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**AWARENESS TOWARDS NEW HISTORICISM: AN EMPIRICAL  
CASE IN CYBER FANTASY NOVEL “GUICHUIDENG”**

Bok Check Meng (a)\*  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Mara University of Technology, Melaka, Malaysia, zeming@uitm.edu.my

**Abstract**

At the beginning of the 21st century, the era narratives of many cyber fantasy novels were not based on the time and space background of contemporary society. Zhang Muye's "Guichuideng" series of tomb robbery stories involve the construction of in new historicism. Although Zhang Muye wrote a tomb robbery story full of whimsy, it has the historical nature of the text and humanistic significance. Therefore, this article uses text analysis as a method to interpret the real cases during the Cultural Revolution. Those real cases presented in "Guichuideng" from the perspective of new historicism, and demonstrated the awareness of new historicism in contemporary cyber fantasy novels. The vocabulary of "new historicism" was first coined by Stephen Greenblatt in the early 1980s. Later, the mutual configuration of text and history raised a concept of "historicity of text". Therefore, the interpreter needs to conduct a two-way study of the society described in the text world and the impact of this described society on literature.

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*Keywords:* Awareness, cultural revolution, cyber fantasy novel, guichuideng, new historicism

## 1. Introduction

Cyber fantasy novels are a representative category nowadays of the rise of cyber literature in China (Qi, 2019). The language and storyline of cyber fantasy novels are becoming realistic (Jian, 2019). At the beginning of the 21st century, the era narratives of many cyber fantasy novels were not based on the time and space background of contemporary society, for example, cyber fantasy novels such as “Guichuideng” that brings a meaning of “ghost blowing the lamp”. This goes against the idea that literature needs to reflect real life. Scholars generally believe that if literature cannot reflect real life, it cannot reflect the nature of the times. Some scholars did not agree that the authors of cyber fantasy novels makes a fanciful fabrication and inserts a large amount of historical data and textual knowledge into the text (Dongfeng, 2006). Another scholar believes that the world constructed by cyber fantasy novels is a kind of surreal world, and there are many violations of the basic logic of real social life (Shanzeng, 2008). Whether it is Tao Dongfeng or Wu Shanzeng, their views seem to illustrate the general characteristics of cyber fantasy novels, that is, to create an imaginary space that is divorced from reality, that is, to build an imaginary “utopia”. Karl Mannheim (1946) listed four ideal types of utopian thought in his article “Utopian Mentality”, such as: carnival millennium theory, liberal humanitarian concept, conservative concept, and socialism-communist utopia.

Just like the Cultural Revolution described in the research text, the ideology in the society is mostly dominated by Mao Zedong's thought. Mao Zedong's thought became Mao's quotations are followed and practiced by the people who are constantly fighting for it. This has led to many incidents of denunciation, which have been recorded by historians, and after screening and writing, they become the history we read. The similarity between fiction writers and historians is that they both select the subject to be written through thinking, and both penetrate the author's thinking. This is in line with the historian Collingwood (2010) that “Nothing but ideas can have a history”. However, since the main purpose of contemporary cyber fantasy novels is not to write history, few authors write their historical imagination in the entire cyber fantasy novels. When some authors intentionally write history in their novels, they often design historical rules in the story, and there are traces of their historical awareness here. In view of the way in cyber fantasy novels are particularly interested in scattered events, incidental episodes, anecdotes, etc., this research adopts the theory of new historicism. New historicism seeks to restore the historical dimension of literary studies, and extend its attention to the historical context in which literary texts are produced (Siyu, L., 2022). New historicism not only revolutionizes the old historicist view of history, also put forward a new view of history (Shanyi, 2019). History is no longer a monologue history written by historians, but a plural history of ordinary people (Jinghong, 2019). The vocabulary of “new historicism” was first coined by Stephen Greenblatt in the early 1980s. Later, the mutual configuration of text and history raised a concept of “historicity of text” (Montrose, 1989). Therefore, the interpreter needs to conduct a two-way study of the society described in the text world and the impact of this described society on literature.

