

ASIAN
THOUGHT
AND
CULTURE

*Between Noble
and Humble*

Cao Xueqin and the
Dream of the Red Chamber

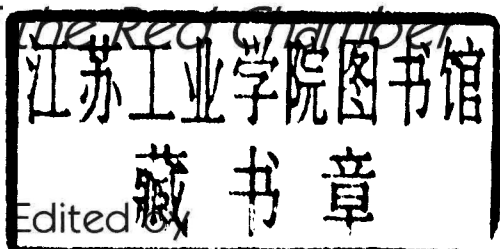
Zhou Ruchang

Edited by Ronald R. Gray and Mark S. Ferrara

Zhou Ruchang

Between Noble and Humble

Cao Xueqin and the
Dream of the Red Chamber



Ronald R. Gray and Mark S. Ferrara

Translated by
Liangmei Bao and Kyongsook Park



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt am Main • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Zhou, Ruchang.

[Cao Xueqin yu Hong lou meng. English]

Between noble and humble: Cao Xueqin and The dream of the red chamber /

Zhou Ruchang; edited by Ronald R. Gray and Mark S. Ferrara;

translated by Liangmei Bao and Kyongsook Park.

p. cm. — (Asian thought and culture; v. 62)

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Cao, Xueqin, ca. 1717-1763—Criticism and interpretation. 2. Cao, Xueqin, ca. 1717-1763. Hong lou meng. I. Gray, Ronald R. II. Ferrara, Mark S. III. Title.

PL2727.S2Z4739 895.1'34—dc22 2009014919

ISBN 978-1-4331-0407-7

ISSN 0893-6870

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the "Deutsche Nationalbibliografie"; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council of Library Resources.



© 2009 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

All rights reserved.

Reprint or reproduction, even partially, in all forms such as microfilm, xerography, microfiche, microcard, and offset strictly prohibited.

Printed in Germany

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

The translation of this book was a group undertaking. We would first like to thank Li Li 李丽 for her research assistance; her constant support throughout the years made the translation of this work considerably easier. Annabelle Zhang and Libby Lee, former students at Beijing Language and Culture University, also provided translation assistance. We would also like to thank Zhou Ruchang for writing a special foreword and Terence Allred and Nicole Ann Jones for proof reading chapters. Two grants from the Drake University Center for the Humanities, and a Walter B. Ford Faculty Development Grant from SUNY Oneonta, helped make the publication of this book possible.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Professor Andrew Plaks at Princeton University once remarked to a Chinese reporter that *Dream of the Red Chamber* was a window to understanding Chinese culture. The famous contemporary Chinese writer Liu Xinwu wrote that while every Chinese college student knows about Shakespeare, rarely does a western college student learn about Cao Xueqin, and this saddened him. This contrast makes me think that something should be done by both Chinese and Western scholars to correct this imbalance.

The author of the literary masterwork *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Cao Xueqin is widely considered one of China's greatest writers. While the academic scholarship on *Dream of the Red Chamber* in China has come to be known as Redology, and scholarly interest in *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the West can be traced back to the 18th century, little has been known about the novel's author until recently mainly due to very limited official documents about the author and his life and times. As a result, writing a brief biography of Cao Xueqin, such as this one, can be quite challenging.

In the summer of 1964, the biography that I wrote on Cao Xueqin was published in China. Since then, I have revised and expanded that book, simply entitled *Cao Xueqin*, several times. Up to now, no other academic biography of Cao Xueqin has been written. The edition of *Cao Xueqin* that you are now reading is my third and is aimed at Western readers. I greatly appreciate the work of four individuals enthusiastic about Sino-US cultural exchanges (Ronald Gray, Mark Ferrara, Liangmei Bao 包良梅, and Kyong Sook Park) who made the translation of this book possible.

