# Research on Reader's Guides to Ming and Qing Popular Novels

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## Abstract

Reader's guides (*fanli* 凡例), which form a distinct genre attached to popular novels, have a great deal of research value. This article collects and counts reader's guides to Ming and Qing popular novels, analyzes the overall characteristics of the genre, and discusses four aspects of them: (1) the historical value of reader's guides to Ming and Qing popular novels; (2) reader's guides and the creative method in popular novels; (3) reader's guides and chapter headings in popular novels; and (4) reader's guides and readers of popular novels. This study approaches this distinct genre of novels from the perspective of both examination of documents and of theoretical research; it uses theory and method to explore the creative methods and systematic structure of Ming and Qing popular novels as well as to trace the true course of popular novels' appearance, development, and evolution.

## Keywords

Reader's guides (*fanli* 凡例) are a distinct editorial genre that convey the content of the work and the main creative idea; other names for the genre include *fafan* 發凡, *xuli* 敘例, *xulüe* 敘略, *liyan* 例言, and *buli* 補例. Reader's guides appeared quite early. Based on Du Yu's (杜預) (222-285) Preface to *Mr. Zuo's Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu Zuoshizhuan xu* 春秋左氏傳序), written

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during the Western Jin period (266-316), it is clear that authors had adopted the reader's guide as early as the compilation of the pre-Confucian historical annals, and Confucius used this form as well.[1]

The earliest author to systematically discuss the origin of the reader's guide and evaluate good and bad examples of it in different periods was the Tang Dynasty (618-907) historian Liu Zhiji (劉知幾) (661-721). He attached great importance to the genre, comparing the reader's guide of a historical annal to "a country having laws."[2] Liu held that the use of reader's guides began with Confucius and had its origins in the compilation of classics and histories. Because it was a distinct genre, the process of development of reader's guides was full of ups and downs. The development was cut short after Mr. Zuo and up to Gan Bao's (干寶) compilation of (*Jinji* 晉紀), but was then revived by Deng Can (鄧粲) and Sun Sheng (孫盛). Early reader's guides mostly conformed to the preface (*xuwen* 序文) genre, for example, in Shen Yue's (沈約) *Song shu* (宋書) and Xiao Zixian's (蕭子顯) *Qi shu* (齊書). Although these were called prefaces, the preface and reader's guide genres were not distinct at this stage. Subsequently, reader's guides gradually became distinguished from prefaces and came to form an independent genre of their own.[3]

## A Count of Reader's Guides to Ming and Qing Popular Novels and an Analysis of Their Characteristics

Reader's guides to popular novels are generally found at the beginning of a novel, between the preface, on the one hand, and the table of contents and illustrations, on the other. A reader's guide contains rich historical material on the novel and has great value and importance for researching the author's or compiler's creative inspiration, the publisher's role, the creative theory of the novel, and the connection between the creation of the novel, on the one hand, and the reader and the market, on the other. From the perspective of the current state of scholarly research, reader's guides to novels have not yet received the attention they deserve. Scholars' main focus has often been the reader's guide to the Jiaxu (甲戌) edition of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*

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1  Du Yu, "Chunqiu Zuoshizhuan xu 春秋左氏傳序 Preface to *Mr. Zuo's Spring and Autumn Annals*)," in *Zuozhuanzhushu* 左傳注疏, the Wenjin Ge edition of *Sikuquanshu* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2005), 49: 6.

2  See Liu Zhiji, "Xuli 序例," in *Shitongtongshi* 史通通釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1978), 4: 88.

3  Ibid.

紅樓夢) (also known as *The Story of the Stone* [*Shitou ji* 石頭記]). There have been at least nine studies of this work,[4] but only one has conducted specific and comprehensive research on reader's guides themselves—that is, Shen Meili's "Research on Reader's Guides in Ming-Qing Novels".[5] This article provides some insight into reader's guides to Ming and Qing novels; however, its account of the documents is incomplete, and additional, deeper investigation is needed.

Based on the author's collection and count, reader's guides to Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) popular novels number forty-two in all. In general, they exhibit the following characteristics: first, there is an intimate relationship between the reader's guide as a genre and Ming- and Qing-era bookstores and bookstore owners. On the basis of the documents currently available, the earliest extant popular novel that includes a reader's guide appears to be (*Dasong zhongxing tongsu yanyi* 大宋中興通俗演義), written by Xiong Damu (熊大木) (1506-1578), a bookstore owner in Jianyang (建陽). It was published by Yang Yongquan (楊涌泉) of the Qingjiang Tang (清江堂) bookstore, also in Jianyang, in 1552, the thirty-first year of the reign of Emperor Jiajingin the Ming Dynasty. Its compilers and editors were all bookstore owners. In addition, Yuan Wuya (袁無涯) of Wu County, Xia Lüxian (夏履先) of Hangzhou, the owner of Sixue Caotang (四雪草堂), and other bookstore owners personally composed reader's guides to novels. This makes clear that the contributions of Ming and Qing bookstore owners to the evolution of the genre of reader's guides to popular novels should not be overlooked.

Second, reader's guides are appended, for the most part, to historical and romantic novels, including "worldly affairs" novels, "gifted scholar/beautiful lady" novels, and "son and daughter hero" novels. For example, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and its five sequels all contain reader's guides.

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4   The main works concerning the reader's guide to the Jiaxu edition of *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 (*The Dream of the Red Chamber*) are 馮其庸《論〈脂硯齋重評石頭記〉甲戌本 "凡例"》，《紅樓夢學刊》1980年第4期；王本仁《〈紅樓夢〉脂殘本〈凡例〉試談》，《青海師範大學學報》1980年第3期；周策縱《〈紅樓夢〉"凡例"補佚與釋疑》，《紅樓夢學刊》1981年第1期；鄧遂夫《論甲戌本"凡例"與〈紅樓夢〉書名》，《紅樓夢學刊》1986年第3期；尚友萍《證甲戌本〈凡例〉的作者是脂硯齋》，《紅樓夢學刊》1992年第2期；魯歌《〈紅樓夢〉甲戌本〈凡例〉的作者是曹頫》，《許昌師專學報》1998年第4期；胡淑莉、張振昌《論〈紅樓夢〉甲戌本"凡例"》，《社會科學戰線》1999年第6期；張傑《淺談〈紅樓夢〉甲戌本的"凡例"》，《陝西廣播電視大學學報》1999年第1期；馬瑞芳《論甲戌本〈凡例〉為曹雪芹所作》，《紅樓夢學刊》2003年第4期。

5   Shen Meili 沈梅麗. "Research on Reader's Guides in Ming-Qing Novels 明清小說中的凡例研究." *Journal of Harbin University*, Vol. 3, 2007.

