ABSTRACT

A Novelist of the late Qing, Wu Jian-Ren (1866 - 1910), was a native of Nanhai, Guangdong. After coming of age, he went to Shanghai and worked for some time at the Press. In 1902, Liang Qi-Chao (梁启超) founded Xin Xiao-Shui (New Fiction Magazine 新小说) in Yokohama, Japan, and Wu contributed several of his works to the magazine, including the first forty-five chapters of the novel of social criticism Strange Events Seen in the Past Twenty Years (Ershinian Mudu Zhi Guai Xianzhuang 二十年目睹之怪現象).

Later, Wu went to Hankow (汉口) to become editor of the Hubei News (Chu Bao 楚报), a newspaper published under American auspices. In 1904, as a form of protest against the United States for her restriction on Chinese immigration, he resigned.

Wu returned to Shanghai to continue his literary career, writing for the Illustrated Fiction (Xiu-Xiang Xiao-Shuo 绣象小说). In 1906, in collaboration with Chou Kui-sheng (周桂笙), Wu founded the magazine, Monthly Fiction (Yue-Yue Xiao-Shuo 月月小说). After which, Wu ventured into the field of education and remained there for the rest of his life.

Among his great volumes of works, "Strange Events" was best known and most widely read. It contains a mass of material illustrating the decadent stage of the political and social conditions of late Qing China. Due to his conservative background, the stories in his novel reveal a strong opposition to Western culture and show a
distaste of the revolutionary movement. However, being a patriot, his fundamental motives in writing his novel was to expose corrupt practices in the officialdom, to point out the malaise in Chinese society, and to arouse political and social consciousness as well as to suggest the necessity for reform.

Being influenced by Western literature, Wu managed to achieve some artistic breakthroughs on the structure of plot and Warrantine style. The "Strange Events" is the first novel written in Bai Hua (Vernacular language) language to employ the first-person narrative style. Although this novel is often criticised as being unduly harsh in the treatment of its subject matter, it managed to gain a notable position among perhaps hundreds of works of the same kind published at that time.

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