

Chinese critical responses

History and time traveling to the past are favorite themes in recent publications that cater to the taste of the popular books market in the country.

Compared to the Chinese ones, critics believe Adam Williams suggests a new and different mode of writing historical fiction through his novel *The Emperor's Bones*.

"I found that a lot of Chinese historical novels separate the history and the characters clearly, without a sound combination," says critic Xie Xizhang, "but in Williams' novel we see a natural entity of personal background together with historic incidents."

Critic Li Jianjun is also impressed by Williams' narrative of history.

"Applying a cross structure, Williams is smooth in shifting from sources like diaries and journalists' reports to protagonists' accounts. And he offers a great number of accurate and vivid details in the text, too," Li says.

Critic Zhi An also notices that the novel contains descriptions of living situations and customs of different countries from a far away period.

"It's rare to find similar descriptions on a far-reaching period that are written with such abundant emotion and freshness as in this novel," Zhi says.

As for Williams, he is always interested in starting a discussion about the boundaries between history and fiction. And he knows clearly what he is trying to do.

"I'm not writing history, I'm writing stories," he says in his spacious and neatly decorated home in Beijing.

Believing in "human memory is not good". Williams says it's difficult to find out what happened in the past anyway.

He likes to rely on personal accounts, diaries and journalists' reports.

"If they're 60 percent true, then it's good enough for me," he says.

To him, the novelist's role is not to tell history, but to use history as a background with which he/she can write whatever he/she wants to.

So rather than following what big decisions leaders made, he's more into how those decisions affect people and their lives.

He also believes the characters a writer invents have "psychological validity" if the writer knows the people he/she is writing about.

"You don't know the people until you start writing," he adds.

Literary critic Chen Xiaoming detected heavy signs of Oxford English training in reading Williams' books, believing Williams reads a lot and knows the literary masters' skills and their works very well.