

# The Poetics of Historical Referentiality: An Outline

*Jue Chen*

## ABSTRACT

The focus of this essay is the European roman à clef and the Chinese *yingshe* method of composition in fiction. This essay argues that, comparing to the European roman à clef, the *yingshe* has played a central role in the overall development of traditional Chinese novel composition. The historical referentiality of *yingshe* makes traditional Chinese novel different from its counterpart in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European tradition. The poetics of historical referentiality distinguishes the analogical imagination from the mimetic imagination. This new perspective in viewing traditional Chinese novel as a special kind of "roman à clef" has important implications that will throw light on the nature and characteristics of both European and Chinese novels in a more universal context.

## KEY WORDS

roman à clef  
historical referentiality  
*yingshe*  
intentional anachronism

intertextual echo  
cross-cultural comparativism  
analogical imagination  
mimetic imagination



As an intercultural comparative endeavor, this essay focuses on two understudied subjects: the European roman à clef and the Chinese *yingshe* 影射 method of composition, observing how the poetics of historical referentiality as a cross-cultural literary phenomenon develops in European and Chinese novels.

What is the roman à clef and what does *yingshe* mean theoretically to literary critics? These questions are so understudied that no modern scholarship offers the reader a book-length, comprehensive introduction to either roman à clef or *yingshe*. In other words, we must map the territory ourselves. To launch our investigation, I shall begin with an overview of the roman à clef in its European context. Then, we will follow the development of *yingshe* in Ming and Qing Chinese novels to form a comparative study.

## I. What is Roman à Clef

What is the roman à clef? Is it a genre, a sub-genre, or something else? Literary critics do not offer a definitive answer to this basic question. Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins view the roman à clef as a “genre” or “kind.” Harry Shaw defines it as a “form of fiction”, which suggests a variety of possibilities, such as a sub-genre of fiction or a style of fiction.<sup>2</sup>

Most dictionaries, however, have reached the following consensus (although they do not precisely define this literary phenomenon): The roman à clef is “usually a fiction in which actual persons are presented under fictitious names.”<sup>3</sup> The above consensus is perhaps enough for a dictionary definition but is less useful as a tool of critical

inquiry. In the history of European literature, many characters presented in fiction are roughly based on actual people, yet the works in which they appear are generally not regarded by literary critics as romans à clef.

Examples are found in different countries and various periods. For instance, in Henry Fielding's novel *The History of Tom Jones* (1749), the character Squire Allworthy is the author's friend Ralph Allen (1694-1764). In Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862), the character Bazarov is the Russian critic V.G. Belinsky (1811-48). In Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27), Albertine is in fact Proust's taxi driver and secretary Alfred Agostinelli (1888-1914); Gilberte is Marie de Benardaky, daughter of the Polish nobleman Nicolas de Benardaky and Proust's teen-age friend in the Champs-Élysées; and Bergotte is actually Anatole France (1844-1924), the 1921 Nobel Prize winner for literature. In Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (1926), the character Frieda is based on Kafka's lover, Milena Jesenská.

The above list represents only a very small portion of the myriad cases in which real people have been portrayed as fictional characters. In English and American literature alone, M.C. Rintoul has recently identified hundreds of instances in which real and fictional people correspond.<sup>4</sup> All of the examples listed above, from Fielding to Kafka, are masterpieces of fiction written by well-known authors from the sixteenth century through the twentieth century. However, none of them is generally regarded as a true roman à clef by literary historians, although "actual persons are presented under fictitious names" in these works. If all these examples were accepted as typical romans à clef, the label would become meaningless.

In fact, "roman à clef" is used principally to refer to a small group of fiction written for the most part by secondary writers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The following works are those most commonly referred to by literary critics as typical romans à clef: Madeleine de Scudéry's *Ibrahim, ou l'Illustre Bassa* (1641), *Le Grand Cyrus* (1649-53) and *Clélie* (1656-60); Mrs. Delarivier Manley's *The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians* (1705)

and *The New Atalantis* (1709); Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818); and Benjamin Disraeli's *Venetia* (1837) and *Coningsby* (1844).<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, the consensus definition—"actual persons presented under fictitious names"—does not make the necessary distinction between the many examples in the first group and those in the second group. In fact, one of the most important distinctions lies in the fact that the first group does not have a key, while the second group usually has one.<sup>6</sup> The key (clef) here represents a technique of matching. By using this technique, many characters in fiction are systematically matched with their historical counterparts—the key unlocks the historical secret otherwise hidden behind the veil of fictionalized characters. Without the benefit of this technique, the correspondences between real people and fictional characters appear to be random and inconsistent. This also explains why, in French literature, this phenomenon is called the *roman à clef*, in English literature the "key novel"<sup>7</sup> and in German literature the "Schlüsselroman."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, I propose to amend the above definition as follows: The *roman à clef* is a kind of fiction in which actual people are presented under fictitious names in a systematic way, and therefore a comprehensive key is necessary to understand the hidden references of a given text. This revised definition distinguishes works in the second group from those in the first group.

However, we still have not answered the basic question raised at the very beginning of this section: "Should *roman à clef* be regarded as a well-defined species of novel?" In order to provide an answer to this question, Sections II and III of this essay will be devoted to a brief analysis of the canonical works listed in the second group, summarizing common characteristics and proposing a clearer definition for this literary phenomenon.

## II. The Rise of the Roman à Clef in Seventeenth-Century French Literature

The seventeenth-century French writer Mlle de Scudéry (1607-1701) is commonly regarded as one of the earliest producers of the roman à clef. Her three romans à clef, *Ibrahim ou l'Illustre Bassa*, *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*, appeared between 1641 and 1660.<sup>9</sup>

We may note that these works are generally categorized by literary historians as romans à clef and heroic romans as well.<sup>10</sup> This reveals that, at the very beginning of its evolution, the roman à clef co-existed with the heroic roman. Therefore, in order to see clearly how the roman à clef arose in seventeenth-century France, we will also have to look at the rise and fall of the heroic roman.

Roughly speaking, the heroic roman in the seventeenth century lasted for four decades, flourishing between d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1607-19) and Mlle de Scudéry's *Clélie* (1654-60).<sup>11</sup> Maurice Magendie, in *Le roman français au XVIIe siècle de L'Astrée au Grand Cyrus*, further divides the corpus of the heroic roman into two sub-kinds, *roman d'aventures* and *roman historico-épique*.<sup>12</sup> Popular between 1620 and 1635, the *roman d'aventures* "is characterized by a free use of the imagination with little regard for history."<sup>13</sup> However, around 1640, the *roman d'aventures* is "superseded by" the *roman historico-épique*, "a prose epic based on history and offering a reflection of *galant* society".<sup>14</sup> After the decline of the *roman historico-épique* in particular and the heroic roman in general during the 1660s, the multi-volume (usually ten volumes) *roman* was replaced by the much shorter narrative *nouvelle*, exemplified by Mme de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves* (1678).<sup>15</sup> It is during these four decades that the roman à clef enters the picture.

Mlle de Scudéry's three works discussed above are part of the *roman historico-épique* tradition.<sup>16</sup> But they also mark the birth of the roman à clef as a literary phenomenon. It is the technique of matching, through the "key" device, that distinguishes Mlle de Scudéry's roman à clef from other *romans historico-épiques* of her time. By using the technique of matching, Mlle de Scudéry presents real

people as fictionalized characters in a systematic way, producing a correspondence between the characters and real people much more complex and comprehensive than that in other *romans historico-épiques*. This has further developed into an independent technique in the later evolution of the roman à clef.

For instance, in *Le Grand Cyrus*, the author portrayed a series of real people under fictitious names, waiting to be deciphered with the help of a key.<sup>17</sup> The protagonist Artamène, the Grand Cyrus, is in reality Louis Bourbon, Prince de Condé (1621-86);<sup>18</sup> Sapho is Mlle de Scudéry herself;<sup>19</sup> Phaon is Pellisson, in reality, Mlle de Scudéry's platonic lover. Princess Cléobuline is in fact Christina of Sweden; Féraulas is Comte de Chabot, Condé's best friend; Elise is Mlle Paultet, "La Lionne de l'Hôtel de Rambouillet," and Cléomire is actually the famous Mme de Rambouillet herself, while Anacrise and Philonide are Angélique and Julie, two daughters of Mme de Rambouillet.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the real people identified above, Mlle de Scudéry's other contemporaries, such as Mme de Maure, Mlle de Vandy, Mme des Pennes, Conrart, Chapelain, Mme Aragonnais, Mme Cornuel, Montausier, Isarn, and many others, are all portrayed "in various episodes throughout the novel."<sup>21</sup> Here, Mlle de Scudéry provides us with a gallery of her contemporaries.

In *Clélie*, many famous historical figures can also be clearly equated with the characters. For instance, Louis XIV in reality is Alcandre, Prince d'Erice, in fiction; Marie-Eléonore de Rohan-Montbazon, abbess of the Trinity convent of Caen in reality, is Octavie, the Grande Vestale, in fiction;<sup>22</sup> and, among others, the historical "Mme de Maintenon, Scarron, Mme Sévigné, the painter Nanteuil, Arnauld d'Andilly, and the *Solitaires de Port-Royal*," all can find their fictional counterparts in *Clélie*.<sup>23</sup>

In seventeenth-century France, many writers experimented with borrowing the techniques of portraiture from painters and tried to incorporate them into their fictional writings.<sup>24</sup> Before Mlle de Scudéry, Montaigne exemplified the art of personal portrayal in the sixteenth century, and d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* represented the early seventeenth-century endeavor to use the portrait technique in literature.<sup>25</sup>

However, principally because of her three romans à clef, Mlle de Scudéry "is commonly credited with the 'invention' of the literary portrait."<sup>26</sup> Her frequent use of portraits helped to establish the so called "portrait genre" in French literature, which was later further transformed into a subtle instrument of character analysis.<sup>27</sup>

"Portraiture" serves here as a component of the overall roman à clef design. It could even be said that Mlle de Scudéry's romans à clef are in fact "portraits à clef": through examination of the character portrayal, the reader can determine who in the real world corresponds to the fictional character in a novel.<sup>28</sup> Through the techniques of matching and word portraits, social ideals of the time are also reflected in the works of roman à clef. Many such ideals presented by Mlle de Scudéry's pen belong to a well-known social group of the time called *précieuses*.<sup>29</sup> According to its advocates, *précieuses* denotes the highest of the four classes of women in French society of the seventeenth century.<sup>30</sup> In the salon of *précieuses*, a woman has to write elegantly in prose and poetry and be familiar with the art of polite conversation. She usually knows "le monde" as well as foreign languages and should have "bien de l'esprit, assez de memoire, et beaucoup de jugement."<sup>31</sup>

One of the ideals for the *précieuses* is "galanterie." A society of "galanterie" requires every individual to learn how "to please," and the ultimate achievement for a male member of such a society is to become an "honnête homme." To be an "honnête homme" means not only to acquire either a military education or the Greek and Latin languages but also to learn how to love pastorally and politely.<sup>32</sup> In the eyes of the *précieuses*, while being a lover, an "honnête homme" serves also as a model for the society.<sup>33</sup>

Polite French society in the seventeenth century provides a material counterpart for the *précieuses*' ideals discussed above. Mlle de Scudéry not only frequented the aristocratic Hôtel de Rambouillet but also established the more bourgeois *Samedi*.<sup>34</sup> She assimilated the intellectual atmosphere of her immediate surroundings and then reflected it in her famous romans à clef.<sup>35</sup> The male "honnête homme" and female "précieuse" in her fiction are not only abstract social

ideals but also imitations of actual frondeurs and frondeuses in reality.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to presenting the *précieuses'* ideals, Mlle de Scudéry's roman à clef also reflects some of the popular ideas and institutions in seventeenth-century French society—for instance, the belief and practice of various kinds of oracles and sorceries, the increasing interest in animal intelligence,<sup>37</sup> the “existence of a well-established and clearly defined political and social hierarchy” and so on.<sup>38</sup> These ideals, ideas and institutions all help to define Mlle de Scudéry's works simultaneously as romans à clef as well as *romans historico-épiques*, offering not only reflections of real people in polite society but also vivid depiction of the overall atmosphere of that society.

The above brief review reveals that the rise of the roman à clef in seventeenth-century French literature is closely associated with a specific cultural milieu of the time. However, later developments render a universally accepted novel form across Europe between the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

### III. The Development of the Roman à Clef in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century English Literature

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, we find romans à clef in the works of Mrs. Delarivière Mary Manley (1663-1724), Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866), and Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81). They are in some ways similar to and in others different from the seventeenth-century French roman à clef. These similarities and differences show us a picture of the development of the roman à clef as an international literary phenomenon during a period of three centuries in Europe.

The eighteenth-century novelist Mrs. Delarivier Manley is generally regarded by critics as the earliest roman à clef writer in the English-speaking world. Both her *The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians* (1705) and her *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, of Both Sexes: from the New Atalantis, an*

*Island in the Mediterranean* (1709, also known as *The New Atalantis*) pretend to be lost historical documents concerning members of an imaginary court. These people reflect the private lives of prominent Whigs and Tories of her time while criticizing the former and favoring the latter.<sup>39</sup> Generically speaking, Mrs. Manley's fiction is part of the *chronique scandaleuse* tradition. Again, corresponding to the rule of the roman à clef, there is a key to *The New Atalantis*.

Representative of the nineteenth-century English roman à clef, Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) is also classified as a "conversation novel,"<sup>40</sup> having the combined flavors of the romance, gothic novel, and social satire. The fiction/reality focus of *Nightmare Abbey* is directed toward a small circle of three English romantic poets, Byron, Shelley and Coleridge, through whom the current literary and philosophical fashions, "such as the taste for the gothic, the excesses of romantic melancholy," and "the transcendental (mystical) philosophy," are parodied and satirized.<sup>41</sup> A key to the novel was later prepared by Peacockian scholars with little controversy over the connection between fact and fiction.

*Venetia* (1837), taken by critics as one of the Benjamin Disraeli's "middle period novels,"<sup>42</sup> also focuses on the disguised life stories of Byron and Shelley. However, instead of satirizing Romantic literary fashions, Disraeli identified himself with Byron and Shelley, two of "England's most unconventional recent poetic geniuses," because "they gave him an opportunity to embody in fiction his pique that major artists, like himself, were unappreciated if not ostracized."<sup>43</sup> At first sight, *Venetia* seems to be a combination of the eighteenth century comic and gothic novels, but in fact it belongs to the "novel of ideas," a genre which fits Disraeli's unique literary imagination.

