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# A Study in Didactics

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A STUDY IN DIDACTICS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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requirements for the degree of  
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in

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by  
Jordan Cormier  
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## Abstract

When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ended *The Final Problem* with Sherlock Holmes' apparent death there was a mass outcry of protest from his fans to the point that myths still circulate about how young Victorian men wore black armbands in mourning. There was a reason why the Holmes stories had such a mass appeal: Sherlock Holmes, brilliant, asexual, emotionally reserved and eminently rational detective that he was, was in many ways the archetype of the ideal Victorian man. As such he struck a very deep chord with British society at the time, the extent of which his creator never quite seemed to have grasped. Given that Sherlock Holmes was a bipolar cocaine addict who would occasionally shoot up the walls of his shared apartment as a salute to the Queen while drinking this probably tells you all you need to know about the Victorians.

During the 1920s and 1930s a Shanghai writer by the name of Cheng Xiaoqing wrote a series of stories about a Shanghai-based Chinese master detective character called Huo Sang heavily inspired by the Holmes stories. Cheng Xiaoqing believed that detective literature could be used as a sort of didactic device to teach the public how to think rationally and be good, modern Chinese citizens, and referred to his detective stories in essays as "popular science textbooks in disguise. Because these stories proved popular it is worth asking why they were well-received and by whom. In doing so we can gain new insight into the thinking of Republican Chinese, particularly somewhat educated urbanites or *xiaoshimin* of Shanghai. These were the people who read Cheng Xiaoqing's stories and who their message was geared toward. By reading the stories and comparing both the overt moral and political messages contained within

and the ways in which the main character himself differs from the original Holmes we can use these stories as a window into the thinking of both the author and his readership and thereby gain new appreciation for the modernization and nation-building process in China and the reception of Western ideas.

## Introduction

When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ended *The Final Problem* with Sherlock Holmes' apparent death there was a mass outcry of protest from his fans to the point that myths still circulate about how young Victorian men wore black armbands in mourning. There was a reason why the Holmes stories had such a mass appeal: Sherlock Holmes, brilliant, asexual, emotionally reserved and eminently rational detective that he was, was in many ways the archetype of the ideal Victorian man. As such he struck a very deep chord with British society at the time, the extent of which his creator never quite seemed to have grasped. Given that Sherlock Holmes was a bipolar cocaine addict who would occasionally shoot up the walls of his shared apartment as a salute to the Queen while drinking this probably tells you all you need to know about the Victorians.<sup>12</sup> The Holmes stories were after all reflective of a fundamentally middle-class English view of society and crime. More to the point, they reflected the desire for a symbol "to assuage the anxieties of a respectable, London-based, middle-class audience,"<sup>3</sup> and much of their initial success derived from fulfilling that demand. Along with the bohemian and eccentric aspects of his character and lifestyle one sees in Holmes many characteristics that such readers would have recognized and approved of. He helps those who are vulnerable and in dire straits without concern for payment or reward. He is markedly more intelligent than any foreigner he

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Musgrave Ritual" in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Project Gutenberg: EBook #834, 2008), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> "I have always held, too, that pistol practice should be distinctly an open-air pastime; and when Holmes, in one of his queer humors, would sit in an arm-chair with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V. R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it."

<sup>3</sup> Steven Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 67.

finds himself dealing with, and has no qualms about mocking pretentious continental authority figures to their faces. Despite his unusual profession and various adventures, Holmes made his dwelling in an ordinary apartment in London. While comfortable and homey they are nothing fancy, nothing that would stand out to readers as extravagant or indulgent. Holmes does not even have the apartments to himself; he and Watson first meet when a mutual friend tells Watson he had just heard an acquaintance complaining about being unable to find “someone to go halves with him”<sup>4</sup> on the Baker Street lodgings that come to be associated with the pair. Holmes navigates between the Scylla of being a wealthy dilettante and thus out of touch with the honest and hardworking professionals of London and the Charybdis of being too mean and beggarly to be respectable. Worrying about money and being excessively free with money would both be considered vices to such an audience. While it was of course good and proper to work hard so as to make and save up and pass on money to one’s family in an honest manner being too eager to make money or too concerned with improving one’s lot economically was unseemly. In short, Holmes was just odd enough to be exciting and dangerous while still being “that familiar figure in English fable, the stern, distant yet ultimately helpful patronizing hero.”<sup>5</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s a Shanghai writer by the name of Cheng Xiaoqing wrote a series of stories about a Shanghai-based Chinese master detective character called Huo Sang. Cheng Xiaoqing, who had read the Holmes canon and translated it into Chinese, based his character on Holmes, albeit with Chinese characteristics. The stories were extremely popular in Shanghai at the time but received relatively little critical attention due to being seen as lowbrow literature aimed at popular audiences. More specifically he was classified as “a ‘Butterfly-

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Project Gutenberg: Ebook #1661, 2011], p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1980), p. 67.

Saturday' writer: that is, one who was read avidly but not taken seriously"<sup>6</sup> and moreover dismissed by more serious writers as a frivolous distraction from the contemporary issues of the day, dominated by pointless love stories and tales of knight-errantry.

