

International Workshop  
Illustration as a Mode of Commentary in Chinese Textual Traditions  
20-22 November 2024

# REWRITING HISTORY AS STORYTELLING: OFFICIAL LIFE AND ITS IMAGE IN FICTIONS OF THE MING-QING TRANSITION

Rainier Lanselle

École pratique des hautes études EPHE-PSL

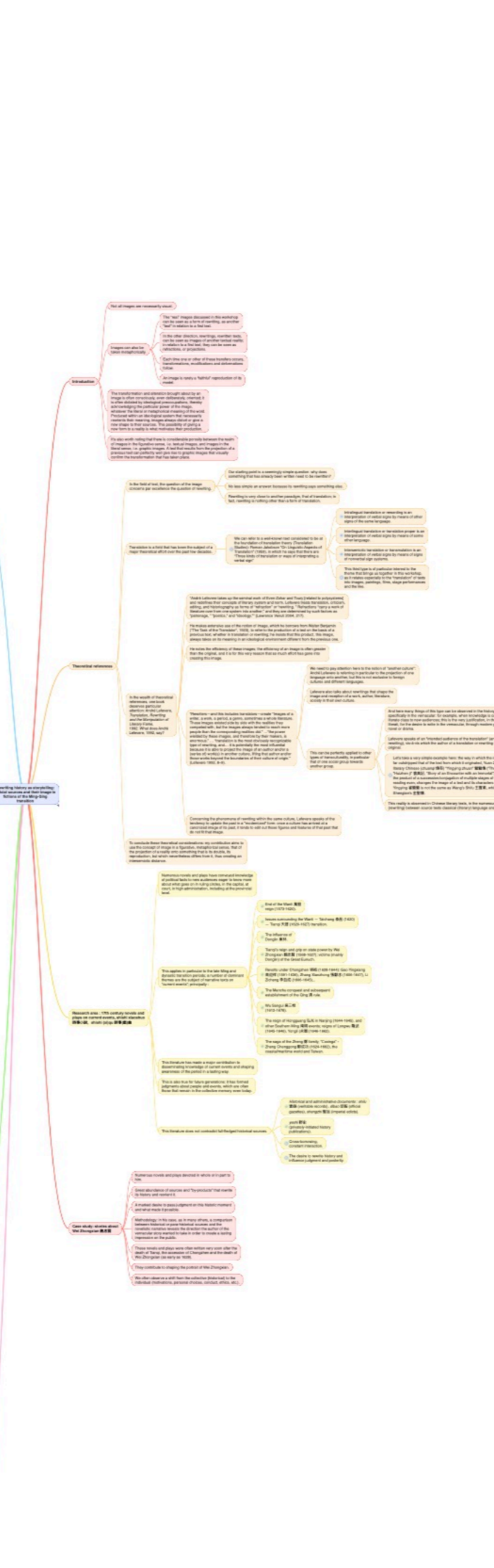
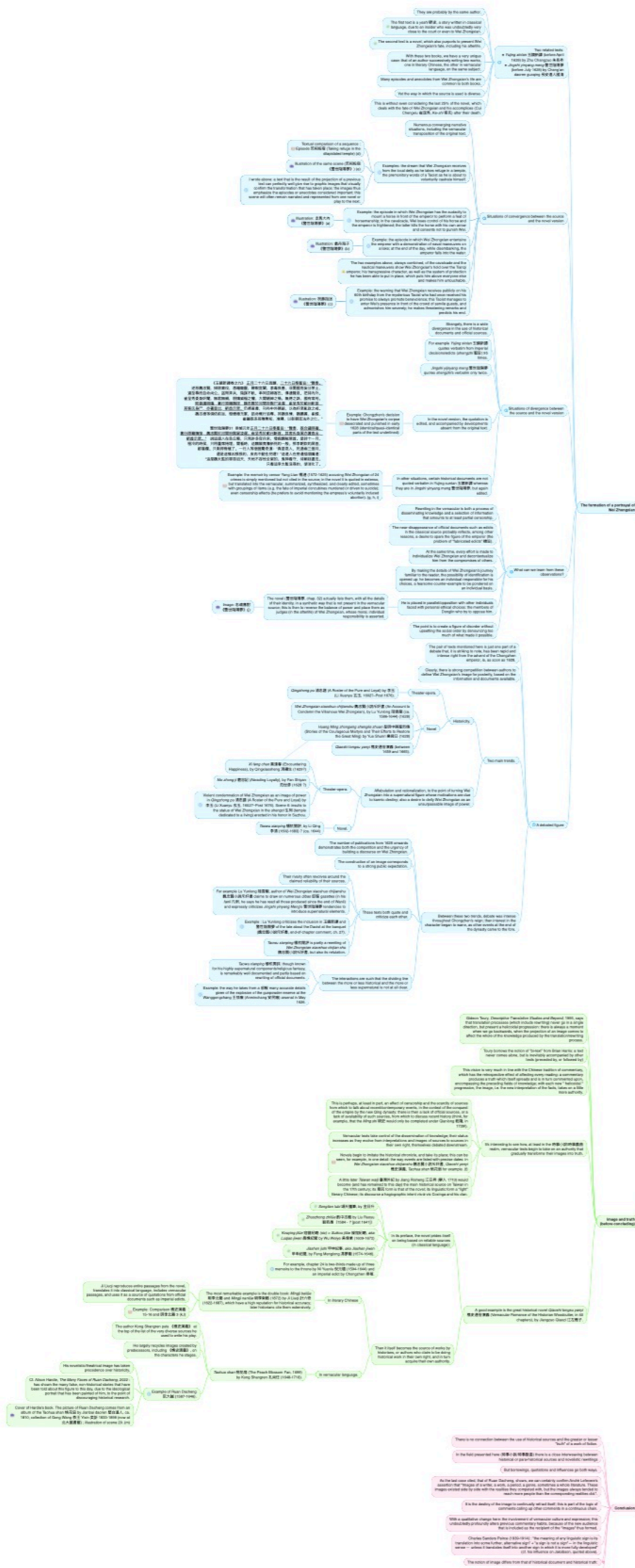
Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale CRCAO

