

Imitation as Dialogue: The Mongolian Writer Yinzhan naxi (1837–1892) and His Imitations of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the publication of the Cheng Gao editions of *Honglou meng* in 1791 and 1792, a large group of rewritings that intended to “redress the regrets” left by Cao Xueqin’s original appeared. Among them, the Mongolian writer Yinzhan naxi’s two imitative works, *Yiceng lou* (*One-Story Tower*, n.d.) and its sequel *Qihong ting* (*The Pavilion of Red’s Lament*, 1878), are particularly interesting, in addressing two issues raised in the interpretation and remaking of *Honglou meng*. These imitations make a conscious effort to incorporate a female perspective in reading and dialoging with the original, as well as interacting with other derivative writings by responding to the debate over “how *Honglou meng* should end.”

The authorial effort of incorporating a female perspective, as this study intends to show, can be seen from the novels’ re-evocation of the fantasies created by women writers and critics, and from the transformation of their female protagonists (reproductions of female characters from *Honglou meng*) from tragic figures to triumphant rebels. This study will further demonstrate that, despite his inversion of the original fictional mode from tragedy to comedy, Yinzhan naxi actually believes that the fictional happy ending is analogous to the illusiveness of a dream. This analogy of a happy ending as a dream elevates the debate over “how *Honglou meng* should end” to an abstract and theoretical level: It anticipates Wang Guowei and Lu Xun’s discussions on tragedy and comedy, although, in contrast to their ideological interpretations, Yinzhan naxi provides a more profound view of the fictive nature of art.

KEY WORDS

Imitations of <i>Honglou meng</i>	reader's response
Model Reader (or implied reader)	female perspective
women readership	freedom of marriage
women's rebellion	Chinese worldview
fictional conventions	fictionality



The publication of the Chengjia 程甲 and Chengyi 程乙 editions (1791 and 1792) of *Honglou meng* (ca. 1754, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, also known as *Shitou ji*, or *The Story of the Stone*) did much to broaden the novel's reading public, turning Cao Xueqin's masterpiece into the most widely read book of the late Qing dynasty.¹ The unprecedented popularity of *Honglou meng* and the feverish debate the novel provoked caused a surge in derivative writings. No less than 17 sequels and 19 imitations were published in the last century of Qing, from the Jiaqing period to the early Republic.²

Two of the imitative works that appeared in this period, *Yiceng lou* 一層樓 (*The One-Storey Tower*, n.d.) and its sequel *Qihong ting* 泣紅亭 (*The Pavilion of Red's Lament*, 1878), were written by the Mongolian writer, Yinzhan naxi 尹湛納希. In the past, Yinzhan naxi's works were of interest to scholars primarily because they were considered a positive example of cross-cultural learning and influence, and, because, by imitating Cao Xueqin, he became the first Mongolian novelist. Yinzhan naxi wrote first in Mongolian for a Mongol audience. Only later his works were translated into Chinese. In so doing, Yinzhan naxi joined another Mongolian scholar Ha Sibao 哈斯寶³ in contributing to the on-going dialogue with *Honglou meng* by introducing *Honglou meng* to an ethnically diverse audience and adding the ideological and literary views of a Mongol reader to a discourse otherwise confined largely to Han and Manchurian readers who provided their criticism in critical discourses as well as narrative rewritings.⁴

While recognizing the cultural uniqueness of *The One-Storey Tower* and *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*, this study examines their complex textual relationships to both their parent work and to other

pre-existing narratives, including other *Honglou meng* sequels and imitative works. For the two novels not only allusively and dialogically evoke their model in the narrative; they also respond to the concerns of several other rewriters. I argue that such a textual complexity is indicative of a more self-reflective and reader-conscious writing style adopted by Yinzhan naxi and his contemporaries in the post-*Honglou meng* era, a kind of literary composition modeled on the classics, but also influenced by readers' responses to them.

The Author and His Imitations

In 1837, Yinzhan naxi (whose Chinese name was Bao Hengshan 寶衡山, style-name Runting 潤亭), was born into a prominent branch of Chengjis Khan's 成吉思汗 line. Yinzhan naxi grew up in a Mongolian administrative division (modern Beipiao 北票 county of Liaoning 遼寧 province) where Mongolians and Chinese lived together and the nomadic life had long been abandoned. There, Yinzhan naxi and his brothers were educated and nurtured in both the Mongol and Chinese cultures. Well versed in Mongolian, Chinese, Manchurian, and Tibetan schools of learning, Yinzhan naxi excelled in the Mongolian and Chinese classics. Like Cao Xueqin, Yinzhan naxi had a very comfortable childhood and youth, but the family fortune turned for the worse in his thirties. In order to make a living, he drifted to different places, and began to write fiction during this period. He spent his remaining years in poverty, and died in a temple at age of fifty-six in 1892. Besides his two imitations of *Honglou meng*, Yinzhan naxi left behind two unfinished novels, *Qingshi yanyi* 青史演義 (*The Historical Romance of Chengjis Khan*) and *Hongyun lei* 紅雲淚 (*Tears of Red Cloud*). He also translated *Honglou meng* and *Zhongyong* (*The Doctrine of Means*) into Mongolian and authored many poems and literary essays.⁵

Although no specific date is provided for *The One-Storey Tower*, the novel must have been completed during the period from 1867 to 1874, the early years of Yinzhan naxi's writing career but before he wrote his sequel *The Pavilion of Red's Lament* in 1875.⁶ This thirty-

two-chapter novel is a tragic love story about the unfulfilled love of Puyu 璞玉 for his three female cousins. Puyu, a Jia Baoyu type hero, is the overprotected favorite of his mother and grandmother. He spends most of his childhood in Huifang yuan 蕙芳園, the family garden, accompanied and surrounded by female relatives and maids. With his coming of age, Puyu's innocent friendship with his three beautiful and talented cousins, Lumei 爐梅, Qinmo 琴默, and Shengru 聖如 (all of whom sojourn at his family compound for various reasons) turns to love. Bound to them all, Puyu is more intimate with Lumei and Qinmo. He is especially affectionate towards the sensitive and delicate Lumei, but he is also strongly attracted to Qinmo's beauty and intelligence. Despite their love, he is unable to marry any of them because of the meddling of the family elders who have arranged a separate match for him to the daughter of a prince. Although the arranged marriage is a happy one, Puyu's happiness is short-lived. Suji 蘇己, his bride, dies not long after the wedding, leaving Puyu alone to face the tragic news that his three beloved cousins have all been unwillingly married to others. Lumei has been married to a rich merchant who is twice of her age; Qinmo to an extremely ugly and uncultured man, and Shengru to a young man who is dying of consumption.

Thematically, and in style, *The One-Storey Tower* is a "mimetic transformation" of the Chenggao 程高 edition of *Honglou meng*, in which, with Gao E's forty-chapter continuation, the tragedy of Baoyu and Daiyu's love is further dramatized and given more emphasis. Some scholars believe that *The One-Storey Tower* is more than just an interpretative re-elaboration of *Honglou meng*, and that it is, in fact, a reflection of the author's own sorrows and resentments. According to the Mongolian scholar Zha Laga and the Chinese scholar Zhang Jun 張俊, both Yinzhan naxi and his older brother, Songwei danjing 嵩威丹精, claimed that the story depicted the author's family vicissitudes and personal experiences.⁷ Since one can only find a sketch of Yinzhan naxi's life in his writings and those of his commentators, it is uncertain whether the claim is true. Such a claim might well be an expression of the author's desire to recapitulate Cao Xueqin's claim that he was "recovering a past reality."⁸ What is unique about *The One-Storey*

Tower, though, is its faithful appropriation of the tragic and elegiac mode found in *Honglou meng*. This contrasts with the majority of its contemporary derivative writings, because most of which invert the original's conclusion in order to contrive a happy ending (*da tuanyuan* 大團圓). However, in *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*, his sequel, Yinzhan naxi made a complete plot reversal, altering the characters' fates through the intervention of miracles and remarkable coincidences.

The Pavilion of Red's Lament was written in 1875. Its earliest surviving edition (a hand-copied manuscript in the Mongolian language) dates to the fourth year of Guangxu 光緒 (1878). It continues the story laid out in *The One-Storey Tower*, but inverts the fates of the three female protagonists by cleverly utilizing a detail from the first imitation. As described in the sequel, what Puyu heard about the unhappy marriages of his cousins was only partly true. Lumei was indeed engaged to an old merchant, but she disguised herself as a man and ran away from home; when Qinmo discovered that she was mismatched, she threw herself into a river, but was saved by a passing ship; Shengru did marry her sick fiancé, but he died before their marriage was consummated, enabling her to return to her natal family. After many twists and turns, all the three girls eventually meet Puyu again in Hangzhou and end up happily married to him. Although the novel ends comically, the reader is warned by the author not to take the story literally. As the novel's closing poem reads: "Three eventful years/ The Absurd words of a daydream; / If you want to know what is true, / Imagine the horns of a hare and the fur of a turtle 茫茫三年事，午夢荒唐語。若考其中實，兔生犄角龜生毛。"⁹

In its thematic treatment, literary mode, and narrative plot, *The Pavilion of Red's Lament* deliberately reverses the outcomes of *The One-Storey Tower*, and in this way repeats the pattern of narrative inversion prevalent in the majority of contemporary derivative writings of *Honglou meng*. Such inversion usually invites the derision of modern critics, not only because most rewritings were artistic failures, but also because they suggest a de-appreciation of the mode of literary tragedy that, in the case of *Honglou meng*, is the basis of the novel's

philosophical profundity and aesthetic empathy. However, a closer study of Yinzhan naxi's imitations suggests a rather more complex literary phenomenon that resists a one-dimensional interpretation of its artistic superiority/inferiority and novelistic meaning.