Cheng Xiaoqing believed that detective literature could be used as a sort of didactic device to teach the public how to think rationally and be good, modern Chinese citizens, and referred to his detective stories in essays as "popular science textbooks in disguise."<sup>7</sup> He argued that while art and literature in general could serve to promote "morality, law, order, utility, etc" detective stories had "an additional kind of value."<sup>8</sup> As he put it, "The material of detective stories places a particular emphasis on science and can expand the intelligence and rational mind of human beings, cultivate people's observation, and increase and improve people's social experience."<sup>9</sup> The stories are intensely moralistic, with the protagonist frequently commenting or passing judgment on contemporary social issues or debunking superstitions and ghost stories. Just as Holmes served as a sort of ideal British citizen, Huo Sang fulfilled a similar role as a model Republican Chinese citizen. Cheng Xiaoqing clearly had a message and an agenda in mind when he wrote these stories. Given that they proved popular enough to be adapted into at least one movie and a readership sufficient to be serialized in various literary journals for over a decade and a half<sup>10</sup> it would seem that quite a few Chinese people found this message agreeable. Because of this it is worth asking why the stories were well-received and by whom. In doing so we can gain new insight into the thinking of Republican Chinese, particularly somewhat

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Wong, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 328: *Chinese Fiction Writers 1900-1949*, Thomas Moran ed (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Cheng Xiaoqing, "Zhentan xiaoshuo de duofangmian" (侦探小说的多方面). Quoted in *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China*, Jeffery C. Kinkley (Stanford University Press: California, 2000), p. 199.

<sup>8</sup> Cheng Xiaoqing, "The Utility of the Detective Novel" in *Cheng Xiaoqing (1893-1976) and his Detective Stories in Modern Shanghai*. by Annabelle Weisl. Master's Thesis (University of Hamburg, 1998), Appendix B, p. V.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* p. V.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Wong, *Sherlock in Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), pp. 208-209.

educated urbanites or *xiaoshimin*<sup>11</sup> of Shanghai. This class, comprised of “small merchants, various kinds of clerks and secretaries, high school students, housewives and other modestly educated, marginally well-off urbanites,”<sup>12</sup> was above the poor but far below the wealthy and outside the rarified academic circles of the true intellectual class. What they were was inextricably tied with the nucleus of the new Chinese state the Guomindang sought to build using cities like Shanghai as their laboratories. While not having the respectability or credentials of academia or holders of public office they were literate enough to be active consumers of the many newspapers and literary journals that competed for the new urban audience. They also had the leisure time and discretionary spending to seek such diversions and the numbers to make their wallets worth catering to. These were the people who read Cheng Xiaoqing’s stories and who their message was geared toward. As such, by reading the stories and comparing both the overt moral and political messages contained within and the ways in which the main character himself differs from the original Holmes we can use these stories as a window into the thinking of both the author and his readership and thereby gain new appreciation for the modernization and nation-building process in China prior to the Communist victory in 1949. In particular we can learn about how Western ideas regarding such issues as crime, justice and social disorder were received by the somewhat educated urban population at large. But before we can discuss the readership's reaction we must needs understand what they were reacting to and the general intellectual and political milieu in which the stories were written

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<sup>11</sup> 小市民, “little city people.”

<sup>12</sup> Annabelle Weisl, *Cheng Xiaoqing (1893-1976) and his Detective Stories in Modern Shanghai*, p. 7.

## Background

From the mid-nineteenth century on, Chinese confidence in their cultural superiority and place in the world had been first shaken and then shattered by a series of humiliating military and diplomatic defeats at the hands of various Western powers, with England being first and foremost among them. This culminated in the rebellion against the ruling Qing dynasty that led to the establishment of the Republic of China. The ruling Guomintang was faced with the task of bringing China into the twentieth century and creating a strong modern government capable of defending Chinese interests and ending the problems of imperialism and warlordism. To this end many Guomintang thinkers and politicians reasoned that one could not establish a modern state without a modern citizenry. This, of course, raises the immediate question of what a modern citizen was. We can begin with what he was not. A proper republican citizen was not superstitious. He did not believe in local gods and spirits and did not waste scarce funds on burning paper money and other traditional rituals. He was devoid of unhealthy habits such as opium smoking (though not tobacco). He was, however, religious. Ideally he (or she) was educated, not in the Confucian classics but in science, and the Western sociological and political ideas that the Guomintang sought to use in their nation-building program.

The reader will no doubt note an immediate problem with this description. What, exactly, was the difference between religion and superstition? The distinction was primarily an utilitarian one. The Chinese words for ‘religion’ and ‘superstition’ are both modern day neologisms taken from Japanese in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. The word for religion, *zongjiao* (宗教) is a reborrowing of a term originally used during the Tang dynasty to refer to the entirety of the Buddhist dharma. The word for superstition, *mixin* (迷信) has its origins in the

term *migan* (迷惑), which means something similar to “mislead” or “bedazzle” and was associated with Daoist mysticism. The modern compound is derived from the Japanese “meishin.”<sup>13</sup> The language used in the Republican constitution to define freedom of religion was similarly modeled on the Meiji constitution, which “served as a legal and linguistic model for many Chinese constitutions, including its phrase *shinkyoo no jiyoo* (信教の自由, literally ‘freedom to believe in a teaching’), a term originally popularized in the 1860s by the ubiquitous Fukuzawa Yukichi.”<sup>14</sup> Nor was this sort of terminology restricted to the Guomindang regime; the current constitution of the People’s Republic of China explicitly grants freedom of religious belief while saying precious little about freedom of religious practice.<sup>15</sup> This was not simply an academic distinction; many “more activist party members claimed that ceremonies, churches, and clergy were alike superfluous to *xinyang zongjiao zhi ziyou*, because the only freedom guaranteed—indeed the only thing required of religion in the modern era—was to *believe*. In other words, the combination of idiom and cultural predilection created a gray zone of governance: freedom might be one of intellect and possibly assembly, but not necessarily one of property and permanent community.”<sup>16</sup> In short, one could definitely have the freedom to believe whatever one chose so long as one did not share it, act upon it in a public manner or expect to be allowed to hold property alongside like-minded people. Again, this is mirrored today. Ask a modern day Christian how they feel about the current mainland Chinese government’s similarly restrictive policies. Clearly any religious group would clamor for more, thereby ensuring a natural conflict between unsanctioned religious communities and the state. It also meant that

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<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Nedostup, *Religion, Superstition and Governing Society in Nationalist China*. (Columbia University: Doctoral dissertation, 2001), pp. 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (United States: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> Constitution of the People’s Republic of China. Chapter 2, Article 36.