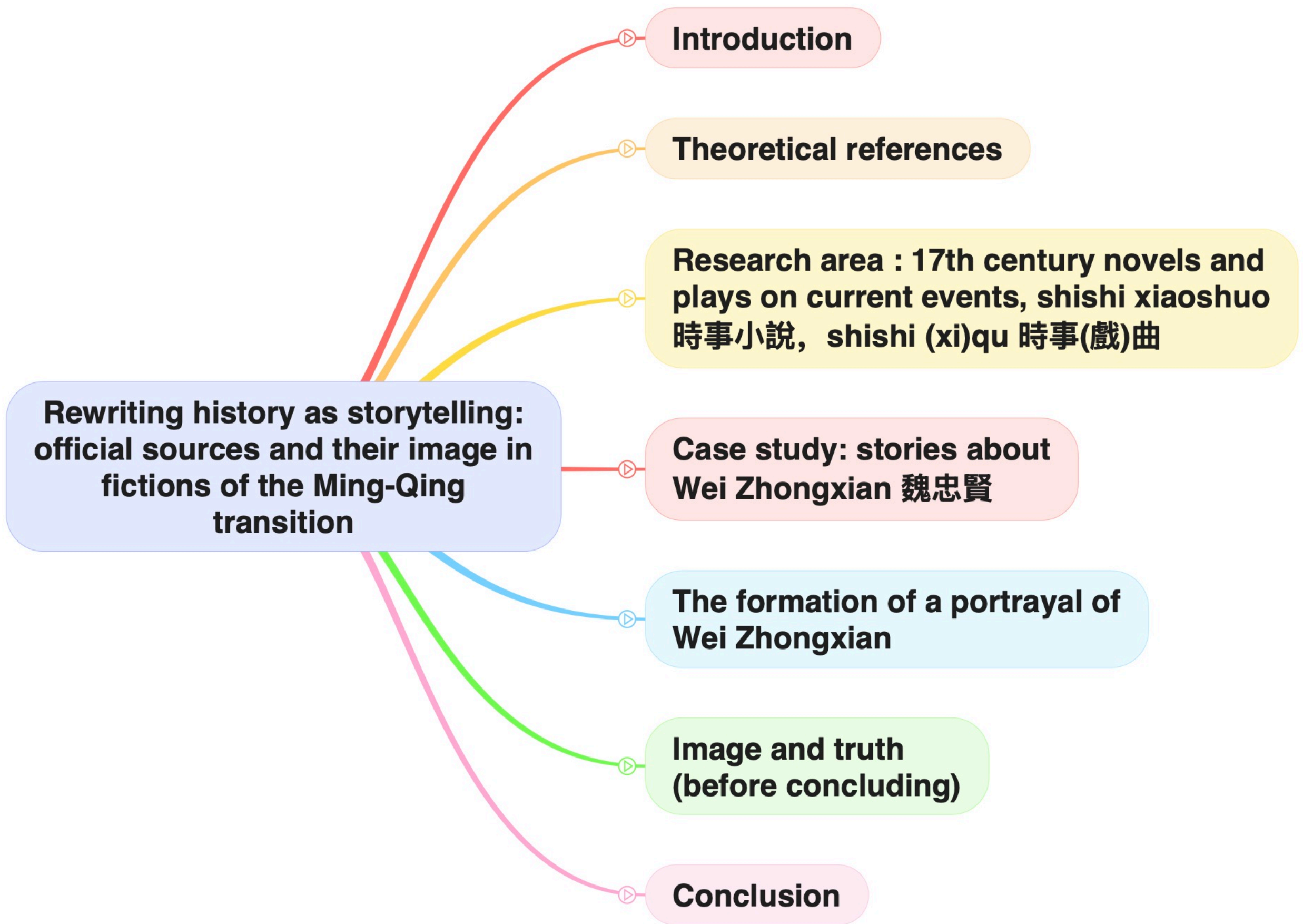


École Pratique  
des Hautes Études



Centre  
de recherche  
sur les civilisations  
de l'Asie orientale





## Introduction

```
graph LR; A[Introduction] --- B[Not all images are necessarily visual.]; A --- C[Images can also be taken metaphorically.]; A --- D[The transformation and alteration brought about by an image is often consciously, even deliberately, oriented; it is often dictated by ideological preoccupations, thereby acknowledging the particular power of the image, whatever the literal or metaphorical meaning of the word. Produced within an ideological system that necessarily reorients their meaning, images always distort or give a new shape to their sources. This possibility of giving a new form to a reality is what motivates their production.]; A --- E[It's also worth noting that there is considerable porosity between the realm of images in the figurative sense, i.e. textual images, and images in the literal sense, i.e. graphic images. A text that results from the projection of a previous text can perfectly well give rise to graphic images that visually confirm the transformation that has taken place.];
```

Not all images are necessarily visual.

Images can also be taken metaphorically.

The transformation and alteration brought about by an image is often consciously, even deliberately, oriented; it is often dictated by ideological preoccupations, thereby acknowledging the particular power of the image, whatever the literal or metaphorical meaning of the word. Produced within an ideological system that necessarily reorients their meaning, images always distort or give a new shape to their sources. This possibility of giving a new form to a reality is what motivates their production.

It's also worth noting that there is considerable porosity between the realm of images in the figurative sense, i.e. textual images, and images in the literal sense, i.e. graphic images. A text that results from the projection of a previous text can perfectly well give rise to graphic images that visually confirm the transformation that has taken place.

Images can also be taken metaphorically.

The “real” images discussed in this workshop can be seen as a form of rewriting, as another “text” in relation to a first text.

In the other direction, rewritings, rewritten texts, can be seen as images of another textual reality; in relation to a first text, they can be seen as refractions, or projections.

Each time one or other of these transfers occurs, transformations, modifications and deformations follow.

An image is rarely a “faithful” reproduction of its model.

## Theoretical references

```
graph LR; A[Theoretical references] --- B[In the field of text, the question of the image concerns par excellence the question of rewriting.]; A --- C[Translation is a field that has been the subject of a major theoretical effort over the past few decades.]; A --- D[In the wealth of theoretical references, one book deserves particular attention: André Lefevere, Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame, 1992. What does André Lefevere, 1992, say?]; A --- E[To conclude these theoretical considerations: my contribution aims to use the concept of image in a figurative, metaphorical sense, that of the projection of a reality onto something that is its double, its reproduction, but which nevertheless differs from it, thus creating an intersemiotic distance.];
```

In the field of text, the question of the image concerns par excellence the question of rewriting.

Translation is a field that has been the subject of a major theoretical effort over the past few decades.

In the wealth of theoretical references, one book deserves particular attention: André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 1992. What does André Lefevere, 1992, say?

To conclude these theoretical considerations: my contribution aims to use the concept of image in a figurative, metaphorical sense, that of the projection of a reality onto something that is its double, its reproduction, but which nevertheless differs from it, thus creating an intersemiotic distance.

In the field of text, the question of the image concerns par excellence the question of rewriting.