Third, although reader's guides are not as common as prefaces and post-scripts, judging by the times at which novels containing reader's guides were created and published, they received wide distribution. Reader's guides appeared during the reign of Emperor Jiajing, when popular novels gradually came into vogue. In *Dasong zhongxing tongsuyanyi*, the front matter contains seven reader's guides. Subsequently, novels published during the reign of Emperors Wanli (萬曆), Taichang (泰昌), Tianqi (天啟), Chongzhen (崇禎), Shunzhi (順治), Kangxi (康熙), Qianlong (乾隆), Jiaqing (嘉慶), Daoguang (道光), Tongzhi (同治), and Guangxu (光緒) all have reader's guides. The late Qing Dynasty novels *Haishanghua liezhuan* 海上花列傳, *Wanguo yanyi* 萬國演義, *Hong Xiuquan yanyi* 洪秀全演義, and *Xin qixia wuyi* 新七俠五義 all have introductory remarks or reader's guides.

Fourth, the form and content of reader's guides in Ming and Qing popular novels are rich and varied. They are generally divided into notes (*ze* 則), but not all are divided in this way. For example, the reader's guides to *Li Zhuowu xiansheng piping Xiyouji* 李卓吾先生批評西遊記, published in the reign of Emperors Taichang (1620) and Tianqi (1620-1627), and the lithograph *Hong Xiuquan yanyi*, published in 1908, the thirty-fourth year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu, among others, are not divided into notes.

*Lieguo zhizhuan* 列國志傳, republished by Yu Xiangdou 余象斗 in Jianyang in 1606, the thirty-fourth year of the reign of Emperor Wanli, contains in its front matter "A Reader's Guide to *Annexation Among States*" in eleven notes, not divided into sections (*duan* 段). This reader's guide concisely relates the process by which the feudal princes of the Warring States Period annexed each other's territory until the Qin state annexed the six kingdoms. It describes how Chu destroyed Chen; Yue wiped out Wu; Tianhe took the place of Qi; Jin was divided into the three kingdoms of Han, Zhao, and Wei; and Qin destroyed Zhou, Han, Zhao, Yan, Wei, Chu, and Qi. The reader's guide provides background on the novel's creation and its main content. Compared to other reader's guides to popular novels of the Ming and Qing periods, this reader's guide is quite unusual.

Reader's guides to Ming and Qing popular novels not only have great value as historical material but also provide a particular angle from which to research the creation of these novels, the theory of the novel, the publishing market, the social class of readers, as well as other issues. In the past, scholars generally approached the creative and critical theory of Ming and Qing popular novels by lumping together prefaces, sketches, commentary, letters, and official and private tables of contents; they very infrequently touched upon reader's guides. Yet taking the perspective of reader's guides as a distinct genre can help us to deepen and complete our understanding of the theory of Ming and Qing

popular novels. In this light, this article discusses reader's guides to Ming and Qing popular novels from four perspectives, as follows.

## The Value of Reader's Guides to Popular Novels as Historical Material

As part of the text of Ming and Qing popular novels, reader's guides have great value as historical material. Because they provide important documentary material on a novel's copyright and ownership, its author's life and achievements, the development of the novel's title, and the sociocultural environment of the novel's production, they deserve our careful attention.

Reader's guides to novels often reveal important information about the author, the archetypes of the novel's characters, and the novel's commentators. For example, the author of *Yue Wumu jinzhong baoguo zhuan* 岳武穆盡忠報國傳 is generally believed to be Yu Huayu (于華玉). The statement at the end of its reader's guide confirms this: "Yu Huayu, courtesy name Hui Shan, was a man of Jinsha (modern-day Jintan in Jiangsu Province), made these notes in the Wo Zhi studio in Xiaowu (modern-day Yiwu in Zhejiang Province)."[6] At the same time, however, another statement at the end of the reader's guide says, "My student Yu Bangjin, courtesy name Gu Yun, a man of Xin'an (in modern-day Jiangsu Province), edited and sequenced the work,"[7] shows that Yu's student, Yu Bangjin, also participated in compiling the book. In other words, they compiled the book jointly, and the records preserved in the reader's guide supplement the traditional account.

Similarly, the reader's guide to the Jiaxu edition of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* includes the seven-syllable poem (*qilü* 七律), (rendered here in prose): "It seems like each word and each phrase is a drop of my life's blood; these ten difficult years of writing have been extraordinary."[8] Because this poem does not appear in any other version, it provides first-hand evidence for textual research on the author of this novel and the circumstances of its creation.

Note 5 in the introductory remarks of Qishengtang's revised and enlarged edition of *The Scholars* (*Rulin waishi* 儒林外史), published in 1874, the

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6  Yu Huayu, "Reader's Guide," in *Yue Wumu jinzhong baoguo zhuan* 岳武穆盡忠報國傳 (Youyi Zhai 友益齋, the last years of Emperor Chongzhen).

7  Ibid.

8  The 1754 Jiaxu edition of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, titled *Zhiyanzhai chongping Shitou ji* 脂硯齋重評石頭記 (*The Story of the Stone: with New Commentaries from Zhiyanzhai*).

thirteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tongzhi, confirms that the author of this work was Wu Jingzi (吳敬梓). However, it also reveals the real-life models of characters in the novel—such as Du Shaoqing, Du Shenqing, Dr. Yu, Zhuang Shangzhi, Mr. Ma'er, Chi Hengshan—and so provides rare and important historical material for our study of *The Scholars*.[9] Some reader's guides also provide information about the novel's commentators. For example, based on the reader's guide to Fang Ruhao's (*Chanzhen yishi* 禪真逸史), we know that the bookstore owner Xia Lüxian was one of this novel's commentators.

