

A Glimpse of Newspaper Fiction from *Union Press* (Nanyang Zonghui Xinbao): 1924 to 1928

Mei-Kao Kow

Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore, Singapore
Email: kowmeikao22@yahoo.com

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Abstract

What we can expect for fiction from the *Union Press* in this period 1924-1928 under study was my primary concern when I carried out my research of fiction from the *Union Press* from 1917 to 1923. Contrary to my expectation, new political developments that took place in Chinese Mainland coupled with economic decline in Malaya affected the production of Singapore Chinese fiction writing; language change in the Sinophonic world plus the pressures from local newspaper competitors aggravated the sharp situation. In referring to tales of ghosts and foxes, surprisingly in this period under study, *Liaozhai* and Pu Songling were vividly associated. The *Liaozhai* imitation carried on with some innovations in scope, especially the fresh appearance of the plot of the black fox and its fur. Other rare demons such as morning glory and banana demons are included. It appears that the intention in publishing these stories changed from asserting belief to drawing attention to these parapsychological phenomena. As they are mythological and religious in nature, it legitimizes the author of this paper to discuss them separately. Since the linguistic styles of *wenyan* and *baihua* by that time were getting closer, the emergence of more *baihua* stories signalled that a new scenario was about to emerge although lagging slightly behind. The *wenyan* fiction is more traditional or historical, while *baihua* stories are more contemporary with modern writing techniques. With Lin Qinnan's translations of Western fiction into *wenyan*, the gap between *wenyan* and *baihua* fictional writings is somewhat narrowed. So it is logical to consider both forms together for discussion. The majority of stories are about love and marriage, including cross-racial marriages (although these are limited in number). Tragedies often occurred as new women clashed with traditional ethical thinking. War fiction which condemned the cruelty of fighting and disclosed human nature is touching as well. The editors shared their efforts in organizing the stories so that enhancement of meanings could be achieved. This is reflected in the affiliated information published here and there with an intention to explain, e.g., martial skills stories reflected the need for self-defence in all walks of life in the

then chaotic China and overseas Chinese communities. The *Union Press* somehow carried on its innovative spirit in this period. Its innovation extended to some advertisements, which are significant in terms of art and theme. The classification of genre and sub-genre was meticulously rigid all along; after the disruption of the North Expedition, most classifications were abolished and some of the *congfan* or small talk columns were opened up to include foreign matters, as a result blurring certain distinctions.

Keywords

Union Press, *Liaozhai* Imitation, Black Fox and Its Fur Coat, Flower Nymphs: Banana and Morning Glory, Demons of Paintings: Sparrow and Horse, New Women: Freedom, Love and Marriage, Civil War Tragedies, Advertisement as a Fictional Form, Initial Tendency of Blurring Distinctions between Sub-Genres, Some Features of Early Singapore Chinese Newspapers

1. Introduction

The local newspapers had *baihua* (colloquial) articles or fiction in their supplements even before 1911, but were comparatively limited in number. After 1919, a great number of newspaper supplements/magazines in Chinese Mainland in the same period adopted *baihua* as a medium of expression. But for local newspapers in Singapore, especially in the case of the *Union Press*, in terms of the language use, *baihua* takes up around 30% of its supplement while *wenyan* (classical/literary) takes up 70% throughout this period under investigation. It shocked the author of this paper that the *Union Press* in the middle of 1928 carried forward its rival contemporary, the *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh's* supplement “*The Wasteland Island*”, a full page of *baihua* articles and fiction. No reasons were given. It looks like it pre-warned its readers of changes ahead but after that, no

