflicts between one’s

[29] See Allan Barr’s Exploration on the Relationship between Tian Qilang and Nie Zheng Zhuan. *Wen, Shi, Zhe*, 1992 (4) 96-98. Also, Shishuo Yuan points out that the friendship between Tian and Wu is unequally established on the social statues between the rich and the poor. It reflects the changing social values in comparison with the traditional ones. See “‘Tian Qilang’: Beyond the Topic of Requital. *Pu Songling Yanjiu*. 2008, (02)104-110.

private responsibilities as an independent individual and loyalty to social principles as required by one's social role is completely disregarded.

In Tian Qilang, however, such conflicting a predicament of making choices is emphasized. In the second part of the story, we can observe Tian's surprise at the early arrival of destiny and his hesitation in the whole process. He falls into a predicament of making choices: to repay the friendship and gratitude for Wu or to preserve his safety and support his own family. After long consideration, Tian decides to make a compromise—he relocates his family secretly before conducting the assassination and scarifying his life.

The emphasis on one's private responsibilities as an independent individual makes Tian Qilang's mother become an important character in this story. Unlike Nie Zheng's mother, who is only mentioned in the story, Tian's mother is not only the main concern of Tian when he plans to make the assassination, but she also intervenes actively in the development of her son's friendship with Wu. Her prophecy constitutes an opposition against the traditional values of "zhiji", accentuating the value of self-preservation as an independent individual. Also, she points out that the friendship between Wu and Tian is essentially unequal. This inequality is rooted in the gap between the rich and poor. Since such a gap can never be filled, the poor have to sacrifice their lives to repay the debt of gratitude to the rich for the purpose of balancing their friendship. In this sense, the friendship between Tian and Wu is very dubious and the traditional theme of "zhiji" is thus altered in this story.

Tian's reciprocation is compelled—it is out of necessity instead of willingness. We may wonder if Tian has any freewill in the affairs. At the very beginning, he seeks to escape from the prophecy by repeatedly evading Wu, and because of his firm belief in the

prophecy, he tries to avoid any contacts with Wu and repeatedly declines Wu's invitation to banquets. In this sense, he could decide his own destiny. However, he kills someone in a leopard hunt. If Wu had not saved him, he would be sentenced to death. After his complete submission to Wu, Tian has indeed no freewill. Since then, he has lived in the shadow of the prophecy, waiting for the misfortune to befall him. However, if he did not adhere to loyalty and obligation to Wu, he could've left the moment when the saber rattled and he wouldn't have got involved in Wu's misfortune. Or if he did not kill anyone, the prophecy would never be fulfilled. However, he would cease to be Tian Qilang if he behaved in this way. Driven by his own character, he kills Lin Er. Out of a sense of morality and gratitude, he counteracts social injustice. He actually has no choices because of his loyalty to the traditional Confucian ethics. He is caught in the predicament—though first attempting to escape from this obligation, once being caught, he has no choice but to obey the principles. Each step he moves in life pushes him forward to the fated end. And this fate, on the basis of loyalty and obligation to the traditional social values, runs counter to his freewill.

The usage of chuanqi mode in writing this story helps display the conflicting predicament in the whole process. By elaborating on details, each character is vividly depicted in the story and pushes the development of the plot. For example, Wu's character deepens his conflict and contradiction with Lin Er. The calamity starts with Lin Er's crime and escape. At that point, Wu is faced with two choices: to bring Lin Er to justice or let him go. A man with a fiery temperament, Wu would never allow Lin Er to get away. He therefore sets his servants to watch for Lin Er, catches him, and beats him hard. Fearing Wu might get into trouble for this, Wu's uncle suggests Lin Er be sent to

the court for trial. At that point, Wu is presented with another choice: to punish Lin Er himself or send him to the court. He takes the suggestion and hands Lin Er to the court, never expecting that the magistrate would return Lin Er to the high official's household. Lin Er becomes all the more brazen in spreading rumors. Filled with rage, Wu goes to the high official's house to scold the family loudly, intensifying the contradiction. In the whole process, we can see that it is Wu's character that leads to his behaviors as well as the development of the events, pushing the plot forward to the final calamity. Also, by adding details about Tian's responses upon the development of Wu's conflict with Lin Er, it clearly indicates Tian's panic and desperation when he observes the advent of his death slowly yet absolutely. Such sentimental expression deepens Tian's unwillingness in this unequal friendship.