<sup>16</sup> Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*, p. 39.

religious communities, especially new religious communities, were guilty until proven innocent as it were seeing as they were unsanctioned by default until the government decided otherwise. This was an obvious recipe for trouble for a society in flux, one made worse by the lack of a clear standard distinguishing acceptable religious communities from communities in need of suppression or a set process for receiving official approval.

This still leaves the question of what the difference between superstition and religion was and why it was an important distinction. The answer to the latter question is simple. The Guomindang never renounced the principle of religious freedom. This was largely because none of the western countries they hoped to emulate had done the same. “To do so would separate China out from the rest of the world, precisely the fate that the project of cultural reform was designed to avert.”<sup>17</sup> The entire point of the nation-building program was to make China a modern country that could be accepted as an equal by the European powers, America and Japan. Furthermore, many Guomindang leaders, among them Jiang Jieshi who was himself a Christian, felt that religion could be used as a means to inculcate civic virtue and morality into the population. Superstition, by contrast, was a bad thing, because it encouraged old modes of thinking and wasteful habits such as spending scarce funds on elaborate rituals. As Nedostup puts it, “The basis of the Nationalist argument against religious rituals was simple. In poverty-stricken China, households could ill afford to waste their income on ritual expenses, whether it be candles, incense, spirit money and paper gods or firecrackers.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, many Chinese writers of the May 4<sup>th</sup> generation such as Lu Xun argued that Chinese tradition and the superstition that came with it had a stultifying effect on the minds of the Chinese people and was ultimately responsible for China’s contemporary problems, foremost among them their weakness

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<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Nedostup, *Religion, Superstition and Governing Society In Nationalist China*, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* pp. 476-477.

in the face of Western and Japanese imperialism. Cheng Xiaoqing felt similarly. While he claimed it was said in the West that “Every person is a natural born detective. Therefore, detective novels possess the potential to have such a large number of readers” such was not the case in China.<sup>19</sup> This claim, he argued, could not be made in China because of the “poor emphasis on natural sciences. Despite of the fact [sic] that curiosity is a natural talent, family education, traditional superstition and the influence of the society simultaneously attacks any kind of effort to encourage curiosity, and these factors often repress the curious spirit to such an extent that it does not develop.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, a religion was a set of spiritual beliefs and practices that encouraged civic virtue and served the state, whereas superstition referred to backwards and harmful beliefs and practices that retarded social progress.

Chinese translation of Western literary works for mass publication began during the late Qing dynasty. It was preceded by the translation of non-fiction works such as science and mathematical texts during the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. This coincided with the adoption of improved Western printing methods, particularly lithographic printing, which was first brought to China via Macau by missionaries and was widely adopted by Shanghai printers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> These two choices of material for publication were connected – both literary and scientific works were seen as being for the purposes of education and strengthening the nation. Traditional Chinese literary forms and methods were attacked by May 4<sup>th</sup> writers such as Hu Shi as being “incomplete,” while western literary methods are ‘much more complete, much

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<sup>19</sup> Cheng Xiaoqing, “The Utility of the Detective Novel” in *Cheng Xiaoqing (1893-1976) and his Detective Stories in Modern Shanghai* by Annabelle Weisl, Appendix B, p. VI.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p. VI.

<sup>21</sup> Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 81.

more brilliant, and hence exemplary.”<sup>22</sup> Popular works could be used for mass education. But mass education required mass readership and introduced a profit motive. It was not enough for something to be famous and Western; it had to be intrinsically entertaining enough to draw a large following.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, detective literature offered qualities that contemporary Chinese society seemed to lack. As Hung puts it, “The detective hero, who solves seemingly impossible problems through the use of logical deduction and disciplined action, exhibits qualities which the average Chinese of the late Qing were seen as lacking—intellectual and physical robustness.”<sup>24</sup> All of this gave detective literature some cover from charges of being vulgar or socially harmful. For example, “While love stories were found by New Culture critics to be pernicious because they advocated an outdated attitude towards relations between the sexes, and muck-raking novels because they corrupted the minds of readers with felonious ideas, detective fiction was fortunate enough to encounter benevolent neglect or even acquiescence from critics.”<sup>25</sup>

## Scientism

China was in dire straits vis-à-vis foreign powers in the early 20th century and the most obvious reason was military technology. One might glibly but not inaccurately say that much of the course of 19th and 20th century Sino-Japanese history stemmed from the fact that the Qing government's response to Western technology and offers of trade tended heavily towards a

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<sup>22</sup> Hu Shi, “Jianshe di wenxue geming lun.” Quoted in *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Toward a Rewriting of Modern Chinese Literary History* by Rey Chow (Stanford University: Ph.D dissertation, 1986), p. 142.

<sup>23</sup> Eva Hung, “Giving Texts a Context: Chinese Translations of Classical English Detective Stories 1896-1916” in *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature In Early Modern China 1840-1918*. ed. David Pollard (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company: 1994), p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid p. 156-157.

<sup>25</sup> King-fai Tam, “The Traditional Hero as Modern Detective: Huo Sang in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai” in *The Post-Colonial Detective*. ed. Ed Christian (Great Britain: Palgrave, 2001), p. 141.

default of "Our celestial empire has no need of your barbaric foreign things. Begone from our shores," whereas their Japanese counterparts had much the same reaction but followed it with some variation of, "Your rifle can kill my rival daimyo's soldiers from how far away?!" and then asked how many were for sale. China had ships and gunpowder and such for a very long time by the late Qing dynasty, but it had been made very clear that Europeans had managed to make much better use of all those things. This technological superiority was a relatively recent thing and could be credited to the Industrial Revolution, which in turn was possible (in a very pared down and simplistic version of events) because of Western science, which had proven itself better suited for creating such innovations as cannons and railways and telegraphs than antecedent modes of thought. People like results, leading to Chinese intellectuals like Liang Qichao and Hu Shi advocating the adoption of Western science so that China could have such wonderful things and be a powerful and wealthy country. When something works in one area of endeavor, it is natural to try applying it to other problems, leading to the question of whether the same modes of thought that produced the telegraph and the steam engine and led to such advances in the field of medicine could also serve to tell us how such technology should be used and explain the workings of the mind as ably as it had those of the body. After all, ethics has always begun with the question of how one should act and relate to others. And so the examples of chemistry and physics inspired the application of the scientific method to social and political problems, and also to scientism as a strain of political thought.

