INTRODUCTION

What is the most important object in audiovisual representation? The human body. What can the most immediate and brief meeting between two of these objects be? The physical blow. And what is the most immediate audiovisual relationship? The synchronization between a blow heard and a blow seen—or one that we believe we have seen. For, in fact, we do not really see the punch; you can confirm this by cutting the sound out of a scene. What we hear is what we haven’t had time to see.

—Michel Chion, Audio-Vision

At the end of the fifth chapter of Ernü yingxiong zhuan 兒女英雄傳 (Tale of romance and heroism), one of the most famous nineteenth-century Chinese martial arts novels, the hero, An Ji, a hapless young scholar from the capital, finds himself in an abandoned temple. Caught by a band of rogue priests, he is bound to a pillar, stripped of his garments, and is about to have his heart eviscerated:

With two hands, [the evil monk] grabbed the many folds of the young scholar’s lapels and, with a loud noise “KECHA,” ripped them open in one single move. Pushing the lapels further back, he exposed the soft, white flesh of [the young man’s] breast. Next he picked up a sharp blade from the copper alms bowl and, holding the handle with the four fingers of his right hand and steadying the blade with his thumb, he next pulled his right arm back, extended his left index finger and placed it on the young gentleman’s chest, right above his heart. Our poor young scholar! His wits had already flown, and both his eyes were now pressed tightly closed! The evil monk located the exact spot and, stabbing down with his upper right arm, went straight for our young scholar’s heart. You could hear a “PU,” “AARGH,” “GUDONG,” and “DANGLANGLANG!” . . . . If you want to know whether the young scholar An survived or not, turn to the next chapter for an explanation.

Accustomed to the visual delights of twenty-first-century cinema, a modern reader might expect a martial arts novel to excite through sheer visual spectacle. Instead, the mid-nineteenth-century Tale of Romance and Heroism exhilarates primarily through its suggestion of sound. To be sure, with its emphasis on the exact position and physical trajectories of blades, arms, hands, and fingers, the book offers plenty of visual clues to help the reader imagine the action about to take place. However, when it comes to the actual moment the blade finds its target, when the victim cries out and his body drops to the floor, at that moment the text tellingly switches from sight to sound. It is the sheer noise of the scene’s climax, with its series of onomatopoeias and exclamations, “PU,” “AARGH,” “GUDONG,” and “DANGLANGLANG,” that fills the reader with a sense of excitement. It is also these loud sounds that compel the reader to turn the page to find out what happens next.

A good deal of the pleasure of late nineteenth-century martial arts fiction is located in this imaginative use of sound. As the opening quote from The Tale of Romance and Heroism shows, the printed martial arts tales of the final decades of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) were filled with the suggestion of aural splendor. Countless onomatopoeic phrases enjoined the reader to imagine the martial arts scene as an acoustic spectacle. And, as the final lines of chapter 5 of The Tale of Romance

2. Inspired by contemporary comic books, I have chosen to print onomatopoeia within quotation marks and in capital letters, although late imperial novels of course did not use such typographic conventions. Instead onomatopoeia (and exclamations) were easily identifiable by their inclusion of a mouth radical. In addition, such words were often embedded in a phrase that marks them explicitly. Both these techniques can be observed in the first sentence of the translation offered here, “a single sound KECHA” 喀喳一聲.
and Heroism suggest, loud onomatopoeic cliff-hangers also incited the reader to turn the page or, better yet, to spend a few more cash to buy (or rent) the next installment of a printed or handwritten tale. As if commenting on the commercial nature of the genre, textual reenactments of loud vendor calls helped to evoke the hubbub of the empire’s marketplaces. Such printed reenactments of mercantile sounds called upon the reader to enjoy, albeit in tasteful fashion, his sensory consumption of commercial space and commoditized text. Finally, the mimicry of dialect accents allowed these novels to mirror the linguistic diversity of the Qing empire in terms of sound. Just as the many regional dialect sounds heard in the capital helped to lend it a sense of linguistic grandeur, so did mastering such a diverse array of dialect accents imbue the reader with a feeling of superiority. Together, these different sonic elements enabled the reader to enjoy the martial arts tale as an imagined cornucopia of sound, reading the silent text as if listening in on a loud and lively storyteller performance. The sounds of the vernacular novel may have been illusory, but many readers valued these phantasmagoric sounds precisely because, much like fiction itself, these sounds helped produce shockingly real effects. It is this remarkable affectivity of sound that provides my book with its title. As one enthusiastic commentator to the famous martial arts classic *Shuihu zhuan* (Outlaws of the marsh) wrote upon facing a particularly lively, loud, if fully fictional snippet of speech, “sound rising from the paper” 紙上出聲.

3. The comment is found in the Yuan Wuyai 袁無涯 edition of the text, published in 1614 with commentaries falsely ascribed to the (in)famous late Ming scholar Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602). The comment is inserted when the hero Wu Song loudly shouts his appreciation of wine in an inn at the bottom of Jingyang Ridge, the place where he will not much later slay a tiger with his bare hands. See *Shuihu zhuan hui ping ben*, vol. 1, chap. 22, p. 419. For a description of this loud vocal moment in seventeenth-century storytelling, see chapter 2, where I discuss Zhang Dai’s 張岱 (1597–1684?) anecdote about the storyteller Liu Jingting 柳敬亭 (ca. 1587–1668) performing the same episode from *The Outlaws*. Similar comments can also be found in other famous vernacular novels. For instance, when in the forty-second chapter of *San guo zhi yanyi* (The romance of the three kingdoms) the hero Zhang Fei roars a load challenge to the gathered forces of Cao Cao at Changban Bridge, the commentator Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (1631–after 1709) adds, “It is as if on the paper you hear the sound of thunder” 紙上猶聞霹靂聲. See *San guo yanyi hui ping ben*, vol. 1, chap. 42, p. 532. For an anecdote about the eighteenth-century Yangzhou storyteller Wu Tianxu 吳天緒 performing this loud
Before explaining some of the ways in which an ear for the sounds of the novel might benefit our analysis, I believe it will be useful to ask one question first: why have thus far so few scholars suggested an acoustic approach to the late-imperial vernacular novel? The answer is found in part in the prominence of certain preconceptions about what a “novel” is, preconceptions that have discouraged us from taking seriously the sounds of the Chinese novel. To uncover these preconceptions, consider one genre of Chinese literature in which an acoustic approach has actually been favored by many scholars: early Chinese poetry. Conventional wisdom holds that many of the features of poetry deemed crucial to an acoustic reading do not apply to the novel. Yet I will contend that in fact certain forms of acoustic analysis prevalent in the study of early Chinese poetry can be applied fruitfully to the nineteenth-century martial arts novel.

Whereas acoustic approaches to literature have by and large been shunned in the case of the vernacular novel, such acoustic appreciations have flourished in the case of poetry, in particular the study of the songs and poems associated with Shiijing (The classic of poetry). Two

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4. Exceptions include an early article by Eugene Eoyang and a more recent article by Ling-hon Lam. While Eoyang’s article is important because of its early date of writing, Lam’s article is significant because it theorizes the important acoustic link between the novel and opera. See Eoyang, “The Immediate Audience”; Lam, “The Matriarch’s Private Ear.”

5. The importance of sung performance for Chinese traditional poetry of course extends beyond The Classic of Poetry. The Classic of Poetry merely represents the most famous of poetic/acoustic texts. For studies that emphasize sound (in its various forms) in other poetic genres, see, for instance, Hu Shi’s 胡適 (1891–1962) Guoyu wenxue shi (pp. 9–36), which emphasizes the interaction of popular song
features of this research are particularly crucial to understanding the sounds of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel. First, the poems of *The Classic of Poetry* are often understood in terms of communal production and consumption epitomized in the form of the (popular) song. In these acoustic readings of *The Classic of Poetry*, formal prosodic features—rhyme, rhythm, and repetition—all function to transform silent text into an acoustic object whose very sonic features allow it to be easily shared orally. In fact, as Marcel Granet makes clear, the acoustic features of sung poetry do not simply reflect their shared, communal nature, but are in fact the very features that allow the production of this community. Whether we, perhaps romantically, imagine these early Chinese gatherings as groups of peasants joining in folkloric songs at communal festivals or as members of an elite hierarchy chanting sacred hymns on solemn ritual occasions, the acoustic features of poetry and song played a crucial role in producing a sense of sociability.

