

Merchant Narratives in Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio from the Perspective of Commodity Economy in the Ming-Qing Dynasties

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Abstract: The Ming-Qing dynasties witnessed unprecedented prosperity of China's commodity economy. The commercial boom broke the traditional social structure of "scholar-farmer-artisan-merchant", shook the orthodox Confucian values of "valuing righteousness over profit", and spawned a large number of merchant-themed literary works. As a classic collection of zhiguai stories in the Qing Dynasty, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* not only inherits the traditional ghost and fairy narrative tradition but also vividly records the commercial landscape, merchant survival status and social value changes under the development of commodity economy. This paper takes the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* as the research object, combing the development context of commodity economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties, analyzing the diversified merchant images, commercial operation scenarios and profit-righteousness value conflicts in the works. It further explores how Pu Songling integrated real commercial social phenomena into fictional ghost and fairy stories, reflected the social changes, spiritual confusion and value reconstruction of the late feudal society, and reveals the unique literary value and historical significance of merchant narratives in the context of traditional Chinese commercial civilization.

Keywords: Ming-Qing Dynasties; Commodity Economy; *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*; Merchant Narratives; Value Conflict.

1. Introduction

From the mid-Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, with the implementation of new taxation policies such as the Single-Whip Tax Law and the gradual relaxation of commercial restrictions, China's commodity economy entered a mature and prosperous stage. The widespread use of silver currency, the emergence of professional commodity markets, the prosperity of urban commerce and the rise of merchant groups completely changed the closed and self-sufficient state of the traditional natural economy. Correspondingly, the social status of merchants, who had long been at the bottom of the traditional social hierarchy, was significantly improved. The folk custom of "valuing commerce over agriculture" prevailed in urban and rural areas, and the traditional Confucian ethical view that "righteousness is superior to profit" was constantly impacted and challenged [1-2].

Literature, as a mirror of social reality, always synchronizes with social changes. The boom of commodity economy and the transformation of social values provided rich creative materials for literary creation in the Ming-Qing dynasties. Different from the previous literary works that either ignored merchants or demonized businessmen, the literary creation of this period began to pay extensive attention to merchant groups, record commercial activities, and reflect the living conditions and spiritual world of merchants. As an outstanding representative of Qing Dynasty classical Chinese short stories, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* breaks the narrow theme of traditional zhiguai novels that focus on ghosts, immortals and strange anecdotes. Based on the real social life of the Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong periods, Pu Songling integrates the booming commercial phenomena and changing folk customs of the Ming-Qing dynasties into ghost and fairy stories, constructing a vivid and complex

commercial world.

In *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, there are more than 40 stories involving merchant images and commercial activities, covering small peddlers, professional merchants, gentry merchants, scholar merchants and female merchants. These narratives not only record specific commercial behaviors such as commodity trading, capital operation and market competition, but also profoundly reflect the social problems such as the conflict between traditional ethics and commercial profit consciousness, the entanglement of official power and commercial interests, and the survival dilemma of merchants in the feudal society. At present, academic research on *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* mostly focus on ghost and fairy images, love themes and artistic techniques, while the researches on merchant narratives are relatively scattered, lacking systematic combing and in-depth exploration combined with the historical background of Ming-Qing commodity economy [3-4].

Based on the perspective of commodity economy development in the Ming-Qing dynasties, this paper systematically sorts out the merchant types and narrative characteristics in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, analyzes the internal logic between commercial social changes and literary narrative creation, discusses Pu Songling's complex attitude towards commercial economy and merchant groups, and excavates the historical value and literary enlightenment of these merchant narratives in reflecting the social transformation of the Ming-Qing dynasties.

2. The Social Background of Merchant Narratives: The Prosperity of Commodity Economy and Social Value Transformation in Ming-Qing Dynasties

2.1. The Prosperity of Urban Commerce and the Rise of Merchant Groups

The rapid development of commodity economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties laid a solid social foundation for the emergence of a large number of merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. In the mid-Ming Dynasty, the imperial court reformed the taxation system, implemented the Single-Whip Tax Law, unified various taxes and corvée into silver payment, which accelerated the monetization of the social economy. Farmers were forced to participate in commodity production and commodity circulation, and the self-sufficient natural economy gradually disintegrated. At the same time, urban handicraft industry developed rapidly, professional commodity markets such as textile, tea, grain and handicraft markets took shape, and urban commercial towns sprang up in the Jiangnan, Shandong and Zhili regions, forming a dense commercial network covering urban and rural areas.