Reader's guides to the novel also preserve important information about the work itself. The reader's guide to the Jiaxu edition of *The Story of the Stone* provides the alternate title *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and describes its origin; it also mentions the *The Dream of the Red Chamber* has the additional titles (*Fengyue baojian* 風月寶鑒), *The Story of the Stone*, and (*Jinling shi'er chai* 金陵十二釵). Note 5 in the reader's guide to (*Guigu siyou zhi* 鬼谷四友志) states: "*Siyou zhi* provides an account of the deeds of Sun Bin (孫臏) (380 BCE-320 BCE), Pang Juan (龐涓, d. 342 BCE), Su Qin (蘇秦, d. 284 BCE), and Zhang Yi (張儀, d. 309 BCE)."[10] In the reader's guide to *Humble Words of a Rustic Elder* (*Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言), note 1 states: "The title of this work is *Humble Words of a Rustic Elder*; it could also be called 'Common People of the Village and Countryside Had Nothing to Do, So They Basked in the Sun and Chatted Together.' "[11]

Some reader's guides also reveal information about the work that researchers of the novel's history have overlooked or that had been lost. For example, ("*Chongbian Sui-Tang yanyi* fafan" 重編隋唐演義發凡) states: "This book is titled *Sui-Tang Yanyi* (*Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties*)... it starts with the Yangdi emperor of the Sui and ends with the Minghuang emperor of the Tang. After Emperor Suzong, the Tang Dynasty had an additional 14 emperors. New and wonderful events that might delight people which happened during this time were compiled and published in another book, *Wan Tang Zhizhuan* 晚唐志傳), which I will not discuss further here."[12] Because *Wan Tang Zhizhuan* was not recorded in any catalogue pertaining to Chinese novels, the reader's guide provides us with otherwise inaccessible information to this work.

Reader's guides can help us to understand, to different degrees, the atmosphere of the particular era in which Ming and Qing popular novels were

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9    See also the article in this issue by Shang Wei, "Examining Narrative Form in *The Scholars*."
10   Yang Jing 楊景, "Reader's Guide," in *Guigu siyou zhi* 鬼谷四友志 (Boya Tang, 1803).
11   Xia Jingqu 夏敬渠, "Reader's Guide," in *Humble Words of a Rustic Elder* (Changzhou: Piling huizhen lou 毗陵匯珍樓, 1881).
12   Chu Renhuo 褚人獲, *Sui-Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Sixue Caotang, the Qing Dynasty), front matter.

created and published. In the guide to *Yue wumu jinzhong baoguo zhuan*, published by Youyizhai in the late Ming Dynasty, note 6 states that the book was based on the story of how Yue Fei defied the Jin and should serve as "a mirror for events of the present day; those whose ambition is to resist invasion by foreign enemies and eliminate those causing internal strife should take note of this book."[13] The publisher hoped that the book would inspire people at the time to resist invasion by foreign enemies and get rid of those causing internal strife.

The political situation in the late Ming was tumultuous, and the conflict between the Manchus and the Han was becoming more intense. Against this backdrop, the story of how Yue Fei defied the Jin received a wide reception. Other works, such as *Yue wumu jingzhong zhuan*, published by Baoxuzhai in 1627, the seventh year of the reign of Emperor Tianqi, Yu Huayu's *Yue wumu jinzhong baoguo zhuan*, published by Youyizhai at the end of the reign of Emperor Chongzhen (1627-1644), (*Xinbian quanxiang Wumu jingzhong zhuan* 新編全像武穆精忠傳), published by Weiwentang at the end of the Ming Dynasty, as well as other collections of novels about the Yue, provide clear evidence that the statement in *Yue wumu jin zhong bao guo zhuan* epitomizes to a certain extent the ethnic conflict and tumultuous circumstances of the time.

In the reader's guide to the Jiaxu edition of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, note 2 states: "This book is merely a collection of jottings on love between men and women; therefore, it recounts in detail matters of the boudoir. The fact that it recounts matters of the boudoir in detail, but matters outside the boudoir superficially, should not be considered lacking in balance."[14] Note 3 states: "This book does not presume to discuss the court. In each case where mention of politics is unavoidable, I pass over it in a few words, because I really do not dare to use the pen that writes of love between men and women to offend and blaspheme the court. One must not consider the book lacking for this reason."[15] These quotations make clear that *The Dream of the Red Chamber* contains many instances of taboo avoidance in writing.

The novel was subject to the influence of the oppressive policies of the time, and this influence is reflected in the novel's subject matter. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* records many matters of the boudoir and describes enduring love between men and women; however, it touches only infrequently on current events or affairs of state. This, in turn, influences the novel's narrative structure: it leads the author, often deliberately, to obscure the novel's setting in space and time and cite past events to allude to the present.

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13    Yu, "Reader's Guide."

14    Cao Xueqin, "Reader's Guide," in *Zhiyan Zhai chongping Shitou ji.*

15    Ibid.

Similarly, in the guide to *Honglou fumeng* 紅樓複夢, note 2 states: "In this book there are no words or phrases that infringe on taboo subjects on characters."[16] Note 3 states: "Although this book is a novel, it is based on loyalty (忠), filial piety (孝), chastity (節), and righteousness (義)."[17] In the reader's guide to *Xu jin ping mei* 續金瓶梅, note 6 states: "Bookstores are forbidden to publish obscene books, but recently there have been a lot of filthy writings."[18] From these reader's guides, it is not difficult to see that the Qing Dynasty's policy of the censorship and destruction of novels and opera had a large impact on the creation and dissemination of novels.

## Reader's Guides and Methods of Creation of Popular Novels

By the Ming and Qing eras, novel publishing was well developed. As they entered the commercial era, popular novels developed new characteristics, different from the past. The creation of popular novels through accretion over generations gradually gave way to independent creation by the literati. This tendency is particularly apparent in the creative realm of current affairs novels in the late Ming and early Qing. Below, I analyze reader's guides from different times in the Ming and Qing eras and from different genres; on the basis of this analysis, I discuss, on three levels, the key elements in the method of creation of popular novels.

On the first level, creators of Ming and Qing popular novels often had previous works on which they could rely. We can easily observe this from the creative process of Xiong Damu's *Dasong Zhongxing Tongsu Yanyi*. In the reader's guide to this work, note 1 states: "This work dramatizes Wumu Wang's historical account, using a novel as a reference."[19] The novel that Xiong refers to is Wu Muwang's *Jingzhong lu* 精忠錄. In *Xu Wumu Wang Yanyi* Xiong Damu states this very clearly:

> Wu Muwang's *Jingzhong Lu*, which records the deeds of Yue Fei, is the original novel, and I have not managed to obtain the whole text. Up to this point, I have secured the version published in Zhejiang. It compiles

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16   Chen Shaohai 陳少海, "Reader's Guide," in *Hongloufumeng* (Rongzhu Shanfang 蓉竹山房), (1799).