Our starting point is a seemingly simple question: why does something that has already been written need to be rewritten?

No less simple an answer: because its rewriting says something else.

Rewriting is very close to another paradigm, that of translation; in fact, rewriting is nothing other than a form of translation.

Translation is a field that has been the subject of a major theoretical effort over the past few decades.

We can refer to a well-known text considered to be at the foundation of translation theory (Translation Studies): Roman Jakobson “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” (1959), in which he says that there are “Three kinds of translation or ways of interpreting a verbal sign”



→ We can refer to a well-known text considered to be at the foundation of translation theory (Translation Studies): Roman Jakobson “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” (1959), in which he says that there are “Three kinds of translation or ways of interpreting a verbal sign”

1 Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.

2 Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.

3 Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.

This third type is of particular interest to the theme that brings us together in this workshop, → as it relates especially to the “translation” of texts into images, paintings, films, stage performances and the like.

In the wealth of theoretical references, one book deserves particular attention: André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 1992. What does André Lefevere, 1992, say?

“André Lefevere takes up the seminal work of Even-Zohar and Toury [related to polysystems] and redefines their concepts of literary system and norm. Lefevere treats translation, criticism, editing, and historiography as forms of “refraction” or “rewriting.” Refractions “carry a work of literature over from one system into another,” and they are determined by such factors as “patronage,” “poetics,” and “ideology.”” (Lawrence Venuti 2004, 217).

He makes extensive use of the notion of image, which he borrows from Walter Benjamin (“The Task of the Translator”, 1923), to refer to the production of a text on the basis of a previous text, whether in translation or rewriting; he insists that this product, this image, always takes on its meaning in an ideological environment different from the previous one.

He notes the efficiency of these images; the efficiency of an image is often greater than the original, and it is for this very reason that so much effort has gone into creating this image.

“Rewriters—and this includes translators—create “Images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes a whole literature. These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities did.” ... “the power wielded by these images, and therefore by their makers, is enormous.” ... “translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and... it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work(s) in another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin.” (Lefevere 1992, 8–9).

Concerning the phenomena of rewriting within the same culture, Lefevere speaks of the tendency to update the past in a “modernized” form: once a culture has arrived at a canonized image of its past, it tends to edit out those figures and features of that past that do not fit that image.

“Rewriters—and this includes translators—create “Images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes a whole literature. These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities did.” ... “the power wielded by these images, and therefore by their makers, is enormous.” ... “translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and... it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work(s) in another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin.” (Lefevere 1992, 8–9).

We need to pay attention here to the notion of “another culture”: André Lefevere is referring in particular to the projection of one language onto another, but this is not exclusive to foreign cultures and different languages.

Lefevere also talks about rewritings that shape the image and reception of a work, author, literature, society in their own culture.

This can be perfectly applied to other types of transculturality, in particular that of one social group towards another group.

This can be perfectly applied to other types of transculturality, in particular that of one social group towards another group.

And here many things of this type can be observed in the history of Chinese literature, specifically in the vernacular: for example, when knowledge is conveyed from the literate class to new audiences; this is the very justification, in the discourse of the literati, for the desire to write in the vernacular, through modern genres such as the novel or drama.

Lefevere speaks of an "intended audience of the translation" (and of the rewriting), vis-à-vis which the author of a translation or rewriting reshapes the original.

Let's take a very simple example here: the way in which the impact of Xixiang ji 西廂記 has far outstripped that of the text from which it originated, Yuan Zhen's 元稹 (779-831) tale in literary Chinese (*chuanqi* 傳奇) "Yingying zhuan" 鶯鶯傳 ("The Story of Yingying", aka "Huizhen ji" 會真記, "Story of an Encounter with an Immortal"); Wang Shifu's 王實甫 play is the product of a succession/conjugation of multiple stages of rewriting. Each rewrite, each reading even, changes the image of a text and its characters: Dong Jieyuan 董解元's Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯 is not the same as Wang's Shifu 王實甫, which is not the same as Jin Shengtan's 金聖嘆.

This reality is observed in Chinese literary texts, in the numerous cases of interaction (rewriting) between source texts classical (literary) language and target texts in vernacular

**Research area : 17th century novels and plays on current events, shishi xiaoshuo  
時事小說, shishi (xi)qu 時事(戲)曲**

Numerous novels and plays have conveyed knowledge of political facts to new audiences eager to know more about what goes on in ruling circles, in the capital, at court, in high administration, including at the provincial level.

This applies in particular to the late Ming and dynastic transition periods; a number of dominant themes are the subject of narrative texts on “current events”; principally :

This literature has made a major contribution to disseminating knowledge of current events and shaping awareness of the period in a lasting way.

This is also true for future generations: it has formed judgments about people and events, which are often those that remain in the collective memory even today.

This literature does not contradict full-fledged historical sources.

This applies in particular to the late Ming and dynastic transition periods; a number of dominant themes are the subject of narrative texts on “current events”; principally :

✓ End of the Wanli 萬曆 reign (1573-1620).

✓ Issues surrounding the Wanli — Taichang 泰昌 (1620) — Tianqi 天啓 (1620-1627) transition.

✓ The influence of Donglin 東林.

✓ Tianqi’s reign and grip on state power by Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568-1627); victims (mainly Donglin) of the Great Eunuch.

✓ Revolts under Chongzhen 崇禎 (1628-1644): Gao Yingxiang 高迎祥 (1591-1636), Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠 (1606-1647), Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606-1645)...

✓ The Manchu conquest and subsequent establishment of the Qing 清 rule.

✓ Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612-1678).

✓ The reign of Hongguang 弘光 in Nanjing (1644-1645), and other Southern Ming 南明 events; reigns of Longwu 隆武 (1645-1646), Yongli 永曆 (1646-1662).

✓ The saga of the Zheng 鄭 family, “Coxinga” - Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624-1662), the coastal/maritime world and Taiwan.

This literature does not contradict full-fledged historical sources.

*Historical and administrative documents : shilu*  
✓ 實錄 (veritable records), *dibao* 邸報 (official gazettes), *shengzhi* 聖旨 (imperial edicts).

*yeshi* 野史  
✓ (privately-initiated history publications).

➔ Cross-borrowing,  
constant interaction.

➔ The desire to rewrite history and  
influence judgment and posterity.

**Case study: stories about  
Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢**

Numerous novels and plays devoted in whole or in part to him.

Great abundance of sources and "by-products" that rewrite its history and reorient it.

A marked desire to pass judgment on this historic moment and what made it possible.

Methodology: in his case, as in many others, a comparison between historical or para-historical sources and the novelistic narrative reveals the direction the author of the vernacular story wanted to take in order to create a lasting impression on the public.

