

## BOOK REVIEWS

LI QIANCHENG: *Fictions of Enlightenment. Journey to the West, Tower of Myriad Mirrors, and Dream of the Red Chamber*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. 250 pp., US\$ 48 (hard cover). ISBN 0-8248-2597-7

Li Qiancheng's monograph is the revised version of his doctoral thesis completed in 1998 at Washington University, St. Louis, under the guidance of Professor Robert E. Hegel. Its somewhat drab, uninspiring dust jacket and rather fragile binding cover an interesting study that aspires to become a milestone in the study of the late traditional Chinese novel. Its innovative approach consists in presenting a new perspective in the research of this genre – the influence of the Buddhist quest for salvation, or enlightenment, on the vision, structure, and narrative form of three works of classic Chinese fiction, namely the Ming novels *Xiyou ji* (The Journey to the West) and *Xiyou bu* (Supplement to The Journey to the West or The Tower of Myriad Mirrors), and the Qing novel *Honglou meng* (The Dream of the Red Chamber, also known as *Shitou ji* or Story of the Stone). Li argues that the plot of these novels are generally patterned after the narratives in certain well-known Mahāyāna sutras and as such can – and should – be read as their fictional equivalents.

From the methodological point of view, the corner stone of this work is that of inter-textuality – the study of thematic and rhetorical relationship between different texts – in both the historical and intergenre sense. On the one hand, individual texts from different periods are thus set against each other with their authors as agents, while on the other the cultural milieu of the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition is identified as a common source of the poetics and aesthetics of various authors. The focus of Li's attention is on the novel *Honglou meng* and the way "it refers back to its predecessors and conversely, how it illuminates them" (p. 3). Equipped with an impressive command of both the scholarship on vernacular fiction and the theories of Buddhism, the author defines a new sub-genre and a narrative mode within the traditional Chinese vernacular fiction, that is the *fiction of enlightenment*. As Li points out, "central to this subgenre is the progress toward enlightenment, in which the end and the means, however, cannot be clearly demarcated... All these works are built on the understanding of the intricate relationship between *samsāra* – the provisional – and *nirvāna* – the ultimate... [they] imply that one cannot achieve enlightenment without going through all that is called life ... and that the human existential experiences... are a prerequisite of enlightenment." (p. 165).

Let us now take a closer look at the structure of the book. The very first part, the Prologue, offers an outline of the whole work with notes on its basic premises and methodology, and a summary of the individual chapters. Chapter 1 sets the terminological framework of the study. Unlike some other modern authors (Andrew Plaks, C. T. Hsia, Ping Shao) who favour a Neo-Confucian, or a Daoist interpretation of the Chinese novel, Li chooses the standpoint of Mahāyāna Buddhism, following the direction indicated by Anthony Yu, Robert E. Hegel, Wai-ye Li and others. He discusses an impor-

tant factor in the creation of literary works, the influence of the cultural milieu of the period, with the Buddhist philosophical background as the common denominator. Then he sets forth the generic implications of the novels discussed from a comparative perspective with a concluding definition of the term “fiction of enlightenment”.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the Buddhist soteriological patterns and their bearing on the narrative structures of the three novels. Much attention is paid to the popular biography of Buddha Śākyamuni and some sutras composed on this model, especially those describing the pilgrimages of Sadāprarudita and Sudhana, two followers of Dharma, as this pattern is identified to be of importance primarily in explaining the narrative structure of the novel *Xiyou ji*. Since the basic contradiction in the Chinese novel is understood as that between *lunhui* or *jieyun* (*samsāra*), the existence in the world of life and death, and *niepan* or *jietuo* (*nirvāṇa*), liberation, deliverance, the Mahāyāna paradox of the intrinsic relationship between these two concepts is explained in some detail.

After this initial “setting of the scene”, the author proceeds to an in-depth discussion of the individual novels in the following three chapters. Chapter 3, that on *Xiyou ji*, considers the relationship between the sūtra *Ru fajie pin* (Gandavyūha), the final book of *Huayan jing* (Avatamsaka sūtra, Flower Garland Sūtra), and the novel. The journey of Sun Wukong and Tripitaka, the protagonists of the novel, is discussed then with an emphasis on the process leading to their enlightenment. This is followed by a consideration of some key issues in the interpretation of the novel: the tension between two views of enlightenment (gradual vs. sudden) and the nature of the journey itself (linear or circular). The chapter concludes with the discussion of the use of doubling devices, that is the technique of duplication and negation of the novel characters, as a result of the Buddhist preoccupation with the human mind.

