



Roland Altenburger

The Sword or the Needle

The Female Knight-errant (xia) in Traditional Chinese Narrative

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This study focussing on narratives about female knights-errant (nüxia) cuts along a thematic line in Chinese literary history, and thus seeks to contribute to understanding and appreciation mainly in three fields of inquiry: the formation of narrative subgenre; the literary representation of gender; and the particularities of the Chinese knight-errantry narrative. It traces the processes of textual collecting, editing, rewriting, and intertextual referencing by which narratives about female knights-errant were invented as, and forged into, a thematic sub-genre. The narratives about a character type who boldly transgresses gender boundaries are studied as an exemplary case for a general inquiry into the subversive significance of images of gender-bending strong female characters in the Chinese narrative tradition. Finally, the present study investigates into representations of the practice of Chinese knight-errantry, which includes assassination for social policing, private vengeance, and banditry.

Contents: Introduction: Xiaoshuo, Xia and the Literary Representation of the Female – Social Policing, Vengeance, Banditry: The Basic Themes of the Female Xia Tale in the Tang – Redressing Wrongs in Human Relations: Transformations of the Female Xia in the Song – Agencies of Order: Female Xia Lore in Qing-Dynasty Classical Tales – Immortal Swords-women Ordering the World: An Early- and a Late-Qing Novel – The Female Xia in the Tangles of Romance: The Taming and Domestication of Shisanmei – Lü Siniang Assassinates the Yongzheng Emperor: Transformations of a Legend in Early-Republican Popular Fiction – Reappraisals of the Female Xia in Modern Urban Popular Fiction Around 1930.

The Author: Roland Altenburger is Research Associate at the University of Zurich, Department of Chinese Studies. He received his doctoral degree in Chinese Studies from the University of Zurich in 1996. His research stays include a two-year term at Harvard University. The present book is the revised version of his postdoctoral thesis for the attainment of the venia legendi (Habilitationsschrift), accepted by the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Zurich in June, 2001. His publications focus on pre-modern and early modern Chinese literature, particularly vernacular narrative. His research interests also include literary regionalism and popular culture.

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