These novels and plays were often written very soon after the death of Tianqi, the accession of Chongzhen and the death of Wei Zhongxian (as early as 1628).

They contribute to shaping the portrait of Wei Zhongxian.

We often observe a shift from the collective (historical) to the individual (motivations, personal choices, conduct, ethics, etc.).



## The formation of a portrayal of Wei Zhongxian

Two related texts:

- *Yujing xintan* 玉鏡新譚 (before April 1628) by Zhu Changzuo 朱長祚
- *Jingshi yinyang meng* 警世陰陽夢 (before July 1628) by Chang'an daoren guoqing 長安道人國清

Situations of convergence between the source and the novel version

Situations of divergence between the source and the novel version

What can we learn from these observations?

✓ A debated figure

Two related texts:

- *Yujing xintan* 玉鏡新譚 (before April 1628) by Zhu Changzuo 朱長祚
- *Jingshi yinyang meng* 警世陰陽夢 (before July 1628) by Chang'an daoren guoqing 長安道人國清

They are probably by the same author.

✓ The first text is a *yeshi* 野史, a story written in classical language, due to an insider who was undoubtedly very close to the court or even to Wei Zhongxian.

✓ The second text is a novel, which also purports to present Wei Zhongxian's fate, including his afterlife.

With these two books, we have a very unique case: that of an author successively writing two works, one in literary Chinese, the other in vernacular language, on the same subject.

Many episodes and anecdotes from Wei Zhongxian's life are common to both books.

Yet the way in which the source is used is diverse.

This is without even considering the last 25% of the novel, which deals with the fate of Wei Zhongxian and his accomplices (Cui Chengxiu 崔逞秀, Ke-shi 客氏) after their death.

Numerous converging narrative situations, including the vernacular transposition of the original text.

Examples: the dream that Wei Zhongxian receives from the local deity as he takes refuge in a temple, the premonitory words of a Taoist as he is about to voluntarily castrate himself.

Example: the episode in which Wei Zhongxian has the audacity to mount a horse in front of the emperor to perform a feat of horsemanship; in the cavalcade, Wei loses control of his horse and the emperor is frightened; the latter kills the horse with his own arrow and consents not to punish Wei.


Example: the episode in which Wei Zhongxian entertains the emperor with a demonstration of naval maneuvers on a lake; at the end of the day, while disembarking, the emperor falls into the water.


The two examples above, always combined, of the cavalcade and the nautical maneuvers show Wei Zhongxian's hold over the Tianqi emperor, his transgressive character, as well as the system of protection he has been able to put in place, which puts him above everyone else and makes him untouchable.

Example: the warning that Wei Zhongxian receives publicly on his 60th birthday from the mysterious Taoist who had once received his promise to always promote benevolence; this Taoist manages to enter Wei's presence in front of the crowd of servile guests, and admonishes him severely; he makes threatening remarks and predicts his end.

Situations of convergence between the source and the novel version

→ Examples: the dream that Wei Zhongxian receives from the local deity as he takes refuge in a temple, the premonitory words of a Taoist as he is about to voluntarily castrate himself.

Textual comparison of a sequence :  
 Episode 荒祠投宿 (Taking refuge in the dilapidated temple) (d)

 Illustration of the same scene (荒祠投宿  
《警世陰陽夢》 ) (e)

→ I wrote above: a text that is the result of the projection of a previous text can perfectly well give rise to graphic images that visually confirm the transformation that has taken place; the images thus emphasize the episodes or anecdotes considered important; this scene will often remain narrated and represented from one novel or play to the next.

偶過村落，臥廢祠拱案間，

便走到空野之處，見一所破籬破落的土地祠，瓦礫滿地，草萊堆砌。...

以傍列小像作枕，

便搬倒泥塑的一個小鬼來做枕頭，把供桌兒刷乾淨了，就睡在上邊。...

鼾息如雷。

且說魏進忠一躺下就睡著了，鼾聲如雷。

抵雞鳴將覺，猶夢寐中，

到五更還未醒哩，似夢非夢，

見白須老人恭揖跪告曰：

見著一個白須老人站在旁邊，

怎生模樣，但見：

點霜兩鬢，銀絲樣灑灑虬髯，駕霧一身，泥塑般巍巍神相。頭戴凌雲三角嵌線巾，身穿蜜色四緗回襴氅。腰系百瓣黃絲縵，手持九節斑竹杖。酒中未醒，依違醉後魔魂；夢里猶疑，彷彿座間靈像。

且說魏進忠在夢中，見這老人說道：

「我此方司土之神也。因上公過止，侍立終宵。不敢違慢，唯此小鬼求救之。」

「小神是本坊司土之神。昨日上公大貴人到來，小神侍立擁護。上公此去，前程遠大，切莫愁煩。這個小鬼望乞寬赦。」

忠賢遂起，而神忽不見，

進忠忽然醒來，把眼兒抹一抹，睜著一看，不見這個老人，

瞻所設像，蓋合夢中所見者也。

便掉過頭來，看那座上伸像，就是夢里一般的。

鳥聲喧林麓，車音載道間，天將曙矣。於是，忠賢忻然有喜色，頓萌妄念，言無後福，安能動鬼神耶？

進忠心裡便喜道：「靈神又指俺路頭兒，但是有什麼本事，掙得個好日？」

荒祠投宿



Example: the episode in which Wei Zhongxian has the audacity to mount a horse in front of the emperor to perform a feat of horsemanship; in the cavalcade, Wei loses control of his horse and the emperor is frightened; the latter kills the horse with his own arrow and consents not to punish Wei.



Illustration: 走馬大內  
《警世陰陽夢》 (a)

走馬大內







Example: the episode in which Wei Zhongxian entertains the emperor with a demonstration of naval maneuvers on a lake; at the end of the day, while disembarking, the emperor falls into the water.



Illustration: 戲舟海子  
《警世陰陽夢》 (b)

戲舟海子





Example: the warning that Wei Zhongxian receives publicly on his 60th birthday from the mysterious Taoist who had once received his promise to always promote benevolence; this Taoist manages to enter Wei's presence in front of the crowd of servile guests, and admonishes him severely; he makes threatening remarks and predicts his end.



Illustration: 祝壽指迷  
《警世陰陽夢》 (c)

祝壽指迷



Situations of divergence between the source and the novel version

Strangely, there is a wide divergence in the use of historical documents and official sources.

For example *Yujing xintan* 玉鏡新譚 quotes verbatim from imperial decisions/edicts (*shengzhi* 聖旨) 95 times.