Interestingly and significantly, *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*, closely emulates the most popular *tanci* 彈詞 of the late Qing: *Zaisheng yuan* 再生緣 (*The Destiny of the Next Life*, 1796) by the talented female writer Chen Duansheng 陳端生. Furthermore, in both his imitations, Yinzhan naxi used many appropriations, allusions, and quotations that can be found in four other derivative writings of *Honglou meng*—Xiaoyao zi's 逍遙子 *Hou Honglou meng* 後紅樓夢 (*The Later Dream of the Red Chamber*, 1796), Qin Zichen's 秦子忱 *Xu Honglou meng* 續紅樓夢 (*A Sequel to Dream of the Red Chamber*, 1799), Chen Shaohai's 陳少海 *Honglou fumeng* 紅樓複夢 (*Re-dreaming of the Red Chamber*, 1805), and Li Ruzhen's 李汝珍's *Jinghua yuan* 鏡花緣 (*The Destiny of Flowers in the Mirror*, 1819).¹⁰ Such a multi-layered intertextuality deserves a reading that goes beyond treating the two narratives as a "transparent vehicle to a signified." To use the Italian scholar Gian Biagio Conte's words, the texts can be described as, "a web of intermeshed overlays of meaning, a complex space where signifiers call not merely to signifieds but also to a series of other signifiers and other signifying systems."¹¹ As such, the complex net that Yinzhan naxi weaved into his texts, and the relationship they bear to previous texts cannot be ignored.

Yinzhan naxi's imitations take as major concerns two issues raised in the interpretation and debate of *Honglou meng*. First, the sequel's deliberate emulation of Chen Duansheng's *tanci* suggests a conscious effort to incorporate a female perspective into the reading and dialoguing of *Honglou meng*. Secondly, both imitations' allusive evocation of other derivative writings indicates a further interaction between Yinzhan naxi and other secondary writings. This interaction results in a reversal of the literary mode found in *The One-Storey Tower* and a happy ending for the protagonists of *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*. The two issues are closely related, in that readers' responses to *Honglou meng*—and in turn, to Yinzhan naxi's imitative works—play

a vital role in his literary compositions. In other words, when Yinzhao naxi calls “other signifiers and other signifying systems” into his own works, he not only valorizes his own creation, he is, at the same time, relativizing old norms, by ensuring that his readers’ tastes and opinions should not be ignored.

A Reader to Be Reinvented: Yinzhao naxi’s Effort to Incorporate the Female Perspective

In *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, Gian Biagio Conte describes the dynamic aspect of the relationship between author and reader by pointing out that, in literary texts, an author not only presupposes his/her reader’s competence (his/her knowledge of the conventions of a given reader), he also creates that competence in the reader who both uses and modifies the literary code. Thus the author’s task is to invent his own Model Reader.¹² Conte writes,

The modes of reading of each epoch are implicit in their modes of writing. The text requires the cooperation of a reader as a necessary condition for its realization. To be more precise, a literary text is a product whose interpretative destiny belongs to its own generative mechanism. Generating a text means activating a strategy that predicts the moves of others.¹³

Conte is unequivocal in affirming a dialectical inter-dependency between author and reader: While the author invents the reader and prescribes his reading, he also depends on the reader to activate the prescribed reading strategy in the literary text, and thus realize the meaning of the text.

Not only is the inter-dependency between author and reader in generating a text manifest in *Honglou meng*, it is actually included in the novel as a subject. Using various literary devices (such as framing the narrative proper with mythical tales and by using predictive

messages), Cao Xueqin invests his Model Reader in the character of Jia Baoyu who, through an author-guided “re-reading” (as in his dream trip to the Land of Illusion, for instance), is transformed from a naive reader into an enlightened one, as demonstrated by his final detachment from *qing* and other worldly desires. Like every writer, Cao Xueqin created his “like-minded-reader” (*tongxin zhe* 同心者) who was brilliantly self-reflected in the character of Baoyu. As a dramatized Model Reader, Baoyu is key to the novel’s interpretation. Baoyu is “a connoisseur of female talent,” but despite of his unusual view of women’s supremacy, *Honglou meng* does not directly answer women’s readerly desires, though it did indeed give rise to such desires.¹⁴

As readers of *Honglou meng*, the authors of sequels and imitations express their readerly desires in their respective re-elaborations of Cao Xueqin’s original. At the same time, as writers, they need to invent their own Model Readers, enlisting the reader’s cooperation in actualizing the meanings of their texts. In the case of Yinzhan naxi, such a reinvention occurs in both of his novels, but more dramatically in the sequel *The Pavilion of Red’s Lament*. If the Model Reader in *Honglou Meng* remains an admirer of talented women and a sympathizer of women’s plight, Yinzhan naxi, in reinventing his ideal reader, allusively includes both woman writer’s and female critics’ views in his text, thereby incorporating a female perspective in the author’s reading code.

In *The One-Storey Tower*, Yinzhan naxi identifies himself as Cao Xueqin’s Model Reader: a “like-minded” reader who truly understands *Honglou meng* and shares Cao’s sorrows, an appreciation that Yinzhan naxi wants to share with “all the talented men in the world 與天下之才子同聲共哭也。”¹⁵ As indicated in his prefaces, although he pays homage to *Honglou meng*, he intends to compete with and improve the “original.”¹⁶ Yinzhan naxi repeatedly states: “The goal of repairing Heaven exists from ancient times, [I] hope that a person of noble aspiration can make up the defects [in the original] 補天之說自古有，望有志賢士彌鄙陋”;¹⁷ [but] [. . .] “My pen is awkward and lacks talent; how can [my] human invention compete with the “work of

heaven? Even so, green comes from blue [and is more appealing] and [does not ice come from water] and is colder than water 筆拙源乎才窮，人巧豈能奪天工！然青尚出於藍色，冰冷弗勝水寒乎”¹⁸ Yinzhan naxi calls *Honglou meng* the “heavenly work” and his own work “human invention.” Nevertheless, he is confident that a derived product can improve the “original.” Yet, his self-revelation is full of ambivalence, oscillating between admiration and dissatisfaction with the original, and between determination to make improvement and self-doubt whether it can be done. Even the novel’s title, *The One-Storey Tower*, suggests its author’s intention of enhancement. The title alludes to a famous line by the Tang poet Wang Zhihuan 王之渙 (688–742). In the poem, “Deng Guanque lou” 登鶴雀樓 (Ascending the Tower of the Hooded Crane), Wang opines that one should not limit himself to the vistas he can see with comfort, but broaden his view by climbing one storey higher in the tower 欲窮千里目，更上一層樓。¹⁹ Through this poetic allusion, Yinzhan naxi implies that he aims to broaden his readers’ view by leading them to a “higher level” of a new fictional plane.

In his effort to improve the “original,” what Yinzhan naxi was actually doing was challenging Gao E’s reading and interpretation of *Honglou meng*. Yinzhan naxi was obviously unhappy with Gao E’s twist of making Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳 and Hua Xiren 花襲人 the villains of Baoyu and Daiyu’s love tragedy, a treatment that deviates from Cao Xueqin’s characterization in his uncompleted first eighty chapters of the novel.²⁰ As a result, in *The One-Storey Tower* the love tale ends tragically like that of the young protagonists in *Honglou meng* but dispenses with Gao E’s stereotypical portrayal of the meddling villains, and “the evil acts of a voracious daughter-in-law and treacherous concubine 惡媳奸妾之弊.” For Yinzhan naxi, the love tragedy is caused not simply by the family elders who turn a blind eye to the young people’s feelings, but is rooted in the youngsters’ own lack of enlightenment into their right to personal happiness and their flaccid resistance to family dictate and the old socio-ideological system. Unlike Gao E who turns Baoyu into a “blockhead” so that Wang Xifeng’s scheme of “bag-changing” 調包計 can work, Yinzhan naxi

does not absolve his hero of responsibility for his personal misfortunes. Puyu's initial lack of focus in his affections and his passive acceptance of the marriage that his father has arranged for him deeply disappoint his three cousins and are partly responsible for the unfruitful closure of his love quest in *The One-Storey Tower*. By retelling the tale of *Honglou meng* in a less dramatic and more ambiguous manner, and by challenging what Gao E wrote in his extension of the original, Yinzhannaxi reactivates the reading code that Cao Xueqin formulated in his first eighty chapters of the novel. Therefore, in his first imitation, Yinzhannaxi's target audience is mainly the like-minded talented men of the world, and his reinvented Model Reader is not distinctively different from what Cao Xueqin envisioned, especially with regard to the neglect of women's readerly desires. However, we see a dramatic change in Yinzhannaxi's idea of a Model Reader in his sequel *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*. Unlike the first imitation, the sequel makes a conscious effort to include a female perspective. Such an intention is evidenced by the novel's allusive title, its close emulation of Chen Duansheng's *The Destiny of the Next Life*, and the author's appreciative response to Chen Shiwen's 陳詩雯 (Chen Shaohai's sister) preface to *Re-dreaming of the Red Chamber*.

