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**Intersections of Detective Fiction and Memory:  
Robert Hans van Gulik's Judge Dee Stories in  
Memory Culture**

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Literature Today

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## Abstract

Inspired by an emerging interest in the intersections between literature and cultural memory and literature's own memory, this thesis tries to shed light on some of ways in which detective fiction and memory meets through a close reading and analysis of Robert Hans van Gulik's Judge Dee mysteries which present the return of elements from precursor texts and the combination of typical conventions of the genres of the Chinese gong'an stories and Western detective fiction. Building on the notion of "memory of literature" summarized and conceptualized by Erll and Nünning and Lachmann's post-structural theory of intertextuality, this thesis attempts to show that Van Gulik's Judge Dee detective series construct their own memories and participate in the inner-literary memory discourses by remembering several earlier (literary or non-literary) texts and echoing and adapting traditions of both the old Chinese and Western detective story. The intertextual reference and transformation of elements from pre-existent texts and detective-story conventions allow the Judge Dee stories to sketch out a memory space made up of texts, to produce a new paradigm that blends the Chinese gong'an formula with the Western crime-writing traditions, and to create an entirely new set of expectations for detective fiction.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter I. Other Texts Remembered by Van Gulik's Judge Dee Series.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>1.1 Van Gulik's Utilisation of Old Chinese Judicial Casebooks and Gong'an Stories.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>1.2 Appropriation of Traditional Chinese Vernacular Fiction, Anecdotes, and Philosophical Writings.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>1.3 Dominating Models of Intertextuality and the Significance of Intertextual Reference.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<b>Chapter II. Different Detective Story Formulae and Traditions in Van Gulik's Works .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>2.1 The Memory of Literary Genres, Genre Memories, and Memory Genres.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>2.2 Conventions of the Chinese Form Assimilated by Judge Dee Mysteries .....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>2.3 Traditions of the Western model Adopted by Judge Dee Mysteries.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>2.4 New Paradigm, New Expectation, and New Memory.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>55</b>

## Introduction

As an introduction to this thesis on Robert Hans van Gulik's Judge Dee Mysteries, I will first provide a brief overview of some fundamental and influential concepts of cultural memory developed in the 20th century, from Maurice Halbwachs's collective memory and Aby Warburg's social memory, to the Assmanns' theory of cultural memory. I will then proceed to outline three basic concepts of memory in literary studies distinguished and theorized by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning – “the memory *of* literature”, “memory *in* literature”, and “literature as a medium of collective memory”. This thesis, which focuses mainly on the inner-literary memory phenomenon, is closely associated with the concept of “the memory *of* literature”. In what follows I will offer a sketch of the notion of intertextuality and “memory-as-intertextuality”, and three models of intertextuality proposed by Renate Lachmann. All this serve as a starting point and a sound theoretical basis for the subsequent close readings of Van Gulik's Judge Dee books and in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of inner-literary memory revealed in these books.

### *A Theoretical Overview of the Concept of Cultural Memory*

“Cultural memory” is a popular term in current public and academic discourse. As Huyssen points out, “for 15 to 20 years, we have been living in a memorial culture in which traumatic histories and victimization discourses of all kinds have taken front billing in the media and in public debate as well as in artistic practices and academic research” (115). Memory as a sociocultural phenomenon plays a crucial role in various aspects of social practice. Memorials have been built to remind people of significant past events and persons. Commemorations – local, national, international – take place every year and anniversaries are celebrated in different countries. Trauma and memory are two of the most common but significant themes in contemporary literary texts, movies, Internet art, and performance.

Similarly, cultural memory as an interdisciplinary phenomenon has received much more scholarly attention over the last few decades. Many researchers of sociology, history, and literature have been involved in exploring the question of memory, more specifically, in examining “social formations, historical processes, literature, art, and media from this new perspective of memory” (Erl1 1).

Certainly expressions or demonstrations of thinking about remembering and forgetting have a very long history. However, in the early days of the twentieth century, scholarly attention was first directed to the social, cultural, and political dimensions of memory and the phenomenon of “cultural remembering.” The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and the art historian Aby Warburg are among the first to give the phenomenon of cultural memory a name – they called it ‘collective’ and ‘social’ memory respectively – and to study it methodically (Erl1 13). Their research revolves around social frameworks and medial representations of memory, arguing that memory should be understood as a cultural phenomenon, which has aroused intense academic interest in cultural memory at that time and laid a foundation for the study of cultural, social, or collective dimensions of memory in a shared field. In particular, the three prominent areas of analysis in Halbwachs’s research on collective memory (*mémoire collective*) – “the dependence of individual memory on social frameworks”, “the forms of intergenerational memory”, and “expansion of the term *mémoire collective* to include cultural transmission and the creation of tradition” – have been applied to various research objects in different academic fields (Erl1 14-15).

Ever since the 1980s, theorizing the phenomenon of memory again has drawn considerable attention from scholars within the fields of humanities and social sciences. At the end of the 1980s, the theory of the cultural memory (*das kulturelle Gedächtnis*), which is indebted to Halbwachs’s studies on collective memory and demonstrates the relation of culture and memory theoretically and systematically, was introduced by Aleida and Jan Assmann.

Since the Assmanns find two different memory frameworks in Halbwachs's collective memory, they divide it into two types – communicative memory and cultural memory, which functions as the starting point of their theory. As noted by Jan Assmann, communicative memory is an informal and natural memory that circulates in about eighty to one hundred years by forms of everyday communication and interaction (56). On the contrary, cultural memory, the other type of collective memory, is a consciously established and highly formalized memory that “transports a fixed set of contents and meanings, which are maintained and interpreted by trained specialists” (Erl1 28). Regarding two registers of the theory of collective memory advanced by Halbwachs as starting point, Jan Assmann coined the term “cultural memory” and defined it as such:

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (132)

From the definition quoted here given by Jan Assmann, at least two aspects of cultural memory can be derived. Firstly, cultural memory is closely associated with “material objectivations” (Erl1 28). It is a type of memory that has various representational forms and can take the form of cultural materials like literary texts, religious practices, commemorations, and images. Secondly, cultural memory is collectively constructed and shared and tied to the formation of self-image and collective identity of a society or group. The Assmanns theorize the connections between culture and memory and uncover the interdependences among cultural memory, the construction of collective identity, and political power, making possible collaboration among disparate academic areas of history, anthropology, archaeology, religious studies, media theory, literary studies, and sociology.

*Mnemonic Dimensions of Literature and Three Basic Concepts of Memory in Literary Studies*

“Literature permeates and resonates in memory culture” (Erl1 144). Research on cultural memory has witnessed a boom in many disciplines and countries over the past three decades. And literature and literary studies are also drawn into the current ‘memory boom’ and contribute to issues of cultural memory. This has led to the construction of a rather heterogeneous field that can be loosely called “literary memory studies”. However, there exist various concepts of memory in the so-called “literary memory studies”, a field that “extends from literary studies in the narrower sense to approaches which are strongly influenced by cultural studies and interdisciplinarity” (Erl1 and Nünning 263). Astrid Erl1 and Ansgar Nünning, based on an analysis of existing scholarly work on memory within literary studies, distinguish three basic and influential concepts of memory in literary studies – “the memory of literature”, “memory *in* literature”, and “literature as a medium of collective memory” – in the exploration of connections between literature and memory (265).

“Memory of literature” designates an area of research that is interested in literature’s own memory. This concept highlights the diachronic dynamics of literature. That is, metaphorically speaking, it accentuates the processes that literature is “remembered” by authors, readers, and institutions. Two different aspects can be derived from the concept of “memory of literature”. When the term “memory of literature” is used as a *genitivus subjectivus*, the concept views literature as a symbol system and denotes an inner-literary phenomenon of memory. It pays attention to the phenomenon that in a literary text, the previous literary works and their aesthetic forms are “remembered” through various literary practices of memory, for example, the usage of topoi, intermediality, and intertextuality (the concept of intertextuality will be briefly introduced in the next part of the introduction). In this sense, “the return of elements from earlier works of art” is made the focal point of the concept (Erl1 68). When used as a *genitivus objectivus*, it understands literature as a social system and points to a system-

internal phenomenon of memory. It emphasizes that some of literary works are selected and “remembered” in a socially institutionalized way, for instance, through the formation of canons and the writing of literary history. In this case, “the processes of canon formation and literary historiography” are placed in an important position. “Memory of literature” is not a new topic or phenomenon for scholars in literary studies. There is a long tradition of exploring the inner-literary and system-internal memory of literature within the field.

“Memory *in* literature” captures studies on memory that discuss the ways in which memory, both individual and collective, is represented in literary texts. While the concept of “memory of literature” foregrounds the diachronic dimension of literature and memory, the idea of “memory in literature” emphasizes “the synchronic, dialogical relation between literature and extra-literary memory discourses” (Erl1 77). Based upon a premise that, according to Erl1 and Nünning, “literature exists in a relationship to contemporary discourses of memory and illustrates functions, processes and problems of memory in the medium of fiction through aesthetic forms” (265-281), researchers investigate the relationship between literature and extra-literary processes of memory. They are also concerned with the specific forms of literary and aesthetic representation of memory in literary works, e.g., the culture-specific literary means regarding reconstructing the past in literary texts. Realizing that the ability of literary texts, especially narrative texts (much of fiction and some of drama and poetry), to portray and illustrate individual and collective memory, several scholars have delved into various aspects of memory that are interwoven with literary texts and coded into specific literary devices, which leads to a surge of scholarly publications on this topic in the field of literary studies and the development of the theory of cultural memory.

“Literature as a medium of cultural memory” is highlighted in research that considers literature as an “active force in memory culture” (Erl1 68). Scholars who work on this direction of research attempt to provide insights into the mediality of literary works and their roles in the

construction and evolvement of cultural memory – that is, into what can literature do as a medium of cultural memory within historical memory cultures and how does the literature work as a medium. Unlike the two types of analyses on the relation of literature and memory mentioned above, research into this direction does not treat literature as a relatively closed system. Rather, it aims to build a relationship with the cultural-historical study of memory that is to a large extent ignored by approaches that accentuate the memory of literature as a closed system, e.g., “the relationship between literature and other symbol systems”, “the historical contexts of literary acts of memory”, or “the social function of those works which appear as an ‘echo chamber’ (Barthes) of the past” (Erll and Nünning 284). Compared to studies based on the theories of intertextuality, literary historiography, and literary representation of memory, the role and function of literature as a medium in the process of the formation of cultural memory within a society or a group is still an issue of memory that needs further discussion.

*Intertextuality, Memory-as-intertextuality, and Three Models of Intertextuality*

Intertextuality is one of the most crucial concepts in contemporary literary theory. According to *Merriam-Webster.com*, intertextuality is “the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text” (“Intertextuality”). It can be established by means of (implicit or explicit) repetition, quotation, allusion, parody, etc. Theories of intertextuality claim that no work of literature stands alone but coexist with a network of textual relations. It is closely associated with the context where it is produced, with codes, systems, and traditions that pre-existent works of literature have established. Thus, a literary text's meaning can only be discovered in relation to previous literary works. In the late 1960s, building on Saussure's and Bakhtin's theories of language and literature, Julia Kristeva coined the term “intertextuality” in her article “Word, Dialogue and Novel” (Allen 15; Erll 72), arguing that a text does not exist as a self-contained or autonomous

whole but as an intertextual production. In her monograph *Desire in Language: a semiotic approach to literature and art*, Kristeva also emphasises that a text can be understood as "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text", where "several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralise one another" (36). Since the late 1960s, intertextuality, as a useful term that "foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life" (Allen 5), has also been employed by non-literary theorists and critics, for example, in the discussions of cultural memory, human relations, and the characteristics of a particular society.