*Jingshi yinyang meng* 警世陰陽夢 quotes *shengzhi*'s verbatim only twice.

In the novel version, the quotation is edited, and accompanied by developments absent from the original text.

In other situations, certain historical documents are not quoted verbatim in *Yujing xintan* 玉鏡新譚 whereas they are in *Jingshi yinyang meng* 警世陰陽夢, but again edited.

In the novel version, the quotation is edited, and accompanied by developments absent from the original text.



Example: Chongzhen's decision to have Wei Zhongxian's corpse  desecrated and punished in early 1628 (identical/quasi-identical parts of the text underlined):

Example: Chongzhen's decision to have Wei Zhongxian's corpse desecrated and punished in early 1628 (identical/quasi-identical parts of the text underlined):

《玉鏡新譚卷之九》 正月二十六日具題，二十六日奉聖旨：“覽奏。  
逆惡魏忠賢，掃除廝役，憑籍寵靈，睥睨宮闈，荼毒良善，非開國而妄分茅土，  
逼至尊而自命尚公。盜帑弄兵，陰謀不軌，串同逆婦客氏，傳遞聲息，把持內外。  
崔呈秀委身奸闖，無君無親，朋攘威福之權，大開縉紳之禍。無將之誅，國有常刑。  
既會議明確，著行原籍撫按，魏忠賢於河間府戮尸凌遲，崔呈秀於薊州斬首，  
其客氏身尸，亦著查出，斬首示眾。仍將爰書，刊布中外曉諭，以為奸惡亂政之戒。  
魏志德等俱依前旨，發煙瘴充軍，誥命概行追奪。其魏良棟、魏鵬翼、崔鏗、  
崔鑰既系孩稚無知，准釋，以彰朝廷法外之仁。”

警世陰陽夢31 崇禎元年正月二十六日奉聖旨：“覽奏，既合議明確。  
著行原籍撫按，魏忠賢於河間府戮屍凌遲。崔呈秀於薊州斬首。其客氏身屍亦著查出，  
斬首示眾。” 說這道人在阜丘縣，只見許多官兵來，發掘魏賊屍首。是時十一月，  
極冷的時候，只用蘆席捲埋。開看時，這魏賊竟像新死的一般。那李朝欽的屍首，  
都腐爛。只剩得骨殖了。一行人等個個驚奇道：“真是惡人，死過兩三個月，  
還是這樣凶狠狠的，皮肉不動些兒哩？”這道人在旁邊插個嘴道：  
“這是魏太監的罪惡滔天，天地不容他全屍的。鬼神看守，待朝廷盡法。  
只看這李太監沒罪的，使消化了。

In other situations, certain historical documents are not quoted verbatim in Yujing suntan 玉鏡新譚 whereas they are in Jingshi yinyang meng 警世陰陽夢, but again edited.



Example: the memoir by censor Yang Lian 楊漣 (1572-1625) accusing Wei Zhongxian of 24 crimes is simply mentioned but not cited in the source; in the novel it is quoted in extenso, but translated into the vernacular, summarized, synthesized, and clearly edited, sometimes with groupings of items (e.g. the fate of imperial concubines murdered or driven to suicide); even censorship effects (he prefers to avoid mentioning the empress's voluntarily induced abortion). (g, h, i)



左副都御史楊漣疏參魏忠賢二十四罪 (明史紀事本末, 71)

警世陰陽夢 version

忠賢本市井無賴。中年淨身，竄入內地。初猶謬為小忠、小信以倖恩，繼乃敢為大奸、大惡以亂政。祖制，以擬旨專責閣臣。自忠賢擅權，多出傳奉，或徑自內批。壞祖宗二百餘年之政體，大罪一。

第一，說他變亂了太祖的祖制，不由閣下票擬奏章。都是自己傳奉，是非倒置，殺戮橫加。

劉一燝、周嘉謨，顧命大臣也，忠賢令孫杰論去。急於翦己之忌，不容陛下不改父之臣，大罪二。

第二，說閣老劉一燝、吏部尚書周嘉謨，同受泰昌爺顧命的，都是正直的老臣。魏賊教一個給事中論了他去。

先帝賓天，實有隱恨。孫慎行、鄒元標以公義發憤，忠賢悉排去之。顧於黨護選侍之沈淮，曲意網繆，終加蟒玉。親亂賊而讐忠義，大罪三。

第三，說泰昌昇天時，有舉春秋大義的禮部尚書孫慎行、重萬古綱常的鄒元標，也教言官論了去。

王紀、鍾羽正先年功在國本。及紀為司寇，執法如山；羽正為司空，清修如鶴。忠賢構黨斥逐，必不容盛時有正色立朝之直臣，大罪四。

第四，說刑部尚書王紀、吏部鍾羽正，先年廷諍有功，議立東宮的，都被矯旨削籍。

<p>國家最重無如枚卜。忠賢一手握定，力阻首推之孫慎行、盛以弘，更為他辭以錮其出。豈真欲門生宰相乎？大罪五。</p>	<p>第五，說不准枚卜，力阻孫慎行、盛以弘拜相。</p>
<p>爵人於朝，莫重廷推。去歲南太宰、北少宰皆用陪推，致一時名賢不安其位。顛倒銓政，掉弄機權，大罪六。</p>	<p>第六，說不容吏部推升，遷擢出自已私。</p>
<p>聖政初新，正資忠直。乃滿朝薦、文震孟、熊德陽、江秉謙、徐大相、毛士龍、侯震暘等，抗論稍忤，立行貶黜，屢經恩典，竟阻賜環。長安謂天子之怒易解，忠賢之怒難調，大罪七。</p>	<p>第七，說不奉朝廷起用，以立己戚。</p>
<p>然猶曰外廷臣子也。去歲南郊之日，傳聞宮中有一貴人，以德性貞靜，荷上寵注。忠賢恐其露己驕橫，託言急病，置之死地。是陛下不能保其貴幸矣，大罪八。</p>	
<p>猶曰無名封也。裕妃以有妊傳封，中外方為慶幸。忠賢惡其不附己，矯旨勒令自盡。是陛下不能保其妃嬪矣，大罪九。</p>	<p>第八、第九、第十都說殺害妃嬪。</p>
<p>猶曰在妃嬪也。中宮有慶，已經成男，乃忽焉告殞，傳聞忠賢與奉聖夫人實有謀焉。是陛下且不能保其子矣，大罪十。</p>	

祖制，不蓄內兵，原有深意。忠賢與奸相沈濬創立內操，藪匿奸宄，安知無大盜、刺客為敵國窺伺者潛入其中。一旦變生肘腋，可為深慮，大罪二十二。

第二十二，說故違祖制，擅立內操。

忠賢進香涿州，警蹕傳呼，清塵墊道，人以為大駕出幸。及其歸也，改駕四馬，羽幢青蓋，夾護環遮，儼然乘輿矣。其間入幕効謀，叩馬獻策者，實繁有徒。忠賢此時自視為何如人哉？大罪二十三。

第二十三，說涿州進香，潛用乘輿。

夫寵極則驕，恩多成怨。聞今春忠賢走馬御前，陛下射殺其馬，貸以不死。忠賢不自伏罪，進有傲色，退有怨言，朝夕隄防，介介不釋。從來亂臣賊子，只爭一念，放肆遂至不可收拾，奈何養虎兇於肘腋間乎！此又寸鬻忠賢，不足盡其辜者，大罪二十四。

第二十四，說走馬御前，驚動了聖駕。

What can we learn from these observations?