### **1.1. The historicity of the text**

The historicity of texts means that all texts are not produced solely by specific historical periods and cultural interactions. The history in them allows readers to know how the text came to be and to investigate the production of history in the text. The novel will focus on describing the living conditions of poor educated youths, and analyze China's historical conditions during the Cultural Revolution from the dimensions of time and space. The whole “Guichuideng” interprets the story from the perspective of the protagonist of the story, Hu Bayi, who is also the narrator of the novel. Inner Mongolia in “Guichuideng” uses the mysterious primitive jungle as the background of the story of the people living in the mountains. During the Cultural Revolution, Hu Bayi went to the most remote ravine in Inner Mongolia to cut the queue. At the same time he experienced the Red Guard movement that was so desolate that no one could be seen even a hundred miles away. This incident in Inner Mongolia is just the beginning of the story that Hu Bayi unfolds.

### **1.2. “Guichuideng” With the theme of history**

In the 1980s, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China implemented a series of reform and opening-up measures, which symbolized the beginning of a new era. Young people in contemporary Chinese society were born in an era of reform, and they grew up without war. Zhang Muye, the author of “Guichuideng”, was born in Tnjin in 1978. He wrote the series of novels “Guichuideng” under the pseudonym of Tianxia Bachang, which is his famous work. Many authors like him are rich from online writing (Jialai, 2019). “Guichuideng” tells the story of Hu Bayi, a retired soldier, Wang Kaixuan or Fatty Wang who are searching for ancient tombs in Northeast China, Xinjiang, Yunnan and Tibet were once all the rage. Some authors followed suit and wrote many novels about tomb robbing, resulting in the prevalence of tomb robbing novels such as tomb robbing include Cai Jun’s “Zhenmushou”, Luo Xiaoyang’s “Sanshiyu”, Feitian’s “Daomu Zhi Wang”, Jing Xufeng’s “Tianyan”, Shi Zhangyu’s “Titianxingdao”, Xiaoguishenshou’s “Mimu Jinghun”, Xielingyibadao’s “Guichuanqi”, Pan Haigen’s “Minghai Jindi”, Xiangxi Guiwang’s “Chumu Jingxin” and so on. Zhang Muye grew up not far from the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), so his novels will have scenes of a communist society during the Cultural Revolution. For example, at the beginning of the story of “Guichuideng”, he used eight chapters to write the social scene of the educated youths going to the countryside to serve during the Cultural Revolution. More description regarding the life of the educated youth who went to the mountains and the countryside after the Cultural Revolution. Zhang Muye said in the postscript to the novel “Guichuideng” that “Huangpizi Fen” or “Huangpizi’s Grave” is “a volume with a very strong historical background”, and he was referring to the Cultural Revolution, and set the background of the story in it.

A scholar of new historicism, believes that: no historical event recorded at random can form a story in itself; for historians, historical events are only the elements of the story. They only can become story through all our usual plot-weaving techniques in novels or plays (Hayden, 1993). The author's imagination is involved in the process from historical events to stories. Therefore, as long as a novel takes history as the theme, it remains a product of personal thought, an expression of the historian's point of view as a “narrator” (Keith, 2009). In fact, before a life event became a historical story, it was imagined

by historians. Therefore, when scholars dispute whether cyber fantasy novels are separated from history, those past events are woven into the novels by the authors in the way of imaginary stories by historians. For example, the volume of “Huangpizi Fen” has the strongest sense of era in the “Guichuideng” series. It reveals the other side of communism from the perspective of Hu Bayi, an unknown person, and has research significance. The author and the narrator, Hu Bayi, are both young men, and both like to explore historical sites. The author uses Hu Bayi to tell the story in the first person perspective, making his narrative credible. While making a sound of injustice about the experience of the educated youths, it also adds to the narrative significance of the history of the Cultural Revolution.