In summary, there is a new value that emerges in the process of the story—a respect for the value of self-preservation as an independent individual in comparison with that for loyalty and obligation to "zhiji" required by the traditional social ethics. In this case, the character's freewill is at odds with his preset fate. Of the two prophecies, one is established on Tian's family's loyalty and obligation to the traditional virtue and the other reveals the value of an individual's life, not only constituting strangeness in the story, but also representing two different and opposite values that intertwine through the whole story. "Yi" here is displayed as a changing social value contradicting the traditional one—a collision between concepts of the new era and the long-standing notions. The usage of chuanqi mode in the whole process helps better achieve a vivid depiction of this collision.

In the last tale “Xi Liu” 细柳, again we can see how a new concept generated by the social changes of the time period is integrated into the conception of “yi” and how an independent new female character, Xi Liu, is created in the dual story lines between a prophecy and reality.

Xi Liu is a clever and competent girl. She is so clever that she learns fortunetelling from books all by herself and gains the ability of prophesying. She intends to find a good husband by using this supernatural power. However, none of the youths who come to make a proposal are to her satisfaction. Her parents become impatient and angry, so she has to give up her efforts to find a satisfactory husband. Obeying the will of her parents, Xi Liu marries a scholar named Gao.

This brief introduction about how she selects her husband illustrates her capability, wisdom, and ambition. Through Xi Liu is quiet most of time, she is adamant about her own marriage—determined to marry the right person and pursue personal happiness. She attempts to control her own destiny through her ability and wisdom. The ability of prophesying is thus a means for her to realize her wish. However, it also reflects the wide gap between her ideal and reality. As a girl living in a society where filial piety 孝顺, the core value of Confucian ethics, is considered as the primary obligation for a child, she has to yield to her parents’ request and bow to her fate. The ability of prophesying in this context, rather than help her avoid misfortunes in the future, in fact brings her even more sorrows. Her fate is externalized into a traditional social rule in which women cannot decide their own happiness but must follow the preset principles for everyone.

Gao is actually a good man in every way except that he is predestined to die at the age of 25 and Xi Liu has been aware of this from the very beginning. Gao’s previous

wife died and left him a son named Changfu 长福. After the wedding, Xi Liu gives birth to a boy and names him Changhu 长怙. According to the tradition, the son should be named by his father. In this case, it is Xi Liu who gives a name to her son and this detail indicates her husband's love and respect for her. The name Changhu carries her good wish that the child could get his parents' protection in the long time to come. But it also implies her vague concern about their future.

In addition, there are several other details in the story echoing the prophecy of Gao's fate. Once Gao jokingly says to Xi Liu: "You are fine in everything: two fine eye-brows, a fine waist, fine feet and finer in consideration." Xi Liu retorts, "You are high indeed: high in personality, inspiration, and in command of writing, hopefully a higher longevity."[30] This conversation between the husband and wife echoes the prediction in the very beginning. There is another event echoing the prophecy. Someone puts good coffins on sale in the village. Xi Liu wants to buy one even though the coffin is so expensive that she has to borrow money from her neighbors. Her husband is confused because the coffin is not in urgent need. A year later, a rich man in the village wants to buy it at double the original price for a deceased family member, but she refuses the offer. Her husband is even more confused. When asked why, she declines to answer, with tears rolling down her face. When Gao turns 25, Xi Liu does not allow him to travel far from home. Whenever he comes back late, she sends servants to fetch him. Despite her constant interventions, however, the predestined fate befalls her husband. On his way back from a friend's banquet, he falls off his horse and dies.

[30] See *Liaozhai* 1017.

All of these events constitute the second time she fights against fate, a fate in which her husband would die at a young age and she would become a widow for the rest of her life. Xi Liu is lonely and helpless in this fighting. Even knowing about her husband's premature death beforehand, she could do nothing but suffer from depression and pain. Her short marriage is something of a race against fate.

