

# A Preliminary Analysis of the Influence of Storytelling Art on Classical Chinese Fiction: A Case Study of Feng Boyu's Love Story

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**Abstract:** The Ming and Qing dynasties were the heyday of classical Chinese novels, and the development of the publishing industry and storytelling art during this period was also an important factor in promoting the peak influence of classical novels. This article is based on the classical novel "Feng Boyu's Love Story of the legend" from the old collection of the Red Leaf Mountain Library in Japan. By analyzing the potential market factors of the published version of this ancient book and the performance factors of storytelling presented in the text. Conduct a case study on the text editing, publishing, and printing of Chinese classical novels, and present personal opinions for researchers to discuss and refer to.

**Keywords:** Feng Boyu's Wind Moon Love Novel; Vernacular Novel; Classical Literature Research; Overseas Chinese Nationality

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When analyzing the social factors that influence literary works, attention should be paid to the textual carrier of literary works at the material level, as well as the art forms closely related to such literary works.

The development of Chinese classical novels during the Ming and Qing dynasties was promoted by the market-oriented book publishing industry and the further development of storytelling art, which had a positive impact on the expansion of the influence of classical novels. This article takes the published version of the ancient book "Feng Boyu's Love Story of the legend" as an example, and will analyze the factors that affect the physical book publishing standards of classical novels from the perspectives of market publishing and storytelling art performance. It will also analyze the correlation and differences between classical novels and storytelling art. To provide a research perspective for studying classical novels, starting from observing the physical objects of ancient books, analyzing the influence of classical novel binding and text content.

## 1. Regarding Feng Boyu's Love Story of the legend

The novel "Feng Boyu's Love Story of the legend" studied in this article was printed by Xiong Longfeng in the Ming Dynasty and is now an ancient book of vernacular novels in the old collection of the Red Leaf Mountain Library in Japan. After investigation, it was found that there is a story titled "Feng Boyu's Love Story" in the "Qingping Mountain Hall Tales" that is similar in text and plot to the ancient book "Feng Boyu's Love Story of the legend", except for differences in printing format. In this novel, a fictional character named Feng Chen (styled Boyu) from the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties falls in love with his adoptive father's daughter Zhao Yunqiong and later takes her as his wife. Feng Chen was recommended by his father-in-law to enter the capital as an official, and later served as the commander-in-chief of the army to suppress the Japanese pirates' rebellion. He achieved victory and was highly valued by the emperor. After the death of Feng and Zhao, they were still bestowed with the emperor's title and ordered to erect a monument to commemorate them. Their deeds were regarded as a legendary story.

## 2. Factors influencing the publication of classical novels in the market

In the electronic scanned copy of the novel "Feng Boyu's Love Story of the legend", there is a reference measuring ruler. After measurement, it is known that the book has a length of about 23 centimeters and a width of about 14 centimeters, and the main body of the book is only 28 pages. From the analysis of binding format and book page count, this version of "Feng Boyu's Love Story of the legend" belongs to a single volume, which was convenient for consumers to store and carry under the conditions at that time. Publishers usually have two choices in the process of producing books in order to strive for more profits in the sale of leisure books: first, to enhance the attractiveness of

the content in the book to the audience, by improving the quality of the text content of the book to attract potential consumers, promote the sale of printed books, and thus obtain profits; Secondly, efforts should be made to minimize the production costs of books, enabling rapid and large-scale printing and distribution, and seizing the market in a short period of time, thereby gaining profits. From the perspective of publishers seeking quick profits, the book production plan that reduces costs and quickly occupies the consumer market is more likely to become the choice of most book publishers. Referring to the physical object of the ancient book “Feng Boyu’s Love Story of the legend”, this lightweight single volume book, for consumers who had a demand for reading novels at that time, could avoid purchasing a collection of classical novels composed of multiple story contents to read a certain story, meeting the individual reading preferences of consumers. Therefore, the publisher printed and bound the classical novel “Feng Boyu’s Love Story of the legend” in the form of a single volume.

In addition, based on the analysis of the performance methods of storytelling art, due to the strong immediacy of storytelling performances, ancient times did not have the corresponding technology of recording or live broadcasting, and the on-site storytelling performances that individuals could access were inevitably limited. Therefore, it can be speculated that popular culture focuses on a certain topic, which arouses some audience’s interest in a certain story. Alternatively, due to watching some plot segments of the story performed by the storytelling artist, the audience may develop an interest in further understanding the entire story, and thus become potential consumers of classical review books. In the text of classical novels, the purpose of simulating the live state of storytelling is to provide readers with a psychological compensation: For not being able to personally watch the real-time storytelling performance, they can instead compensate by reading literary works such as classical novels. This further gave rise to a market for publishing and selling classical novels. This is also one of the possible reasons why classical novels exist in the consumer market.