The post-structural concepts of "memory-as-intertextuality", which have their roots in the 1920s, in Bakhtin's theories, were put forward by Harold Bloom and Renate Lachmann. In his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom suggests that "poetry is the anxiety of influence" (95). Realising that this anxiety inspires literary defence mechanisms, Bloom attempts to uncover the manner in which some poets manage to produce original work under pressure from influence. He finds that those poets rely mainly on six revisionary ratios, that is, six types of "intertextual actualisation and variation of elements of the literary tradition which are recognisable in the text as rhetorical strategies", in an attempt to deal with this kind of influence (Erl 72).

Unlike Bloom's revisionary approach that addresses but never explicitly mentioned memory, Lachmann combines the notion of cultural memory with her intertextuality theory and describes intertextual reference as an effect of memory. In terms of the relation of literature and memory, Lachmann indicates in her influential monograph *Memory and Literature*:

[Literature] appears as the mnemonic art par excellence. Literature supplies the memory for a culture and records such a memory. It is itself an act of memory. Literature inscribes itself in a memory space made up of texts, and it sketches out a memory space

into which earlier texts are gradually absorbed and transformed. (*Memory and Literature* 15)

What's more, her theory of literature and memory, which emphasises literature's function to record and contribute cultural memory, builds on the concept of intertextuality, which she understands as "interchange and contact, formal and semantic, between texts—literary and non-literary" (Lachmann, "Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature," 301). On the interrelation of literary memory and intertextuality, Lachmann points out, "The memory of a text is its intertextuality" (*Memory and Literature*, 15). The memory of the text, both literary and non-literary, "is formed by the intertextuality of its references. This intertextuality, in turn, arises in the act of writing considered as a traversal of the space between texts" (Lachmann, *Memory and Literature*, 16). For Lachmann, intertextual references can be understood as a possible way to create a text's memory and recharge the text with new meanings.

Lachmann distinguishes three models of intertextuality: participation, troping, and transformation (*Memory and Literature*, 17). As noted by Lachmann, participation is considered as a dialogical sharing of written texts of a culture that happens in writing. For this type of intertextuality, repeating and sharing the existing written texts by imitating them is in the foreground. Troping, the second model of intertextuality that is much indebted to Harold Bloom's idea of the trope, Lachmann explains, is "a turning away from the precursor text, a tragic struggle against those other texts that necessarily write themselves into the author's own text, and an attempt to surpass, defend against, and eradicate traces of a precursor's text" (*Memory and Literature*, 17). Compared with "conservative" participation discussed above, this form of intertextuality highlights authors' attempt to represent the previous texts in new ways and effort to "break the authority of one representation over another" (Molloy 5). In contrast to troping, transformative intertextuality, the third model, is concerned with appropriating other texts through a process of distancing, concealing, playing with, and mixing

past texts in writing. For Lachmann, this form of intertextuality is cryptic, esoteric, but ludic, syncretistic, and carnivalesque (*Memory and Literature*, 17). Although Lachmann identifies these three models of intertextuality, the boundaries between them are blurred and muddled because elements of all three models can find their expression in a single text. Her theory of cultural remembrance and intertextuality inspires an area of analysis in literary studies that revolves around “the way the mechanisms of forgetting and remembering in literature construct cultural memory” (Molloy 2).

*Intersections of Detective Fiction and Memory, the Judge Dee Series, and Chapter Outline*

In the study of mnemonic dimensions of literature, works of fiction are often used as cases to demonstrate multiple connections of literature and memory. As suggested by Erll, “it is narrative texts in particular which exhibit forms that show a special affinity to memory” (77). Indeed, fiction, benefitting from its narrative structure and distinctive way of arranging information, exhibits its potential to not only “code” the ideas and discourses about the past life into a coherent and memorable narrative text, but also “perform” the acts and processes of remembering and forgetting and make observable the contents and fragility of individual and cultural memory. Besides, due to the popularity of works of fiction in the public sphere and its ability to easily circulate across the ages, fiction plays a crucial and irreplaceable role in fulfilling several mnemonic functions, for instance, constructing, storing, circulating, and mediating cultural memory within a specific society or group as a medium in memory culture. All this allow fiction to be a fertile ground for the analysis of intersections of literature and memory.

However, detective fiction has received more popular attention in culture than scholarly attention within the field of cultural memory studies. According to different narrative techniques, unifying tone or style, archetypes, or other defined criterion, fiction can be broken

down into many genres: science fiction, historical fiction, crime fiction, fantasy fiction, etc. Generally, detective fiction is understood as a subgenre of crime fiction and mystery fiction. From the 1970s onward, the debate over “high” and “low” culture has contributed to the establishment of detective fiction as a form of and a genre in popular literature (Hao 551). Today, the detective story has a wide readership in the public sphere, leading to the recent emergence of more scholarly interest in it. Tzvetan Todorov, in his essay “The Typology of Detective Fiction”, investigates peculiar features of three different genres (forms) of detective fiction –the whodunit, thriller, and suspense novel– and the interconnection of “the evolution of detective fiction” and “the succession of these forms” (Todorov 232). In *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story*, Ernest Mandel studies the social history of the crime story through the Marxist lens in an attempt to provide a Marxist interpretation of “the historical relationships between ideology and form in the crime story” (Lewis 39). And some scholars approach the detective-story genre from feminine perspective in their essays and deal with gender issues related to the woman detective in detective fiction<sup>1</sup>. But detective fiction has received limited academic attention in memory studies. Many literary scholars have attached importance to historical fiction, drama, and autobiography in the exploration of cultural memory dynamics. Actually, detective fiction can also be a fertile ground for memory scholars. Some issues, such as how a detective story involves recalling clues, and how the narrator recall the story of crime and tell it to readers when reporting the story of investigation, are closely linked to the phenomenon of memory. And the detective fiction can “perform” acts of remembering, for example, remember precursor literary texts and their aesthetic forms through a variety of literary practices of memory. Besides, since some detective stories are set in a distant era, it can store and convey some ideas about the past. Surprisingly, few articles have

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<sup>1</sup> For more about this see *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, edit by Glenwood Irons, University of Toronto Press, 1995.

been dealt with detective fiction from the perspective of literary and cultural memory from the 1980s to the present.

In my thesis, I have set out to investigate mnemonic dimensions of detective fiction, more specifically, some of the ways in which detective fiction participates in inner-literary memory discourses. As a distinctive literary genre, at what points precisely do detective fiction intersect memory? What kinds of literary works and what traditions of the existing genres do works of detective fiction remember? Building upon the notion of “memory of literature” conceptualized by Erll and Nünning and the poststructuralist theory of intertextuality developed by Renate Lachmann, I will dig into the intersections of detective fiction and memory through a close analysis of Van Gulik’s Judge Dee detective series which remember many prior texts and assimilate many the Chinese and Western crime-writing conventions, aiming to bring to light the ways in which works of detective fiction create their own memories and participate in cultural memory dynamics.

Robert Hans Van Gulik was a Dutch orientalist, detective writer, and diplomat. Encouraged by his translation of a largely forgotten Chinese detective novel *Dee Goong An* (or *Di Gong An, Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*) written in the Qing Dynasty (AD 1644-1912), he became interested in the traditional Chinese detective story. Inspired by his desire to bring ancient Chinese crime literature to the attention of modern writers and readers, he tried his hand at writing his own series of Judge Dee stories (his works were first written in English and then translated into other languages such as Chinese and Japanese). Van Gulik’s original Judge Dee mysteries consist of the following works<sup>2</sup>: *The Chinese Maze Murders, The Chinese Bell Murders, The Chinese Gold Murders, The Lake Chinese Murders, The Chinese Nail Murders, The Haunted Monastery, The Red Pavilion, The Lacquer Screen, The Emperor’s Pearl, The*

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<sup>2</sup> These detective works are arranged in order of first publication in English.

*Monkey and the Tiger*<sup>3</sup>, *The Willow Pattern*, *The Phantom of the Temple*, *Murder in Canton*, *Necklace and Calabash*, *Judge Dee at Work*<sup>4</sup>, and *Poets and Murder*.

Judge Dee, the leading role of Van Gulik's detective stories, is based on the historical personage Di Renjie, a magistrate and statesman who lived in Tang Dynasty China (AD 618-907). But his works are not set in the Tang Dynasty but in Ming Dynasty China (AD 1368-1644), with society and customs portrayed in the stories reflecting this dynasty. In Van Gulik's Judge Dee books, Judge Dee unravels a series of mysteries at different times in his career. Through a close examination of his detective stories, it can be found that they contain the memory of traditional Chinese texts and memory of literary genres (both traditional Western detective formulae and Chinese crime-writing traditions) in his own series of Judge Dee stories. Thus, considering their various connections with inner-literary memory phenomenon, my thesis will use Van Gulik's Judge Dee series as major cases to explore some of the ways in which detective fiction participates in cultural memory discourse.

The first chapter will be dedicated to studying the utilization and variation of elements from previous (literary and non-literary) texts in Van Gulik's Judge Dee books, especially the old Chinese texts. In the composition of Judge Dee series, Van Gulik borrowed many fragments from earlier texts, which contributes to establishing intertextual relations of Van Gulik's detective stories and the precursor texts. In this section, I will first try to categorize the various kinds of pre-existent texts that are remembered in Van Gulik's detective stories and investigate the ways in which they are remembered and reused. I will then proceed to examine the dominating model(s) of intertextuality presented in the Judge Dee stories based on Lachmann's theory of intertextuality. Additionally, I will explore how the return of elements from prior

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<sup>3</sup> *The Monkey and the Tiger* collects two novellas: "The Morning of the Monkey" and "The Night of the Tiger".

<sup>4</sup> *Judge Dee at Work* collects eight short stories.

texts helps build the memory of Van Gulik's stories and produce a memory space made up of texts.

The second chapter will move to uncover how the Judge Dee series maintains and adapts formulae of both the traditional Chinese crime stories and the Western detective fiction to create a new, hybrid paradigm that combines the Chinese and Western crime-writing traditions for the genre and to reconstruct expectations for the detective story. To begin with, three aspects of the relation of memory and genre should be differentiated to ground the analysis that will follow. On this premise, I will then attempt to show that the subtle blend of the Chinese and Western traditions of the detective story in Van Gulik's Judge Dee books contributes not only to the production of a new crime-writing paradigm that mixes together special features of the gong'an story and Western detective fiction for the genre, but also to the construction of the memory of both the Judge Dee mysteries and the genre of detective story.

## Chapter I. Other Texts Remembered by Van Gulik's Judge Dee Series

This chapter will take a close look at the relations of Van Gulik's Judge Dee series and earlier texts, and the manner in which they contribute to forming the memory of the Judge Dee books. Van Gulik's detective works remember and appropriate many previous texts – literary and non-literary, Chinese and Western – through intertextual references. And these precursor texts – for instance, their characters, plots, motifs, narrative techniques, textual paradigm, or other literary elements – serve as sources of “raw material” in the writing of the Judge Dee stories, suggesting that it is possible to approach Van Gulik's works through the lens of Lachmann's theory of memory and intertextuality. In what follows, I will first categorize the prior texts that are remembered in Van Gulik's Judge Dee series through the usage of intertextuality and delve into how they are employed in the composition of these detective stories. On this premise, I will then investigate the dominating model(s) of intertextuality that are applied to these detective works to remember the existing texts. In the last section of the chapter, I will scrutinize the significance of remembering pre-existent texts for Van Gulik's own detective works on the one hand and for previous texts utilised by his stories on the other.

