MAKING IT STRANGE: THE TRAVEL WRITINGS OF WANG SIREN

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I. *Milieu and Zeitgeist*

One of the late Ming authors of *xiaopin* 小品 or prose vignettes, Wang Siren 王思任 (1575-1646) was greatly admired, even among his contemporaries, for his travel writings, out of which some fifty pieces are extant today. A collection of travel notes published during Wang's life-time that established his reputation in the subgenre was entitled *Calls for Travel* (*You huan* 《遊唤》), which details a two-month journey in his native Zhejiang (Chekiang) in the year 1610, in thirteen pieces of various length. Another collection also in print when he was alive, *The Travels* (*Li you ji* 《歷遊記》), consists of fifteen pieces that chronicle his numerous trips in the Southland (Jiangnan), most notably at Lake Taihu and along the Yangzi, in the Shandong area (Mt. Taishan and the Confucian temples), and Mt. Wutaishan in the Shanxi province. The posthumously published collection of both prose and poetry, *Vignettes as Literary Meals* (*Wen fan xiaopin* 《文飯小品》), in addition to many shorter pieces from the two earlier collections, includes another twenty pieces not found therein, mostly about trips to places in the Southland. [1]

Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), widely respected as a leader among literary circles of the period, wrote a preface for *Calls for Travel* which contains the frequently cited observation:

> Famous mountains and great rivers represent only one portion of the two expanses of water and earth. Their rotation in fame and obscurity depends largely on the Wheel of Wind. What is the Wheel of Wind? It is in the penmanship of the talented men of letters. Wang Siren's style is bold and his mind perspicacious; he is a man of great nerve and sharp eye. In his travel to the Tiantai and Yandang mountains, he takes turns being fearful or courageous, frustrated or delighted, laughing or crying, startled or scared, ridiculing or abusing. Sometimes he turns into a spirit to confront great risks; sometimes he turns into an immortal to walk in the air.[2]

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[1] For the Chinese texts of Wang Siren's works see *Wang Jizhong za zhu* 《王季重雜著》 [Miscellaneous Writings of Wang Jizhong], reprint, 2 Vols. (Taipei: Weiwen tushu chubanshe, 1977); *Wen fan xiaopin* 《文飯小品》 [Vignettes as Literary Meals], edited by Jiang Jinde 蔣金德 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1989); *Wang Jizhong xiaopin* 《王季重小品》 [Vignettes by Wang Jizhong], selected and annotated by Li Ming 李鳴 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1996). Jizhong was Wang Siren's *style* (字 - traditionally a name adopted at the age of twenty, by which a Chinese man was known or addressed to).

[2] Chen Jiru, *Wanxiangtangji* 《晚香堂集》[Writings from the Evening Fragrance Hall], (Zui lü ju, c. 1636), *juan* 3, p. 12ab. Also cited in Xia Xianchun 夏咸淳 ed., *Ming liushijia xiaopinwen jingpin* 《明六十家小品文精品》 [Vignette Gems from Sixty Ming Authors] (Shanghai: Shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1995), p. 365.

The great Ming playwright Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), another admirer of Wang's prose, has resorted to lyrical language in his appreciation: "In his writings, his mind and spirit is lofty, his music and tone limpid and bright...Some, in their depths of space, are like hilltop clouds embroidering the horizon. Some, in their splendor, are like the sun's glow at riverside drifting above the forest."[3]

The late Ming period was an age that may also be described by Charles Dickens's often quoted characterization of the eve of the French revolution at the beginning of his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities:* "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." After the death of Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525-82), the last capable minister who was able to efficiently run the state's business in spite of the incompetent emperor, the Ming empire moved towards its downfall through an ever-worsening political situation in its last six decades, marked by the rise of the power of the eunuch and the bitter, often ruthless, partisan infighting in court.

On the other hand, it was a relatively liberal period in terms of ideological control. The kind of large-scale and thorough literary inquisition carried out during the reigns of Manchu emperors in the subsequent Qing dynasty was literally unknown. It was a good time for book publishers, as there was an ever-growing need for reading materials, especially those for the purpose of entertainment, from an almost unprecedentedly large reading audience, that consisted not only of the intellectuals but also the "government school students" (*sheng yuan* 生員), those who had passed the preliminary civil service examination and were admitted to county schools, and henceforth earned a modest livelihood on the government payroll while they prepared for the more advanced degrees needed for an official appointment.[4] It was also a time when a fine taste for gourmet food and nice drinks, both wine and tea, for gardening and horticulture, were developed. In other words, the Chinese knew better than their predecessors how to enjoy the art of living.

