Paper Swordsmen

Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel

John Christopher Hamm

University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu

© 2005

miss), a contemporary romance narrated in the first person.[9] Also adopting the narrative strategy of the diary, and making colorful use of Cantonese for its dialogue passages, is part 319 of *Shigougong ziji* (The personal diary of Shigougong), a tragicomic account of the vicissitudes of Hong Kong life signed by Shigougong, a pseudonym of the prolific San Su.[10] Veteran historical novelist Hu An contributes installment 117 of *Tianguo yingxiong* (Heroes of the Heavenly Kingdom), a tale set during the Taiping Rebellion.[11] Tang Ren's epic fictionalization of Chiang Kaishek's career, *Jinling chunmeng* (Fleeting dreams in Nanjing), is in its third year with installment 864.[12] And rounding out today's "Arabian Nights" is part 15 of *Yumian hu* (The jade-faced fox), an illustrated novel (three panels with accompanying text) of romantic intrigue in contemporary Hong Kong.

The international struggles of the Cold War era, and the tensions between the Nationalist and Communist governments in particular, dominate the news. The dominance is evident not only in the subjects of the front-page reports but in their provenance (international wire services) as well. Within the pages of the newspaper, however, the Chinese nation's struggles on a global stage play themselves out against a decidedly local fabric woven of advertisements, police reports, readers' reminiscences, sports coverage, and weather bulletins. While such items offer neither comprehensive coverage nor detailed analysis of Hong Kong affairs, and while the *Xin wanbao*'s textual potluck offers no more of an integrated account of the world than does the daily newspaper of any other time and place, the materials made available here allow the possibility of contemplating Hong Kong's place in a multilevel narrative of personal and political events.

Another striking aspect of the newspaper's textual materiality—previously noted in our discussion of the Chen-Wu match—is the haziness of the boundaries between information and entertainment, fabrication and reported fact. The two types of material do not merely coexist on the newspaper's pages but actually seem to seep into one another. Particularly striking in this regard are Tang Ren's fictionalization of China's contemporary history, sandwiched between the modern romances and historical fantasies of "The Arabian Nights" supplement, and the world-affairs section's presentation of a traditional-style novelization of the events of the Second World War.[13] But there are equivalent slippages as well between *The Jade-Faced Fox* or *Diary of a Hong Kong Miss* and the melodramas reported in the local news, while the rambling first-person narrative of *The Personal Diary of Shigougong* seems as close to reportage as to fiction.

It is within this jigsaw puzzle of fiction and fact, of world events and local ephemera, of the recollected past and the still-unresolved present that Jin Yong's *Book and Sword* makes its debut; and it is in this context that we must seek to understand the novel's contemporary impact and the particular slice of representational terrain to which it stakes its claim.

Book and Sword: The Empire and the Borderlands

Book and Sword, set during the reign of the Qianlong emperor, relates the adventures of the Red Flower Society (Honghuahui), a secret brotherhood devoted to aiding the oppressed and resisting the Manchu invaders. Early in the tale the band escorts the young hero Chen Jialuo from the northwestern wilderness, where he has been in training, back to the Chinese heartland so that he may assume leadership of the Society after the former chief's mysterious demise. Battling to free a brother of the Society captured by the Qing soldiery, the Society joins forces with a Muslim tribe whose sacred Koran has been seized by the Manchus. The captured brother turns out to hold the key to a potent weapon in the struggle against Qing rule. He knows of proof that Qianlong is not the late Yongzheng emperor's son, but a Han Chinese by birth, Chen Jialuo's own brother, substituted as an infant for a daughter born to the former emperor. After various adventures, the Red Flower Society captures the emperor. They confront him with the proof of his origins and exact his promise to declare his true birth, expel the Manchus and eradicate their customs, and reinstate a native Han dynasty. The emperor delays taking action, though, and then demands that Chen Jialuo surrender to him his beloved, the beautiful Princess Fragrance (Xiangxiang gongzhu), daughter of the Muslim chieftain. Chen Jialuo, torn between love and duty, finally agrees. But the princess soon learns that Qianlong intends to betray the Red Flower Society, and she kills herself in order to warn her beloved. Chen Jialuo and his comrades fight free of the emperor's ambush, pay their final respects at the princess's grave and flee for the wilderness beyond the northwest passes.

The preceding summary does little justice to the eight-hundred-page *Book and Sword;* it gives no hint of the varied pleasures of language, imagery, and narrative spectacle offered by the work, and, even in terms of plot alone, elides the multiple subplots, individually complex and dizzyingly interwoven, into which the narrative irrepressibly expands. But as the warp to the subplots' woof, and as the central enunciation of themes on which the sub-narratives play variations, the tale of Chen Jialuo and the Qianlong emperor provides a valid first point of approach to the novel's reimagining of the material of martial arts fiction.