### *1.1 Van Gulik's Utilisation of Old Chinese Judicial Casebooks and Gong'an Stories*

Van Gulik drew on a large number of precursor texts that mainly belong to the culture of imperial China and referred to them in multiple (explicit or implicit) ways. The vast majority of the prior texts Van Gulik borrowed and transformed in the Judge Dee series are derived from traditional Chinese judicial casebooks, collections of fictional court cases, and crime novels. Specifically, he took “source material” of his detective stories chiefly from four books: a thirteenth-century judicial handbook *T'ang-yin-pi-shih* (or *Tang Yin Bi Shi*, Van Gulik himself translated it in English in the middle of the twentieth, as *Parallel Cases from Under the Pear*

*Tree: A 13th Century Manual of Jurisprudence and Detection*), an eighteenth-century gong'an<sup>5</sup> (court case) novel *Dee Goong An* (Van Gulik translated the book in English as *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*), a sixteenth-century gong'an novel *Lung-t'u-kung-an* (*The Court Cases of Dragon Design*, also known as *Pao-kung an*), and a collection of crime stories compiled in the early twentieth century, *Ku-chin-chi-an-wei-pien* (*Strange Cases of Old and Modern Times*). He reused many plots and "fragments" from Chinese historical records about court cases, old detective novels, and crime stories as the basis of his own Judge Dee detective stories.

However, this does not mean that Van Gulik's detective stories are just cobbled together from some old Chinese "fragments" or lack originality. Instead of making a copy of these ancient Chinese materials, Van Gulik blended the ancient "fragments" he borrowed with plots and twists he crafted according to his literary creativity and imagination to recreate the Judge Dee and his world. He selected suitable plots and elements from these old Chinese sources, reworked them in order to make them more absorbing and palatable to a modern reader, and wove together the richly embellished ones with new stories he invented into his detective works, which can be viewed as an extraordinary claim for the stunning originality of the Judge Dee. Although he utilised many plots and elements from the ancient Chinese cases, he himself also supplied "a considerable part of the intrigue" (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Lake Murders*, 194).

Probably because Van Gulik translated and conducted scholarly research into the ancient Chinese casebook *T'ang-in-pi-shih*, which records more than one hundred criminal and court cases, he drew much inspiration and some sort of plot from this casebook in the writing of Judge Dee mysteries. The first five volumes of his Judge Dee series, all except *The Chinese Lake Murders*, borrowed plots and elements from the old Chinese casebook mentioned above. In the postscripts appended to the Judge Dee books, Van Gulik points out that the case of

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<sup>5</sup> Gong'an can be translated as court case or crime case. It has various spellings due to the Latinization of the Chinese characters, such as goong an, gong-an, and kung-an, but they all bear the same meaning and represent the same genre. Gong'an fiction (or court case fiction, or courtroom fiction) is the main form of the genre of Chinese crime (or detective) fiction featuring local magistrates who deal with criminal cases.

hidden testament, the girl with the severed head, and three lying monks in *The Chinese Maze Murders*, are taken respectively from Case 66-B, Case 64-A, Case 57-B in *T'ang-Yin-Pi-Shih* (*The Chinese Maze Murders*, 319-321). Similarly, in *The Chinese Nail Murders*, the plot of the headless corpse is based on Case 64 in *T'ang-Yin-Pi-Shih* (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Nail Murders*, 190). And the story about the quarrel over the broken cakes and its solution in the novel takes advantage of Case 35 in that judicial manual (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Nail Murders*, 190).

The story of the hidden testament in his novel *The Chinese Maze Murders* is related to an ancient Chinese criminal case briefly recorded in *T'ang-yin-pi-shih*. Later versions of the case can also be found in the traditional Chinese crime novel *Lung-tu-kung-an* and the seventeenth-century collection of Chinese vernacular stories *Chin-Ku-Ch'i-Kuan*. The original stories recorded in the abovementioned books show that Governor Yoo hides his last will in the mounting of a painted scroll to prevent his eldest son from pocketing all his property after his death and leaving nothing to the younger one. Van Gulik borrowed the name of some of main characters in the story, such as Yoo Shou-chien, and the plot of concealing the will into a painted scroll. And he redesigned and enriched the story with new plot lines, a couple of unexpected twists, and elements. In his novel *The Chinese Maze Murders*, while the fake will is pasted behind the lining of the mounting of Governor Yoo's painting by the Governor himself to mislead Yoo Kee, his eldest son, it is the content of the scroll picture that contains key and subtle clues to the puzzle of the real testament: the landscape picture indicates a route to a mysterious pavilion inside the maze built in the old Governor's country estate, where the real testament is hidden. Through a comparison of the original stories and Van Gulik's story about the inheritance of the old Governor, it can be found that Van Gulik didn't apply the old plot mechanically in his novels, but added new plots, elements, twists and turns to the traditional plot to generate a new story. Additionally, a well-designed maze, a common part of

western centuries-old large estates but an unusual thing in ancient China as well as traditional Chinese crime stories, is added to a traditional Chinese plot, which, in a sense, creates an atmosphere of tension in the novel and helps highlight the wisdom of Judge Dee.

Also, Van Gulik drew many elements for his books from some traditional Chinese gong'an short stories and novels, such as *Dee Goong An* and *Lung-tu-kung-an*. Not only are Judge Dee and his four lieutenants, central characters in *Dee Goong An*, adopted as the main roles in Van Gulik's detective stories, but also some interesting "fragments" from those old Chinese detective novels and short stories are worked into his own Judge Dee series. For instance, both the plot of the bolting bride and the case of a butchered bully in *The Chinese Gold Murders* are based on the collection of old Chinese mystery stories *Ku-chin-chi-an-wei-pien* (*Strange Cases of Old and Modern Times*). Van Gulik rewrote them and brought them a couple of details, like the sickle, in an attempt to make them more convincing and integrate successfully into his stories (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders*, 165). Take the third case, the case of the murdered Magistrate in *The Chinese Gold Murders*, for example. It involves the story about the poisoned bride in the old Chinese detective novel *Dee Goong An*. In the original story written, a bride dies on her wedding night from venom poisoning. But she is neither bitten by a poisonous snake nor poisoned by other people. She is accidentally killed by an adder that winds around a mouldy rafter of the roof in the kitchen, above the place where maids usually boil water for making the tea. When the hot water steams on the burner, the frightened adder puts its venom into the water. In *The Chinese Gold Murders*, the method used to poison Judge Wang and the way in which "judge Dee discovers the truth, namely by observing dust fallen from the ceiling into his teacup" closely echo that of the case of the poisoned bride in *Dee Goong An* (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders*, 165).

It should be added that the intertextuality (memory) of Van Gulik's Judge Dee series finds expression not only in Van Gulik's borrowing and transforming several traditional plots

and motifs from ancient Chinese crime stories, but also in a reader's referencing of the existing texts in reading Van Gulik's detective stories. Although Van Gulik explicitly indicates that he uses the old Chinese court cases, crime novel and short stories as the basis of his own detective work, some plots, motifs, or literary elements of his detective stories are reminiscent of some Western detective novels and stories, which also can be considered as good examples of intertextuality. In his essay "Some Chinese Detective Stories", Vincent Starrett notes that the method adopted to kill the magistrate in *The Chinese Gold Murders* brings to mind one of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes short stories, "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (7). In Van Gulik's novel, it is all part of political conspiracy to poison Judge Wang, which can invoke the feeling of reading Doyle's story about the death of Helen's twin sister.

Further, Judge Dee's admiration for Mrs Kuo and his ambivalent attitude toward her after knowing that she killed her wicked ex-husband by a nail in Van Gulik's *The Chinese Nail Murders* will remind readers of amateur detective Philip Trent in E. C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case* (Huang 10). In the process of investigating the murder of a wealthy American plutocrat called Sigsbee Manderson, Trent falls in love with one of the suspects, Manderson's wife Mabel. The internal conflict Trent experiences when gathering evidence against the person he loves also happens to Judge Dee (Huang 10). On the one hand, when reading those stories, a reader easily connects them with other texts, both oriental and western. On the other, Van Gulik's Judge Dee mysteries, as mentioned above, reuse many prior Chinese crime cases and stories. All this contribute to the production of intertextuality and the construction of Judge Dee mysteries' memory.

## 1.2 Appropriation of Traditional Chinese Vernacular Fiction, Anecdotes, and Philosophical Writings

Van Gulik's detective books connect (explicitly or implicitly) with many literary and non-literary Chinese texts written or compiled in bygone times. Within the Judge Dee stories, he appropriated several plots and motifs from old Chinese court cases and gong'an stories through a process of mixing, playing with, and veiling them on the one hand, and borrows and rewrites several literary elements from traditional Chinese vernacular fiction, the Confucianist and Daoist classic texts, anecdotes about historical figures, and philosophical writings, on the other hand. In other words, in addition to age-old Chinese crime stories, a great number of other works of ancient Chinese literature, including *Hsing-shih-heng-yen*<sup>6</sup> (*Stories to Awaken the World*), *Shui-hu-chuan*<sup>7</sup> (*Water Margin*), and *Lun-yü*<sup>8</sup> (*The Analects of Confucius*), also provide many "raw materials" for Van Gulik to write detective stories in the traditional Chinese style.

Many narrative elements of Van Gulik's Judge Dee books, even seemingly more modern notions of gender and sexuality, have their origins in Chinese vernacular fiction in bygone times. For example, the case of the headless girl in his detective novel *The Chinese Maze Murders* is indebted not only to an authentic court case written in the ancient casebook, but also to some old Chinese plays and novels composed during the Ming (AD 1368-1644) and Qing dynasty (AD 1644-1912). In the postscript to the novel, Van Gulik indicated that the case of a headless girl is based on Case 64-A recorded in *T'ang-yin-pi-shih* (320). However, the

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<sup>6</sup> *Hsing-shih-heng-yen* is a seventeenth-century collection of vernacular short stories attributed to a Chinese novelist Feng Menglong. It focuses on common people's daily lives in Ming Dynasty China to capture the social reality and real emotion of people and undermine false ethics.

<sup>7</sup> *Shui-hu-chuan* is a fourteenth-century Chinese novel written in vernacular Chinese by Shi Nai'an and is deemed one of the Four Classic Novels. It tells a story of a group of 108 outlaws who have no alternative but to gather together at Mount Liang to organise an army and eventually have to accept amnesty and surrender.