Dream of the Red Chamber is also known by the title *Story of the Stone*. Although a physically inorganic substance, stone is imbued in traditional Chinese lore with magic properties that allow it to think, communicate, and even express emotions like human beings. Ancient Chinese history records the story of a learned Buddhist monk, Zhu Daosheng, who was marginalized and subsequently thrown out of the monastery by a group of powerful monks due to his perceived lack of orthodoxy. He went by himself to the mountains, and

finding no one to teach, he gave a lecture to a pile of stones. After the lecture, Zhu asked: "Do you all understand Buddhist teaching now?" The stones nodded with approval.

As absurd as this story sounds, one can find meaning in this tale when it is carefully examined. At the beginning of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the unused stone is an analogy for the author himself. Left unused by the goddess Nūwa when she repaired the sky, the stone was forgotten on a lonely mountain for eons. This stone lamented his fate before finding a way to be reborn into the human red dust world. Full of expectations of living an enjoyable human life, the stone instead witnessed the suffering of 108 intelligent and beautiful women with great disappointment and grief. Consequently, this stone came to extol the virtues of these ladies and the ugly forces that led to the destruction of their truth, beauty, and kindness. *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a tragic novel, and for this reason, in China Cao Xueqin is most often compared to Shakespeare. Cao lived a life full of suffering and hardship, and he wrote his great novel in grinding poverty that defies our imagination. As one reads the pages of this biography, one cannot help but admire this great novelist.

Finally, I should note that the Chinese name of the title of the novel consists of three characters: Red *hong* 红, Chamber *lou* 楼, and Dream *meng* 梦. Red Chamber together refers to the ancient dwelling of women from rich families (as commoners' houses were most often gray). Red refers to a fine crimson color, and not to the more grotesque shade of red, while chamber generally denotes a two-story dwelling.

Zhou Ruchang
June 18, 2008

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Between *Noble and Humble: Cao Xueqin and Honglou meng* is a translation of the book *Cao Xueqin Xin Zhuan* 曹雪芹新传 by the renowned Chinese scholar Zhou Ruchang (Chou Ju-ch'ang) 周汝昌. This biography of Cao Xueqin (1724-1764), the author of the Qing dynasty novel *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), was originally published in 1992 and has gone through several Chinese editions.¹ While Western scholars have extensively studied *Honglou meng* during the last 20 years,² few books by prominent Chinese experts on the work have been translated into English. This is the second such translation to appear,³ and it is the first historical biography of Cao Xueqin to be published in English.

Honglou meng is widely considered the greatest Chinese novel. Dore Levy has written, "To appreciate its position in Chinese literature, we should imagine a work with the critical cachet of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and the popular appeal of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*—and twice as long as the two combined."⁴ The noted Princeton University sinologist Andrew Plaks has observed that *Dream of the Red Chamber* "provides in one volume a summation of the three-thousand year span of Chinese literary history."⁵ For these reasons, the novel belongs to a unique genre known as the encyclopedic narrative (a

¹ This translation is based on the 1992 edition published by Foreign Language Publishers in Beijing. In 2003, this book formed the basis for a Chinese CCTV television series (曹雪芹) about Cao Xueqin's life.

² For a bibliography of writings in English on the novel, see: "Bibliography of Selected English Writings on *Honglou meng*: 1944-2004." *Tamkang Review* 36:1-2 (2005): 271-294. This particular issue of the *Tamkang Review*, edited by Mark Ferrara and Ronald Gray, features articles on *Honglou meng* by noted experts.

³ The first was *Reflections on Dream of the Red Chamber* by Liu Zaifu (Cambria Press, 2008).

⁴ *Ideal and Actual in The Story of the Stone* (Columbia UP, 1999), p. 1. Zhou Ruchang has frequently compared the status of Cao Xueqin in China with that of Shakespeare in English speaking countries, noting that English speakers feel about Shakespeare as Chinese do about Cao Xueqin.

⁵ *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton UP, 1976), p. 11.

work of fiction that is also a rich compendium of the central beliefs and knowledge of a national culture), and it is comparable in scope and detail to such major Western encyclopedic narratives as Dante's *Commedia*, Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, and Melville's *Moby Dick*.