17   Ibid.

18   Ding Yaokang 丁耀亢, "Reader's Guide," in *Xu jin ping mei* 續金瓶梅, (1660).

19   Xiong Damu, "Reader's Guide," in *Dasongzhongxingtongsuyanyi* 大宋中興通俗演義 (Jianyang: Qingjiang Tang, 1552).

and recounts the deeds of Yue Fei in exhaustive detail. However, its importance is abstruse, and its portrayal of all the characters is based on the deeds in the historical account. Readers below the level of scholar-officials may suddenly find that they cannot make sense of it.[20]

Through Xiong's reference to the older work *Jingzhong Lu*, we learn that the book's meaning is obscure, and its language is cryptic and hard to understand. Therefore, on the basis of the previous work, "by dramatizing the original biography of Wumu Wang,"[21] Xiong creates a new work. Similarly, in Xu Shigeng's Qing Dynasty "*Sanguo zhi yanyi* buli" 三國志演義補例," note 2 states: "The present work has been completely corrected in accordance with the ancient book (*guben* 古本)."[22]

The creation of genres besides historical novels was also often based on older works. For example, in Yuan Wuya's novel of knight errantry "*Zhongyi shuihu quanshu* fafan 忠義水滸全書發凡," note 6 states: "The old book (*jiuben* 舊本) is the version published by Guo Wuding."[23] In the guide to *Chanzhen yishi*, note 2 states: "The meaning of the old book is obscure, and its usages are classical; it would be difficult for ordinary people to enjoy."[24] In the guide to the "gifted scholar/beautiful lady" novel *Baigui zhi* 白圭志, note 6 states: "This book features poems prominently; the original work (*yuanzhu* 原著) generally left them out."[25] In the guide to the "son and daughter hero" novel *Humble Words of a Rustic Elder*, note 6 states: "Omissions are still according to the original book (*yuanben* 原本)."[26] These quotations all mention ancient books, old books, original works, or original books. In the field of Ming and Qing popular novels, the concept of "old books" is closely related to the publishing culture, the route of distribution, and so forth. Its meaning encompasses, at a minimum, the following perspectives. From the perspective of the time of publication, "old books" described novels that had already been published and that subsequent writers changed, expanded, and reprinted. From the perspective of

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20      Ibid.

21      Ibid.

22      Xu Shigeng 許時庚, "*Sanguo zhi yanyi* buli 三國志演義補例," in Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, *Sanguo zhi yanyi* 三國志演義 (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) (Shide Tang, 1769).

23      Yuan Wuya 袁無涯, "*Zhongyi shuihu quanshu* fafan 忠義水滸全書發凡, in Shi Nai'an 施耐庵, *Li Zhuowu piping Zhongyi shuihu quanzhuan* 李卓吾批評忠義水滸全傳 (Shuzhongtang, 1614).

24      Fang Ruhao 方汝浩, "Reader's Guide," in *Chanzhen yishi* 禪真逸史 (Hangzhou: Xia Lüxian, the end of the Ming era).

25      Cui Xiangchuan 崔象川, "Reader's Guide," in *Baigui zhi* (Yong'an tang, 1807).

26      Xia, "Reader's Guide," in *Humble Words of a Rustic Elder*.

the route of distribution, "old books" described folk forms, such as storytelling set to music (*shuoshu* 說書) and novels in verse (*cihua* 詞話), that were transformed by the literati into high literature. From the perspective of the manner of distribution, "old books" also described the hand-copied manuscripts that served as contributing sources to the publication of novels. As Ming and Qing popular novels entered the era of publishing, adaptation on the basis of previous works became a prominent practice; it stood in contrast to the traditional creation and distribution of novels before the Ming era. Reader's guides provide us with a glimpse of this process.

On the second level, truth and fantasy were interdependent. The books that contain reader's guides are mainly historical novels and romances (including "worldly affairs" novels (世情小說), "gifted scholar/beautiful lady" novels (才子佳人小說), and "son and daughter hero" novels (兒女英雄小說). These two types of popular novels both emphasize the link between fiction and nonfiction and the interdependence between truth and fantasy. However, there are also differences between the two types in the concrete meaning of "truth," which I discuss below.

In the actual process of creation, authors of historical novels often mixed official history, unofficial history, and legend. The authors were aware of historiography, a principle of recording the facts that preserved the flavor of the school of "historical tales" in the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) eras. For example, in the reader's guide to *Yu Shaobao cuizhong zhuan* 于少保萃忠傳, published by Dalai Tang in the reign of Emperor Tianqi, note 22 catalogs twenty-two major types of sources that were collected in preparation for the writing of this work, including histories, short sketches, and many other kinds of documentary material. Using the official history *Huang Ming shilu* 皇明實錄 as an outline for the whole book, it constitutes the main pillar of the novel. At the same time, *Lieqing zhuan* 列卿傳, which "records the story of Yu Qian (于謙 1398-1457?), it is plucked from old legends to appeal to the masses," or *Mengzhan leikao* 夢占類考, which recounts how "Yu Qian's soul is in heaven; if scholars pray to him their wishes will come true," also became important sources of creative material for *Yu Shaobao cuizhong zhuan*.[27] It combined the official dynastic histories with legend, fiction alternating with fact. This reveals the creative method of *Yu Shaobao cuizhong zhuan*, and it is quite representative for the creative process of historical novels in the Ming and Qing periods.

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27    For the passages cited above, see the reader's guide to Sun Gaoliang 孫高亮, *Yu Shaobao cuizhong zhuan* 于少保萃忠傳 (Dalai tang, in the Tianqi reign, notes 1, 8, and 22, respectively.