## 2. Research Methods

In literature, creation of real and fictional characters is also part of human history (Yujie & Yeping, 2022). This study uses the text analysis method to compare the similar family characteristics between the historicity of the text and Guichuideng. Textual analysis is a methodology that involves understanding language, symbols, and pictures present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences. Visual, written, or spoken messages provide cues to ways through which communication may be understood. There is scholar criticized cyber fantasy novels for smashing and dismantling real life and deconstructing history (Qiuyang, 2008). As Zhang Muye's “Guichuideng” related description:

虽说是内蒙，其实离黑龙江不远，都快到外蒙边境了。居民也以汉族为主，只有少数的满蒙两族。我们这一拨知青总共有六个人，四男两女，一到地方就傻眼了，周围全是绵延起伏的山脉和一望无际的原始森林，出了屯子走上百十里地也看不见半个人影。（〈大山里的古墓〉）

In this text, the background of the story is Inner Mongolia. No words found to describe the real historical era and location of the Han, Manchu and Mongolian society storyline. However, readers can understand from the word “知青” or educated youth that this is the era of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China. This is the historical awareness of the authors of cyber fantasy novels. If authors want to write history, they condense history into the historicity of the text in their writings. This is the writing phenomenon of new historicism. Now is the time to learn from the new historicism to re-save history (Yalin, 2022). Therefore, this article uses text analysis as a method to interpret the real cases during the Cultural Revolution. Those real cases presented in “Guichuideng” from the perspective of new historicism, and demonstrated the awareness of new historicism in contemporary cyber fantasy novels.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. The educated youths were sent to the countryside for battle

In the early 1960s, due to the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the city could not provide many employment opportunities. Therefore, the central government arranged for educated youths to go to the

mountains and the countryside. From 1962 to 1966, about 1.3 million urban educated youths in China went to the countryside (Yinxian et al., 2014).

After graduation, in addition to joining the army and working as workers in the city, young people go to the mountains and the countryside. The young educated youths who went up to the mountains and went to the countryside to jump in line were those who “没门路、没关系，或者家里受到冲击的” or who had no way out, it didn't matter, or their family was affected by poor (“精绝古城之十六字阴阳风水秘术“Jingjue Gucheng zhi Shiliu Zi Fengshui Mishu”). Since the novel is serialized by different websites, the source is annotated with the title of the section, which is the same below, and no further explanation will be given here. In Hu Bayi's view, most of the common people during that period belonged to this type. Sometimes, they have to go to such remote virgin forests because they have no choice. Those who stay at home will encounter daily revolving disturbances from neighborhood committees, schools, and educated youths. Some people refused to go and ended up being assigned to work in the city. When educated youths become recruits, they have to obey the instructions from above, that is, orders. After listening to the order, they have to execute it without disobeying it. Hu Bayi once told his teammate Wang Fatzi that both of them “接受了最高指示来农村接受很有必要的贫下中农再教育” or both of them received the highest instructions to go to the countryside to receive the necessary re-education of the poor and lower-middle peasants (精绝古城之大山里的古墓“Jingjue Gucheng zhi Dashan li de Gumu”), which shows that the re-education of middle peasants was not planned by their parents, but by their superiors. There is an atmosphere of walking dead in the novel, and the educated youths can't even decide their own destiny; their destiny, including theirs, is in a state of rootlessness.