One of China's foremost *Honglou meng* scholars, Zhou Ruchang⁶ was born in 1918 in Tianjin and is a graduate of the Department of Western Languages and Literature at Yenching University. In 1947, Zhou found a book of poems at a Beijing University library that contained important information about Cao Xueqin's life and penned a newspaper article about it. This article caught the attention of the renowned Chinese scholar Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), who had written several highly influential papers on *Honglou meng* in the 1920's and was then President of Beijing University. Hu was so impressed by Zhou that he lent him a rare and extremely valuable Jiaxu edition of the novel to study.⁷ Zhou Ruchang's first book, the 654 page *New Evidence on Honglou meng* (红楼梦新证), appeared in 1953 and became a bestseller. It is now considered a classic in *Honglou meng* studies.⁸ The noted sinologist Jonathan Spence has written that this "work is of such subtlety and meticulous scholarship that it is hard to fault, and the material that he has collected is invaluable."⁹ The famed literary historian C.T. Hsia noted that Zhou "has deservedly earned the gratitude of all readers of the novel for the immense amount of material on the Ts'ao family presented in this major work."¹⁰

During the Cultural Revolution, Zhou published little as his manuscripts were confiscated, and in 1969 he was sent to rural Hubei province for "re-education." Since then, Zhou has published over 60 books. His 2004 book, *Honglou duo mu hong* 红楼夺目红 sold more than 200,000 copies. The same year, he published a single collated version of the first 80 chapters of the novel,

⁶ For an extensive biography of Zhou Ruchang, see Liang Guizhi's *Hongxue taidou Zhou Ruchang zhuan honglou fengyu mengzhongren* 红学泰斗周汝昌传 红楼风雨梦中人 (Lijiang Publishers, 2006).

⁷ In 2005, Zhou published *Mr. Hu Shi and Me* 我与胡适先生 (Lijiang Publishers), an account of his relationship with the famous scholar.

⁸ A 1,182 page expanded second edition of this book was published in 1976 by People's Literature Publishing House.

⁹ TYKE, 119.

¹⁰ *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (Cornell UP, 1996), p. 365.

Shi touji hui zhen (石头记会真), based upon a close study of 11 editions of *Honglou meng*. He worked on that project for more than 50 years. This work attempts to restore the original design of the novel and was published in 10 volumes.¹¹ Zhou is also an expert on Chinese calligraphy and poetry. *Between Noble and Humble* is Zhou's favorite book, and it was written to introduce *Honglou meng* to Western readers.

Hongxue 红学 (Redology, the study of *Honglou meng*) has a long history in China.¹² Ever since the novel's publication in 1791, it has been the subject of contentious discussion. Even today, the work is passionately debated in China, and many books continue to appear on it. The mainland *Honglou meng* scholar Liang Guizhi 梁归智 in his book *Dushang honglou* (独上红楼) has broadly divided *Hongxue* into four schools: allegory or hidden meaning school, literary thought, critical thought, and investigative studies.¹³ Zhou Ruchang belongs to the investigative school, which argues that *Dream of the Red Chamber* was in large part autobiographical. Other distinguished members of this school include Hu Shi and Yu Pingbo 俞平伯 (1900-1990), author of the ground breaking 1954 study *Researching Dream of the Red Chamber* (红楼梦研究). While Zhou Ruchang has agreed with some of the tenets of this school, he also differs in that what concerns him "is probably not the 'autobiographical' but the 'biographical'—not how the fact that the author is the subject of his own writing transforms the writing of the novel but, rather, what is transmitted through the novel that actually happened to the author."¹⁴

Zhou's major contributions to *Hongxue* lie in the massive historical information he has uncovered regarding Cao Xueqin and his family. For example, he brought to light a collateral branch of the Cao clan, information regarding Cao Yin's background, the nature of the relationship between Cao Chan and Cao Yin, Cao Xueqin's friendships, possible locations of the Cao

¹¹ This collated version was published in a 2-volume edition in 2006 by People Press. For a selective bibliography of Zhou Ruchang's writings, and a link to a list of his published books, see the appendix.