The sequel's title, *Qihong ting* or *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*, is borrowed from Li Ruzhen's *Jinghua yuan*, a novel that is itself an imitation of *Honglou meng*. In Chapter 48 of Li's novel, Tang Guichen 唐閩臣, a flower fairy incarnated as a talented woman, voyages to Little Penglai 小蓬萊, an overseas island, where she finds a pavilion that houses a jade tablet. The pavilion is called the "Qihong ting" because it preserves the stories of the "one hundred talented women" (flower fairies banished from Heaven for upsetting the seasonal order) inscribed on a large jade tablet. As a literary metaphor, "Qihong ting" has two connotations in *Jinghua yuan*. First, it is indicative of a thematic focus on women's talents and their ill fates; secondly, since Li's novel is a derived work from *Honglou meng*, the metaphor implies a sympathetic response from Li Ruzhen (as a reader) to the misfortunes of the female characters in Cao Xueqin's original.

According to Ellen Widmer, *Jinghua yuan* stirred a strong

reaction among women readers when it was published, a sign that the novel had “reached out to people of both sexes.”²¹ When the novel’s 1828 edition was published, it included an appendix of congratulatory poems by women. Among these was a poem by Qian Shoupu expressing her view that *Jinghua yuan* answered the needs of a reader like her who had long awaited a successor to *Honglou meng*.²² This view was later echoed by many others, including two late Qing rewriters of *Jinghua yuan*, Chen Xiaolu 陳嘯廬, Hua Qinshan 華琴珊, and the famous literary historian and critic Hu Shi 胡適. In his reworking of *Jinghua yuan*, *Xin Jinghua yuan* 新鏡花緣 (*New Destiny of Flowers in the Mirror*, 1908), Chen Xiaolu, a moderate reformer, took the theme of gallant and talented women from Li Ruzhen, and refashioned it into a novel that promotes progressive ideas on women’s issues.²³

On the other hand, Hua Qinshan, a conservative, found the images of Wu Zetian 武則天 and androgynous women in *Jinghua yuan* offensive and promoting of transgressions by women. Therefore, in his sequel, *Xu Jinghua yuan* 續鏡花緣 (*A Continuation of Destiny of Flowers in the Mirror*, 1910), Hua adopted a contentious attitude toward Li Ruzhen and tried to reassert the old gender boundaries that he believed had been broken in the parent novel.²⁴

Hu Shi, of course, offered the most influential critique of *Jinghua yuan* as a book for women. In his “*Jinghua yuan de yinlun*” 鏡花源的引論 (*A Guide to the Destiny of Flowers in the Mirror*), Hu believes that *Jinghua yuan* is a novel that shows serious concern for women. He asserts that Li Ruzhen criticizes the subordination of women and the practice of footbinding, and demands social change that allows women to be educated and to participate in state politics.²⁵ The consistency of these responses suggests that although *Jinghua yuan* may not strike today’s reader as a novel that answers women’s readerly desires; it was perceived to be doing so by some readers of the late Qing and the early Republican era.

The Pavilion of Red’s Lament was written about sixty years after *Jinghua yuan* and three decades earlier than Cheng Xiaolu and Hua Qinshan’s rewritings. Given the fact that this was a time when

women's movements were starting to gain a momentum in China,²⁶ Yinzhao naxi's borrowing from *Jinghua yuan* cannot be seen as mere accident or coincidence.²⁷ He must have intentionally targeted the increasing number of female and reform-minded male readers. This conclusion is further evidenced by the novel's close emulation of Chen Duansheng's *tanci*.

If *Honglou meng* is a heartrending elegy that immortalizes a group of beautiful and talented female characters who eventually perish or suffer in the fictional world, *The Pavilion of Red's Lament* obviously intends to alter such a sorrowful fate for women. In particular, the novel relates three stories of protest against arranged or forced marriage by evoking motifs and episodes from the *The Destiny of the Next Life*, searching for a way out for characters such as Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, and Yuanyang 鴛鴦.

The three stories of women's rebellion involve two of Puyu's cousins Lumei and Qinmo and the family maid Miaoluan 妙鸞. In *The One-Storey Tower*, Lumei is portrayed as quick-witted, overly sentimental, and extremely delicate. In the mind of the reader, she evokes the image of Lin Daiyu from *Honglou meng*. Her nickname, Xiangfei 湘妃, and her lodging "Lüzhu zhai" 綠竹宅 (Green Bamboo House) are all allusions to Lin Daiyu. Most importantly, she is as devoted to love as is her fictional model. When Puyu's loyalty and faithfulness to her are in doubt, she becomes seriously ill and almost dies. Although more honest and straightforward in expressing her feelings, Lumei is as helpless and self-destructive as Daiyu was when it comes to confronting the obstacles to love in *The One-Storey Tower*.

However, Lumei's character changes radically in *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*. In the sequel, in defiance of a bad match arranged by her mother, she disguises herself as a man and runs away from home. The episode closely imitates the story of Meng Lijun 孟麗君 from the *The Destiny of the Next Life*—from the character's falling into dire straits en route to the Capital to her rescue by a rich villager; and from the disguised girl becoming the villager's "adopted son" to her turning into the "groom" for the daughter of a high ranking official. To readers who are familiar with both *Honglou meng* and the *The Destiny of the Next*

Life, Lumei's character is transformed from Lin Daiyu reborn to Meng Lijun reincarnated. Although both are described as women with intellect and learning superior to that of men, Meng Lijun, as a fictional character, is distinctly different from Lin Daiyu. Unlike Lin, who often falls into self-pity and self-destruction when faced with the cruelties of fate, Meng Lijun is self-reliant, daring, and resourceful. But more importantly, she exerts her intelligence and learning outside of inner quarters of the household, becoming a female Prime Minister in male disguise. If Lin Daiyu dies for love, Meng Lijun searches for her self-fulfillment in public service—a form of political achievement usually sought out by men. By transcending gender boundaries and outdoing men on both the battlefield and in examinations, Meng Lijun becomes the expression of Chen Duansheng's desires as a female reader-writer.

The transformation of Lumei's character from *The One-Storey Tower* to that in the sequel is suggestive of at least two authorial intentions. First, Yinzhan naxi seems to be trying to improve the character of Li Daiyu, who, although no doubt one of the most successful and memorable female characters ever created in Chinese literature, was already not completely ideal in the minds of most late Qing readers. Secondly, although *Honglou meng* was one of the favorite narratives for women in Qing times, it did not directly answer women's readerly desires. On the other hand, in the late Qing, *tanci* became a literary genre that was written primarily for and by women. *The Destiny of the Next Life*, for example, was extremely popular with woman readers. In it the author created a fictional world that questioned the patriarchal social order and gave expression to women's fantasies. It is probable then that, Yinzhan naxi's intention in incorporating the woman's perspective into his sequel was to attract these female readers.

The other two stories of women's protest also point to such intentions. Qinmo, a reworking of the character Xue Baochai, is similarly made over in Yinzhan naxi's novels—especially in the sequel. In *The One-Storey Tower*, echoing the rivalry between Daiyu and Baochai, Qinmo is endowed with superior beauty and intelligence, and becomes Lumei's competitor for Puyu's love. Although some of her

character traits remind us of Xue Baochai (such as being very shrewd and quick to win people's praise), Qinmo demonstrates a fundamental difference from her precursor in her attitude to love. If Xue Baochai behaves "properly" in her relationship with Baoyu by seeking parental permission and allowing the family's interests to overshadow her personal feelings, Qinmo pursues her love boldly and actively, and is not constrained by the rules of Confucian womanly behavior. Openly competing with Lumei for Puyu's affection, Qinmo repeatedly and directly expresses her romantic sentiments to Puyu in songs and poems.

