Abstract

This is a study on Xingshiyan (〈型世言〉), a collection of short stories written by a late Ming literati Lu Renlong. It was lost in mainland China for more than three hundred years and was only discovered in the Royal Library (Kyujanggak, 奎章閣) of Seoul, South Korea, recently. Its discovery has stirred up immense interest among scholars in the academic circle.

Previous studies on Xingshiyan mainly concentrated on its writer, critics and two other related collections. The author wishes to summarize the findings of these studies. However, the main focus of this exercise is to analyse the themes and literary achievements of Xingshiyan which were only briefly covered by most previous studies.

In the title Xingshiyan, Xing means "to mould", shi means "the society". The stories in the collection depict certain social norms desirable for a traditional Confucian society. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that most stories bear the themes of moral and ethical values. In addition, the writer also expresses his political views, for example his opinions of a good government. The structure of Xingshiyan follows the tradition of Chinese colloquial short stories (huaben, 话本). However, it has its own unique form, that is, each story begins with a foreword and ends with a criticism. Furthermore, by using different methods, it creates a number of lively characters which make it immensely enjoyable to read.

Although Xingshiyan has certain flaws, such as over-emphasis on retribution and pornographic descriptions in some of the stories. This, however, does not affect its status as a classical piece of work in the history of Chinese literature.