

FROM PUBLIC NITPICKING TO INDIGNANT WRITING: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SATIRICAL SPIRIT OF *THE SCHOLARS* IN THE CONDEMNATION NOVELS OF THE LATE QING DYNASTY

Jingmei Huang

School of Liberal Arts, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.1045>

Received: 19 June 2025/Published: 21 July 2025

ABSTRACT

The Scholars holds an extremely important position in Chinese classical novels. With his superb satirical art and unique writing style, Wu Jingzi made this novel a paradigmatic satire in Chinese literature. The late Qing dynasty's condemnatory novels inherited and developed the satirical art and spirit of *The Scholars* in many aspects. Although they are not as literarily valuable as *The Scholars*, exploring the evolution of the satirical spirit of *The Scholars* in these novels helps us further understand the complexity of the late Qing society and also provides a new perspective for our study of the satirical spirit of *The Scholars*.

Keywords: The Scholars; satirical spirit; late Qing dynasty condemnatory novels; pointing out faults with an impartial mind; writing furiously out of indignation.

1. INTRODUCTION

When Lu Xun evaluated the satirical art of *The Scholars* in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, he remarked that "With the publication of Wu Jingzi's *The Scholars*, written with an impartial perspective, it exposed the contemporary social evils. Its incisive criticism was particularly targeted at the scholarly community. The writing style was both poignant and humorous, subtle yet replete with satire. As a result, a novel truly deserving of the label of a satirical work emerged in the literary world." The outstanding satirical art of *The Scholars* has elevated it to the pinnacle of Chinese classical satirical novels. Its satirical elements and artistic structure have had a profound impact on the emergence and development of the late - Qing condemnatory novels. Lu Xun also noted in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* that the late - Qing condemnatory novels were deeply influenced by *The Scholars*, but they fell short of *The Scholars* in terms of the application of satirical techniques and overall artistic quality. However, during the late Qing, a transitional period between Chinese feudal society and modern society, the development of novels held great significance for the history of Chinese literature. The condemnatory novels were a highly influential genre during this era. Therefore, exploring how *The Scholars* influenced the maturation and development of the late - Qing condemnatory novels is of great value for the study of both the late - Qing condemnatory novels and *The Scholars*.

2. THE CONNOTATION OF SATIRE IN *THE SCHOLARS*

Lu Xun commented that Wu Jingzi satirized the world with an impartial mind in *The Scholars*. The satirical art in the book has made it the pinnacle of ancient Chinese satirical novels. The motivation for Wu Jingzi to create *The Scholars* is deeply rooted in the social context of the Kangxi and Qianlong periods of the Qing Dynasty and his personal life experiences. His family,

which had a long - standing noble status, declined midway. His own failure in the imperial examinations and his witnessing of the strife among scholars prompted him to use literature to deconstruct the alienation of scholars' spirits caused by the imperial examination system. The contemporaries' fanatical pursuit of fame and wealth and the hypocrisy of Confucian ethics are the core targets of his criticism. Through the narrative of "upholding an impartial mind and pointing out the current social problems", he exposed the contemporary situation in which the imperial examination system using the eight - legged essay as the standard distorted the personalities of lower - class scholars in the group portrait of scholars. This work not only continued the reflection on the rigid feudal ethics by the School of Individuality since the late Ming Dynasty, but also reconstructed the ideal of scholar culture with a satirical writing style of "being sad yet harmonious", and he place on his pursuit and longing for an independent personality through the images of recluses like Wang Mian. This creative intention goes beyond personal resentment and completes a systematic review of the value system of feudal literati, making *The Scholars* a rare critical text in classical Chinese literature that deconstructs the spiritual dilemma of the era with an "impartial mind", and its satirical nature stands out among ancient Chinese novels.