Rewriting in the vernacular is both a process of disseminating knowledge and a selection of information that amounts to at least partial censorship.

The near-disappearance of official documents such as edicts in the classical source probably reflects, among other reasons, a desire to spare the figure of the emperor (the problem of “fabricated edicts” 矯旨).

At the same time, every effort is made to individualize Wei Zhongxian and decontextualize him from the compromises of others.

By making the details of Wei Zhongxian's journey familiar to the reader, the possibility of identification is opened up: he becomes an individual responsible for his choices, a fearsome counter-example to be pondered on an individual basis.

He is placed in parallel/opposition with other individuals faced with personal ethical choices: the members of Donglin who try to oppose him.

The point is to create a figure of disorder without upsetting the social order by denouncing too much of what made it possible.

He is placed in parallel/opposition with other individuals faced with personal ethical choices: the members of Donglin who try to oppose him.



The novel (警世陰陽夢, chap. 32) actually lists them, with all the details of their identity, in a synthetic way that is not present in the source in literary language; this is then to reverse the balance of power and place them as judges (in the afterlife) of Wei Zhongxian, whose moral, individual responsibility is asserted.

The novel (警世陰陽夢, chap. 32) actually lists them, with all the details of their identity, in a synthetic way that is not present in the source in literary language; this is then to reverse the balance of power and place them as judges (in the afterlife) of Wei Zhongxian, whose moral, individual responsibility is asserted.



Image: 忠魂應對  
《警世陰陽夢》 (j)

忠冤歷對



✓ A debated figure

The pair of texts mentioned here is just one part of a debate that, it is striking to note, has been rapid and intense right from the advent of the Chongzhen emperor, ie, as soon as 1628.

Clearly, there is strong competition between authors to define Wei Zhongxian's image for posterity, based on the information and documents available.

▶ Two main trends.

▶ Between these two trends, debate was intense throughout Chongzhen's reign; then interest in the character began to wane, as other events at the end of the dynasty came to the fore.



Two main trends.

```
graph LR; A[Two main trends.] --- B[Historicity.]; A --- C[Affabulation and rationalization, to the point of turning Wei Zhongxian into a supernatural figure whose motivations are due to karmic destiny; also a desire to deify Wei Zhongxian as an unsurpassable image of power.]
```

Historicity.

Affabulation and rationalization, to the point of turning Wei Zhongxian into a supernatural figure whose motivations are due to karmic destiny; also a desire to deify Wei Zhongxian as an unsurpassable image of power.

**Historicity.**

```
graph LR; A[Historicity.] --> B[Theater-opera.]; A --> C[Novel];
```

**Theater-opera.**

**Novel**

Theater-opera.

*Qingzhong pu* 清忠譜 (A Roster of the Pure and Loyal) by 李玉  
(Li Xuanyu 玄玉, 1602?–Post 1676).

Novel

*Wei Zhongxian xiaoshuo chijianshu* 魏忠賢小說斥奸書 (An Account to Condemn the Villainous Wei Zhongxian), by Lu Yunlong 陸雲龍 (ca. 1586-1644) (1628)

*Huang Ming zhongxing shenglie zhuan* 皇明中興聖烈傳 (Stories of the Courageous Martyrs and Their Efforts to Restore the Great Ming) by Yue Shunri 樂舜日 (1628)

*Qiaoshi tongsu yanyi* 樵史通俗演義 (between 1659 and 1665).

Affabulation and rationalization, to the point of turning Wei Zhongxian into a supernatural figure whose motivations are due to karmic destiny; also a desire to deify Wei Zhongxian as an unsurpassable image of power.

Theater-opera.

Novel.

Theater-opera.

*Xi feng chun* 喜逢春 (Encountering Happiness), by Qingxiaosheng 清嘯生 (1629?)

*Mo zhong ji* 磨忠記 (Abrading Loyalty), by Fan Shiyan 范世彥 (1628 ?)

Violent condemnation of Wei Zhongxian as an image of power in *Qingzhong pu* 清忠譜 (A Roster of the Pure and Loyal) by  
→ 李玉 (Li Xuanyu 玄玉, 1602?–Post 1676). Scene 6: insults to the statue of Wei Zhongxian in the *shengci* 生祠 (temple dedicated to a living) erected in his honor in Suzhou.

Novel.

*Taowu xianping* 櫛机閒評, by Li Qing  
李清 (1602-1683) ? (ca. 1644)

Between these two trends, debate was intense throughout Chongzhen's reign; then interest in the character began to wane, as other events at the end of the dynasty came to the fore.

The number of publications from 1628 onwards demonstrates both the competition and the urgency of building a discourse on Wei Zhongxian.

The construction of an image corresponds to a strong public expectation.

These texts both quote and criticize each other.

The interactions are such that the dividing line between the more or less historical and the more or less supernatural is not at all clear.



These texts both quote and criticize each other.

Their rivalry often revolves around the claimed reliability of their sources.

For example Lu Yunlong 陸雲龍, author of *Wei Zhongxian xiaoshuo chijianshu* 魏忠賢小說斥奸書 claims to draw on numerous *dibao* 邸報 gazettes (in his *fanli* 凡例, he says he has read all those produced since the end of Wanli) and expressly criticizes *Jingshi yinyang Meng's* 警世陰陽夢 tendencies to introduce supernatural elements.

Example : Lu Yunlong criticizes the inclusion in *Yujing Xin Tan* 玉鏡新譚 and  
→ *Jingshi yinyang Meng* 警世陰陽夢 of the tale about the Daoist at the banquet (魏忠賢小說斥奸書, end-of-chapter comment, ch. 27).