In the early Qing Dynasty, the rulers adopted policies of recuperation, relaxed commercial bans, and encouraged domestic commodity circulation, making the commodity economy reach its peak in feudal China. A large number of regional merchant groups such as Shanxi merchants, Huizhou merchants and Shandong merchants rose rapidly, mastering a large amount of social capital and controlling the main domestic commodity trade. Merchants' business activities were no longer limited to small-scale peddling, but developed into cross-regional long-distance trade, chain operation and capital accumulation. The continuous expansion of commercial scale made merchants an indispensable important group in social operation[5-6].

Pu Songling lived in Zichuan, Shandong, a commercially developed area in the Ming-Qing dynasties. The local urban and rural commercial activities were frequent, and the merchant groups were active. The real commercial scenes around him provided direct and vivid creative materials for his creation. Most of the merchant stories in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* take Shandong and Jiangnan commercial towns as the background, which is a direct reflection of the regional commercial prosperity in the Ming-Qing dynasties.

2.2. The Collision and Transformation of Traditional Ethics and Commercial Values

The development of commodity economy completely subverted the traditional social value system centered on Confucian ethics. Since the Han Dynasty, feudal society had always advocated the value orientation of "valuing righteousness over profit" and "emphasizing agriculture and restraining commerce". Scholars were respected while merchants were despised, and profit-seeking behavior was regarded as vulgar and immoral. However, with the prosperity of commerce in the Ming-Qing dynasties, wealth became an important standard to measure social status, and the folk social ethos of "worshipping wealth and pursuing profit" prevailed day by day.

The traditional hierarchical order of "scholar, farmer,

artisan, merchant" was severely impacted. A large number of scholars abandoned Confucian studies and engaged in business, and the social phenomenon of "scholars turning to business" became common. Some merchants accumulated huge wealth through business and improved their social status through donations and gentry transformation, breaking the traditional class boundary. At the same time, the commercial profit consciousness penetrated into all aspects of social life, and the traditional ethical concepts such as loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and righteousness were gradually replaced by the contractual consciousness and profit consciousness of commodity exchange.

This kind of value conflict and social transformation is fully reflected in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. On the one hand, Pu Songling, as a traditional scholar, adhered to Confucian ethical concepts and despised excessive profit-seeking and unscrupulous business behaviors. On the other hand, he objectively recognized the rationality of commercial development and the diligence and wisdom of merchants, and affirmed the legitimate pursuit of wealth by ordinary people. This dual value attitude constitutes the core ideological connotation of the merchant narratives in the work.

3. Diversified Merchant Images in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* under the Commodity Economy Context

Driven by the prosperous commodity economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties, the merchant groups in society showed diversified characteristics, which are fully shaped in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Different from the single and stereotyped merchant images in traditional literature, Pu Songling created a three-dimensional and diverse merchant group including honest peddlers, immoral profiteers, Confucian merchants with both morality and wisdom and independent female merchants, comprehensively presenting the survival forms and spiritual features of merchants in the Ming-Qing commercial society.

3.1. Honest and Diligent Civilian Peddlers

Civilian small peddlers are the most numerous and basic merchant group in the Ming-Qing commodity economy, and also the most vivid and touching images in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Most of these peddlers are ordinary people at the bottom of society. They engage in small-scale commodity trading such as grocery sales, handicraft sales and seasonal goods operation to make a living. They have no huge capital and powerful background, relying on diligent labor and honest management to obtain meager profits, representing the most real survival state of bottom merchants in the commercial society.