¹² See Louise Edward's *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in The Red Chamber Dream* (U of Hawai'i P, 2001) for a history of *Hongxue*.

¹³ For an overview of Chinese redology, see Dun Zhijun's "Thirty Years of Redology in the New Era: 1978-2008" (新时期红学三十年: 1978-2008), *红楼梦学刊* 2 (2009): 1-36.

¹⁴ Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation: Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Stanford UP, 1995), p. 179.

family's houses in Beijing, and the real location of Prospect Garden in the novel. He also helped to establish that the Caos were bondservants of Chinese ancestry connected to the Manchu, and not Chinese, banner.

Zhou Ruchang is also well-known for several controversial theories regarding the writing of *Honglou meng*. Among these are his belief that the famous commentator and editor of the novel, Zhiyan Zhai 脂砚斋, was Cao Xueqin's cousin and second wife, as well as the prototype for the character Shi Xiang-yun (who Zhou thinks is Bao-yu's true love, not Lin Dai-yu). He also argues that Gao E 高鹗 (1740?-1815), a Palace scholar who edited the first printed edition of *Honglou meng* in 1791, changed some of the first 80 chapters and actually fabricated the last 40 chapters thereby turning the novel into a sordid love triangle. Furthermore, Zhou posits that this forgery was masterminded by the notorious Manchu official Heshen 和珅 (1750-1799) and that it had the support of the Qianlong emperor (1711-1799).

Zhou Ruchang also maintains that the novel originally consisted of 108 chapters (twelve sections of nine chapters each), not the 120-chapter version printed by the Imperial Household Department Printing Office, and that the story's 108 female characters were intended by Cao to mirror the 108 heroes in the celebrated Northern Song dynasty novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* (水浒传). Zhou also contends that Cao Xueqin, in addition to being a great novelist and poet, was also a philosopher who came up with a radical new theory regarding good and evil based on *qing* 情. More recently, Zhou has supported the controversial novelist Liu Xinwu's 刘心武 research concerning the character Qin Keqing. Liu argues that she was in actuality a princess whose death in the story leads to the Jia family decline.¹⁵ While Zhou does not always agree with Liu's claims, he does think that lively but responsible debate about the novel is necessary for *Hongxue* to remain vibrant.

Zhou also holds an essentialist view of Chinese culture and believes that *Honglou meng* provides a first-rate introduction to it. Consequently, in *Between Noble and Humble*, he provides a complex overview of traditional Chinese civilization in an attempt to historically and culturally contextualize Cao

¹⁵ Liu Xinwu's books include *Liuxinwu Jiemi Hongloumeng* (刘心武揭秘红楼梦, People's Press, 2005), *Liuxinwu Jiemi Hongloumeng II* 刘心武揭秘红楼梦 (People's Press, 2005), and *Liuxinwu Jiemi Guben Hongloumeng* 揭秘古本红楼梦 (People's Press, 2006). The last book contains Liu's speculations concerning the missing 28 chapters of the novel, and it was heavily influenced by Zhou's ideas.

Xueqin's life for Western readers. He is particularly interested in accurately depicting the general historical context of *Honglou meng*, such as the nature of the Imperial Household Department, the organization of the Manchu Eight Banner system, the life of the literati, the problem of literary censorship, and the ways in which imperial political succession struggles impacted upon the Cao family.¹⁶ He also discusses the important role poetry played in Qing society, the significance of Cao Xueqin's illustrious ancestry, and the critical part Red Inkstone played in the composition of the novel. The title for this translation comes from chapter one of this book and was chosen because it neatly describes the problematic status that Cao Xueqin occupied in Qing society, as well as the identity problems this created (which is one of the major themes of the work).