Her character as a self-serving but faithful lover was already outlined in *The One-Storey Tower*. In Chapter 31, she expresses her indignation over Puyu's submission to his father's will and his engagement to Suji, the daughter of a powerful prince. Meeting Puyu before his wedding and using a jade ring (a love token she received from Puyu) as the symbol of her pure and constant devotion, Qinmo metaphorically but poignantly points out Puyu's fickleness and disloyalty to their love, something that Xue Baochai as an exemplar of Confucian virtues would never do. However, although she expresses her resentment, Qinmo nevertheless bends to fate and prepares to marry the husband chosen by her parents at the end of *The One-Storey Tower*.

Like Lumei, Qinmo is elevated to a rebellious character in *The Pavilion of Red's Lament*. Shocked by Lumei's disappearance and having discovered that her betrothed is both ugly and uncultured, Qinmo cannot help feeling victimized. Even a sense of filial piety does not rid Qinmo of resentment towards her parents, who are not only responsible for the bad match, but also show little concern for her feelings. Trapped and deprived of happiness, Qinmo decides to take her own life in protest. She calmly arranges her suicide, painting a self-portrait before jumping into the stormy Yangtze River. This episode again evokes characters and motifs from the *The Destiny of the Next Life*. The motif of the self-portrait repeats an act of Meng Lijun before she disguises herself as a man and leaves home, and the suicide is borrowed from the story of Su Yingxue 蘇映雪, another female

character from the *The Destiny of the Next Life*.

Drawing a self-portrait, an elaborate and ritualistic act conducted by Meng Lijun in the *The Destiny of the Next Life*, is, in fact, a motif borrowed from the famous seventeenth-century play *Mudan ting* (*The Peony Pavilion*) by Tang Xianzu. While the self-portrait for Tang's heroine Du Liniang has the additional meaning of preserving beauty before dying, in both Tang and Chen's works the motif represents the female protagonist's narcissistic self-mirroring and self-perception, and a desire for "recognition," either by the desiring other or by a future viewer. Since this is a brilliant literary device to represent self-portrayal by a female character whose desire has been suppressed and whose beauty and talent have been neglected, it became one of the most beloved literary images among woman readers and writers in Ming and Qing dynasties. Dorothy Ko, in her book *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, has described an obsession of Feng Xiaoqing 馮小青, a historical figure and an avid reader of *The Peony Pavilion*, with her own self-portrait. Xiaoqing not only emulated Du Liniang in having her portrait drawn when she was ill, but she had the artist redo it three times before she was satisfied.²⁸ As a talented but neglected concubine of a rich man, Xiaoqing's obsession with her self-portrait can be seen as a desperate effort at self-actualization, a cry for love and appreciation.²⁹ A reader of Tang Xianzu's play and Xiaoqing's legend and a gifted but ill-fated woman herself,³⁰ Chen Duansheng likewise used this motif (through her alter ego Meng Lijun) to voice her indignation at being unappreciated as a woman of beauty and intelligence. Since the motif of drawing a self-portrait conveys the female reader-writers' desire of self-representation, Yinzhan naxi's appropriation of this detail from *The Destiny of the Next Life* re-voices the need for expression by his female characters and woman readers.³¹

As for the suicide, a new layer of meaning is added in Yinzhan naxi's elaboration. In the case of Su Yingxue in *The Destiny of the Next Life*, the suicide is the means by which she expresses her double loyalty to her benefactor Meng Lijun and to her beloved Huangfu shaohua 皇甫少華. After Meng Lijun runs away to avoid marrying Liu Kuibi 劉奎壁 (the younger brother of the Empress) who attempted to

kill his rival Huangfu shaohua, Su Yingxue (who takes shelter in Meng's household since she was little) is asked to disguise herself as Meng Lijun to marry Liu. Su makes an attempt to assassinate Liu and takes her own life by jumping into a river after the assassination failed. Her action is motivated by a combination of *baoen* 報恩 (repaying other's kindness) and love. However, in the situation of Qinmo, it is not an interfering villain but her own parents and the old marriage system that cause her misery. Having realized that by following her parents' orders she will sacrifice her own happiness; she chooses, in defiance of Confucian teachings on womanly virtue, to die rather than consummate the marriage. By placing individual desire and happiness over *fumu zhiming* 父母之命 (parental authority), Qinmo's uncompromising behavior criticizes Xue Baochai's submission to the family elders who made her marry Baoyu in his condition of mental disorder. In writing about Qinmo's rebellion, Yinzhan naxi fundamentally distinguishes her from Xue Baochai: While Baochai abides by propriety and behaves in accordance with the dictates of society, Qinmo protests when those rules deprive her of the right to seek her own happiness. Since, in the sequel, both Lumei and Qinmo are allowed to marry their love (Puyu) in the end, Yinzhan naxi proves himself to be an advocate of a woman's right to marry whom she chooses. However, his idea of improvement in this aspect is limited, as he still endorses a male-centered polygamous marriage.

The third story of female protest is a remaking of Yuanyang's tale from *Honglou meng*. Miaoluan, a favorite maid of Puyu's grandmother, refuses to become a concubine of Puyu's licentious uncle. Taking the episode of Yuanyang almost verbatim from the original, Yinzhan naxi makes a deliberate alteration in the character's fate, allowing Miaoluan to triumph in the end. Instead of killing herself after the death of her protector (the matriarch of the family), as Gao E designed for Yuanyang in Chapter 111 of *Honglou meng*, Miaoluan escapes and takes refuge in a nunnery to avoid the "forced marriage." She returns to Puyu's family when the uncle is dead. There she remains unmarried for the rest of her life. Miaoluan's hiding in a nunnery repeats Liu Yanyu's 劉燕玉 means of evading an unwanted suitor in *The Destiny of the Next*

Life. Her story has a function similar to Liu's, which is to reinforce the message already delivered in the tales of the two main female characters that women should be the masters of their own fates and fight for their happiness. When they do so, they can triumph, or at least avoid becoming the ready victims of their oppressors.

By now it is clear what Yinzhan naxi accomplished by appropriating character traits, motifs, and episodes from Chen Duansheng's *tanci*. He not only improved characters like Lin Daiyu, Xue Baochai, and Yuanyang in ways that his contemporary women readers and writers would find appealing, he also re-voiced women's desire for self-representation by recalling the cherished literary legends of Du Liniang and Feng Xiaoqing, and by evoking the wishful thoughts of a female writer (Chen Duansheng). Yinzhan naxi responded to women readers because by the time he wrote his novels women were already actively reading fiction and criticism, and their interpretations and commentaries were already significant enough to be noted by the reform-minded writers like Yinzhan naxi.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, China had a female readership that was large enough to have influenced fiction writing and criticism. This is evidenced by the fact that many of *Honglou meng's* sequels and imitations consciously described women reading, discussing, and commenting on the novel. Some of the female characters from the sequels also play games based on characters from *Honglou meng* or perform songs about them. For instance, Chapter 27 of Yinzhan naxi's first novel, *The One-Storey Tower*, contains a detail about Puyu's grandmother gathering the female relatives of the family together to discuss the recently published fiction *The Twelve Beauties of Jinling* (one of the four titles used for *Honglou meng*). This detail not only reveals *Honglou meng's* popularity among woman readers, it also reflects Yinzhan naxi's awareness of the novel's large female audience. Similar depictions can be found in other derivative writings. In Chapters 1 and 20 of *The Later Dream of the Red Chamber* (a novel Yinzhan naxi quoted when he wrote his imitations), the author, Xiaoyao zi, claims that it was the dissatisfaction of Baochai (a female reader's disapproval) with the novel's ending and her demand for a

continuation of the story that motivated him to write his sequel. In three imitations of *Honglou meng*—*Huayue hen* 花月痕 (*Traces of Flower and the Moon*, 1872), *Huifang lu* 繪芳錄 (*The Record of Painting Flowers*, 1878), and *Fengyue meng* 風月夢 (*The Dream of Wind and the Moon*, 1888)—courtesans and singsong girls are described as ardent readers of *Honglou meng*. They are familiar with its novelistic characters, story plots, and wine games. Some of them even provide sophisticated critiques of the novel.³² However, more direct proof of women readers' active participation in the interpretation and remaking of *Honglou meng* comes from Gu Taiqing 顧太清, a female rewriter (1799–1877), and two female critics, Chen Shiwen and Shen Xiangpei 沈湘佩. While Gu published her own *Honglou meng* sequel, *Honglou meng ying* 紅樓夢影 (*The Shadow of Dream of the Red Chamber*) in 1877, Chen and Shen wrote prefaces for *Re-dreaming of the Red Chamber* and *The Shadow of Dream of the Red Chamber*, respectively. Although there is no evidence that Yinzhan naxi had knowledge of Gu Taiqing's novel or Shen Xiangpei's preface, he certainly paid close attention to Chen Shiwen's commentary when he wrote his novels.