If someone lost all his illusion in the affairs of the state and gave up all his Confucian ideal and ambition of serving the throne, he could always choose to follow the example of the great fifth-century poet Tao Qian, an idol and a source of inspiration for Wang Siren as well for many of his contemporaries, and return to the private life of a recluse "by the river or on the lake." Nature, especially the scenic places that had been described by poets and authors in the past, provided a great escape and refuge from the chaos of the time, which was one of the reasons behind the rise of tourism and the popularity of travel notes in the age.[5]

During the Age of Division (220-589), the beautiful and luxuriant landscape of Zhejiang, so different and strange to those more used to that of the desolate northern China, opened up the eye of the northern literati who retreated to south of the Yangzi River after the invasion of the non-Chinese tribes and the collapse of the Western Jin dynasty, and settled down in the Southland, which has

[3] Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 ed., *Tang Xianzu shiwen ji* 《湯顯祖詩文集》 [Poetry & Prose of Tang Xianzu] (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2 Volumes, 1982), Vol. 2, pp. 1074-1076.
[4] See "New Light on Ming China: An Interview with Richard von Glahn," *ISOP Intercom* (University of California, Los Angeles), vol. 15, no. 8 (1 February 1993).
[5] For an example of the prosperity of commercialized travel see Zhang Dai''s piece "An Inn in Tai-an (Tai'an)" in Richard E. Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writings from Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 339-341.

thenceforth been closely associated with the literati of that age. Men of letters and artists such as Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361), China's greatest calligrapher of all times who headed the literary gathering at the Orchid Pavilion in Shanyin, Sun Zhuo 孫綽 (314-371), author of the *Rhapsody on a Journey to Mt. Tiantaishan* 遊天臺山賦, and Gu Kaizhi (345-406), one of China's earliest landscape painters, in terms of their contempt of the Confucian decorum, of their unorthodox, and not infrequently eccentric, way of life, became the spiritual forefathers to many during the late Ming period, as evidenced by the reinvigorated popularity of *A New Account of Tales of the World* 《世説新語》, the fifth-century classic that contains all the anecdotes and stories about those ancient celebrities. Wang Siren wrote a preface to a new edition of the book in which he compared the passages in it to "delicate appetizers" that could be taken daily to keep one from getting bored with the "heavy roast" of the long-canonized histories of the renowned historians Sima Qian 司馬遷 and Ban Gu 班固.[6]

In his introduction to *Calls for Travel,* Wang Siren described how he had dreamed about his homeland for two decades, since the time when he was a teenager preparing for the civil service examinations living in the north. To him, his travels in Zhejiang were not only a long-cherished dream that had come true, but also an eye-opening and life-changing experience. As they had been to the Eastern Jin literati a millennium ago, the mountains and rivers of Wang's native land was so strange to him and so different from the northern landscape he had been used to until then. One of his greatest achievements in these writings, it seems to me, is his ability to "make it strange" (to use the Russian formalist concept of *defamiliarization* or *enstrangement),* to convey to the reader his amazement, awe, bewilderment and delight facing the spectacular beauty of the Southland.[7]

In his ground-breaking work, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1975), Harold Bloom has used Siegmund Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex to rewrite literary history, arguing that poets live in a constant anxiety in the shadow of, and are in a kind of rivalry with, giants before them, like sons living under the pressure of their fathers and thus developing a love-hate relation towards them. A "strong poet" has the courage to acknowledge such a "belatedness" and in revising, displacing, and remolding the works of his precursors, finds an identity and voice of his own.

Examples of such an *anxiety* may indeed be found in the Chinese tradition from now and then as well, and the late Ming period was no exception. It was an age of canonizing and recanonizing, which was demonstrated in the making of numerous anthologies and the debates among various literary camps. The "anxiety of influence" of the late Ming authors, of living in the shadow of the great poets and authors in the past, from Qu Yuan 屈原 and Sima Qian to Du Fu 杜甫 and Su Shi 蘇軾, resulted in a kind of, what I venture to call, "inferiority complex," which ironically displayed itself in the form of behavioral and verbal

[6] *Wang Jizhong xiaopin*, pp. 160-161.
[7] For the concept of "making it strange" (*ostraneniye* in Russian) see Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Translated and with an Introduction by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3-24, esp. 13-22.

arrogance or presumptuousness (*kuang* 狂). It was a kind of mannerism that has often been identified with the so-called "celebrated scholars" (*mingshi* 名士), those who kept themselves away from the pursuit of an official career and indulged themselves in a Bohemian and unconventional way of life. A representative of such a social group was Chen Jiru, who was known as a "prime minister among civilians" (*baiyi qingxiang* 白衣卿相) due to his close connections with high-ranking nobilities in spite of his own civilian status.