¹The two carry forward supplements of the “*Wasteland Island*” are dated 26/7/28 and 8/8/28 in *Union Press*. My latest readings have discovered that in Hong Kong in August 1928, a *baihua* pure literature magazine entitled *Companion* or *Banlv* appeared. Traditionally Singapore and Malaya Chinese newspapers looked to Hong Kong since the colony was also under British rule. It was said that Hong Kong’s culture was based on Guangdong’s culture, and was the melting pot of Eastern and Western Cultures, but the impact of the 1911 Revolution on it was not huge. The publication of *Companion* or *Banlv* marked the beginning of Hong Kong new literature (Ding, 2013, p. 396). 1928 is generally regarded as the beginning of Revolutionary Literature by Hong Kong’s Literary Society. To what extent it influenced Singapore newspapers has yet to be explored. Parallel checking of Mainland publications of similar period is important. Zhu summarises the three introductions to the fiction volumes of *Chinese New Literature 1917-1927* without saying anything about war fiction. Mao Dun did complain that the scope of early fiction writing was limited and fiction in this period did not fully reflect the reality. The absence of war fiction in the anthology was thus apparently answered, but when I re-read Mao Dun’s Introduction, I discovered there were five pieces of fiction by Wang Sidian, three on native towns while the last two were war fiction. One of them is included in the *Series* (Zhao, Vol. 3, p. 12 and 284-293); the piece entitled “A Bullet” is not available to me. This somehow shows that civil war fiction did appear although it was disproportionately reflected in the Series. 1928 is regarded as the beginning of Revolutionary Literature by the first *Sequel to Modern Chinese Literature Series: 1918-1927* (See Chang Junshi’s introduction to *A Sequel to Chinese Modern Literature Series: 1928-1937*, Vol II, 1968, Literary Research Society). Many other literary historians share the same view.

changes especially in language usage took place.¹ In fact, the oldest Chinese newspaper in Singapore, the *Lat Pau*, though believed to be rather conservative, keeps a 46% to 54% ratio, somewhat closer to a balanced proportion in its language usage in its supplement at the beginning of 1928.² But my random check of the first two days at the end of December 1928 of *Lat Pau*, the proportion of *baihua* in its supplement shoots up to even 75% against 25% in *wenyan* language. This random check somehow shows the language trend for the *Lat Pau*.³

One of the *Union Press* contemporaries, the *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* (the *Nanyang Siang Pau* is not available to me during the Covid pandemic period), looks like it advocates and favors the use of *baihua* ever since its inception in 1919. The first extant issue in 1919 has an editorial in *baihua*, but when I look at its other news reports, most of them were in *wenyan*, a fashionable literary style initiated by Liang Qichao in the 1900s. I must say if you take away the particles in the *wenyan* news reports, whether in the *Union Press* or its contemporaries, the *baihua* and *wenyan* styles are similar. So I think the issue of *wenyan* and *baihua* is less significant in Singapore Chinese newspapers during the transitional period.⁴

Another matter needing clarification is their different stances. The *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh* in Singapore follows strictly KMT's policies, which is why the *Union Press* accused it of being a KMT Party mouthpiece when there was a great debate sparked by the publishing of an article in the *Union Press*. In the "Notification" column in the *Sin Kuo Min Jit Poh*, the paper states it focuses on "Real Estate and Education" while the *Union Press* in its similar column states its stance is "above politics" (*chaoran*) and "as long as reports/articles" are not offending or ideology than on the treatment of *wenyan* or *baihua* usage.

The *Union Press* at first was the Qing royalists' newspaper. At the time in the Republican period, it changed and adopted this "sur-political" stance (close to neutrality is my intuitive impression of it) and could occasionally clash with the Republican orthodox views).

1924 and 1925 were productive years for fiction in the *Union Press* in this period of study. 1926 shows severe disruptions of China's Northern Expedition (civil war), which lasted for two and a half years. Until the *Union Press* resumed its normal functioning after about a year and a half, fiction was overlooked, and classification of the fiction or articles practically stopped. In 1928 right to the end of the period, we begin to see the fiction genre appearing but without sub-division. No reasons were given. Could it be due to financial problems as the economy of the colony in general was in decline?

The other contemporary of the *Union Press* is the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, established in late 1923, re-organized in 1924, and owned by Tan Kah Kee (1874-1961), whose rubber industry and subsidiaries flourished although the colony's economy (Malaya's) at the time was declining.⁵ The *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, owned by Aw

²The *Lat Pau* published in 1881, but the extant copy starts from 1887.