Wu Jingzi made the satirical nature of *The Scholars* rank among the top in ancient Chinese novels through his superb writing techniques. To achieve such a high - level satirical writing, the main satirical targets are hardly singular but should be diverse. Among them, the primary satirical target of Wu Jingzi is the alienation of scholars by the feudal imperial examination system, which is manifested in two aspects. First of all, he satirized the absurdity of the imperial examination system using the eight - legged essay in the Qing Dynasty. Wu Jingzi, through typical examples such as Zhou Jin banging his head against the examination booth board and Fan Jin going crazy upon passing the imperial examination, exposed the tragedy of the imperial examination system turning scholars into "puppets of fame and fortune".

The scholars in the book exhausted themselves in the empty eight - legged essays. For instance, Lu Bianxiu taught his daughter "imperial examination essays", which actually turned knowledge into a stepping - stone to officialdom. This satirizes how the eight - legged essay system for selecting officials devastated human nature. Another aspect is the satire of the false ecosystem bred by the feudal imperial examination system. In the book, Wu Jingzi depicted examples like Kuang Chaoren degenerating from an honest young man into a shameless one and Yan Gongsheng bullying the villagers under the pretext of his "imperial examination status", implying that the imperial examination system itself had long become a hotbed for hypocrisy and greed, and the so - called "those who excel in learning can become officials" had degraded into a fig leaf for power.

The hypocrisy and instrumentalization of Confucian ethics are also important targets of Wu Jingzi's satire in *The Scholars*. He satirized the formalization of the ritual and moral doctrines. The contradiction between Wang Yuhui's cold words "It's a good death" when persuading his daughter to commit martyrdom and his subsequent "grieving and fainting" exposed the distortion of human nature by the Neo - Confucian concept of "preserving heavenly principles and eliminating human desires". Meanwhile, Niu Pulang's impersonation and Kuang Chaoren's ingratitude tore off the warm veil of the "filial piety and fraternal love" ethics.

At the same time, Wu Jingzi also satirized the spiritual collapse and social decline of the gentry class. Tang Feng starved the Hui people in the name of "honest governance", and Wang

Hui judged his political achievements by the "sound of the weighing scale". Through these extreme cases, Wu Jingzi revealed the utilitarian nature beneath the guise of "ethical and moral principles" in the bureaucratic system, delivering a sharp satire on the operating logic of the feudal regime. He also showed the stinginess and rascality of ordinary townspeople through plots such as Yan Jiansheng's reluctance to waste the candle at his deathbed and Yan Gongsheng's refusal to pay the boat fare, which deconstructed the cultural image of the gentry class as "gentle, kind, respectful, frugal and yielding". The ineffective actions of the "ideal scholars" like Dr. Yu implied the collapse of the traditional scholar's way in the torrent of the times. Mr. Ma Er views the "imperial examination" as something "sacred and inviolable." In reality, he equates it with a "path to wealth." During his visit to the West Lake, he remains unmoved by the scenic beauty but is solely fixated on the exam papers in the bookstore. This depiction metaphorically reflects the gradual spiritual desertification of scholars under the influence of the commodity economy.

Meanwhile, Wu Jingzi also mocks the futility of scholars' attempts to resist reality with the ideal of reviving ancient traditions. He does so by portraying Zhuang Shaoguang, who retreats to Xuanwu Lake for seclusion, yet still gets caught up in the officialdom's web, and Chi Hengshan's renovation of the Taibo Temple, which degenerates into a mere formality. This also hints at the predicament of traditional scholar - culture during the modern transformation. It is precisely these diverse satirical subjects and the sharp satirical edge that make *The Scholars* a paragon of satire in Chinese classical novels.

2. THE TRANSFORMATION OF SATIRE IN THE CONDEMNATION NOVELS OF THE LATE QING DYNASTY

After the Gengzi Incident, Chinese society in the late Qing Dynasty was plunged into a dual crisis of institutional collapse and value disorder. "Anxiety and indignation" became the collective psychological undercurrent among the intellectual community during this period. Journalist-writers like Li Boyuan and Wu Jianren, leveraging the modern media ecosystem, fused the factual nature of news with the critical edge of literature to create a distinctive form of "indignant writing". This creative shift was not only rooted in the identity anxiety of the scholar-gentry class following the abolition of the imperial examination system but also constrained by the public critical space fostered by the concession culture. Media outlets such as *The Amusement Gazette* and *The Current Affairs Gazette* offered dissemination channels for "exposing the dark side" writing, which in turn made novels a new critical vehicle to supplant traditional remonstrance.