Re-dreaming of the Red Chamber, a sequel written by Chen Shiwen's older brother Chen Shaohai, is one of the *Honglou meng* sequels that Yinzhan naxi used as a reference for his own rewritings. He made particular effort to respond to the readerly desires conveyed by Chen Shiwen in her preface. Chen indicates that male readers and female readers react differently to *Honglou meng* and expresses her desire to read a sequel that improves the fates of the characters. As she puts it,

A thread of "heart-incense" creates the illusive mundane world of three thousand things; a sourceless spring suddenly gives rise to twelve jade towers.³³ The talented men of the world read [*Honglou meng*] philosophically, while [in reaction of the fates of the novel's characters,] the gifted woman calls out in anguish, "What can be done!" Love comes from the heart. Why must [the characters of *Honglou meng*] be so ill fated? Since [the novel] is the

product of *qing* (love, feelings), what is the harm in prolonging the dream [created by the author of *Honglou meng*].

心香一線，幻來色界三千；春夢無端，倏起瓊樓十二。普天才子作如是之達觀，絕世佳人喚奈何於幽恨。愛由心造，緣豈天慳。斯則情之所鍾，即亦夢何妨續。³⁴

Chen further states that in a sequel she hopes to see the reader led to “a higher level of a tower 樓上樓，更上一層” through positive outcomes so that “those who are in love are able to marry each other in the end 有情的終成眷屬.” In pointing out that women readers respond to *Honglou meng* empathically rather than philosophically, Chen Shiwen emphasizes that women want their desires to be realized in fantasy. A sophisticated reader, Chen does not take *Honglou meng* or any fiction at face value. She sees fiction as a genre that releases her passions and projects her dreams. It is important for her to read about idealized love and happy endings in a novel, not because she sees such a reality, but because that she believes fiction can provide an alternative “reality” and show the path to future possibilities.

Yinzhan naxi clearly agreed with Chen Shiwen in this. In composing his works, he not only echoed Chen Shiwen on the idea of ascending to a “higher level” by means of a fictional world, he responded approvingly to her demand for idealized love and a happy ending, intentionally changing his story from a tragedy to comedy. However, Yinzhan naxi’s reversal of the literary mode opens up an aesthetic issue that goes beyond the call of women readers.

A “Dream” to Be Re-imagined: Yinzhan naxi’s Reversal of the Literary Mode

Like many rewritings of *Honglou meng*, *The One-Storey Tower* and *The Pavilion of Red’s Lament* are notable for their interaction with other contemporary derivative writings. Such an interaction is reflected in these two narratives’ numerous motif appropriations and plot borrowings from works such as *The Later Dream of the Red Chamber*,

A Sequel to Dream of the Red Chamber (by Qin Zichen), and *Re-dreaming of the Red Chamber*. More importantly, the novels are responsive to the issue of “how *Honglou meng* should end”: an issue that triggered a heated debate among the readers-rewriters of the late Qing.

Critics believe that the sudden surge in the number of rewritings after the publication of the Cheng Gao editions was the result of readers’ attempts to dialogue with *Honglou meng* (the 120 chapter edition, more precisely).³⁵ This surge was mainly motivated by the readers-rewriters’ dissatisfaction with the tragic ending of the novel: *Buhen* 補恨 (making up the regrets left by the “original”) became the common theme of this group of rewritings. In her preface to *The Shadow of Dream of the Red Chamber*, the famous late Qing female poet, Shen Xiangpei 沈湘佩 (pseudonym Xihu sanren 西湖散人) comments:

Ever since Crimson Pearl, a rare talent and beauty, died with unfulfilled love, readers all over China have vied to write continuations to the original text, each expressing his/her own views [on how the story should end]. [The rewriters] vent Crimson Pearl’s grievances, invert her ill fate, and impart this descended immortal plant with wealth and rank. [In their sequels, the authors] make the dead come back to life, and the pure become impure. Although [these rewriters] do their best to provide extravagant details, one cannot help but feel that most of these elaborations are absurd.

海內讀此書者，因絳珠負絕世才貌，抱恨夭亡，起而續接前編，各抒己見。

為絳珠吐生前之夙怨，翻薄命之舊案，將紅塵之富貴加碧落之仙珠。死者令其複生，清者揚之使濁，縱然竭力鋪張，益覺擬不於倫。³⁶

Shen Xiangpei makes three points in this short passage: First, the motivation of writers of sequels; second, the change in focus of those

sequels; and last, her assessment of the general success of these derivative works. Although Shen's description of the thematic focus of the sequels is not entirely accurate (some of the works obviously did not focus on venting Daiyu's grievances, but did their best to praise Xue Baochai), her analysis of the writers' motivation (that they intended to satisfy their own readerly desires by altering the conclusion and "making up the regrets" left by the original) is quite insightful and is a view echoed by many other writers and critics.³⁷ Her criticism of these works also strikes home, revealing their philistinism and artistic inferiority.

In an attempt to alter the fates of characters, rewriters called for a complete narrative reversal—*da tuanyuan* (a big happy ending). This is clearly demonstrated in the three *Honglou meng* sequels referred to in Yinzhan naxi's novels. For instance, *The Later Dream of the Red Chamber* has Daiyu return and become the heiress to a large fortune. This enables her to marry Baoyu and bring new prosperity to the Jia clan. Qin Zichen's *A Sequel to Dream of the Red Chamber*, on the other hand, turns the fictional world from the *lihen tian* 離恨天 (the realm of separation regret) of the original into a *buhen tian* 補恨天 (the world of making up regrets) where not only the love between Daiyu and Baoyu is fulfilled but all the members of the Jia clan from different worlds (mythical, ghost, and human) are reunited, turning the family fortune for the better. *Re-dreaming of the Red Chamber* offers another happy ending with Baoyu, Daiyu, and other female residents of the Land of Illusion coming to the world of Red Dust a second time, bonding to each other as husbands and wives, and enjoying a life of wealth and rank.

Clearly, Yinzhan naxi's novels were influenced by the overwhelming demand for a sequel that had a happy ending. However, he concluded his sequel in a way that complicated the stock fictional happy ending, indicating a difference between him and the authors of the three *Honglou meng* sequels that he frequently quoted. As indicated previously, Yinzhan naxi reversed the plot development from his first to second imitation. Whereas *The One-Storey Tower* ends with the death of Puyu's wife, his separation from the three female protagonists,

and the suggestion that Puyu will renounce the world; *The Pavilion of Red's Lament* tells of the victorious rebellions of the heroines, and concludes the novel with Puyu reuniting with his cousins and marrying all three of them on the same day. In so doing, Yinzhao naxi literally changes his narrative ending from a regretful separation to a blissful reunion, and alters the novelistic theme from “qihong” 泣紅 (literally, crying over red, or lamenting talented women) to “xihong” 喜紅 (cheering for red, or cheering the triumph of women). However, the “happy ending” created by Yinzhao naxi is distinctly different from those written by his precursors in at least three aspects. First, in contrast to the fantastic treatment of “coming back to life” and supernatural assistance employed in the three *Honglou meng* sequels, the heroines' fulfillment in *The Pavilion of Red's Lament* is presented as the reward for the women's courageous rebellions or the result of their faithful love. Therefore, the “happy ending” awards the female characters' defiant actions and celebrates their triumph over misfortune. Secondly, instead of deflating female characters like Lin Daiyu and Qingwen 晴雯 and turning them into the idealized wives and concubines of Confucian teaching as in the three *Honglou meng* sequels, Yinzhao naxi's reversal of the fictional mode elevates his heroines and gives them stronger characters and more progressive ideologies. Yinzhao naxi's female characters are empowered to fight for their personal happiness, and their victories attest to their intelligence and strength. Lastly, unlike the three sequels that use *da tuanyuan* as a remedy for the regretful conclusion of their parent novel, Yinzhao naxi presents both tragedy and comedy as dreams, or fictional illusions, which brings the discussion of “how *Honglou meng* should end” to a higher aesthetic level.

The Pavilion of Red's Lament begins with a dream and ends with a dream. As the prologue has it, Puyu, who by now has lost his wife and heard about the misfortunes of his three cousins, feels empty and alone. One day, while wandering in the family garden, he falls asleep in the Pavilion of Green Waves (Lübo ting 綠波亭). In his dream, he comes to an overseas island where he finds a pavilion inscribed with the characters “Qihong ting.” A jade tablet stands inside, and some

enigmatic pictures and poems are engraved on the stone. The pictures and poems foretell the fates of the female protagonists of the novel. However, Puyu cannot comprehend any of them. While Puyu is trying to copy down the written words, the dream is interrupted when his father awakens him. This episode is reminiscent of Jia Baoyu's dream of the Land of Illusion in *Honglou meng* and Tang Guichen's voyage to Little Penglai in *Jinghua yuan*. Like Jia Baoyu and Tang Guichen, who are the dramatized readers of their respective narratives, Puyu is also presented as a fictionalized reader, and his experience of reading the Qihong ting inscription mirrors that of the reader who reads Yinzhan naxi's novel—*The Pavilion of Red's Lament*. Two important things are suggested in this episode: One is that, since the women's misfortunes³⁸ are emphasized in both the predictive poems and the name of the pavilion, the literary mode employed here is evidently tragic. This gloomy mood of novelistic beginning is consistent with the sorrowful ending of *The One-Storey Tower*. On the other hand, the ominous signs are presented as a dream. While the illusive nature of a dream poses a question to its validity, the metaphorical meaning of "dream" used in Chinese literature, especially in *Honglou meng*, draws the reader's attention to the issues of fiction making and reading. The underlying message is that the narrative is a literary construct of the author's imagination and should be regarded as such by the reader.