³This is a rough average of statistics for the first few days in the beginning of 1928.

⁴The Republican Government issued orders in 1920 that the *baihua* be used in schools.

⁵See Tai, 2018: pp. 199-202, 237-273.

Boon Haw (1882-1954), is beyond the scope of this investigation. Aw was successful in his medical business. It should be noted that Aw Boon Haw advertised regularly for his medical products in the *Union Press*.

The writing techniques of *wenyan* and *baihua* fiction were also closer by this time because translated Western fiction by Lin Qinnan (1852-1924)⁶ was widely available in this transitional period. I must say the modernity of fiction in the *Union Press* cannot be expected as very avant-garde to the extent of betraying the Aristotelian mimesis.⁷ But it is indeed fresh and innovative. Themes of fiction are comparable to Mainland Chinese fiction: they are of serious types, no eroticism, no radical or chauvinistic sentiments ever appeared,⁸ but instead, a kind of multi-racial and harmonious sentiment begins to emerge. Some of the fiction writers were from China (some few of them are established), and some are Chinese sojourners in South East Asian countries, especially from various states of Malaya.⁹ Evidence shows that some of them are *Union Press* staff and readers.

In this paper, apart from those listed as fiction in the *Union Press*, the author of this paper includes some of *biji* logically defined by Liu, Z.¹⁰ and others such as advertisements as fiction as well. In fact, some of the local news can be distilled into fiction. The journalistic nature of fiction and its fluidity in morphology facilitate creativity in the writing approach. So far the author of this paper hasn't made any attempt to make distillation.

2. *Liaozhai* Imitation Style

2.1. Demonic Foxes, Their Types, Elements and Characteristics

The major outcome of this research is the appreciation and recognition of the

⁶Lin was the first major translator of Western literature into Chinese, with the collaboration of a couple of friends who were proficient in foreign languages; by the way, I have to add the Western works translated were not always masterpieces in the West. Dr. Reinsch in his book entitled *Intellectual and Political Currents in the East* (1911, Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.), criticized the Chinese situation by comparing the translated titles with those of the Japanese. I support his judgment as most of the Japanese translated materials such as the French authors Flaubert and Maupassant and the Russian writers Dostoyevsky as well as Gorki, etc., by today's standard are still regarded as canonical (Zhao, 1935, pp. 352-353).

⁷See Cunliffe, 1987: pp. 356-357.

⁸See Qian, 2008: pp. 38-59.

⁹Guo Huifen quoted Qiu Shuyuan's Preface to his own book entitled *Talks at the 500 Stones Cave*, where Qiu recorded the Chinese emigrant writers as the core among local writers (Guo, 2015: p. 89.) This is especially so during the later periods in the 1930s (Guo, 2015: p. 89). Some anonymous pieces of this period under study could be writers in China whose works were carried forward under special arrangements. Similar study by Li Kui reveals that out of out of the 128 pieces of the fiction in the *Lat Pao* (*Lat Pau*) for the period under his study, 35 pieces or 27% were carried forward from Mainland China's Chinese newspapers (Li's MA dissertation "A Preliminary Exploration of Singapore *Lat Pao* Newspaper's Chinese Fiction 1887-1919", p. 31, quoted by Guo (2015: p. 89). I have similar experiences when I did a study of the fiction in the *Chong Shing Press* (*Zhongxing Ribao*) where it appeared there were mutual agreements for exchanging pieces between the newspapers.

¹⁰I follow the definition of *biji* fiction (Liu, 2009). Liu has a comprehensive study of the developmental concept of *biji* fiction in modern China, which includes strange stories and monstrous tales and anecdotes about human beings, and must be very short as well as in classical language (See Liu, Z. (2009, Sept. 1) "Identifying the Genres of *Biji* Fiction and the Research Done on Them" <http://guoxuewang.com>, which is adopted by the author of this paper as a criterion for his analysis.

extensive influences of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. The author also has discovered that both editors' and authors' interest in foxes and ghosts changed gradually from appreciation to drawing attention to their psychical and parapsychological phenomena.¹¹ The author of this paper intends to treat the *Liaozhai* genre as a separate entity, not mixing with the themes and artistry of other stories under discussion.

