

The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph)



During the centuries of its popularity, early Chinese vernacular fiction was never adequately preserved or even documented. The great popular appeal of the short stories saved them from oblivion, but it was only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that they were first collected and published. Mr. Hanan's erudite study is the first thorough attempt to uncover the history of the Chinese short story. Using a variety of techniques, but principally that of stylistic analysis, the author solves the fundamental problem of dating the stories in terms of periods. He is able to place each story in one of three broad categories, early (ca. 1250-1450), middle (ca. 1400-1575), and late (ca. 1550-1627), and to assign some of them to the earlier or later part of the time span. In many cases he offers evidence of sources and influences, place of origin, and possible or probable authorship. On the basis of the author's research, it is possible to see in minutely researched detail how the short story developed in China, what kind of men composed it, its relationship to other kinds of literature, and the main social preoccupations with which it deals. The results of Mr. Hanan's study are vitally important to all scholars of Chinese literature. Historians and linguists will also find it valuable as a model of the innovative use of stylistic analysis.

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