In the story of *A-Xiu*, the grocery merchant family where A-Xiu lives operates a small shop in the town, engaging in daily commodity trading. The family adheres to the business principle of honesty and trustworthiness, treats customers sincerely, and never cheats or profiteers. Although the business scale is small and the profit is thin, they live a stable life through hard work. Similarly, in *Xiao-Er*, the protagonist Xiao-Er starts from small-scale retail business, operates in a standardized manner, treats people sincerely, and gradually expands the business scale through long-term honest operation. These bottom peddlers are the practitioners of the positive commercial ethics in the Ming-Qing dynasties. They

inherit the traditional folk virtues of honesty and diligence, and their business behaviors reflect the simple commercial order of early commodity economy[7-8].

Pu Songling showed obvious sympathy and affirmation for such civilian peddlers. In his narration, these bottom merchants have noble moral qualities, they abide by business ethics, do not covet ill-gotten gains, and maintain the most basic moral bottom line in the profit-driven commercial society. Their success in business is not derived from opportunism and fraud, but from long-term diligence and integrity, which embodies Pu Songling's ideal of honest commercial operation.

3.2. Greedy and Immoral Profiteers

The development of commodity economy stimulated people's desire for wealth, and at the same time spawned a large number of profiteers who abandoned morality for profit. In order to pursue excessive profits, such merchants resort to all kinds of unscrupulous means, such as cheating customers, shoddy goods, usury exploitation and even colluding with officials to bully the people. Pu Songling profoundly exposed and criticized the ugly behaviors of profiteers in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, reflecting the moral decline and chaotic commercial order in the process of commercial economic development in the Ming-Qing dynasties.

In many chapters of the work, profiteers regard profit as the only goal of business activities, completely abandoning traditional ethical constraints. Some merchants raise prices in short supply, exploit ordinary consumers; some adulterate goods, cut corners on work and materials, and pursue excess profits by damaging the interests of customers; some lend money at exorbitant rates, exploit the poor, and make huge profits through usury. These behaviors reflect the negative impact of the expansion of commercial profit consciousness on social morality in the Ming-Qing dynasties.

Different from the positive shaping of civilian peddlers, Pu Songling's narration of profiteers is full of satire and criticism. He often sets tragic endings such as property loss and moral bankruptcy for profiteers who are greedy for money and unscrupulous, implying his moral judgment that "greed leads to ruin". This kind of narrative setting not only exposes the social ills of the commercial society, but also conveys the author's adherence to traditional moral norms, and reflects the public's aversion to improper commercial behaviors in the Ming-Qing dynasties.

3.3. Elegant and Righteous Confucian Merchants

The rise of Confucian merchants is a unique commercial and cultural phenomenon in the Ming-Qing dynasties. With the transformation of social values, a large number of scholars abandoned official careers and engaged in business, forming a merchant group with Confucian cultural literacy and moral cultivation. Confucian merchants take "righteousness as the foundation and profit as the end", adhere to Confucian ethical norms in business activities, pay attention to credibility and benevolence, and pursue the unity of moral value and economic benefit. This ideal merchant image is highly praised and shaped by Pu Songling in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*.

Huang Ying is the most typical work depicting Confucian merchant images. The protagonist Huang Ying and her brother Tao Lang are the incarnations of chrysanthemum spirits, inheriting the elegant temperament of Tao Yuanming,

a representative of traditional Confucian scholars. Different from the traditional scholars who are proud of being poor and disdain business, Huang Ying takes chrysanthemum planting and sales as her career, and regards business as a legitimate means of making a living. She is proficient in chrysanthemum cultivation technology and market operation rules, and accumulates rich wealth through standardized and honest business operation. At the same time, she always maintains the elegant demeanor of a Confucian scholar, is indifferent to fame and fortune, generous and benevolent, and never becomes vulgar and greedy due to wealth accumulation.

In contrast, the scholar Ma Zicai in the story adheres to the old-fashioned concept of "valuing scholars and despising merchants", thinks that business is a vulgar behavior, and is unwilling to accept commercial profits. Through the contrast between the two images, Pu Songling breaks the traditional prejudice against merchants, affirms the rationality of scholars engaging in business, and advocates the business concept of "integrating Confucian ethics and commercial operation". The image of Confucian merchants created by Pu Songling embodies the ideal commercial personality in the context of Ming-Qing commodity economy, and is the author's positive exploration of the integration of traditional ethics and modern commercial spirit[9-10].