As the summary makes clear, *Book and Sword* utilizes a number of situations and images familiar from martial arts fiction in the Guangdong School tradition. One of the Guangdong School's essential premises, the enmity between Han and Manchu, is enshrined in the Red Flower Society's anti-Manchu mission. The Society's very name evokes the Red Flower Pavilion, at which, according to Guangdong School tales and secret-society lore, the survivors of the razing of the Shaolin temple pledged their continued resistance to the Qing.[14] Although the brothers of *Book and Sword's* Red Flower Society are not themselves Shaolin disciples, the late Yu Wanting, the Society's founder and Chen Jialuo's godfather, once served as a novice at the southern Shaolin temple. The need to unravel the mystery of Yu's departure from Shaolin takes Chen and his comrades to the temple at a crucial point in the plot. And even a version of the archetypal tale of the temple's destruction finds its way into Jin Yong's work: during the climactic battle, as the Red Flower Society strives to fight its way free of the emperor's ambush, the Shaolin monks come to their rescue, reporting as they do so that the emperor's troops have burned their monastery to the ground. The figure of the Qianlong emperor provides yet another link with the Guangdong School tradition. Although the villainous and cowardly ruler of *Book and Sword* is a far cry from the swaggering autarch of *Everlasting*, in scenes portraying Qianlong disguised as a merchant and dallying with the courtesans of Hangzhou, Jin Yong draws on the earlier novel, or at least on the legends on which it too was based.

Yet the differences between *Book and Sword* and a typical Guangdong School yarn are vast. One of the most basic is Jin Yong's recentering and revitalization of the theme of Han-Manchu struggle. Guangdong School fiction carries but dim echoes of the role this ethnic distinction played in the revolutionary politics of the early part of the century; it employs the antagonism, on the one hand, as a celebration of southern allegiances and, on the other, as a sort of Manichean paradigm, allowing the distribution of characters into clearly defined camps of good and evil, engaged in endless battle. The feuds waged against this background often develop into personal or interschool rivalries that neither directly challenge the fact of Manchu rule nor question the terms of the defining paradigm. Jin Yong's novel, in contrast, re-foregrounds the struggle between Manchu and Han, posing as the key element of its plot a crisis that could bring about a radical resolution of the question of dynastic authority. This foregrounding of dynastic crisis constitutes one of the most obvious links between the content of *Book and Sword* and its immediate textual and sociopolitical environments. On a certain level this yarn of a turning point in the exercise of imperial authority cannot help but resonate with the recent change of regime on the mainland, which had so profoundly affected the lives of Hong Kong's residents, new and old, and the still perilous military and political aftershocks that were reported on the front page of each day's paper. Of course the fact that the dynastic struggle in *Book and Sword* is waged between two different ethnic groups, one of which is portrayed as a foreign interloper, raises the possibility of associations with the Chinese nation's struggles against imperialist aggression, or more immediately with Hong Kong's own status as a British colony. The political and cultural implications of Hong Kong's colonial status are unquestionably relevant to an understanding of Jin Yong's work. We cannot overlook the fact, nonetheless, that for readers in Hong Kong in the 1950s, one of the first associations invoked by *Book and Sword*'s tale of dynastic struggle might be the recent civil war.

Setting the question of specific political resonances aside temporarily, we may take note of another significant aspect of *Book and Sword*'s portrayal of the Han-Manchu conflict: the fact that it personalizes this conflict in the relationship between Chen Jialuo and the Qianlong emperor. This personalization of the Han-Manchu struggle is one aspect of the overall reorientation of the novel toward emotional and psychological drama, which is almost universally cited as one of Jin Yong's major contributions to New School martial arts fiction. Jin Yong's works replace simple blood feuds and power struggles with plots revolving around complex and conflicted relationships; focus on protagonists' moral and psychological responses to these conflicts of loyalty; display an interest in romantic melodrama at least as great as that in martial conflict as such; and interweave the martial with the psychological, utilizing even martial training and battle as vehicles for the exploration of identity and relationship. All of these features are present in *Book and Sword*, if in some respects less developed than in the author's later work. Scenes of battle and adventure abound, but a good part of the novel's immediate appeal to its readers seems to have rested on the tragic romance between Chen Jialuo and Princess Fragrance, Chen's conflicting attractions to Fragrance and to her sister Huo Qingtong, the struggle for Fragrance's affections between Chen and his imperial brother, and the myriad similar romances, rivalries, and crises of loyalty played out among the novel's supporting characters.[15]

What is most significant for the present argument is the way in which the novel's interest in personal melodrama and psychological exploration encompasses even the theme of dynastic struggle. Major portions of the narrative are devoted to the revelation (both to the reader and to the char-

acters) of Qianlong and Chen Jiaoluo's relationship, and to the brothers' encounters in a succession of shifting guises and circumstances—first incognito, then with the emperor a captive of the rebel leader, finally with Qianlong reinstated to the power and privilege of the Forbidden City. The brothers' rivalry for the affections of the Muslim Princess Fragrance both heightens the conflict between them and further motivates the narrative's focus on their emotional (rather than merely political or martial) lives. The novel places the fate of the empire in question, yet presents the political as subsumed by the personal; the crisis is experienced, solutions sought, failure confronted, on the level of interpersonal loyalties, moral choice, and psychological experience.

Still another element of *Book and Sword*'s foregrounding of the struggle for dynastic control is a geographic imaginary rather different from that of Guangdong School fiction. The novel's geography is, first of all, much larger in scope, encompassing not merely the Guangdong heroes' haunts in Guangzhou and Fujian, but a China vast in scale, ranging from the southeastern seaboard to the land beyond the northwestern passes, and varied in environment, incorporating the roadways and taverns of the traditional Rivers and Lakes, the palaces of Beijing, the bustling cities of the lower Yangtze, the scenic wonders of West Lake and Haining, the desolation of the Central Asian deserts. The conflation of the struggle for China with the representation of the Chinese landscape finds expression in a variant title under which the book has circulated: *Shujian jiangshan*, literally "Book and sword, river and mountain," *jiangshan* being a conventional metonymy for the empire.[16] In addition to being expanded in scope, the novel's geography also exhibits different conceptual demarcations. Guangdong School fiction's primary geographic allegiances are to local cultural and linguistic centers; in the background looms a more general consciousness of cultural differences between north and south China (differences easily made to dovetail with the Manchu-Han feud). While the North-South division and certain regional allegiances still appear in *Book and Sword*, perhaps the most significant of this novel's geographic conceptualizations is the opposition between the interior and the borderlands.