Second, studies of *The Classic of Poetry* have further emphasized how the purely formal acoustic features of poetry had very important ideological implications in terms of the way people thought about social

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6. Most notably C. H. Wang drew on the work of Homer scholars Albert Lord and Milman Parry to argue for an almost exclusively oral form of composition and transmission. Scholars since then have critiqued this exclusively oral approach to *The Classic of Poetry*, pointing out that at a very early stage it was already circulating as text. As these same scholars point out, however, even when circulating as text, the oral recitation of the poems remained crucial. See C. H. Wang, *The Bell and the Drum*. For a good critique of Wang, see Kern, “*Shi jing* Songs as Performance Texts.”


8. See Granet, *Fêtes et chansons anciennes*, for a popular reading of the section on "guofeng" (The airs of states); for a reading of a particular poem that emphasizes ritual chanted performance in a court setting, see Kern, “*Shi jing* Songs as Performance Texts,” pp. 77–111. According to some scholars, the rhythm of the songs actually allowed coordinated physical movement in court dances. See Maspero, *China in Antiquity*, pp. 274–76.
order. In early practices of poetry there was a strong sense of correlative thinking: the acoustic order of the text was thought to reflect or even create social order. As Martin Kern, for example, has shown by gathering a discrete host of phonic details and imbuing these ornamental details with clearly recognizable patterns—rhyme, rhythm, stanzic repetition—hymnal songs of *The Classic of Poetry* were thought to ritually enact the collecting and ordering of the material world itself. Recent studies in classical Chinese thought illustrate how this acoustic cosmological thinking was imbued with philosophical rigor. Veritable paragons of philosophy such as Zhuangzi 莊子 (369–286 BCE) and Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 312–230 BCE), indeed even the historical prose of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, reflected the idea that by structuring the phonic features of language one could cultivate the individual body and order the social polity.

When we recognize those aspects of acoustic analysis that have found most traction in the study of early poetry, it is easy to understand why, in contrast, the study of the late-imperial vernacular novel has rarely been conducted in terms of sound. First, whereas in the poetic tradition sound and orality were understood in terms of communal sociability, the late-imperial novel is often regarded as a genre of writing produced and consumed by individuals laboring and reading in private and in silence. To a degree, this image of the vernacular novel as works of individual and silent writing and reading practices is based on late-imperial Chinese aesthetics itself. Guided by the interlineal comments of seventeenth-century literati such as Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆 (1610?–1661) and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 (1670–98), scholars such as

9. Zheng Yuyu has expanded on these ideas of correlation in terms of *fu* poetry, showing that such ordering of the social body takes the form of acoustic healing or “harmonizing” of the individual body. See Zheng Yuyu, “Lianlei, fengsong yu shiyu tiyan de chuanyi.”
10. See Kern, “*Shi jing* Songs as Performance Texts.” For the way in which *fu* poetry similarly employs its acoustic form to discipline the reader, see Kern, “Western Han Aesthetics,” esp. pp. 423–31.
11. For an argument not necessarily for correlative thought but instead for the idea of metaphor, see Saussy, “‘Ritual Separates, Music Unites’”; for an investigation of the way sound in the writings of Zhuangzi allowed for an early form of (physical) self-cultivation, see West, “Look at the Finger”; for a discussion of the importance of musical correlative thought in the *Zuo zhuan*, see Wai-yee Li, *The Readability of the Past*, pp. 118–47.
Andrew Plaks understood the Chinese vernacular novel, in particular its most famous incarnation, the six great masterworks of the late-imperial period, as texts penned by a single, genius author and consumed by an individual reader. At the same time, the influence of Western notions of the novel was crucial, most notably Ian Watt’s path-breaking analysis, *The Rise of the Novel*, which famously regarded the formation of the novel as a genre of writing indelibly interlinked with the formation of the modern, bourgeois individual and a realist style of prose that elided its own act of enunciation.

To be sure, many of Watt’s ideas have since been either nuanced or rejected. For our purposes, it has been shown that although silent, interiorized modes of reading may define the consumption of the modern, Western novel, they cannot be taken to be the norm for earlier or other forms of literature or for those “novels” belonging to a non-Western tradition. Similarly, the idea of an individual author whose labor is defined as

12. In the West, Plaks is the foremost champion of the idea of the “Four Masterworks” as works penned by literati authors. As he points out, it is not simply that these men composed their works as individuals, but also that they composed their works under the influence of a new, late-Ming interest in individual subjectivity as exemplified in the philosophies of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) and Li Zhi. See Plaks, *Four Masterworks*, esp. pp. 19–20, 25, 39, 44. The emphasis on individual authorship is most strongly worded as it relates to the most controversial novel of the four masterworks, the *Jin Ping Mei*, when Plaks refutes the notion of collective authorship and advocates the novel instead as “an astonishingly ‘original’ work of art, conceived, at least to some extent, within the mind of a single author.” Plaks, *Four Masterworks*, p. 70. Later scholars have drawn on this work to further expand the idea of the vernacular novel as a genre of writing crucial to the formation of the individual subject. See Martin Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation*, pp. 1–44.

13. The silence of Watt’s study becomes apparent in his analysis of the written epistolary form (as opposed to oral communication) of Richardson’s *Clarissa* and the autobiographical journal of Defoe’s *Crusoe*. See Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 174–207 and 60–92. For a critique of the self-sufficiency of the (Western) subject from a post-colonial angle, see Lydia Liu, “Robinson Crusoe’s Earthenware Pot.”

14. For a review of some of the critiques of Watt and the way these critiques nevertheless incorporate many of his main tenents, see Folkenfilk, “The Heirs of Watt.”

15. Andrew Pettegree points out, for instance, how in the sixteenth century many forms of leisure literature, including Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, remained highly suitable for reading aloud and communal discussion. See Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance*, pp. 155–58. For a study of a crucial seventeenth-century shift towards silent reading practices in the West and the way this shift produced a new form of
intellectual by the silence of his study has been shown to be the result of a typically nineteenth-century mode of literary production. Finally, the late-imperial vernacular novel is anything but realistic and often delights in drawing attention to its own fictionality. And yet, despite some notable exceptions, Watt’s ideas did leave an indelible stamp on the research of the late-imperial Chinese novel. For many, the value of the Chinese vernacular novel, in particular the most famous works in the tradition, was found in the writing and reading practices of the individual who was assumed to be silent. As a result, sound, whether real or imagined, and its associations of communal sociability had little place in the processes of writing and reading associated with these novels.

Second, the very structural and linguistic features that define the Chinese vernacular novel all too easily seemed to prohibit the kind of acoustic analysis favored by scholars of poetry. Aesthetic (and ideological) analyses of prosody make eminent sense for poetry, a form of literature that tends to be brief and is characterized by a tightly regimented use of language; they do not work as well for late-imperial vernacular novels, which are long and episodic in terms of structure and variegated, if not simply unruly, in terms of language. Linguistically and structurally speaking, the vernacular novel seems the opposite of poetic song: impossible to memorize succinctly, chant communally, transmit orally, or consume acoustically. Not surprisingly, scholars have argued for an aesthetics of the novel that is explicitly intertextual, an aesthetics particularly evident in studies of the sixteenth-century Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅 (The plum in the golden vase). David Roy’s early readings, for instance, drew on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia to interpret the linguistic variegation of the novel as a carefully authored interweaving of textual quotations. Scholars further investigated this notion of an explicitly textual heteroglossia as the product of an explicitly printed intertextuality. Shang Wei has argued that in many ways the sixteenth-century novel most resembles a printed encyclopedia, a literary form that enthralled its
reader by collecting snippets of texts from other printed sources, recombining these snippets of text on a single page. How can the novel, so readily defined by its intertextual features and print-cultural context, ever be understood in terms of sound, vocality, and acoustics?