3.4. Independent and Intelligent Female Merchants

The prosperity of commodity economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties broke the traditional gender restrictions, and a large number of women began to participate in commercial activities and became important participants in social commodity circulation. *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* creates a group of distinctive female merchant images, which is a major breakthrough in traditional literary creation. Different from the traditional female images who are dependent on men and confined to the inner chamber, the female merchants in the work are independent, intelligent and capable, proficient in business operation, and can independently support their families and create wealth through commercial activities.

In *Xiao Er*, the heroine Xiao Er is smart and decisive. She starts from small grocery business, flexibly grasps market changes, adjusts business strategies in a timely manner, and gradually expands the business scale. She is good at managing human relations, abides by business credibility, and finally becomes a successful female merchant with abundant wealth. In *Nong-fu (The Farmer's Wife)*, the rural woman breaks the traditional rural women's life mode of only engaging in farm work and housework, takes the initiative to participate in commodity trading, and obtains rich returns through diligent operation. These female merchant images break the feudal ethical restriction of "women not participating in external affairs", and reflect the awakening of women's independent consciousness and the diversification of social roles under the influence of commodity economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties.

Pu Songling's shaping of female merchants is full of praise. He fully affirms women's business wisdom and independent survival ability, and breaks the traditional male-centered narrative perspective. The emergence of female merchant narratives not only enriches the merchant image system of the work, but also truly reflects the profound changes of social gender concepts and family values in the process of commercial economic development in the Ming-Qing dynasties.

4. Narrative Connotation: Social Changes and Value Reflections under the Commercial Prosperity

4.1. The Subversion and Reconstruction of Traditional Social Hierarchy

The merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* profoundly reflect the subversion and reconstruction of the traditional “scholar-farmer-artisan-merchant” social hierarchy by the commodity economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties. In traditional feudal society, merchants were at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with low social status and no right to participate in social public affairs. However, with the prosperity of commerce in the Ming-Qing dynasties, merchants accumulated huge wealth, and their economic status was continuously improved, which gradually changed their social status.

In many stories of *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, wealthy merchants can equal with scholars and even officials, and their wealth can change their social identity and interpersonal relationships. Many poor scholars change their living conditions by marrying merchant women or cooperating with merchants, which fully shows that wealth has become an important factor affecting social status. The traditional moral superiority of scholars is gradually weakened in front of commercial wealth, and the single social evaluation standard centered on Confucian morality is broken, forming a diversified social evaluation system combining morality and wealth.

At the same time, the phenomenon of “scholars turning to business” in the work also reflects the flow of social classes in the Ming-Qing dynasties. A large number of intellectuals abandon the traditional official career path and turn to commercial operation, which is not only a choice of survival under economic pressure, but also a recognition of the value of commercial industry. The cross-class flow between scholars and merchants breaks the rigid social hierarchy of feudal society and reflects the openness and mobility of social structure under the influence of commodity economy[10-11].

4.2. The Conflict and Integration of Righteousness and Profit Values

The conflict and integration of “righteousness” and “profit” is the core ideological theme of the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Traditional Confucian culture advocates “valuing righteousness over profit”, regards the pursuit of material interests as vulgar, and takes moral righteousness as the highest life value. However, the commodity economy takes profit maximization as the core logic, which inevitably conflicts with traditional righteous ethics. Pu Songling comprehensively presents the game and integration of the two values in his works.

On the one hand, Pu Songling criticizes the social malaise of “valuing profit over righteousness” caused by the overdevelopment of commodity economy. Through the tragic endings of profiteers who are greedy for money and abandon righteousness, he warns the society that excessive pursuit of profit will lead to moral loss and personal ruin, adhering to the traditional Confucian righteous outlook. On the other hand, he objectively affirms the legitimacy of pursuing legitimate profits, denies the rigid moral concept of “abstaining from profit for the sake of righteousness”, and recognizes the rationality of ordinary people relying on

business labor to obtain wealth.

Pu Songling’s ideal value orientation is the integration of righteousness and profit, that is, taking righteousness as the foundation and profit as the result. The Confucian merchant images in the work are the concrete practice of this value ideal. They pursue economic profits on the premise of abiding by moral ethics, realize the unity of moral value and economic value, and provide a beneficial solution for the value conflict between traditional ethics and commercial economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties.