### **3. The Art Elements of Storytelling in Classical Fiction Texts**

There are a large number of poems appearing in Feng Boyu’s Wind Love legend Novel, totaling 31 pieces from the beginning to the end. The expressed content is the ideals and emotions of the story characters, and the poetry content occupies nearly 1900 words in the over 6000 word novel. For the extensive use of poetry in this work, compared to some previous works such as supernatural novels and Tang legends, most of the works do not use poetry as the beginning of the text content, while this classical novel begins with poetry. For example, at the beginning of a novel, there is a section that prompts readers to “enter the topic”, and at the beginning of the story, there is a poem as a starting point. Starting from the marked topic, it is speculated that the origin of using poetry to express characters’ emotions, activities, etc. is related to the “opening poetry” (also known as stable audience poetry) and “praise and embellishment poetry” in storytelling art.

In the art of storytelling, the proper name for the opening poem is setting poem. This specific type of poetry is created by storytelling artists to attract and focus the attention of potential audiences on the artist’s upcoming performance. To analyze the role of setting poems, first analyze the venues where storytelling artists perform, which are mainly divided into two types. One type is a fixed entertainment venue specifically designed for people’s leisure, usually with storefronts and seating, such as guardrails, bookstores, etc. Some also provide supporting light meals for guests to consume and eat, such as tea houses, hotels, theaters, etc. Another type is open-air places where people spontaneously gather, such as commercial markets, festival temple fairs, etc. Both of these venues have high crowd mobility and unorganized crowds, mainly formed by temporary gatherings of people for entertainment or commercial activities. In order to earn performance income, storytelling artists need to attract potential audiences from the gathered crowd to watch and consume storytelling performances.

The art of storytelling, as a cultural and entertainment activity with its own dissemination nature, is different from street acrobatics. If storytelling artists use shouting and selling to attract audiences, it is inconsistent with the public’s cultural impression of storytelling art and will indirectly affect the income of storytelling artists themselves. Therefore, reciting poetry in public can not only attract the attention of the audience, but also showcase the cultural literacy and performance skills of the artist, making it a commonly used technique in storytelling performances. And this technique is reflected in classical novels in the form of text.

The use of poetic texts in Chinese classical novels is partly due to the performance techniques of storytelling artists. The technique of artists adjusting the audience’s attention in a timely manner during the performance is a common practice that remains in the novel text. Watching storytelling performances is only a form of leisure and entertainment for individual audiences. If the performance cannot meet their

entertainment needs, in non ticket based performances, the audience has the freedom to leave at any time. Storytelling artists have no right to directly intervene in the audience's choice to watch the performance or leave the performance venue. At the same time, the audience's attention may be diverted due to personal preferences or communication with other audience members in the performance venue. Additionally, since performers' economic income comes from the audience, it is impossible for them to force silence and concentration from the audience in the performance venue. Therefore, performers can only try their best to focus the audience's attention on them with their unique artistic style and techniques. The most ideal way for performers to achieve this goal is to incorporate poetry into their performance. This type of poetry, which is different from spoken language and has a certain degree of standardization, can not only adjust the rhythm of performances, attract audience attention, but also showcase the artist's own technical style. The technique in this art of storytelling not only does not disrupt the unstable relationship between performers and audiences in the storytelling scene, but also achieves the goal of not abruptly reminding the audience to concentrate and maintaining order during the performance.

#### **4. The Value Orientation Reflected in “Feng Boyu’s Love Story of the legend”**

The novel embodies the traditional Chinese romantic encounters between talented scholars and beautiful women. The main content of the story is that the characters use their own talents and abilities to seize opportunities, achieve personal political success and military victory, and ultimately repay the emperor's favor to the higher ups, and also achieve success and fame themselves. The story of gaining honor in the court and establishing achievements on the battlefield is more of a yearning of the Ming people for making achievements and gaining glory at that time. This is different from the pursuit of personal wealth through personal ability and luck.