Such an acoustic approach to vernacular fiction is, however, not only possible but also illuminating. Moreover, it is precisely those acoustic modes of analysis associated with the study of early poetry that allow us to read late-imperial fiction as acoustic text. In other words, even though the late-imperial novel has often been understood in terms of individual silent reading practices, it is worthwhile to borrow some of the ideas of shared poetic production and consumption championed by scholars of *The Classic of Poetry*. This is not to say that late-imperial novels were, as sometimes has been suggested, necessarily communally produced or vocally consumed in a literal sense. Rather, I argue that the suggestion of sound allowed for the idea of these novels as acoustic objects that could be shared communally. First, imagining these mute texts as loud performances allowed the novels to project a sense of community even if they were in fact produced and consumed privately and silently. Second, just as the formal acoustic features of poetry imbued these texts with a sense of order, so did the imagined sounds of the novel lend structure to the text. Finally, as in the case of classical poetry, this acoustic structure of the vernacular novel was associated with a certain sense of social order: in nineteenth-century martial arts novels the imagination of a well-governed society or a disciplined subject was made possible by linking acoustic elements to the structure of the plot.

*The Acoustic Structure of the Novel’s Plot*

Although classical poetry suggests ways in which the Chinese late-imperial novel can be read acoustically, there are crucial differences between these two very different forms of literature and their use of

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18. See Shang, “‘Jin Ping Mei’ and Late Ming Print Culture.”
19. For an argument that some of the most popular texts in fact may have been produced and consumed communally and orally, see McLaren, *Chinese Popular Culture*, pp. 32–57.
sound to provide literary structure. Most notably, whereas classical poetry primarily provides structure through prosody, the late-imperial novel primarily offers a sense of structure through plot. To uncover this acoustic order of the novel’s plot, in particular the plot of the late nineteenth-century martial arts novel, I will draw on Andrew Plaks’s formal analysis of the elite late-imperial novel as well as on classical poetics. Throughout my analysis, however, it remains important for the reader to differentiate the nineteenth-century martial arts novel from both ancient poetry and more elite forms of vernacular fiction. Whereas ancient poetry arose in a ritual context, the productive forces behind nineteenth-century fiction were unmistakably commercial. Plaks’s reading of the vernacular masterworks of the Ming is based on the aesthetics of the literati elite, yet the nineteenth-century martial arts novel sought to engage with the politics and pleasures of the popular marketplace.

At first a focus on plot might not seem a likely way of arguing for an acoustic structure of the Chinese martial arts novel. After all, if late imperial vernacular novels are notoriously episodic and loosely structured in general, the nineteenth-century martial arts novel, a commercial and popular genre par excellence, is particularly rambling and convoluted. Seeking to please readers, the authors of these novels often introduced scores of characters whose many adventures are told through plots that promise lots of excitement but offer little in terms of structured connections. As already indicated by some of their titles—Qun ying jie 群英傑 (The gathered heroes; undated, early 19th c.), Qi xia wu yi 七俠五義 (The seven knights and the five gallants; 1889), Xiao wu yi 小五義 (The latter five gallants; 1890), Qi jian shisan xia 七劍十三俠 (The seven swordsmen and the thirteen knights; 1892)—these novels entertain by offering a huge cast of characters. Similarly, in terms of plot, even a cursory reading of a few of these novels reveals not a simple chain of events, but instead a confusing heap of multiple interconnecting and overlapping plotlines.20

20. Anyone who has ever used reference works to get a grasp of the main plot of one of these novels will quickly come to the same conclusion: there is no main plot. Rather, the novel’s structure consists of a bewildering number of events that defy easy and succinct summary. For a selection of plot summaries, see Jiangsusheng shehuikexueyuan Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu zhongxin wenxue yanjiusuo, Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao.
Although some early scholars have critiqued the late-imperial novel for lacking a clear structure or purposeful plot, more recently, scholars have increasingly pointed out that the multiple plotlines and myriad different characters are not necessarily the result of slipshod work. Instead the abundance of characters and plotlines can also speak of a distinct, late-imperial aesthetic that prizes structural complexity over linear progression and that favors interactions among multifarious characters over the actions of an individual protagonist. As Andrew Plaks has illustrated, in the case of the famous “Masterworks of Vernacular Fiction”—The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, The Outlaws of the Marsh, Xi you ji 西遊記 (The journey to the west), and Jin Ping Mei— the superficial chaos of multiple plotlines and dozens of characters actually serves to create a highly complex, tightly structured work of art. Notably, these works espoused plotlines that move through repetitive cycles of waxing and waning as they gather and disperse multiple characters and numerous events in the process. It is the repetition of these cycles that helps to structure the seemingly chaotic narrative into a single, yet still highly multifaceted, totality: the multi-chapter vernacular novel.

By focusing on sound, we find that a variety of acoustic elements contribute to the kind of structural complexity found in the late-imperial vernacular text. As the vernacular novel moves through cycles of waxing and waning, bringing together characters and events in constantly evolving constellations and juxtapositions, it employs the suggestion of sound to lend these cycles a sense of acoustic atmosphere. It is the accumulation of sounds—a plethora of onomatopoeias in action scenes, a bevy of vendor calls in urban market settings, or a diversity of dialect accents in dialogues—that helps to define the climactic moments of these tales. It is the repetition of these moments of acoustic spectacle as well as the sonic lull that follows them that creates a clear sense of rhythm in the text. Meanwhile it is the promise of ever more acoustic spectacle that lends momentum to the narrative and keeps the reader glued to the page.

21. Most notable among these early scholars is probably C. T. Hsia. Regarding the structure of Jin Ping Mei, for instance, Hsia has argued that the novel clearly lacks “ideological or philosophical coherence” because it manifests “obvious structural anarchy.” See Hsia, The Classic Chinese Novel, p. 180.
22. See Plaks, Four Masterworks.
If these imagined sounds help to structure the ebb and flow of events in the martial arts novel, the novel’s acoustic elements also help to link isolated climactic moments into longer, multi-episodic plots. As shown in the brief snippet from *The Tale of Romance and Heroism* quoted earlier, nineteenth-century martial arts novels often employ a single onomatopoeia or a series of exclamations to introduce a new character or produce a new twist in the plot. At times such acoustic elements can be understood as a sonic break that interrupts a moment of celebratory liveliness, marking a temporary climax and signaling the beginning of the inevitable cycle of dispersal. At other times, such onomatopoeia, exclamations, or vendor calls function as an acoustic bridge, linking one cycle of events to the next, enticing the reader to read on by suggesting that more sonic liveliness will soon follow.

The sounds of the vernacular novel did not merely provide a sense of aesthetic structure, in turn this structure suggested a broader sense of social order. Though some political reformers in the early twentieth century were inspired by these tales to acts of anarchism, these tales of martial men are in fact remarkably conservative in ideological outlook.\(^23\) As Lu Xun 魯迅 (penname of Zhou Shuren 周樹人, 1881–1936) has pointed out, in the end the rowdy martial men that fill the pages of these novels are brought to order under the authority of the central character, the judge, just as the rebellious potential of unbridled martial arts action is invariably legitimated by making it serve imperial power.\(^24\) By attuning ourselves to the sounds of the novel, we can begin to discern how this sense of ideological order is not only found on the

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\(^{23}\) In an essay titled “On the Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the People,” Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) famously fulminated against martial arts novels, most notably *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *The Three Kingdoms*, because their descriptions of masculine brotherhood had led directly, according to Liang, to the formation of secret societies and the disaster of the Boxer Rebellion. See his “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi.” The most famous early twentieth-century revolutionary to be inspired by tales of martial arts derring-do remains undoubt-edly Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907). For a discussion of Qiu Jin’s activities as literary and revolutionary paragon, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, pp. 767–808.