The lush landscapes of the interior constitute both the emotional heartland of the Han Chinese and the locus of dynastic authority, while in the sere wastelands beyond the passes roam the culturally alien and politically marginalized nomad tribes. These two geographic domains and their associated peoples define the interlocking plot lines, political and romantic, that embroil the novel's protagonist, Chen Jialuo. The political crisis lies in the fact that a people from beyond the borders, the Manchu, has seized possession of the Chinese heartland. The novel opens with two secondary characters, Li Yuanzhi, the daughter of a military commander in the northwest, and her tutor, Lu Feiqing. Lu is a former member of an anti-Manchu brotherhood, who "fled to the far-off borderlands" when his band was destroyed and eventually found concealment in his position as a tutor (10). When Li's father is rewarded with a coveted post back in Zhejiang province for his successes against the Muslim tribes of the region, the young girl, who has "lived since childhood in the border regions of the northwest," is overjoyed at the prospect of seeing the "fair mountains and clear waters of the South," and her old tutor, "long absent from the interior," is equally pleased to accompany her (20). Returning to the heartland after years of exile, Lu Feiqing is moved to recite a lament by Xin Jiaxuan (Xin Qiji, 1140–1207), the Southern Song poet and hero of resistance against the Jin invaders. "This lyric," muses Lu, "is like an inscription of my own heart's feelings. He in his day was the same as I, with the flourishing realm of China fallen to barbarians before his very eyes" (21). When the barbarians enter the passes and seize control of the heartland, Han Chinese loyalists such as Lu or Chen Jialuo find themselves driven out tc the borderlands. In this respect, the border regions share a certain range of significance with the Rivers and Lakes, the traditional realm of exile anc inversion.

Lu and his young disciple soon encounter both the Red Flower Soci- ety, escorting their new leader back from beyond the passes for his destinec confrontation with Qianlong, and a band of Muslim tribesmen, seeking the sacred Koran seized from them by the Qing. Thus it is that these lesse characters lead us toward the primary strands of the tale; and thus it i that the stage is set for Chen Jialuo's own meeting with the Muslim tribe His romantic entanglement with the chieftain's two daughters (he eventu ally settles his heart on the younger, Princess Fragrance) echoes in th romantic mode the male Han protagonists' displacement from the cente and search for allies in the borderlands that we have seen in the politica sphere. When the emperor becomes infatuated with Princess Fragranc and seeks to win her affections away from his brother, the inversion o heartland and borderlands becomes extreme; Qianlong has a replica o the Princess's home, complete with sand dunes and camels, constructe within the confines of the Forbidden City itself. When Chen Jialuo meet with Princess Fragrance one final time to inform her that he must leav her for the sake of the nation, it is only fitting that their tryst be at th

Great Wall, a symbol both of China's grandeur and of the boundaries between the lands within and the lands without on which its existence depends.

The dialectic between the empire's center and its borders, and between the peoples of these two locales, also enters into the novel's treatment of the martial arts. The martial arts play a more limited role in *Book and Sword* than in Jin Yong's later fiction. As we shall see in the following chapter, the later novels devote considerable narrative attention to the gradual and often tortuous process of the protagonist's training, employing the martial arts as the medium for a bildungsroman of emotional and moral growth. In *Book and Sword*, descriptions of combat constitute an important part of the narrative, and expertise in the martial arts is crucial to both the identities of individual characters and the relationships between them. But the protagonists' martial development as such is not a major part of the story; they enter the tale with their basic skills already perfected.[17]

The primary instance of a breakthrough in martial ability in the course of the narrative occurs when Chen Jialuo, Princess Fragrance, and Huo Qingtong, pursued by a horde of wolves and a band of determined foemen, take refuge in an ancient city hidden in the depths of the western deserts. They soon find themselves trapped in this necropolis together with the skeletons of its ancient inhabitants. Among the bones of what was once the Muslim damsel Mamir they find an account, written in her dying blood, of how she and her comrades sacrificed their loves and lives to free their people from the foreign (non-Muslim) tyrant who held sway over the citadel. Mamir's narrative brings Chen Jialuo to the realization that his romantic entanglement with the two sisters has distracted him from his mission of expelling the Manchus, and he vows to emulate this Muslim heroine and set his personal affairs aside until the grand enterprise has been achieved. Chen Jialuo and the others learn from Mamir's testament that the map which has brought them to the hidden city was originally from her hand. They learn too that instrumental in Mamir and her companions' struggle was a Chinese book from which her lover Ali divined a mysterious martial skill that allowed him to defeat the tyrant's minions. Seeking this lover's remains, Chen Jialuo discovers a second text, written in ancient Chinese characters on bamboo strips:

> Chen Jialuo's heart leapt; but then he saw that the first line was: "In the northern darkness is a fish, the name of which is Kun." Looking it over, he saw that the strips all contained the [ancient philosophical work] *Zhuangzi*. He had thought at first that it might be some wondrous text, but this *Zhuangzi* was something he had learned by heart as a child. He couldn't help feeling a bit disappointed. "What's that?" asked Princess Fragrance. "It's one of our ancient Chinese books," said Chen Jialuo. "These bamboo strips are antiques, but they're of no use to us. Only an antiquarian would be interested in them." He tossed them to the ground, and the bamboo strips scattered. They saw then that one in the middle looked different from the rest; each character was marked with a tiny circle, and there were several words in an ancient Muslim script as well. Chen Jialuo picked it up and saw that it was the section "Bao Ding Carves the Ox" from the third book of the *Zhuangzi*. He pointed to the Muslim script and asked Princess Fragrance, "What does this say?" She answered, "'Herein may be found the secret to destroying the foe.'" Chen Jialuo was puzzled: "What does that mean?" he asked. Huo Qingtong said, "Mamir's testament says that Ali found a Chinese book and used it to figure out how to defeat the enemy with his bare hands. Maybe it was these bamboo strips that he found." "Zhuangzi preaches renouncing desire and obeying Heaven," said Chen Jialuo. "It has nothing to do with the martial arts." (720)

Under the sisters' continued questioning, however, Chen experiences a revelation. "He knew the *Zhuangzi* by heart, and it had seemed to him that there was nothing novel about it; but now, prodded by someone who had never read the book at all, he felt as if a window had been thrown open to the light." He divines the principles embodied by Zhuangzi's peerless butcher and their relevance to martial practice and realizes furthe that the postures of the fallen Muslim warriors hold the key to the techniques they used against their foe. Imitating the skeletons' poses, he himself masters the esoteric martial techniques and later uses them to defea his most formidable opponent.

Densely interwoven in this episode are several themes central both t *Book and Sword* and to the subsequent corpus of Jin Yong's work. Chen Jialuo's derivation of fighting techniques from a written text which is not pe se a martial arts manual posits a deep resonance between the practice o the martial arts and the communicative functions of a literary text. The lit erary text is further located—by the repeated reminders that this is "a Chi nese book" (literally *Hanren de shu*, "a book of the Han Chinese"), by th specific identity of the text as one of the recognized classics of the Chines literary tradition, and by its physical configuration as an article of recog nizable, even emblematic antiquity (bamboo strips)—within the matri of a Chinese cultural tradition, of which textuality and antiquity are mutu

ally implicated signifiers. An ancient Chinese cultural heritage constitutes the root of which the martial arts and the literary tradition are flowers, and for which they both serve as vehicles of transmission.

The picture presented is more complex, though, than a simple fusion of the martial arts, textuality, and the Han Chinese cultural heritage. We may note, first of all, that the text is a necessary but not a sufficient source of Chen's realization. Although he divines the principles from the read and remembered words of the text, in order to fully realize his new techniques he must additionally resort to visual and somatic cues—examining the postures of the long-dead warriors and mimicking their motions with his own body. We may note too that the Han Chinese tradition remains inert until stimulated by non-Han factors. Chen Jiaoluo's very familiarity with the literary tradition allows him to dismiss the *Zhuangzi* as a known quantity. It is only the unexpected rediscovery of the text in the unfamiliar environment of the deserts beyond the passes, the annotations in a foreign script, and the promptings of his non-Han comrades—"illiterate" at least in the sense of being completely untutored in the Han Chinese linguistic and literary canons—that stir him to a realization of this Chinese text's potential. It is significant too, given the novel's representation of a world in which patriarchy rules as firmly in the Rivers and Lakes as it does in the court, that the unlettered non-Han who prompt the scholarly Chinese hero's realizations are also females. Finally, we must note that the *Zhuangzi* is only one of the two texts appearing in this episode. The ancient Chinese text offers Chen Jialuo the key to the development of martial prowess; but it is the testament of the Muslim woman, written in her own blood, that moves him to redevote himself to the duty of political struggle. Political aims and martial prowess may be yoked together in Chen Jialuo's dedication of his powers to the anti-Manchu cause; but the fact that his twin realizations are sparked by two separate texts—one Chinese, male-authored, and philosophical; the other non-Han, female-authored, and narrative in character—implies the potential dissociation of martial ability, as such, from any particular ideological commitment.

Our examination of this episode allows us to refine the earlier discussion of Han and non-Han peoples and their placement within the novel's fictional geography. Given that the Manchus, a people from the empire's periphery, have usurped control of the heartland from the Han Chinese and sent the Han heroes into exile beyond the passes, the borderlands and the deserts beyond clearly serve as the territory of dispossession and displacement. The scene in the lost city, however, makes it clear that this

displacement can paradoxically lead to a reinvigoration of the central tradition. The ancient Han text inscribed on the bamboo of the verdant heartland yields its secret fruits only when reencountered in the desert wastes. And its mystery is glossed in a "Muslim script": for if the Manchus embody the outlands' dispossessive aspect, the Muslim tribes here represent their fructifying potential.

The fact that the two sisters and their long-departed predecessor, the Muslim damsel Mamir, are instrumental in Chen Jialuo's rediscovery of his mission and mastery of his martial skills alerts us to the circumstance that the borderlands' antithetical possibilites vis-à-vis the male Han protagonist—threatening on the one hand, regenerative on the other—are further differentiated in terms of gender. While the Muslims are portrayed as dauntless warriors led by a patriarchal chieftain, the most prominent Muslim characters are female, the chief's two daughters. The exotic and erotic allure of this non-Han people is epitomized in the love feast that Chen Jialuo encounters when he seeks out the tribe, at which the Muslim maidens take the initiative in choosing their romantic partners (chapter 14). The most prominent representative of the Manchus (even if his parentage is in fact Han), and Chen Jialuo's chief foe, is a male, the emperor. The only notable female presence among the Manchu characters is the cold and scheming dowager empress, asexual by reason of her age, a "mother" who is revealed as having no biological relationship with her supposed son, but who succeeds in turning Qianlong against his natal brother when he wavers over assenting to Chen Jialuo's plans.