*Coningsby* (1844), the first novel in Disraeli's Young England trilogy, is also a "novel of ideas," although it takes the form of a Bildungsroman. Instead of focusing on a literary group, the novel describes a special political group in the England (during the 1840s), made up of such well-known aristocratic politicians as George Smythe, Lord John Manners, Alexander Baillie-Cochrane, and Dis-

raeli himself, fighting against “utilitarianism, middle-class liberalism, and centralized government” while seeking “to return England to the feudal monarchical antecedents of its national youth.”<sup>44</sup> A key was published separately from the novel so that the fiction/reality relationship in the novel could be made incontrovertible.

Reviewing the development of the English roman à clef over two centuries, we find these works generally follow the rule established in the seventeenth century French roman à clef. First, the generic form of the roman à clef can be almost anything—a gothic novel, *chronique scandaleuse* or a Bildungsroman.<sup>45</sup> Second, the major focus of roman à clef is usually either on a significant political group or influential literary/artistic circle of the time. Third, the core of these romans à clef is often “discussion” of certain artistic, social and political ideas or ideals. Fourth, a key to the novel will be provided sooner or later by either the author or his/her critics.

These internal features do suggest that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English roman à clef is derived from its seventeenth-century predecessors. The “discussion” of ideas and ideals could be regarded as deriving from Mlle de Scudéry’s polite “conversation” that reveals the ideals of the “*précieuses*.” The focus on a certain social group may also be taken as derived from Mlle de Scudéry’s focus on the “polite society.” And the “key” is of course derived from the device invented by Mlle de Scudéry.

Meanwhile, the enthusiastic reception of the seventeenth-century French roman à clef in Restoration England proves the above influence from an external perspective. English translations of Mlle de Scudéry’s *Le Grand Cyrus* by Dorothy Osborne, Lady Temple and Mrs. Pepys were “greatly admired in Restoration England, and influenced John Dryden and Thomas Killigrew.”<sup>46</sup> Within the boundary of the roman à clef itself, Mlle de Scudéry’s influence in the same period was also very strong. Mrs. Manley, the initiator of the English roman à clef, “clearly read widely in the French *chronique scandaleuse* and *roman à clef*, from which she developed her own version tailored to a British history and public in the early years of the eighteenth century.”<sup>47</sup>

The major difference between the seventeenth-century French roman à clef and its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English counterpart seems to be simply that the former takes the form of a heroic roman while the latter takes that of other genres (gothic novel, *chronique scandaleuse*, or Bildungsroman). This difference tells us an important fact: The roman à clef is a literary phenomenon which interacts with many different narrative genres through different centuries and in various nations.

#### IV. Roman à Clef and *Yingshe* as Methods of Composition

Based on the above analysis of canonical works, an answer to the question of what constitutes the roman à clef is proposed as follows.

My argument is that roman à clef is a method of composition, a special way to perceive, imitate and represent the world in which we live. Differing from the realistic method of composition popular in the nineteenth-century European fiction, which is designed to imitate the real world as it is, the roman à clef method of composition focuses on the principle of analogy. That is why the technique of matching serves always as a cornerstone and why correspondences between the fictional characters and historical people become a key to this method of composition.

From the perspective of European cultural history, it is no coincidence that this method was established by the seventeenth-century heroic roman. Erica Harth points out that “representation in Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century was cast in an aristocratic mold of analogy.”<sup>48</sup> The reigning monarch “was regularly portrayed, in image and in text, as Hercules. Representation was the glorification and celebration of a royal or noble subject.”<sup>49</sup>

“Since the general perceptual and intellectual mode in the early modern times was analogical,” Harth further argues, “historical figures were linked to the heroes and heroines of antiquity through mythological representation, while at the same time fictional,

mythological characters were given the dignity of history."<sup>50</sup> In other words, it is this analogical mode that links together history and fiction, the present and the past, interweaving them into a given text. "Thus medieval and Christian characters whose representation was based on a visual model alone appeared as ancient deities," Harth points out, "while an ancient god or goddess known solely from a written document turned up in medieval costume. One result of what Seznec calls the 'strange game of changing places,' in which Christian or contemporary historical figures appeared in the guise of ancient counterparts, was the development of an analogical mode of perception and representation."<sup>51</sup>

The poetics of the analogical imagination is of course that of *vraysemblance* or verisimilitude, which is mainly produced by the correspondences and discrepancies between the representation and the represented as discussed above. *Vraysemblance*, serving as the core of analogical imagination, gives the roman à clef two important features which distinguish it from the nineteenth century realistic method of composition. The first is "intentional anachronism," or *l'anachronisme volontaire*, as termed by Philippe Ariés,<sup>52</sup> which creates narrative spaces within which the author can manipulate between the poles of the analogy. Within this feature, the anatopical—the place version of the temporal anachronous—plays a significant role in the composition of the roman à clef. Generally speaking, in the roman à clef, the anatopical does not appear without the anachronistic, which we will also see in the Chinese *yingshe* method of composition discussed later in this essay. Most of today's literary critics specializing in seventeenth-century French fiction have noticed that Mlle de Scudéry's *Ibrahim*, *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie* are all full of intentional anachronism which "shocks our present-day taste for historical precision, but for Mlle de Scudéry it was merely part of the rule of the game that, moreover, represented an added charm for her readers".<sup>53</sup> However, very few of these critics have ever seriously studied this feature because they think that it is archaic and out of fashion when viewed against many newer methods of creating narrative spaces developed by nineteenth century European writers of fiction.

The second important feature is “intertextual echoes.” Mlle de Scudéry’s above works are also full of intertextual echoes. Borrowing textual segments from earlier authors is a common practice in seventeenth-century French fiction. These segments come from a variety of sources—for instance, historical documents, epic and romance masterpieces, and philosophical classics, among others. These segments do introduce various kinds of narrative voices into Mlle de Scudéry’s roman à clef by bringing a variety of textual resonance into the text.<sup>54</sup>

These textual segments function differently on various narrative levels in a given text, from providing a framework for the main plot development to serving as merely ornamental details. However, they all appear to be structural methods of organizing an overall layout for the novel, or the paragraph. It is within such an organizational method that the content of seventeenth-century roman à clef—such as the conversational elements, the *précieuse* ideals, as well as the political and artistic focuses—finally fits into the format of the roman à clef. Again, the importance of this feature has been under-estimated by literary critics, mainly because it seems out of fashion in today’s fiction writing.

Both these features, combined with the analogical mode of imagination, reflect a special stage in the development of European fiction during the seventeenth century: the transition between the medieval romance and the modern novella. According to Harth, it is during the seventeenth century that the analogical mode of “representation gradually ceased to fit its mold. The correspondences persisted, but the value of the representation became debased.”<sup>55</sup> When the realistic method of composition triumphed during the development of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European fiction, the roman à clef conventions of intentional anachronism and intertextual echoes, as well as its poetics of analogy, finally declined.

This analysis helps to explain why the roman à clef as a method of composition has never become mainstream in the history of European fiction, except for a short period in the seventeenth century. It also explains why romans à clef from the eighteenth through the

nineteenth century are generally produced by secondary writers, as discussed in earlier sections of this essay. Compared with the nineteenth-century realistic type of imagination, the roman à clef analogical type of imagination holds a very marginal position in the European chapter of world literature.

In contrast to the less popular position of the roman à clef in the European tradition, the same method of composition has a central significance throughout the history of traditional Chinese novel composition. In Chinese traditional terminology, *yingshe* best describes this kind of analogical imagination. Literally, *yingshe* means “shadow shooting”; but in fact it refers to the fictional projection of a certain historical event.

From the perspective of cross-cultural comparativism, we define this “roman à clef” phenomenon in the Chinese literary tradition as “historical referentiality,” a term invented to cover both the similarities and differences between the European roman à clef and its Chinese counterpart. A comparative study between the poetics of *vraysemblance* in the European roman à clef and the poetics of historical referentiality in traditional Chinese fiction composition will lead to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences between the Chinese and European analogical imaginations.

While studying the historical referentiality in traditional Chinese novels, we will focus on the mechanics of a similar system of “intentional anachronism” and “intertextual echoes,” a similar usage of systematic matching, a similar employment of literary portrait, and a similar focus on privileged social and artistic groups.

These superficial similarities reveal deeper cultural differences in mimesis. Those differences allow us to ask several critical questions: Why does historical referentiality play such an important role in the development of traditional Chinese fiction, while roman à clef analogy does not in the European context? How do similar compositional techniques, such as “intentional anachronism” and “intertextual echoes,” work differently in these two cultures? And, finally, what is the nature of traditional Chinese analogical imagination? The

above questions serve as a point of departure for our critical investigation on the Chinese side.

## V. "Roman à Clef" in the Late-Qing "Novels of Social Critique"

The vernacular novel (*zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說) as a major genre of Chinese fiction reached its golden age during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. A large number of Ming and Qing vernacular novels, in one way or the other, adopts the "roman à clef" method of composition.<sup>56</sup> However, no systematic research has yet been conducted in this area from either a historical or a critical perspective.<sup>57</sup> This essay will therefore serve to illustrate the overall development of this method of composition in this genre during the period of its apogee. For the sake of convenience, let us begin with the Late-Qing,<sup>58</sup> the concluding chapter in the history of Ming and Qing vernacular fiction, and then go back step by step to its beginning chapter, the Early-Ming.<sup>59</sup>

Considered by many literary historians as the last sub-genre produced by traditional Chinese vernacular novelists,<sup>60</sup> the "novel of social critique" (*qianze xiaoshuo* 譴責小說) flourished at the very end of the Late-Qing approximately between 1900 and 1911.<sup>61</sup> Four representative novels in this sub-genre are: Li Baojia's 李寶嘉 (1867-1906) *Guanchang xianxing ji* 官場現形記 (1903), Wu Yanren's 吳研人 (1866-1910) *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀 (1904), Liu E's 劉鶚 (1857-1909) *Laocan youji* 老殘遊記 (1906), and Zeng Pu's 曾朴 (1872-1935) *Niehai hua* 孽海花 (1907).<sup>62</sup>

In these four novels, the reader can find so many traces of the "roman à clef" approach between the lines and throughout the pages that an endeavor in search of the hidden "historical referentiality" is therefore required for a meaningful reading of each text. This endeavor in traditional Chinese terminology is called *suoyin* 索隱 (in search of relevant hidden historical reference),<sup>63</sup> which consists of a series of well-formulated techniques to dig out the historical truth behind fictional disguises. It is important to observe that the knowledge

of these techniques is shared by both the author, who creates a “shadow” story for certain historical events, and the reader, who deconstructs that “shadow” to regain the hidden historical truth.

Both the creation and the deconstruction of a shadow need to follow certain kinds of rules. *Guanchang xianxing ji* well illustrates the technique of anecdote-oriented shadow making, which is also a source for intertextual echoes.<sup>64</sup> If a well-known anecdote of a historical figure is applied to a fictional character, that character will naturally be recognized by the reader as a shadow figure of that historical person.<sup>65</sup> For instance, the anonymous associate Imperial Commissioner (*fuginchai* 副欽差) of Zhejiang Province (浙江) in chapter nineteen is a shadow of the historical You Zhikai 遊智開, Imperial Commissioner of Guangdong Province (廣東), because the former shares the latter’s “old robe” anecdote;<sup>66</sup> the General Shu 舒軍門 in chapter twenty-eight is actually the well-known anti-French chief commander Su Yuanchun 蘇元春, because they share a “bribing the prison guards” anecdote;<sup>67</sup> and the Shi Butong 施步彤 in chapter forty-eight is the historical Gang Yi 剛毅 because they share the anecdote of “mis-reading characters” and “mis-using allusions.”<sup>68</sup> In these examples, every fictional description has an intertextual echo from *Nanting biji*, the corresponding unofficial historical record written by the same author.<sup>69</sup>

The techniques of matching used in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaxian zhuang* can be regarded as a development from those in *Guanchang xianxing ji*.<sup>70</sup> While the technique of anecdote-oriented shadow making continues to play an important part,<sup>71</sup> there are several significant patterns being systematically incorporated into our “roman à clef” picture.<sup>72</sup> One of them is intentional “miswriting of names” under certain rules so as to link the fictional character and the historical person.<sup>73</sup> For instance, Gu Yushan 古雨山 consists of a shadow name for the historical Hu Xueyan 胡雪巖 under the rules of the “radical principle”;<sup>74</sup> Chen Zhinong 陳稚農 is a shadow name for the historical Cen Ziheng 岑子恆 under the rules of the “phonetic principle”;<sup>75</sup> Ye Bofen 葉伯芬 is a shadow name for the historical Nie Zhongfang 聶仲芳 under the rules of the “phonetic principle,” the “sequential prin-

ciple” and the “principle of simile in partial parallelism”;<sup>76</sup> and Wu Xianglou 武香樓 is a shadow name for the historical Wen Yunge 文芸閣 under the rules of the “principle of simile in complete parallelism.”<sup>77</sup>

Another important “roman à clef” pattern in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* is anatopical, the place version of the temporal anachronous, which is discussed in some detail earlier in this essay within the study of the European roman à clef.<sup>78</sup> For instance, Wu Yanren’s father died in Ningbo 寧波 in history; however, in fiction, he died in Hangzhou 杭州. Both of them are major cities in Zhejiang Province and therefore geographically interchangeable.<sup>79</sup>

The third important pattern is to create a “roman à clef” account that mixes up the true identity of a historical figure and the fictional identity of a character. For instance, Li Zongdai 李宗岱 in history was Zhang Yinheng’s maternal uncle (*jiufu* 舅父), but in fiction the former became the latter’s father’s brother-in-law (*guzhang* 姑父).<sup>80</sup>

While *Laocan youji* generally follows the above mentioned two novels’ “roman à clef” apparatus and does not make any major methodological breakthroughs, *Niehai hua*, the last of these four novels, not only noticeably develops its predecessors’ “roman à clef” techniques but also brings the Chinese “roman à clef” to a more complex and mature stage.

Within this three hundred page novella,<sup>81</sup> the author portrays altogether two hundred and seventy-eight historical people in fictional disguises.<sup>82</sup> The focus of this novella is the romance between the male protagonist Jin Jin 金洵, a shadow figure of the well-known diplomat Hong Jun 洪鈞,<sup>83</sup> and the female protagonist Fu Caiyun 傅彩雲, a shadow figure of the well-known courtesan Sai Jinhua 賽金花, who was for many years Hong Jun’s concubine.<sup>84</sup> Through this focus, many significant historical people, political events and social institutions in the end of nineteenth-century China are described and criticized by the author. The following list contains just some examples of the most famous historical figures portrayed in this novella: The fictional Cheng Musheng 成木生 is the government-sponsored merchant Sheng Xuanhuai in reality;<sup>85</sup> the fictional Tang Youhui 唐猶輝 is the scholar-politician Kang Youwei 康有為 in reality;<sup>86</sup> the fictional

Yun Hong 雲宏 is the diplomat Rong Hong 容閔 in reality;<sup>87</sup> the fictional Gu Minghong 古冥鴻 is the historical scholar-translator Gu Hongming 辜鴻銘;<sup>88</sup> and the fictional Imperial Concubines Jin 金妃 and Bao 寶妃 are the historical Imperial Concubines Jin 瑾妃 and Zhen 珍妃;<sup>89</sup> and so on.<sup>90</sup> From this incomplete list, the author has already provided the reader with a comprehensive gallery of the author's contemporaries in all walks of upper class life during the eventful late Qing period.