4.3. The Survival Dilemma of Merchants in Feudal Commercial Society

Although the commodity economy prospered in the Ming-Qing dynasties and the social status of merchants was improved, merchants were still in a disadvantaged position in the feudal autocratic society and faced multiple survival dilemmas. The merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* truly record the difficult survival state of merchants under the dual constraints of feudal system and traditional ethics.

First of all, merchants were restricted by feudal official power. In the feudal society, commercial operation was always under the control of the imperial court. Officials often exploited merchants through exorbitant taxes and miscellaneous levies, power rent-seeking and other means. Many stories in the work reflect the phenomenon of officials colluding with profiteers to oppress honest merchants, and ordinary merchants have to pay huge costs to obtain living space. Secondly, merchants were constrained by traditional ethical prejudice. Although the trend of valuing commerce prevailed, the traditional concept of “despising merchants” was deeply rooted. Merchants were often excluded by the mainstream society and faced moral discrimination and public opinion pressure.

In addition, the instability of the commercial market also brings huge risks to merchants’ operation. In the Ming-Qing dynasties, the commercial market lacked standardized institutional constraints, and problems such as market fraud and malicious competition were prevalent. Merchants often faced operational risks such as loss of principal and difficult recovery of debts. Pu Songling’s description of merchants’ survival dilemmas breaks the superficial prosperous appearance of the Ming-Qing commodity economy, and reveals the inherent defects of the feudal commercial economy and the sufferings of merchant groups at the bottom of society.

5. Narrative Characteristics and Artistic Innovation of Merchant Themes

5.1. The Integration of Ghost-Fairy Fantasy and Real Commercial Reality

The biggest artistic feature of the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* is the organic integration of ghost-fairy fantasy narrative and real commercial social reality. Different from the pure supernatural narration of traditional zhiguai (tales of the strange) novels, Pu Songling takes the real commercial life of the Ming-Qing dynasties as the background, endows ghost, fairy and fox spirit images with human commercial behaviors and value concepts, and uses fantasy stories to reflect real commercial social problems.

In the work, many ghost and fairy images have the same business wisdom, profit pursuit and moral constraints as human merchants. The chrysanthemum spirit Huang Ying engages in flower trade, the fox spirits operate shops and participate in market competition. These fantasy characters are completely integrated into the real commercial society, and their business activities are consistent with the operation rules of the Ming-Qing commodity economy. This kind of narrative technique not only retains the fantasy interest of zhiguai stories, but also makes the commercial narrative have realistic social depth, realizing the perfect combination of fantasy art and realistic reflection.

5.2. The Combination of Moral Judgment and Social Reflection

Pu Songling's merchant narratives have distinct dual attributes of moral judgment and social reflection. On the macro level of social reflection, he comprehensively records the prosperity of commodity economy, the transformation of social values and the changes of class structure in the Ming-Qing dynasties, presenting a panoramic commercial social picture. On the micro level of moral judgment, he adheres to the traditional Confucian moral standard, evaluates the merits and demerits of merchants' behaviors, rewards goodness and punishes evil, and conveys positive moral values.

For honest merchants who abide by ethics and work diligently, the author often sets happy endings of wealth accumulation and family prosperity; for profiteers who are greedy and immoral, he arranges tragic endings of financial ruin and moral bankruptcy. This kind of narrative setting with obvious moral orientation not only enhances the readability and educational significance of the work, but also integrates personal moral ideals with social reality reflection, making the merchant narratives have both literary appreciation value and social cognitive value.

5.3. The Civilian Perspective and Humanistic Care

Different from the official historical books that focus on politics and diplomacy and ignore the life of bottom groups, the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* adopt a civilian narrative perspective, focusing on the survival state and spiritual world of ordinary bottom merchants. Pu Songling pays attention to the trivial business activities, life joys and sorrows of small peddlers and ordinary merchants, and truly records the hardships and struggles of bottom merchants in the commercial society.