For the purpose of battle, many young people are forced to participate in the service of going to the mountains and the countryside. This is a movement that gradually spread throughout China after Mao Zedong issued an order in December 1968 that “it is necessary to accept the re-education of the poor and lower-middle peasants (Yinxian et al., 2014). Such encounters make it impossible for them to choose their ideals. When Hu Bayi went to the countryside, he sometimes felt an inexplicable loneliness, which made him “一想到一辈子窝在山沟里，不能参军打仗实现自己的抱负，内心深处立时产生阵阵恐慌，鼻子发酸，眼泪差点没掉下来” or thought of living in a ravine all his life and not being able to join the army and fight to realize his ambitions. He immediately felt panic in the depths of his heart, his nose was sore, and he burst into tears.(来自草原的一封信（上）“Lai Zi Caoyuan De Yi Feng Xin (Shang)”) Sadness for not being able to join the army to fight shows that Hu Bayi's thoughts on struggle are extremely profound. The tasks assigned to him by Hu Bayi's superiors were except for cutting grave bricks, but guarding the timber of the forest farm. In Hu Bayi's view, these tasks were “全是些个蹲点儿的苦闷差事” or all boring errands (黄皮子坟之赶冬荒（上）“Huangpizi Fen zhi Gandonghuang (Shang)”). Under the ideology of communism, the contributions made by the educated youths were all contributed to the leadership of the Revolutionary Committee. For example, Hu Bayi and Fatty Wang picked up golden beans in Tuanshanzi Forest Farm and had to hand them over to the public office. Encountering such hard work all the year round will inevitably make the educated youths feel distressed. Hard work, poor life, and empty thoughts make the educated youths have pessimistic thoughts about the future, which makes them doubt the reality and life, and causes their values on life to fundamentally

change. This objectively made the educated youths reflect on the existing system, and made this generation of educated youths become the social foundation of Deng Xiaoping's later reform and opening up (Yinxian et al., 2014).

### 3.2. Cultural revolution caused chaos in China

An important reason why educated youths need to be arranged to serve in the mountains and the countryside is that the country's economy has problems. During the Cultural Revolution, China had a lot of manpower and natural resources, but it lacked the technology needed by factories. At that time, “要文化没文化，要生产技术没生产技术。” or if you need culture without culture, you need production technology without production technology.(昆仑神宫之布莱梅乐队“Kunlun Shengong zhi Bulaimei Yuedui”) Originally There is no production technology that can make up for the deficiency through education. But when the teachers of the school are criticized, many students are unable to attend classes normally. After the Cultural Revolution, China was full of chaos, government agencies were paralyzed, factories and schools closed (Yinxian et al., 2014). This naturally includes Hu Bayi and Fatty Wang. There is no choice for the future that is because the country is still suffering from poverty, the economy has not improved, and the people can only live a bitter life without food. In addition, there is no choice as to whether to jump in the queue in the countryside. The so-called queue jumping in the countryside means that the account has been transferred to the countryside, and educated youth like Hu Bayi is considered to have a rural account, which is the only resident account and a proof of the population, indicating that Hu Bayi is still alive. Under this system of resident registration, Hu Bayi cannot go back to his original hometown registration. That is because Hu Bayi's population certificate has been registered as a rural person. The urban household registration of his former hometown has been deleted. There is no such person as him. It means there is no way to find a job with proof of the city's population, and no work unit will take him in. Even if he reluctantly returns to his hometown, he is still a “black household”. A situation like an illegal immigrant, who cannot live like a person with household registration. Since they are unable to work, naturally they will not have the points accumulated by work, nor will they be able to use the work points to receive salary to buy the necessities of life. Due to the shortage of food in the country, the Party Central Committee needs to intervene in the control of people's household registration. Spending part of the manpower to become self-reliant in the countryside can relieve the pressure of insufficient food rations in the city. From the perspective of time, during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, China was in a middle ground that was stagnant and dragged by the historical process. If measured by the spatial dimension, the social class of the common people is scattered all over the place. This spatial dimension presents the contradiction between urban and rural areas.