In order to create this gallery, the author uses every "roman à clef" technique at his disposal. Especially noticeable is the technique of "mixing up real names with fictional names," through which a half real and half imaginary environment is created in the novella. For instance, the following historical people all appear under their real names in the novella: the well-known scholar-official Zhang Shuxun 張書勛;<sup>91</sup> the well-known calligrapher Yao Fengsheng 姚鳳生 and painter Tang Xunbo 湯燠伯;<sup>92</sup> the famous general Zeng Guoquan 曾國荃;<sup>93</sup> the Japanese general Ôshima Kaikei 大鳥介圭;<sup>94</sup> the famous Shanghai courtesan Lin Daiyu 林黛玉;<sup>95</sup> the famous Peking male prostitutes Zhu Xiafen 朱霞芬 and Suyun 素云;<sup>96</sup> the famous Peking opera actor Xiaojiaotian 小叫天;<sup>97</sup> the Hong Kong lawyer He Qi 何啟; the terrorist Shi Jianru 史堅如;<sup>98</sup> and the revolutionaries Zhu Guiquan 朱貴全 and Chen Qianqiu 陳千秋;<sup>99</sup> and so on.<sup>100</sup>

The complex nature of shadow projection in Chinese "roman à clef" is vividly seen through an examination of the above four texts in general and *Niehai hua* in particular. Sometimes the shadow projection is based on the "person" and sometimes on the "event". Sometimes one historical anecdote can be distributed among stories of several fictional characters, and sometimes one fictional character accommodates several anecdotes involving different historical individuals. Sometimes the author uses phonetically similar names to bridge a historical person and his/her fictional counterpart, and sometimes the author uses names with similar meanings to create the same bridge. Sometimes the author achieves the goal through changing radicals, and sometimes the author just reverses the order of a name to secure the same effect. These techniques sometimes are used individually, and sometimes

collectively to create a “roman à clef” kaleidoscope, in which the real identity of historical people can be unmistakably identified as long as the reader shares the same rules of projection with the author.

In addition to the above sub-genre, another extremely popular sub-genre of Chinese fiction during the Late-Qing—especially throughout the Guangxu 光緒 reign (1875-1908) was the “novel of prostitution” (*xiaxie xiaoshuo* 狹邪小說),<sup>101</sup> whose representatives are Han Ziyun’s 韓子雲 (1836-94) *Haishanghua liezhuan* 海上花列傳 (1894) and Haishang Shushisheng’s 海上漱石生 (1862-1937) *Haishang fahuameng* 海上繁華夢 (1903).<sup>102</sup> The latter insinuates a real love story between the author (under the fictional name Xie Youan 謝又安) and his young concubine (under the fictional name Gui Tianxiang 桂天香), focusing on the level of family,<sup>103</sup> while the former shadows a variety of well-known people of the time (overlapping with those people portrayed in “novels of social critique”), illustrating the then “polite society” in Shanghai.<sup>104</sup>

By focusing on a certain social class or group and by systematically using the technique of matching, the above texts do remind us of the seventeenth-century French through the eighteenth-century British romans à clef discussed earlier in this essay, especially considering the fact that both of them tend to “exist” in other fictional sub-genres—be it the heroic roman, the gothic novel, the “novel of social critique” or the “novel of prostitution.”<sup>105</sup>

We should also remark that all the above mentioned “roman à clef” texts were produced during an age in which “journalistic novels” (*shishi xiaoshuo* 時事小說 or *xinwen xiaoshuo* 新聞小說) became extremely popular and that most of these texts were first published in newspapers before being printed out as books.<sup>106</sup> This context suggests why Chinese “roman à clef” became so popular and mature in the Late-Qing in general and during the Guangxu reign in particular. In order to provide a clearer picture of its development, an endeavor will be made in the next two sections to trace the generic roots of this type of “roman à clef” in the Mid-Qing and the Ming periods through a discussion of *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (The Scholars) and *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (The Dream of the Red Chamber) as well

as of the four masterworks of the Ming novel (*sida qishu* 大四奇書): *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of Three Kingdoms), *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Journey to the West), *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin), and *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the Golden Vase).

## VI. "Roman a Clef" in the Mid-Qing Novels

Both Wu Jingzi's 吳敬梓 (1701-54) *Rulin waishi* and Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 (?-1763?) *Honglou meng* were produced in the eighteenth century between the Yongzheng 雍正 (1723-35) and Qianlong 乾隆 (1736-95) reigns of the Qing dynasty.

The appearance of those two texts represents an important stage in the development of Chinese "roman à clef." *Rulin waishi* represents a model in which a one-to-one correspondence between history and fiction is generally identifiable. In contrast, *Honglou meng* represents another model, in which various possibilities are suggested but no definite correspondence is established. The former continues in the Late-Qing "novel of social critique" to reach its ultimate form, while the latter is a development of the embryonic "roman à clef" elements embedded in the four masterworks of the Ming novel which will be examined in the following section of this essay.

In *Rulin waishi*, fictional characters can be unmistakably identified as historical figures through a key provided by either the author or literary critics,<sup>107</sup> because a set of shadow-making techniques is commonly and systematically shared by both the author and the reader. For instance, through a specific structural change in a given character (*chaizi fa* 拆字法),<sup>108</sup> the fictional Ma Er 馬二 "becomes" the historical Feng Cuizhong 馮粹中, one of the author's best friends in reality.<sup>109</sup> By sharing a common position, the fictional Senior Imperial Instructor X (*taibaogong* 太保公) "becomes" the historical Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉.<sup>110</sup> By using the simile principle of partial parallelism, the fictional Zhuang Zhuojiang 莊濯江 "becomes" the historical Cheng Pingjiang 程洪江, a friend of the author's father's.<sup>111</sup> By using the simile principle of complete parallelism, the fictional Niu Buyi 牛布衣 "becomes" the historical Zhu Caoyi 朱草衣, a poor local

poet.<sup>112</sup> By using the allegorical principle, the fictional Quan Wuyong 權勿用 “becomes” the historical Shi Jing 是鏡, a hypocritical though influential scholar of the time.<sup>113</sup> By combining two or more of the above principles, the fictional Xiang Ding 向鼎 “becomes” the historical Shang Pan 商盤, a famous scholar/official/literatus of the time.<sup>114</sup> With all these historical people fictionally portrayed, Wu Jingzi provides us a gallery of the southern scholar/official/literatus of his time, which, in terms of mimetic method, is very close to the *précieuses* portrayed in the seventeenth-century French roman à clef. We may also note that the same model is widely adopted in the Late-Qing novels of “social critique” and “prostitution,” as discussed in the earlier section: a long list of fictional characters matched with historical figures can be reproduced in both cases without involving much debate.<sup>115</sup>

In contrast to *Rulin waishi*, *Honglou meng* represents another model of Chinese “roman à clef,” in which a fictional character will usually have more than one possible historical counterpart; the final candidate is always open to interpretation and therefore forever debatable. Although hundreds of “keys” have been provided by literary critics for *Honglou meng* and many more continue to come out each year, no one is ever able to provide a definite key to the novel. Most of the keys can be categorized into three major groups: the family history interpretations (*jiashishuo* 家事說), the secret court history interpretations (*gongweimishshuo* 宮闈秘事說), and the autobiography interpretations (*zixuzhuanshuo* 自敘傳說). From the Qianlong to the Guangxu reigns, many readers believed that *Honglou meng* was a fictionalized family history concerning one of the prime ministers or famous generals between the Kangxi 康熙 (1662-1722) and the Qianlong reigns. According to this interpretation, *Honglou meng* is a “real story written by the contemporaries for the contemporaries.”<sup>116</sup> Which family does the novel really portray? There are four major guesses. The first guess is that it is a story of the Nalan Mingzhu 納蘭明珠 (1635-1708) family.<sup>117</sup> The second is that it is a reflection of the family history of Zhang Yong 張勇 (1616-84).<sup>118</sup> The third refers the novel to the family history of Fu Heng 傅恆 (?-1770).<sup>119</sup> The

fourth takes it as a family history of He Shen 和珅 (1750-99).<sup>120</sup> Even within this family history interpretation, there are at least four different sub-sets of keys.

Instead of taking the novel as a family history, another “roman à clef” interpretation believes that *Honglou meng* is a “secret court history” in the disguise of fiction.<sup>121</sup> In 1916, Wang Mengruan 王夢阮 and Shen Ping’an 沈瓶庵, in *Honglou meng suoyin* 紅樓夢索隱, asserted that the novel was a story about a love affair between Emperor Shunzhi 順治 (r. 1644-61) and his imperial concubine Dong E 董鄂妃 (1625-51). In 1917, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, in *Shitouji suoyin* 石頭記索隱, announced that the novel covered some of the major political and racial conflicts throughout the Kangxi reign between the ruling minority Man 滿 ethnic group and the ruled majority Han 漢 ethnic group. In 1919, Deng Kuangyan 鄧狂言 asserted that *Honglou meng* covered five successive reigns, from the Ming dynasty Chongde 崇德 (1636-43) reign to the Qing dynasty Qianlong reign. This multi-reign theory legitimates the so-called “one character in fiction shadowing several people in history” (*yiren duoying* 一人多影) principle, which allows one fictional character to incorporate, in the manner of “roman à clef”, several historical people in different periods. The third major “roman à clef” interpretation is the “autobiography” theory, which started with the Red Inkstone Studio (*zhiyanzhai* 脂硯齋) commentary and was transformed into a modern version in Hu Shi’s 胡適 *Honglou meng kaozheng* 紅樓夢考證 in 1921. According to this theory, the protagonist Baoyu in fiction is the author Cao Xueqin in reality.

However, none of the proponents of the above interpretations successfully convince the others of the correctness of their views. In other words, every group has its own reason to advocate its position and to reject the other theories. The set of matching techniques *Honglou meng* critics use to reconstruct the characters’ historical counterparts is the same as the set used by the *Rulin waishi* critics, such as names, positions, anecdotes, similes, and allegories.<sup>122</sup> Yet their results are different. This is because the fiction/history correspondence in *Rulin waishi* is single-layered, whereas that in *Honglou meng* is multi-layered: In the former, one fictional character generally qualifies for

only one historical person in reality, while in the latter it always qualifies for more than one. That is why many provide a key but no key is accepted by all.

The single-layered and the multi-layered correspondences have influenced the entire “roman à clef” design in *Rulin waishi* and *Honglou meng* respectively. We may note that in *Rulin waishi* historical people and fictional characters are mixed up together. The author presents several real people in the novel as they were in history, without bothering even to change their names. For instance, Feng the Elder 鳳老爹 in fiction is the famous knight-errant Gan Fengchi 甘鳳池 in reality,<sup>123</sup> and Jing Yuan 荆元 in fiction is the low-status literatus Wu Jingyuan 吳荆元 in reality.<sup>124</sup> These real people help the author set up a seemingly real background for the shadow story, as we have already observed earlier in this essay when discussing the Late-Qing “novel of social critique” *Niehai hua*. In contrast, such an approach is never employed in *Honglou meng*. In *Honglou meng*, everything real is already hidden (*zhenshiyinquin* 真事隱去), what the reader has read is nothing but false accounts of a real story (*jiayucunyan* 假語村言). This feature helps allow the real historical background of the story to remain unrecognizable and indeterminable.

Different types of intentional anachronism also distinguish *Rulin waishi*'s “roman à clef” from *Honglou meng*'s. Readers of *Rulin waishi* observe that the novel has two chronologies: One is the surface chronology of fiction which covers more than one hundred and twenty years, starting from 1487 and ending in 1615 in the Ming dynasty,<sup>125</sup> while the other is the hidden chronology of history, which ranges between the 1730s and the 1740s in the Qing dynasty. To combine these two chronologies, an anachronistic method of composition (*tuoshi* 托事) typical to the Ming and Qing novels is thus involved: Although the author claims that he is writing about certain events in the Ming dynasty, what he actually projects is a story of the Qing dynasty (*suitou Ming shi shixie Qing shi* 雖托明事實寫清事).<sup>126</sup>

We may also note that this combination produces a “roman à clef” effect on the reader that is very close to the one we have in

Mlle de Scudéry's *Ibrahim ou l'illustre Bassa* and in Mrs. Manley's *The New Atalantis*. In *Ibrahim ou l'illustre Bassa*, there is a surface/fictional chronology of an ancient oriental court on the one hand, and a hidden/historical chronology of the seventeenth-century French polite society on the other. Similarly, in *The New Atalantis*, there is a surface/fictional chronology of a court-of-nowhere on the one hand, and a hidden/historical chronology relating to the eighteenth Century England Whigs and Tories on the other.<sup>127</sup> The core point here is that these two chronologies are cross-referential and mutually-determinable.

The chronologies in *Honglou meng* are of a very different type. In *Honglou meng* the author claims that all events in the novel happened in a time no one can recall (*wu chaodai nianji kekao* 無朝代年紀可考), emphasizing that its chronology is not framed in any external dynastic framework, a convention used in the four masterworks of the Ming novel.<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, there is a fifteen-year internal chronology hidden in the first eighty chapters of the novel, which can be reproduced by the reader year by year and month by month.<sup>129</sup> These two kinds of chronology are generally not cross-referential or mutually-determinable, and thus their combination provides a multi-dimensional temporal indeterminacy in the novel's narrative flux.

Based on the above analysis, I would venture to argue that *Rulin waishi* can be taken as a typical kind of Chinese "roman à clef" that fulfills most of the requirements of a European roman à clef. At the same time, *Honglou meng* can be taken as another kind of "roman à clef," different in many ways from its European counterpart.