\(^{24}\) His exact words were, “The heroes of such novels, though rough and gallant like the earlier outlaws, had to serve under some important official and considered it honorable to do so. This could happen only in an age when the people were completely subdued and subservient.” In Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue*, p. 204. Translation by Xianyi and Gladys Yang in Lu Xun, *A Brief History*, p. 371.
level of content and character, but also on the level of form. Like the heroic martial men featured in these novels, the acoustic spectacle they produce at first seems playful, liberating, perhaps even unruly. Yet inevitably, these moments of acoustic attraction are brought in line through the unfolding of a well-structured plot. Thus the acoustic seduction of vendor calls is turned into a moral lesson about disciplining one’s commercial and sexual desires; the riotous liveliness of dialect accents reflects a clear hierarchy of social distinctions; the onomatopoeic sparkle of ineffable action might open up a host of undisclosed possibilities, but invariably sound is made meaningful and the teleology of plot reestablished.

Although poetry and the elite vernacular novel are instructive for understanding how imaginary sounds worked in the nineteenth-century martial arts novel, it is important to remember that the popular nineteenth-century martial arts tale also differs markedly from these two other forms. For one, the martial arts novel strategically embeds acoustic elements within prose so as to produce the progression of plot. Equally important, unlike the poetry of the ancient period, the nineteenth-century martial arts novel was produced not in a ritual context but rather in a distinctly commercial context. Originally performed as popular storyteller tales staged at local markets and urban teahouses for a few coppers, these novels were eventually edited, printed, and sold by commercial book vendors who sought to cash in on the popularity of these tales. Not surprisingly, the martial arts novel is drenched not in the rarified and ritual atmosphere of the courts of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), but rather in the aesthetics, attractions, and anxieties of the nineteenth-century urban marketplace. As a result, one of the more interesting acoustic features of these novels is found in the way they incorporate brief snippets of vendor calls into their narratives. Partially these printed and performed reenactments of the sounds of hawkers and merchants serve to evoke the attractions and atmosphere of the marketplace. Yet because these mercantile sounds are staged as

25. That said, as Hu Siao-chen has argued, *The Tale of Romance and Heroism*, an exceptional elite literati product, not a commercial novel, shows a strong interest in ritual form. See “Pinfan riyong yu daotong lunli.” As I show in chapter 6 of this book, a focus on the acoustic aspects of the novel form reveals how this interest in ritual is not only expressed in the author’s intellectual arguments, but also embedded in the very form of the novel’s prose and poetic song.
crucial acoustic linkages in the unfolding of plot, they also manage to order the wayward desires elicited by these calls into a clear and disciplined structure.

The popular, unmistakably commercial background of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel also helps to differentiate it from the more highbrow martial masterworks of the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) favored by Plaks. The structural complexity so prized in the famous elite novels of the late Ming most certainly influenced the aesthetics of the commercial products of the late Qing. Yet the majority of these later novels never adhered solely to an exclusively elite, highly structured organizational scheme. Even the four elite novels discussed by Plaks were never solely interpreted in terms of the structural complexity espoused by literati editors and commentators. As Anne McLaren points out, the “masterworks” of the Ming dynasty were read by a variety of audiences and for remarkably different purposes. As Plaks himself notes, the elite literati’s investment in the tightly structured prose and well-wrought plot of the masterworks of the late Ming was the result of their often ironic reaction to the more popular source material—storyteller tales, dramatic performances, and folk legends—on which these novels were originally based.

When turning to the sounds of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel, we must similarly keep in mind that different segments of the population found different pleasures in the acoustic attractions provided by these novels. While some readers read these novels with a self-conscious ear for their acoustic aesthetics, other readers simply appreciated the surface liveliness provided by the plethora of different sounds in the text. In fact, simply understanding that the acous-

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26. Margaret Wan (Green Peony, esp. pp. 109–112) has argued in detail how the earlier, literati aesthetics of the late Ming dynasty can be found in the martial arts novels of the early nineteenth century.
27. McLaren, “Ming Audiences and Vernacular Hermeneutics.”
28. In fact, Plaks notes this early on when he states, “Each [of the four great novels] represents the culmination of a long prior and subsequent history of source materials, antecedent narratives, and alternate recensions. Yet my principal thesis here will be that in each case the sixteenth-century text we have represents the most significant phase of this process of evolution, the one that puts the final stamp on the process and raises the respective narrative materials to the level of self-conscious artistic constructs.” See Plaks, Four Masterworks, pp. 3–4.
tic elements in these novels may have been read differently by different segments of the population is not enough; it is even more important to understand how these different appreciations of the sounds of the novel may have been instrumental in the formation of different social groups. The imaginary sounds of the novel do not simply reflect sociability, they create it. In the next section I will explore the ways in which printed sound produced different modes of sociability and distinctly different imaginations of community.

Sound and Sociability

Although I draw linkages between the sounds of early Chinese poetry and those of late-imperial martial arts novels in terms of producing a sense of sociability, there remains a marked distinction between the two: unlike early Chinese poetry, the sounds of late nineteenth-century martial arts fiction are patently not real. Whereas the community engendered by the sounds of early Chinese poetry was one associated with oral and ritual performance, martial arts novels are print-cultural commodities typically consumed in silence. Rather than seeing this as an impediment to an acoustic sense of community, however, we should take the purely fictive nature of the novel’s sounds as an incentive to further explore how textualized sound can produce sociability at the very heart of print culture. Specifically, I will show how the imaginary sounds of martial arts fiction were crucial in opening up paths to imagining two distinct forms of acoustic sociability. The first form, which I will call “popular,” employed the sounds of the martial arts novel to produce a simulacrum of heightened sociability associated with the loud noise of popular gathering places such as temple fairs, marketplaces, and teahouses. Even when reading in silence and isolation, the individual reader was called upon by those sounds to imagine himself as part of this larger sociable experience. The second form, which I will term “elite,” sought to distance itself from such vulgar and noisy gatherings and in doing so emphasized the illusory nature of sound, yet in the process produced a different, more highbrow form of sociability predicated on the appreciation of the novel’s (meta)fictional technique.
Previous studies on the sociability of sound—Western and Chinese, literary and non-literary—tend to employ sound in a concrete sense. For historians, for example, it was the actual sound of village bells or the genuine rhythms of the drum tower that allowed villages in nineteenth-century France and urban sites in imperial China to establish a sense of community. In literary studies, this need for sound to be actualized in order for it to produce a sense of community is found in the (relentless) emphasis on orality. Walter Ong, for instance, draws a remarkably strong distinction between textual and oral culture in terms of the production of a sense of community; according to Ong, whereas text and, in particular, print isolate individuals, the sound of the spoken word produces a sense of direct communication that allows transparent accessibility and hence is eminently suitable to social interaction and communal sharing. In the realm of early Chinese poetry, the idea of The Classic of Poetry as a purely oral text is, of course, a thing of the past. That said, even for those contemporary scholars who emphasize the textual circulation of The Classic of Poetry, the efficacy of these poems still depends heavily on the ritual act of chanting them aloud. In short, sound as a medium might be effective in the ways it establishes a sense of community, but only if there is actual sound to begin with.