<sup>8</sup> *Lun-yü*, which is believed to have been written and compiled during the Warring States Period ( BC 475-221), is one of the most important classics of Confucianism, comprising a number of sayings and ideas of Confucius and his followers.

original story in *T'ang-yin-pi-shih* has nothing to do with sapphism and sadism – Van Gulik's idea of adding a lesbian and sadist character into the account is motivated by “frequent occurrence of sapphism, and occasional cases of sadism among women in ancient China” and relevant depiction in some Chinese vernacular stories (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, 320). In *The Chinese Maze Murders*, Mrs Lee, a painter, lesbian, and sadist, is attracted to a girl called White Orchid, so she lures the girl to her house and secretly locks her up for several weeks. Fearing that the kidnapping and captivity come to light, she kills her captive in a sheltered pavilion of Governor Yoo's maze. In fact, the motive of sapphism has been described in some age-old Chinese plays and novel of manners, such as the love story of Ou Guan and Di Guan in *Hong Lou Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*, or *The Story of the Stone*) by Cao Xueqin, of Cui Jianyun and Cao Yuhua in *Lien-hsiang-pan* (*The Fragrant Companion*) by Li Yu, and of Sun Yulang and Liu Huiniang in *Hsing-shih-heng-yen* (*Stories to Awaken the World*) by Feng Menglong. And the behaviour and phenomenon of sadism among women, as mentioned by Van Gulik, have been occasionally portrayed in traditional Chinese fiction, for instance, in *Chin-p'ing-mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase* or *The Golden Lotus*).

It is the precursor texts addressing queer themes and his scholarly research into sexual life in ancient China that play the crucial role in inspiring him to embed the depiction of lesbian relationships and sadism among women in the case of a girl with a severed head, as opposed to the representation of lesbian characters in Western novels. In his book on the sexual life of ancient Chinese, he claimed:

Female homosexuality was, on the contrary, quite common, and viewed with tolerance. Provide that excesses were avoided, female homosexual relations were considered as a custom bound to prevail in the women's quarters, and even praised when it gave rise to self-sacrifice or other beautiful acts of love and devotion. (*Sexual life in Ancient China* 163).

“The frequent occurrence of sapphism, and occasional cases of sadism among women in ancient China,” he believes, “must doubtless be ascribed to the polygamic family system, where a number of women were obliged to live in constant and close proximity” (*The Chinese Maze Murders* 320). Although the description of female homosexuality and sadism has seldom been provided by the prior Chinese detective and crime stories, what he finds in some works of traditional Chinese fiction as well as his insights into ancient Chinese sexual life encourage him to work these elements into his own series of detective stories as an essential innovation to “create unexpected developments” and “show how surprisingly ‘modern’ old Chinese plots can be” (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, 320-321).

Further, philosophical contents, especially Confucian and Taoist thought, are deeply embedded in many aspects of Van Gulik’s detective stories, from serving as a background of conversations to crafting the surprise twists in the storyline. “The characterization of Confucianist and Taoist ideals given in the present novel is based on authentic Chinese texts”, such as *Lun-yü* (*The Analects of Confucius*) and *Tao-te-ching* (also known as *Lao Tzu*) (Van Gulik, *The Haunted Monastery* 197-198). In his novel *The Chinese Maze Murders*, in a desire to get a general understanding of Governor Yoo’s life in Lan-fang, Judge Dee leaves the tribunal for the mountain valley outside the south gate to visit a hermit called Master Crane Robe. He happens to find that a pair of paper scrolls which bear a couplet written by the old Governor Yoo in beautiful calligraphy hangs on the plaster wall of the hermit’s abode. It says, “There are but two roads that lead to the gate of Eternal Life: Either one bores his head in the mud like a worm, or like a dragon flies up high into the sky” (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, 213). The paper scrolls play a double role in the novel. On the one hand, Governor Yoo’s signature on the paper scrolls is a vital clue to both the puzzle of Governor Yoo’s last will and the attempted murder of General Ding: first, the signature written on the paper scrolls differs from the one found in Mrs Yoo’s scroll picture, thus confirming that the will pasted

behind the lining of mounting of Governor Yoo's painting is forged; second, it reveals that The Abode of Tranquillity is the pen name of the old Governor Yoo, that is to say, the writing brush that is used to killed General Ding is sent by Governor Yoo. On the other hand, the profound couplet on the paper scrolls describes two different ways of life, epitomising the Confucianist and Taoist ideal of governing and life.

The couplet about the worm and dragon is not created by Van Gulik but is quoted from a Buddhist work on Chan Buddhism (*The Chinese Maze Murders*, 322).<sup>9</sup> For the present novel, it is not a sentence that merely bears the Chan philosophy but is enriched with manifold new meanings. It, to begin with, accommodates two contrasting ways of thought, behaviour, and life, acting as the background of conversation of Judge Dee and the hermit (*The Chinese Maze Murders*, 321-322). Governor Yoo, a typical Chinese scholar-official, devotes wholeheartedly to wiping out the evil, reforming the Empire, and making the society much better. On the contrary, his friend Master Crane Robe chooses a totally different way of life – he accepts everything, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, with a desire to keep his behaviour in line with the natural order of things, which means that he won't try to change anything, let alone to reform the Empire. More importantly, in addition to reflecting different ways of life of Governor Yoo and the hermit, the couplet mirrors the Confucianist and Taoist ideals: "worm in the mud" represents the way of thinking and living of the Confucianism and "dragon flying into the sky" embodies the spirit of Taoism. Confucianism and Taoism are two conflicting systems of thought and behaviour that have stemmed from ancient China and played crucial roles in Chinese philosophy and religion. Confucianism emphasises the importance of personal ethics, morality, respect for the family, and the values of social harmony. Governor Yoo, as well as Judge Dee, are the quintessence of orthodox Confucianist literatus and officials. They

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<sup>9</sup>Chan Buddhism is one of major sects of Chinese Buddhist that developed from the 6th century onward in China. It was subsequently spread to many other countries in Asia, for example, to Japan as Japanese Zen. And the development of Chan Buddhism was influenced by Taoism to some extent.

are realistic and focus on self-cultivation and the pursuit of creating a harmonious, orderly community and society. In contrast, Taoism stresses naturalness, simplicity, spontaneity, and advocates a life of "nonaction" and detachment from desires. The Taoists expect to live in harmony with the natural world and its principles. Master Crane Robe, who is unworldly and does not miss worldly rewards, is a model of Taoist. In short, endowed with the contrast between Confucianism and Taoism (between Confucianist scholars and Taoist hermits), the couplet that gains new meaning in the present novel helps readers understand these Chinese characters better and immerse themselves in the Chinese atmosphere.

Van Gulik sometimes directly quotes the *Lun-yü* (*The Analects of Confucius*, a Confucianist classic text) and *Tao-te-ching* (also known as *Lao Tzu*, Taoist masterpiece) to his detective stories. In the postscript to *The Haunted Monastery*, he pointed out that the name of Master Gourd was taken from *Tao-te-ching* (143). And conversation topic about how Confucius fishes on page 61 refers directly to a sentence in *Lun-yü*, "The Master fished with a rod but not with a longline. He shot at birds with a stringed arrow, but not if they were roosting" (*The Analects of Confucius*, 51). These quotations from Chinese classic texts reflect not only Van Gulik's in-depth knowledge of ancient Chinese literature, philosophy, and scholar-officials, but also his expectation of portraying the ancient China and Chinese people in his stories as realistic and accurate as possible in the context of frequent misrepresentation of them in Western popular crime literature. And readers, when reading his Judge Dee series, are provided with ample opportunity to learn more about certain aspects of life in ancient China.

In addition to echoing a few traditional Chinese vernacular stories and classic texts, Van Gulik took some historical figures, such as the statesman Yen Shi-fan, the scholar Ou-yang Hsiu, and the poetess Yü Hsüan-chi, as prototypes of characters in his detective works. He adapted anecdotes about them for his recreation of Judge Dee mysteries. Take the anecdote of the statesman Yen Shi-fan for example. In the composition of *The Chinese Maze Murders*, Van

Gulik utilised a legend about Yen Shi-fan, the son of the Senior Grand Secretary of the Ming dynasty Yen Sung, mentioned in Arthur Waley's introduction to Bernard Miall's English translation of the traditional Chinese novel *Chin-p'ing-mei* (*Chin P'ing Mei: The Adventurous History of Hsi Men and His Six*). The introduction mentioned that Yen has a tailor-made writing brush for self-protection and defence, which is capable of shooting a very small poisonous projectile when placed over the flame of a candle and heated<sup>10</sup> (Waley x). Inspired by Yen's distinctive writing brush, Van Gulik took it as the model and worked the redesigned one into his story as a made-to-order killing weapon (*The Chinese Maze Murders*, 318-319). In *The Chinese Maze Murders*, General Ding is killed by a strange writing brush. There is a special and diabolical device inside the hollow shaft of the writing brush: a coiled spring is pressed down and fixed by wax; a small dagger is also inserted into it. Once the wax inside the brush holder melts, the released spring emits a deadly tiny dagger from the end of the writing brush. When General Ding holds horizontally the brush that he has received from one of his friends as a gift for his sixtieth birthday and heated it in his sealed library, with its end toward himself, the poisoned dagger is ejected and plunges into his throat.

Moreover, there are some other astonishing similarities between the story of General Ding and the anecdote of Ye, although Van Gulik didn't indicate this in the postscripts to his novels. Waley wrote down a popular legend concerning the death of Yen and the authorship of the *Chin-p'ing-mei* in the introduction. According to the legend, Yen was murdered by Wang Shih-cheng because of a vendetta against him and his father. In 1551 Wang's father was impeached by Yen's father and Yen and was eventually executed since the army he led failed to resist the aggression of the Tatar. Several years later, as Wang "began to make his mark as a man of great literary attainments and determined character" (Waley x), he started to avenge

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<sup>10</sup> Ancient Chinese people used the heat from the flame of a candle to trim the superfluous hairs of a new writing brush.

his father's death. He hired many assassins to kill Yen but failed each time because Yen was watched over and strongly guarded. Wang had to do it himself: he wrote a love story called *Chin-p'ing-mei* and gave it to Yen to cater his pleasure. And finally, Yen died from the book whose pages were smeared with deadly poison. The case of the murder in a sealed study is also a story of delayed vengeance. General Ding is accused of betraying his own men and throwing them to the wolves. Thanks to the lack of direct evidence, he is just forced to resign rather than be executed. To make him pay the price of his evil deeds, Governor Yoo takes early retirement and settles in the town where General Ding lives. Like Yen, General Ding has so many enemies, so he has to be closely guarded, which provides no opportunity for strangers to get close to him. Governor Yoo comes up with a good idea to kill General Ding secretly. He gives General Ding a “special” writing brush as a gift for his sixtieth birthday. It is as expected that General Ding appreciates that brush so much – he uses that brush for the first time on his sixtieth birthday and dies from the brush. These two stories, from the cause of impeachment of the main character to the way of vengeance, have so much in common. However, it is unfair to claim that the mystery of General Ding's death is a simple repetition or imitation of an anecdote of a wicked statesman of imperial system. Van Gulik absorbed them into the framework of his own story, played with them, and took control of them: in his own novel, the delayed vengeance is only a part of the double murder; the poisoned plum in General Ding's sleeve and Candidate Ding's entanglement with his father's fourth wife also form parts of the story. Through a creative appropriation and transformation of elements of earlier anecdotes and recombination of the old and new plot, Van Gulik gives new life to the old pieces and extends the space of interpreting a new story.