Wang Siren, whose fifty years of government service were interrupted by forced returns to private life that took half as long, certainly shared such a mannerism of the time. During the late Ming period, the travel notes or landscape essays, as a subgenre of literary prose, had established its own canon. Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-c.1684) once ranked Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) as the very best among authors of travel notes of the old times, and singled out Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610) as a master among recent writers.[8] In the late sixteenth century, through the promotion of the so-called Tang-Song School of prose authors such as Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507-1560), Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512-1601), and especially Gui Youguang 歸有光 (1507-1571), Liu Zongyuan had been firmly established as one of the great masters of all times, and his travel notes of trips in the Yongzhou prefecture during his exile were considered as the model *par excellence* of the genre.[9] Wang Siren was certainly well aware of the canon, but what was his attitude towards it? In a preface for a collection of travel notes by a fellow Zhejiang native, he observes:

> Sima Qian was good at traveling, but Heaven had not yet enlightened him, so he did not know how to keep the record (of his travels). The record was initiated by Liu Zongyuan, but his words are so depressed that the mountains and rivers seem to have turned miserable through him, so what was there in him that I could learn?[10]

Obviously Wang Siren was not inclined to follow in the wake of the Tang master, his greatness notwithstanding. He continues to enumerate several authors of travel notes, from the Song master Su Shi to a couple of his recent predecessors, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-90) and Yuan Hongdao, whose works, in their various styles, "began to exhaust the wonder of recording." However, he concludes by saying that in spite of all these records, "The journey of all times is still right there in front of our eyes." Obviously, in spite of the established canon, he was determined to find his own voice. In the following, I shall use some of his shorter travel notes to exemplify his achievements in travel writing.

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[8] This is from the second of Zhang Dai's two colophons on Qi Biaojia's 祁彪佳 (1602-45) collection of vignettes on his private garden, *Yu shan zhu* 《寓山注》 [Notes on Lodge Hill]. See Xia Xianchun ed., *Zhang Dai shiwen ji* 《張岱詩文集》 [Poetry and Prose of Zhang Dai] (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1991), p. 306.

[9] For the English texts of the "Eight Pieces from Yung (Yongzhou) Prefecture" see Strassberg, pp. 141-147.

[10] *Wang Jizhong xiaopin*, pp. 174-175.

II. *Wang Siren's Achievements in Travel Writing: A Close Reading*

In writing "A Trip to Brimming Well," Wang Siren must have had in his mind, before he set his pen, a piece on the same place by Yuan Hongdao, which focuses on the larger background of the northeastern suburbs of Beijing, where the Brimming Well, an extremely popular tourist spot at the time, was located. Rather than describing the well itself, Yuan's piece devotes its space primarily to the delineation of nature and to some of his own afterthoughts.[11]

It is always a challenge to write on the same object, and in the case of travel notes, on the same place that has already been written about. In writing the two rhapsodies on the Red Cliff, which have ever since been widely acknowledged as timeless little classics, the Song dynasty master Su Shi confronted such a challenge and succeeded in making the two pieces quite different in atmosphere, tone, and their respective imaginary world.[12] Much as Wang Siren admired Yuan's travel writing, the style of which he once characterized as "vigorous and intriguing" *(qiao juan* 峭隽*)*, he was not going to repeat what Yuan had done.[13] Instead, after an opening that immediately catches our attention by its humorous turn ("The capital is a thirsty place. Where there is water, there is fun."), he provides, albeit in a few lines only, a description of the Brimming Well itself, which Yuan seems to have completely ignored, through a series of vivid similes ("the fountain surges and gurgles like a string of beads, like crabs' eyes agape, or the foamy bubbles of fish"). Then he devotes the main body of the piece to a panorama of all and sundry people around the place, which reminds one of the famous Song paintings, the long horizontal scroll of *Along the River on the Qingming Festival*. Wang Siren's piece, however, is not just a painting in words; rather it is a mini-play full of sound and noises, as he inserts therein direct quotations of the shouting of the vendors ("Great hot cakes!" "Great wine!" "Great big dumplings!" "Great fruit!").