To suggest, then, that the nineteenth-century martial arts novel could likewise employ sound to produce a sense of sociability might seem problematic. After all, these lengthy novels are eminently textual products. Produced by well-established printing houses in Beijing and Shanghai, clothed in a variety of para-textual wrappings that often include calligraphic title pages and numerous illustrations, and

29. I am referring here respectively to Alain Corbin, who has shown how the sound of church bells helped to define the spatial boundaries of rural communities in nineteenth-century France, and Wu Hung, who has suggested how the rhythm of the drum and bell tower established the temporal order of urban communities in imperial China. See Corbin, Village Bells; Wu Hung, “The Hong Kong Clock.”
30. Ong, Orality and Literacy, esp. pp. 72–75, 152–53 (where Ong coincidentally draws on Ian Watt’s earlier study).
31. See Kern, “Shi jing Songs as Performance Texts.” For a paper that takes the materiality of bronze inscriptions into consideration (but nevertheless keeps the oral instantiation of such inscriptions in mind), see Schaberg, “Virtue’s Sound Shining.”
comprising a hundred chapters or more, there is little historical information that suggests that these works were ever intended for oral/aural consumption. Unless we imagine these novels as being read aloud, something which is always possible but for which little evidence exists, the act of reading these novels remained an act of individual and silent consumption.32

Yet, if the novel did not produce the kind of acoustic sociability brought to life during actual oral performance, it did offer a simulacrum of such sociability by mimicking within the text a sense of orality. Most notably, it did so through one of its more remarkable features, the rhetorical figure of the storyteller. It was the illusion of an oral presence within the text that helped to turn the silent signs on the page into a lively acoustic spectacle. Similarly, it was the storyteller figure who, as the embodiment of popular orality, lent these tales a sense of shared communal values and interpersonal intimacy. Moreover, this presence of a storyteller figure and the way in which his presence suggested a communal performance (as opposed to a solitary act of reading), grew particularly strong in nineteenth-century martial arts fiction. As I show in chapter 2, whereas in much late-imperial vernacular fiction the storyteller is merely a rhetorical figure that has little to do with actual storytelling performances, the nineteenth-century martial arts novel drew much of its material from popular storytelling cycles. Prefaces and title pages emphasized this historical link to storytelling as a way of strengthening the sense of a shared oral heritage.

In addition, nineteenth-century martial arts novels employed a host of acoustic elements associated with the storyteller figure—onomatopoeia, vendor calls, dialect accents—snippets of sound designed to draw the reader from his silent reading into the simulacrum of the “storyteller’s” lively and loud performance. Sometimes acoustic elements would do so by conjuring up a sense of a shared public space. As I show in chapter 3, for instance, the insertion of simulated vendor calls in these texts recreated the text as a literary marketplace, familiar to all if still tightly segregated in terms of tasteful appreciation. Alternatively, acoustic elements projected a sense of shared linguistic community by

32. Wolfram Eberhard documents storytellers in Taipei reading novels aloud, but this form of public performance can hardly be considered a representative form of “reading aloud.” See Eberhard, “Notes on Chinese Storytellers.”
emphasizing the sound of the spoken voice. As I show in chapter 5, the imitation of the sounds of different dialects in these novels presents language in its most popular and easily accessible form. Together, the storyteller’s voice and the myriad acoustic elements brought to life by his voice tempted the reader to enter a community defined by an imagined orality, imbuing the act of solitary reading with the aura of shared experience.

The sounds of the novel, just like the community they promised, were of course a fiction. Indeed, most readers were well aware of the illusory qualities of the acoustic spectacle, just as they were well aware that the martial arts novel, even if it presented itself as an “oral” tale, was only accessible to those who could read. This recognition could make the nineteenth-century martial arts novel particularly attractive as a “high” literary form. Although the sounds in these texts allowed the reader to imagine his act of literary consumption as part and parcel of a broadly shared oral culture, the recognition of the fictional nature of these sounds still allowed the reader to maintain a careful distance both from the illiterate masses and, more importantly, from supposedly less educated readers.

To understand how this worked, it is necessary to understand one final aspect of the acoustic pleasures of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel, its emphasis on self-conscious metafictionality. As literary critics have increasingly pointed out, there exists in the late-imperial literary tradition a strong tendency towards metafiction. Through studies of works ranging from the eighteenth-century masterwork Hong lou meng 紅樓夢 (Dream of the red chamber) to the Red Light fiction of the nineteenth century, scholars have shown how late-imperial fiction often presented itself in metafictional terms, delighting in fiction exposed as nothing but fiction.33

An acoustic approach to the novel allows us to recognize how sound played an important role in this metafictional tradition. For instance, in what undoubtedly is the prime example of self-conscious fictionality in the late-imperial vernacular tradition, Dream of the Red Chamber, references to the sensory experience of sound consistently draw the

33. See, among others, Karlitz, The Rhetoric of the Chin p’ing mei; Anthony Yu, Rereading the Stone; Starr, Red-light Novels.
reader’s attention to the illusory nature of the text itself.\footnote{Sound is not the only sense being marshaled for the purposes of metafiction; the novel is, after all, famously visual. For a reading of the novel from a sensory and in particular olfactory “point of view,” see Zhang Shijun, Hong lou meng \emph{de kongjian xushi}.} Of course, these sounds may be seductive, but they can never be real. Their illusion merely highlights the fictional nature of the novel and arguably even serves to call attention to the illusory and evanescent nature of life itself.

Although a sensory aesthetics of metafiction thus can be ascribed to some of the masterworks of late-imperial vernacular fiction, it cannot be ascribed to all works of premodern fiction. To be sure, strong metafictional themes can certainly be detected in the more highbrow martial arts novels such as \textit{The Tale of Romance and Heroism}.\footnote{For the metafictional tendencies of this novel, see Hamm, “Reading the Swordswoman’s Tale.” For an exploration of metafiction in earlier nineteenth-century martial arts novels, see Wan, \textit{Green Peony}, pp. 101–29.} Yet in most other martial arts novels of the nineteenth century metafiction is voiced only occasionally, suggesting that much of the noise in these novels is precisely what it seems: a form of acoustic spectacle meant to delight the reader, to distract him from his everyday experience, and to immerse him in an imagined lively, communal atmosphere.

Because of this, rather than understanding the metafictional aesthetics of imagined sound as merely a reflection of the elite status of the masterworks of vernacular fiction, we should approach such acoustic metafictionality as a crucial element necessary to generate a sense of elite status. As Sai-shing Yung has recently pointed out, the sounds of late-Ming opera were often interpreted to divide neatly into elite and non-elite forms of appreciation; according to conventional readings, the raucous noise of more spectacular opera was enjoyed by more popular crowds, whereas the more muted sounds of contemplative scenes were appreciated by a more elite audience.\footnote{See Yung, “From Exorcism to Connoisseurship.”} Traditional approaches to the vernacular novel and its imaginary acoustics made a similar distinction. On the one hand, readers could choose to indulge their senses in rather “vulgar” fashion, allowing themselves to be lost in the liveliness of the imagined spectacle. On the other hand, readers could tastefully recognize the evanescence of such sounds. Simply put, the recognition of the sounds of the novel as illusory became one of the

\footnote{34. Sound is not the only sense being marshaled for the purposes of metafiction; the novel is, after all, famously visual. For a reading of the novel from a sensory and in particular olfactory “point of view,” see Zhang Shijun, Hong lou meng \emph{de kongjian xushi}.} \footnote{35. For the metafictional tendencies of this novel, see Hamm, “Reading the Swordswoman’s Tale.” For an exploration of metafiction in earlier nineteenth-century martial arts novels, see Wan, \textit{Green Peony}, pp. 101–29.} \footnote{36. See Yung, “From Exorcism to Connoisseurship.”}
ways of producing an invisible dividing line between different reading practices, popular and elite, if not actual readers. 37

This division between popular and elite tastes should be understood in light of the unprecedented print-cultural effervescence of the late-imperial age. The vernacular novel represents one of the most preeminent literary products of the print-cultural age.38 Drawing on the ever-growing plethora of texts made available by the print boom of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the late-imperial novel incorporated an unprecedented array of different, often heterogeneous sources and other literary forms. Similarly, in terms of language, it mixed a wild array of different registers ranging from the vernacular to the classical, including, for example, poetic diction as well as snippets of thieves’ argot. Finally, the print boom of the late-imperial period also made this variegated form of literary writing readily available to a broad, diverse audience consisting of women, children, merchants, and scholars (or so prefaces often claimed).39 In short, commercial in nature, popular in appeal, and constructed on the basis of a remarkable heteroglossic use of language and intertextual use of sources, the vernacular novel epitomized the way in which print technology allowed the culture of text to expand from a relatively small scholarly elite to a much wider audience, threatening to erase distinctions of class and cultivation in the process.