At the same time, the work is full of profound humanistic care for merchant groups. The author does not simply praise or deny merchants, but objectively understands the survival pressure and value confusion of merchants in the social transformation period. He affirms the diligence and wisdom of merchants, sympathizes with their survival dilemmas, and criticizes their moral defects, showing a comprehensive and objective humanistic view of merchants. This civilian perspective and humanistic care make the merchant narratives in the work break through the limitations of traditional elite literature and have unique folk literary value[11-12].

6. The Times Limitation and Historical Value of Merchant Narratives

6.1. The Ideological Limitation of Traditional Confucian Values

Restricted by the times and personal cognition, the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* have inevitable ideological limitations. Although Pu Songling affirmed the development of commodity economy and the legitimate business behaviors of merchants, he always took traditional Confucian ethics as the core value standard, and his recognition of commercial economy was passive and limited. He advocated "scholars turning to business" only as a means for poor scholars to get rid of poverty, and the ultimate ideal was still to return to Confucian official career, lacking absolute recognition of the independent value of commercial industry.

In addition, the author's judgment on merchants' behaviors still has the color of traditional fatalism. Many merchants' success or failure is attributed to destiny and divine punishment, ignoring the influence of social system and market rules on commercial operation. This kind of narrative logic makes the work's reflection on commercial social problems stay on the moral level, and fails to deeply explore the institutional root of social problems, which is the inevitable limitation of feudal literati's cognition.

6.2. The Unique Historical and Literary Value of Merchant Narratives

Despite the inevitable limitations of the feudal era, the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* possess profound and irreplaceable historical and literary value. Historically, the book meticulously and comprehensively documents the authentic commercial operation modes, grassroots merchants' living conditions, and evolving social values during the booming period of Ming-Qing commodity economy. Official historical records in feudal China mostly focused on politics and bureaucracy, largely ignoring folk commercial activities and ordinary merchants' lives, and this work perfectly makes up for such historical deficiencies. It retains vivid, detailed and credible literary materials for modern academic research on Ming-Qing social economy, folk customs and public value changes, serving as a crucial literary carrier for exploring the commercial civilization of ancient feudal China[12-13].

Literarily, the book greatly broadens the thematic connotation and artistic vision of traditional Chinese zhiguai novels. It subverts the long-standing literary prejudice that belittled merchants in traditional literature and builds a diversified, vivid and three-dimensional system of merchant images. By integrating real commercial life and social economic phenomena into literary creation, it facilitates the in-depth integration of literature and social economy, establishing a brand-new creative paradigm for ancient Chinese commercial literature. Furthermore, its in-depth exploration of the unity of righteousness and profit, as well as the balance between moral principles and economic interests, offers precious ideological enlightenment for the construction of modern commercial ethics.

7. Conclusion

The prosperous commodity economy in the Ming-Qing dynasties promoted the transformation of social structure and

value concepts, and provided rich creative soil for the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. Taking the real commercial social life of the Ming-Qing dynasties as the background, Pu Songling shaped diversified merchant images such as honest civilian peddlers, immoral profiteers, righteous Confucian merchants and independent female merchants through the integration of ghost-fairy fantasy and realistic narration. These merchant narratives profoundly reflect the subversion and reconstruction of traditional social hierarchy by commodity economy, the conflict and integration of righteous and profit values, and the survival dilemmas of merchants in feudal autocratic society.

Pu Songling's merchant view presents a dual and contradictory feature: he both affirms the rationality of commercial economic development and the legitimate pursuit of wealth by merchants, and adheres to traditional Confucian moral ethics, criticizing the moral anomie caused by excessive profit-seeking. His ideal of integrating righteousness and profit and combining morality and business embodies the advanced value pursuit of intellectuals in the Ming-Qing social transformation period. Although restricted by the times, the merchant narratives in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* have inherent ideological limitations, they still retain unique historical cognitive value and literary artistic value.

As a vivid literary record of Ming-Qing commercial civilization, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* not only reproduces the prosperous commercial landscape and complex social changes of the late-feudal period, but also provides important ideological reference for the construction of modern commercial ethics and the balance between economic development and moral progress. It occupies an indispensable important position in the development history of ancient Chinese commercial literature and social and economic thought.

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