I am particularly grateful to the author for his treatment of the novel *Xiyou ji*, especially the sustained analysis of the pilgrims’ quest for enlightenment. With its exhaustive and illuminating approach it supersedes a great deal of scholarship of the older authors. However, as is often the case with complicated, multi-layered semantic structure of the novel, there is one aspect or another that resists an overall interpretation. In this case, it is disputable how well the ending of this novel fits into Li Qiancheng’s interpretive framework, that is, whether Sun Wukong and Tripitaka did reach some kind of enlightenment and what was its nature, at the end of their journey.

The analysis of the novel *Xiyou bu*, generally ascribed to Dong Yue (1620-1686), in chapter 4 serves as a link between the two longer works. *Xiyou bu* is seen as a milestone in the development of the fiction of enlightenment. The reason is its introduction of such concepts as desire and self-reflexivity. It draws attention to the study of human psychology since the very philosophical message of the book is defined by Dong Yue himself as “emptying and destroying the roots of desire” (p. 93). The evocation of the dream world as a factor of dramatization is discussed in this chapter along with the doubling devices that take another dimension in this novel compared to its predecessor.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the analysis of *Honglou meng*, the major work of the fiction of enlightenment. Li argues that it shares with *Xiyou ji* an identical soteriological structure and narrative pattern and as such these two novels can be regarded as both antithetical (a “novel of gods and demons” vs. “novel of manners”) and complementary in terms of interpretation. The main character of *Honglou meng*, Jia Baoyu, undergoes an experience that is basically identical to that of Sun Wukong and Tripitaka in their trip to the human realm in search of enlightenment. Considerable attention in this chapter is devoted to the relationship between desire (*qing*) and dharma (*fa*), the first serving as a means to reach the latter. Emphasis is given to the adaptation and revitalization of the

previously applied patterns (the metaphor of a mirror, doubling of the protagonists), and the reenactment of the protagonist's quest within a new context. The discussion culminates in a study of self-reflexivity on different planes, of the metaphysical dimension of the novel and of the manipulation of various discourses as a logical outcome of their engagement with Buddhism.

In the Epilogue, the author briefly discusses other longer fictional works of the Ming-Qing period in order to validate his perspective. The result is that there is very little beyond the three novels mentioned above to be subsumed into the newly defined subgenre. This fact, however, does not diminish the value of Li's argument. The interpretive framework of the enlightenment quest he offers to bridge the two masterpieces of the classical Chinese novel is very inspiring and one can only hope to see this approach developed by further research in the field.

Another important section of every book, the index, characterizes the nature of the whole of this monograph – it is, seemingly, rather concise, yet a closer look reveals its being closely knit, well-wrought and very informative.

In his book Li takes another step forward on the formal side when adapting the pinyin system thoroughly to the extent of transforming into it even the older romanization forms in quotations. He is also very consistent in supplying the Chinese titles of Buddhist scriptures in the text with English and Sanskrit equivalents.

The monograph is richly researched and documented with annotations and bibliography reaching one-fourth of the length of the text itself. The author's style is vivid and fluent which makes this theoretical literary treatise enjoyable reading. His command of both the Chinese and Western scholarly tradition is remarkable, however, one cannot but regret that he did not incorporate in his study the fruits of the sinological research in Japan from the recent decades, as well.

As Li Qiancheng concludes, the novels under discussion, especially *Xiyou ji* and *Honglou meng*, comprehensive and all-inclusive as they are, cannot yield to a single interpretation, no matter how sophisticated. There are – and there should be – a number of equally valid, plausible readings. However, using the author's simile, it is obvious that he untied a significant part of the knot and he did it in an elegant, persuasive way.

Radovan Škultěty

MUSASHI TACHIKAWA, SHOUN HINO, LALITA DEODHAR: *Pūjā and Saṃskāra*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited 2001. 177 pp.

The aim of the book under review is to describe and analyse two Hindu rituals, *pūjā* (offering service) and *saṃskāra* (initiation rituals at important occasions of life) and also “to indicate the place of the ritual in the total structure of religion” (p. IX).

In a short Preface, the author gives his definition of religion as “a form of purposive action performed with consciousness of the distinction between the sacred and the profane” (p. V), and divides religious activities into group activities (where *saṃskāra* belongs) and individual activities (where *pūjā* belongs). He shows how the category of religious activity determines the meaning of the sacred and the profane. Notes on the distinction and dynamic relationship between sacred and profane are further developed in the Introduction to Part I of the book. This part is a revised version of Tachikawa's paper “A Hindu Worship Service in Sixteen Steps, *Shoḍaśa-upacāra-pūjā*, originally pub-