The appearances of Fox stories are scattered across the period. The imitation of *Liaozhai* took place even before this period under study, and initially the writer of this paper passed lightly over these. But the *Liaozhai* generic stories in this period are somewhat unusual and surprisingly appeared right until the end of the period under study. Some stories are imitations of *Liaozhai* with a little twist in the plot, but quite a substantial portion are innovative either by adding new elements to the stories or by expanding their scope.

“Wang Mengmei” by Xueqin dated 12/5/1925 depicts the romance of a fox with a human being. Because of their sincerity and true love, when the male protagonist knows that his lover is a vixen, he is neither afraid nor unhappy. Their romance ended when the vixen knew would she only become a concubine because the protagonist was married (a pioneer women's liberation view appeared in Pu Songling's stories).¹²

Black foxes¹³ appeared in this period in at least two cases. In the first instance a black fox demon was mentioned in preface to the writings of a high ranking monk who was very well versed in the *Three Teachings*. He recalled that when he was secluded in Zhongnan Mountain (in Shaanxi), he wanted to live in a cave, where most travelling monks would opt to live. This place was always being haunted by foxes. As the monk was highly respected, when he wanted to move in, the black fox turned up, revealing its true appearance before disappearing. It looked like it wanted to say farewell to the venerable monk. The following piece is on a black fox. It appeared in a *biji* note where a black vixen romance was portrayed. That black fox helped the Great Yu regulate floods in ancient times. She spent 600 years in cultivation and had acquired the ability of shape shifting. She transformed herself into a lady and befriended two brothers down the hill. When these two brothers discovered that she was a vixen, they tried to capture her by grabbing her fur coat. Without her fur, she could not escape. Here we can see how the fur was so important to a fox. Other foxes who would cultivate themselves to become immortal, treasured their pearls very much. This is probably my first time seeing pearls being substituted for furs, for a vixen. Thus we can see some development of fox stories. New elements were

¹¹The author of this paper is aware that some of the *Liaozhai* imitations were attacked by Zhixi (Luo Jialun) for their bad influences as early as 1918 (Zhao, 1935: Vol. II pp. 351-352). But interests on reading and research on *Liaozhai* are lingering on (Hu, 2020). *Foxtreal Legend* is extensive and original work with a rather different perspective and is good for further reading on this subject.

¹²See Gu, 1988, *On Strange Stories from Liaozhai Studio or Liaozhai Zhiyi and Its Author Pu Songling*, p. 259-271.

¹³Pu Songling looks like he is not particular about colour of foxes. But in fact most of the foxes in *Liaozhai*, judging by their characteristics and power are black, which tallies with the research results of Li Jianguo (Li, 2002: pp. 6-30, 42-52, 160-255 and 312-314).

added where the fox breathed out a lotus flower.¹⁴ Vixens all along in Chinese culture are permissive and sexually indulgent. But in a certain story, this was not the case. The story dated 17/12/25 in the *Union Press* is one of the examples. Is it the case that the romantic characteristics of foxes henceforth have changed? I guess it would require the support of a skillful great master to turn this trend and the time has not yet come. In Youlong Guanzhu's story of a vixen dated 20/2/25, the author expounded the vixen's characteristic stealing skills. A certain man by the surname of Lin was once able to learn the skills of stealing from a vixen. He acquired the techniques but his mentality was too greedy. He succeeded in stealing some goods a couple of times. During his last attempt, he hurt his foot and when he returned home, he vomited blood and died soon after. The appreciation for this old story had turned into a moral.