Serving as major models of the Chinese "roman à clef," these two novels have many similarities despite all the differences listed above. For instance, both of them use intertextual echoes as a "roman à clef" device to incorporate certain flavors of earlier texts in order to make the shadow story textually richer. In *Rulin waishi*, intertextual echoes appear basically in the form of the re-shaping of anecdotes. For instance, the famous anecdote of "Fan Jin's 范進 Passing the Provincial Examination" in fiction is perhaps borrowed from a similar

but real Ming dynasty story of Yuan Ti'an's 袁體庵; the "Leqing 樂清 County Head" anecdote in fiction is most probably borrowed from the historical Xu Qianxue's 徐乾學 life story in the Early-Qing; and the anecdote of Wang Hui 王惠 in fiction is in fact borrowed from the historical Yuan Yuling's 袁于伶 life story in the Early-Qing.<sup>130</sup> Other kinds of intertextual echoes in *Rulin waishi* include the direct textual incorporation. For instance, the famous "Knight-errant" story (*xiake xushe rentou hui* 俠客虛設人頭會) stems from a similar text in Feng Yi's 馮翊 *Guiyuan congtan* 桂苑叢談 (a Tang dynasty text).<sup>131</sup> The "jealous woman" rune in chapter forty-three derives from a similar text in both Duan Chengshi's 段成式 *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 and Zhang Zhuo's 張鷟 *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載 (both Tang dynasty texts).<sup>132</sup> The "burning incense" rune in chapter ten copies from Jai Sidao's 賈似道 *Yuesheng suichao* 悅生隨鈔 (a Song dynasty text),<sup>133</sup> and so on.

In *Honglou meng*, intertextual echoes appear at all levels of the narrative, from the overall framework to small circumstantial details. Here and there, a variety of earlier texts are seamlessly incorporated into the novel. The Lady Lin the Fourth (Lin Siniang 林四娘) anecdote in chapter seventy-eight can be taken as a vivid illustration, because it is one of the most frequently discussed examples. Lady Lin was the Ming dynasty Prince Heng's (*hengwang* 衡王) concubine, who led a legendary female army to suppress a certain local rebel around the end of the Ming. Before *Honglou meng*, both Wang Shizhen's 王士禛 (1634-1711) *Chibei outan* 池北偶談 and Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 recorded this tale. The former is generally an objective account while the latter appears to be a political critique directed at the Qing dynasty rulers. *Honglou meng*'s intertextual debt to these two sources turns out to be a magic touch that serves as part of the "roman à clef" design.

The formation of these two models influenced many Chinese novels of the same period in a variety of sub-genres: for instance, Lü Xiong's 呂熊 *Nüxian waishi* 女仙外史, a supernatural martial arts fiction (*shenguai xiaoshuo* 神怪小說);<sup>134</sup> Xia Jingqu's 夏敬渠 *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言, a "knowledge and talent" fiction (*caixue xiaoshou*

才學小說);<sup>135</sup> Chen Sen's 陳森 *Pinhua baojian* 品花寶鑒, a "homosexual" fiction (*xianggong xiaoshuo* 相公小說);<sup>136</sup> Tu Shen's 屠紳 (1744-1801) *Yinshi* 蟬史, also a supernatural martial arts fiction;<sup>137</sup> Wei Zi'an's 魏子安 (1818-73) *Huayue hen* 花月痕, a "genius and beauty" fiction (*caizijiaren xiaoshuo* 才子佳人小說);<sup>138</sup> and Wen Kang's 文康 (1798?-?) *Ernü yingxiongzhuan* 兒女英雄傳, a "knight-errant" fiction (*xiayi xiaoshuo* 俠義小說).<sup>139</sup>

## VII. "Roman à Clef" in the Ming Novels

The Chinese novel becomes a full-fledged genre in the Ming dynasty. The four masterworks of the Ming novel are not yet truly "roman à clef," but they do demonstrate a strong interest in "historical referentiality" and therefore can be taken as preparation for the later development of Chinese "roman à clef."

First of all, we may note that these four novels all involve in two basic layers of reality: the remote and the proximate. *Sanguo yanyi* deals with the contemporary issues of legitimation and usurpation in the form of a historical novel, using a "cup" of the Three Kingdoms to drink the "wine" of the transition between the Yuan and the Ming. Many segments of *Xiyou ji* insinuate certain political situations throughout the Jiajing reign in the disguise of a supernatural fiction whose temporal location falls into the Early-Tang.<sup>140</sup> *Shuihu zhuan* criticizes social institutions of the Ming dynasty in the disguise of a Song dynasty story (*suituo Songshi shixie Mingshi* 雖托宋事實寫明事). *Jin Ping Mei*, according to some critics, uses a segment of *Shuihu zhuan* as its narrative framework to project the life story of a Ming dynasty person in a Song dynasty small town.<sup>141</sup>

On the other hand, none of those four novels really qualifies as a typical "roman à clef" because no "historical referentiality" is systematically and definitively presented in these cases. In *Sanguo yanyi*, one may feel that some battles in the Three Kingdoms share some circumstantial details with their Ming dynasty counterparts;<sup>142</sup> and in *Shuihu zhuan*, one may find that certain Ming dynasty institutions are described as those of the Song dynasty. However, no Ming dynasty

individuals are clearly disguised in these two novels.<sup>143</sup> In *Xiyou ji* and *Jin Ping Mei*, although a couple of characters can be debatably identified with certain historical Ming figures, no literary critic has been able to identify a large number of real people being portrayed in either of these novels.<sup>144</sup> In other words, the kind of comprehensive array of one-to-one correspondences that appears so often in later works—including *Rulin waishi*, “novels of social critique,” and “novels of prostitution” in the Late-Qing—can not be found in the four masterworks of the Ming novel.

These four masterworks serve as the embryo for the gradual development of many elements of the later Chinese “roman à clef.” First, all four novels blend real people with not only fictional characters but also false events in certain narrative patterns. The characters in *Sanguo yanyi*, as a historical novel, are basically historical people. However, these real people often have fictional achievements that in fact belong to other historical individuals. For instance, in chapter five, there is a famous episode in which Guan Yu 關羽 slays Hua Xiong 華雄 so quickly that when he returns triumphant, his cup of wine is still warm. Both Guan Yu and Hua Xiong are historical people; however, historically, Hua Xiong is not slayed by Guan Yu but by Sun Jian 孫堅. This example tells us that even in such a historical novel, real people are often doing false deeds (*zhenren jiashi* 真人假事).<sup>145</sup> By employing this and other similar techniques, the author of *Sanguo yanyi* creates the famous “seventy percent real and thirty percent imaginary” (*qishisanxu* 七實三虛) scenario.

In *Xiyou ji*, Xuan Zhuang 玄奘 a well-known historical person, lives with four fictional characters—namely, Monkey, Pigsy, Sandy, and Dragon-horse. The historical Xuan Zhuang’s well-known pilgrimage to India thus turns into a fantastic “journey to the West,” full of gods and demons. In *Shuihu zhuan*, a variety of historical names have been anachronistically re-assigned to fictional characters so as to make them half-real and half-imaginary.<sup>146</sup> For instance, both Wang Lun 王倫 and Zhang Shun 張順 are historical names. However, the dates of the historical Wang Lun’s uprising was 1043, seventy-two

years earlier than the fictional dates of 1115, when he was murdered by his fellow men in *Shuihu zhuan*. Again, historically Zhang Shun died in 1272, which was forty-nine years later than his fictional death in the novel in 1123.<sup>147</sup> In *Jin Ping Mei*, the court personages, including Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047-1126) and Yuwen Xuzhong 宇文虛中 (1079-1146), are definitely historical, but the local people, such as Ximen Qing 西門慶 and Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, are totally fictional.

We may also note that intentional anachronism, a typical device of “roman à clef,” is systematically developed in the four masterworks of the Ming novel. Each of the four has a “chronological table” (*nianbiao* 年表) hidden in the narrative flux: *Sanguo yanyi* covers historical events from 184 to 280; *Xiyou ji* starts in 639 and ends in 653; *Shuihu zhuan* ranges between 1112 and 1120;<sup>148</sup> and *Jin Ping Mei* goes from 1112 to 1127.<sup>149</sup> All these “tables” are full of intentional anachronisms.

Compared with relevant historical records, *Sanguo yanyi*'s chronology is full of anachronistic mistakes, indicating that it is a novel rather than a historical document.<sup>150</sup> *Shuihu zhuan*'s chronology is also full of anachronism and anatopical as emphasized by many modern critics.<sup>151</sup> *Jin Ping Mei*'s is not only filled with ordinary intentional anachronism but also develops an embryonic form of double chronology.<sup>152</sup> Regarding the ordinary intentional anachronism, we may note that the protagonists Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian's birth dates are always inconsistent throughout the novel.<sup>153</sup> Regarding the double chronology, the Song dynasty 1117 winter solstice in chapter seventy-two refers allegorically to two Ming dynasty consecutive winter solstices in 1620 and 1621;<sup>154</sup> and the Song dynasty 1118 in chapter eighty-seven corresponds to the Ming dynasty 1601, based on a similar allegorical principle.<sup>155</sup>

*Xiyou ji* also has a double chronology of another type: a definite external chronology versus an indefinite internal chronology. In history, according to Bianji's 辯機 “Da Tang xiyuji zan” 大唐西域記贊, Xuan Zhuang leaves China in the third year of Zhenguan 貞觀 reign (629) and returns in the nineteenth year of the same reign (645), spending sixteen years in India. In *Xiyou ji*, however, the pilgrimage

starts from the thirteenth year of Zhenguan reign (639) and ends in the twenty-seventh year of the same reign (653), translating into fourteen years on the road.<sup>156</sup> This fictional chronology is totally non-historical, because the Zhenguan reign ends in the twenty-third year (649) and does not have a “twenty-seventh year” at all.<sup>157</sup> Within this absurd but definite external chronology, the internal chronology is cyclical and indefinite: The pilgrimage travels year after year and no one ever cares to count exactly how many years they really spend on the road.

Furthermore, we note that intertextual echoes, another “roman à clef” device, is developed in all four novels. *Sanguo yanyi* incorporates many segments of historical documents such as *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 and *Shiqishi xiangjie* 十七史詳節.<sup>158</sup> The majority of the stories *Xiyou ji* are borrowed from a variety of texts in Chinese history, religion and literature—many of them anecdotal.<sup>159</sup> The *Shuihu zhuan* text includes many derivational proverbial texts, poetic texts, and texts of miscellaneous notes.<sup>160</sup> In *Jin Ping Mei*, in addition to the other kinds of texts listed above, numerous earlier and contemporary theatrical song-book texts, especially those from the famous *Cilin zhaiyan* 詞林摘豔 and *Yongxi yuefu* 雍熙樂府, are borrowed and incorporated into its narrative account.<sup>161</sup> The *Sanguo yanyi* type of historical intertextual echo is seen in many later novels.<sup>162</sup> The *Xiyou ji* type of anecdotal intertextual echo enjoys much popularity in later novels such as *Rulin waishi*, *Guanchang xianxing ji*, and *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang*, to name only a few. The *Shui zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei* type of textual incorporation is most frequently observed in the design of *Honglou meng*. Such intertextual echoes bring the flavors of earlier texts into the current text and therefore create more than one plane of reality in the same text.

All three devices serve as generic signals, revealing two sides of the same coin simultaneously: 1) what you are reading is not history (first layer) but fiction (second layer), and 2) under that seemingly fictional account, there is a distorted version of hidden historical truth (third layer), waiting to be deciphered. In short, to understand a Chinese novel, the reader needs to prepare himself/herself for at least a

three-layer reading of the text. This multi-layered reading required by the Ming novel provides a point of departure for the later development of the “roman à clef” in Chinese fiction, especially in the following areas: the pattern of occasional correspondence between a couple of fictional protagonists and their historical counterparts versus the pattern of comprehensive and systematic one-to-one correspondences between those two parties.<sup>163</sup> My argument here is, on the one hand, the four masterworks of the Ming novel provide a special intellectual environment in which many typical elements of the Chinese “roman à clef” developed. These elements are 1) the method of using fictional characters to project historical people versus the method of using a blend of fictional characters, historical names, and both real and fictional deeds; 2) intentional anachronism in a single-dimension chronology versus intentional anachronism in a double chronology; and 3) various types of intertextual echoes. On the other hand, the main reason that the four masterworks under consideration here are generally not taken as typical “romans à clef” lies in the fact that the technique of matching has not yet been systematically applied to every part of the given texts.

In addition to these four masterworks, many second-rate Ming dynasty novels also in one way or the other promoted the later development of the “roman à clef” in the Qing dynasty. Most of these novels belong to the sub-genre of the “novel of gods and demons” (*shen-moxiaoshuo* 神魔小說).<sup>164</sup> For instance, the fictional Shang dynasty (16th-11th century B.C.) prime minister Wen Zhong 聞仲 in Xu Zhonglin’s 許仲琳 *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 is read by critics as Tao Zhongwen 陶仲文, a Ming dynasty Imperial Advisor (*guoshi* 國師);<sup>165</sup> the fictional description of the Yongle 永樂 reign (1403-24) in Luo Maodeng’s 羅懋登 *Sanbao taijian xiyang ji* 三寶太監西洋記 is actually a shadow critique of the political situation in the Jiajing reign;<sup>166</sup> and the Tang dynasty (618-907) social fashions portrayed in Dong Yue’s 董說 *Xiyou bu* 西遊補 are in fact those in the end of Ming.<sup>167</sup>

In conclusion, I would venture to argue that the Chinese “roman à clef” in the Ming-Qing period can be roughly delineated into three basic models. The first is the *Niehai hua* model. In this model, “historical referentiality” is so systematically distributed throughout every part and layer of the text that a comprehensive and definite key—a list of fictional and historical correspondences—can be and must be provided. This model appears to be very close to the European roman à clef. The similarities exist not only in shape but also in status and nature—this type of Chinese “roman à clef” consists basically of lesser works, with the exception of *Rulin waishi*. The second is the *Jin Ping Mei* model. In this model, the protagonist (or protagonists) often vaguely or debatably refers to a historical person (or persons), but no definitive fictional/historical correspondence can be asserted. This model displays a lesser degree of history/fiction correspondence than its European counterpart but has a higher position in the hierarchy of literariness—This type of Chinese semi- “roman à clef” includes some of the masterworks of the Ming novel and some lesser works in both the Ming and the Qing periods. This is a semi- or quasi- “roman à clef.” The third is that of *Honglou meng*. In this model, multiple historical personages are suggested as candidates for each fictional character. This model produces a super-“roman à clef” that has never been seen in the European scene. It is these three models that provide a point of departure for the discussion of our central concept in Chinese-Western comparative literature studies: the poetics of historical referentiality.

### **VIII. Towards a Cross-Cultural Comparativism of Historical Referentiality**

Throughout the above sections, we have seen different roles played by the “roman à clef” in the European and Chinese narrative traditions, respectively. The “roman à clef” occupies only a very small territory in the European kingdom of narrative. In contrast, it holds a highly visible position over the entire pre-modern history of the Chinese novel, as both a cross-genre and trans-period literary phenomenon.