*Taowu xianping* 橈杓閒評 is partly a rewriting of *Wei Zhongxian xiaoshuo chijian shu* 魏忠賢小說斥奸書, but also its refutation.

The interactions are such that the dividing line between the more or less historical and the more or less supernatural is not at all clear.

*Taowu xianping* 禱杌閒評, though known for his highly supernatural components/religious fantasy, is remarkably well documented and partly based on rewriting of official documents.

Example: the way he takes from a 邸報 many accurate details given of the explosion of the gunpowder reserve at the Wanggongchang 王恭廠 (Anminchang 安民廠) arsenal in May 1626.

**Image and truth  
(before concluding)**

Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, 1995, says that translation processes (which include rewriting) never go in a single direction, but present a helicoidal progression: there is always a moment when we go backwards, when the projection of an image comes to affect the whole of the knowledge produced by the translation/rewriting process.

Toury borrows the notion of "bi-text" from Brian Harris: a text never comes alone, but is inevitably accompanied by other texts (preceded by, or followed by)

This vision is very much in line with the Chinese tradition of commentary, which has the retrospective effect of affecting every reading: a commentary produces a truth which itself spreads and is in its turn commented upon, encompassing the preceding fields of knowledge; with each new "helicoidal" progression, the image, i.e. the new interpretation of the facts, takes on a little more authority.


It's interesting to see how, at least in the 時事小說/時事戲曲 realm, vernacular texts begin to take on an authority that gradually transforms their images into truth.

A good example is the great historical novel *Qiaoshi tongsu yanyi* 樵史通俗演義 (Vernacular Romance of the Historian Woodcutter, in 40 chapters), by Jiangzuo Qiaozi 江左樵子.

It's interesting to see how, at least in the 時事小說/時事戲曲 realm, vernacular texts begin to take on an authority that gradually transforms their images into truth.

This is perhaps, at least in part, an effect of censorship and the scarcity of sources from which to talk about recent/contemporary events, in the context of the conquest of the empire by the new Qing dynasty: there is then a lack of official sources, or a lack of availability of such sources, from which to discuss recent history (think, for example, that the *Ming shi* 明史 would only be completed under Qianlong 乾隆, in 1739!).

Vernacular texts take control of the dissemination of knowledge; their status increases as they evolve from interpretations and images of sources to sources in their own right, themselves debated downstream.

Novels begin to imitate the historical chronicle, and take its place; this can be seen, for example, in one detail: the way events are listed with precise dates: in  *Wei Zhongxian xiaoshuo chijianshu* 魏忠賢小說斥奸書, *Qiaoshi yanyi* 樵史演義, *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 for example. (f)

A little later *Taiwan waiji* 臺灣外紀 by Jiang Risheng 江日昇 (舉人 1713) would become (and has remained to this day) the main historical source on Taiwan in the 17th century; its 章回 form is that of the novel; its linguistic form a “light” literary Chinese; its discourse a hagiographic intent vis-à-vis Coxinga and his clan.

第五回

天啓二年事

大指亾命興內操

廣布番旗開告密

卷二

第六回

天啓三年事

張貴人圓寵殞身

李成妃斥奸貶號

第七回

天啓四年事

斥異已連逐大臣

陷忠貞捉拿內翰

第八回

天啓四年事

楊左都劾奸數罪

萬工部殺身成仁

第九回

天啓四年事

A good example is the great historical novel *Qiaoshi tongsu yanyi* 樵史通俗演義 (Vernacular Romance of the Historian Woodcutter, in 40 chapters), by Jiangzuo Qiaozi 江左樵子.

In its preface, the novel prides itself on being based on reliable sources (in classical language):

Then it itself becomes the source of works by historians, or authors who claim to be doing historical work in their own right, and in turn acquire their own authority.

In its preface, the novel prides itself on being based on reliable sources (in classical language):

✓ *Songtian lubi* 頌天臚筆, by 金日升

✓ *Zhuozhong zhilüe* 酌中志略 by Liu Ruoyu 劉若愚 (1584 - ? [post 1641])

✓ *Kouying jilüe* 寇營紀略 (*sic*) = *Suikou jilüe* 綏寇紀略, aka *Luqiao jiwen* 鹿樵紀聞 by Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609-1672)

✓ *Jiashen jishi* 甲申紀事, aka *Jiashen jiwen* 甲申紀聞, by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646).

For example, chapter 24 is two-thirds made up of three → memoirs to the throne by Ni Yuanlu 倪元璐 (1594-1644) and an imperial edict by Chongzhen 崇禎.

Then it itself becomes the source of works by historians, or authors who claim to be doing historical work in their own right, and in turn acquire their own authority.

In literary Chinese

In vernacular language.



In literary Chinese

The most remarkable example is the double book: *Mingji beilüe* 明季北略 and *Mingji nanlüe* 明季南略 (1872) by Ji Liuqi 計六奇 (1622-1687), which have a high reputation for historical accuracy; later historians cite them extensively.

The most remarkable example is the double book: *Mingji beilüe* 明季北略 and *Mingji nānlüe* 明季南略 (1872) by Ji Liuqi 計六奇 (1622-1687), which have a high reputation for historical accuracy; later historians cite them extensively.

Ji Liuqi reproduces entire passages from the novel, translates it into classical language, includes vernacular passages, and uses it as a source of quotations from official documents such as imperial edicts.

 Example: Comparison 樵史演義 15-16 and 明季北略 3 (k,l)

在途擁兵

在途擁兵

千餘人，皆久蓄亡命，弓上弦，刀出鞘，聲勢鴟張，如叛逆然。與其降發鳳陽，其謀逆而後擒之，勞師動眾，靡有歲月，不若

云云。乞

早早肆諸市朝，

早肆諸市朝。

除此妖孽。

這本一上，崇禎即傳旨兵部道：

疏奏，上即傳旨兵部云：

朕臨御以來，深思治理。乃有逆黨魏忠賢竊國柄，奸盜內帑，誣陷忠直，草菅多命，狠如狼虎。本當肆市以雪眾冤，姑從輕發鳳陽。豈巨惡不思自改，致將素蓄亡命之徒，身帶凶戈惡械隨獲，勢若叛然，朕心甚惡，著錦衣衛差的當官旗前去扭解，交押赴彼處交割。其經過地方，著該撫按等官，多撥營兵，沿途護送。所有跟隨群奸，即時擒拿具奏，毋情容賂賄。若有疏虞，罪有所歸。爾兵部馬上著官星遞彼處，屬該衙門。欽此。

