Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701-1754), the author of *Rulin Waishi* 儒林外史, has a sharp eye for reflecting and criticizing the social illnesses in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In fact, his critical outlook of life enables him to paint a splendid gallery of characters with similar yet different in temperament.

In this thesis, I attempt to compare and contrast three pairs of characters in *Rulin Waishi*, carefully chosen from a total of more than three hundred and eighty characters. The areas that are dealt with include the comparison of the background and moral characteristics of each pair of characters.

Aged and ignorant scholars, a product of the ill civil service examinations, are often seen in the society then. This is due to the unfair system that is incapable of selecting people of talent. Due to the same reason, blood brothers make use of their scholarly honour to either bully or exploit fellow villagers in order to gain fame and wealth. Women, a section of the society under the same system, adopt different definitions of a being a moral and virtuous woman although they are brainwashed with similar teachings.

Through examining the similarities and differences of the characters, we can clearly see that a detailed comparison of characters has the advantage of allowing us see their characters more distinctly from a wider perspective. How a person's thinking is shaped depends very much on his/her inborn character, his/her family, background and social influences.