The dialectic of heartland and borderlands—the "Central Plains syndrome [which] represent[s] a hierarchy of cultural differentiation derived from geographic, territorial, and cultural boundaries between the mainland core and the outlying periphery"[18]—structures the central elements of *Book and Sword*'s plot and themes. It shapes the contours of its narrative as well, in a fairly obvious fashion: the story moves from the border regions into the heart of the empire, at the beginning of the novel, and makes a final exit with the heroes' westward ride on the last page. To a certain extent the lands encircling China's central plains are coterminous with the Rivers and Lakes, both as a terrain of political exile and contention and as the discursive home ground of the martial arts novel's narrative activity. But with the novel's conclusion—the characters' departure from the field of discourse—the lands beyond the passes become borderlands in an even more radical sense. They mark the regions into which the narrative does not enter, into which the protagonists fade once their love

have ended in tragedy and their dreams of national salvation, in betrayal. What is it that lies outside the geographical scope of the empire's Rivers and Lakes and beyond the martial arts novel's narrative range? How do these invisible regions shape the terrain, both diegetic and discursive, on display in the novel's text? Jin Yong's second work of martial arts fiction, *Bixue jian*, offers clues for further exploration of these questions.

Beyond the Borders: *Royal Blood*

Bixue jian (titled in English as *The Sword Stained with Royal Blood* and hereafter referred to as *Royal Blood*) was serialized in *Xianggang shangbao* from January 1 through December 31, 1956. It is set at the time of the Ming dynasty's fall before an uprising led by Li Zicheng and the invasion of the Manchu Qing. The narrative is organized around the adventures of Yuan Chengzhi, the fictional son of Yuan Chonghuan (1584–1630), an historical Ming general distinguished for his successes against the Manchus but executed by the Chongzhen emperor at the urging of opposed factions at court. The novel's young Yuan Chengzhi, raised in exile by his father's loyal followers, becomes the pupil of the martial arts master Mu Renqing. In addition to learning the arts of his master's Huashan School, he studies the *Secret Scroll of the Golden Serpent (Jinshe miji)*, a manual of esoteric martial arts he discovers with the remains of the mysterious Jinshe Langjun (Young Lord of the Golden Serpent). Yuan Chengzhi descends from his master's mountain lair and joins forces with the rebel leader Li Zicheng, intending to avenge his father by assassinating the emperor. In his travels he befriends a wayward and oddly beguiling young scholar, Wen Qing. He eventually discovers that Wen Qing is in fact a young woman, Wen Qingqing, the daughter of none other than the Young Lord of the Golden Serpent, between whom and the villainous elders of the Wen clan stands a history of bitter and bloody feuding. Yuan bests the Wen elders and heads off with Wen Qingqing for further adventures, interweaving the rivalries between and within the various schools of *wulin* ("the Martial Grove," i.e., the world of the martial arts) with resistance against the despotic Ming regime, the Manchu invaders, and traitorous eunuch factions at court. Li Zicheng's armies finally take Beijing, and the Chongzhen emperor commits suicide; the convoluted affairs of the Huashan School and of the Golden Serpent's legacy likewise draw toward a conclusion. Just at this juncture, the wife of Li Yan, Li Zicheng's most trusted lieutenant and Yuan Chengzhi's sworn brother, appears on the scene to report that the Ming general Wu Sangui has opened the mountain passes to the Manchu armies, Li Zicheng is in retreat, and Li Yan has been framed by a rival and sentenced to execution. Yuan Chengzhi rushes off to save his comrade, but arrives too late. Disconsolate, he gathers his remaining companions and sets off for an island in the southern seas; there, he hopes, they can begin a new life.

How does Yuan Chengzhi know of this island? During his adventures he has encountered a troop of Portuguese soldiers who are escorting a battery of Western-made artillery to Beijing. The foreigners are arrogant, contentious, and armed with deadly pistols and muskets. They are accompanied by a jewel-bedecked European beauty who excites Wen Qingqing's envy, and by a Chinese interpreter who uses the status conferred by his association with foreigners to abuse his countrymen. Believing the Ming emperor will use the cannon against the Manchus, Yuan Chengzhi tells his comrades to leave the Portuguese in peace. When he learns that the weapons will be directed against Li Zicheng's uprising, however, he destroys the cannon and captures their escort. The Portuguese captain is shocked to hear that his artillery was to be used against the oppressed people of the empire. Moved by Yuan Chengzhi's chivalrous spirit, he presents him with the map to the southern isle:

> "Rather than fight on so bitterly here, you would be better off leading the hungry and oppressed common folk of China to this island." Yuan Chengzhi smiled to himself, thinking, "This foreigner has a good enough heart, but he doesn't know how vast China is. No matter how large this island of yours may be, it will never hold our hundreds of millions!"[19]

At the end of Yuan Chengzhi's tale, though, as he despairs over the Manchu victories and Li Yan's ignoble death, it is the sight of this map that kindles his ambition to set forth and make a new home for himself and his followers.

