Twitter Thread by Jess Nevins

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TIL:

- first Western detective stories translated & published in Japan in *1863*--that's pre-Meiji, even!

- first Chinese-written detective stories featuring Western-style detectives starred women as both detectives and criminals were published in 1907--author Lü Simian (!).

Quote: “This case is so complicated that even Sherlock Holmes would feel helpless if it fell into his hands. [Now] it is solved by a woman who returned from abroad for a brief
visit to her hometown. Who is to say that the wisdom of Chinese cannot compete with the Westerners?”

The lead female detective in these stories, Chu Yi, is a fan of Doyle's Holmes stories and asks herself "What would Sherlock Holmes do?" while crime-solving, but succeeds through her use of martial arts and more "Chinese" attributes--China, not the West, solves the crimes.

Author Lü Simian, btw, is this guy: https://t.co/swPvAxr87J . One of the "four greatest modern Chinese historians," also wrote a landmark work of literary theory, and helped cohere Chinese detective fiction with his stories. Bit of a badass.

Holmes was the dominant influence on Chinese detective fiction of the late-Qing & early Republic years, and the biggest star of Chinese detective fiction of those years, Cheng Xiaoqing's Huo Sang, was a spin on Holmes.

I've got some info on Huo Sang here: https://t.co/Nizn9p1zfv . He was a (mostly successful) attempt to meld Western scientific methods & mindset with Chinese ethics & moral principles--a New Man, but accepting Chinese traditions in good faith.

The Huo Sang stories are fun--there's a good translation of several of them here: https://t.co/pcXNH3nCR5

But when things get really interesting (for me, anyhow) is when Huo Sang--Holmes--meets Sun Liaohong's gentleman thief Lu Pin ("the Oriental Arsene Lupin").

Arsene Lupin, of course, being this guy: https://t.co/zOwkjfWtv6 . Lupin was the greatest gentleman thief of them all, and someone who matched wits with Holmes (https://t.co/EdbJ4cvVCP)

Sun Liaohong's Lu Ping is obviously influenced by Arsene Lupin (the similarity in names is a dead giveaway), but Lu Ping (dozens of stories, 1923-1949) differs from Lupin in that Lu Ping is much more hardboiled. Lu Ping is a gentleman thief who seeks justice outside the law. But!

Lu Ping seems almost lifted from the pulps--he talks in a hardboiled patter, mutters wisecracks, whistles while he burgles, and makes asides to the reader. He's almost like Robert Leslie Bellem's Dan Turner (https://t.co/e0xDVsoMxN), if not so pronounced.

Huo Sang, like Holmes, values justice more than the law but generally seeks to work inside the law, not outside it, and within the Chinese traditions, not outside them.

Lu Ping, much more than Lupin, becomes an instrument of justice and flouts the law.

So the clashes between Huo Sang & Lu Ping aren't just for entertainment, the way the Holmes/Lupin crossovers were. Huo Sang & Lu Ping embodied differing ideas of what justice meant, and were attempts to influence Chinese writers to step outside tradition in their crime stories.

Even more interesting (to me, at least) is that Huo Sang remained Holmesian for a long time, while Lu Ping is heavily influenced by USian hardboiled fiction.

So Huo Sang-v-Lu Ping becomes a commentary on classical British detective fiction versus 1920s/1930s USian det. fiction.

Arthur Conan Doyle chose to stop the Holmes stories in 1914--Holmes never had to confront the War, or the post-War environment, or the massive changes in detective fiction in the 1920s.

Huo Sang-v-Lu Ping shows us what that confrontation is like --not so great for Huo Sang.

Now, if we turn to Burmese & Thai iterations of Holmes, we find (is showered with rotten eggs, hook drags me off-stage).

I'll talk about those another day, shall I?

(as always, thanks for reading!)