### 1.3 Dominating Models of Intertextuality and the Significance of Intertextual Reference

All three models of intertextuality (participation, troping, and transformation) proposed by Lachmann find expression in Van Gulik's Judge Dee series. The first model of intertextuality, participation, can be found in Judge Dee mysteries but not very often. The interconnection between Van Gulik's stories and previous texts is occasionally created by directly repeating, citing, and imitating. In the postscript to *Necklace and Calabash*, Van Gulik indicates, "The pronouncement of Master Gourd on p. 3 is a direct quotation from the famous Taoist text *Tao-te-ching*...Judge Dee's remark on Confucius fishing with a rod instead of with a net (p. 61) is quoted from the Confucianist Classic *Lun-yü*" (143). Additionally, Van Gulik not only used the well-known poetess Yü Hsüan-chi as a model for the Poetess Yoo-lan in *Poets and Murder*, but cited a poem which was written by 14-year-old Yü Hsüan-chi and included in *Quan Tangshi (Complete Tang Poems)* to highlight Yoo-lan's brilliance as a poetess. By quoting or repeating pre-existent written texts in his stories, Van Gulik successfully provides a direct link between his literary works and other written texts.

Troping, the second form of intertextuality, also occurs infrequently in Van Gulik's detective works. The couplet about the worm and dragon in *The Chinese Maze Murders* is a perfect example of this form of intertextual reference. According to its postscript, the couplet is taken from a book about Chan Buddhism to craft a complex plot and surprise twists (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders* 322). Instead of reusing its previous meaning, he tried to uproot its original meaning, took it out of the sentence on which it depends, and then gave it a new, different implication in the novel. When using elements from earlier texts, he occasionally attempts to "eradicate traces of a precursor's text" rather than simply repeat or share the elements from prior texts, which helps produce the second model of intertextuality (Lachmann 17).

The transformative intertextuality is the most common model presented in these detective stories, which plays the most important part in constructing the memory of Judge Dee books, while the other two forms of intertextuality are occasionally produced in these texts. Compared to directedly sharing elements from prior texts or making these foreign elements entirely turn away from their original meanings, Van Gulik prefers to contact with existing texts in a more creative and veiled way – he "conceals the other texts, veils them, plays with them, renders them unrecognisable, irreverently overturns their oppositions, mixes a plethora of texts together " (Lachmann 17). In his detective works, "fragments" of precursor texts he borrowed from old Chinese texts, new plot and twists he crafted intertwine and blend together, subtly forming a harmonious whole.

This form of intertextuality can be seen more clearly in the first five detective novels he published. Take for example the novel *The Chinese Maze Murders*. In the novel, both the elements borrowed from an anecdote about Yen Shi-fan and a new plot he developed about Candidate Ding's adultery with his father's fourth wife are mixed together in the case of sealed room. The case of Governor Yoo's testament is a blend of an old Chinese plot written in many collections of crime stories and the puzzle of the maze indebted to Van Gulik's imagination, an uncommon part of traditional Chinese crime novels. And the case of a girl with a severed head is based on both a murder case recorded in an old casebook and lesbian theme showed in several age-old Chinese vernacular novels. In brief, elements borrowed from the precursor texts are inextricably interwoven with Van Gulik's boldness of conception in his ambitious books in an attempt to attract a great number of modern readers, both Asian and Western, which not only build a close connection between Van Gulik's stories and previous texts, but also create a memory space in relation to a network of textual relations.

Many factors encourage Van Gulik to utilise fragments from existing texts and ground his novelties on the subtle blend of old elements borrowed from the precursor texts and new

features he creates in his own detective works. Van Gulik points out in the postscript of *The Chinese Maze Murders* that one of the main purposes that he writes the original Judge Dee series and intentionally appropriates a great number of previous texts, especially old Chinese historical court cases, gong'an novels, and vernacular stories, in his stories, is to remind modern Chinese and Japanese readers how much better the traditional Chinese crime stories are than those bad translations of third-rate Western detective novels sold in Shanghai and Tokyo, and to “prove to present-day Chinese and Japanese authors that it is possible to write a detective-novel in traditional Chinese style that yet appeals to the modern Oriental reader” (*The Chinese Maze Murders*, vi). In the first half of the 20th century, large numbers of Western detective novels, whether received by critics as good, bad, or with indifference, flooded into China and were translated into Chinese and published. Inspired by this, some native Chinese writers tried their hands at writing their own detective stories in the Western mode for the Chinese reading public. A flood of Western-style detective novels circulated within the country and became popular among the Chinese readers at that time, but traditional Chinese crime stories were nearly forgotten. Van Gulik's attempt to use elements found in conventional Chinese sources as the basis of his own Chinese-style detective stories helps the Chinese-style crime stories be caught again in the spotlight of attention.

Also, the appropriation of elements from Chinese texts composed in bygone times allows Van Gulik to preserve the way of life of ancient Chinese people as much as possible and to better present the Chinese characters and a deeply rooted culture of imperial China in his stories. It was common, Van Gulik noted, for Western writers of detective novels to draw upon the “Chinese elements”, such as the Chinatowns in foreign countries, in their books to create “a weird and exotic atmosphere” and to misrepresent the Chinese people at the time (this led him to translate ancient Chinese gong'an novel *Dee Goong An* into English and introduced it to the Anglophone reading public) (“Translator's Preface,” i). The Chinese elements, as well

as the Chinese characters in those novels, are just stunts to catch the reader's eyes, which may encourage a negative stereotype about China and Chinese people. Unlike those written by many other Western authors, his detective stories offer relatively accurate depictions of various aspects of daily life in traditional China to Western readers, allowing Western readers to take a close, fresh look at imperial China. In the introduction to *The Chinese Bell Murders*, Donald F. Lach expresses a similar view: "imperial China is depicted as a living, identifiable culture...Because it is no longer possible to recapture the old China by visiting the new, the Dee stories continue to be one of the best available means of recovering a bit of the everyday life of the past" (4). And the relatively accurate portrayals of the life of ancient Chinese are indebted to both his in-depth understanding of China, its history, literature, culture, and art, and the usage of fragments from old Chinese sources as well. His own reading and scholarly research deepen his understanding of various aspects of China. And borrowing "the plots, stories, and data offered by the whole body of Chinese literature" to construct his original stories about Judge Dee enables him to tell stories about Chinese people in a more authentic way and to retain the Chinese atmosphere to the greatest extent (Lach, 11).

Van Gulik's borrowing, surpassing, transforming, and mixing together precursor texts in his books is the embodiment of intertextuality. And for Lachmann, this can also be viewed as acts of remembering and new interpretation. Through a process of intertextual reference to ("fragments" of) the previous texts, the memory of Van Gulik's Judge Dee series of books and a memory space made up of texts are constituted, where elements of earlier texts are incorporated, remembered, surpassed, and transformed, and the intersection of old and new texts produces a memory narrative and a new meaning.

For the previous texts, well-known and unknown, being remembered and utilised by other texts can prolong their "lives" and increase their influence, to some extent. Take for example the 13th-century Chinese casebook *T'ang-Yin-Pi-Shih*. Van Gulik took some old plots

from it and rewrote them in his stories shortens the distance between the contents of the ancient casebook and the present-day reading public, thus giving new life to the ancient casebook in this regard. Generally, that casebook that records the typical criminal cases which happened in and before the Ming dynasty in China only attracts the attention of scholars who are interested in ancient Chinese jurisprudence and detection. By interweaving fragments from that book with new plots he developed in the Judge Dee mysteries, some of the old plots from the casebook are given a new look for a new age and are reintroduced to a much wider readership. In this sense, Van Gulik's Judge Dee stories revive and revitalise some contents of the old casebook.

For Van Gulik's Judge Dee series, appropriating the existing texts first helps retain the Chinese atmosphere and portray imperial China and the everyday life of Chinese people who live in the Ming dynasty more realistically. Moreover, the act of remembering other texts adds layers of depth and meanings to his stories, motivating the reading public to read and interpret them from different angles based on their previous knowledge, experience, and understanding. In other words, the memory of these stories can make these stories more distinctive, attractive, and worthwhile to be carefully studied.

## Chapter II. Different Detective Story Formulae and Traditions in Van Gulik's Works

Erll argues that “intertextuality means reference not only to individual texts, but also to genres. The very existence of literary genres is an effect of intertextual processes, of ‘literature’s memory” (73). This chapter will concentrate on the crime-writing traditions that Van Gulik’s detective stories assimilate, examining how these stories adapt conventions of both gong’an genre and the genre of Western detective fiction to create a new paradigm. I will first distinguish three different aspects of the relation of memory and genre to lay the foundation for the following analysis. In what follows I will investigate the manner in which these detective books adopt conventions of genres of both Chinese and Western forms and mix them together. And the subsequent part of this chapter will probe into how Judge Dee stories’ blend of different traditions of Chinese and Anglophone genres of detective fiction contributes to constructing the memory of the Judge Dee texts and creating a new memory for the genre.

### *2.1 The Memory of Literary Genres, Genre Memories, and Memory Genres*

Genres are understood as conventionalized “repositories of cultural memory” by Van Gorp and Musarra-Schroeder, which points to manifold and complicated relationships between genre and memory (qtd. in Erll and Nünning 273). In light of Erll’s and Nünning’s theory, three possible aspects of the links between genre and memory can be roughly differentiated: “the memory of literary genres”, “genre memories”, and “memory genres”. Firstly, “the memory of literary genres”, as part of “the memory of literature” and inner-literary memory, is “a phenomenon of intertextual relations and thus a further expression of intertextuality” (Erll and Nünning 264). From the perspective of literary memory, literary genres and their characteristics are “the result of fundamental processes of memory, namely continual repetition and actualization” (Erll and Nünning 273). And “repertoires of forms specific to particular genres are elements of the collective memory and as such belong to the common knowledge of

societies, which individuals acquire through socialization and culturalization” (Erll and Nünning 273). Secondly, the concept of the “genre memories” understands literary genres as “a constitutive element of our memory” (Erll and Nünning 274). In other words, the patterns and conventions of a literary genre, not only has the ability to influence and shape the formation of individual memory, but also play a significant role in symbolizing, constructing, interpreting life experiences and making them memorable within the framework of cultural memory. Thirdly, “memory genres” refer to, for example, (auto)biography, historical novel, and memoirs that are important for the construction and transmitting of cultural memory. Acts of cultural remembering, such as forming the concepts of collective identity, communicating shared values, and interpreting collective experiences, are closely associated with memory genres.

Lachmann argues that “the memory of a literary work is formed by the intertextuality of its reference” (304). And the reference can be not only to precursor texts, but also to literary genres (Erll 74). In addition to remembering a great number of old texts, especially traditional Chinese texts, Van Gulik’s works of detective fiction echo many conventions of genre of detective fiction, all of which plays to the memory of these works and the genre. It is hard to define Van Gulik’s Judge Dee texts as purely Chinese-style detective stories because Van Gulik combined conventions of Chinese gong’an fiction (the earliest known genre of Chinese detective fiction) with formulae of genre of Western detective fiction in the composition of Judge Dee stories. Based on the first aspect of relation of memory and genre distinguished by Erll and Nünning, what follows will discuss the ways in which Judge Dee novels echo different detective-story models and respond to both the Chinese and Anglophone traditions of detective fiction.