In the reader's guide to *Bei shi yanyi* 北史演義, note 1 states:

> The story that this novel narrates began in the Northern Wei (386-534?), and ended in the early years of the Sui Dynasty. It is all based on accounts in the official histories. They have been used completely, but some accounts from popular legends have been used as well in order to supplement what the official histories are lacking and to fill out content that the eyewitness accounts do not touch upon. Everything has a basis in fact, and cannot be compared to books that have been compiled according to whim.[28]

Among the histories that serve as sources for historical novels, books like Sima Guang's (司馬光) (1019-1086) *A Mirror for the Wise Ruler* (also known as *A Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*) (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒) and Zhu Xi's (朱熹) (1130-1200) *Tongjian Gangmu* 通鑒綱目 and *Tongjian* 通鑒 doubtlessly received the most attention. The reader's guide to *Dasong zhongxing tongsu yanyi* clearly shows how the book was created on the basis of these works. Note 4 of the reader's guide states: "The major themes are all linked to *Tongjian Gangmu*. In certain places of that original work, the main idea and the message are abstruse and hard to understand; therefore I used popular legends to draw connections and fill in the gaps. I hope this will help common, ordinary people to understand."[29] The guide to *Nianyi shi tongsu yanyi* 廿一 史通俗衍義 also points out that the author created the novel by drawing on *Tongjian Gangmu*. This not only refers to *Tongjian Gangmu* as the source for the novel's subject matter, ideological orientation, compositional structure, and narrative, but also highlights how the novel fills in the deficiencies in the account in *Tongjian Gangmu*.

In sum, the "truthful" content in Ming and Qing historical novels is reflected mainly in historical facts—indeed, whether they conform to historical facts became an important standard for evaluating the novels' quality. The reader's guide to *Sui Yangdi yanshi* 隋煬帝豔史 makes this clear in note 1:

> Even though this book is called a novel, it references historical events and classical allusions. It is wholly based on official histories. It has not sown confusion among ordinary people by presenting things that are not true or by jumping to absurd conclusions. Therefore, the narrative has a beginning and an end, and it is based on reliable sources. It is not

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28    Du Gang 杜綱, "Reader's Guide," in *Bei shi yanyi* (1793).

29    Xiong Damu, "Reader's Guide," in *Dasong zhongxing tongsu yanyi*.

only appealing to the masses at present, but it is sufficient to transmit true facts to the next generation.[30]

This note emphasizes that *Yanshi* was written in accordance with official histories and that the content was true and reliable. At the same time, it also allows for a small number of reasonable inventions, on the basis of respect for historical facts, in order to make the novel more entertaining, as well as to achieve the purpose of "assisting the official histories" and remedying their deficiencies.[31]

By comparison, the "truth" of romantic novels is mainly focused on lived reality, with a focus on the ways of the world. The reader's guide to *Kuaixin bian* 快心編 states: "This volume is written entirely based on the ways of the world, and every piece is true to life."[32] In the reader's guide to *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳, note 1 states: "The names used in this book—Chao Yuan, Di Zong, Tong Ji, and Xue Ao—are not people's real names. I do not wish to reveal their true deeds to other people."[33] Note 5 states: "All the events of this book have a basis in fact. The existence of its characters can be verified."[34] This kind of creative method, which is rooted in lived reality, also appears in note 4 of the folktale-based novel (*huaben* 話本) *Pai'an jingqi* 拍案驚奇, published during the reign of Emperor Chongzhen (1610-1644) of the Ming Dynasty:

> My use of historical precedents and classical allusions to make my points through analogy generally hews closely to human nature and everyday life, and makes little reference to supernatural or fantastic matters.... There are one or two points that touch by chance on supernatural beings and the netherworld, but for the most part it stays close to what is credible, in distinction to lies based on pure fabrication.[35]

Writers of romantic novels, and even folktale-based novels, emphasize "writing entirely based on the ways of the world," "hewing closely to human nature and everyday life," and "staying close to what is credible." This shows that the novels

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30    Qidong Yeren 齊東野人, "Reader's Guide," in *Sui Yangdi yanshi* (Jinling: Renrui Tang, 1631).

31    See Yu Huayu, "Reader's Guide," in *Yue wumujinzhongbaoguozhuan*, notes 4 and 5.

32    Tianhua Caizi 天花才子, "Reader's Guide," in *Kuaixin bian* 快心編 (Kehua Shuwu, the early Qing Dynasty).

33    Xizhou Sheng 西周生, "Reader's Guide," in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* (Tongde Tang, the Qing Dynasty).

34    Ibid.

35    Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, "Reader's Guide," in *Pai'anjingqi* 拍案驚奇 (Jinchang: Shangyou Tang, 1628).

reflect the lived reality and daily life of ordinary city dwellers. Compared to the techniques of historical novels, which revere historical facts and insist on creating a record of the facts, romantic novels and folktale-based novels focus on lived reality. To a certain degree, these tendencies represent the legacy and development of Song and Yuan historical storytelling (*jiangshi pinghua* 講史平話), on the one hand, and the creative method of novelistic folktale-based forms, on the other.

Finally, on the third level is the practice of taking material from imperial bulletins. Current-affairs novels at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Qing eras emerged from novels on historical themes (*lishi yanyi* 歷史演義). However, these two types of novels are clearly distinct with respect to the subject matter, method of composition, and creative form. Novels on historical themes made historical figures and events the focus of description. Building off these figures and events, they tapped into stories and experiences under the surface of historical tradition. They demonstrated appropriate creative judgment, characterized by using the past as a mirror for the present in order to set an example for later generations. By contrast, current-events novels focused on presenting important contemporary events. They were created on the basis of imperial bulletins (*dibao* 邸報, *tangbao* 塘報) and hew closely to contemporary reality.

In Chinese literary history, there is a long tradition of reflecting current events in literary works. For example, during the Tang Dynasty, Bai Juyi (白居易) (772-846) clearly stated in "A Letter to Yuan Zhen" his position that: "Essays should be written in response to current conditions; poetry should be written in response to particular events."[36] Although Bai discusses "current" and "events" separately, his emphasis on the depiction of contemporary reality has an intrinsic connection to later current events novels of the late Ming and early Qing eras. By developing the creative tradition of novels on historical themes, these novels directly continue the spirit of books such as *The Golden Lotus* (*Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅), which criticized contemporary reality. This, in turn, forms a point of convergence between historical novels and romantic novels.

The dividing line between current events novels and novels on historical themes, with respect to their method of creation, is that current events novels were often created by taking material from imperial bulletins, and on this basis they amalgamated official histories and short sketches. For example, in *Wei Zhongxian xiaoshuo chijian shu* 魏忠賢小說斥奸書, note 3 of the reader's guide states: "It took me 'from spring to autumn' to write this book: it took

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36    Bai Juyi, "Yu Yuan Jiu shu 與元九書 (A Letter to Yuan Zhen)," in 白居易集 (*A Collection of Bai Juyi*), comp. Gu Xuejie (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1979), 3: 926.

three years to finish. I read the imperial bulletins from the forty-eighth year of the reign of Emperor Wanli (1620) to the first year of the reign of Emperor Chongzhen; if I stack them up, they stand over six feet tall."[37] After consulting a large number of imperial bulletins, the author also consulted records such as official histories and short sketches. This particular creative method and manner of selecting material determined, to a certain degree, these novels' stylistic characteristics, making them governmental, journalistic, and prescriptive. This makes them unusual in terms of the creative process of Ming and Qing popular novels.