The reasons for this contrast are of course complex, among the major ones is the differences in the type of imagination at work and therefore the dominant method of mimesis. Generally speaking, the analogical imagination does not hold a predominant position in the European tradition of fiction, but it does in the Chinese tradition.

For the European mind, a piece of fiction is basically an aesthetic imitation of the real world, and this imitation does not necessarily need to be symbolic or allegorical. In the Chinese mind, it is commonly believed that any plane of reality corresponds to other planes of the same world, and a shadow is as important as the living being to which it belongs. Therefore, the analogical imagination becomes the source of a major method of imitation and *yingshe* becomes a major method of fictional composition.

If the European poetics of narrative is a poetics of aesthetic creativity, the Chinese poetics of narrative may be termed as a poetics of historical referentiality. Different orientations make different products of art. That explains why some of the less important techniques of narrative in the European tradition such as intentional anachronism and intertextual echoes, appear to be so important in the Chinese tradition. The same situation applies to the different destinies of the "roman à clef" in both traditions.

Thorough investigations on different functional aspects of the "roman à clef" in both traditions will certainly contribute much to our understanding of European and Chinese narrative traditions respectively and may create a new sub-area for Chinese-Western critical inquires.

## NOTES

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Andrew Plaks, Yu-Kung Kao, Earl Miner, and Thomas Pavel for their support and guidance which contributed much to the completion of this research.

<sup>1</sup> See Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker and George Perkins's *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, 1985, p. 401. C. Hugh Holman and

William Harmon also take the roman à clef as a genre, see their *A Handbook to Literature*, 1986, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> See Harry Shaw's *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1972, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> See J.A. Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary History*, 1991, p. 508. However, these dictionary compilers once again disagree about the degree of disguise involved in the roman à clef: Should the characters in the roman à clef be lightly or heavily disguised? According to Chris Baldick, "thinly disguised" is the principle, but, according to Cuddon, a "lack of effort to disguise characters" in a roman à clef will draw "disapproval" from literary critics. See Baldick's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1990, p. 191, and Cuddon, p. 509.

<sup>4</sup> See Rintoul's *Dictionary of Real People and Places in Fiction*, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> I have searched extensively through encyclopedias and dictionaries of literary terms. The above eight works are those most frequently discussed in these encyclopedias and dictionaries as romans à clef. The dictionaries I have consulted include the following: Harry Shaw's *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1972; Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins' *The Harper Handbook to Literature*, 1985; C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon's *A Handbook to Literature*, 1986; Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz's *Literary Terms: A Dictionary*, 1989; Chris Baldick's *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1990; J.A. Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary History*, 1991; Christina Ruse and Marilyn Hopton's *The Cassell Dictionary of Literary and Language Terms*, 1992; and Ian Ousby's *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, 1993.

In addition to the above list, a much less frequently cited group of works also deserves our attention. For instance, some critics take La Bruyère's *Caractères* (1688) as roman à clef; see Cuddon, p. 508 and Ruse and Hopton, p. 160. Others take Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* (1852) and Robert Hichens's *The Green Carnation* (1894) as romans à clef. See Beckson and Ganz, p. 214; and Ousby, p. 808. Some critics, for instance, Dalai Brenes, even take *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) as a roman à clef; see Brenes' "*Lazarillo de Tormes*:"

Roman à Clef", 1986, pp. 234-43. However, these inclusions are debatable.

<sup>6</sup> In the second group of works of fiction listed above, most have a "key", provided either by the author or by later critics, which unlocks the hidden relationship between many characters in fiction and people in history. The existence of a key suggests that the correspondences between fictional and historical versions of the story are not random but consistent and comprehensive.

<sup>7</sup> See Ruse and Hopton, p. 160, and Cuddon, pp. 508-09.

<sup>8</sup> See Cuddon, p. 508.

<sup>9</sup> This point of view has generally been shared by literary historians and critics. However, some critics have argued that the roman à clef flourished during the entire period of the heroic roman, from 1607 to 1678 (between d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* and Mme de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves*). With such an inclusive point of view, these critics also take La Calprenède's *Cassandre* (1642-45), *Cleopatre* (1647-57) and *Faramond* (1661-63) as romans à clef. See Philippe Ariès' *Le temps de l'histoire*, 1954, p. 254, and also Erica Harth's *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*, 1983, pp. 139-40.

<sup>10</sup> For details, see English Showalter's *The Evolution of the French Novel: 1641-1782*, 1972, pp. 11-37; and Mark Bannister's *Privileged Mortals: The French Heroic Novel, 1630-1660*, 1983, pp. 4-9.

The birth of roman à clef is closely related to the development of heroic roman in seventeenth century Europe. John Barclay's (1582-1621) Spanish heroic roman *Argenis* portrays many historical people as fictional characters. Since *Argenis* was translated into many European languages and had a direct influence on the development of seventeenth century French heroic roman, we may take it as one of the pioneering works for the roman à clef.

<sup>11</sup> See Bannister, pp. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> For details, see Maurice Magendie, 1932, pp. 181-245; see also Bannister, pp. 2-5. Some historians of seventeenth-century French fiction have employed other types of categorization. For instance, Dorothy Frances Dallas uses the category of *roman d'aventures* but

does not keep that of *roman historico-épique*. See Dallas's *Le roman français: De 1600 à 1680*, 1977, pp. 27-42.

<sup>13</sup> Bannister, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Bannister, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> See Showalter, pp. 20-22. For a more detailed study on the transitional period from heroic roman to nouvelle, see Nicole Aronson's "Mlle de Scudéry: Du roman héroïque à la nouvelle," 1985, pp. 169-90.

<sup>16</sup> Other examples of the same tradition also include Gombervill's *Polexandre* (1637); La Calprenède's *Cassandre* (1642-45), *Cleopatre* (1647-57), and *Faramond* (1661-63), among others. For a detailed discussion, see Bannister, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Victor Cousin offered the most comprehensive key to *Le Grand Cyrus* in the 1850s. Cousin's 1858 monumental study, *La société française au XVII siècle d'après le Grand Cyrus de Mlle de Scudéry*, even revived the reading public's interest in Mlle de Scudéry's novels in the nineteenth century.

However, some critics in the 1980s questioned the validity of Cousin's key. For instance, René Godenne even questioned the validity of the term "roman à clef" per se because this "key" comes two centuries later than the original dates of the novel's composition. See Godenne's *Les romans de Mademoiselle de Scudéry*, 1983, pp. 83-96.

<sup>18</sup> See Alan Bold and Robert Giddings *Who Was Really Who in Fiction*, 1987, p. 86. The same dictionary also tells us: "Condé was generalissimo of the French forces, and achieved notable victories over the Spaniards (Rocroi, 1643), the Bavarians (Freiburg, 1644 and Nördlingen, 1645) and captured Dunkirk in 1646. He was disgraced and imprisoned by Mazarin, but popular feeling caused Mazarin to flee Paris and Condé was released. He served as commander in the Spanish army against France, and despite defeat was so formidable that he was pardoned and restored to his estates. In 1675 he was commander of the French army on the Rhine. He retired to Chantilly and associated with Molière, Racine, La Bruyère and Boileau". See Bold and Giddings, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> For details, see Bold and Giddings, p. 86.

<sup>20</sup> For details, see Nicole Aronson's *Mademoiselle de Scudéry*, 1978, p. 80-81.

<sup>21</sup> Aronson, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> See Bebecca Tingle Keating's *The Literary Portraits in the Novels of Mlle de Scudéry*, 1970, pp. 251-58.

<sup>23</sup> In contrast to *Le Grand Cyrus*, the real identity of many other characters in *Clélie* remains ambiguous, at least to modern readers. As a contemporary of the author, Boileau firmly believed that the novel really was a gallery of the *bourgeois* living in the Marais. However, he did not give us an actual "who's who." It seems to me that this phenomenon suggests that Mlle de Scudéry developed her technique of matching between *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*, going from a clear-cut method to a more subtle and ambiguous form of artistic creation.

<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, a painting is sometimes taken as "a metaphor that creates a visual analogy to a literary theme". On the other hand, the principles of portraiture in painting are taken here as "an aesthetic standard applicable to" fiction. See Helen O. Borowitz's, *The Impact of Art on French Literature: From de Scudéry to Proust*, 1985, pp. 21-22.

<sup>25</sup> See Keating, pp. 50-57.

<sup>26</sup> See Keating, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> There are approximately one hundred and eighty portraits in *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*, according to Keating's statistics; see Keating, p. 8. We may even argue that, in Mlle de Scudéry's roman à clef, "portraiture" is important not only because it provides "portrait à clef" but also because it plays a significant role in the formation and development of the entire "portrait genre" in French literature.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Keating's dissertation. Portrait à clef is also known as *portrait déguisé*. As to the *précieuses'* taste for *portrait déguisé*, see Borowitz's "The Unconfessed Précieuse: Madame de Staël's Debt to Mademoiselle de Scudéry," 1982-83, p. 34. For a more recent study of the use of portrait in Mlle de Scudéry's fiction, see Borowitz, 1985, pp. 15-55.

<sup>29</sup> Mlle de Scudéry's novels, according to Borowitz, are none other than the "literary extensions of the *ruelles*" of her contemporary *précieuses*. See Borowitz, 1982-83, p. 33. As for a comprehensive study of *préciosité* as a literary and social movement, see Roger

Lathuillère's *La préciosité: Étude historique et linguistique*, 1966; and, especially, pp. 15-28.

<sup>30</sup> In the preface to his *Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, Antoine Baudeau de Somaize lists all four classes. For a detailed discussion of this classification, see Lawrence A. Wilson's *The Cyrus and the Clélie of Mademoiselle de Scudéry as Reflections of XVII Century Life, Ideas and Manners*, 1941. pp. 36-38. As for the opponents' opinions, such as Boileau's and Molière's, see also Wilson, pp. 17-18, 37-38.

<sup>31</sup> See Wilson, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> See Wilson, pp. 137-40. According to such a concept, "harmony between men and women...was not to be based upon equality of the sexes, but upon respect and love". See Wilson, p. 137.

<sup>33</sup> See Wilson, pp. 144-46.

<sup>34</sup> The *Samedis* was a famous post-Fronde salon in Paris (located at Mlle de Scudéry's home on rue de Beauce) during the 1650s. It is said that there was an original record of this salon's activities called *Chronique des samedis*. But that record is no longer extant.

<sup>35</sup> For more details, see Nicole Aronson, 1978, pp. 25-30, 37-43.

<sup>36</sup> It refers to the participants in the Fronde Movement (1648-53). For details, see Erica Harth, 1983, pp. 96-102.

<sup>37</sup> For more detailed discussion, see Wilson, pp. 163-78.

<sup>38</sup> See Wilson, pp. 180-97.

<sup>39</sup> It strongly reminds us of the Frondeurs and Frondeuses in Mlle de Scudéry's roman à clef.

<sup>40</sup> Margaret McKay, in her *Peacock's Progress: Aspects of Artistic Development in the Novels of Thomas Love Peacock*, 1992, points out that "[t]he conversation novels of Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866) have always occupied a special niche in the canon of English literature, 'special' because Peacock's prose fictions, both in form and content, are unlike anything else in English literature"; see McKay, p. 9. It is the extensive use of pseudo-philosophical dramatic dialogue as a special means of composition that makes Peacock's novel "conversational" and thus "so different from the mainstream eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels"; see McKay, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> See McKay, pp. 67-68.

<sup>42</sup> See Daniel R. Schwarz's *Disraeli's Fiction*, 1979, p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> See Schwarz, p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> See Schwarz, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> These non-realistic genres probably serve here as a special means to create a remote atmosphere in contrast to the proximate reality that roman à clef always tries to convey.

<sup>46</sup> See Bold and Giddings, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup> See Ros Ballaster's "Introduction" to *New Atalantis*, 1991, p. vii.

<sup>48</sup> See Harth, pp. 17-18.

<sup>49</sup> See Harth, pp. 17-18.

<sup>50</sup> See Harth, p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> See Harth, p. 28. As for Harth's citation of Jean Seznec, see Seznec's *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 1972, pp. 24-25 and 212-213.

Before the 18th century, there were no clear-cut lines between literature and art, especially in methods of representation. Erica Harth further points out: "Literature, for example, in the specialized sense that the term has acquired since the eighteenth century of a compartmentalized discipline distinct from science, the social sciences, and sometimes even poetry, did not exist at the time. The notion of imitation or representation did, however, and it could be applied equally to belles-lettres—various forms of fictional and discursive writing—and to the plastic arts, music, theatre, and so on. 'Art' consisted in the skillful practice of imitation in any one or all of these domains. No matter to which form or genre it was applied, the art remained the same." See Harth, pp. 17-18.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of intentional anachronism (l'anachronisme volontaire) in the seventeenth-century French narrative, see Philippe Ariès' *Le temps de l'histoire*, 1954, pp. 253-56.

<sup>53</sup> See Aronson, 1978, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> This also shows that seventeenth-century analogical and nineteenth-century realistic fiction writers do have different methods of creating narrative voices.

<sup>55</sup> See Harth, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> This observation is based on my research via the authoritative *Zhongguo tongxuxiaoshuo zongmu tiyao* 中國通俗小說總目提要, a comprehensive annotated bibliography published in 1990, as well as other bibliographies of traditional Chinese fiction.

<sup>57</sup> David Rolston mentioned the “roman à clef” phenomenon in Ming and Qing Chinese vernacular fiction in his *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary: Reading and Writing Between the Lines*, 1997, pp. 78-82. Very few other references can be found regarding Chinese “roman à clef” in Western-language secondary sources.

<sup>58</sup> The Late Qing as a historical period ranges from 1840 to 1911.

<sup>59</sup> Generally speaking, the Ming and Qing vernacular novel had not established itself as a matured genre until as late as the Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522-66) and Wanli 萬曆 reigns (1573-1619) of the Ming dynasty, though some critics argue that one or two masterpieces of the genre possibly have appeared as early as in the Yuan (1279-1368) and the Early Ming; see Andrew Plaks’ *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, 1987.

<sup>60</sup> “Traditional novelists” here refer to novelists in imperial China, in contrast to “modern novelists” in the early Republican period, especially novelists after the 1919 May 4th Movement.