## 2.2 Conventions of the Chinese Form Assimilated by Judge Dee Mysteries

There is a long-established narrative tradition for crime and detective stories in China. As early as the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279), judicial casebooks which recorded crime, detection, and punishment, such as the *Che-yü-kuei-chien* and the *T'ang-yin-pi-shih*, were compiled in China. In terms of the key features of these casebooks, Ann Waltner sums them up in her article entitled "From Casebook to Fiction: Kung-an in Late Imperial China": "The crimes are located long ago and far away, which renders them less horrifying. The entries are short; their language is relatively straightforward classical Chinese. They are quite entertaining and were, I think, intended to be so" (282). Van Gulik himself translated one of these casebooks, the *T'ang-yin-pi-shih* into English and studied the book systematically and methodically.

Parallel to these casebooks there emerged several collections of fictional court cases and crime stories revolving around legendary detective-magistrates, for instance, Judge Pao (or Judge Bao, Bao Zheng), Judge Shih (or Judge Shi, Shi Shilun), and Judge Dee (or Judge Di, Di Renjie), and the gong'an (court-case) genre. Many traditional gong'an stories in those collections takes as the point of departure the court cases recorded in various judicial casebooks and historical deeds performed by local magistrates living in different periods. Van Gulik dig into traditional Chinese detective stories and translated an eighteenth-century Chinese gong'an novel *Dee Goong An* into English, as *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*. His translation of and research into traditional Chinese crime stories not only help him get a better understanding of the gong'an genre, but also pave the way for his recreation of the Judge Dee series.

To produce a Chinese-style detective story, Van Gulik not only used many plots from the traditional Chinese crime and court-case stories as the source materials for the recreation of Judge Dee and his world, but also worked within the genre of the Chinese detective fiction formed and practised in bygone times. However, instead of imitating the Chinese gong'an formula blindly and mechanically, he adapted conventions of the Chinese detective story in the

composition of his Judge Dee stories to cater to the modern taste and encourage a broader readership.

First, the role of detective in Van Gulik's stories, like most ancient Chinese crime novels, is played by "a righteous magistrate with a talent for investigation" (Starrett 5). A magistrate in imperial China is the official "in charge of the entire administration of the district under his jurisdiction", such as "the collection of taxes, the registration of births, deaths and marriages, keeping up to date the land registration, the maintenance of the peace" (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, 313). Also, he is fully responsible for "the apprehension and punishing of criminals and the hearing of all civil and criminal cases" as an investigator, judge, and prosecutor (*The Chinese Maze Murders*, 313). The hero of the traditional Chinese crime novel is generally a district magistrate in a province, or a similar local official, based on historical personages, such as Judge Dee and Judge Pao. However, it should be mentioned that few old Chinese detective stories featuring magistrate-detectives have recourse to the historical deeds of a certain magistrate in the historical record. Most plots are created by authors themselves according to their own fancy or adapted from that of other crime novels.

Following the fundamental custom of the Chinese genre, Van Gulik portrayed Judge Dee, the central figure in his detective stories, as an upright, responsible, and incorruptible magistrate who picks over the facts of the case, extracts the confession, and metes out punishments prescribed by law. However, to make the detective more credible and attractive for modern readers, especially Western readers, he crafted a more multidimensional image of Judge Dee in his original Judge Dee novels. According to the Chinese traditions, the judge/detective is a representative of the emperor and devotes himself to righting wrongs and defending social justice. His shortcomings, weakness, and his private life are almost absent in traditional Chinese crime stories. In his own books, Van Gulik tended to "reach for Judge Dee a compromise between the 'superman' dictated by Chinese tradition, and a more human type

of person preferred by me – and probably by many readers, too” (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Nail Murders*, 196). In his detective works, Judge Dee occasionally is blinded by the false appearance to the real situation; he sometimes doubts his judgment with a guilty conscience; he wavers over whether to bring to justice Mrs Kuo, a woman whom he has a crush on, when knowing she killed her wicked husband by a nail; he prejudices Buddhism and Taoism, and his judgement may be warped by prejudice, but at times he admires the way the Taoist hermits cope with life and desires to choose a Taoist path. Also, there is an account of Judge Dee’s domestic life with his three wives in the novels. The judge in Van Gulik’s detective books no longer just serves as an instrument of the emperor in struggling for a harmonious society, or a model of courage, sagacity, loyalty, and impartiality, but is presented as a real and multifaceted person.

Second, in most of Van Gulik’s detective novels the master-detective Judge Dee engages on several cases simultaneously, which provides another example of retaining interesting features of the Chinese gong’an fiction. Unlike the Western detective novel which tends to centre around the detection of a single case, the detective in the traditional Chinese crime novel deals simultaneously with three or more independent cases, each with its own characters and background. That is, three or more different stories continue to unfold parallelly in the same novel so that the direction of the narrative constantly changes. The narrator has to start to tell readers a new and irrelevant story before he/she finishes telling the previous stories. Although this peculiar device is sometimes criticised for “lack of emphasis on setting up a tightly unified shape or model” (Plaks 331), it plays an essential part in leaving room for the reader’s thinking and imagining and putting them in suspense for what will happen next. Considering that a county or town might have a large population of people, Van Gulik believed that it was logical and close to reality that several civil and criminal cases have to be solved by the magistrate at the same time. Therefore, he adopted this pattern in most of the Dee stories,

which enabled him to craft complex and distinct storylines in a novel and keep the reader in suspense. They each consist of three cases as did the *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*.

As the series developed, he improved it in a unique and creative way rather than directly assimilate this multi-case formula from conventions of the genre. To make his work more coherent and intriguing, Van Gulik no longer allowed the three cases in a novel to be entirely unrelated. Instead, he attempted to weave them together and build manifold connections (plot connections, character connections, etc.) between cases in the same novel to make them have some areas of overlap. Additionally, to make readers who are accustomed to reading the Western-style detective novels more involved in the fictional world he created, he placed the central focus to one of them when presenting the process of solving the three cases.

His novel *The Chinese Maze Murder*, for instance, features three main cases: the death of General Ding in a sealed room, a hidden testament of Governor Yoo, and the headless girl in a maze. In the novel, Judge Dee's judicial inquiries about the inheritance of Governor Yoo keeps pace with his investigation of the other two murders. Van Gulik viewed the case of a hidden testament as the most significant part of the novel so that he crafted more complex plots and surprise twists for it. The story concerning the hidden testament is narrated in many discontinuous chapters of the novel. It is first introduced just after the narrative of Judge Dee's arrival at the tribunal of Lan-fang as a new magistrate. The murder of Magistrate Pan is the first case Judge Dee faced. And when he had a glance at the old archives and documents, he noticed a lawsuit marked "The Case Yoo versus Yoo" about the inheritance of a provincial governor Yoo Shou-chien (27). After a brief introduction to this case, it is put aside and then another story began to be told – the judge finds that the murder of Pan is related to the scoundrel Chien. What follows is that General Ding, the father of Candidate Ding whom the judge met when investigating Chien, is killed in his locked study, which reveals an urgent need for investigation (84). It is not until the emergence of Mrs. Yoo with a painted scroll in the tribunal

that the attention of the reader is shifted back to the case of a hidden will. This kind of “discontinuous” narration, like the montage-style narration, helps the stories develop at an appropriate pace to create suspense and to get readers more involved in the mysteries.

Besides, there is some unexcepted overlap between these cases – the writing brush used to kill General Ding in the story about sealed-room murder is sent by Governor Yoo, one of the central persons for the case of hidden testament, as a birthday gift; and the girl with a severed head is murdered by Mrs. Lee, a friend of Governor Yoo’s wife. The surprising intersections of cases not only allow the novel to be more well-constructed but also add many new and clever twists to plots, thus enabling readers to be gripped by the dramatic stories without interrupting their train of thought about what they have been reading. In most of his Judge Dee books<sup>11</sup>, Van Gulik maintained this improved multi-case formula that is rarely employed in Western detective novels.

Judge Dee series also maintain many prominent characteristics of the old Chinese fiction, full-length fiction in particular, and reveal this in an authentic manner<sup>12</sup> (it should be added that many typical features of the ancient Chinese full-length fiction can be found in most of the traditional full-length gong’an novels as well). More specifically, he followed the conventions of “beginning a crime novel with a brief introductory story where the main events of the novel itself are alluded to in veiled terms” in some of his Judge Dee books, which has never been seen in Western crime novels before (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Bell Murders* 202). And the poem in the beginning and “the Chinese-style chapter headings in two parallel sentences, two of the most indispensable parts of the traditional Chinese (detective) fiction, were persevered in some of his detective novels.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Monkey and the Tiger*, a Judge Dee book that contains two novellas, is one of the exceptions.

<sup>12</sup> This can be seen more easily and clearly in his early Judge Dee stories, which he wrote during the period of 1950 and 1958. The Dee stories that he wrote subsequently largely discard these traditions.

In Van Gulik's early Judge Dee books, he retained an old Chinese tradition of devising an edifying poem and an introductory episode as the prologue to the novel. Take *The Chinese Maze Murder* for example. The first chapter of it begins with a poem indicating the protagonist of the novel and his primary duties and qualities:

Heaven created an immutable pattern for ten thousand ages,  
Regulating sun and stars above, mountains and rivers below;  
Thereafter the sages of old did model our sacred social order,  
Taking Heavenly Justice as warp, and man-made Law as woof.

A wise and honest judge is Heaven's unerring instrument,  
The people's father and mother, both compassionate and stern;  
In his court the oppressed obtain redress of all their wrongs,  
No criminal there escapes, despite base fraud and guile. (1)

The poem emphasises the importance of social order and justice on the one hand, and praises Judge Dee for his righteousness, wisdom, and compassionate acts on the other, leading readers to a fantastic introductory story in this chapter and laying the groundwork for the appearance of Judge Dee and major events ahead. The subsequent section shares an episode about a member of the literati who lives in the Yoong-lo era of the Ming dynasty with an interest in collecting old records and archives about famous criminal cases solved by well-known judges in the past (2-8). At the Western Park he meets an old gentleman who claims to be a descendant of the great Judge Dee, a famous magistrate-detective living in the Tang Dynasty China (AD 618-907), and listens to three stories about the Judge Dee acting as a magistrate-detective in Lan-fang until he falls asleep. The next day, he wakes up alone and then writes down the entire story the old man told to him, with a doubt about if his encounter and the conversation with the old man has been a dream. The edifying poem and the introductory story in the beginning are

characteristic features of traditional Chinese fiction. A large majority of ancient Chinese novels, both in literary and vernacular Chinese, such as *Water Margin* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, present these features. Van Gulik applied them to his detective-story creation in an attempt to bring them back to the modern reader, Western and Oriental, and retain “as much as possible Chinese style and atmosphere” in his Judge Dee stories (*The Chinese Maze Murders*, vii).

Also, Van Gulik roughly followed in his early detective works the old Chinese tradition of heading each chapter a summary couplet. Generally, every chapter in a traditional Chinese novel has a thoughtfully designed heading comprising two paralleled sentences that implies what will happen in the particular chapter. This tradition has also been persevered by many famous Chinese full-length gong’an novels, including *Shih Goong An (Cases of Judge Shih)*, *Peng Goong An (Cases of Judge Peng)*, and *Dee Goong An (Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee)*. In *Dee Goong An*<sup>13</sup>, for instance, sixty chapters each was given a two-line heading briefly summarising two main events that happen in the chapter. The heading of the first chapter is “Judge Dee is appointed magistrate Chang-ping; The people crowd his tribunal to report grievances” (*Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, 5), which suggests that the chapter focuses mainly on two events: Judge Dee’s arrival at the town Chang-ping as a new magistrate and the first case he must deal with. And chapter headings of the first five volumes of Van Gulik’s series of Judge Dee books<sup>14</sup> follow the same Chinese style.