As stated above, one of the arguments Cheng Xiaoqing made in defense of detective literature was that unlike other works of popular fiction it could be used to teach rational thought which in turn set it apart from other works of popular literature like romance and adventure stories. This is of course rather ironic in light of the fact that muck-raking novels were the

original Sherlock Holmes' favorite form of literature. Shortly after they first moved into their Baker Street apartments Watson observed that Holmes's knowledge of sensational literature was "Immense—He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetuated in the century."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, a reader of the original Holmes stories cannot help but remember Watson's shock when he discovered that Holmes was unaware of the Copernican Theory that the Earth moved around the sun rather than vice-versa, and was moreover dismissive of the idea that he should care about it in the slightest, saying,

"You see," he explained, "I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones."<sup>27</sup>

When Watson went on to express amazement over this, Holmes testily replied, "What the deuce is it to me?... You say we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me or to my work."<sup>28</sup> One cannot help but see the radical contrast between this and the educated man of Western learning that Huo Sang was supposed to represent. To Holmes scientific knowledge and education were instruments in his toolbox, relevant and useful only in so far as they could help him achieve his goals. Huo Sang, as we will see, embodied a very different worldview. Indeed, one could draw a parallel between Holmes's

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<sup>26</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* p. 11.

worldview and that of the pre-revolution Qing dynasty's position on science, best summed up by the maxim *zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong* (中学为体, 西学为用), "Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for practical use." That is to say, Holmes cared little about science for its own sake. When they moved into their Baker Street apartments together, Watson was quick to note that while Holmes was very well read on a number of technical subjects, his knowledge was often scattershot or unsystematic, with Holmes having extremely detailed knowledge of the minutia of certain aspects of a discipline but being completely ignorant of other parts.<sup>29</sup> When Holmes studied aspects of chemistry or the various types of soils and where in London they were found or published detailed monographs on how to distinguish the ashes produced by various kinds of tobacco<sup>30</sup> he did so because he planned to use that knowledge to advance his career as London's only consulting detective. Science was a tool to facilitate what was really important, be it solving crimes or preserving and strengthening the empire. Similarly the Qing had precious little interest in adopting Western ideologies and forms of governance and continued to make mastery of the Confucian classics the prerequisite for officialdom until 1903 but could definitely see the virtues of European guns, artillery and naval vessels. Huo Sang, by contrast, despite being "unabashedly ignorant about literature, a subject traditionally held in high regard" was "enamored of what he terms 'practical disciplines,' such as the natural sciences, law, medicine, economics, and philosophy (often narrowed down to denote only exercise of the rational mind), all of which were considered by his contemporaries to be the essence of Western learning."<sup>31</sup> Coupled with Cheng Xiaoqing's stated belief that detective literature could be used to teach rational, scientific thinking and that detective stories were "popular scientific textbooks in

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<sup>29</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four* (Project Gutenberg edition: EBook #2097, 2008), pp. 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> King-fai Tam, "The Traditional Hero as Modern Detective: Huo Sang in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai" in *The Post-Colonial Detective*, pp. 145-146.

disguise” it becomes apparent that the Huo Sang stories are about science in a way that the Holmes stories were not. Lest anyone forget, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a spiritualist who believed that faeries were real and had been photographed in England. In other words, the Qing wanted the technological benefits of science while retaining their old worldview and ways of thinking, in much the same way that a present-day American creationist might enjoy the benefits of vaccines or improved crops and livestock while rejecting the theory of evolution and looking suspiciously at fancy liberal university educations. It is very possible to appreciate the fruits of a way of thinking without wanting to actually adopt it. After all, we had medicine and engineering long before the rise of modern science and the scientific method. Huo Sang by contrast encouraged people to be scientists, to internalize modern ways of thinking.

Conversely, it is entirely possible to advocate 'science' and the adoption of 'scientific ways of thinking' without having a formal education in the relevant field of science, without having a formal education in any field of science and indeed without having any idea what one is talking about. Lack of knowledge rarely stops some of the most vocal members of any given community from holding and expressing an opinion, and those opinions can find a receptive audience with others and take on a life of their own quite separate from their supposed origins. Picture a conversation of economics between Adam Smith and a present-day American libertarian or a discussion of theology between a 14th century caliph and Osama bin Laden and the violent disagreements likely to ensue. There is always someone looking to take advantage of something in vogue and authoritative to lend credibility to their own agenda. Thus we come to

the subject of scientism, i.e., “the tendency to use the respectability of science in areas having little bearing on science itself.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> D. W. Y. Kwok, *Scientism in Chinese Thought: 1900-1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1945), p. 3.

## The Stories

In *The Anxiety of Influence* Harold Bloom writes, “A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor’s poem to execute a *clinamen*<sup>33</sup> in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves.”<sup>34</sup> This conceptualization of literary evolution meshes well with the pre-modern Chinese literary tradition: “Whereas readers in the modern West assume fictional texts to be the created products of an individual author who retains—legally, through copyright—sole proprietorship of what he writes, traditional authors of *xiaoshuo*<sup>35</sup> narratives are little more than transient participants in a potentially endless evolutionary process. Every well-known premodern *xiaoshuo* comes in a variety of versions that differ significantly one from another.”<sup>36</sup> How much this is actually true in the modern West is debatable; fictional characters such as Batman or fictional works such as those of Tolkien or indeed the Sherlock Holmes stories discussed herein have been through decades of adaptations by numerous authors, and one need only look at the myriad fan stories on the internet about the Avengers or the eponymous hero of *Doctor Who* to see that many, many Western readers are no great respecters of copyright or canon as conceived by original authors. Still, it is far truer of modern Euro-America than it was in old China if only because our copyright holders are so much more dogged and better equipped in enforcing their claims, and so we can see that the Huo Sang stories could have a respectability that contemporary Holmes imitators in England would not.