### Reader's Guides and Chapter Headings in Popular Novels

Chapter headings are an important organizational component in novels, and reader's guides can give us a glimpse of how they evolved in popular novels. In the reader's guide to *Pai'an Jingqi*, note 1 states:

> Each chapter has a heading. Because the phrasing in the old novels was always exquisite, people in the Yuan Dynasty used it for the titles of plays. Of the plays mentioned in *Taihe zhengyin pu* 太和正音譜, about half are phrases from old novels. Recently, authors were taking incompatible content from two different chapters and making couplets out of them. Inevitably, this made it necessary to cut out the original chapter headings, turning a good piece of writing into a bad one. Now, for each chapter authors use two phrases that constitute a couplet, in imitation of *Water Margin, Journey to the West*, and other historical examples.[38]

From the perspective of the novel's chapter headings, this note deserves our careful attention. It clarifies the origin of chapter headings in novels, including the inspiration that the titles of Yuan-era musical comedies (*zaju* 雜劇) took from such elements of the novelistic tradition as Song- and Yuan-era historical storytelling (*jiangshipinghua*) and literary Chinese novels (*wenyan xiaoshuo* 文言小說). At the same time, together with the titles of Yuan musical comedies, it influenced later generations of chapter headings in vernacular novels (*baihua xiaoshuo* 白話小說).

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37    Wuyue Caomang Chen 吳越草莽臣, "Reader's Guide," in *Wei Zhongxian xiaoshuo chijian shu* 魏忠賢小說斥奸書 (Qiantang: Zhengxiao Guan, 1628).

38    Ling, "Reader's Guide," in *Pai'an jingqi*.

By the same token, this note demonstrates that compilers and publishers of folktale-based novels at the end of the Ming era tended to phrase chapter titles in couplets. Consulting the chapter headings in volume 40 of *Pai'an jingqi*, one sees that the chapter headings are all in the form of two phrases. Of these, six consist of two phrases of six syllables each, eighteen consist of two phrases of seven syllables each, and twenty consist of two phrases of eight syllables each. They are quite consistent. In imitation of the older example of *Water Margin* (also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh*) and *Journey to the West* (also known as *Pilgrimage to the West*, or *Monkey*), "for each chapter, authors used two phrases that constitute a couplet"; in this way, the chapter headings in couplets in the main text and the statements in the reader's guide can be said to echo each other.

Throughout the process of creation and dissemination of novels in the Qing Dynasty, the tendency of chapter headings in popular novels to take the form of couplets continued to evolve, and this is reflected in reader's guides to novels. The reader's guide to *Chun liu ying* 春柳鶯 states: "Each chapter has a title made up of two phrases placed at the beginning."[39] It consists of ten chapters in total; except for chapters 4 and 7, which have headings in two phrases of eight syllables each, all the other chapters have headings in two phrases of seven syllables each. This continues the developmental tendency of chapter headings in popular novels to take the form of couplets.

In the reader's guide to *Baigui zhi*, published during the reign of Emperor Jiaqing (1796-1820), note 4 states: "At the beginning of every chapter in this book there are two phrases that form a couplet. This is the guiding principle for the book."[40] It consists of four volumes and sixteen chapters in total; of these, eight chapters have titles in two phrases of seven syllables each, and eight chapters have two phrases of eight syllables each. The author of the reader's guide calls the chapter headings the "guiding principle of the book," indicating how highly he regards them. In the reader's guide to *Wanguo yanyi* 萬國演義, published during the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1871-1908), note 4 states: "Every volume has a title in couplets; moreover, it classifies and lists the important records at the level of specific items, linked together under each heading. One can grasp the main points almost at a glance."[41] From the evidence in reader's guides, composing chapter headings in couplets became a mainstream tendency in Ming and Qing-era popular novels.

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39    Nanbei Heguan Shizhe 南北鶡冠史者, "(Self-Record of the Author)," in *Chun liu ying* 春柳鶯 (published in the Kangxi reign).

40    Cui, "Reader's Guide".

41    Shen Weixian 沈惟賢, "Reader's Guide," in *Wanguo yanyi* (Zuoxin She, 1903).

The reader's guide to *Chun Liu Ying* states that the use of chapter headings in couplets is the reason that the author was "limited by the bookstore's whim";[42] the role that the bookstore and its owner played in arranging chapter titles into couplets should not be overlooked. In the process of compiling and publishing novels, Ming- and Qing-era bookstore owners and lower-level literati connected with bookstores revised the chapter headings of older works. At the end of the Ming era, the Hangzhou bookstore owner Xia Lüxian published Fang Ruhao's 方汝浩 *Chanzhen yishi* in eight volumes and forty chapters. In note 2 of the reader's guide, Xia emphasizes the work that went into revising the chapter headings of older works:

> The meaning of the old book is obscure, and its usages are classical; it would be difficult for ordinary people to enjoy. I have organized it into forty chapters, which are divided into eight volumes, and the volume numbers are marked using the eight divinatory trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). I have cut out the old annotations in order to showcase the new and unusual.[43]

When chapter headings were revised, pains were taken to use easy-to-understand language, to emphasize novelty and creativity, and to excise clichéd material. This was one of the starting points for bookstores and bookstore owners to edit chapter headings in novels.

At the same time, the contributions of the middle and upper strata of the literati in revising and improving the chapter headings of Ming and Qing popular novels should not be overlooked. The author of the reader's guide to *Yue Wumu Jinzhong Baoguo Zhuan*, published during the reign of Emperor Chongzhen was Yu Huayu, who passed the highest imperial civil service exam in 1640, the thirteenth year of the reign of Emperor Chongzhen, and served as the head magistrate of Xin'an and Yiwu Counties. Yu's edition omitted *Dasong Zhongxing Tongsu Yanyi*, and also revised the chapter headings from the older work, which had been compiled by Xiong Damu.