On close examination, his portrayal is not a random enumeration of everything that comes in sight, but a meticulously chosen assembly of objects that include the rich and the poor, young and old, men and women. The author's precise and sharp observation is like that of a cinematographer, constantly shifting and choosing his angle of the film camera that keeps "recording and revealing" (in the German film critic Siegfried Kracauer's terms).[14] He does not forget to

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[11] For a short biography of Wang Siren and citation of the English text of the four vignettes discussed here see Yang Ye, *Vignettes from the Late Ming: A Hsiao-p'in Anthology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), pp. 75-80. The English text of Yuan Hongdao's piece is on pp. 49-50.

[12] For English text of the two rhapsodies see Strassberg, pp. 185-188.

[13] For Yuan Hongdao's influence on later authors of travel notes of the Ming dynasty see Hung Ming-shui, *The Romantic Vision of Yuan Hung-tao, Late Ming Poet and Critic* (Taipei, Taiwan: Bookman Books, 1997), esp. p. 191. Wang Siren's characterization of Yuan Hongdao's travel writings is in his "Foreword to Travel Notes in Southern Ming" (Nan Ming ji you xu 《南明紀遊序》), cited in Wu Chengxue 吴承學, *Wan Ming xiaopin yanjiu* 《晚明小品研究》 [A Study of Late Ming Vignettes] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), p. 209.

[14] See Siegfried Kracauer, "The Establishment of Physical Existence," in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen ed., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 7th Edition, 2009), pp. 147-158.

throw in a brief humorous remark at the very end to provide a glimpse of where he himself is located in the scene: "My friend Chang and I had a drink in the shade of a reed umbrella and didn't leave until we had seen enough of this circus show." The author remains, throughout all the hustle and bustle, a spectator on the sideline.

In comparison to Yuan Hongdao's piece, Wang Siren's description has its focus of attention much less on nature than on human activities, and it displays such a strong sense of drama, or rather the melodrama, that the entire place has turned into a huge stage for its presentation. The quiet beauty of nature in Yuan Hongdao's piece is replaced by the dynamic snapshots of the society under Wang Siren's pen.

"A Trip to Wisdom Hill and Tin Hill" begins likewise in a humorous and unexpected way (which reminds one of the poetic openings of Li Bo 李白 or John Donne), by a description of the emotional reaction of these two hills on someone like the author himself, a southerner back from the north: "To look at the blue stroke that crosses half the sky is like getting a drink after having been thirsty for a long time." From such a comparison it naturally moves on to the detailed description of a wine-shop at the foothill, run by a "woman with a relaxed and detached look" who allows the customer to try the wine before the purchase, and even offers a piece of pastry to go with the trial. This prompts the direct quotation of an emotional exclamation from the author: "What a sweetheart—just worth dying for!" The picture is completed by the allusion to the story of the legendary beauty Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 of the Han dynasty, who left her father, a rich merchant, eloped with the handsome and talented young man Sima Xiangru 司馬相如, and helped him to earn a livelihood by running a wine-shop by themselves, serving as a waitress herself in the wine-shop. Next, a jump cut (to use another cinematic term): the intoxicating encounter yields to a quiet view of the Lake Taihu from the summit of the hill in long shots. The piece alternates between scenes of human encounter and observations of nature, and breaks the monotony in varying its tempo of development throughout.

The eminent late Chinese scholar Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1916-98), in discussing Su Shi's poetry, has observed on Su's use of "expansive comparison" *(bo yu* 博喻*)*, a number of similes or metaphors in quick succession, such as in his famous poem about the exciting experience of boating along the "Hundred Step Rapids":

> It's like a rabbit on the run—
> an eagle swoops—
> A steed gallops down
> the slope a thousand yard long—
> A broken string snaps from the peg—
> an arrow leaves one's hand—
> A flash of lightning flits pass a crack—
> a drop of water tumbles on a lotus leaf.[15]

[15] See Qian Zhongshu, *Song shi xuanzhu* 《宋詩選注》 [Poetry of the Song Dynasty: An Annotated Selection] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, reprint 1982), pp. 71-73.