2.2. Foxes Haunting

Traditionally foxes are cunning and mischievous, be they Chinese foxes or Western foxes as exemplified by *Reynard the Fox* (Anonymous, 1100).¹⁵ There is a record of fox haunting by (Jiaqing (Wu Xianzi), 1924). He was an important editor with the *Union Press* whose surname was Wu, popularly known as Wu Xianzi.¹⁶ This piece is dated 5/8/24 briefly records three occasions when fox haunting took place. The first case took place at Yixing in the Taihu lake area where a recluse saw a demonic-like thing appearing, but in actual fact, it was a mountain elf. The second one took place at Changzhou, a city at the middle of Shanghai and Nanjing, where a 30-year-old candle manufacturer was haunted by a vixen. The final story recorded a fox, apparently male, who haunted a woman. Evidently fox hauntings were common in the Jiangsu Province. This piece is also very important to prove that the *Union Press* editors participated in the *Union Press's* fictional creativities. Wu Xianzi was the second editor identified, while the other two were Jizhe (real name unknown), who had obviously one piece of fiction written in this period, and Liang Xiangfan.¹⁷

2.3. Demonic Floral Nymphs, Painting Demons et al.

As for flowers nymphs, more varieties were added such as pomegranates (Anonymous, 1925). No author is indicated for this piece dated 29/8/25. This is the first instance of extension. In the story, when Scholar Cheng Ken realized it was

¹⁴This piece dated 19/22/25 by Yi Ming, the *Union Press*.

¹⁵See Avery, 2020.

¹⁶The NUS Library keeps three of Wu's books, namely *Zhongguo Minzu Zhuyi* or *Chinese Democracy*, (1957, Hong Kong: Freedom Press), and other titles such as *Kongzi (Confucius)* and *Guoxue Gailun* or *an Outline of Chinese Studies*. The details of the latter two titles are not provided.

¹⁷Guo Huifen's list (Guo, 1999) does not include these two authors. But her list could provide some clues for tracing the identities of those anonymous writers, and for counter-checking with published catalogues for writers of this period under investigation. The author of this paper has yet to find time to do this challenging checking task. Liang was very active in the *Union Press* even before this period. He wrote editorials more often but occasionally a few pieces of fiction. By the end of this period under study, he was on sick leave, but I believe he was still in power directing the *Union Press* during this period.

a demon, he used peach wood to nail the tree, a method commonly adopted to pacify demons and ghosts in ancient China.

“Morning Glory” dated 12/7/26 depicts a flower nymph. Although flower nymph haunting was not new, this work expanded the content and varieties of this genre.

Some flower nymphs are elevated to the status of Goddess. For instance, a piece entitled “Flower Goddess” dated 23/10/24 depicted scholar Wang of North Shaanxi, who liked horticulture very much. One day, he encountered a young lady accompanied by her brother. He introduced himself and said that his sister had a predestination relation with him. Later they flew the secluded place. Wang at first thought they must be poisonous foxes. After the encounter, when Wang sat for the imperial exams, his essay was highly evaluated by the examiner, and Wang suddenly realized it was the efforts of the Flower Goddess.

The addition of banana demons to the genre surprised me as China was not a typical origin of banana production. I have been monitoring for demonic stories for a number of years, yet I just came across one such piece. This is the second one I came across after so many years. Like the Indian cultures where tales on banana were plentiful, South East Asian countries once influenced by Indian culture,¹⁸ and I won’t be surprised to find South East Asian banana demonic stories equally fascinating.

2.4. Other Demons

There were other demons such as “Eight Steeds” where a horse ran out from a painting to help its owner to tide over his financial difficulties, and “Sparrows” where the sparrows in a painting flew out of the painting to chase off a thief. Chinese parasol tree and plume tree were occasionally appeared in the fictional writings of this period under study.

2.5. Ghosts

The *Union Press* had less fiction on ghosts, but it did publish some of this genre.