Strange Events Witnessed in Twenty Years uses the first - person account of "One Who Has Survived a Dozen Perils" to condemn the officialdom as a "world of jackals and wolves." Compared with the objective portrayal in *The Scholars* with "an impartial mind," this book features emotional criticism driven by individual experiences. Wu Jianren employs a cartoonish depiction of characters like Gou Xilou, a figure representing a dandy in the foreign concessions, to turn the moral degradation resulting from the impact of commercial civilization into a personal outburst of anger. In *The Officialdom Unmasked*, the exaggerated scene of "the governor meeting a foreigner" adopts the extreme approach of "exaggerating from ten to twelve points" [1], breaking the restraint of the traditional "Spring and Autumn Annals writing style." This writing strategy of "excessive and undisguised language" actually aligns with the "sensational" communication logic of the newspaper industry during that period. For instance, in *A Record of Civilization*, Li Boyuan creates a visual impact similar to a "gallery of scoundrels" by stringing together events such as anti -

foreign incidents and the New Deal. The Carnal Prayer Mat should be The Flowers of the Evil Past. It breaks through the biographical structure of The Scholars, which is described as "a long work but rather like a collection of short stories." It weaves the history of the last thirty years of the Qing Dynasty through the fictional storylines of Jin Wenqing and Fu Caiyun. By using the writing technique of presenting history as news, the novel's structure exhibits the fragmented collage characteristic unique to modern media.

In essence, the aforementioned transformations represent the creative adaptation of the classical "eulogy and satire" tradition within the context of modern media.

When The Scholars still had to adopt the narrative strategy of "pretending to be set in the Ming Dynasty" to evade risks, the late Qing satirical novels were able to turn satire into a "social CT scan" thanks to the publishing freedom in the concessions.

In Jin Xinrong's opinion, the late Qing satirical novels signaled the shift of Chinese satirical literature from "elegant satire by literati" to "social realism." Their artistic merit lies in the fact that these novels exposed social ills in a manner akin to "news reports," thus laying the groundwork for the critical tradition of modern literature.[2] This also equipped literary criticism with the empirical validity of sociological field research and offered dual preparations in terms of narrative paradigm and critical ethics for the emergence of the "problem novels" during the May 4th era. Wang Dewei contends that, in contrast to the increasingly constricted orthodoxy of "concern for the times and the nation" after the May 4th Movement, the late Qing period unveiled more intricate possibilities. He even posited the claim that "without the late Qing, there would be no May 4th." [3]

3. MANIFESTATIONS AND TRACING OF THE TRANSMUTATION

3.1 Manifestation of transformation

In fact, in terms of content, Strange Tales from Twenty Years' Experience truly encompasses a New The Scholars. When it comes to portraying bureaucrats, Wu Jianren might not have outperformed The Officialdom Unmasked. However, he was indeed successful in depicting the dandies in the foreign concessions at that time. Although his over - exaggeration of their vices deviated from the truth, it didn't turn into a drawback.[4]

A Ying's discussion on Wu Jianren's *Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio* proves the achievements in satirical art of *The Officialdom Unmasked* and *Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio*, two of the four major condemnatory novels of the late Qing Dynasty. The Classical Literature Editorial Office of the People's Literature Publishing House holds that *The Scholars* represents the pinnacle of ancient Chinese satirical novels. Although the achievements and values of the late Qing condemnatory novels such as *The Officialdom Unmasked*, *Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio*, *The Flower That Withered in a Dream* and *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* cannot be put on a par with those of *The Scholars*, either their genres imitate *The Scholars* or their overall writing styles are obviously influenced by it.[5] Jin Xinrong points out that late Qing condemnatory novels like *Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio* differ from the "allegorized" criticism in Ming and Qing satirical novels. Instead, they expose the social darkness with a "realistic" approach, and behind their "exaggeration" lies the precise capture of real - life details.[6] The underlying motivation for this satirical transformation stems from the upheaval of the social and cultural structure in the late Qing Dynasty. In *The Repressed Modernity*, Wang Dewei

further reveals that through the rhetoric of "excessive vilification" in such works, for instance, the extreme portrayal of the "whoring, gambling, feasting and idling" of the dandies in the foreign concessions in **Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio** actually deconstructs the traditional ethical order through a carnival - like narrative. Behind the exaggeration lies the manifestation of the modern - day anxiety about the collapse of the imperial examination system and the disorder of social values under the impact of commercial civilization.[7]