Here, within the limited space of four lines (in the original), a total of seven different images are offered as comparison to the speed of the boating down the rapids. Qian provides a historical survey of such use of figures of speech, from the ancient poetry anthology *Book of Songs* and *Zhuangzi* all the way to the poetry of Han Yu 韓愈, and alerts us of similar usage in Shakespeare (as in *Sonnet* No. 52). Wang Siren's "Passing by the Small Ocean," one of the shorter pieces from *Calls for Travel,* is a full display of the author's verbal power of such "expansive comparison."

Here again we have an impressive opening that catches the reader by surprise with its originality and creates a dramatic tension right from the beginning. To describe the narrow passing, the author resorts to the humorous use of personification: "The sky was bullied by mountains; the river begged the rocks for mercy to let it run free." The next sentence provides the beginning of an abrupt transition by introducing the title scene, and after a few lines that deliberately move in an unhurried pace, we have the climactic line: "Presently we looked up in a startle and yelled in excitement." The main body of the piece is devoted to a description of the evening glow at sunset, which displays all the skills of *defamiliarization* in its originality and freshness.

Wang Siren, also known as a calligrapher and painter, introduces elements of both fine arts in the description: strokes and touches that take turns being graceful or powerful. First the long shots up and down: the sun ("rouge just emerging out of a fire"), the mountains on the horizon ("green as a parrot's plumage or black as a crow's back"), the clouds and their reflections in the water ("red agates spread out upon a sheet of brocade"). The largely spatial framework is now superseded by the temporal one; a sense of duration is hereby introduced: the sun sets, it gets dark, the moon shines. Now the author alternates between long shots and close-ups: the color of the mountains like that "of the rind of a ripe melon," the shape of the various clouds like "goose feathers or oddments of cloth" and "glittering and translucent grapes," mists in the mountains "white like the bellies of fish." The horizon becomes "a smelting furnace" and "a huge dye-works," set forth in a series of verbs ("baking, steaming, and simmering"). Ever the dramatic, the author remembers to incorporate an imaginary speech from the Creator addressing the audience—the author and his company, thus enlivening the entire scene.

"Shanxi Brook," another shorter piece from *Calls for Travel,* mixes its visual description with the rich sounds of nature: we hear dogs "barking as loudly as leopards" and birds trilling in the distance, resounding with echoes in the mountain valleys all around. Like the allusion to Zhuo Wenjun in "A Trip to Wisdom Hill and Tin Hill," the author seems to have felt obliged to refer to the famous allusion of the place to Wang Huizhi 王徽之 and his overnight trip in the snow to visit his friend, but he introduces a fresh twist of humor and wit in the reference, which keeps it from becoming a hackneyed stereotype: he calls the latter a family member (from the surname Wang) and banters him. This yields to more description of the landscape that excels in its use of vivid figures of speech. The many streams and rivers that converge into the sea are "like a multitude of aristocrats dangling the jade pendants on their gowns." Note that the simile used here, consistent with the entire piece, is both visual and aural. A bridge that spans across the river is compared to "a rainbow" that, following an ancient myth, stoops down from heaven to drink from the earth. Finally, it closes in an image, or

rather a gesture, of the author himself, having the boat moored right by the bridge and choosing to sleep in the open, prompting the boatman to "murmur" in disapproval.

Lu Yunlong 陸雲龍, a contemporary of Wang Siren's who compiled one of the few anthologies of the vignettes published during the Ming dynasty, has remarked in his introduction to Wang's selection in the anthology:

> He does not relinquish the cliché entirely, but he is always able to transform the stale into the fresh. With his magic touch, all the dust is wiped clean. In his writings presumably inspired by the mountains and rivers, it is actually not the mountains and rivers that have enlightened his soul and mind. Instead it is the master himself who has made use of his words to inscribe their spirit, explore their depth, reveal their secret, fathom their difficulty of access, and by presenting them in extraordinary grandeur, stays at their very top.[16]

The secret of the charm of Wang Siren's travel writings, it seems to me, lies in his refreshing, often daring, choice of words and phrasing. As the ancient poet Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) has noted in his *Rhapsody on Literature* 《文賦》: "Set a piece of expression at a key position / To make a cracking horse-whip for the entire piece."[17] In all the examples above, the objects of his description are not necessarily places with extraordinary views, but the author always manages to make it different, strange, unfamiliar. Through the use of such "cracking horse-whips," the hustle and bustle of the madding crowd around the Brimming Well, the charming lady who runs the wine-shop by Wisdom Hill, the dusk glow at the "Small Ocean," so vividly presented in front of our mind's eye, make up for the banality of the landscape.