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<sup>33</sup> “Swerve”

<sup>34</sup> Harold Bloom “The Anxiety of Influence” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leitch, Vincent (New York: Norton, 2010), p. 1657.

<sup>35</sup> Used to mean “novel” in the sense of books in modern Mandarin Chinese. Literally “small talk.”

<sup>36</sup> Timothy Wong, *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 328: Chinese Fiction Writers, 1900-1949*, ed. Moran, Thomas (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), p. 50.

If Bloom's concept can be rarified and applied to Cheng Xiaoqing's fiction then the question arises: how do the Huo Sang stories swerve? What immediately stands out is that the story of *The Examination Paper* is not an epic story of murder that leaves the police dumbfounded and requires the attentions of the master detective to solve. *A Study in Scarlet* begins with the introduction of Holmes as a cool, pragmatic rationalist with seemingly superhuman powers of perception and deduction. Nor do we hear in this story or elsewhere allusions to off-screen accomplishments on par with Holmes's involvement with various European royal families, the Pope and other such luminaries. The effect of this diminishment in scale is that Huo Sang is a far more emulatable figure than Holmes, who Doyle wrote to be an "accessible but not imitable" hero whose "intellectual power" the reader could never hope to match.<sup>37</sup> After all, there is only one Sherlock Holmes, but anyone can train themselves not to jump to conclusions when something goes missing. Indeed, technically we do not even receive the promised story of the pair's first meeting, since it is off-handedly mentioned that the two already knew each other in passing at the time.

Another question that this raises is why Huo Sang needs his trusty assistant Bao Lang. Watson served Holmes on two levels. From an in-universe perspective he was Holmes's only real friend, and provided him with the audience and praise Holmes secretly craved. And from a narrative standpoint Watson serves as our window onto Holmes and his methods to compensate for the fact that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was not a genius and as such could not properly portray Holmes's thoughts and inner monologue. Holmes had to be seen from the outside. This is not necessarily true in the case of Huo Sang. Huo Sang was a sociable fellow who would have had more than one friend. He acted out of civic duty, not personal egotism, as we will see later. Huo

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<sup>37</sup> Steven Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p. 92.

Sang, while intelligent, could not be some freak genius like Holmes if the stories are to accomplish their didactic purpose. Was this, perhaps, a missed opportunity on Cheng Xiaoqing's part? Perhaps he would have been better served by breaking the Holmsian model even further and giving Huo Sang multiple companions across different stories, or telling the story from the perspective of a client, or even an antagonist. In this way he could have shown the process of individuals other than our Watson surrogate being educated in Huo Sang's methods and way of thinking. Or perhaps instead of having them be boon companions, Cheng Xiaoqing might have made Bao Lang into Huo Sang's explicit apprentice and student, a detective in training who might have one day taken on the mantle himself. All of these things would have had the effect of further universalizing Huo Sang's methods, showing that anyone could learn to think and act in a rational, modern manner.

This concept becomes particularly relevant when one realizes that China was facing its own "anxiety of influence of national proportions" due to its position vis-a-vis the West and the sense that China's own traditional Confucian culture had failed them.<sup>38</sup> It is perhaps instructive here to look at some of the other writers who were influenced by Doyle and inspired to imitate his signature character. The most obvious example is the Arsene Lupin stories by Maurice LeBlanc, and as we shall see they are particularly relevant to our purpose here. Lupin, and his later Chinese counterpart Lu Ping in the stories written by Cheng Xiaoqing's friend and rival Sun Liaohong, was a master thief and burglar known for his daring and inventive robberies. While Holmes and Huo Sang also "embodied the literary conceit that they were legends in their fictional worlds"<sup>39</sup> to the extent that the real-life London postal service still receives mail addressed Holmes at his once-fictional Baker Street address and the organization assigned the

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<sup>38</sup> Jeffery Kinkley, *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China*, p. 172.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid* p. 171.

street number in the 1940s felt the need to employ a secretary to field the great detective's mail<sup>40</sup> Lupin took that concept and ran with it to a spectacular degree. Whereas Holmes grudgingly allowed Watson to publish accounts of his cases and only rarely admitted to his love of attention and the spotlight, Lupin not only sent letters to the newspapers about his plans<sup>41</sup> but was also one of the "principal shareholders" in the *Echo de France*, which served as "the official reporter of the exploits of Arsene Lupin."<sup>42</sup> Whereas Holmes grouched to Watson that "Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid"<sup>43</sup> and that "Some facts should be suppressed, or at least a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes by which I succeeded in unraveling it"<sup>44</sup> Lupin reveled in his fame and the attention it drew. Whereas Holmes found that his growing reputation with London's criminal class increasingly necessitated going about his investigations in disguise Lupin (also a master of disguise) at times relied upon it to make his crimes even feasible in the first place, such as the plots of *Arsene Lupin in Prison*<sup>45</sup> and *The Escape of Arsene Lupin*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Sheila Rule, *Sherlock Holmes' Mail: Not Too Mysterious*. New York Times, Nov 5th 1989. Accessed at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/05/world/sherlock-holmes-s-mail-not-too-mysterious.html> on 10/30/2014.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice LeBlanc, "Arsene Lupin in Prison" in *The Extraordinary Adventures of Arsene Lupin, Gentleman-Burglar* (Project Gutenberg: EBook #6133, 2009), p. 25.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice LeBlanc, "The Escape of Arsene Lupin" in *The Extraordinary Adventures of Arsene Lupin, Gentleman-Burglar*, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four*, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Lupin wished to rob a castle which had a level of security that he deemed impossible to bypass by stealth. To this end he sent the baron who owned the castle and its treasures a letter requesting that the baron pack the desired articles up and ship them off pre-paid to be received by Lupin, who was at the time in prison, or else Lupin would be obliged to remove them and perhaps other items as well on a specified date eight days hence. Lupin then spread word through a local newspaper which the baron was known to read that his arch-nemesis the detective Ganimard was vacationing in a nearby town. The baron, by now in a panic, sought Ganimard out and recruited him to help