朕臨御以來，深思治理，乃有逆黨魏忠賢擅竊國柄，奸盜內帑，誣陷忠良，草菅多命，狠如狼虎，本當肆市，以雪象冤，姑從輕降發鳳陽，豈巨惡不思自改，致將素蓄亡命之徒，身帶兇刃，環擁隨護，勢若叛然，朕心甚惡，著錦衣衛差的當官旗前去扭解，押赴彼處交割，其經過地方，著該撫按等官，多撥官兵，沿途護送，所有跟隨群奸，即時擒拿具奏，毋得縱容遺患。若有疏虞，罪有所歸。爾兵部馬上差官星速傳示各該衙門。欽此。

### 魏忠賢自縊

旨意一下，衛裡即便差錦衣旗千戶吳國安前去扭解，

兵部聞旨，即差千戶吳國安，前去扭解魏忠賢，

兵部也在馬上差官傳示各衙門。李永貞早已著心腹人飛報魏忠賢去了。此魏忠賢正和李朝欽排塔行來，

到了新店地方，離阜城縣只得二十里了。

至新店，距阜城縣二十里，

## 樵史演義 15-16

## 明季北略 3

有個京師人姓白，幼時曾讀幾年書，學得些《掛枝兒》，在外廂唱，要他聽得，他唱道：

時有京師白書生，作《掛枝兒》唱云：

聽初更，鼓正敲，心兒懊惱。想當初，開夜宴，何等奢豪。進羊羔，斟美酒，笙歌聒噪。如今寂寥荒店裡，只好醉村醪。又怕酒淡愁濃也，怎把愁腸掃！

聽初更，鼓正敲，心兒懊惱。想當初，開夜宴，何等奢豪。進羊羔，斟美酒，笙歌聒噪。如今寂寥荒店裡，只好醉村醪。又怕酒淡愁濃也，怎把愁腸掃！

二更時，展轉愁，夢兒難就。想當初，睡牙床，錦繡衾裯。如今蘆為幃，土為炕，寒風入牖。壁穿寒月冷，檐淺夜蛩愁。可憐滿枕淒涼也，重起沿房走。

二更時，展轉愁，夢兒難就。想當初，睡牙床，錦繡衾裯。如今蘆為幃，土為炕，寒風入牖。壁穿寒月冷，檐淺夜蛩愁。可憐滿枕淒涼也，重起繞房走。

夜將中，鼓冬冬，更籌三下。夢才成，還驚覺，無限嗟呀。想當初，勢傾朝，誰人不怕。九卿稱晚輩，宰相謁私衙。如今勢去時衰也，零落如飄瓦。

夜將中，鼓鞞鞞，更鑼三下。夢才成，還驚覺，無限嗟呀。想當初，勢傾朝，誰人不敬？九卿稱晚輩，宰相謁私衙。如今勢去時衰也，零落如飄瓦草。

城樓上，鼓四敲，星移斗轉。思量起，當日裡，蟒玉朝天。如今別龍樓，辭鳳閣，淒淒孤館。雞聲茅店月，月影草橋煙。真個目斷長途也，一望一回遠！

城樓上，鼓四敲，星移斗轉。思量起，當日裡，蟒玉朝天。如今別龍樓，辭鳳樓，淒淒孤館。雞聲茅店月，月影草橋煙。真個目斷長途也，一望一回遠！

鬧攘攘，人催起，五更天氣。正寒冬，風凜冽，霜拂徵衣。更何人，效殷勤，寒溫彼此。隨行的是寒月影，吆喝的是馬聲嘶。似這般樣荒涼也，真個不如死！

鬧攘攘，人催起，五更天氣。正寒冬，風凜冽，霜拂徵衣。更何人，效殷勤，寒溫彼此。隨行的是寒月影，吆喝的是馬聲嘶。似這般樣荒涼也，真個不如死！

兩個說了哭，哭了又說。只聽是外廂《五更傳》朗朗唱過，句句譏諷忠賢，忠賢聞了又惶愧、又淒楚，便道：罷，罷，罷！今夜是咱的死期了！於是也次第上吊。

在外廂唱徹五更，形其昔時豪勢，今日淒涼，言言譏刺，忠賢聞之，益淒悶，遂與李朝欽縊死。

In vernacular language.



*Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (The Peach Blossom Fan, 1699)  
by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718).

*Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (The Peach Blossom Fan, 1699)  
by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718).

The author Kong Shangren puts 《樵史演義》 at the top of the list of the very diverse sources he used to write his play.

He largely recycles images created by predecessors, including 《樵史演義》, on the characters he stages.

→ Example of Ruan Dacheng  
阮大鍼 (1587-1646).



Example of Ruan Dacheng  
阮大鍼 (1587-1646).

His novelistic/theatrical image has taken precedence over historicity.

Cf. Alison Hardie, *The Many Faces of Ruan Dacheng*, 2022 : has shown the many false, non-historical stories that have been told about this figure to this day, due to the ideological portrait that has been painted of him, to the point of discouraging historical research.



Cover of Hardie's book. The picture of Ruan Dacheng comes from an album of the Taohua shan 桃花扇 by Jianbai daoren 堅白道人, ca. 1810, collection of Gong Wang 恭王 Yixin 奕訢 1833-1898 (now at 北大圖書館) ; illustration of scene 29. (m)



THE MANY FACES OF  
**RUAN DACHENG**

Poet, Playwright, Politician  
in Seventeenth-Century China

Alison Hardie



## Conclusion

There is no connection between the use of historical sources and the greater or lesser "truth" of a work of fiction.

In the field presented here (時事小說/時事戲曲) there is a close interweaving between historical or para-historical sources and novelistic rewritings

But borrowings, quotations and influences go both ways.

As the last case cited, that of Ruan Dacheng, shows, we can certainly confirm André Lefevere's assertion that "Images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes a whole literature. These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities did."

It is the destiny of the image to continually refract itself; this is part of the logic of comments calling up other comments in a continuous chain.

With a qualitative change here: the involvement of vernacular culture and expression; this undoubtedly profoundly alters previous commentary habits, because of the new audience that is included as the recipient of the "images" thus formed.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) : "the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign" + "a sign is not a sign" — in the linguistic sense — unless it translates itself into another sign in which it is more fully developed" (cf. his influence on Jakobson, quoted above).

▶ The notion of image differs from that of historical document and historical truth:

Intersemiotic distance is also social distance and ideological distancing, with interaction between different sociolects.

The notion of image differs from that of historical document and historical truth:

It enables appropriation and positive or negative identification.

The change in linguistic register brought about by the vernacular opens up even more effective ways of appropriating historical figures.

Thanks to this transformation, we can compare ourselves with images; an ethical issue.