Being a younger contemporary of Yuan Hongdao and Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574-1624), Wang Siren shared some of the stylistic features of the Gong'an 公安 and Jingling 竟陵 schools, the two leading contemporary literary camps respectively represented by these two peers. In aiming for spontaneity and freshness, Wang Siren's writings in general observe the former's promotion of "natural sensibility" (*xing ling* 性靈). In their search for originality in word choices and phrasing, they approximate the latter's pursuit of intricacy and profundity. However, Wang took pride in maintaining his individuality from either school.[18] He once noted how a friend of his had commended him on his "not sharing the same 'clothes and food' with Gong'an and Jingling," and remarked how he took that friend as someone who really understood him.[19]

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[16] Cited in Xia ed., *Ming liushijia xiaopinwen jingpin*, p. 365.

[17] My translation. For a complete English translation see Archilles Fang tr., *Rhymeprose on Literature*, in Victor Mair ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 124-33.

[18] For Wang Siren's stylish relationship with the Gong'an and Jingling schools see Mei Xinlin 梅新林 and Yu Zhanghua 俞樟華 ed., *Zhongguo youji wenxue shi* 《中國遊記文學史》[A History of Chinese Travel Writings] (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2004), pp. 285-287.

[19] Cited in Wu, p. 225.

III. *Influence and Vicissitudes of Recognition*

In Zen Buddhism, the metaphor of "passing on the lantern" is used for the continuation of a convention or tradition. In that sense, Wang Siren's style found a marvelous lantern bearer in Zhang Dai, probably the greatest late Ming author of vignettes. Zhang, a younger fellow Shanyin native, was among Wang's most enthusiastic admirers.[20] Numerous examples of Wang Siren's impact on Zhang Dai's writings may be found in the latter's masterpiece collection, *Dream Memories from the Tao Hut.*

In "Viewing the Snow from the Mid-Lake Gazebo," an account of the author's whimsical late night trip to West Lake after three days of heavy snow, the description of the landscape is much enlivened by the unexpected company from a group of tourists who invite the author to have a drink at the otherwise desolate scene. It closes thus: "When I got off the boat, the boatman murmured to himself, 'Don't say that our young gentleman is crazy; there are people even crazier than he!' "[21] Compare this with the end of "Shanxi Brook" and the similarity stands out. Also, as in Wang Siren's "A Trip of Brimming Well," the insertion of direct vernacular speech (like the shouting of the vendors) is frequently used by Zhang Dai as, for one example, in the piece on the professional matchmakers of concubines, "The Lean Horses of Yangchou."[22]

Most notably, Zhang Dai's most frequently anthologized and translated piece from the collection, "West Lake on the Fifteenth Night of the Seventh Month," shifts the reader's attention almost entirely from the landscape to the human melodrama being presented in there.[23] It opens with a claim to prepare the reader's expectation for something different: on that particular night, the author argues, "there was nothing worth seeing except the people milling around." Then it starts describing the five kinds of people in the crowd. Only at the very end does the author turn to himself and his company. Although much longer and somehow better organized, one could easily see that Zhang Dai has learnt the basic structure and spirit for this piece from Wang Siren's "A Trip to the Brimming Well," as some critics have already noticed.[24]

Although Wang Siren enjoyed his reputation as an outstanding author of travel notes even in his life time, he was dropped out of the canon in the early years of the subsequent Manchu Qing dynasty. Because of Wang Siren's loyalist stand, his writings were censored, if not completely banned, during the years of literary inquisition of the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns. Then the more orthodox Tongcheng school dominated the literary stage for more than two centuries, and the works of Wang Siren, Zhang Dai, and the other late Ming authors remained in obscurity until they were rediscovered by modern writers like Zhou Zuoren 周作人 and Lin Yutang in the 1920s. After a short period of revival,

[20] Zhang Dai's prose collection includes several pieces related to or on Wang Siren, including a letter to Wang and a biography. See *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, pp. 226, 287-91, 330.
[21] Ye, p. 90.
[22] For a superb English translation that keeps much of the original flavor see that of Lin Yutang, "Professional Matchmakers," included in Mair, pp. 597-98.
[23] Ye, pp. 93-95.
[24] Wu, p. 218.

however, they went into oblivion once again for political and ideological reasons in China, with the Sino-Japanese war and the subsequent communist takeover in 1949, and did not surface (at least not in the mainland) until the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, although they have since enjoyed much popularity. Much awaits to be done, however, in their introduction to the Western reader.