As the reader's guide makes clear, Xiong's original work consisted of eight volumes in total, with ten headings in each volume. Yu dismisses Xiong's work as redundant and trivial. He criticizes in particular chapter headings such as *Yinsi zhong Yue Fei xianling* 陰司中岳飛顯靈, *Qin hui yu fengmo xingzhe* 秦檜遇風魔行者, *Mingsi zhong baoying Qin Hui* 冥司中報應秦檜, and so on as

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42    Nanbei Heguan Shizhe, "Self-Record of the Author."
43    Fang, "Reader's Guide."

"shallow and boorish, preposterous and nonsensical,"[44] and deletes them to reorder the book into seven volumes, with four headings in each volume. When Youyi Zhai revised the chapter headings in the older work *Dasong Zhongxing Tongsu Yanyi*, it focused on deleting superfluous headings and making the chapter headings concise and elegant. At the same time, it did its utmost to make the chapter headings and the main text correspond with each other and to avoid having many different things linked together in the same chapter.

By comparison, Xiong Damu's *Dasong zhongxing tongsu yanyi*, a creation of the initial phase of the popular novel in the Ming Dynasty, was faithful to the historical work on which it was based. This is apparent from the chapter headings, in which "the major themes are all linked to *Tongjian Gangmu*."[45] *Tongjian Gangmu*, in distinction to *Zizhi tongjian*, "has a table of contents, but is nevertheless still difficult to consult,"[46] and invoking "outline" (*gang*) together with "index" (*mu*]) had an influence on the development of chapter headings in Ming and Qing popular novels.

This influence is particularly obvious with respect to *Dasong Zhongxing Tongsu Yanyi* and other early popular novels.[47] However, Yu Huayu's *Yue Wumu Jingzhong Baoguo Zhuan*, published in the late Ming era, is oriented toward presenting refinement and novelty. It revises the chapter headings of the older work, displays a strong awareness of the novel as an independent genre, gradually breaks free of the restrictions of the official histories, and moves the popular novel a step closer to being a professional literary production.


## Reader's Guides and Readers of Novels

Documentary materials concerning the social class of readers of Ming and Qing popular novels are not only rare but also quite scattered. Until now, scholarly research on the relationship between readers' social class, on the one hand, and the creation and distribution of Ming and Qing popular novels, on the other, has unfortunately been scarce. Reader's guides to novels provide an important perspective for us to study this question.

Popular novels were published in order to satisfy the needs of readers in different social classes. When readers in different social positions and at different

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44    Yu Huayu, "Reader's Guide."

45    Xiong Damu, "Reader's Guide," note 4.

46    Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House; Hefei: Anhui Education Publishing House, 2002), 21: 1002-1003.

47    See Yu Huayu, "Reader's Guide," notes 4 and 5.

levels read novels, they had different experiences, and the novels produced different reading effects. Due to the development of the commodity economy around the mid- to late Ming Dynasty, the class of urban people was continually expanding. At the same time, following improvements in printing technology and the fall in the cost of printing books, the price of books dropped. Many lower-class readers joined the ranks of novel readers, and their reading needs and leisure habits became an important impulse for the development of the Ming and Qing popular novel.

In the reader's guide to *Dasong Zhongxing Tongsu Yanyi*, note 4 states: "I hope this will help the common people to understand."[48] Note 7 states: "The sentence structure is coarse, and the choice of words is vulgar, so the book is easy for dull-witted, common people to read. I do not dare to claim connections with noblemen of talent."[49] As we can see, *Dasong Zhongxing Tongsu Yanyi* considered lower-class readers "below scholar-officials"—that is, people who were "ordinary" and "ignorant"—the main audience for the novel. This is a concrete reflection, apparent from the novels, of the development of the commodity economy and the changes occurring in social classes. It explains that, in the Ming and Qing eras, urban people were gradually taking the place of gentry and merchants who had dominated the readership until the middle of the Ming era, and it explains that urban people became the main component of the novel-reading public.

Lower-class readers' literacy level was quite low; their reading level and reading habits hastened the novel's popularization. We can gain a glimpse of this from reader's guides to popular novels of the Ming and Qing period. Based on the records in reader's guides, the tendency toward popularization of the Ming and Qing popular novel is evident in the following several respects.

First, in order to satisfy the reading needs of lower-class readers, novels adopted the convention of author's notes (*zuozhu* 作注), which made the language of the novels easier to understand. In the reader's guide to *Xin lieguo zhi* 新列國志 published by Ye Jingchi (葉敬池), note 7 states: "Place names were different in the past than they are today. I have now consulted the book *Yitong zhi* 一統志, clarified everything, and annotated it for the reader's convenience."[50] In Ming and Qing popular novels, a large number of notes about people's names, place names, official titles, customs and allusions,

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48     Xiong Damu, "Reader's Guide."

49     Ibid.

50     Feng Menglong 馮夢龍, "Reader's Guide," in *Xin lieguozhi* (published in the Chongzhen reign).

pronunciations, expressions, and so on, are inserted into the main body of the text in order to give the reader an "overview."

Second, using easy-to-understand language, or adopting vernacular language and dialect, in order to accommodate or even cater to the reader was a common practice in many popular novels. In the reader's guide to *Kuaixin Bian*, published in the early Qing era, note 1 states: "The meaning of the words is common and obvious, so that scholars and ordinary people alike can enjoy them. I do not dare to use obscure language to ornament myself, for fear I might offend learned noblemen."[51] In the reader's guide to *Honglou Fu Meng*, note 6 states: "In the book I avoid using unfamiliar phrases, thus making it easier to read."[52] In the reader's guide to the typeset and printed edition of *Wanguo Yanyi*, published by Zuoxinshe in the twenty-ninth year of the reign of Emperor Guangxu, note 1 states:

> This book relates in particular historical and present-day facts about the countries in Europe, the Americas, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. So that it can be used in instruction, it is written using clear language that makes it easy to understand, and for this reason it is titled *The Romance of the Ten Thousand States*.[53]

As all the reader's guides cited above make clear, using plain, everyday language—even dialects and local slang—had the goal of accommodating the reading habits and characteristics of lower-class readers.

The third aspect was adopting plain, everyday verses and inserting them into the main text. In the reader's guide to *Sanjiao kaimi guizheng yanyi* 三教開迷歸正演義, note 4 states: "The reason this book is recited in common verse is to help people understand clearly."[54] In the reader's guide to *Chun liu ying*, note 6 states: "The verse at the beginning of every chapter is not composed using standard methods. It is merely to clarify the narration and is meant as a convenience to common people."[55] In the reader's guide to *Honglou Fu Meng*, note 21 states: "The verse in the previous book was too obscure. It was not only oppressive and hard to understand for the reader, but tasteless as well.