From a textual perspective, the novel “Feng Boyu’s Love Story of the legend” is written in the traditional Chinese style of classical Chinese, with a large number of literary genres such as poetry, ci, and fu interspersed throughout the plot, consciously enhancing the literary style of the novel. But this kind of poetry and prose appears stiff and distorted when applied to the plot, and the male and female protagonists are like writing poetry and prose for the sake of poetry and prose. The use of poetry in the text cannot conceal the traditional cliché plot of talented scholars and beautiful women.

The process of the acquaintance between the male and female protagonists Feng Chen and Zhao Yunqiong in the novel is basically the same as the plot pattern of Zhang Sheng and Yingying meeting in a temple in “The Legend of Yingying”. The communication between Feng Chen and Zhao Yunqiong through poetry and prose is also similar to that between Zhang Sheng and Ying Ying through poetry and prose, playing a similar role in portraying the emotions and personalities of the characters. However, in terms of story content and editing level, Feng Boyu’s Love Story belongs to a shallower existence, without too many plot twists or various actions taken by the protagonist to solve difficulties.

For example, after learning about the relationship between Feng Chen and his own daughter, Zhao Yu immediately changed his mind and agreed without any obstruction; Based solely on Zhao Yu's verbal recommendation, the emperor summoned Feng Chen to the capital; When there was a war of invasion by Japanese pirates, the emperor appointed Feng Chen as the General of Jinghai, commanding up to 580000 soldiers to go and attack; Feng Chen, as an ordinary official who had not received systematic military training, was able to lead by example on the battlefield and ultimately turn the tide, causing the Japanese pirates to submit to the Ming court and seek peace after their defeat; The evaluation of the victory in this war between the emperor and his ministers, as well as Feng Chen's final report to the emperor, are all verbal praises and excuses for the achievements of the victory in this war, and are not related to the serious political affairs operation process.

These plots in the novel depict the author's attitude and specific behavior towards families with certain social status in marriage at that time, and do not follow the factual logic of the Ming Dynasty bureaucratic system regarding the relevant process and system of government selection and appointment of bureaucrats. Moreover, the specific initiation, command, and combat process of the war are blurred in the plot. This reflects the author's shallow understanding and recognition of war in the novel.

The shallow portrayal of marriage, politics, and war in this classical novel is partly due to its focus on portraying the love story between Feng Chen and Zhao Yunqiong, as well as their ultimate success. As for Feng Chen's tenure in the Ming government, participation in

battles, and achievements, as well as his acceptance of titles and honors, they were all designed as background stories to showcase or prove Feng Chen's personal talents, or to provide relatively reasonable scenarios for the deepening of emotions between Feng and Zhao.

The development and expression of the plot presented in the text do not pay more attention to the logic or details of marriage, politics, and war, nor do they focus on the writing style. So, this kind of understanding or imagination of political operations, specific institutional processes, and war situations that are not in line with the logic of reality also reflects that the group targeted by novels like Feng Boyu's Love Story is not the ruling class that is truly immersed in and familiar with political affairs and occupies the dominant position in refined culture.

## 5. Summary

In the texts of classical novels, there are live performances of simulated storytelling art, which is to some extent due to the limitations of technological conditions in the era. It is speculated that the market audience for literary works such as classical novels may be potential readers who cannot personally watch live storytelling performances, or potential readers who have difficulty physically accessing storytelling performances in time and space and make up for them by reading literary works such as classical novels. Therefore, the poetic text content widely appearing in classical novels should be related to some of the performance techniques in storytelling art, as referenced or simulated. For example, classical novels usually start with poetry works, which can be seen as a situational simulation of storytelling performances. Because reciting poetry in storytelling performances aims to attract the audience's attention, showcase the storyteller's artistic skills, and set the tone for the performance content. The classical novels published in books, on the other hand, face the connection between the textual content and individual readers, and have already departed from the environment of real-time performance in storytelling. Therefore, although the poetic texts extensively used in classical novels and the techniques applied in storytelling performances are not products of the same field, there should be a reflection and analysis of the correlation between the two.

It should be determined that storytelling belongs to the category of rap art, while classical novels belong to literary creation. The creation of classical novels is influenced by storytelling performances, but it is still a product of conscious editing by the literary community. From the perspective of analyzing the generation and editing process of classical novel texts, the stories orally interpreted by the art of storytelling and the intentionally created and edited classical novels cannot be the same type of product.

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## Research direction:

Chinese classical bibliography; Chinese classical novels.