Both the excitement and the anxieties caused by these print-cultural shifts can be heard in the sounds of the novel, in particular in a term often associated with the “noise” produced by the raucous nineteenth-century martial arts novel, renao 熱鬧. The term, variously translated as “lively,” “spectacular,” “crowded,” or simply “loud,” is usually associated with the hustle and bustle of large crowds, the places these crowds gathered (temple fairs, marketplaces, or teahouses), and the loud atmosphere they produced.40 Yet in the case of Chinese

37. For the way in which visual spectacle was used to produce a similar distinction in terms of taste, see Sieber, “Seeing the World.”
38. See Ding Naifei, Obscene Things; Shang, “The Making of the Everyday World.”
39. For an analysis of these different audiences and the way various paratextual materials were used to produce idealized readers, see McLaren, “Constructing New Reading Publics.”
40. Not surprisingly, the term has been most theorized by scholars of anthropology. For instance, Stephan Feuchtwang, who translates the term as “spectacle,” discusses renao as the kind of entertainment that draws crowds to temple
late-imperial literature the term can also be used to describe vernacular fiction, most notably those aspects mentioned above: its popular appeal, its appetite for spectacle, the way in which it voraciously incorporates different genres and languages into a single, exciting package. Indeed, for Chinese critics offended by the incursion of popular tastes into the sacred realm of text, renao signified the ways in which, amid the heady mixture of languages, genres, objects, and impressions, proper distinctions might be lost. Especially in the case of the martial arts novel, a form of fiction that could claim tremendous appeal in terms of audience and that depended quite heavily on the attraction of its loud spectacle, the concept of renao proved a convenient target for critics.

This is not to say that these critics were mere gainsayers of fiction or even martial arts novels per se, but rather that they embraced the notion of renao brought to life in these popular forms of fiction precisely to keep the distinction between high and low, elite and lower-class forms of literary consumption, intact. From the late Ming until the late Qing, critics and authors often welcomed the loud noise of vernacular forms of literature not because they identified with the vulgar pleasures brought to life by the myriad sounds of the novel, but because they thought that by recognizing such sounds as mere illusion they could differentiate themselves from the common crowd, thereby establishing their elite sense of sociability. An early twentieth-century critic such as Shi An, for instance, had little problem with the elite (literally “those belonging to the upper class” 上等社會) indulging their taste in martial arts fiction. The problem was with the lower classes and how they failed to differentiate fact from fiction. As Shi An argued, how could “these lower class kinds of people with their feeble understanding tell that these stories were mere illusory castles in the sky?” 下等社會之人類, 知識薄弱, 焉知此等書籍為空中樓閣? And failing to tell the difference between fiction and reality, how could such lower-class people fail to try and imitate these martial heroes and in the process create untold social chaos, indeed cause the demise of China itself? 

42. Shi An was clearly influenced by Liang Qichao, who wrote some eight years earlier, “Now everywhere among our people there are heroes of the green forests.”...
The illusion of sound created by these novels lends itself beautifully to the formulation of such class distinctions. As I show in chapter 1, building on sound as the spectacular sign of illusion, the critic Jin Shengtan applied a metafictional logic to his appreciation of one of the more popular and rambunctious vernacular novels, the martial arts tale *Outlaws of the Marsh*. In the nineteenth century, the most remarkable product of such an acoustic aesthetics of metafiction was found in the martial arts novel *The Tale of Romance and Heroism*. As I illustrate in chapter 5, the writer Wen Kang (fl. 1842–51) went to remarkable lengths to bring the sounds of the novel to life, even while keeping the acoustic implications of those sounds firmly within the realm of the metafictional. Indeed, his novel is unprecedented in the way it fleshes out the storyteller figure as a fully voiced oral narrator, and yet it nevertheless tirelessly reminds the reader of the illusory nature of the sounds produced by his voice. The novel may present itself in the guise of the popular sociability of an oral tale, but it still allows its readers to create a distinct, elitist sociability by reminding them of the illusory nature of the novel’s use of sound.

*The Nineteenth-Century Martial Arts Novel*

Though my investigation of the acoustic imagination has broader implications for the late-imperial novel, I have chosen to focus on one partic--

Dreams of having ‘big bowls of wine, big slices of meat, sharing gold and silver and weighing them on a scale, and putting on complete suits of clothes,’ as these heroes did, fill the minds of the lower classes’ (emphasis mine). See Liang Qichao, “On the Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the People,” p. 80; Liang Qichao, “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi,” p. 18. For similar arguments that fulminate against the illusory nature of martial arts attractions, though in this case the lower classes have been transformed into “urban petty bourgeois” and novels into film, see Mao Dun, “Fengjian de xiaoshimin.” Mao Dun 茅盾 is the pen name of Shen Dehong 沈德鴻, 1896–1981; most telling is his description of noisy showings of the film *Huoshao Hongliansi* 火燒紅蓮寺 (Burning of the Red Lotus Temple), and the effect the film has on the youthful, urban audience, for whom “the film is no longer an illusion, it has become reality!” 影戲不復是“戲，而是真實! See Mao Dun, “Fengjian de xiaoshimin,” p. 370. This passage is partially translated and fully discussed in Fan, “Football Meets Opium,” pp. 212–14.
ularly loud genre of vernacular fiction, the martial arts novel. More specifically, I limit this study to those martial arts novels produced in the late nineteenth century, a moment of interest because it represents both the end of the novel in its late-imperial form and the beginning of the martial arts tale as the most popular and financially lucrative genre of modern printed fiction. Finally, because most of these late nineteenth-century martial arts novels were first produced in the capital of the Qing empire, I have further delineated this study geographically to the martial arts novels of Beijing, which allows me to locate the acoustic aesthetics of these novels within the specific context of local storytelling performance as well as the particular late-imperial ideology of Beijing bannermen.

Although this study is not a genre study in the conventional sense, it remains nevertheless important to offer a concise outline of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel and a succinct discussion of some of the previous scholarship on this genre. The study of literary genres represents, needless to say, a modern intervention into a body of texts whose history and relationships will be mapped according to the needs and interests of the contemporary scholar. The genre that is at the heart of this study, the late nineteenth-century martial arts novel, or to be exact, “novels of chivalric justice and court cases” 俠義公案小說, is no exception. \(^{43}\) Strictly speaking, the genre itself was not invented until Lu Xun devoted a single chapter to these novels in his influential study, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 (*A brief history of Chinese fiction*) in 1924. \(^{44}\) He defined these martial arts tales, produced between 1878 and 1900, as the confluence of two earlier genres, the knight-errantry novel and the court-case novel. According to Lu Xun, this merging of genres served an important ideological function, namely

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43. As the foremost Taiwanese scholar of martial arts fiction, Ye Hongsheng, has pointed out, the Chinese term most commonly used for “martial arts fiction” 武俠 小說 did not come into being until the early twentieth century, when Liang Qichao imported it from Japan. See Ye Hongsheng, *Lun jian*, pp. 8–10. See also Petrus Liu, *Stateless Subjects*, pp. 46–48; and Wan, *Green Peony*, p. 2. Even though the term “martial arts novel” is hence anachronistic when used in the context of the late nineteenth century, in this study I nevertheless use it because it is less cumbersome, enjoys broader recognition, and carries less of a connotation of outdated feudal thought implied by the term “novels of chivalric justice and court cases.”

the containment of the potentially subversive martial hero within the imperially sanctioned framework of the official judge. Whereas the heroes of earlier martial arts novels such as The Outlaws of the Marsh possessed a clearly independent, indeed rebellious streak, in the case of the late nineteenth-century martial arts tale such a potential for rebellion had neatly been upended by marrying the martial arts tale to the more ideologically tame court-case novel.45

Since Lu Xun’s first observations, many scholars have contributed to our understanding of the generic qualities and ideological implications of this particular form of fiction.46 Margaret Wan, for instance, has sought to redefine the historical boundaries of the genre, pushing the roots of the chivalric/court-case novel back to the late eighteenth century.47 Chen Pingyuan, arguably the most influential mainland Chinese scholar to comment on the late nineteenth-century martial arts novel, posits the relationship between the two genres of court-case fiction and chivalric justice not as a newly formed bond between two pre-existing genres, but rather as a rupture within a single genre that produced two new ones.48 Finally, David Wang’s crucial study of nineteenth-century fiction expands on the argument by directly addressing the ideologi-

45. Though Lu Xun does not explicitly make the point, the figure of the judge endows the novel with both ideological and formal structure, because the judge is a central figure whose presence in the novel helps organize the sometimes only loosely connected adventures of many martial men.