The fictionality of the narrative is re-emphasized by the epilogue, although this time it is presented as a dream of a "big happy reunion." After Puyu's wedding to his three cousins, the members of his family all happily gather in the family garden. Having played games and drunk wine with his wives and female relatives, Puyu feels tipsy and takes a nap. A second dream journey takes Puyu to the same place he went to in the prologue. However, this time not only has the name of the pavilion been changed from "Qihong ting" to "Xihong ting," but the ominous signs are all gone. While Puyu is enjoying the peaceful and auspicious scenery in the dream, the chiming of a clock suddenly awakens him. The closing poem then re-asserts the "absurdity" of the narrative, ridiculing anyone who believes what he has read has truly happened.

What is worth pondering in the epilogue is the suggestion that *da tuanyuan*, or a fictional happy ending, is a dream. In *Honglou meng*, the conclusion of “a big happy reunion” is impossible, because such a conclusion promotes a naïve view of life, a view that is against the logic of the novel and its underlying rationalism. A line frequently quoted from *Honglou meng* is “You can set up tents for a thousand miles, but there will never be a banquet that does not finally break up 千里搭長棚，沒有個不散的宴席，”³⁹ implying the limits of happiness and the inevitability of parting, dispersion, and desolation. This belief in the transience of togetherness and joy in the human world is closely related to the Buddhist/Taoist notion that “life is but a dream.” Therefore, all worldly pleasures and the bliss they bring are illusive and fleeting. In fact, *da tuanyuan* as an ultimate happiness in human life is presented as a dream in *Honglou meng*. Both love and prosperity, the two most important aspects of such happiness, are destined to be lost by the end of the novel. As predicted in the epilogue of the twelve *Honglou meng* suits in Chapter 5: “The office jack’s career is blighted, / The rich man’s fortune is gone [. . .] / The one who owed a life is dead, / The tears one owed have all been shed [. . .] / Like birds who, having fed, to the woods repair, / They leave the landscape desolate and bare 為官的，家業凋零；富貴的，金銀散盡[. . .] 欠命的，命已還；欠淚的，淚已盡[. . .] 好一似飛鳥各投林，落了片茫茫大地真乾淨。”⁴⁰ In this regard, the tragic mode of Gao E’s sequel offers a denouement that is closer to what Cao Xueqin projected in the first eighty chapters than are many of the others. But even he concludes the novel with the hints of a returning order and prosperity. If *Honglou meng* presents “a big happy reunion” as a dream in reality, Yinzhan naxi tells his readers that in fiction a happy ending is even less “real.” Whereas in *Honglou meng*, the Buddhist/Taoist metaphor that “life resembles a dream” highlights the theme of the novel and at the same time self-reflectively points to the fictionality of this particular text, the same analogy is used by Yinzhan naxi to further indicate the fictive nature of all happy endings—and all tragic endings for that matter. He thus brings the debate of “how *Honglou meng* should end” to a more abstract and theoretical level. In a way, Yinzhan naxi’s analogy of the fictional

happy ending as a dream not only anticipates Wang Guowei's 王國維 (1877–1927) and Lu Xun's (1881–1936) discussions on tragedy and comedy, but also has a “reverse critique” on these views.⁴¹

In his salient study on *Honglou meng* “*Honglou meng pinglun*” 紅樓夢評論 (A Critique to the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, 1904), Wang Guowei asserts that the novel's acclaimed excellence as art is to be defined mainly by the work's successful employment of tragedy. Quoting Western theoreticians and philosophers such as Aristotle and Schopenhauer, Wang believes tragedy is the highest form of art as it has the double function of aesthetic empathy and spirit cleansing. Wang is disappointed that so few Chinese literary works are written in the tragic mode (besides *Honglou meng*, as Wang indicates, only the late Ming *chuanqi* drama, *Peach Blossom Fan*, can be considered to be a tragedy). He also dismisses the value of derived works, especially those of *Honglou meng*, as these works tend to aim for the shallow happy ending. To explain the rarity of tragedy in Chinese fiction and drama, Wang suggests that the Chinese are a people whose world-view is inclined to be optimistic and secular. As he puts it:

Since the world-view of our people is both secular and optimistic, all the dramatic and fictional works reflecting such a view are colored with optimism: The works that begin with sorrow end with joy, those that start with separation conclude with reunion, and those that begin with destitution end with fame and power [. . .].

吾國人之精神，世間的也，樂天的也，故代表其精神之戲曲小說，無往而不著此樂天之色彩，始於悲者終於歡，始於離者終於合，始於困者終於亨 [. . .].⁴²

Lu Xun echoes Wang Guowei in his book *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略 (*A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*). Like Wang, Lu Xun also thinks that a happy ending is artistically less satisfying than a tragic ending. For him, however, it is more about how “historical reality” should be presented and whether one is able to face the imperfection and harshness of reality. He writes:

The Chinese like a happy ending. I suppose we in China know that life is not perfect, but we do not like to admit it; for if you admit it openly, the problem arises: "How to remedy it?" Then men begin to worry and think of reforms, and that leads to trouble. As the Chinese do not like trouble and worry, readers are annoyed when a story describes the trials of life. So, unhappy endings in history are generally changed into happy endings in fiction: all debts are repaid, and we deceive each other. This is one of the problems of our national character.

中國人的心理是很喜歡團圓的，所以必至於如此，大概人生現實的缺陷，中國人也很知道，但不願意說出來；因為一說出來，就要發生“怎樣補救這缺點”的問題，或者免不了要煩悶，現在倘在小說裏敘了人生的缺陷，便要使讀者感著不快。所以凡是歷史上不團圓的，在小說裏往往給他團圓；沒有報應的，給他報應，互相騙騙。——這實在是關於國民性的問題。⁴³

Wang Guowei and Lu Xun share two points in their discussions. First, they similarly express regret for the "predominance" of the *da tuanyuan* mode in Chinese fiction and drama. Secondly, both believe that the Chinese readers' preference for a happy ending is rooted in the Chinese "world-view" or "national character." It is an over-optimistic, escapist, or even self-deceiving view that has a negative impact on the Chinese people and culture. In the past, their assessments and analyses were considered accurate and perceptive, and were thus never seriously questioned. However, when these views are reconsidered in the context of *Honglou meng's* rewritings—and particularly in the light of Yinzhan naxi's treatment of the concept of a fictional happy ending—several questions are called to attention.

One problem is the accuracy of Wang's and Lu's assertion that *da tuanyuan* is the dominant mode of Chinese fiction. A survey of Ming-Qing fictional writings does not support such a claim—although a large number of works are indeed comic rather than tragic. For instance, none of the four masterpieces of the Ming novel are comedies:

Romance of the Three Kingdoms ends with China's unification, but with "illegitimate" political contenders gaining power; *The Journey to the West* tells of the successful pilgrimage of four monks, but this success only means a triumph of Buddhist teaching over worldly desires and pursuits; *The Water Margin* finishes the narrative by having the one-hundred-and-eight Liangshan heroes dispersed—if they are not dead, or crippled, they disappear; *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, too, concludes the novel with the death of its main characters and the ruin of Ximen's household. The denouncements of two satiric novels of the Qing dynasty—*Marriage as Retribution*, *Awakening the World* and *The Scholars*—are also anything but happy endings: if the former perfunctorily grants its hero a peaceful end after long sufferings of spousal abuse and adversity, the latter stops at where the main characters are long gone and their ideal of a return to Confucian rituals is dashed, only to exist in people's memories.

