

PREFACE

This guide to six major Chinese novels is intended for several kinds of readers: specialists in Chinese literature, nonspecialist teachers and students having occasion to discuss these works in the classroom, students of Western and comparative literature desirous of enlarging their knowledge of fiction, and others similarly impelled by curiosity. Accordingly, while I have provided for the unprepared reader pertinent information concerning the evolution and authorship of each novel, I have mainly undertaken the kind of inquiry that should prove of equal interest to the specialist and the student of Western literature—critical exploration of the art and meaning of the six novels and of their genre. In adopting this critical approach, I am of course fully aware that the specialists commanding the highest respect in the field have been invariably those primarily concerned with bibliographical and historical scholarship. But it seems to me obvious that we cannot indefinitely neglect the critical study of classic Chinese novels until all puzzles concerning their composition and publication have been solved. Problems of authorship and textual corruption have similarly plagued modern students of Elizabethan drama, but this handicap has not deterred the best critical minds among them from significantly enriching our understanding of that drama as literature.

The main text of this book was completed just before the full-scale launching of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution on mainland China in the summer of 1966. The six novels under study, which had hitherto

been proclaimed as national classics, are now dismissed as relics of the feudal past totally incompatible with the thought of Mao Tse-tung. I have not thought it advisable, however, to change my references to the affirmative Communist attitude toward traditional Chinese fiction to the past tense since it is most likely that this earlier position, though officially repudiated, still claims the silent allegiance of mainland scholars seriously concerned with the nation's literary heritage.

With the exception of *The Scholars*, I have translated most of the except from the six novels myself either because they are missing from the available English translations or because the corresponding passages appear to me unsatisfactory. I have translated the longer excerpts with especial care in the hope that they may bear scrutiny as Arnoldian touchstones by readers who cannot read the novels in the original. Beyond serving the immediate context of my critical discussion, each of these passages possesses an intrinsic literary interest deserving of further exploration.

The preparation of this study was made possible mainly through the support of funds granted by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to the Columbia University Committee on Oriental Studies and, additionally, through a contract with the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, under the provisions of Title VI, Public Law 85-864, as amended, Section 602. To Professor and Mrs. Wm. Theodore de Bary, who kindly read the manuscript upon its completion, I am deeply grateful for their great interest in my project and their constant encouragement. In translating passages from *Chin P'ing Mei*, I have benefited from the treasured advice of Professor Liu Ts'un-yan of the Australian National University, though any remaining errors in the translated excerpts are entirely my own responsibility. I also want to thank Dr. Hsin-cheng Chuang of the University of California at Berkeley for repeatedly arranging the loan of materials available at his university and at the Hoover Institution. The Chinese characters adorning the title page are in the distinguished hand of Professor Chiang Yee, who includes among his various inimitable accomplishments that of a master calligrapher.

Portions of Chapters III and VII have seen earlier publication, in somewhat different wording, as articles in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* (No. II, 1962) and *Criticism* (V, No. 3, Wayne State University Press, 1963), respectively titled "Comparative

Approaches to *Water Margin*” and “Love and Compassion in *Dream of the Red Chamber*.” I wish to thank the editors of these journals and the Director of the Wayne State University Press for giving me permission to incorporate these articles in the present work. Chapter IV developed from a paper I read in March, 1964, at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. That paper and a companion paper given by my late brother T. A. Hsia at the same meeting have subsequently been accepted for inclusion in *Wen-lin: Studies in the Chinese Humanities* (University of Wisconsin Press, in press) under the joint title “New Perspectives on Two Ming Novels: *Hsi-yu chi* and *Hsi-yu pu*.” To Professor Chow Tse-tsung, the editor of that volume, I owe a special debt of gratitude for allowing me to quote and adapt portions of the forthcoming article. The Appendix originally appeared in *The Kenyon Review* (XXIV, No. 3, Summer, 1962) under the title “‘To What Fyn Lyve I Thus?’—Society and Self in the Chinese Short Story.” Thanks are due the editor for permitting me to reprint the article in its present revised form.

The name of my beloved brother appears on the dedication page—a feeble commemorative gesture that suggests nothing of our deep attachment to each other while he was alive and of my abiding loneliness since his passing on February 23, 1965.

C. T. H.
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