<sup>61</sup> The year 1900 serving as a demarcation line here is not accidental. In that year, the Boxer Movement (*yihetuan* 義和團) appeared in China and largely destroyed the Chinese intellectuals’ remaining confidence in the Qing House. Lu Xun says: “After 1900 there was a rich crop of novels of exposure [novels of social critique]. During the nineteenth century, though many internal uprisings were suppressed, including the White Lotus Rising and the Taiping, Nien and Hui uprisings, China was invaded by foreign powers such as Britain, France and Japan. Though the urban population might still listen with interest while sipping tea to romantic stories about the suppression of rebels, intelligent men realized that changes were necessary and started agitating for political reforms and patriotic action, emphasizing the need to make the country rich and strong. Two years after the failure of the 1898 Reform came the Yi Ho Tuan Movement, a result of the peo-

ple's complete loss of faith in the government. The trend in fiction was to expose social abuses and lash out at contemporary politics, sometimes at social conventions as well" (光緒庚子后，譴責小說之出特盛。蓋嘉慶以來，雖屢平內亂(白蓮教、太平天國、捻、回)，亦屢挫於強敵(英、法、日本)，細民暗味，尚啜茗聽平逆武功，有識者則已翻然思改革，憑敵愾之心，呼維新與愛國，而於富強尤致意焉。戊戌變法既不成，越二年即庚子歲而有義和團之變，群乃知政府不足與圖治，頓有掎擊之意矣。其在小說，則揭發伏藏，顯其弊惡，而於時政，嚴加糾彈，或更擴充，並及風俗)。 See Lu Xun's *Zhongguo xiaoshou shilue* 中國小說史略, p. 235. English translation Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang's, see their translation of Lu Xun's above book *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, 1976, p. 352.

<sup>62</sup> The publication and earlier circulation history of these four novels seem to be very complicated. The dates given here are the most commonly-accepted ones.

<sup>63</sup> The concept of *suoyin* in the Chinese cultural tradition can be traced back to as early as *Yi jing* 易經. One of the earliest applications of this concept in historical exegesis appeared in the Tang dynasty Sima Zhen's 司馬貞 *Shiji suoyin* 史記索隱. However, this concept was not generally used in fiction criticism until the appearance of Ming dynasty novels, especially *Xiyou ji* 西遊記.

<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, Li Baojia's other book, *Nanting biji* 南亭筆記, records many historical anecdotes that have been fictionalized in *Guanchang xianxing ji* and therefore provides a cross reference between fiction and history. This cross-reference definitely involves the intertextual echoes of the roman à clef discussed earlier in section IV.

Zhou Yibai 周貽白 is one of the earliest literary critics to systematically put these two sources together and to offer a key to the novel. In addition to *Nanting biji*, Zhou also extensively uses relevant materials of both *Qingshi gao* 清史稿 (official history) and *Qingchao yeshi daguan* 清朝野史大觀 (unofficial historical writings) as supporting evidence. For details, see Zhou's "*Guanchang xianxing ji suoyin*" 官場現形記索隱, 1948, reprinted in Wei

Shaochang's 魏紹昌 *Li Boyuan yanjiu ziliao* 李伯元研究資料, 1980, pp. 344-578.

<sup>65</sup> I have extensively utilized Zhou Yibai's research and material in the following notes. However, I have double-checked the original texts, such as *Nanting biji*, for accuracy.

<sup>66</sup> This anecdote is seen in *Nanting biji* (游智開在粵時，每見客，必穿舊袍掛。僚屬有衣服麗都者，游必目逆而送之。省城四牌樓估衣鋪之舊袍掛，為之一空); see *Nanting biji*, 1924 (rpt.), 11:4; and in Zhou Yibai, pp. 346-47. It is worth noticing that the historical Guangdong Imperial Commissioner You Zhikai here is replaced by the fictional anonymous associate Imperial Commissioner of Zhejiang, so as to share the same anecdote in a "roman à clef" manner. This technique is discussed earlier in section IV as "anatopical," the place version of the temporal anachronous.

<sup>67</sup> This anecdote is seen in *Nanting biji* (甲申年諒山之役，蘇元春督隊而前，嘗一日而敗績者三，其實未嘗交綏也。蘇下刑部獄，獄卒以杖斃沈蓋之處居之。蘇見篇跡斑斕，大為駭異。詢知其故，因以銀三百兩賄獄卒使遷焉。僕人燃煙以進，獄卒堅持不可，其徵賄以百金始已); see *Nanting biji*, 4:13:1; and Zhou Yibai, p. 348. Here, the historical figure's last name, Su, is phonetically close to the fictional character's last name, Shu. This technique is based on the "phonetic principle" discussed in detail in note 75.

<sup>68</sup> The fictional name, Shi Butong, is a phonetic pun of Si Butong 死不通, meaning that a person never learns how to read and write correctly until his death. It contains Li Baojia's strong criticism towards Gang Yi's reading abilities. For a similar usage in another example, see note 69. This anecdote is seen in *Nanting biji* (剛毅讀書不多，大庭廣眾之中，多說訛字。如稱虞舜為舜王，讀皋陶之陶作如字，庾死為瘦死，聊生為耶生之類，不一而足); see *Nanting biji*, 1:2:10; and in Zhou Yibai, pp. 53-54.

<sup>69</sup> Other examples include the following: the Prime Minister Xu 徐大軍機 in chapter twenty-six is the Prime Minister Wang Wenshao 王文韶 in reality, because the former shares the latter's nickname, "glass egg" (*liulidan* 琉璃蛋). This anecdote is seen in *Nanting biji* (王仁和相國文韶，入軍機處後，耳聾愈甚。一日榮鹿爭一事，

相持不下。西太后問王意如意。王不知所云，只得莞爾而笑。西太后再三垂問，王仍笑。西太后曰：“你怕得罪人？真是個琉璃蛋”); see *Nanting biji*, 3:10:7; and in Zhou Yibai, p. 374. Here the historical Prime Minister Wang Wengshao shares the same anecdote with the fictional Prime Minister Xu, whose first name is dubiously hidden from us. Obviously, the “position” of prime minister (*shilü* 仕履) plays a very important role as a linking device between the two here. Cf. note 79.

The Tang Liuxuan 唐六軒 and Yu Jinchun 休盡臣 in chapter twenty-nine are actually the historical Gong Shengjie 龔盛階 in reality because they share the anecdote of “wearing prostitutes’ clothing”; see *Nanting biji*, 3:12:7; and in Zhou Yibai, p. 349.

The Jia Shiwen 賈世文 in chapter forty-two and chapter forty-three is in fact the famous scholar-official Governor Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 because the former shares the latter’s “letter” and “appointment” anecdotes. The fictional name, Jia Shiwen, is a phonetic pun of Jia Siwen 假斯文, meaning “falsely civilized person.” Li Baojia takes Zhang Zhidong as a hypocrite and therefore uses this pun to criticize Zhang. For another example of such “pun criticism”; see also note 68. The “letter” anecdote is seen in *Nanting biji* (南皮之長親某，一日由遠道寄書來，假銀三百，飾帳房備銀如數，而令幕友作覆函焉。既成閱之，蹙然曰：“太深了。”另覓一人起稿，又曰：“太淺了。”將自握管為之，以事冗無暇及此，忽忽已逾三月。俄得電文一紙，則其長親已以老病而亡，而銀猶儼然在也); see *Nanting biji*, 4:16:4; and in Zhou Yibai, pp. 350-351. The “appointment” anecdote is also seen in *Nanting biji* (南皮號令不時，是其一生弊病。有出洋留學生數輩，已束裝待發矣，南皮忽令入見，學生日日詣轅守候，直至一月之久，音信全無。學生大為激憤，因發傳單，以聲其罪。後得梁鼎芬調停始已); see *Nanting biji*, 4:16:2; and in Zhou Yibai, p. 351.

The Tong Ziliang 童子良 in chapter forty-six is actually the conservative Prime Minister Xu Tong 徐桐, because they share the anecdote of “hating people from foreign countries.” This anecdote is seen in *Nanting biji* (徐桐為清季著名頑固黨，固已有口皆碑。有友談其軼事，頗堪破睡。友云：徐私宅偪近東交民巷，各國於其

大門前關馬路，徐惡之，而不能禁止。遂將前門堵塞，從後門出入，謔者遂謂之開後門。徐每衣除綢緞外，必土布。吸淡巴菰。或有饋贈銀元者，必卻之，以其為墨西哥所鑄，必易松江銀始受); see *Nanting biji*, 3:12:1; and in Zhou Yibai, pp. 352-353. It is noticeable that the historical Xu Tong's first name here phonetically corresponds to the fictional Tong Ziliang's last name. For the "phonetic principle" used here, cf. notes 67 and 75.

<sup>70</sup> These techniques of matching should be viewed in the light of similar techniques used in romans à clef in Europe.

<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, Wu Yanren also has written a non-fiction book, *Wofoshanren biji* 我佛山人筆記, which records many historical anecdotes being fictionalized in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang*. In this sense, *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* and *Wofoshanren biji* do parallel *Guanchang xianxing ji* and *Nanting biji*, and intertextual echoes do play an important role in Wu's "roman à clef" way of thinking as well.

<sup>72</sup> These patterns are sometimes also randomly used in *Guanchang xianxing ji*. However, the employment of these patterns are much more systematic in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang*.

<sup>73</sup> I term this technique here as "nominal anachronism".

<sup>74</sup> 古(Gu) is the left-hand side radical of 胡 (Hu), 雨 (Yu) is the top radical of 雪 (Xue), and 山 (Shan) is the top radical of 巖 (Yan). Grasping the rules of the author's "radical principle" games, the reader can easily decipher that the fictional Gu Yushan is Hu Xueyan in reality.

<sup>75</sup> 陳 (Chen) and 岑 (Cen) are very close in pronunciation. The only phonetic difference between them lies in their initials. 稚 (zhi) and 子 (zi) are also very close in pronunciation. Again, the only phonetic difference between them lies in their initials. This principle is also used extensively in *Guanchang xianxing ji*.

<sup>76</sup> 葉 (Ye) is phonetically very close to 聶 (Nie), 伯 in Chinese means the eldest brother and 仲 means the second eldest brother. Both 芬 (fen) and 芳 (fang) refer to a kind of fragrance. They share similar phonetic elements and are often used together as one phrase 芬芳. In these two names, we can see that the last two characters of

each name do parallel and the basic design is based on the principle of simile.

<sup>77</sup> 武 in Chinese means “martial” while 文 in Chinese means “civil”. 香 in Chinese means fragrance and 芸 refers to a special kind of fragrance. Both 樓 and 閣 are buildings. Between these two names, we can see that every character is carefully paralleled to form a complete pair.

<sup>78</sup> This pattern is also sometimes seen in *Guanchang xianxing ji*, cf. note 66.

<sup>79</sup> See *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang*, 1959 (rpt.), 1:2:7.

Other examples include the following: Zhang Yinheng 張蔭恆 in history became a rich man in Shandong Province 山東, but in fiction his shadow did so in Guangdong Province; see *Ershinian*, 2:71:650-2:72:660; in history Sheng Xuanhuai 盛宣懷 was the head of the “Business Promotion Department” (*zhaoshangju* 招商局), while in fiction he was the head of a boat company; see *Ershinian*, 1:51:459. This so-called Business Promotion Department was in fact the largest boat company of the time, sponsored by the Qing government. Here, the same position—the head of the company—connects the fictional character with its historical counterpart.

<sup>80</sup> See *Ershinian*, 2:71:651. Other examples include the following: In history, Wu Yanren’s father was an official of Ningbo, but he became a merchant of Huangzhou in fiction; see *Ershinian*, 1:2:7; and in history Wu Yanren’s uncle was his father’s younger brother, but in fiction he became Wu’s father’s elder brother; see *Ershinian*, 1:2:8. In writing these notes, I have extensively consulted Chen Xinghui’s 陳幸蕙 *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang yanjiu* 二十年目睹之怪現狀研究, 1982, pp. 49-51.

This technique is related to the technique of “mixing up real names with fictional names,” which will be discussed in detail later in this essay.

<sup>81</sup> *Niehai hua* has only thirty chapters (another five chapters are regarded as a supplement) and has two major editions: the Xiaoshuolin 小說林 and the Zhenshanmei 真善美 editions. Its modern edition is just about three hundred pages.

<sup>82</sup> As in a typical European roman à clef, the author Zeng Pu provides a key at the end of his novel (in his own calligraphy), revealing the identity of many major characters. The most comprehensive key, however, is provided by the literary critic Liu Wenzhao 劉文昭 in his “Niehai hua renwu suoyinbiao” 孽海花人物索隱表, on which the above statistics are based.

<sup>83</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 1979 (rpt.), 2:4-5. The protagonist's last name 金(gold) corresponds to the historical person's last name 洪 (phonetically similar to 紅, red); the former's first name corresponds also to the latter's first name 鈞, with a change of radicals (from “water” to “gold”); and it is also noteworthy that the historical person's last name 洪 has a “water” radical).

<sup>84</sup> The protagonist's last name 傅 (be as good as) corresponds to the historical person's last name 賽 (surpassing) in meaning; and the former's first name 彩雲 (colorful clouds) corresponds also to the latter's first name 金花 (golden flowers). Another interpretation to this name is that Sai Jinghua's maiden name is Zhao Caiyun 趙彩雲, and that the author changes only her last name here.

<sup>85</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 2:8. The fictional character's last name, 成, is the top of the historical person's last name 盛. The historical Sheng Xuanhuai's style/alternate name (zi 字 *hao* 號) is Xingsun 杏蓀, meaning “a plum's grandson.” The first part of the fictional character's first name, 木, is the top radical of the first part of the historical person's style name, 杏, and the second part of the fictional character's first name, 生 (giving birth to someone), corresponds to the second part of the historical person's style name, 蓀 (grandson of a plant). Sheng Xuanhuai is also portrayed in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang*; see note 79.

Another example is that the fictional Hu Xingyan 胡星巖 is the historical Zhejiang merchant Hu Xueyan; see *Niehai hua*, 3:13. The first part of the historical person's first name is changed from 雪 (snow) to 星 (star) in fiction. The same historical person is also portrayed in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* under another fictional name based on another set of principles; see note 74.

<sup>86</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 11:88. The historical person's last name 康 shares the same top radical with the fictional character's last name 唐; the historical person's first name, Youwei 有為 (capable), corresponds to the fictional character's first name, Youhui 猶輝 (still bright), in both meaning and phonetic elements.

Other examples of scholar-politicians include the following: the fictional Liang Chaoru 梁超如 is the historical Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (Liang Qichao's style name is Zhuoru 卓如, so his fictional name becomes Chaoru), and the fictional Wang Gongxian is the historical Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲; and so on.

<sup>87</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 3:12. The usage of the phonetic principle here is obvious. Another example of diplomats is that the fictional Gong Xiaoqi 龔孝琪 is the historical Gong Cheng 龔橙; see *Niehai hua*, 2:8. Gong Cheng's style name is Xiaogong 孝拱, so his fictional name becomes Xiaoqi. His father is the well-known Qing politician and poet Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792-1841).