In *Royal Blood*, as in *Book and Sword*, the protagonists' adventures among the Rivers and Lakes of the empire end with their departure for a land beyond China's borders.[20] Here, though, the departure is elaborated far beyond the simple westward ride that concludes the earlier novel. Yuan Chengzhi's sailing off for a southern island evokes precedents in such classic treatments of *xia* material as the Tang *chuanqi* "The Curly Bearded Stranger" and Chen Chen's *Sequel to the Water Margin*. Yuan's fate also evokes the historical precedent of the Ming general Koxinga (Zheng

important on the affective level, perhaps, is the fact that it is a profoundly familiar terrain.

Since these tales' concern is displacement, the heroes' homeland lies outside the boundaries of the narrative as such. *Water Margin*'s Mount Liang appears only briefly in the first installment of *Beyond the Sea;* when, in the final episode, the characters set off for the interior, they exit the narrative's discursive domain, and the story perforce must end. To say that their homeland is familiar terrain, then, is perhaps less to the point than to say that it carries the connotation of familiarity. It is precisely the assumed familiarity, the "homeliness," of this absent homeland that allows the tale's protagonists, and through them the reader, to experience Hong Kong as alien. Within the boundaries of the narrative proper, the sense of familiarity is borne by the characters themselves. The heroes from Mt. Liang, the eccentric Daoist Lü Dongbin, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and the rest of the company from *The Journey to the West,* would all be familiar to this fiction's readers, from the Ming and Qing novels recounting their exploits, from more recent fictional adaptations, from storytelling and operatic versions and radio broadcasts of the same, and from countless other renditions in both traditional popular cultures and the modern mass media. The recognition they evoke in the reader combines personal history (familiarity since childhood), a broad sense of cultural tradition, and a more specific association with the traditional literary and artistic genres in which these characters appeared. The comedies of displacement mobilize this recognition in at least two directions. On the one hand, the characters and their implied homeland offer a familiar and positively identified ground from which to mock and critique the absurdities of modern life in Hong Kong. On the other, the characters' familiarity gives latitude for the staging of their own shortcomings. Ignorance or ineptitude in dealing with the modern colonial city is both humorous and excusable in these beings from another realm; displays of lust or anger are simultaneously deplorable and welcome as the signature traits of old companions.

The Discursive Terrain of New School Martial Arts Fiction

The comedies of displacement give us one perspective from which to understand the shape and contemporary significance of Hong Kong's New School martial arts fiction. Beyond, or perhaps prior to, the attractions of plotting, characterization, and prose style, works such as *Book and Sword* and *Royal Blood* offer the more fundamental appeal of a compelling

chronotope—the Rivers and Lakes of a mythicized Chinese past. If fiction such as *An Agent's Diary* offers a narrative of Hong Kong society in the 1950s and 1960s, and the comedies of displacement satirize this world by introducing characters from another, then the New School martial arts novel may be thought of as presenting a vision of that second world in its pristine state. The often-advanced claim that the figure of the knight-errant *(xia)* and the world in which he moves have an immemorial appeal for the Chinese reader does not sufficiently account for the martial arts novel's rebirth at this particular time and place. An aura of "immemorial appeal" is indeed a crucial element of New School martial arts fiction; but this aura is less an ahistorical given than a part of the deliberate evocation of tradition that lies at the genre's heart, and that assumes a special significance in the particular cultural environment of post-1949 Hong Kong.

The clearest evidence of the relative discursive positions of the comedies of displacement and martial arts fiction is the fact that characters from the latter genre can themselves be deployed in the staging of a displacement farce. From February 21 through June 20, 1960, Jin Yong's own fledgling newspaper *Ming Pao* serialized the novel *Honghuahui qunxiong nao Xiangjiang* (The heroes of the Red Flower Society raise a ruckus in Hong Kong) (hereafter *Red Flower Society*). An "Editor's Introduction" on the first day of publication presents the piece as follows:

> Mr. Jin Yong's martial arts novel *Book and Sword* has received an enthusiastic welcome from its readers. Each one of the ten or more heroes of the novel's Red Flower Society—Chen Jialuo, Wuchen, Wen Tailai, Yu Yutong, and the rest—is given a distinctive personality, "like a living dragon appearing in the flesh." The present work employs a comical style and imagines that these heroes have arrived in Hong Kong, where they become embroiled in a variety of adventures. The tale is exciting and unique. The author, Mai Xuan, narrates it in the person of Chen Jialuo's page, Xin Yan, bringing us even closer to the action.

The motivation for the journey to Hong Kong is Chen Jialuo's yearning for Princess Fragrance. The final pages of *Book and Sword* show the heroes visiting her tomb and finding it empty but for a lingering perfume; as *Red Flower Society* opens, the group decides to seek the lost princess through all the "fragrant" places of the earth. They save the "fragrant harbor" of Hong Kong for last because of the overwhelming number of "fragrant" hotels, restaurants, banks, and so forth within its tiny area. While

the Society's strategist, Xu Tianhong, pores over the itinerary, prepares a press release for their arrival, and awaits a telegram from Jin Yong confirming their travel plans (which the author is slow in sending, busy as he is with writing his next novel), the impetuous swordswoman Zhou Qi hurries down to Hong Kong on her own. There she puzzles over her hotel's practice of charging by the hour, samples the sickly sweet liquors at the bar, and before long has become involved in the affair of a bar-girl's stolen racing ticket. The other members of the Red Flower Society eventually arrive for a series of adventures that, in the standard mode of the displacement farce, play their chivalry and ignorance against the colony's modern amenities, curious Western ways, and cutthroat pursuit of personal gain.