Arsene Lupin was created at least in part as a French counterpart to Sherlock Holmes. More specifically, Arsene Lupin was created to be a superior counterpart to Sherlock Holmes. The last story in the first anthology of Lupin's doings ends with Lupin one-upping Holmes in an embarrassing manner and is immediately followed by a full novel pitting the two against one another. France had its own issues of national inferiority vis-a-vis England and LeBlanc "wanted to even France's score with England, as did many of his countrymen on various grounds. But combat in the field of detective literature necessarily evoked Britain's superiority over France, as over China. To be humbled here was bitterly ironic, for France and China had once 'led' in this field, thanks to Vidocq, Gaboriau, and China's *gongan* writers."<sup>47</sup> And shades of Waterloo aside "China's discomfiture before the West ran much deeper than France's vis-a-vis Britain."<sup>48</sup> France had lost wars with Britain. France had also won wars with Britain and was considered a peer that had to be taken seriously if not necessarily an equal. China had lost every war with the West thus far and lacked political control over substantial parts of its territory. China had gone from the center of civilization in their part of the world to what Marxist historians called a 'semi-colonial' state, an official historiography that is even now reflected in the preamble to the Chinese constitution.<sup>49</sup> While one might argue that on the whole China did relatively in dealing

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defend his castle on the appointed night. The detective turned out to be a disguised associate of Lupin, who had concluded that the only feasible means of robbing the castle was to be invited in by the baron himself.

<sup>46</sup> Lupin, having allowed himself to be arrested so that he could take a vacation in hopes of settling his frazzled nerves after recent adventures, publically declares that he will not attend his trial. He is watched carefully for his inevitable escape attempt. When the day of the trial arrives the detective Ganimard, who had arrested Lupin in the first place, examines him and declares that the man in court is without a doubt not Lupin but rather a man of similar appearance whom Lupin has somehow swapped places with. The man is allowed to walk out of the courtroom, and later meets Ganimard on a park bench, where he explains that he slightly altered his appearance and trusted that everyone would believe that the amazing Arsene Lupin must have already pulled off some miraculous escape and would therefore see what Lupin wanted them to see; namely, another man.

<sup>47</sup> Jeffery Kinkley, *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China*, p. 172.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p. 172.

<sup>49</sup> Constitution of the People's Republic of China. Preamble. Translation taken from People's Daily Online, <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>

<sup>50</sup> "Feudal China was gradually reduced after 1840 to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country."

with the threat of Western imperialism, since whatever ‘semi-colonial’ means it was definitely better than actually being colonized, as any Indian historian would likely agree, it was indisputably a time of national humiliation for China. Chinese faith in Chinese cultural superiority had been shattered in a way that even the Manchu conquest had not, and the major national question was what would replace the traditional way. As such, Cheng Xiaoqing and other Chinese writers of this period wrote their stories with a keen awareness that they were writing at a time “when Chinese intellectuals largely accepted the West’s view of the Chinese people as backward and uncouth. Cheng Xiaoqing and Sun Liaohong, like their colleagues writing ‘serious’ fiction, were anti-imperialist, yet both kinds of writers favored an international hybrid culture instead of building a wall against ‘cultural imperialism.’<sup>51</sup> Staying the course was no longer an option; the question was what to adopt and what to retain.

It should come as no surprise that the Holmes stories reinforce a middle-class Londoner’s conception of crime and its causes rather than criticizing conventional societal wisdom. There is no question of crimes having their root in socio-economic realities. No one ever has no choice but to become a criminal to make a living. Rather, crime happens due to a lack of virtue and “the stories assert that if decent people pulled together, did their duty and fulfilled their moral roles these disorders would not occur.”<sup>52</sup> While a middle-class person living a comfortable lifestyle might agree that their society is less than perfect and might think that the rich could stand to be reined in, it would be anathema for them to believe that there was something fundamentally wrong with the system, that they themselves are complicit in a system that forces certain people into poverty and crime through no fault of their own. Indeed, a wealthy aristocrat might well be more inclined to consider such a possibility being as they have the means to survive rocking the

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<sup>51</sup> Jeffery Kinkley. *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China*, p. 172.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid p. 90.

boat much more easily than the people who depend on a regular paycheck. As such, “Doyle’s stories are concerned with property and money, but they do not show acquisitiveness and protection of money as virtues in and of themselves. Money and property are considered the natural result of correct ethics, and failure in morality causes the attacks on property and even life.”<sup>53</sup> While having too much wealth is not presented as a mark of shame as such, the desire to acquire more money is, such that even the appearance of such greed is to be avoided. Witness Watson’s romantic angst in *The Sign of the Four*. Watson reflects repeatedly throughout the story that he would love nothing more than to court the female client who sought Holmes’ aid in the case, but laments that despite the chemistry between them he dare not make his feelings known for fear of being seen as “a mere vulgar fortune-seeker”<sup>54</sup> after the money she could expect to inherit if Holmes managed to resolve the case. When the aforementioned fortune is proclaimed beyond recovery due to the vengeful actions of the perpetrators of the story Watson ejaculates with relief and joy that he is free to follow his heart now “that the golden barrier was gone” from between them.<sup>55</sup>