<sup>88</sup> Gu is a famous Qing dynasty diplomat and literatus with a Ph.D. from a British university.

<sup>89</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 23:208. Here, the fictional Imperial Concubines 金 (gold) and 寶 (treasure) correspond to the historical Imperial Concubines 瑾 (jade) and 珍 (treasure).

<sup>90</sup> Other miscellaneous examples include the following: The fictional Li Chunke 李純客 is the historical Li Ciming 李慈銘, see *Niehai hua*, 5:30. The historical Li Ciming's style name is Chunke 尊客, phonetically similar to the fictional name Chunke 純客. Li is a famous politician and literatus of the time.

The fictional Zhuang Zhidong 莊芝棟 is the historical Zhang Zhidong; see *Niehai hua*, 5:30. The fictional name and the historical name are phonetically similar: the only phonetic difference is that the fictional last name, 莊 (Zhuang), adds a medial "u." 張 (Zhang). Zhang Zhidong is also portrayed in *Guanchang xianxing ji* under the fictional name of Jia Shiwen; see note 69.

The fictional Zhuang Lunqiao 莊侖樵 is the historical Zhang Peilun 張佩綸; see *Niehai hua*, 5:30. The historical Zhang Peilun's style name is Youqiao 幼樵. The fictional last name, Zhuang, stands

for the historical last name, Zhang; the first part of the fictional first name, Lun 倫, stands for the second part of the historical first name, Lun 綸, and the second part of the fictional first name, qiao 樵, is identical with the second part of the historical style name qiao, 樵. Zhang is a famous imperial teacher (*shijiang* 侍講).

The fictional Zhuang Huanying 莊煥英 is the historical Zhang Yinheng, see *Niehai hua*, 9:68. Again, the fictional character's last name, Zhuang, is phonetically close to the historical person's last name Zhang. The fictional character's first name, Huanying (brightness), is in contrast to the historical person's first name, Yinheng (shadow), in meaning. The same historical person is also portrayed in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* under another fictional name, see note 79.

The fictional Yu Tong 余同 is the historical Xu Tong. 余 is the right-hand side of 徐, while 同 is the right-hand side of 桐. The historical Xu Tong is also portrayed in *Guanchang xianxing ji* under a fictional name; see note 69.

The fictional Count of Weiyi 威毅伯 is the historical Li Hongzhang 李鴻章; see *Niehai hua*, 18:158. In history, Li Hongzhang is Count of Suyi 肅毅伯. In fiction, 威 (power) replaces 肅 (seriousness) to create a shadow title.

The fictional Ding Yuting 丁雨汀 is the historical Ding Ruchang 丁汝昌; see *Niehai hua*, 18:158. The historical Ding Ruchang's style name is Yuting 禹廷, phonetically similar to the fictional first name Yuting 雨汀.

And the fictional Deng Shichang 鄧士昶 is the historical Deng Shichang 鄧世昌; see *Niehai hua*, 25:230. The fictional character's name and the historical person's name are in fact phonetically the same.

<sup>91</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 2:5. Other examples of this kind include Chen Chuzhe 陳初哲, Shi Zuotang 石琢堂, Pan Zhixuan 潘芝軒, Qian Xiangling 錢湘齡, Wu Tingchun 吳廷琛, and Wu Xinzong 吳信中. These people are all natives of Jiangsu Province and are all Qing dynasty Imperial Examination Winners.

<sup>92</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 2:6 and 27:247. Other examples of calligraphers and painters include Yang Yongchun 楊詠春, Ren Fuchang 任

阜長 and Miao Suyun 繆素筠. Yao is good at the regular script and Yang is good at the seal script. Tang and Ren are famous southern painters while Miao is a northern imperial painter.

<sup>93</sup> Other examples of generals include Xu Yanxu 徐延旭, Tang Jiong 唐炯, Peng Yulin 彭玉麟, Pan Dingxin 潘鼎新 and Cen Yuying 岑毓英; see *Niehai hua*, 6:41.

<sup>94</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 24:219.

<sup>95</sup> Other examples include Hua Cuiqin 花翠琴, Lu Lanfen 陸蘭芬, Zhang Shuyu 張書玉, Li Pingxiang 李蘋香, Lin Jiangxue 林絳雪, Weng Meiqian 翁梅債, Jin Xiaobao 金小寶, and Hu Baoyu 胡寶玉. Some of these courtesans appear only in the *Xiaoshuolin* edition, while others appear only in the *Zhenshanmei* edition. The first few of these courtesans listed above (Lin, Hua, Lu, and Zhang) are taken as the “Big Four” in the Shanghai circle of courtesans of the time (*Shanghai huajie sida jingang* 上海花界四大金剛).

<sup>96</sup> Those two male prostitutes appear in both the *Xiaoshuolin* and the *Zhenshanmei* editions.

<sup>97</sup> This is the nick name of the famous Tan Xinpei 譚鑫培.

<sup>98</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 29:275.

<sup>99</sup> See *Niehai hua*, 28:268.

<sup>100</sup> Other miscellaneous examples include the following: The conservative high court officials Feng Jingting 馮景亭 and Wo Genfeng 倭良峰; see *Niehai hua*, 2:9-10. Both of them are famous Confucianists of the time. The anti-French generals Feng Zicai 馮子材, Liu Yongfu 劉永福, Wang Xiaoqi 王孝琪 and Pan Ying 潘瀛; see *Niehai hua*, 6:45-48. The Mandarin general Sengge Linqin 僧格林沁; the eunuchs Yong Lu 永祿, Gao Wanzhi 高萬枝, Xiaode Zhang and Kou Liancai 寇連材; see *Niehai hua*, 26:240, 27:244, and 27:248.

The technique of “mixing up fictional names with real names” is very popular in a variety of Late Qing fictional sub-genres. It is even seen in Huang Xiaopei’s 黃小配 “journalistic novels” (*shishi xiaoshuo* 時事小說) *Huanhai chao* 宦海潮 and *Huanhai shengchenlu* 宦海升沈錄: one of the protagonists Zhang Yinheng uses a fictional name Zhang Renpan 張任磐 (the same historical person is also fictionalized in *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* and *Niehai hua*, cf.

notes 79 and 90) while the other protagonist Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 uses his real name. It suggests that by using this technique, even a “historical novel” may contain a certain kind of “roman à clef” flavor.

<sup>101</sup> Generally speaking, both the “novel of social critique” and the “novel of prostitution” are products of the Late Qing.

<sup>102</sup> There are many lesser famous texts of “novels of prostitution” in the Late Qing such as *Jiuwei gui* 九尾龜.

<sup>103</sup> These correspondences are based on Zou Shu’s 鄒述 preface to the novel.

<sup>104</sup> For instance, the fictional Qi Yunsou 齊韻叟 is taken as the historical Shen Zhongfu 沈仲馥; the fictional Shi Tianran 史天然 is the historical Li Muzhai 李木齋; the fictional Laitou Yuan 賴頭龜 is the historical Le Yuanxia 勒元俠; the fictional Fang Penghu 方蓬壺 is the historical Yuan Xiangfu 袁翔父; the fictional Li Shifu 李實夫 is the historical Sheng Puren 盛朴人; the fictional Li Heting 李鶴汀 is the historical Sheng Xuanhuai (Sheng Xuanhuai is also portrayed in both *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* and *Niehai hua*. Cf. notes 79 and 85); the fictional Li Zhuanhong 黎篆鴻 is the historical Hu Xueyan (Hu Xueyan is also portrayed in both *Ershinian mudu zhi guaixianzhuang* and *Niehai hua*. Cf. notes 74 and 85); the fictional Wang Liangsheng 王蓮生 is the historical Ma Meishu 馬眉叔; the fictional Xiaoliu'er 小柳兒 is the historical Yang Houzi 楊猴子; and the fictional Gao Yabai 高亞白 is the historical Li Yuxian 李芋仙.

All of the above correspondences are based on the information provided in *Tanyinshi biji* 譚瀛室筆記.

<sup>105</sup> See section III of this essay.

<sup>106</sup> See Ouyang Jian’s 歐陽健 “Chaoqian yu shiji bianzuan de xiaoshuo chuanguo Ming Qing shishi xiaoshuo xinlun” 超前於史籍編纂的小說創作——明清時事小說新論, 1992, pp. 80-90.

<sup>107</sup> The earliest key of *Rulin waishi* was provided by Jin He 金和 (in his 1869 postface to the novel). Later on, Tianmu Shanqiao 天目山樵 (in his commentary to the novel), Huang Xiaotian 黃小田 (in his commentary to the novel), Ping Buqing 平步青 (in his *Xiwai junjie* 霞外摺屑), Sha Ou 沙滙 (in his *Yiyexuan manbi* 一葉軒漫筆), Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 (in his *Xiaoshuo xianhua* 小說閑話), Kong

Lingjing 孔另境 (in his *Zhongguo xiaoshuoshiliao* 中國小說史料), Ji Xianlin 季羨林 (in his *Kalin waishi qucai de lai yuan* 儒林外史取材的來源), and Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 (in his *Xiaoshuo zhixiao* 小說識小) continued to provide additional information regarding the correspondence between historical figures and fictional characters. He Zehan's 何澤翰 *Rulin waishi renwubenshi kaolue* 儒林外史人物本事考略 (1957) is so far the most comprehensive and systematic key done by a modern critic, identifying about sixty historical people in fictional disguise in the novel. He Zehan's major sources are both the earlier keys (especially, Jin He's, Tianmu Shanqiao's, and Ping Buqing's) and other relevant miscellaneous writings by literati between the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns of the Qing dynasty.

<sup>108</sup> Later, the same technique is very frequently used in the "novel of social critique" in the Late-Qing.

<sup>109</sup> See He Zehan, pp. 14-17. The fictional last name 馬, is the right-hand side of the historical last name, 馮, while the fictional first name, 二, represents the left-hand side radical of the historical last name, 馮. Other examples include the following: The fictional Yu the Elder 余大先生 "becomes" the historical Jin Qu 金渠, the author's cousin and friend (the fictional last name, 余, shares the same top radical with the historical last name, 金); see He Zehan, pp. 102-14. The fictional Tang You 湯由 and Tang Shi 湯實 "become" the historical Yang Jia 楊甲 and Yang Kuan 楊寬, sons of General Yang Kai 楊凱 (both fictional names, 湯, share the same right-hand side with the historical last names, 楊. The first fictional first name, 由, is a reversed 甲, which is the first historical first name. The second fictional first name, 實, shares the same top with the second historical first name, 寬); see He Zehan, pp. 94-102.

<sup>110</sup> See He Zehan, pp. 64-66. Another example is that the fictional Junior Imperial Instructor Ping (*pingshaobao* 平少保) "becomes" the historical Nian Gengyao 年羹堯; see He Zehan, pp. 86-90.

<sup>111</sup> See He Zehan, pp. 90-94. 濯 parallels 洪 and 江 parallels 江. Other examples include the following: The fictional Yun Qingchuan 雲晴川 "becomes" the historical Du Yunchuan 杜雲川, a famous Wuxi 無錫 poet of the time (the fictional last name, 雲, parallels the

first part of the historical first name, 雲, and the second part of the fictional first name, 川, parallels the second part of the historical first name, 川); see He Zehan, pp. 52-54. The fictional Ji Weixiao 季韋蕭 “becomes” the historical Li Xiaocun 李嘯村, a romantic though poor scholar (if the top of 季 is removed, the last name becomes 李; and if the left-hand side radical 口 is added and the top radical, “grass”, is removed, the first name, 蕭, becomes 嘯); see He Zehan, pp. 28-35.

<sup>112</sup> See He Zehan, pp. 17-21. In the above case, 牛 parallels 朱 (phonetically the same as 豬), and 布衣 parallels 草衣. Other examples include the following: The fictional Shen Qiongzhi 沈瓊枝 “becomes” the historical Zhang Wanyu 張宛玉, an unconventional female poet (沈 parallels 張, and 瓊枝 parallels 宛玉); see He Zehan, pp. 82-86; the fictional Xu Ji 徐基 becomes the historical Xu Ben 徐本, one of the prime ministers of the time (here, 徐 parallels 徐 and 基 parallels 本); see He Zehan, pp. 63-64.

<sup>113</sup> According to He Zehan, this name is inherited from a famous sentence in *Yi jing* 易經 (*qianlong wuyong* 潛龍勿用), which allegorically suggests Shi Jing’s hypocritical personality; see He Zehan, p. 3. Another example is that the fictional Yu Yude 虞育德 “becomes” the historical Wu Mengquan 吳蒙泉, a model scholar in the author’s mind. According to He Zehan, the fictional first name, 育德, cleverly involves the historical person’s first name, 蒙泉, based on a famous sentence in *Yi jing* (*shanxia chuquan meng junzi yiguoxing yude* 山下出泉，蒙，君子以果行育德); see He Zehan, p. 54.

<sup>114</sup> See He Zehan, pp. 21-27. 向 is structurally close to 商 and 鼎 parallels 盤 in meaning. The first parallelism is based on the radical principle, while the second is based on the simile principle. Other examples include the following: The fictional Mr. Kang 康大人 “becomes” the historical Ji Zengyun 嵇曾筠, one of the prime ministers of the time (if we let the fictional last name, 康, follow that historical last name 嵇, we get 嵇康, a great recluse in Chinese history. The whole design is based on both principles of simile and allegory); see He Zehan, pp. 55-57; the fictional Chi Hengshan 遲衡山 “becomes” the historical Fan Nanzhong 樊南仲, a typical Confucian and one of the author’s friends (衡山—the Southern Mountain—parallels 樊南—the south of Fan); see He Zehan, pp. 44-49. The fictional Wang

—the south of Fan); see He Zehan, pp. 44-49. The fictional Wang Yuhui 王玉輝 “becomes” the historical Wang Qiawen 汪洽聞, who encourages his daughter to commit suicide after his son-in-law’s death (王 is phonetically similar to 汪 while 玉輝—brightness of jade—parallels 洽聞—comprehensiveness of knowledge in meaning); see He Zehan, pp. 115-20.

<sup>115</sup> Jin He believes that if a reader reads carefully the miscellaneous writings of the time, he will be able to identify most of the historical people fictionalized in the *Rulin waishi* (若以雍乾間諸家文集紬繹而參稽之，往往十得八九); see Li Hanqiu’s 李漢秋 *Rulin waishi yanjiu ziliao* 儒林外史研究資料, 1984, p. 129.