This transformation is not only reflected in the innovation of artistic techniques but also implies a shift in the cultural criticism paradigm. Satirical novels of the Ming and Qing dynasties, such as **The Scholars**, still adhered to the poetic tradition of "gentleness and sincerity." However, the condemnatory novels of the late Qing dynasty transformed satire into social dissection by "exposing the dark side." The "excessive and undisguised language" was precisely the inevitable form of public criticism in the context of modern media. This attempt laid the groundwork for the realist attempt of the May 4th literature to "reveal the sufferings."

Different from the cruel social environment, such as the "literary inquisition," faced by writers like Wu Jingzi in the early and mid - Qing dynasty when writing **The Scholars**, the social environment was more tolerant for the late Qing condemnatory novelists when they wrote their works. During this period, China was beset with both internal strife and external aggression. The Qing government was struggling to fend off the invasions of powerful Western and Japanese countries.

Although there were still exorbitant taxes and levies, the supervision of literati was far less strict than in the early and mid - Qing dynasty. Therefore, writers like Li Boyuan, Wu Jianren, and Liu E were able to expose the social reality quite profoundly. With the change of the social environment, the targets they intended to expose in their writing were naturally different from those in the era of **The Scholars**. When these condemnatory novelists wrote novels, they could turn the "gentle and veiled satire" that Wu Jingzi and others only dared to use into a more straightforward form of "ridicule." In his early work **A Brief History of Chinese Fiction**, Lu Xun regarded **The Scholars** as the origin of condemnatory novels, highlighting its "spirit of criticizing politics and customs." Later, in **A Brief History of Chinese Fiction** again, he differentiated between satire and condemnation, praising **The Scholars** for "upholding fairness and pointing out the contemporary social ills," and criticizing the late Qing condemnatory novels for their "excessive and undisguised language and lack of subtlety." [8] Chen Pingyuan also thought that the late Qing condemnatory novels tended to overstate, showing the flaw of "exaggeration." [9] Nevertheless, the late Qing satirical novels remain highly significant for the development of modern Chinese fiction. These novels are characterized by their direct exposure of social evils. For instance, works such as *The Officialdom Unmasked* employ exaggerated writing styles to directly target bureaucratic corruption and moral degradation, breaking away from the traditional poetic doctrine of "gentleness and sincerity". Their satirical approach with "blunt and outspoken language" directly echoes the modern social transformation. They deconstruct the old ethics in a manner akin to news reporting, laying the groundwork for the criticism of tradition in modern literature and carrying distinct modern enlightenment significance.

3.2 Exploration of the causes of transformation

Different from the publishing industry in the early Qing Dynasty, as European capitalist powers invaded China, the newspaper and periodical industry in the late Qing Dynasty witnessed rapid development. The newspaper and periodical industry were quite prosperous during this period, and newspapers and periodicals like Shenbao and Shiwubao sprang up one after another. These newspapers and periodicals not only spread news and political commentaries but also serialized novels and essays, serving as an important platform for ideological dissemination and literary creation during this period. The four masterpieces among the late Qing satirical novels were all initially serialized in newspapers and periodicals. Li Boyuan's *The Officialdom Unmasked* was serialized in *The World of Vanities*, Wu Jianren's *Strange Tales from a Lonely Studio* was serialized in *New Fiction* magazine, while Liu E's *The Travels of Lao Can* was published in *Illustrated Fiction*, and Zeng Pu's *Flowers of the Evil Sea* was serialized in *Fiction Forest*. The development of newspapers and periodicals expanded their readership, and the novel serialization model played a major role in this. Readers were enthusiastic about reading novels in newspapers and periodicals, and the weekly or semi-monthly serialization of novels could fully stimulate their reading enthusiasm. It was this serialization model that made readers, the audience of newspapers and periodicals, constantly urge the progress of novel writing. As a result, late Qing novels represented by satirical novels had to adopt a "short, simple and fast" narrative model to meet the needs of readers and the market. In such a fast-paced novel-writing process, it was difficult for satirical novels to maintain the euphemistic satire similar to that in *The Scholars*. Their satire even became more rapid following the rhythm of writing and publication, and it could be said that the satire was written in a hasty manner.