In *Between Noble and Humble*, Zhou's writing style is eclectic, frequently conversational, discursive, and at times strongly worded (especially regarding the Yongzheng emperor). We have attempted to compensate by developing narrative continuity while remaining true to his unique and personal way of writing. Zhou also employs imaginative historical reconstruction for key parts of Cao Xueqin's life.¹⁷ Because of page limitations, we have abridged this translation yet we have endeavored to retain Zhou's Ruchang's central claims. Editorial footnotes have been added for elaboration, as has emphasis on key differences between his approach and that of mainstream *Honglou meng* scholars (to show how his work complements current Western research, and to provide short summaries of omitted sections and further readings in English).

¹⁶ Zhou's historical approach largely fits the definition of traditional historicism in that he tries "to establish relationships among the historical context in which the work was produced, the work as an imaginative artifact, the reception of the work in its own world, and the significance of the work for the reader today." *A Handbook of Literature*, by C. Hugh Harmon and William Harmon. Sixth Edition. (Macmillan, 1992), p. 230.

¹⁷ Zhou's purpose in using imaginative recreation when writing about Cao's life parallels that employed by Norman Sherry in his biography of Graham Greene's life. Sherry strove to recreate "the total experience in a particular area at a particular time: to see and feel what Greene saw and felt, trying to submerge and steep himself in his life. To the extent this can be done, we are in a position to see what Greene saw, and more important, to have a sense of what he used and what he discarded in his work" *The Life of Graham Greene: 1955-1999*. Volume Three. (Viking, 2004), p. xviii.

As *Honglou meng* becomes more popular in the West, it is important that Chinese voices also be heard in the English criticism on the novel. We therefore hope that this translation will encourage others by reputed Chinese *Honglou meng* scholars. In addition, there is a need for Western scholars to take a more biographical and historical approach to *Dream of the Red Chamber*. One new area of sinology that holds intriguing possibilities for doing so is the New Qing History, which promises to shed light on the identity problems encountered by Cao Xueqin and his family.¹⁸

Ronald Gray and Mark Ferrara, June 2009

¹⁸ For overviews of Western *Hongxue*, see Lucian Miller's "The English Dream" *Tamkang Review* 36.1-2 (2005): 251-270 and Ronald Gray's "Yingyu hongxue yanjiu zonglan" 英语红学研究纵览 in *Honglou meng Xuekan* 红楼梦学刊 5 (2007): 181-226. Zhou Ruchang expressed an interest in this new historical approach in 2008.

ABBREVIATIONS

English translations of passages from *Honglou meng* are from either David Hawkes and John Minford's translation *Story of the Stone* (Penguin Books), or Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's *Dream of Red Mansions* (Foreign Languages Press). The Hawks and Minford translation is mainly based on the Renmin wenzueben A 人民文学本 version of the novel, while the Yang translation follows Renmin wenzueben B 人民文学本.

In addition, the following abbreviations are used throughout this work:

AAW Huang, Pei. *Autocracy at Work: A Study of the Yung-cheng Period 1723-1735* (Indiana UP, 1974).

CIHD Torbert, Preston. *The Ch'ing Imperial Household Department: A Study of its Organization and Principle Functions, 1662-1796*. (Harvard UP, 1977).

CL Owen, Stephen. *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginning to 1911*. (W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).

CCL Minford, John and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds. *Classical Chinese Literature: From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty. Volume One*. (Columbia UP, 2000).

DOTIC Hucker, Charles O. *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford UP, 1985).

ECCP Hummel, Arthur H., ed. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*. Two Volumes. (U.S. Government Printing House, 1944).

EQSH Elliott, Mark C. *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (Longman, 2009).

EFT Guy, R. Kent. *The Emperor's Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch'ien-Lung Era* (Harvard UP, 1987).

IC Mote, F. W. *Imperial China 900-1800* (Harvard UP, 1999).

LE Rawski, Evelyn S. *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (U of California P, 1998).