The existence of such a story makes clear the affinity between the New School heroes' native environment and that of Zhu Bajie, Lü Dongbin, and other "displacement" protagonists. This affinity may be, in part, one of genre, indicating the close association of the martial arts novel with traditional forms of fiction. Its primary register, however, is cosmographic: Chen Jialuo and his comrades come from the same "place," in some sense, as the heroes of the displacement comedies. A sequence of serializations in *Xianggang shangbao* provides a fortuitous illustration of this point. *Beyond the Sea* concludes, as we have seen, on September 30, 1953, with the *Water Margin*'s heroes leaving Hong Kong on a bus bound for the interior. The following day the paper's fiction supplement begins the serialization of Mou Songting's *Highwaymen of Shandong*, an adventure set during the late Qing period in the *Water Margin*'s home province of Shandong. *Highwaymen of Shandong* is succeeded in January 1956 by *Royal Blood;* and this novel ends, on the last day of the year, with the protagonist on board a ship bound for what sounds uncannily like Hong Kong.

The symmetry between *Beyond the Sea*'s heroes departing their tale for the interior and *Royal Blood*'s protagonists departing theirs for an island to the south neatly suggests the identity, on a conceptual level, of the characters' homelands. At the same time, though, it also dramatizes the relationship between this homeland and the two genres' quite divergent discursive projects. When the *Beyond the Sea*'s protagonists set out for Shandong, the curtain falls on their story, for their role in this work is to enact a tale of satire and burlesque that is predicated on the very fact of their finding themselves in an alien land. Yuan Chengzhi's story ends, in contrast, at that moment when he turns his back on the Chinese mainland; for the New School martial arts tale is a story of China proper, the middle kingdom, the unassailable center of cultural authority.[41]

If the displacement comedy's business is the staging of cultural disorientation, the New School martial arts novel's is the nostalgic recreation of a Chinese culture envisioned as whole and unchallenged. To say that this fiction's imagined China is "whole and unchallenged" as a cultural entity is not, of course, to claim that it is free from conflict. The Rivers and Lakes are by definition the unstable and often violent regions of society; and in a strand of the martial arts tradition that stretches from "The Curly-Bearded Stranger" to the New School novelists, this innately dangerous terrain further serves as the ground for struggles over political control of the empire. Yet in the world of the New School novel neither the violence nor the political contest imperils the cultural hegemony of the Chinese tradition. To the contrary, conflict provides the occasion for the performance of what is, in the discourse of martial arts fiction, the cultural tradition's consummate manifestation: the practice of the Chinese martial arts. *Royal Blood*'s Portuguese soldiers, whose weapons threaten both the empire's political balance and the supremacy of China's martial practices, are the exception that proves the rule.[42] Foreigners with such radically disruptive potential reappear in Jin Yong's oeuvre only with his final novel, the consciously iconoclastic *The Deer and the Cauldron*. In his other works, as in the vast majority of New School fiction, the various roles played by foreigners (whether non-Han subjects of the empire or peoples from beyond the borders)—as objects of mockery, horror, or erotic allure; as hungry aspirants to the dragon throne; as supporters and nurturers of Han protagonists and Han traditions—all tend to reaffirm the paradigmatic centrality of the Chinese state and Chinese cultural identity. The colonial presence that haunts the comedies of displacement makes itself known in New School martial arts fiction primarily through the fervency of its disavowal.

That this impregnable cultural China be imagined as temporally and spatially distant from the Hong Kong of the mid-twentieth century is obviously a necessity. It is not so much that the absence of modern technology and competing cultural systems allows the supremacy of traditional Chinese arts as that the Chinese cultural tradition, epitomized in the martial arts, stakes out an imagined territory in which other cultures and technologies lack any right to issue a challenge. And yet the world portrayed by Hong Kong's New School novelists is not an entirely mythical realm Jin Yong, Liang Yusheng, and other Hong Kong writers of the late 1950s and early 1960s almost invariably provide their tales with concrete histor-ical backgrounds. Their contemporaries in Taiwan, where a body of Nev

School martial arts literature also emerged during the 1950s, generally avoid defining historical settings, instead placing their tales in an unspecified and apparently timeless past, and often in a self-contained world of Rivers and Lakes thoroughly divorced from the affairs of court and the institutions of ordinary society. These choices reflect the Taiwan novelists' skirting of painful political realities and their care to avoid government censorship. The Hong Kong authors' predilection for moments of historical crisis, in contrast, given room for free expression under the British colonial government's laissez-faire policy toward the arts, suggests the extent to which this literature, for all its fantastic tendencies, is also informed by a sense of political and cultural urgency generated by the ongoing crises in China and the Cold War world at large.

Also useful for clarifying the shape of and motivations behind the Hong Kong New School's imagining of its world is the contrast with the works of the Old School master Huanzhu Louzhu. This author set several of his novels at the moments of dynastic crisis favored by the New School writers: the Manchu conquest of China in his epic *Shu shan jianxia zhuan* (Legend of the swordsmen of the mountains of Shu, 1932–1949), the Mongol invasion in *Liuhu xiayin* (The hermit knights of Willow Lake, 1946). In Huanzhu Louzhu's tales political disaster occasions the protagonists' flight to remote mountains, the habitation of grotesque monsters and swordsman-immortals with preternatural powers, and it is within this transcendent world that his stories unfold. In Hong Kong's New School novels, as we have seen, the hero's withdrawal to an overseas island or beyond the mountains signals the conclusion of the tale. The milieux of Huanzhu Louzhu's novels, however turbulent, are far removed from the sufferings of the empire; but it is these sufferings themselves—the crises that set the fate of the nation adrift among the perilous and unstable borderlands of society—that make up the Rivers and Lakes of Hong Kong's New School. The New School novel's imagined world is shaped by both the nostalgic invocation of an idealized cultural past and the anxious awareness of precisely those political and historical contingencies that make the nostalgic vision so appealing.