Wu Xianzi in his *Notes* (Jiaqing, pen-name of Wu Xianzi) dated 4/12/24 said that east of Tianning temple in Beijing, there was an old battle field haunted by many ghosts. Having no other alternatives, many travelling monks who had difficulties in finding lodgings opted to live there and carried on their meditation. One day when they practiced meditation, they saw a ghost. Skeptically these

¹⁸Banana is sacred in Hinduism. For instance, Kadali Plant, a variety of banana mainly grown for temple offerings, is considered auspicious by the Hindus, particularly by the followers of Vishnu and Shiva, as the plant is believed to be the incarnation of Parvati, the wife of Shiva and Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu. The Kadali plants, and particularly its leaves are considered sacred for purposes of religious ceremonies and entire plants are placed at the entrance of houses for marriage... to symbolize fertility and plenty... The plant deity is called Navapatrika, who is worshipped as Lakshmi and is also placed in front of a Bilva tree and worshipped for invocation of Durga, sometimes also associated with the Sun God. Durga or Lakshmi is worshipped mainly by women for the gift of a child’s prosperous life and a husband. (See earthstoriez.com/India-banana). For story Banana Goddess, see KidsGen.com: the Banana Goddess; for Southeast Asian stories such as Banana Tree Spirit of Thailand, see Nang Tani, thailandinsider.com.

monks made an investigation. To their surprise they found out that the ghost was just a broomstick. Wu Xianzi sighed over this incident that monstrosity was just a psychological fact.

An anecdote dated 6/1/25 tells of a worker by the name of Zhang Erhu who was not a ghost believer especially when he was in a state of semi-drunkenness and was bold enough under the power of alcohol. But when he was soberer, he was actually very scared. Apparently after an incident of coming across a ghost, thenceforth he did not dare to commit or take up any duties for others. This man's attitude towards ghosts was actually not ambivalent.

All these reports drew readers' interest to spooky phenomena. In one such fictitious story entitled "A Ghostly Villa" dated 18/9/25, at the end of the story the author said this might provide good research material for parapsychologists.

In the "Notes of Wushizhai" dated 28/3/25, the author said when one was suspicious, invisible ghosts would appear. This was to try to explain the psychology towards ghostly phenomena.

Despite of all these clarifications, ghostly news was intermittently reported. There was a news scrap dated 18/4/25 concerning ghost news in Shanghai.

A story on a ghost claiming for military costume was published on the *Union Press* on 22/2/28 and a court retrial of Platoon Leader Na's ghost was carried out and was reported on 6/3/28.

3. Themes (Apart from Those Fox and Ghost Stories)

In this section I have blurred the distinction between literary fiction and modern fiction when I see some similarities and fewer differences between the two types. This accidentally coincides with Liu Yong's and Liu and Li's methodology as they advocate for a holistic view in their study of fiction, and oppose the confrontational or antagonistic duality of *wenyan* and *baihua* and want to study the relationship between the two styles,¹⁹ as I mentioned in a note earlier on. Apparently this view is influenced by Foucault and the school of structuralism. This could spark off a new direction for writing a new history of Singapore and Malayan Chinese literature,²⁰ and I won't be surprised to see that in the near future. I have heard a new local project for writing 100 years of Chinese literature, and this is encouraging.

3.1. Martial Skills

Many pieces were on martial art. One might be tempted to treat these pieces lightly if one is not interested in or knowledgeable about martial art. China's security in those days was extremely poor especially in Guangdong province. This was repeatedly revealed in the *Union Press*. Thus self-defense was needed to protect one's own safety and property. These stories were on various related

¹⁹Liu, 2013: pp. 324-329, 367-373; Liu & Li, 2015: pp. 1-10.

²⁰As time passes, understanding of the history Singapore-Malayan Chinese literature has become deeper and wider as new perspectives are added, from realism to include modernity, from modernity to cover post-colonialism, and structuralism. This represent a natural progress.

subjects ranging from sheer skillful martial art to learning attitudes and to various types of people, male or female, practicing the art, and/or martial art and morality. If one knows this historical background, one would not pass over these stories lightly. The author of this paper is apologetic as he is no *kongfu* learner nor can appreciate and properly evaluate the cleverness of the practitioner.