In the early Qing Dynasty, Neo-Confucianism devolved into empty talk about moral principles. Wu Jingzi satirized the hypocrisy of false Confucian scholars through plots such as "The Funeral of the Du Family" by Du Shaoqing, which echoed Dai Zhen's reflection that "cruel officials kill people with the law, and later Confucian scholars kill people with moral principles." Inspired by Huang Zongxi's idea that "learning should be applied to real-world affairs", Wu Jingzi demonstrated his pursuit of the ideal that "scholars should take the world as their responsibility" through plots such as Wang Mian's seclusion and refusal to take up an official post, and Doctor Yu's efforts in building water conservancy projects. This stood in contrast to the cumbersome tendency of the Qian-Jia School of Textual Research. During the prosperous Kangxi and Qianlong eras, the development of the commodity economy continuously challenged traditional ethics, and the scholarly circle presented a scene of "the breakdown of propriety and music". For instance, plots like Yan Jiansheng's frugality with candles on his deathbed and Kuang Chaoren's betrayal exposed how utilitarianism undermined filial piety, fraternal love, trust, and righteousness. Wu Jingzi attempted to reconstruct the ethics of scholars regarding "conduct and career choices" through characters like Du Shaoqing, who distributed his wealth, and Zhuang Shaoguang, who declined official positions. This echoed Li Zhi's "innocent-heart theory" in the late Ming Dynasty, which called for the true nature of humanity. Such a social environment motivated Wu Jingzi to achieve his satirical writing by setting the story in a fictional Ming-Dynasty historical context and adopting a euphemistic writing style. However, the condemnatory novels of the late Qing Dynasty were different. Since the Westernization Movement, China had embarked on the journey of "the introduction of Western learning". Although the fundamental feudal central-集权 system

remained intact, the thoughts in the late Qing Dynasty were still influenced by the West to a certain degree. Under the influence of the spread of Western learning, Liang Qichao, Kang Youwei and others launched the Reform Movement of 1898, aiming to save China by establishing a constitutional monarchy. Similarly, the condemnatory novels of the late Qing Dynasty also reflected a reflection on the social system. In his novel *Travels of Lao Can*, Liu E revealed his vague longing for the constitutional monarchy through Lao Can's travels. He advocated introducing the Western constitutional framework based on the Qing court and achieving the transformation of the system through reform rather than revolution. The plot in the book that criticizes cruel officials and tyrannical rule actually implied an expectation to restrict the monarch's power. He hoped to support the monarch's power through industrial and educational reforms to build a modern state form of "shared rule by the monarch and the people", which reflected the political ideals of the reformists in the late Qing Dynasty.

The transformation of writers' social identities also accounts for the changes in the satirical art of late Qing condemnation novels. Unlike in Wu Jingzi's time, during the era of Li Boyuan, Wu Jianren and others, literati writers typically had multiple social identities rather than just one. They often held several positions simultaneously. For instance, Li Boyuan worked as a newspaper editor while also being a literary creator. Liu E's **Travels of Lao Can** was published in **Illustrated Fiction**, which was edited by Li Boyuan. These multiple identities not only allowed these writers to gain exposure to a broader spectrum of society and gather more writing materials for their novels but also enabled them to shed the euphemistic traits of scholars in the mid- Qing Dynasty and earlier, thus facilitating more direct and incisive satirical writing.