It seems that Wang Guowei's and Lu Xun's statements are not particularly fitting for the so-called "literati novels," but are more appropriate for the *scholar-beauty* novels, the Ming *chuanqi* dramas, and derivative writings such as sequels and imitations. This suggests that in addition to a characteristic Chinese world-view there are literary factors such as generic conventions that contributed to the prevalence of happy endings in the many fictional and dramatic genres. If the happy ending is a recognizable convention of the *scholar-beauty* and *chuanqi* dramas, in sequels and derived works it is usually part of a deliberate turning of the tables (*fan'an wenzhang* 翻案文章). In these it is the means by which the rewriters try to remedy the "regrets" left in the readers' minds by the parent works.⁴⁴ Almost all *Honglou meng* sequels (and some imitations too) have happy endings. This is because these works are written under the generic codes of both the *scholar-beauty* novel and the *xushu* 續書 (sequel or continuation). It was therefore apt for Yinzhao naxi to use the comic mode in his sequel, which is an inversion to both *Honglou meng* and his own imitative work. According to Andrew Plaks, *Honglou meng* belongs to the genre of *wenren xiaoshuo* 文人小說 (literati novel), like the four Ming masterpieces and the two Qing satiric novels mentioned above. One of

the most important generic features of this genre is the author's heavy emphasis on formal patterns of "complementary bipolarity" in his ordering of narrative text. As Plaks puts it:

This means not only that he [the author] structures his text in terms of the interminable alternation of scenes dealing with such traditional polarities as joy and sorrow 悲喜, union and separation 離合, or prosperity and decline 盛衰, but, more important, that he carefully contrives to evince a sense of the logical interrelation, or interpenetration, of these contrasting phases of experience.⁴⁵

Such rhetoric underpins the structure of the literati novel, which is why a cyclical ontological view is always underscored in the literati novel, despite its conventional narrative progression from joy to sorrow, union to separation, and prosperity to decline. Furthermore, a new (or reversed) cycle of movement is usually suggested at the end of this fictional genre, making the novelistic ending inconclusive, temporary, and open to new possibilities. These generic features of the literati novel explain why, on the one hand, Gao E, had to end *Honglou meng* tragically and, on the other hand, his extension of the novel invited later rewritings that consistently reversed the narrative development of the "original."

In representing both tragedy and comedy as "dreams" or fictional illusions, Yinzhan naxi suggests that his switch to a comic mode in *The Pavilion of Red's Lament* is an artistic choice rather than a proof of his world-view. It is a critical response to *Honglou meng* rather than a mirroring of "historical reality." The way he responds to the question of "how *Honglou meng* should end" is inspiring and encompassing, exhibiting his consciousness and profound understanding of the issues of fiction making and reading. His mode reversal may have been partly a result of readers' influences, but he goes beyond them to a higher level of thinking. In this line of thinking, the debates of "how *Honglou meng* should end," raised by his contemporary rewriters, are legitimate

and meaningful, considering both tragedy and comedy are art forms. This makes one wonder whether by devaluing comedy and works written in this mode, Wang Guowei and Lu Xun overemphasized the ideological and social impact of literature while overlooking the autonomy of art. Yinzhan naxi's clever and successful experiment with the comic mode in his sequel proves that it is not that all happy endings are "bad," rather it depends on how one uses them. Furthermore, contrary to Wang Guowei and Lu Xun, who generalized a preference in the Chinese reader for happy endings, the reception of *Honglou meng* and its rewritings indicates an opposite pattern: While the tragic *Honglou meng* has only gained in reputation over the past two hundred years, most of the rewritings with a *da tuanyuan* ending are long forgotten by the general public. The fact is, Chinese readers indeed love comedies such as *The Peony Pavilion* and *The Story of the West Chamber*, but they have also dismissed a lot of works with happy endings. Whereas the happy endings in the *scholar-beauty* novel, the *chuanqi* drama and some rewritings of fictional masterpiece may reflect an "optimistic and secular" world-view, the literati novel promotes a cyclical ontology and the rhetoric of "complementary bipolarity." Wang Guowei's and Lu Xun's claims are correct to some fictional and dramatic writings, but they do not hold true for others, and thus cannot be regarded as general rules of vernacular fiction and drama.

Conclusion

Like many derived works of *Honglou meng*, Yinzhan naxi's imitative works are virtually unknown to the students of Chinese literature. However, they stand out as interesting cases of readers' response to *Honglou meng*. As such, their ideological and artistic undertakings merit scholarly attention.

Yinzhan naxi's novels significantly contributed to our understanding of how *Honglou meng* was received after the novel's popularization in the late Qing: While his effort at incorporating the female perspective suggests an enlarged and more active woman

readership of the novel, his reversal of literary mode and the analogy of a happy ending as a dream not only opened *Honglou meng* up to new possibilities, but also elevated the discussion of the virtues of a happy versus a tragic ending to a higher theoretical plane. His views on tragedy and comedy anticipate Wang Guowei's and Lu Xun's critiques of the same subject, but pose a critical challenge to them.

In an attempt at improving the characters of *Honglou meng*, Yinzhan naxi transformed his female characters from tragic figures of ill fate to self-affirming individuals, revealing his progressive views in advocating women's rights in marriage. By empowering characters such as Lumei and Qinmo with the courage to fight for their personal happiness, Yinzhan naxi implicitly passed judgment on their precursors from *Honglou meng*, and in this his literary creation was motivated by and responsive to the countrywide women's movement in China of the late nineteenth century. Artistically speaking, although borrowed from numerous previous novels and a *tanci* narrative, both imitations are well organized and nicely tied together as a whole. By employing the dream metaphor, the sequel, in particular, displays a highly self-conscious manner, cleverly recalling both *Honglou meng* and *The One-Storey Tower* while inverting them both.

For these significant and appealing qualities, Yinzhan naxi's novels certainly should be included in the repertoire of *Honglou meng* scholarship.

NOTES

¹ In his book *Wenzhang youxi* 文章遊戲, the Qing scholar Miao Gen 繆良 comments on how widely *Honglou meng* was read during the Jiaqing 嘉慶 period (1796–1820), saying: “Nowadays, *Honglou meng* is the best in the category of fiction. It is so popular that every family reads and talks about it, and even women and children are familiar with the story.” See, Yisu 一粟, *Honglou meng shulu* 紅樓夢書錄 263. Another Qing commentator Yang Maojian 楊懋建, in his *Jing chen zalu* 京塵雜錄, also notes the popularity of *Honglou meng* by quoting the doggerel: “If someone opens his mouth without talking about

Honglou meng, he spends his time in vain even if he has read all the classics 開談不說紅樓夢，縱讀詩書也枉然。” See Yisu 268. The English translations in this article are mine except as indicated.

² Yisu's *Honglou meng shulu* (1962) includes 17 sequels and 18 imitations written from 1796 to 1917. Zhao Jianzhong 趙建忠, however, lists 17 sequels and 19 imitations in the same period in his book *Honglou meng xushu yanjiu* 紅樓夢續書研究 (1997). Since Zhao's study is the more recent, I have used his figures in this study. See Zhao Jianzhong, *Honglou meng xushu yanjiu* 179.

³ According to Chen Nianxi 陳年希, no exact dates and written records are available for Ha Sibao's life, except that Ha Sibao himself mentioned in his writing that he visited Chengde 承德 prefecture around 1819. Ha Sibao began to translate *Honglou meng* from Chinese into Mongolian around the twenty-seventh year of the Daoguan 道光 period (1847). He abridged the one-hundred-twenty-chapter novel into a forty-chapter narrative, entitled *Xinyi Honglou meng* 新譯紅樓夢 (*New Translation of Honglou meng*). He also appended the translation with a preface, a reading guide, a general discussion, and chapter commentaries for all of the forty translated chapters. See Chen Nianxi, "Ha Sibao," in Liu Shide 劉世德, et al., eds., *Zhongguo gudai xiaoshuo baike quanshu* 139.

⁴ According to the Mongolian scholar Zha Laga 紮拉嘎, the earliest existing edition of *The One-Storey Tower* dates to the twenty-ninth year of the Guangxu 光緒 period (1903) and was translated into Chinese by Jiayi muhan 甲乙木漢 in 1963. The earliest extant edition of *The Pavilion of Red's Lament* is dated to the fourth year of Guangxu (1878) and was not translated into Chinese until 1981 by Cao Du 曹都 and Cheng Dingyu 陳定宇. See Zha Laga, "Qihong ting" and "Yiceng lou," in Ouyang Jian 歐陽健, et al., eds., *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao* 中國通俗小說總目提要, 725-29.

⁵ For a detailed discussion on Yinzhannaxi's life and works, see Zha Laga, *Yicenglou, Qihong ting, yu Honglou meng* 一層樓、泣紅亭、與紅樓夢 1-20.

⁶ Zhang Jun believes that Yinzhannaxi did not start to write fiction until he was thirty years old, and that he wrote *The Pavilion of Red's*

Lament in 1875. See Zhang Jun, *Qingdai xiaoshuo shi* 清代小說史 415–16. According to this timetable, Yinzhan naxi must have completed *The One-Storey Tower* sometime between 1867 and 1874.

⁷ See Zha Laga, *Yicenglou, Qihong ting, yu Honglou meng* 4–6; also Zhang Jun 415–16.

⁸ In the Jiayu 甲戌 edition (1754) of *Honglou meng*, a preface, attributed to Cao Xueqin (or Cao Tangcun 曹棠村, Cao Xueqin's cousin or brother), claims: The purpose of writing the novel is to memorialize the “remarkable girls” whom the author has known. The author seeks to redeem the past by making manifest the talents and virtues of the female companions of his youth. The preface also quotes Cao vowing that he will not allow the memory of these remarkable girls to pass into oblivion because of his worthlessness. Wai-ye Li believes, it is entirely fitting that Cao “should have penned just one such preface” since there is a deep affinity between the preface and the work itself. See Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* 164–66.