Some of these stories are as follows. For instance, a martial article dated 13/5/25 first had an archaeological study of various schools of martial art, which shows the *Union Press's* efforts in providing its readers with background knowledge. Another piece in *biji* form entitled “Drum Dance Girls”, dated 5/6/25, recorded northern martial art groups typically the Shaolin school.

Many pieces were classified as “Martial Art Short Pieces” not as *biji* or *congtan*. This vividly shows the authors’ and editors’ casual intention on the distinction between the *biji* and *congtan* with short fiction. The author of this paper blurs this distinction to include some *biji* and *congtan* as fiction as well.

There are pieces denoting dark examples of martial art practitioners, for instance a piece dated 1/5/25 portraying a renowned practitioner in the Suzhou area who was an alcohol addict and was violent and sexually indulgent. This individual ended his life in complicated poisoning.

Some pieces were classified as “*Ji Duanpian*” (extremely short piece) such as the one dated 16/10/24. These were scattered over the supplements.

3.2. Freedom, Love and Marriage

These themes take up a high percentage of all fiction in the *Union Press*. Many of the woman themes were less on gentleness/femininity or on avant-garde women’s liberation. Women’s status was raised constitutionally in the early Republican era, and massive works on women were published in response to the trend but probably over generalized to prove that women were not a weaker gender in terms of martial art. Many women were praised for their traditional virtues. The stories tried to explore what was true love. One or two pieces even allowed polygamy where love was sincere and genuine.

Many works of fiction portrayed the conflicts especially between new women professionals in the case of trainee teachers confronted with hierarchical forces, but often they were too weak and fragile and usually ended up in tragic suicide. These were severe social phenomena at that time.

A few pieces reflected the ignorance of naïve “new women” who misunderstood the concept of freedom and as a result they were fallen. These stories were used as warnings to young females.

One or two pieces uniquely portrayed interracial marriages with a series of serious conflicts. These could be regarded as good reads in their own right.

3.3. War Fiction²¹

This group includes also wars in classical times and those of the late imperial China. A few pieces portraying the contemporary civil war were good pieces.

There was no ideological or partisan bias but simply depiction of the cruelty of war. The conscience of human beings was finally revealed.

A piece entitled “Charging: An Episode of a Civil War” dated 3/12/24 was written by Jin Mingsheng. The story tells of a father being killed by his son in battle. Apparently the father and the son were from different camps. The killing took place when both sides engaged in fierce fighting and a young man killed his opponent—but when he heard a familiar voice calling his name he discovered that the man was his father.

There was one piece where a couple was separated by a civil war and the wife became a nurse caring for wounded soldiers. Coincidentally one day she came across a wounded soldier, who was none other than her husband. Coincidental happiness and reunion took place in those dark and saddened days healing the doomed lives.

Relationships torn by war could be another sub-theme. A piece entitled “A Wounded Soldier Who Rejected Medical Treatment” dated 23/3/25 was written by He Tianyan. The story depicted the civil war which caused great destruction and ruined many houses. The wounded soldier was a young man whose armpit was pierced by bullets and physically he was in much pain and distress. He refused to be treated and begged to end his life by gunshot. After his death, they searched his pocket and found a torn letter vaguely revealing it was sent from Yangzhou. It looks like his parents expected him to bring home his military pay and provisions and get married to a girl who didn’t want his gifts and dowry. They could live happily together apparently his parents’ dreams were broken by his wounds and his penniless situation. In such an awkward condition life to him was meaningless. The doctors deciphered that those could be the reasons why he refused treatment and ended his life.