This form of chapter heading has its own advantages and limitations. It can give readers some clues to what will happen in the chapter, which helps them keep pace with the plot and attracts them to continue their reading of the book. But this pattern goes against the expectation of modern reader of detective fiction to some extent. As pointed out by Porter, the art of detective narrative lies in the well balance of withholding and giving information that may be

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<sup>13</sup> The original version of *Dee Goong An* contains sixty chapters. Van Gulik’s English translation of *Dee Goong An*, as *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, only consists of thirty chapters.

<sup>14</sup> The first five novels include *The Chinese Bell Murders*, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, *The Chinese Lake Murders*, *The Chinese Nail Murders*, and *The Chinese Gold Murders*.

useful to solve the crime (51). Modern readers generally like to “be kept guessing, the identity of the criminal remaining shrouded in mystery till the last page of the book” (Van Gulik, “Translator’s Preface” ii). Chapter headings in traditional Chinese style are more or less likely to leak out some details about the plot, such as crucial people closely related to criminal cases, the judge’s investigative work, the progress of the investigation, and even the identity of the perpetrator. When taking the hint suggested to them through the heading of a chapter, readers can guess what will happen and how the storyline will be developed before they proceed to read the chapter, which inevitably reduces the elements of suspense on the one hand, and may lead to a less satisfying reading experience on the other.

Therefore, in consideration of the reading habit and expectation of the modern reading public, Van Gulik adjusted this pattern of the chapter heading and then employed the modified one in his literary works. As mentioned above, the heading of a chapter is used to drop a hint about the main events in the chapter so as to arouse the reader’s interest in reading it. Additionally, it is expected by modern readers to accept the responsibility for concealing some significant details and allowing them to be shrouded in mystery to build suspense and to seize them by curiosity. Van Gulik tried to find some way to balance these two needs. The chapter headings of his detective work no longer disclose important details of the facts of crimes and the identity of real culprits, but merely give some fundamental information on significant events of the story told in each chapter to catch the readers' fancy. The heading of the twenty-third chapter – “The judge leads his men to the heart of the maze; A gruesome discovery is made in a secret pavilion” – is a good example: it reveals a subtle blend of these two demands. It tells readers a central event that will happen in the chapter – Judge Dee and his men go deeper into the maze in Governor Yoo’s country estate, which drives them to guess, for example, what will happen to them when finding the way through the maze, and what they will find in the

pavilion. This adjusted pattern not only retain the key features of Chinese-style title, but also cater to a wider readership.

### *2.3 Traditions of the Western model Adopted by Judge Dee Mysteries*

Although Van Gulik aimed to write a traditional Chinese-style detective story, his novels didn't assimilate all the typical features of the gong'an genre. On the contrary, Van Gulik not only avoided retaining a few old Chinese features in the Dee stories that might kill the enthusiasm of modern readers who devour detective novels for entertainment, but also embraced many virtues of the Western detective fiction. His Judge Dee stories can not be understood as pure Chinese-style works in this regard. Both Chinese and Western traditions of detective fiction can find expression in Judge Dee stories.

In the preface of his translation of *Dee Gong An (Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee)*, Van Gulik argues that the traditional Chinese detective story differs from the Western form mainly in five points (ii-iv). First, the identity of the criminal is usually exposed at the very beginning, his/her name, life story, crime, and main factors that drive him to commit a crime all are explained on the first few pages of the book, which means that the excitement of keeping guessing “*Who* done it?” and “*Why* done it?” when reading detective novels is almost absent in most traditional Chinese crime stories. The enjoyment of reading works of conventional Chinese crime literature lies in finding out the detective's effort to capture the villains, convict them of a crime, and secure confessions. Second, the supernatural elements, including goblins, ghosts, and visit to the Nether World, as well as animals and household utensils, participate freely in the process of detection and accusation, which is contrary to the principle of realistic principle followed by the Western model. Third, old Chinese detective novels are usually “written in a broadly narrative vein, interlarded with lengthy poems, philosophical digressions, and what not” (Van Gulik, “Translator's Preface” iii). As a result, most old Chinese detective

works are pretty long, with a hundred or more chapters. Forth, traditional Chinese novels, including crime novels, tend to be well-populated. They, in general, have a large cast of character with complex family relationships. Sometimes the overall number of characters in a single novel reaches two hundred characters. By contrast, the Anglophone crime novels favour smaller casts and clearer relationships with a list of dramatis personae in the beginning. Fifth, a faithful description of “how the criminal was executed, with every gruesome detail”, and often a detailed description of “the punishment the unfortunate criminal received, after his execution”, are provided by most ancient Chinese crime novels to “satisfy the Chinese sense of justice” (Van Gulik, “Translator’s Preface,” iii-iv). But the vivid depiction of the execution of the criminals is considered to be undesirable for the Western reading public, those who prefers an ending that hints at the penalty the culprit will face. Being aware that these five characteristics of old Chinese crime story were not very palatable to a modern reader, especially Anglophone readers, Van Gulik tried to “combine a maximum of undiluted detection and of general human interest, with a minimum of the peculiarly Chinese features discussed earlier” (Van Gulik, “Translator’s Preface,” v).

Instead of telling a crime story in a chronological and linear order and disclosing the identity of the culprit at the beginning as most of ancient Chinese crime novels did, Van Gulik followed conventions of the Western model and didn’t allow the full story to come out until the last few pages. The narrative of old Chinese crime novels has roughly been arranged in a natural, chronological order: (1) introduction of the criminal and the process of committing a crime; (2) investigation and inquest into the crime; (3) confession and judgement; (4) punishment received by the culprit (Shi 184). In brief, the traditional Chinese crime novels generally first introduce the culprit and the way in which he/she committed the crime (that is, the story of crime), and then tell readers how the magistrate-detective picks over the facts of the case, arrests and interrogates the criminal suspect, extracts a confession, and punishes the

criminal (the story of investigation). The premature revelation of the perpetrator, Van Gulik believes, lead to the lack of suspense so that it is unacceptable for most modern readers (“Translator’s Preface” ii). With this in mind, he discarded this tradition and had his detective stories narrated in a “Western” way.

Unlike traditional Chinese crime novels which usually tell the story of crime first, then the story of investigation, Van Gulik’s Judge Dee stories followed the Western convention of intertwining the story of crime with the story of investigation. As suggested by John G. Cawelti, core events in a typical Western detective novel are usually arranged in a particular order: “(a) introduction of the detective; (b) crime and clues; (c) investigation; (d) announcement of the solution; (e) explanation of the solution; (f) denouement” (82). That is, in a typical Western detective novel, especially in a whodunit, the crime is discovered by the detective in the very beginning, but the identity of the criminal and his/her motive for crime are not fully revealed until the last few pages. The detective initiates an investigation and attempts to uncover the truth, during which clues gathered from various sources are gradually put together in a coherent story of crime. And the description of the detective’s investigation and discovery of clues to the puzzles usually take up hundreds of pages. Similarly, in Van Gulik’s Judge Dee series, the story of the crime is deliberately concealed. Readers have to closely follow every move of the detective to piece up it with “data” gathered from his investigation during the reading. It is not until the last few pages that the identity of the culprit and his/her motive for the crime are entirely presented. All this leave enough room for readers themselves to uncover and examine various clues and ascertain who the killer is, which help in this sense keep them in suspense and immerse themselves totally.

Van Gulik didn’t allow supernatural elements to be a driving force of the solution of the crime in his detective novels. It should be mentioned that it doesn’t mean that there is no supernatural intervention in the Judge Dee series. In *The Chinese Maze Murders*, for example,

an old man who declares himself to be a descendant of the great Judge Dee tells a half-asleep scholar three stories about mysterious criminal cases solved by Judge Dee at Lan-fang over dinner. The next day, the scholar wakes up alone the next day, with a haunting sense of doubt whether their encounter and conversation is a dream. Also, in *The Chinese Bell Murders*, a connoisseur as a narrator tells the reader a wired story that he goes back to the era in which Judge Dee lives and witnesses how Judge Dee solves three crimes as a spectator when wearing the old cap of Judge Dee. The narrator leaves it to the reader to decide if it is a dream, an actual happening, or a figment of his imagination in a fever-tormented brain. Although Van Gulik occasionally inserts supernatural contents into the narrative, he made sure that none of these supernatural elements plays to confirm Judge Dee's conclusion.

Van Gulik didn't reject the idea of beginning his detective novels with an introductory episode with a touch of the supernatural because he believed it can not only reveal a peculiar feature of ancient Chinese novels, but also make the full novel be cloaked in mystery. Nonetheless, it was totally unacceptable for him and the modern reader to allow the superhuman strength and occult powers to help the detective analyse the cases and confirm his deductions. Thus, he didn't allow supernatural elements to play a decisive role in the solution of crimes in his detective stories. As discussed in the previous chapter, Van Gulik deliberately deleted the supernatural elements of the plots he adapted from ancient Chinese crime stories. Take for example the case of hidden testament in *The Chinese Maze Murders*, Van Gulik abandoned an event in the original plot that the judge pretends to see and talked with the ghost of Governor Yoo about his will to get Yoo Kee to plead guilty. In his own Judge Dee books, Judge Dee no longer breaks the case with the assistance of the paranormal. Instead, Judge Dee manages to deal with the cases mainly by his reasoning and psychoanalytic capacity, extensive knowledge, and talent for investigation, like a Western detective.

“While Judge Dee retains the incorruptible persona of Chinese detectives like Pure-official Bao, as an investigator”, J. K. van Dover writes, “he is much more in the tradition of the reasoning agent of Western detective fiction” (18). Indeed, Judge Dee’s persona and working methods all are the product of the combination of Chinese and Western traditions of detective fiction. Although Van Gulik maintained the Chinese custom of choosing a local magistrate as the hero of his detective stories, he deviated from it in several points. In addition to intentionally showing the judge’s shortcomings, weakness, and private life that are usually missing in traditional Chinese crime stories, Van Gulik followed the Western tradition of making the detective use “scientific” methods more frequently in his stories than employ authorised torture and the supernatural to solve a mystery and wring evidence. Given the absence of modern science and technology in ancient times, Van Gulik allowed the judge in Judge Dee mysteries to rely more upon thoroughly questioning, carefully observing people’s behaviour, his capacity for logical thinking and reasoning, “shrewd psychological insight”, “wide knowledge of their fellow men”, and “sound common sense” (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Lake Murders*, 251).

Van Gulik’s detective novels are relatively short (no more than 28 chapters), with a limited number of casts, few irrelevant details and unnecessary materials, which echoes the Western form of the genre. Although he availed himself of the multi-case formula from the Chinese genre in his own stories, he managed to keep the characters in a relatively small number by establishing manifold connections between different cases in the same novel. It must be added that Van Gulik’s later works have a smaller cast of characters than that of his early works. In addition, he inherited the Western tradition of adding a list of the dramatis personae at the beginning of the novel to help readers gain a basic understanding of characters and their relationships in advance.