### Traditional Antecedents

China had detective fiction long before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Going back as far as the Tang and Song dynasties stories about upright and insightful magistrates untangling mysteries and bringing criminals to justice were a distinct genre in Chinese literature. Various comparisons

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid p. 92.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four*, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid p. 68.

invite themselves between these *gong'an*<sup>56</sup> stories and both the Huo Sang canon and the more recent Western literature that influenced Cheng Xiaoqing as they all share much in common. Characters such as Judge Bao and Judge Di used methods exceedingly familiar to readers of modern detective literature. The investigating magistrate would use “detection and his extremely sharp intellect to solve cases. [Judge] Bao often shows a deep insight into the psychology of the people he is confronted with and is able to analyze the character of others in an amazingly precise manner, which helps him to set up canny traps for the perpetrators” and “is also skilled in disguising himself and travels incognito during an investigation.”<sup>57</sup> This description could as easily apply to Holmes or Huo Sang, both of whom were masters of disguise who often demonstrated their ability to silently follow another’s train of thought and manipulate otherwise recalcitrant witnesses and informants. Holmes, noted for his utter lack of proclivity towards romance, once went so far as to woo and become engaged to a housemaid in the house of Charles Augustus Milverton while in disguise as a plumber to gain needed intelligence on the household and its residents.<sup>58</sup> Though traditional *gong'an* stories were more apt to include supernatural trappings such as ghosts and prophetic dreams they focused first and foremost upon the magistrate uncovering the facts of the case through the use of his intelligence, powers of observation and the vast store of knowledge he possessed as an educated scholar-official.

Huo Sang held no official position and was a free agent. He, like Holmes, worked with the police but was not one of them and had no obligation to aid them or turn a criminal in if he felt it in the interests of justice not to do so. Despite this the police treated him as a respected ally and partner; in *On The Huangpu* Huo Sang casually tells his partner Bao Lang afterward that “I

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<sup>56</sup> 公案, “public records.”

<sup>57</sup> Annabelle Weisl, *Cheng Xiaoqing (1893-1976) and his Detective Stories in Modern Shanghai*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (Project Gutenberg: EBook #108, 2007), p. 120.

called the station from home and told them to assemble quietly on the east side of the river and mix in with passengers on ferries or workers on transports while patrolling the area,” when asked how it was that the police showed up in such a timely manner to help deal with the gang of kidnapers the story revolved around.<sup>59</sup> We see many times that Huo Sang is willing to go around the law when he feels it is inadequate to the purposes of securing justice and protecting the innocent, such as when he sets one of the angry dupes of the villain of *The Other Photograph* on a fatal collision course with the perpetrator as “the criminal tendency in him had already hardened. Neither intimidation, persuasion, or prevention would have had the least effect on him.”<sup>60</sup> Holmes was willing to do the same betimes; *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* ends with Holmes electing to allow an admitted jewel thief who had been about to allow an innocent man to face punishment in his place go free as:

I am not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies. If Horner were in danger it would be another thing, but this fellow will not appear against him, and the case must collapse. I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to gaol now, and you make him a gaol-bird for life. Besides, it is the season of forgiveness.<sup>61</sup> Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward.<sup>62</sup>

One might be tempted to read this and conclude that a fundamental difference between the modern and the pre-modern here is the contrast between an establishment figure endowed with political authority and tasked with upholding the law and a free agent working in accordance with his own conscience and willing to break or bend the law as necessary. In truth, the Sherlock Holmes canon has far more in common with *gong'an* fiction than Cheng Xiaoqing's work in this respect. Holmes was a hero portrayed to appeal to the middle-class Londoner and as such is fundamentally a conservative hero in that he upholds the established

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<sup>59</sup> Timothy Wong, “On The Huangpu” in *Sherlock in Shanghai*, p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> Timothy Wong, “The Other Photograph” in *Sherlock in Shanghai*, p. 92.

<sup>61</sup> The story is set around Christmas.

<sup>62</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Project Gutenberg: EBook #1661), p. 134.

social order. In the Holmes stories “any intention to show the relevance of social conditions to the crimes committed is missing. A collective responsibility for crime is never suggested.”<sup>63</sup> We have seen that Holmes was willing to break the law when he deemed it necessary, but he did so only when necessitated by extreme circumstances and never against anyone other than the blackest of villains. In *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton* Holmes only chose to burglarize the eponymous villain’s home as a last resort. The beginning of the story makes it clear that Holmes was at his wit’s end in dealing with Milverton; he never would have tried something as crude or as desperate as trying to rob Milverton by brute force or made the assumption that such an experienced blackmailer would bring his blackmail materials along to be seized if he had not been completely out of options. Moreover, he does not have Watson’s immediate acquiescent support. On the contrary; Watson’s initial reaction is that Holmes is courting disaster by embarking on this course of action, and immediately tries to talk him out of it. As he puts it,

“I had a catching of the breath, and my skin went cold at the words, which were slowly uttered in a tone of concentrated resolution. As a flash of lightning in the night shows up in an instant every detail of a wild landscape, so at one glance I seemed to see every possible result of such an action—the detection, the capture, the honoured career ending in irreparable failure and disgrace, my friend himself lying at the mercy of the odious Milverton.”<sup>64</sup>

It is only after strenuous argument by Holmes that this course of action is morally justified by the inability of the law to stop Milverton and that “Since it is morally justified, I have only to consider the question of personal risk. Surely a gentleman should not lay much stress upon this, when a lady is in most desperate need of his help?”<sup>65</sup> that Watson concedes. Nor does he passively obey Holmes’s instructions on the matter; when told he cannot accompany the master detective he shouts, “Then you are not going...I give you my word of honour—and I

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<sup>63</sup> Annabelle Weisl, *Cheng Xiaoqing (1893-1976) and his Detective Stories in Modern Shanghai*, p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, p. 139.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid* p. 139.