4. EXPLORATION OF THE VALUE OF LITERARY HISTORY IN TRANSFORMATION

Late Qing condemnatory novels originated from satirical novels such as **The Scholars**. For example, Lu Xun commented on Li Boyuan's **Exposure of the Official World**: "With a complex plot and a large number of characters, the narrative usually begins and ends with one character, being rather disjointed, which is quite similar to **The Scholars**." [10] Moreover, most of these novels share the same genre structure as **The Scholars**, and almost all of them are chapter - and - verse novels. When structuring these novels, the method of stringing together trivial matters and anecdotes is often employed. Works like **Exposure of the Official World** and **The Officialdom** are simply compilations of stories. One story is told after another, and the connections between characters and plots across different stories are rather tenuous. Works such as **Strange Tales of My Twenty - Year's Experience**, **A Dispassionate View**, and **The Travels of Lao Can** use the protagonist's travels and the rotation of storytelling to string together different types of stories, creating a superficial sense of unity. Although there are characters that run through the entire book in these novels, the way the stories are strung together is similar to that in **The Scholars**. [11] This reflects the inheritance of condemnatory novels from Ming and Qing satirical novels.

Wang Dewei pointed out in the introduction of **The Repressed Modernity: A New Study of Late Qing Fiction** that "In my view, Chinese writers' efforts to modernize literature were no less significant than those in the West. This eager impulse did not start with the May 4th Movement but originated in the late Qing Dynasty." [12] Although Wang Dewei's statement seems to over - exaggerate the role of late Qing novels, his evaluation of the significance of late Qing novels to the modernization of Chinese literature is justifiable. Although the late Qing dynasty condemnatory novels are not as good as **The Scholars** in terms of satirical art and not as profound

as the realistic novels after the May 4th Movement in exposing society, they still made significant contributions to the modernization of Chinese literature. The late Qing dynasty condemnatory novels promoted the modernization of literature through the innovation of narrative paradigms. They attempted to break away from the paradigm of classical chapter - and - verse novels and create the "news - compilation style", simulating the information explosion of modern society with a fragmented structure. This is reflected in the collection - style cases of *The Officialdom Unmasked*. The satirical techniques of the late Qing dynasty condemnatory novels shifted from the "gentle and subtly satirical" style in *The Scholars* to "excessive exposure of evils", deconstructing traditional ethics through exaggerated realism. This can be evidenced in *The Travels of Lao Can* when it exposes the tyranny of cruel officials.

Meanwhile, the serial - publication mechanism of newspapers and periodicals further facilitated the marketization of literature. The "social dissection" - style criticism provided narrative resources and critical ethics for the "revealing of sufferings" in May 4th literature. In fact, it was a crucial transitional form in the transformation from classical literature to modern literature, and this creative approach directly influenced the writing of "social novels" during the May 4th period. Although Lu Xun criticized the late Qing dynasty condemnatory novels, stating that "Although their intention is to rectify the world, seemingly similar to satirical novels, their language is flamboyant, their writing lacks subtlety, and they even overstate things to cater to the public's tastes. Therefore, there is a wide gap in their measure and technique, so they are called condemnatory novels.[13]", it was difficult for him not to be influenced by the late Qing dynasty condemnatory novels when writing his own novels. In Lu Xun's *A Madman's Diary*, the perspective of the "madman" is used to expose the "cannibalistic" feudal ethics, and its radical stance of "using novels to condemn the world" is consistent with the spirit of "exposing the dark side" in condemnatory novels. Fragmented narration and the focus on social issues have become the forerunner of critical realism, completing the transformation of the literary paradigm from classical satire of the world to modern enlightenment.