However, although she fails to escape her fate, her persistence and wisdom are highlighted in the development of the story. Except wishing her husband longevity and expecting that the prophecy would never be fulfilled, she makes preparations for the rest of her life as a widow and learns to live on her own. During her short marriage, she pays little attention to the traditional role of a wife and the household chores, but takes great care in managing the business affairs in the family. It says,

> "一日，生赴邻村饮酒，适有追逋赋者，打门而谇；遣奴慰之， 弗去。乃趣童召生归。隶既去，生笑曰："细柳，今始知慧女不着痴男 耶？"女闻之，俯首而哭。生惊挽而劝之，女终不乐。生不忍以家政累之， 仍欲自任，女又不肯。晨兴夜寐，经纪弥勤。每先一年，即储来岁之赋，以 故终岁未尝见催租者一至其门；又以此法计衣食，由此用度益纾。" "One day, when Gao went out to a neighboring village for a drink, a tax-man came to his home to collect taxes. He scolded and banged at the door, Xi Liu sent a servant to apologize and calm him down, who did not react favorably. She had to send a handyman for her husband. After the tax-man left, Gao smiled and said to his wife, "Now you have learned that a cleaver woman is not as good as a foolish man." She started to weep at hearing it. He hurriedly held her hand to console her, but she could not pluck up her spirit. Not bearing to see the family business bothered his wife, Gao wanted to run it himself, but she insisted on running it. Afterword, she became even more diligent in the management, preparing tax in advance for the next year, so the tax-man never knocked at their door. She planned well the expenses on food and clothing, so the family became much better off." (*Liaozhai* 1017)

It is very difficult for a female to be independent without her husband's support in that society, however, she still attempts to narrow the gap between her wishes and the reality. She decides to use her actions to deny the traditional notion, "A clever woman is not as

good as a foolish man," and proves that she is capable of handling all family business herself.

The above discussion of Xi Liu's marriage and her relationship with her husband shows that Xi Liu has broken the boundary between the traditional inner-outer domains that women inhabit in a society dominated by Confucian gender ethics. In the book *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Ko points out that,

> "Confucian gender ethics was founded on the twin pillars of Thrice Following[31] and the doctrine of separate spheres (man: outer / woman: inner). Chinese society has often been said to thrive on a clear demarcation between domestic and public spheres, with women confined to the former and men controlling the latter." (Ko, 12)

However, in this story, we observe that Xi Liu not only participates in the management of the family business, but also runs it successfully—even better than her husband. Though she is forced to practice the management of the household and be more independent in dealing with "outer matters", her capabilities are undeniable in the process.

Her third struggle against the fate is displayed in her children's education. She is in an awkward position as a step-mother of Changfu. Stereotypes would have people assume that no stepmother could treat her stepchildren well, especially when she has her own child, her husband has died, and the family is poor. However, Xi Liu treats both her sons fairly. She does not spoil Changhu because she actually gave birth to him. Moreover, shortly after her husband's death, Changfu becomes idle, lazy, and refuses to study. Xi Liu makes a resolute decision to send him to toil with servants on farms. She does not care about the gossip of the neighbors who believe that she is merely treating him poorly since he is her stepchild. Finally, Changfu repents, becomes diligent and attentive in his

[31] Thrice Following 三从 is a traditional Confucian gender standard defining the social status of a woman: she is required to obey her father before marriage, her husband in marriage, and her son(s) in widowhood.

studies, and achieves success. In this part of the story, we see a far-sighted mother who, unlike the traditional mother portrayed in other stories, acts more like a strict father and sticks to her principles with no tolerance for her children's mistakes.

Chuanqi mode, which involves the depiction of details and emotions, has vividly portrayed her personality through her three fights against fate. Hence, an independent female who is vastly different from weak females in traditional views is established. Even knowing what the future has in store for her, she fights against fate, remains independent, and remains well prepared for any misfortune in life. She takes care of family business affairs which are supposed to be handled by her husband. She deals with the tax-man and does very well in managing the family business. All of these prove that a woman is capable of living on her own without the support of men. Her wisdom is reflected in her far sight and strong heart. Even when raising her two sons all by herself after her husband's death, she is not bothered by the rumors about her maltreatment of her stepson. Due to her efforts, one of her sons becomes a rich businessman and the other becomes a high official. In the commentary she is praised by the Yishishi as "a woman with a strong personality like that of a man 此无论闺闼，当亦丈夫之铮铮者矣" (*Liaozhai*, 1020).

The prophecy in this story is not as much a source of strangeness as an externalization of the foresight of Xi Liu. On the one hand, it may be satirical that she attempts to learn the ability of prophesying to control her life and pursue her happiness, while this attempt turns out to bring her even more sorrow and pushes her to be even tougher in facing the world. The sharp comparison between her ideal hope and harsh reality increases the difficulties for a woman in a society that believes "a cleaver woman is not as good as a foolish man." On the other had, these prophecies are also evidence of

Xi Liu's wisdom as well as her toughness and independence. The strangeness of the story therefore changes from the extraordinary supernatural power represented by the ability to prophesize, to the unique characteristics of Xi Liu rarely found in ordinary women at that time: farsightedness, great courage, and determination.