⁹ Yinzhan naxi, *Qihong ting* 219.

¹⁰ Critics usually refer to the Jiezi yuan 介子園 edition (1828) as the earliest existing edition of *Jinghua yuan*. Zhao Jianzhong, however, mentions a Suzhou original print that is dated to the twenty-third year of the Jiaqing (1819). See Zhao Jianzhong 179.

¹¹ Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* 11.

¹² Coute 10.

¹³ Coute 29–30.

¹⁴ See Ellen Widmer, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* 390.

¹⁵ Yinzhan naxi, “Yiceng lou mingxu” 6.

¹⁶ The “original” here refers to the Cheng Gao editions of *Honglou meng*, which includes Gao E's forty-chapter sequel.

¹⁷ Yinzhan naxi, “Yiceng lou xu” 1.

¹⁸ Yinzhan naxi 1.

¹⁹ The original poem reads:

The bright sun rests into the mountain,
The Yellow River flows into the sea,

If you want to see a full thousand miles,
Climb one more storey of this tower.

白日依山盡，
黃河入海流。
欲窮千里目，
更上一層樓。

The English translation of the poem is from William H. Nienhauser, *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* 860.

²⁰ In Cao Xueqin's first eighty chapters, Wang Xifeng is described as very fond of Daiyu. Daiyu and Xiren are also close. In chapters 25, 29, and 34 of the novel, Wang Xifeng repeatedly but good-naturedly jokes about the match between Baoyu and Daiyu. She seems to genuinely believe that such a match would be ideal. In Cao's original text, the closeness of Daiyu and Xiren is also apparent. In Chapter 20, Daiyu comes to Xiren's defense when Baoyu's wet nurse humiliates her. In Chapter 31, Daiyu calls Xiren "my good sister-in-law." Although joking, Daiyu seems to sincerely like Xiren, and she is quite happy about the prospect that in the future Xiren may become Baoyu's concubine.

²¹ See Ellen Widmer 389–91.

²² Ellen Widmer 389–90.

²³ For a detailed discussion on Chen Xiaolu's novel, see Ying Wang, "The Voices of the Re-readers: Interpretations of Three Late Qing Rewrites of *Jinghua yuan*," in Martin Huang ed., *Snake's Legs: Sequels, Continuations and Chinese Fiction*.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion on Hua Qinshan's rewrite, see Ying Wang, "The Voices of the Re-readers: Interpretations of Three Late Qing Rewrites of *Jinghua yuan*."

²⁵ Hu Shi, "Jinghua yuan de yinlun," in *Hushi wencun* 胡適文存 400–33.

²⁶ According to Xia Xiaohong, the movement in favor of natural feet, advocated by Western missionaries and late Qing reformers, became more forceful and fruitful in the late nineteenth century. In addition, women's schools, women's newspapers, and all sorts of

women's organizations also emerged in the major cities of China around the same period. See Xia Xiaohong, *Wanqing wenren funüguan* 晚清文人婦女觀 1–55.

²⁷ In *The One-Storey Tower*, Yinzhan naxi also borrowed some episodes from *Jinghua yuan*, including the mythical frame-tale in the first two chapters and a plot of several female characters discussing the history of tea in Chapter 26.

²⁸ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* 96.

²⁹ According to one of Xiaoqing's biographers, she wished to be resurrected after death, just as Du Liniang was by Liu Mengmei. See Dorothy Ko 96.

³⁰ According to Qingyun Wu, Chen married a man of no great intelligence at the age of twenty-three. Her husband later committed the crime of asking a substitute to take the national examination for him and was subsequently exiled to Yili 伊犁 in Xinjiang province. Chen suffered greatly from her husband's failure and exile. This probably contributed to Chen's belief that women were not inferior to men and deserved equal opportunities in the world. See Qingyun Wu, *Female Rule in Chinese and English Literary Utopias* 51.

³¹ Feng Xiaoqing's story was also written up as literature after she died. According to Dorothy Ko, more than fifteen plays about Xiaoqing's life were written and performed on stage within a decade of her supposed death in 1612. See Dorothy Ko 92–3.

³² In Chapter 25 of *Huayue hen*, for example, Du Caiqiu 杜采秋, a courtesan with superb literary talent, comments on *Honglou meng* and several of its sequels. According to her, the purport of the novel is to enlighten its readers about the "emptiness" of the Red Dust world. She further explains that this underlying meaning is manifested in two contrastive characters—Baoyu and Miaoyu 妙玉. While Baoyu heads out of the world of illusions, pleasures, and attachments to a world of enlightenment, Miaoyu goes in the opposite direction, eventually falling back from the pure realm (of Taoist beliefs) to the impure Red Dust world. Du Caiqiu, undoubtedly, is a mouthpiece of *Huayue hen*'s author who uses his novelistic characters to offer his interpretation of

Honglou meng; it is, however, significant that the author was quite comfortable to express his critical view through a female character. This again attests to the popularity of *Honglou meng* among female readers at the time. See Wei Xiuren 魏秀仁, *Huayue hen* 148.

³³ The expression “Qionglou shi'er” 瓊樓十二 or “twelve jade towers” is probably borrowed from the famous seventeenth century writer Li Yu (1611–1680). Li named one of his collections of short stories *Shi'er lou* 十二樓 (Twelve Towers), implying that they are products of the fictional imagination, like towers built in thin air (空中樓閣).

³⁴ Chen Shiwen, “Xu,” in Chen Shaohai’s *Honglou fumeng*, rpt. in Li Zhaoxiang 李肇翔 et al., eds., *Siku jinshu* 四庫禁書 11: 8135.

³⁵ See Zhao Jianzhong 137–41; also see Wang Peiqin 王佩琴, “*Honglou meng xushu yanjiu*” 289.

³⁶ The whole preface is included in Zhao Jianzhong’s book on *Honglou meng* sequels. See Zhao Jianzhong 97.

³⁷ Qin Zichen, for instance, indicates in his preface to *A Sequel to Dream of the Red Chamber* that he wrote the sequel because he was unable to rid himself of resentment over Baoyu and Daiyu’s fate, see Qin Zichen, “*Xu Honglou meng bianyan*,” 續紅樓夢弁言, in *Qin Xu Honglou meng* 秦續紅樓夢 11. Qin’s friend, Zheng Shijing 鄭師靖, who contributed another preface to Qin’s sequel, also held that the purpose of Qin Zichen in writing the sequel was to please the readers’ hearts and eyes by becoming a “matchmaker” for Baoyu and Daiyu in their after-lives, see Zheng Shijing, “Xu,” in *Qin Xu Honglou meng* 7.

³⁸ One poem suggests that Lumei will leave home; another hints that Qinmo will jump into a river. The happy outcomes of these unfortunate events are intentionally left unmentioned.

³⁹ The phrase is used in the novel several times by different characters. For instance, in Chapter 26, when a young maid complains about being mistreated by Qingwen, one of Baoyu’s favorite maids, Xiaohong, another maid who serves in the outer chamber of Baoyu’s house, uses this saying to express her indifference to the maids’ power struggles and their competition for Baoyu’s favor. See Cao Xueqin and Gao E, *Honglou meng* 1: 361.

⁴⁰ Cao Xueqin and Gao E, *Honglou meng* 1: 89. The English translation is from David Hawkes trans., *The Story of the Stone* 144.

⁴¹ In his book *Rereading Matei Calinescu* asserts that the literary texts influence each other dynamically. Unlike the “historical” past, the “aesthetic past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.” Following this line of thinking, Yinzhao naxi’s works, although written before the critical discourses of Wang Guowei and Lu Xun, could have a “reverse influence” on them. For a discussion on the “reverse influence” of literature, see Matei Calinescu, *Rereading* 55.

⁴² Wang Guowei, *Honglou meng pinglun*, rpt., in *Jiuji xinkan* 舊籍新刊 11.

⁴³ Lu Xun, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 246. The English translation is from Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang trans., *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* 411.

⁴⁴ “Zuo fan’an wenzhang,” 作翻案文章, or to make a table turning, is a conventional rhetorical device in the genre of Chinese rewritings such as sequels and imitative works. In his preface, Chen Chen 陳忱 (1613-?), the author of *Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸後傳 (A Sequel to the Water Margin), states that it is important for a sequel “to make a reversal of the original plot and use new structure and language “機局更翻，章句不襲”. See Chen Chen, “*Shuihu houzhuan xu*” 水滸後傳序, in Huang Lin 黃霖 and Han Tongwen 韓同文, eds., *Zhongguo lidai xiaoshuo lunzhu xuan* 中國歷代小說論著選 307.

⁴⁵ Andrew Plaks, “Allegory in *Hsi-yu Chi* and *Hung-lou Meng*,” in his *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays* 191.

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