46. I here mention just three important scholars who have utilized Lu Xun’s definition of the genre, but much of the mainland Chinese scholarship on martial arts fiction follows the logic of Lu Xun’s first discussion. Cao Yibing, for instance, uses the same term, “chivalric justice and court-case novels” 俠義公案小說, but applies it to all of Chinese martial arts fiction from the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE) to the present day. Chen Ying uses the term but reverses its order (i.e., “court-case chivalric justice novels” 公案俠義小說 instead of “chivalric justice court-case novels”). Liu Yinbo divides the chivalric justice novel 俠義小說 into different genres, one of which is the “court-case [chivalric justice] novel” 公案小說. Luo Liqun renames the “chivalric justice and legal-case novel” the “martial arts and court-case novel” 武俠公案小說, which, like Liu Yinbo, he regards as a subgenre of the Qing dynasty martial arts novel in general. See Cao Yibing, Xiayi gongan xiaoshuo shi, in particular pp. 176–264; Liu Yinbo, Zhongguo wuxia xiaoshuo shi, pp. 216–55; Chen Ying, Zhongguo yingxiong xiayi xiaoshuo tongshi, pp. 99–149; Luo Liqun, Zhongguo wuxia xiaoshuo shi, pp. 134–82.

47. Wan, Green Peony, pp. 21–55.

cal import of Lu Xun’s genre definition. According to Wang, the relationship between an imperial judge and a righteous outlaw does not represent, as Lu Xun would have it, a conservative spirit of involution, but rather a radical and innovative questioning of traditional notions of justice as well as a reinvention of the literary genres and techniques associated with such justice. 49

At the heart of the divided opinions of genre lies not simply the precise definition of a body of literary texts, but rather how we should view the existence of this particular body of texts vis-à-vis our understanding of the nineteenth century in general. Does the martial arts novel represent the last dying breath of an outdated political and literary system, as Lu Xun suggests, or the beginning of a new age, a “repressed modernity,” as David Wang posits? I take up this question at various points in the book, in the first chapter where I suggest that the acoustic interests of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel are already foreshadowed in the seventeenth-century reinterpretations of *The Outlaws of the Marsh*, or in the coda, where I suggest that the sounds of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel, though divorced from the storyteller persona, have found their way into a rich variety of literary genres. It suffices to say here that the late nineteenth-century martial arts novel, thanks to earlier studies by Lu Xun and others, represents a relatively well-known body of texts whose generic boundaries and aesthetic qualities have important ideological implications.

A second reason I have chosen the nineteenth-century martial arts novel is because of its immense popularity. The martial arts novel represents a genre whose aesthetics are firmly rooted in the marketplace. As such, it is crucial to remember that beginning in the 1870s, the genre experienced an accelerated moment of commercial growth in China. Starting with the phenomenal success of two novels, Wen Kang’s *Tale of Romance and Heroism* and the anonymous *San xia wu yi* 三俠五義 (The three knights and the five gallants; first published in 1879), a true tidal wave of martial arts fiction swept the country. Old and familiar tales were rewritten so as to include more martial arts mayhem, as in the case of Weng Shan’s *Qian Ming Zhengde Baimudan* 前明正德白牡丹 (The white peony and emperor Zhengde of the former Ming), an adaptation of the earlier 1842 work *Da Ming Zhengde you* 49. Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*, pp. 117–82.
Introduction

*Jiangnan* 大明正德游江南 (Emperor Zhengde of the Great Ming travels to Jiangnan). Sequels to already popular novels such as *Shi gongan* 施公案 (The cases of Judge Shi; first published in 1798; first sequel published in 1894, with a preface dated 1893) similarly included more action scenes and shifted attention from the order of the courtroom to the thrill of the green woods.50

To give one particular example of the late nineteenth-century martial arts novel as bestseller: after its first printing in 1879, *The Three Knights and Five Gallants* was republished at least thirteen times before the end of the nineteenth century.51 In the process, the title changed two times, from *Zhonglie xiayi zhuan* 忠烈俠義傳 (The tale of loyalty and righteousness; its original 1879 title), to *The Three Knights and the Five Gallants* (the title most commonly used nowadays; first used in the 1883 Wenya zhai 文雅齋 edition), and *Qi xia wu yi* 七俠五義 (The seven knights and the five gallants; used for the Guangbaisong zhai 廣百宋齋 edition edited by Yu Yue in 1889). A quick search in a bibliographic database such as WorldCat reveals, moreover, that the popularity of the novel did not wane in the twentieth century. By the end of the twentieth century, *The Three Knights* had been republished in different editions and under different titles at least fifty times. By now, *The Three Knights* has been translated into six different languages (Japanese, Russian, English, Malay, Vietnamese, and French), has provided material for popular contemporary storytelling performances, most notably in the versions of Wang Shaotang 王少堂 (1889–1968) and Shan Tianfang 单田方 (1935–), has been turned into different styles of regional opera including Peking opera, and has been adapted for television and film.52 The original novel was more-

50. For a list of martial arts novels published in the years between 1878 and 1900, see Keulemans, “Sounds of the Novel,” pp. 284–89.
52. For the many, mostly Beijing-based operas associated with the stories of *The Three Knights* and its sequels, see Chen Tao, *Bao gong xi yanjiu*, pp. 221–28. Note that Chen slightly overstates the influence of the novel. Some of the operas Chen associates with *The Three Knights* had a genealogy that long predated the novel (or the storytelling on which the novel is based). As such, these operas may have become associated with the popular novel, but most likely were originally based on older versions of the same opera, not the more recent novel.
over soon followed by two sequels, *The Latter Five Gallants* in 1890 and *Xu xiao wu yi* (The continued latter five gallants) in 1891, both of which offer even more scenes of martial arts action than the original. In the years following, close to twenty additional sequels were printed, all of which show a similar fascination with heroic knights, flying heroes, and dazzling duels.\(^5^3\)

As one of the most popular bodies of texts written during the late nineteenth century and as one of the genres prominently discussed by the progenitor of Chinese literary studies Lu Xun, the martial arts novel has enjoyed its fair share of scholarly attention, inspiring what can be loosely categorized as three different lines of inquiry: the generic, the philological, and the folkloric.\(^5^4\) Since I have already discussed the generic approach above, let me here continue with the second line of inquiry initiated by Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962), who, in two seminal prefaces written in the 1920s, took a more philological approach. In his preface to *The Three Knights and the Five Gallants*, for instance, Hu Shi traced the textual genealogy of the novel, investigating issues of plot, characterization, and language from the early Song dynasty historical sources concerning the novel’s main character, Judge Bao, until its eventual nineteenth-century novel form.\(^5^5\) Moreover, because of his interests in the relationship between regional and national languages, Hu Shi played a crucial role in reestablishing the Beijing origins of this popular novel, a theme of geographical specificity he further elaborated upon in his preface to Wen Kang’s *Tale of Romance and Heroism*, which Hu identified as “typically Beijing bannerman,” both in terms of its cultural conservatism and its linguistic brilliance.\(^5^6\)

\(^{53}\) For details on these editions, see Keulemans, “Sounds of the Novel,” pp. 290–311.