Of course, there are indeed certain problems in the artistic quality and the depth of social problem exposure of the late Qing dynasty condemnatory novels. Their limitations are concentrated in what Lu Xun criticized as "superficial and unrestrained in diction, without any subtlety in writing." Affected by the intensification of the social crisis after the Boxer Rebellion, newspaper - man writers such as Li Boyuan and Wu Jianren were eager to intervene in reality through literature. This led to the change of the satirical technique in condemnatory novels from the in - depth portrayal of human nature in *The Scholars*, which was "sad yet humorous", to the "exhibition of a group of ugly characters" like in *The Officialdom Unmasked*. For example, the extreme description of the "whoring, gambling, eating and indulging" of the dandies in the foreign concessions in *Strange Events Witnessed in Twenty Years* seems to claim to be "realistic writing", but in fact, it simplifies social criticism into a list of curious phenomena, losing the narrative tension of "gentle and full of satire" in classical satirical literature. Wang Dewei pointed out that the essence of this "excessive vilification" rhetoric is the superficial deconstruction of the ethical order by carnival - style narration. It fails to penetrate into the mechanism of the imperial examination system's alienation of human nature as *The Scholars* does, resulting in the critical dimension of such novels only remaining at the news - style exposure of social scandals, which greatly weakens the depth of these works' thinking about the dilemmas of literary modernity.

5. CONCLUSION

As the pinnacle of Chinese classical satirical novels, the satirical art and profound expression in *The Scholars* have become a model for satirical art in ancient China and even in modern and contemporary times. From the impartial criticism in *The Scholars* to the passionate writing in the late Qing dynasty's condemnatory novels, the evolution of satire can be seen as a collision between the fading spirit of feudal scholars and the rising enlightenment discourse. It can be said that the scope of satirical criticism in the late Qing dynasty's condemnatory novels has broadened compared with that in *The Scholars*. Due to factors such as society and the writers themselves, the objects involved are more diverse. However, this doesn't mean that their satirical art outshines that of *The Scholars*. In fact, the expansion of the satirical breadth in the late Qing dynasty's condemnatory novels is achieved at the expense of their inner artistic depth. Compared with their satire, which is sharp but not profound enough, the "impartiality" spirit of *The Scholars* still remains the highest standard for satirical literature.

REFERENCES

- [1] Chen Pingyuan. *The Starting Point of Modern Chinese Novels: A Study of Novels from the Late Qing Dynasty to the Early Republic of China* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010: 254.
- [2] Jin Xinrong. *The Transformation of Realistic Satire — An Introduction to Late Qing Dynasty Condemnatory Novels* [J]. *Jiangsu Social Sciences*, 2008, 5: 173 - 177.
- [3] [US] Wang Dewei. Translated by Song Weijie. *The Repressed Modernity — New Theories on Late Qing Dynasty Novels* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005: 2 - 16.
- [4] A Ying. *A History of Late Qing Dynasty Novels* [M]. Beijing: Dongfang Press, 1996: 20.
- [5] (Qing Dynasty) Wu Jingzi. Annotated by Zhang Huijian. *The Scholars* [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2002: 5.
- [6] Jin Xinrong. *The Transformation of Realistic Satire — An Introduction to Late Qing Dynasty Condemnatory Novels* [J]. *Jiangsu Social Sciences*, 2008, 5: 173 - 177.
- [7] [US] Wang Dewei. Translated by Song Weijie. *The Repressed Modernity — New Theories on Late Qing Dynasty Novels* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005.
- [8] Wen Qingxin. *Lu Xun's "Literati Habits", Essay Writing and the Study of Chinese Novel History — Centered on the Satirical Novels and Condemnatory Novels in A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* [J]. *Journal of Jiangxi Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2017, 50(3): 96 - 103.
- [9] Chen Pingyuan. *The Starting Point of Modern Chinese Novels: A Study of Novels from the Late Qing Dynasty to the Early Republic of China* [M].
- [10] Lu Xun. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction (Illustrated Edition)* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2004: 259.
- [11] Zhou Lingyun, Wen Mingming. *The Structure of The Scholars and Its Influence on Late Qing Condemnation Novels*[J]. *Movie Literature*, 2007, (22): 76-77.
- [12] [US] David Der-wei Wang. Translated by Song Weijie. *Repressed Modernity: Towards a New Theory of Late Qing Fiction*[M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005: 9-10.
- [13] Lu Xun. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction (Illustrated Edition)*[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2004: 258.