As to common materials inserted in the traditional Chinese (crime) novels, such as poems, philosophical digressions, and official documents, Van Gulik removed most of them from his Judge Dee stories. But a small number of necessary materials were preserved either to serve to solve the cases as crucial clues or to keep “as much as possible Chinese style and atmosphere” (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, vii). Poems and philosophical digressions, for instance, can still be found in *The Chinese Maze Murders*. Candidate Ding’s poem quoted in the fifteenth chapter is crucial to half the General’s murder. And the philosophical discussion between Judge Dee and Master Crane Robe reveals two different ways of thinking and living that have dominated Chinese philosophy for more than two thousand years – Confucianism and Taoism, which is not only employed to provide an essential clue to the two cases in the novel, but also to lead readers to a better understanding of traditional Chinese literatus and Taoist hermits. Besides, the abovementioned philosophical discussion and the poem in Van Gulik’s novel play an essential role in retaining peculiar Chinese elements and creating a Chinese atmosphere.

Similarly, given the Western convention of declaring or dropping a hint at the punishment the villain would receive at the end of the story, Van Gulik nearly abandoned the Chinese tradition of describing how the villain is punished or executed in a gruesome detail. Generally, the old Chinese crime stories tend to give the reader a faithful and detailed account of an execution as an ending to cater to the Chinese taste and “satisfy the Chinese sense of justice” (Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, 317). However, Van Gulik thought that “it offends the Western reader, since it reminds him too much of beating a man who is already down” (Van Gulik, “Translator’s Preface” iv). Therefore, he usually suggested a tragic ending of the criminal with a deliberate omission of the full description of execution to cater to a wider readership. When he occasionally added an account of execution into the narrative, he tried to condense it into a few sentences.

In Van Gulik's later works, he discarded some of the typical features of classical Chinese fiction that he adopted in the initial works. He no longer began every novel with an edifying poem and a fantastic introductory episode as the prologue to the book. Also, he abandoned the convention of heading every chapter with a summary title which consists of two parallel sentences. All this make his later series of Judge Dee mysteries products of a subtle blend of Chinese and Western conventions of detective fiction rather than purely Chinese-style works of popular literature.

#### *2.4 New Paradigm, New Expectation, and New Memory*

Van Gulik remembered both the Chinese and Anglophone genres of the detective story and adapted some of the conventions in the genres in his own series of Judge Dee mysteries, which, together with his stories' intertextual reference to the precursor texts, helps construct the memory of the Dee stories. Various traditions of the genre of detective story are etched into every aspect of Van Gulik's Judge Dee books. On the one hand, the Judge Dee stories adapted many peculiar traditions of the Chinese genre: the hero/detective of his original detective books is a local magistrate/judge based on a historical personage rather than a private or an amateur detective; Van Gulik retained the multi-case pattern, allowing the judge to deal simultaneously with three cases in a novel; he employed in his early works the Chinese-style chapter headings and the device of open the book with a suggestive poem and fantastic tale hinting at some important events and characters. On the other hand, he followed in his novels some of prominent Western conventions of the detective story to make them more suitable for the Western reading public: he allowed the detective to identify the criminal and surprising readers at the end; he made the detective investigate and solve cases through judicial inquires, careful observation, logical reasoning, and psychological analysis, instead of using torture or occult to elicit a confession; he attempted to minimise irrelevant details, and the number of chapters,

characters, and supernatural elements; he abandoned the detailed and faithful depiction of the execution of the villains. His stories are a hybrid of the Chinese form and the Western formula, remembering a large number of conventions of the genre of the detective story.

Moreover, Van Gulik's Judge Dee novels contribute to the development of the genre of detective fiction and creating a new memory for the genre by combining different conventions of the Chinese and Western model. As pointed out by Erll and Nünning, "literary genres and their formal characteristics are closely related to conventionalised expectations" (273). More specifically, literary genres "constitute sets of expectations" that exert considerable influence on both the writing process (authors) and the reading process (readers) (Wesseling 18). In the Judge Dee stories, Van Gulik assimilated some of the genre conventions in his own composition of Judge Dee novels on the one hand, and attempted to create a new paradigm for the genre and guide the expectations of modern readers along a new path on the other hand. The gong'an genre and the genre of Western detective fiction have developed independently. And there are many differences in conventionalised expectations for crime fiction between the Chinese and Anglophone reading public. In his original series of Judge Dee mysteries, as discussed in the previous and present chapters, Van Gulik's attempt to reuse old Chinese plot, characters, and elements, and to blend the Chinese traditions of the crime story with the Western conventions of detective fiction, not only allows Van Gulik to produce a new paradigm for detective fiction, but also helps update or reconstitute expectations for detective fiction, thus creating a new memory for the genre of detective fiction.

## Conclusion

Departing from case studies of Van Gulik's detective stories, this thesis presents an attempt to explore the phenomenon of inner-literary memory in popular literature, specifically, the inner-literary memory phenomenon in detective fiction. Detective fiction, like historical fiction, autobiography, and drama, can also be considered as a fertile ground for the exploration of intersections of literature and memory: some issues about the narrative structure of a detective story, for example, how a detective story involves recalling clues and how the narrator recall the story of crime and tell it to readers when reporting the story of investigation, are closely associated with the subject of memory; besides, the detective fiction also can "perform" acts of remembering, for example, remember pre-existent texts and "code" some ideas about the past into the narrative. All this suggest that it is feasible to think about detective fiction in relation to cultural memory. And Van Gulik's Judge Dee mysteries, which have established close relationships with earlier texts and different crime-writing conventions, provide good cases for studying some of the ways in which detective fiction and memory meets. Building upon the concept of "memory *of* literature" summarized and conceptualized by Erll and Nünning and Lachmann's theory of memory-as-intertextuality, my thesis has shown that Van Gulik's Judge Dee series construct their own memories and participate in the inner-literary memory discourses by remembering and adapting the previous (literary or non-literary) texts and conventions of both the gong'an genre and the genre of Western detective story.

Chapter 1 of this thesis has shed light on the interrelationships of Van Gulik's detective stories and the precursor texts and contributions they make to constitute the memory of the Judge Dee stories and a memory space made up of texts. In Van Gulik's Judge Dee books, fragments of many old Chinese texts, including ancient judicial casebooks, gong'an stories, traditional vernacular novels, anecdotes, and philosophical pieces, are remembered through a literary practice of memory – intertextuality. Also, the Judge Dee novels are reminiscent of

some of Western detective stories. Both Van Gulik's utilizing and adapting the prior texts and readers' referencing of the pre-existent detective stories during their reading play to the intertextuality and memory of the Judge Dee stories. As to models of intertextuality, three models all find their expression in the Judge Dee series. Transformative intertextuality is the most common form, while the other two models of intertextuality occur occasionally. The intertextual relations between Van Gulik's Judge Dee stories and previous texts, are by-products of Van Gulik's attempt to ground his novelties on a subtle blend of old Chinese sources and original plot and twists he crafted, as well as his desire to recapture imperial China in his detective works. The intertextuality (memory) of the Judge Dee stories, on the one hand, revitalises the prior texts in a new age and brings layers of meanings to these stories. On the other hand, it helps produce a memory space filled with textual relations and enables Van Gulik's detective novels to participate in the inner-literary memory dynamics.

Moreover, considering that "intertextuality means reference not only to individual texts, but also to genres" (Erl1 73), the ways in which the Judge Dee books retain and adapt crime-writing traditions and combine formulae of the Chinese and Anglophone detective fiction have been examined in the chapter 2. In the Judge Dee stories, Van Gulik followed the peculiar Chinese custom of choosing a local magistrate as the hero of his detective novels and letting the detective handle three different criminal cases simultaneously. Also, the typical Chinese devices of opening the story with a poem and an episode to imply crucial characters and events, of giving every chapter a summary, two-sentence heading, were echoed in most of his early works. Besides, he assimilated several Western conventions of detective stories to cater to a broader readership. Like in a whodunit, it is not until near the end of the story that the identity of the perpetrator is revealed as the high point in Judge Dee series. Although the detective in Van Gulik's detective stories is a magistrate living in Tang Dynasty China, the detective relies more on his knowledge, reasoning skills and psychological insight than torture or the occult to

solve the case like a Western detective. And Van Gulik intentionally portrayed a multifaceted judge – his strengths and weaknesses, his private life are presented to readers – rather than made him to be a superman or a instrument of imperial system. Also, Van Gulik’s stories have a limited number of chapters, casts, unimportant details, and supernatural elements, which fits well into the Western traditions of detective fiction. The blend of the Chinese and Western traditions of the detective story in Van Gulik’s Judge Dee books contributes not only to the production of a new, hybrid paradigm for the genre, but also to the construction of the memory of both the Judge Dee mysteries and the genre of detective fiction.

Van Gulik’s Judge Dee stories, as well as their translations and adaptations, not only make Judge Dee, a semi-fictional character, well-known in many (Oriental and Western) countries as “China’s Sherlock Holmes”, but also play to the construction of cultural memory. According to *judge-dee.info*, the Judge Dee novels have been translated into 29 different languages and sold in 38 countries<sup>15</sup> (“Judge Dee Novels in Various Languages”). Furthermore, the Judge Dee mystery series have engendered numerous textual and screen adaptations. The French writer Frédéric Lenormand wrote 25 sequels to Van Gulik’s Judge Dee detective series and published them between 2004 and 2018<sup>16</sup>. Also, several other authors, such as the Dutch novelist Janvillem van de Wetering, the Chinese-American writer Zhu Xiao Di, Eleanor Cooney and Daniel Alteri, tried their hands at composing their new Judge Dee books based on Van Gulik’s Judge Dee character. Besides, the Judge Dee stories have been adapted into comic strips, television drama, and movies in different countries. Some of the notable movie versions include the Edgar Award-nominated television movie *Judge Dee and the Monastery Murders* created by Gerald Isenberg in Anglophone world and the *Detective Dee* film series directed

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<sup>15</sup> Access to the full text at: [http://www.judge-dee.info//judge\\_dee/languages/index.jsp?presentation=detailed&sorteer\\_1=year&sorteer\\_1\\_volgorde=asc&sorteer\\_2=serial\\_number&sorteer\\_2\\_volgorde=asc](http://www.judge-dee.info//judge_dee/languages/index.jsp?presentation=detailed&sorteer_1=year&sorteer_1_volgorde=asc&sorteer_2=serial_number&sorteer_2_volgorde=asc).

<sup>16</sup> Frédéric Lenormand’s new Judge Ti series (Série *Les Nouvelles Enquêtes du juge Ti*) began with *Le Château du lac Tchou-an: Une nouvelle enquête du juge Ti. Mort dans un champ de lotus* was released in 2018. During his writing, he attempted to stay faithful to the fictionalized history of Van Gulik’s Judge Dee stories.

and produced by Tsui Hark<sup>17</sup> in China. Notable television versions include four different series produced by China Central Television (CCTV) in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010. All this enable the semi-fictional character Judge Dee to reach a wider audience and participate in cultural memory dynamics.

For reasons of space and of thematic consistency, this thesis has only discussed some of the ways in which Van Gulik's detective series and memory meets, focusing on exploring how they remember prior texts and literary genres. It has not taken in consideration the afterlife of the Judge Dee stories and has not studied the impact of various adaptations in memory culture. Future research in this direction might lay more emphasis on the afterlife of Van Gulik's detective stories, attempting to investigate how those stories and their afterlives play to creating the memory of the Judge Dee novels, representing memory, and function as media of cultural memory.

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<sup>17</sup> The *Detective Dee* film series comprises *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame* (2010), *Young Detective Dee: Rise of the Sea Dragon* (2013), *Detective Dee: The Four Heavenly Kings* (2018).

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