During the Cultural Revolution, the educated youths who went to the mountains and the countryside were scattered all over the country. Hu Bayi's friend Ding Sitian was assigned to Inner Mongolia, and other places such as Shaanxi, where the educated youths were assigned to have a difficult life. They “几年里压根没见过一粒像样的粮食” or they haven't seen a grain of grain in years (精绝古城之大山里的古墓“Jingjue Gucheng zhi Dashan li de Gumu”). There were even no lights in some remote areas. At that time, if the central government of the country had not developed public facilities in

the countryside, the educated youths would not have even basic living conditions. Hu Bayi explained: “这里根本不通公路，更别说通电了，在这地方点个油灯都属于干部待遇了，使手电筒相当于现在住总统套房，在城里完全想象不到” or there is no road at all here, let alone electricity, lighting an oil lamp in this place is a cadre's treatment, making the flashlight equivalent to living in the presidential suite now, that is absolutely unimaginable in the city”. This is naturally not comparable to the bright lights in the city. Although there are thousands of lights in the city, most of the educated youths still can't go home. Hu Bayi also compared the experiences of educated youths in different places with his own. He realized that his situation was not much better, so he couldn't help but lament: “哪还有家啊，咱们的父母不是被隔离审查了，就是被安排靠边站了，家里的房子都给封了，既然革命者以天下为己任，以后就四海为家吧” or how can there be a home, our parents are also quarantined and censored, They were arranged to stand aside, and the house in the family was sealed. Since the revolutionaries take the world as their own responsibility, they should make the world their home in the future (黄皮子坟之金井 “Huangpizi Fen zhi Jinjing).

### 3.3. People lived in an era with beasts and stagnation of education

Living in such a society with scarce production, Hu Bayi naturally did not want to go back to the city “主要是因为当时回去就没有口粮了” or mainly because there was no food ration when he went back(黄皮子坟之来自草原的一封信（下）“Huangpizi Fen zhi Laizi Caoyuan de Yi Feng Xin(Xia)”). It means that people have to endure the torment of lack of food. Instead of living a life of poverty in the city, it is better to live a life of light food in the countryside. Moreover, according to Hu Bayi's oral description: “这附近的山比较富，山货很多，河里还可以捞鱼，倒不愁吃不饱饭” or the nearby mountains are relatively rich, there are many mountain goods, and you can fish in the river, so you don't have to worry about not having enough to eat (精绝古城之大山里的古墓“Jingjue Gucheng zhi Dashan li de Gumu”). The danger of being attacked by wild beasts in the mountains is a little better than a light meal, and a lot better than going to the city to starve. The folks in the countryside told Hu Bayi and Fatty Wang that they had seen a man in the village with only half of his face left after eaten by a man-bear. The man-bear's tongue was covered with thorns, which easily licked off a large piece of his flesh (精绝古城之大山里的古墓 Jingjue Gucheng zhi Dashan li de Gumu. Although life in the countryside was not easy, Hu Bayi and Fatty Wang still chose to stay in the mountains and forests compared to the poor life in the city where they had no food for three meals a day. The narrative about mountains and cities in the novel makes readers realize one thing, that no matter how ferocious the wild beasts in the mountains are, they are no more deadly compared than having nothing to eat.

This is an era full of “ghosts”. Under the banner of “Down with Bulls, Ghosts, Snakes and Gods” during the Cultural Revolution, the teachers were unable to teach normally when they were criticized. The narrator used such a lens to present to the readers: A horrifying picture emerges. This storyline tells that during the Cultural Revolution, a middle school teacher led students to dig a tomb. The owner of the tomb was a famous person during the Restoration Period in the late Qing Dynasty. The celebrity's body was pulled out from the grave, hang upside down on a tree to show the crowd. After Hu Bayi found out,

brought his friend Ding Sitian and others to see this ancient corpse hanging on a tree in the dark and windy night.(黄皮子坟之引魂鸡 (下) “Huangpizifen zhi Yinhunji(Xia)”. This seems to imply that the school's teacher behaved abnormally by showing students the hanging corpse. This behavior revealed the whole society has become abnormal. That is undoubtedly a tragedy that “subverted the binary opposition between literature and history” (Dian & Shunsheng, 2019). This it is also a hint of the author to the low social morality and education of that era.