MFR Ripa, Matteo. *Memoirs of Father Ripa During Thirteen Year's Residence at the Court of Peking in the Service of the Emperor of China*. Selected and Translated by Fortunato Prandi (John Murray, 1846).

MW Elliot, Mark C. *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford UP, 2001).

OTRCD Wu, Shih-Ch'ang. *On the Red Chamber Dream: A Critical Study of Two Annotated Manuscripts of the Eighteenth Century* (Clarendon Press, 1961).

PTP Wu, Silas H.L. *Passage to Power: K'anghsi and His Heir Apparent, 1661-1722* (Harvard UP, 1979).

PTCL Naquin, Susan. *Peking Temples and City Life, 1400-1900* (U of California P, 2000).

RIFLIC Hegel, Robert E. *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford UP, 1998).

SCS Kuhn, Philip A. *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Harvard UP, 1990).

TBTB Spence, Jonathan. *Treason by the Book* (Viking, 2001).

TM Crossley, Pamela Kyle. *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (U of California P, 1999).

TYKE Spence, Jonathan. *Ts'ao Yin and the K'anghsi Emperor* (Yale UP, 1966).

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgments	ix
Author's Foreword	xi
Editor's Preface	xiii
List of Abbreviations	xix
Chapter One. Between "Noble and Humble"—A Peculiar Family History.....	1
Chapter Two. The Mixing of Manchu and Han Culture.....	9
Chapter Three. The Close Connection between the Cao Family and the Kangxi Emperor	15
Chapter Four. Outstanding Talents of the Early Qing Dynasty	24
Chapter Five. Sudden Misfortune Comes	29
Chapter Six. After a Long Drought, Heavy Rain Fell: The Birth of a Luminary	34
Chapter Seven. The Plot and Cruel Persecution.....	40
Chapter Eight. Unusual Heredity.....	50
Chapter Nine. Bondservants in the Imperial Household Department.....	56
Chapter Ten. The Old Mansion at the Jinling Imperial Textile Factory.....	62

Chapter Eleven. Great Disaster Looms.....	66
Chapter Twelve. The Catastrophe of Confiscation.....	71
Chapter Thirteen. A Little Courtyard in Suanshikuo.....	76
Chapter Fourteen. Cao Xueqin's Most Influential Teachers	85
Chapter Fifteen. Seventy-Two Divisions of Hell and More than One Hundred Maidservants.....	93
Chapter Sixteen. "Petals Fall as the Water Runs Red"	101
Chapter Seventeen. Out of Misfortune Comes Happiness: The Paozi Riverside	109
Chapter Eighteen. Splendidly Clothed but Lost Among Actors.....	117
Chapter Nineteen. "The Sentimental World".....	123
Chapter Twenty. An Astonishing New Philosophy of "Good and Evil"	129
Chapter Twenty-one. House Arrest	136
Chapter Twenty-two. A Second Radical Change.....	143
Chapter Twenty-three. Wandering Aimlessly and Living Off Relatives.....	150
Chapter Twenty-four. Friendship with the Dun Brothers Forged	156
Chapter Twenty-five. The Land of Poetry.....	166
Chapter Twenty-six. Writing in Tears and Blood.....	176
Chapter Twenty-seven. West Mountain and Wormwood Weeds.....	188

Chapter Twenty-eight. "An Old Dream of Qinquai, Yet the People Remain"	194
Chapter Twenty-nine. The Red Inkstone Commentary.....	200
Chapter Thirty. The Yangshi Compound at Anding Gate	204
Chapter Thirty-one. "A Proud and Aloof Person Like You Astonishes the World"	208
Chapter Thirty-two. The Thin Mist of Evening over Cao's Humble Hut	211
Chapter Thirty-three. The Death of a Literary Genius.....	221
Chapter Thirty-four. A Matter of Eternal Regret.....	228
Appendix: Bibliography of Selected Writings by Zhou Ruchang	237