The character of Xi Liu, like that of Chen Yunqi discussed in the second category, belongs to a new female group appearing in the Ming-Qing dynasties. Accompanying the socioeconomic and intellectual changes of the seventeenth century—"the rise of commercial publishing and a reading public, a new emphasis on emotions, the heightened visibility of courtesan culture, the promotion of women's education, increased opportunity for women to travel"[32]—a new definition of womanhood emerges. The importance of talents in the new definition of womanhood, such as virtue, ability, and beauty, greatly challenged the traditional ideas of womanhood derived from the age-old Confucian Four Virtues 四德(womanly speech, womanly virtue, womanly deportment and womanly work). Many educated women came to enjoy the freedom of pursuing men's work, notably scholarship and writing, and began to sneer at tasks traditionally reserved for women. The changing social values, and the new meanings of womanhood, were injected into the old Four Virtues, contributing to the gentry-women "a time of heightened ideological control and augmented social freedom" (Ko, 176).

From the stories of Xi Liu and Chen Yunqi, we can see that both of the heroines are created in this context, reflecting the spirit of the time. Xi Liu breaks the traditional boundary of inner-outer gender domains, while Chen Yunqi is a housewife who has been a Taoist nun and is completely inept at caring for the household. These women challenge

[32] See Dorothy Ko. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

the traditional image of ideal housewives based on Confucian ethics. Both of them are more independent and self-seeking. They are an outgrowth of the updated womanhood in the seventeenth century. Their distinct images generate a sense of strangeness in comparison with the traditional female characters. This kind of strangeness, vividly represented in the mode of chuanqi, is deeply rooted in the new social values of a changing society and expands the connotation of strangeness in the traditional zhiguai tales.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This thesis points out that Pu Songling's generic innovation in *Liaozhai* of writing zhiguai tales in chuanqi mode should be considered as a distinct genre. It is very different from its generic predecessors in terms of content and writing purposes as well as other features.

Neither the genres of zhiguai nor chuanqi alone could achieve the aesthetic effects of "zhiyi genre". On the one hand, by using zhiguai tales, and narrating things of the other world, the reader is kept at a certain distance from the real world and the author adopts a logic and theoretical system that could be very different or even opposite to human society. Such a distance, not only helps readers reexamine human society from a new and objective perspective, but also helps them unconsciously gain didactic knowledge that is allegorized into the strange stories. On the other hand, by using chuanqi mode in representing twists of plots and sentimental involvement, the world of the strange is made understandable and more human-like. The strangeness is no more a peculiar object that wanders beyond human knowledge, but an extended part of human society. In this way, the didactic purpose is better achieved.

Also, "zhiyi genre" is not simply a rough combination of zhiguai and chuanqi genres. With a study of prophetic tales, this thesis demonstrates some features of this new genre.

First, by referring to the impact of Buddhist concepts such as samsara and karma and virtues advocated by Confucianism, the strangeness is used to achieve a didactic purpose. In other words, “zhiyi genre” changes the traditional social status of the zhiguai genre, handling the high-value as well as the more serious social concerns.

Secondly, the Buddhist concepts provide systematical and theoretical support for the strange phenomena, making the strangeness explainable and understandable and helping it to function as an extended part of the human society.

Thirdly, due to the usage of chuanqi mode—focusing on the plot development, vivid depiction of details, and emotional elaboration—characters in each prophecic tale display stronger “freewill” than those in traditional zhiguai tales. Characters in these stories constantly confront the difficulty of making choices, and the authorial intention sometimes is diluted or even altered by the voice of the narrator in the text. Such conflicts are deeply rooted in the contradiction between the traditional values and the changing ones of the Qing Dynasty.

In summary, when an old genre is unsuitable to record new social aspects or reflect changed social values, it is necessary to create a new one to undertake the task. Pu Songling’s generic innovation conforms to the need of the time and has its own distinct aesthetic features. It should be considered as a new genre recording and reflecting new social values in a changing society and its creation is deeply rooted in social changes. Such a generic innovation is of great significance in the history of Chinese Literature. However, this thesis is simply an attempt at exploring the uniqueness of this genre. It is worthy of fuller identification with more in-depth study at a later time.

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