\(^{54}\) The distinctions between these three lines of inquiry are of course not absolute. Moreover, the philological approach of Hu Shi, as well as the folkloric approach of Aying and others, can already be found in Lu Xun’s study, albeit in brief form. Lu Xun notes, for instance, the earlier Yuan dynasty operas informing the stories of Judge Bao in *The Three Knights* just as he comments on the storyteller origins of many of these novels. See Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe*, pp. 198 and 203–4 respectively.

\(^{55}\) Hu Shi, “*San xia wu yi xu.*”

\(^{56}\) See Hu Shi, “*Ernü yingxiong zhuan xu.*”
Finally, we can discern a third line of inquiry that builds on Hu Shi’s interest in philology, textual origins, and geographical provenance but places these concerns in the context of folk literature, in particular the specific history of nineteenth-century Beijing storytelling. As Hu Shi pointed out in his early preface, the *Three Knights and the Five Gallants* was originally authored by “a certain Shi Yukun” 石玉昆, someone Hu Shi mistakenly identified as the writer of the novel but who, as scholars such as Aying 阿英 (pen name of Qian Defu 錢德富 1900–1977) and Li Jiarui 李家瑞 (1895–1975) pointed out, was actually a popular, early nineteenth-century storyteller from Beijing. This line of inquiry eventually led to the work of Susan Blader, who painstakingly compared the printed martial arts novel *The Three Knights* with earlier handwritten storyteller manuscripts located in the Fusinian library of the Institute for Historical Philology of the Academia Sinica. Building on Li Jiarui’s and Susan Blader’s early work, scholars such as Meir Shahar, Miao Huaiming, and Margaret Wan further developed this relationship between a local storytelling manuscript culture and printed texts, each of them adding new layers to our understanding of the oral-textual interaction that led to the development of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel.

This book draws on all three lines of inquiry but seeks to add a new angle by focusing on how these novels employ the suggestion of sound. If the first line of inquiry brought a strong ideological component to the study of the martial arts novel, focusing in particular on the tension between potentially rebellious and orthodox elements in terms of characters, I seek to show how such an ideological tension can also be found in the very acoustic form of the novel itself, the loud spectacle of *renao* presenting a kind of vulgar, unruly, and boisterous entertainment both exciting and potentially transgressive. From an ideological point of view the sounds of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel are interesting because they show how printed texts can simultaneously introduce and discipline the loud excitement of *renao*, producing a commodity that...
sells because it packages—both in the sense of presenting and containing—a particularly popular form of acoustic spectacle.

The second line of inquiry introduced a philological interest in the martial arts novel and coupled this to the geographical specificity of Beijing bannerman culture. I aim to explore these issues from an acoustic angle, focusing in particular on the relationship between dialect sounds and standard vernacular pronunciation and the way the acoustic elements of speech are codified in text. Looking back at the events of the twentieth century, we might opine that the interest in bringing speech and writing together expressed in this second line of inquiry foreshadowed the vernacular language movement of the 1910s and 1920s. I prefer, however, to avoid such a teleological path pointing towards a national language movement, and instead discuss the combination of spoken and written language as expressive of typical late-imperial interests, that is, the combination of Qing dynasty evidential scholarship on the one hand and the rise of nineteenth-century regionalism on the other.

Finally, this book will add to the existing folk literature studies by showing how sound crucially mediates the relationship between oral and textual cultures. Specifically, I argue that the relationship between storyteller praxis and printed text should not simply be regarded as reflecting a straightforward evolutionary progression from primitive oral origins to sophisticated textual final product, but rather as a strategically produced association between storyteller and text promoted by the nineteenth-century printing industry. This production of storyteller liveliness within the text was not simply a matter of transcribing “sound”; rather, it involved a protracted process of textual reinvention of the storyteller voice aimed at maximizing sales while minimizing costs. By comparing handwritten storyteller manuscripts with printed texts, this book will show how authors, editors, and publishers incorporated, elided, transformed, or at times added telltale storyteller signs such as onomatopoeias, poetic song, imitation of vendor calls, or the mimicry of dialect accents, special effects that combined “storyteller” acoustic craftsmanship and printing techniques to produce a highly entertaining, highly marketable form of fiction.
The first chapter of this book begins by exploring the role of sound in the late-imperial vernacular novel by contrasting the way two important scholars—the seventeenth-century scholar Jin Shengtan and the renowned scholar Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907)—imagined the voice of the popular storyteller. The writings of these two scholars, one from the beginning and one from the final years of the period in which the vernacular novel flourished as a form of writing, reveal how, despite the popular, oral connotations of the storyteller’s voice, the literati employed the acoustic qualities of the storyteller figure in an elitist fashion, namely to define a realm of written textual communication shared by like-minded scholars during moments of expanding print culture.

The second chapter turns from the literati appreciation of the storyteller figure to the more local and popular realm of Beijing publishing in the nineteenth century. An investigation of the local roots of the martial arts novel reveals that the proliferation of this popular genre at the end of the nineteenth century should not be understood solely as the result of new printing techniques introduced from the West, but also as the revival and reinvention of certain “traditional” storytelling techniques. As the novel was transported from its original local origins to an ever-widening circle of readers, the rise of the martial arts novel remained predicated upon an older, Beijing storytelling culture that was reinvented at every reiteration of the novel as handwritten manuscript, xylographic, and eventually lithographic printed object. In emphasizing the interaction between printing technology and “traditional” storytelling methods, chapter 2 shows that with technological “progress,” older traditional forms of entertainment do not necessarily disappear, but rather are reinvented for the purposes of modern print. Indeed, in communities connected through the mechanics of printed text, the storyteller’s voice helps to facilitate the imagination of this community by lending it an organic sense of oral intimacy.

After introducing the print-historical background of the martial arts novel in the first two chapters, in the next three chapters I focus on three specific acoustic techniques employed both by storytellers and printed texts to show how acoustic spectacle was produced in these tales. The third chapter, “Sounds That Sell,” looks into the first of such techniques, the imitation of loud vendor calls. Specifically, the chapter explores the literary use of these acoustic advertisements in different performance texts produced in the nineteenth century, arguing
that authors employed these calls to both highlight and contain the lively attractions (*renao*) of the marketplace. In doing so, these authors created a typically late-imperial literary appreciation of the marketplace, producing an implied listener/reader who approaches the literary marketplace with disciplined attention, an implied artesian storyteller/narrator whose tasteful craft allows him to transcend the vulgarity of other market attractions, and finally a narrative form that subjugates the diverse attractions of the market to the demands of a linearly unfolding plot. In the process of turning oral performance into printed text, these novels may have preserved some of the original attraction of the oral performer’s mimicry of vendor calls, but they severely truncated such calls to fit the demands of the textual medium and the novel form.

If the third chapter shows how the acoustic performance of the storyteller became muted in the process of printing, the fourth chapter illustrates how, in the transformation from popular handwritten libretto to printed novel, the sound of acoustic spectacle can also become increasingly loud. In this chapter I investigate a second oral/textual technique, onomatopoeia, and show how nineteenth-century martial arts novels were increasingly filled with such acoustic sparkles of sound. Specifically, the first half of the chapter looks at the way one particularly popular martial arts series, the various novels belonging to *The Three Knights* series, uses onomatopoeia to capture the physical sensation of the martial arts action scene not on a visual but on an acoustic level. The second half places the use of this form of acoustic excitement into its print-historical context. A comparison between the early storyteller libretti on which *The Three Knights* and *The Five Gallants* is based and the final iteration of the novel as printed text demonstrates how the later novels employ onomatopoeia to a much greater extent than the handwritten texts, thus suggesting that onomatopoeias in such novels may well have been associated with storyteller performances, but were still repackaged for the purposes of the printing industry.

The fifth chapter shifts from these commercial aspects of acoustic spectacle to the more explicitly political uses of printed sound by investigating the storyteller’s technique of mimicking regional speech. In the context of nineteenth-century regionalism, such dialect mimicry allowed martial arts novels to reaffirm Beijing’s central political and linguistic status (often at the expense of the provincial periphery) in two ways. First, as a vernacular reflection of the capital, the novels