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51    Tianhua Caizi, "Reader's Guide."
52    Chen Shaohai, "Reader's Guide."
53    Shen Weixian, "Reader's Guide."
54    Pan Jingruo 潘鏡若, "Reader's Guide," in *Sanjiao kaimi guizheng yanyi* (Jinling: Wanjuan Lou, in the Wanli reign).
55    Nanbei Heguan Shizhe, "Self-Record of the Author."

It did not describe people and events as enjoyably as this book does."[56] The use of verse showed concern for readers of the novel, particularly for lower-class readers' literacy level and experiences. "So that people might understand clearly" and "for the convenience of common people" became the main goals of inserting verses into popular novels.

The fourth aspect was the widespread adoption of commentary. Chen Bangjun, who lived around the middle of the reign of Emperor Wan Li (1573-1620), pointed out in the reader's guide to *Guang Xie Shi*: "The reason commentary has become popular today is that it helps beginning students (*chuxue* 初學) to read. It is not for scholars (*dafang* 大方)."[57] What Chen calls "beginning students" refers mainly to lower-class readers who have some knowledge of literature but whose level is not high. The fact that Chen places "beginning students" in opposition to "scholars" in this quotation indicates his regret that commentary of all genres, including commentary of novels, had undergone a change. From initially fulfilling the reading needs of officials and scholars, it came to focus on the demands of lower-class readers.

Commentary was intended to serve readers. Yuan Wuya's "Zhongyi Shuihu Quanshu Fafan" states: "The book values commentary because it can convey the author's thoughts and inspire the reader's mind."[58] Commentary became a bridge for communication between writers and readers. In the reader's guide to *Bailian Zhen* 百煉真, note 4 states: "It is necessary to add detailed marks to crucial points in the plot, and discuss them one by one."[59] In the reader's guide to *Baigui Zhi*, note 4 states:

> At the beginning of each chapter in this book…there are several lines of commentary. These are the book's main entries. Readers can first read the commentary and then read the main text, or else first read the main text and then read the commentary; after that, they can refine their own understanding. Such are my, He Qingchuan's, words of wisdom.[60]

Commentary hewed close to the novel's content and plot, the novel's main creative idea, and its compositional structure. It was through commentary that the reader could better understand and absorb the text.

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56    Chen Shaohai, "Reader's Guide."
57    Chen Bangjun 陳邦俊, "Reader's Guide," in *Guangxie shi* 廣諧史 (Sheng Yingkui, 1615).
58    Yuan Wuya, "Zhongyishuihuquanshufafan."
59    Molangxian Zhuren 墨浪仙主人, "Reader's Guide," in *Bailian zhen* (published in the Kangxi reign).
60    Cui Xiangchuan, "Reader's guide."

Fifth, the arrangement of illustrations often took into account the needs of lower-class readers. In the reader's guide to *Xiuping yuan* 繡屏緣, note 1 states: "Usually, at the beginning of every novel there were several pages with exquisitely drawn portraits to delight the reader's eye. Presumably because the events in the novel were not all wonderful, bookstore owners first used this method to entice readers."[61] In the reader's guide to *Honglou Fu Meng*, note 4 states: "This book reproduces the illustrations from the original book for the reader's enjoyment."[62]

Illustrations could fill in deficiencies in the novel's text, as the reader's guide to *Chanzhen yishi* states in note 5: "The human emotions in *Chanzhen Yishi* are both beautiful and ugly. It uses words to describe them, but for those things that words cannot express, it uses pictures to portray them."[63] The work used illustrations to fill in deficiencies in the textual account. Because of this, bookstores of the Ming and Qing era, and particularly those of the Ming era, attached quite great importance to the use of illustrations in novels, to the extent that they invited famous artists to draft illustrations. In the reader's guide to *Sui Yangdi Yanshi*, note 8 points out: "The portraits often seen in the market only hint at a person's form. They are merely playthings for children. For this book I have specially invited a famous and skillful artist to paint the portraits, and he did his utmost to reveal their charms."[64] Note 9 states:

> For each portrait, I chose a wonderful line of poetry from one of the ancients that matched the events in the story. With these words as inspiration or assistance, I worked their wonderful qualities into the portrait. So besides the words themselves, there was something else to enjoy. This is truly unprecedented among all the books in the world.[65]

Pairing illustrations with verse increased the picturesque charm of the illustrations and so increased the reader's enjoyment.

There was a close connection between the needs of the reader and the compositional structure of the novel. For example, in *Bei shi yanyi* 北史演義, the reader's guide conveys in detail that the book's method of composition is closely connected to the reader's reception. As note 4 states:

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61    Su'an Zhuren 蘇庵主人, "Reader's Guide," in *Xiuping yuan* 繡屏緣 (the manuscript in 1670).

62    Chen Shaohai, "Reader's Guide."

63    Fang, "Reader's Guide."

64    Qidong Yeren, "Reader's Guide."

65    Ibid.

There are reasons a war is won or lost. For every war I write about in this book, I must first give the reasons for its success or failure. If a country's military is strong, I describe the formations by which defeat is already foretold. Or if a country's military is weak, I describe the tendencies by which victory is already assured. Each has a different structure, and I portray each one by one. They clarify at a glance the true situation on that day.[66]

Note 8 states: "Although this book has a lot of different threads, one main thread holds it all together: every event is analyzed thoroughly, in order to help the reader see clearly."[67] Note 11 states: "The important characters in the book are all painted in thick ink and heavy color in order to help the reader observe them."[68] Describing war, the commentary conveys in advance "the reasons for victory and defeat"; this lays the groundwork for the conclusion of the war. It allows the reader to understand clearly and not perceive the conclusion to be abrupt. The structure of the novel's plot and the depiction of its characters also give consideration to the reader.

In conclusion, I have researched reader's guides to Ming- and Qing-era popular novels from several perspectives. Reader's guides to popular novels have a high value as historical materials and can provide useful clues for us to research the writers, commentators, novels, and the contemporary environment of the creation and dissemination of novels. At the same time, reader's guides provide a distinct perspective to research issues of the creative method of novels, the chapter headings of novels, novel's readers, and so on. This perspective can help us to explore the true course of the Ming and Qing popular novel's emergence and development, as well as the patterns in its evolution.

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66      Du Gang, "Reader's Guide."

67      Ibid.

68      Ibid.

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