Historical events may be a potential part of the story, but historical events are neutral in the value judgement. The nature of historical events depends on how historians put a plot combined with the historical event of some significance that he was looking forward to (Hayden, 1993). In the novel, linking the middle school's teachers with students to watch the hanging corpse incident has in fact revealed the implied author's awareness of the revolutionary era, it was an era that was inseparable from the stagnation of education and the stagnation of morality.

A great cultural revolution made many educated youths like Hu Bayi devote themselves to an intangible ideal. It is a kind of determination to never return the revolution for the sake of the revolution “讲革命、讲传统，其实就是给新兵们讲讲连队的历史” or speaking of revolution and traditional, in fact, it is to tell the recruits about the history of the team”(精绝古城之地震“Jingjue Gucheng zhi Dizhen”) Hu Bayi, as a team leader, was sent to explain the history of the team to the recruits, they also need to instill communism in the recruits. That is, the brainwashing work of the veterans on the recruits, to make the people “fear and blame”. During the Cultural Revolution, the landlords were most afraid of being exposed as a collection of the Four Olds, because after being exposed, they would be indicted. The responsibility of collecting old things is heavy. Under the ideology of communism, the people cannot have ancestral property, all the industries owned by the people belong to the country. Only when the country is rich can the people have food to eat. Hu Bayi felt: “在这个特殊的年代里，畏怖之心终究不如惧责之心来得强烈” or in this special era, the heart of fear is not as strong as the heart of fear and blame”(黄皮子坟之引魂鸡 (下) . “Huangpizi Fen zhi Yinhunji(Xia)) The fear of blame was caused by the frequent accountability of the Revolutionary Committee. The Revolutionary Committee played the role of supporting the world revolution, and was Mao's eyeliner in Mao Zedong's leadership of the Cultural Revolution. On behalf of him, the Revolutionary Committee supervises whether most of the people live in accordance with the rules of Mao's book. Hu Bayi has a friend Old Sheepskin. The old sheepskin owned an ancient Mongolian sword. Through Hu Bayi's narration, this Mongolian sword was given to a man by Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty. When the Four Old Times were broken, the descendants of the prince asked the Old Sheepskin to throw the knife away secretly, but the Old Sheepskin was happily preserved after seeing the hunting heart. This plot is a metaphor for communist ideology. Although the old soldiers are used to brainwash the new soldiers to control their minds, but communism still cannot control the greedy human nature, which is very ironic. Even though the Mongolian knife that Old Sheepskin kept secret was finally discovered and snatched by the Cultural Revolution Committee, Hu Bayi and Ding Sitian dare not said that Old Sheepskin was the Mongolian Sword's owner. Otherwise the Old Sheepskin will be denounced as a sinful person. This situation such as the author said in the narration: “在那个横扫一切牛鬼蛇神的年代，有些话不能乱讲，讲了就会成为众矢之的，这种事被入乡随俗的知青知道了也没什么，可万一传进了革委会的耳朵里就麻烦了”



or in that era that swept away all the bulls, ghosts, snakes and gods, some words could not be talked. If you talk some taboo words, you will become the target of public criticism. It's okay for the educated youths. But, it will be troublesome if it gets into the ears of the Revolutionary Committee (黄皮子坟之舌漏“Huangpizi Fen zhi Shelou”). In the historical events regarding above-mentioned Cultural Revolution, implies that the author has a negative explanation of popular pressure impact on the Cultural Revolution.

#### 4. Conclusion

Interpreting a novel from the perspective of new historicism, we can see the author's reflection on history (Qiuyao, 2022). From the perspective of the historical nature of the text, the author uses the historical experience of the educated youths to shape the historical context of the country's economic scarcity and the policy of going to the mountains and going to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, Zhang Muye's “Guichuideng” realized a new way of interpreting history, and intervened in the historical discourse power, so that some of his historical narration of “Guichuideng” should be regarded as the author's awareness towards new historicism in cyber fantasy novels.

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