never broke it in my life—that I will take a cab straight to the police-station and give you away, unless you let me share this adventure with you.”<sup>66</sup> Even at the end, when the robbery goes sour and Milverton is shot by one of his victims Watson’s first impulse is to leap out and intervene to stop the murder, which is presented as totally unexpected and shocking, “but, as the woman poured bullet after bullet into Milverton's shrinking body I was about to spring out, when I felt Holmes's cold, strong grasp upon my wrist. I understood the whole argument of that firm, restraining grip--that it was no affair of ours, that justice had overtaken a villain, that we had our own duties and our own objects, which were not to be lost sight of.”<sup>67</sup>

Huo Sang was by contrast a critic of Chinese society at the time, both traditional and that of the emerging nation-state. It was not at all uncommon for Cheng Xiaoqing to begin a story with Bao Lang’s narration citing the fact that “torture has given way to critical examination of the evidence and the use of medical science, and the incompetent and uneducated have been gradually weeded out” over the course of Huo Sang’s career as evidence that “our country's judicial system has been liberated from the darkness of superstition wherein the lives of men were worth less than a blade of grass and has begun to move towards a system guided by the light of science and reason, wherein human rights are upheld and the rule of law is carried out”<sup>68</sup> or to conclude with Huo Sang sighing and reflecting that the murder of an innocent housewife he had just solved ultimately had its roots in “this tidal wave of speculation in the stock market.”<sup>69</sup>

Reform is not a modern concept. A Confucian scholar-official of a Chinese imperial dynasty could well believe that society as it existed was in need of improvement. The idea that a

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid p. 140.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p. 145.

<sup>68</sup> Cheng Xiaoqing, “The Bloody Dagger” (血匕首) in *Cheng Xiaoqing's 'The Huo Sang Files'* (程小青霍桑探案), p. 1. Translation mine.

<sup>69</sup> Timothy Wong, “The Shoe” In *Sherlock in Shanghai*, p. 44.

virtuous official has an obligation to improve his people and in extremity refuse to serve corrupt superiors is one with a long lineage in the Confucian tradition. Huo Sang fundamentally differs from the heroes of *gong'an* fiction in rejecting the idea that there is a correct way to govern and structure society. While a Judge Di story might begin by proclaiming that if “a judge is honest, then the people in his district will be at peace, their manners and morals will be good. All vagabonds and idlers, all spreaders of false rumors and trouble makers will disappear, and all of the common people will cheerfully go about their own affairs”<sup>70</sup> the presumption is always that the upright magistrate is guiding those under his authority towards some sort of ideal state. Huo Sang does not do this. Huo Sang questions. When he sees his trusty companion Bao Lang fretting over the contemporary phenomenon of young men and women posting notices in the newspapers announcing their decision to cohabit or break up rather than going through the “feudalistic practices of marriage by barter or compulsion or parental arrangement” he is quick to assure him that “there’s no need to be so serious” and that “once a massive dike that has held for thousands of years is broken down by overwhelming waves of modern thought, it inevitably releases a powerful burst of wild crosscurrents” and that there is no point getting upset over it.<sup>71</sup> Huo Sang recognizes that many new and often frighteningly radical things need to be tried to find a better way for the fledgling Republican Chinese society and that it is okay to make mistakes in the process and nothing to condemn or feel shame over. Whereas a Judge Bao story begins with an omniscient narrator’s description of the crime, the criminal and an explanation of his motives and ends with a description of his punishment and often his fate in the underworld, Huo Sang stories oftentimes end with the master detective ruminating on how unfortunate it is that otherwise good people find themselves caught up in the shifting tides of societal upheavals

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Van Gulik (trans), “The Double Murder at Dawn” in *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee (Dee Gong An)* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> Timothy Wong, “The Other Photograph” in *Sherlock in Shanghai*, pp. 45-46.

well beyond their ken and unsure exactly what should be done to make things right. On an even more basic level Huo Sang recognizes that while some systems and structures may produce a better life and a healthier society than others, there is no correct way. Rather than seeking to lead people to some predetermined ideal Huo Sang holds up science as a means to create better ways. There is no perfect to Huo Sang, but the good is real and very much worth working towards.

## Conclusions

The Huo Sang stories are interesting as much for how they cleave to the Holmesian model as for how they swerve. While Cheng Xiaoqing saw the detective as a symbol of modernity and reason, the character of Sherlock Holmes and by extension the character of Huo Sang had clear parallels with earlier works of popular Chinese literature. Unlike his contemporaries in Chinese literature like Lu Xun, Cheng Xiaoqing advocated a blended modernity that neither wholly rejected tradition nor accepted that everything the West had to offer could or should be transplanted to China, even if the premise of his stories was specifically to transplant a Holmes-style consulting detective in a Chinese city that had no such detectives. Just as other iconic heroes of British literature and legend, such as “Arthur with sword and round table meaning martial fraternity” and “Robin Hood with bow and greenwood setting to symbolise the force of anti-authoritarian morality” survived the period and social classes that gave them rise to be adapted again and again in myriad other times and places “Holmes with magnifying glass and London fog had attained the same status, epitomising the rational hero who resolves urban disorder.”<sup>72</sup> The fact that readers in China’s most modern and Westernized city avidly consumed these stories for over a decade shows that there was an audience that wanted just such a balancing of old and new; a modernity with Chinese characteristics one might call it. While often overlooked in favor of the intellectual elite and the political movers and shakers, the voices of these ordinary urbanites are unique in their connection to and ability to speak on both sides of the issue, being neither poor and ignorant nor rich and out of touch. If we are to truly understand this critical juncture in Chinese history these voices must be sought out and heard,

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<sup>72</sup> Steven Knight. *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, p. 104.

and we can begin to do so by looking at what stories attracted them enough to spend their limited money and leisure time.

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