4. The Artistry of Other Stories Apart from Foxes and Ghosts

4.1. Perspectives

The artistry of fiction in the *Union Press* of this period carried forward what was

²¹According to the study conducted by Zhu (Zhu, 2009: pp. 63-73), it looks like there was no war fiction in the *Modern Chinese Literature Series: 1917-1927*. From the three introductions she summarises, I can see why civil war fiction was absent in the anthology due to its limited scope. Zhu summarises the three introductions to the fiction volumes without saying anything about war fiction. Actually Mao Dun did complain that the scope of early fiction writing was limited and fiction in this period did not fully reflect the reality. The absence of war fiction in the anthology was thus apparently answered, but when I re-read Mao Dun’s Introduction, I discovered there were five pieces of fiction by Wang Sidian, three on native towns while the last two were war fiction. One of them is included in the Series (Zhao, Vol. 3, p. 12 and 284-293); the piece entitled “A Bullet” is not available to me. This somehow shows that civil war fiction did appear although it was disproportionately reflected in the Series. Hence the *Union Press* coupled with other local newspaper supplements were not alone to condemn civil wars. Singapore anthologists, who model upon the format of *Modern Chinese Literature Series: 1917-1927*, do mention war fiction (Fang, 1970: Vol. 2, pp. 1-8). The introduction by Fang Xiu concludes that the fiction of this period is basically realistic in creative mode. Initially some fiction was particularly focused on structure. In the second phase (1924-1927), war fiction was mentioned and has reached a certain high level of maturity. Fang Xiu’s periodization of fiction in the *Malayan Chinese New Literature Series*, Vol. 3, tallies with what I have observed. (Fang, 1970); Li Tinghui’s anthology does not cover this early period. (Li et al., 1971)

generally being practiced by modern fiction writers. First person was used but very few writers adopted this viewpoint except one or two stories. In the piece entitled “The Poor She”, the protagonist recalled 15 years ago when they were young. She lost her dignity and was shy to see her childhood friends.

Adopting the first-person view makes the facts appear more real and fresh for the readers. But a third-person omniscient, all-knowing and all-capable narrator was adopted for most of the stories.

4.2. Plots

Linear development was the norm for both the literary and the colloquial stories. Flashbacks were hardly used. Conversation was applied to move the plot forward. Sentimental expressions and portrayal of scenery were seen both in literary and colloquial stories. However, the latter appears to have been used more often. Open-ended conclusions are rare in literary stories. This approach is more often used in modern short stories. For instance, in “On the Freedoms of Females” dated 1 /8/24, the work ends abruptly.

Again *medias res* is adopted combined with psychological portrayals, makes the stories look like a piece of prose. Yes, they are a true early form of fiction and as the morphology of fiction is fluid, who knows what fiction will look like a century later.

4.3. Advertisements²²

One significant feature of artistry of the stories under this period of investigation is the application of advertisements, although this was randomly used and was not within the consciousness of all fiction writers.

There was a piece of advertisement inserted for Yongantang’s Hexigrams Elixir of Tiger Balm Company that condemned fake medicines and was classified in the genre of “documentation of facts”. The same advertisement appeared consecutively for a few days. This example was followed by another medical company and though this particular practice did not survive for long, the spirit lingered on. In my previous examination for ICAS11, we saw rules and regulations being used as a form of fiction.

A divorce announcement was inserted in the advertisement column dated 23/11/27 in the “*Shisheng*” Supplement affiliated to the *Union Press*. LS told LD her marriage to him was miserable and it was like living in hell. She had decided to leave him and was going for further studies to acquire new knowledge so as to live independently—a way of achieving male-female equality. LS’s reply also appeared in the advertisement column. Both advertisements combined together can form unexpectedly, an epistolary fiction. The unintentional written forms

²²In the section “The Art of Advertisements and Its Effect and the Translation of Foreign Children’s Literature”, the volume touched extensively on advertisement and book launches, though the example given were slightly later than these few in the *Union Press*. Liu and Li state that famous writers like Lu Xun and Ba Jin had made use of advertisements for book promotion. (Li and Li and Wan, 2017: *A Chronological History of Chinese Modern Literature*. Culture and Art)

could be recognized for that aim. Advertisements for book promotion began to be very popular in 1928 in China and I wonder whether these advertisements—fiction pieces—took inspiration from Chinese Mainland advertisements.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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