<sup>116</sup> See Ye Dehui’s 葉德輝 *Shulin qinghua* 書林清話 (紅樓夢一書……以同時人紀同時事，殆非架空之作) in Yi Su’s 一粟 *Honglou meng juan* 紅樓夢卷, 1963, p. 16. A most recent example is Pi Shumin’s 皮述民 *Suzhou Lijia yu Honglou meng* 蘇州李家與紅樓夢, 1996.

<sup>117</sup> Nalan Mingzhu is one of the prime ministers (*daxueshi* 大學士) of the Kangxi reign. For his biography, see *Qingshi liezhuan* 清史列傳, 1987 (rpt.), 2:530-35. It is said that Emperor Qianlong himself initiated this guess, though he did not give any substantial proof to support his argument; see Zhao Liewen’s 趙烈文 *Nengjingju biji* 能靜居筆記 in Yi Su’s *Hongloumeng juan*, p. 378.

Sun Tongsheng 孫桐生 added more circumstantial details to this guess by bringing the reader’s attention to the similarities in name and life between the fictional Jia Yucun 賈雨村 and the historical Gao Jiangcun 高江村. Both of their first names mean “a lot of water in a village,” and both of them became high officials due to the strong recommendation of a powerful family of the time—the Jia family (*jiafu* 賈府) in fiction and the Mingzhu family in reality—and both of them betrayed their patrons when these patrons were politically in trouble. Along the same line of thinking, Chen Kangqi 陳康祺 guessed that the twelve beauties (*shi'erchai* 十二釵) in the novel are in reality Nalan family’s male literati friends, such as Gao Jiangcun and Jiang Ximing 姜西溟. Ying Hao 英浩 further argued that the Duke of Rong (*Rongguogong* 榮國公) and the Duke of Ning (*Ning-*

*guogong* 寧國公) in the novel have genealogical associations with Mingzhu's grandfather in reality.

<sup>118</sup> See Yuan Mei's 袁枚 *Piben suiyuanshijia* 批本隨園詩話 in Yi Su's *Hongloumeng juan*, p. 356. Zhang Yong, Marquis of Pacification of Rebels (*jingni hou* 靖逆侯), was a well-known Early-Qing general. For his biography, see *Qingshi liezhuan*, 20:6458-63.

<sup>119</sup> See Yuan Mei's *Piben suiyuanshijia* in Yi Su's *Hongloumeng juan*, p. 356. Fu Heng was one of the prime ministers in the Qianlong reign. For his biography, see *Qingshi liezhuan*, 5:1458-98.

<sup>120</sup> See *Tanyingshi biji* in Yi Su's *Hongloumeng juan*, p. 412-14. According to this secondary source, the major and minor twelve beauties (*zhengfu shi'erchai* 正副十二釵) in the novel are shadow figures of He Shen's twenty-four concubines. He Shen was a powerful prime minister in the Qianlong reign. For his biography, see *Qingshi liezhuan*, 9:2693-2705. Reading through He's biographical documents, one will find that He's life style was very similar to that in *Daguan yuan* 大觀園 in many respects. Most of the secondary sources discussed above regarding the family history theory are found in miscellaneous notes between the Tongzhi 同治 (1862-74) and the Guangxu reigns.

<sup>121</sup> It does remind us of Mrs. Manley's roman à clef/*chronique scandaleuse* discussed earlier in this essay.

<sup>122</sup> Cai Yuanpei suggested using the following three *suoyin* methods to decipher *Honglou meng*. The first one is "character portrayal"—similarities in personality between the historical person and the fictional character (*pinxing xianglei* 品性相類); the second is "anecdote"—the overlapping areas in anecdotal and biographical details between the historical person and the fictional character (*yishi youzheng* 軼事有徵); and the third is "name"—the traceable link between the historical person's name and the fictional character's name (*xingming xiangguan* 姓名相關). See Cai Yuanpei's preface to the sixth edition of *Shitouji suoyin* in his *Shitouji suoyin*, 1963 (rpt.), p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> See He Zehan, pp. 120-24.

<sup>124</sup> See He Zehan, pp. 124-27.

<sup>125</sup> This chronology is based on Tan Fengliang's 談鳳梁 "Rulin waishi jili" 儒林外史紀曆, 1984, pp. 44-56. This chronology ranges from the Chenghua 成化 (1465-87) to the Wanli reigns of the Ming dynasty.

<sup>126</sup> This *tuoshi* method of composition will also be discussed in the next section.

<sup>127</sup> As a rule, in chronologies of both fiction and of history, intentional anachronism appears between the lines to remind the reader that neither of them is really reliable and that the truth lies in between.

<sup>128</sup> See *Honglou meng sanjia pingben* 紅樓夢三家評本, 1988, 1:1:5.

<sup>129</sup> See Zhou Ruchang's 周汝昌 "Honglou jili" 紅樓紀曆 in his *Hongloumeng xinzheng* 紅樓夢新證, 1976, 1:183-212.

<sup>130</sup> For all the three examples, see Tan Fengliang's "Rulin waishi chuanguzuoshijian guocheng chutan" 儒林外史創作時間過程初探, 1984, p. 239.

<sup>131</sup> See Tan Fengliang, p. 239.

<sup>132</sup> Tang texts seem to be very important to these Ming and Qing novelists here.

<sup>133</sup> See Li Hanqiu, pp. 176-77.

<sup>134</sup> It is said that this novel uses a famous Ming battle (*jingnan zhiyi* 靖難之役) to insinuate the historical event of the Qing's overthrow of the Ming House; see Yang Zhongxian's 楊鍾賢 preface to the novel.

<sup>135</sup> There are not only systematic fictional/historical correspondences in this novel but also many intentional anachronisms. For details, see Qian Jingfang's 錢靜方 *Xiaoshuo congkao* 小說叢考, 1957 (rpt.), pp. 162-67.

<sup>136</sup> The fictional Tian Chunhang 田春航 (spring sail) is the historical Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730-97), whose style name is Qiufan 秋帆 (autumn mast); the fictional Su Huifang 蘇蕙芳 is the historical Li Guiguan 李桂官; and the fictional Hou Shiweng 侯石翁 is the historical Yuan Mei, both last names represent a phonetic pun of monkey (*hou* 猴/*yuan* 猿).

<sup>137</sup> The protagonists Sang Zhuosheng 桑鐳生 and Gan Ding 甘鼎 are taken as shadow figures for the author and Fu Nai 傅鼎 (?-1738) in reality, respectively.

<sup>138</sup> The protagonists Wei Chizhu 韋癡珠 and Han Hesheng 韓荷生 are taken as shadow figures for the historical Li Ciqing 李次青 and Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812-85) in reality, respectively.

<sup>139</sup> The female protagonist is taken as a shadow of a real person, and the male character An Ji 安驥 is taken as the shadow of the author.

<sup>140</sup> This pattern is the so called "Ming dynasty events in the disguise of the Tang". Two comprehensive and influential studies on this issue are done by Su Xing 蘇興; see his "Xiyou ji dui Ming shizong de yinyu pipan he chaofeng" 西遊記對明世宗的隱寓批判和嘲諷, 1984, pp. 33-53, and "Xiyou ji de Yuhuang Dadi Rulai Fo Taishang Laojun tankao" 西遊記的玉皇大帝、如來佛、太上老君探考, 1988, pp. 64-76.

<sup>141</sup> This is the Ming dynasty Yuan Zhongdao's 袁中道 (1570-1623) theory (舊時京師，有一西門千戶，延一紹興老儒於家。老儒無事，逐日記其家淫蕩風月之事，以西門慶影其主人，以余影其諸姬); see Fang Ming's 方銘 *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huilu* 金瓶梅資料匯錄, 1986, p. 171. There are many other theories of "historical referentiality" for the novel as well—for instance, the eunuchs theory; see Deng Xingyu's 鄧星雨 "Jin Ping Mei shehuiyi guan kui" 金瓶梅社會意義管窺, 1989; and Chen Zhao's 陳詔 "Jin Ping Mei yu Mingdaihuanguan" 金瓶梅與明代宦官, 1990. For the "secret agent" (*changwei* 廠衛) theory, see Chen Zhao's "Ximen Qing guan zhi kao" 西門慶官職考, 1989.

<sup>142</sup> See Xiong Du's 熊篤 "Sanguo yanyi bingfei qishi sanxu" 三國演義并非七實三虛, 1986, pp. 217-20.

<sup>143</sup> Many literary critics try to link the characters in these two novels with certain historical Ming people in many ways. However, no definite proof has been provided for these links.

<sup>144</sup> Literary critics can only provide a list of only very few historical people corresponding to fictional characters in each of these two novels.

<sup>145</sup> For more examples, see Xiong Du, pp. 213-17. Another similar example is the story of Liu Bei's 劉備 wife, Lady Sun; see Yang Zhihua's 楊芷華 "Zhizi dagui miaoru huang he Sun furen kaoshi" 之子大歸、杳如黃鶴——孫夫人考實, 1985.

<sup>146</sup> The same technique is extensively used in later novels such as *Rulin waishi* and *Niehai hua*.

<sup>147</sup> See Wang Liqi's 王利器 *Naixuetang ji* 耐雪堂集, 1986, p. 163.

<sup>148</sup> This chronology is based on the research done in He Xin's 何心 "Shuihu zhuan biannian" 水滸傳編年 in his *Shuihu yanjiu* 水滸研究, 1955, pp. 175-99.

<sup>149</sup> This chronology is based on the most recent studies, done in Wei Ziyun's 魏子雲 "Jin Ping Mei biannian shuo" 金瓶梅編年說, 1980; in his *Jin Ping Mei biannian jishi* 金瓶梅編年記事, 1981; and in Zhu Yixuan's 朱一玄 *Jin Ping Mei cihua gushibiannian* 金瓶梅詞話故事編年, 1985. As for anatopical, the place version of the temporal anachronous, in the novel, see Chen Zhao's "Jin Ping Mei gushididian kao" 金瓶梅故事地點考, 1987.

<sup>150</sup> For the anatopical in *Sanguo yanyi*, see Ren Zhaokun 任昭坤 and Shen Bojun's 沈伯俊 "Shitan Sanguo yanyi de dilicuowu" 試談三國演義的地理錯誤, 1985.

<sup>151</sup> For the former, see He Xin, pp. 185-92; and for the latter, see Qiu Zhensheng's 邱振聲 *Shuihu zhuan zongheng tan* 水滸傳縱橫談, 1992, pp. 262-65.

<sup>152</sup> *Rulin waishi*'s double chronology is discussed in detail earlier in this essay.

<sup>153</sup> Internally contradictory information regarding Ximen Qing and/or Pan Jinlian's birth dates is seen in chapters three, twelve, twenty-nine, thirty-nine, and eighty-seven of the novel.

<sup>154</sup> See Wei Ziyun, 1981, pp. 37-38.

<sup>155</sup> See Wei Ziyun, pp. 38-39.

<sup>156</sup> See *Xiyou ji*, 1955 (rpt.), pp. 1125-26.

<sup>157</sup> Zhenguan reign ranges from 627 to 649. It is such an important reign in Chinese history that its beginning and ending years are commonplace knowledge for traditional Chinese scholars. The tre-

mendous erudition of the author of *Xiyou ji* in various aspects of Chinese history and culture is seen everywhere throughout the novel; it is very unlikely that he did not know that Zhenguan reign ended in the twenty-third year.

<sup>158</sup> Ogawa Tamaki's 小川環樹 paid attention to the relationship between *Sanguo yanyi* and *Shiqishi xiangjie*, see his *Chūgoku shōsetsu shi no kenkyū* 中國小說史の研究, 1968, pp. 28-33.

<sup>159</sup> See Cao Shibang's 曹仕邦 "Xiyou ji ruogan qingjie benyuan de tantao" 西遊記若干情節本源的探討, 1970; "zaitan" 再探, 1975; "sitan" 四探, 1981; "wutan" 五探, 1983; "liutan" 六探, 1983; and "qitan" 七探, 1985.

<sup>160</sup> Among many sources on this issue, two typical examples are Wang Liqi's *Naixuetang ji*, pp. 269-92; and Li Quan's 李泉 "Shuihu quanzhuan zhushi xuanli" 水滸全傳注釋選例 1986, pp. 136-40.

<sup>161</sup> Among a large number of secondary sources on this topic, especially important to our discussion is Zhou Juntao's 周鈞韜 *Jin Ping Mei sucui lai yuan* 金瓶梅素材來源, 1991.

For an example of copying the *huaben* 話本 fiction, see Zhou Juntao's "Jin Ping Mei chaoyin huaben xiaoshuo kaotan" 金瓶梅抄引話本小說考探, 1988; for examples of copying other novels, see Liu Hui 劉輝 "Ruyi jun zhuan de kanke niandai jiqi yu Jin Ping Mei zhi guanxi" 如意君傳的刊刻年代及其與金瓶梅之關係, 1987, and Lu Dawei's 陸大偉 (David Rolston) "Lin Lanxiang yu Jin Ping Mei" 林蘭香與金瓶梅, 1987.

<sup>162</sup> For instance, see Zhang Qiang's 張強 "Lun Sanguo gushi dui Xiyou ji de yingxiang" 論三國故事對西遊記的影響, 1989.

<sup>163</sup> The Ming dynasty type of occasional correspondence develops during the Qing dynasty and becomes a systematic correspondence in *Rulin waishi*. Meanwhile, a combination of the occasional type and the systematic type of correspondence helps to produce a great multi-shadow design in *Honglou meng*, forever open to interpretation.

<sup>164</sup> We may note that the later Chinese "roman à clef" exists in a variety of sub-genres, including but not only the "novel of gods and demons".

<sup>165</sup> For relevant historical records, see Liu Tsun-yen's 柳存仁 *Hefengtang dushuji* 和風堂讀書記, 1977, 1:227-34. As for intertextual echoes between other Ming texts and *Fengshen yanyi*, see Su Xing's "Xiyou ji suotan" 西遊記瑣談, 1983.

<sup>166</sup> Among a large number of secondary sources, the following are just a few examples: for historical records, see Zheng Hesheng 鄭鶴聲 and Zheng Yijun's 鄭一鈞 "Zheng He xiixiyang shishi xinzheng" 鄭和下西洋史事新證, 1985, pp. 51-71; and Chen Xuelin's 陳學霖 "Ming Wang Jinghong xiixiyang shishigouchen" 明王景弘下西洋史事鉤沉, 1991, pp. 223-56. For a general discussion of "roman à clef" in the novel (including intertextual echoes), see Zhou Huabin's 周華斌 "Ping Xiyang ji" 評西洋記, 1987, pp. 143-56; and for detailed fiction/history correspondence and intertextual echoes, see Feng Hanyong's 馮漢鏞 "Xiyang ji fawei" 西洋記發微, 1988, pp. 121-34.

<sup>167</sup> See Lu Xun's *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue*, p. 138.

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