While chapter 2 reviewed New School fiction's immediate predecessor, the martial arts tales of the Guangdong School, and ended with a Guangdong School hero's appearance in a comedy of displacement, this chapter's further exploration of the displacement comedies, as well as of Jin Yong's earliest novels, has illuminated the shift from the Guangdong School's imaginary world to that of Jin Yong and his contemporaries. It is the intersecting visions of the Chinese nation as an immemorial cultural entity and as an imperiled political body that move Jin Yong's novels away from the more parochial concerns of their Guangdong School predecessors. Guangdong School fiction's fascination with local heroes, personal rivalries, and regional culture make its world too narrow to serve as a vehicle for the expression of an "émigré discourse of centralizing nationalism."[43] More importantly, perhaps, the concreteness and continuity of its ties with the local community preclude the establishment of that distance so essential to the imagining of an idealized Chinese past. Having touched on differences between the settings, plots, and characters of Guangdong and New School martial arts fiction above, we may now consider, as a final illustration of their divergent concerns, the variance in their respective linguistic registers. Jin Yong, Liang Yusheng, and their imitators reject the Guangdong School's Cantonese-inflected prose in favor of a standard vernacular braced with colorful four-character phrases and studded with conscious archaisms. Their models are the classics of premodern vernacular fiction (*Water Margin*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, etc.) and the works of the prewar Old School authors. The New School's prose thus epitomizes the undertaking of the novels as a whole: the envisioning of a world projected into the past, supported by the cultural authority of a venerable tradition, and implicitly but emphatically distinguished from the realities of life in contemporary Hong Kong. There exists no better testimony to the importance of the linguistic register in the New School's imaginative project than the role that language plays in *Red Flower Society*'s cultural burlesque. Here language serves as a medium for the comedy of displacement both on the narratorial level, where the text makes play of Xin Yan's leaps from hackneyed classical tags to Cantonese vernacular, and on the diegetic level, where the visiting heroes' unfamiliarity with contemporary slang leads to scandalous misunderstandings.[44]

Led by the works of Jin Yong and Liang Yusheng, New School martial arts fiction vaulted to a popularity far beyond any ever enjoyed by the works of the Guangdong School. It did not immediately or completely replace this earlier mode of martial arts fiction; *Sing pao* continued to serialize Zhongyi Xiangren's tales well into the 1960s, and even Jin Yong's own *Ming Pao* carried fiction by Woshi Shanren in its early days.[45] But while Guangdong School fiction maintained its modest niche, New School works proliferated rapidly, often claiming first billing in the expanding fiction supplements of the late 1950s and early 1960s. On January 1, 1957, *Xianggang shangbao* began its serialization of the work that was to solidify Jin Yong's reputation as the new master of martial arts fiction, *The Eagle-Shooting Heroes*. On March 29 of the same year, the paper began running

Huang Hanxi and Hua Qiao's *Huang Feihong shifu zhuan* (The story of our master Huang Feihong), a series of biographical anecdotes reminiscent of those published by Zhu Yuzhai in *Gongshang ribao* some ten years earlier. This feature appeared not in the fiction supplement but alongside local news and sports. Such placement is only logical, given the anecdotes' supposedly factual basis; nonetheless, Huang Feihong's retreat to the sphere of local interest illustrates the extent to which the Guangdong heroes have ceded the imaginary empire of martial arts fiction to the new creations of Jin Yong and his peers.

Chapter 4

National Passions

From *The Eagle-Shooting Heroes* to *The Giant Eagle and Its Companion*

With *The Eagle-Shooting Heroes* and *The Giant Eagle and Its Companion*, Jin Yong's fiction emerges more confidently from the nurturing and shaping soil of its contexts to assert a new distinctiveness and independence. This independence manifests in multiple modes: thematic, institutional, and critical, and it is the articulation of the new thematic vision that is the primary focus of this chapter. These two novels represent the consummation of that heroic nationalism expressed through a dialectic of heartland versus geo-cultural margins, which hints at an underlying consciousness of exile. At the same time, they reveal the coalescence and increasing dominance of a second vision: an essentialized and celebratory Chinese cultural identity. Gradually extricating itself from the dynastic and territorial concerns that govern the early works, this vision of identity locates itself within a timeless, mandala-like mythic geography; simultaneously, it asserts the priority of individual emotional experience—expressed above all in romantic relationships—over political and ethnic allegiances.

If the early works' consciousness of loss and displacement can be termed exilic, the later novels' vision might be described as diasporic. The word "diaspora" is close in sense to "exile" in its earliest usages; recent discussions, however, have differentiated the two on the basis of diaspora's more constructive aspects:

> The key contrast with exile lies in diaspora's emphasis on lateral and decentered relationships among the dispersed. *Exile* suggests pining for home; *diaspora* suggests networks among compatriots. Exile may be solitary, but diaspora is always collective. Diaspora suggests real or imagined relationships among