The Minor Characters in Ju-Lin Wai-Shih

Wu Ching-tzu has combined his capacity for realism with his outstanding artistic skills to create the novel _Ju-Lin Wai-shih_, through which we are presented with a microcosm of the lives of intellectuals of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

In this novel, the author presents us with the confrontation between benevolence and self-interest, the choice between rectitude and ill-gotten gain. Similarly, human frailty is set against the uncompromising stance of integrity, the fortunes of those successful in the examinations are set against the trials and tribulations of the civil scholars fated to be poor, and the injustices meted out to the honest, simple and sincere common folk. The author skilfully lays bare the inner mind of man, gradually revealing the strengths and weaknesses typified by the orthodox intellectuals. We see how the dead-weight of tradition stifles virtue and leads to superficiality of feeling and a gradual loss of touch with reality. Their lives are purposeless and their destinies are as birds tossed about by wind currents.

In Chinese literary history, Ju-Lin Wai-Shih is in the fine tradition of "neither fake beauty nor shun virtue" found in the Shih-chi. By inspiring future generations of satirical writers, this work is manifestly the precursor of great satire in Chinese literature.

In this dissertation, I shall examine the lives, the thoughts as well as the dispositions of a few minor characters. They are
Hu T'u-nu, Wang Shih and Chao Shih, Niu Yu-pu and Niu P'u, Pao Wen-ch'ing, Hsiao Yun-hsien, Wang Yu-hui. The author's refined and subtle style successfully portrays his own experiences with real people and actual events. At the same time, he places side by side several incidents and characters with contrasting distinctive features, skilfully creating a calculated satirical effect.