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CAO XUEQIN

THE STORY OF THE STONE

VOLUME 1 • THE GOLDEN DAYS



Penguin Classics



CAO XUEQIN

THE STORY OF THE STONE

TRANSLATED BY DAVID HAWKES

The Story of the Stone (c. 1760 A.D.) is the great novel of manners in Chinese literature. Divided into five volumes, of which *The Golden Days* is the first, it charts the glory and decline of the illustrious Jia family (a story which closely accords with the fortunes of the author's own family). The two main characters, Bao-yu and Dai-yu, are set against a rich tapestry of humour, realistic detail and delicate poetry which accurately reflects the ritualized hurly-burly of Chinese family life. But over and above the novel hangs the constant reminder that there is another plane of existence – a theme which affirms the Buddhist belief in a supernatural scheme of things.

The cover shows 'Girl Playing a Flute' by Tang Yin (1470-1523)

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THE STORY OF THE STONE

A CHINESE NOVEL BY
CAO XUEQIN
IN FIVE VOLUMES

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VOLUME I
'THE GOLDEN DAYS'

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TRANSLATED BY
DAVID HAWKES

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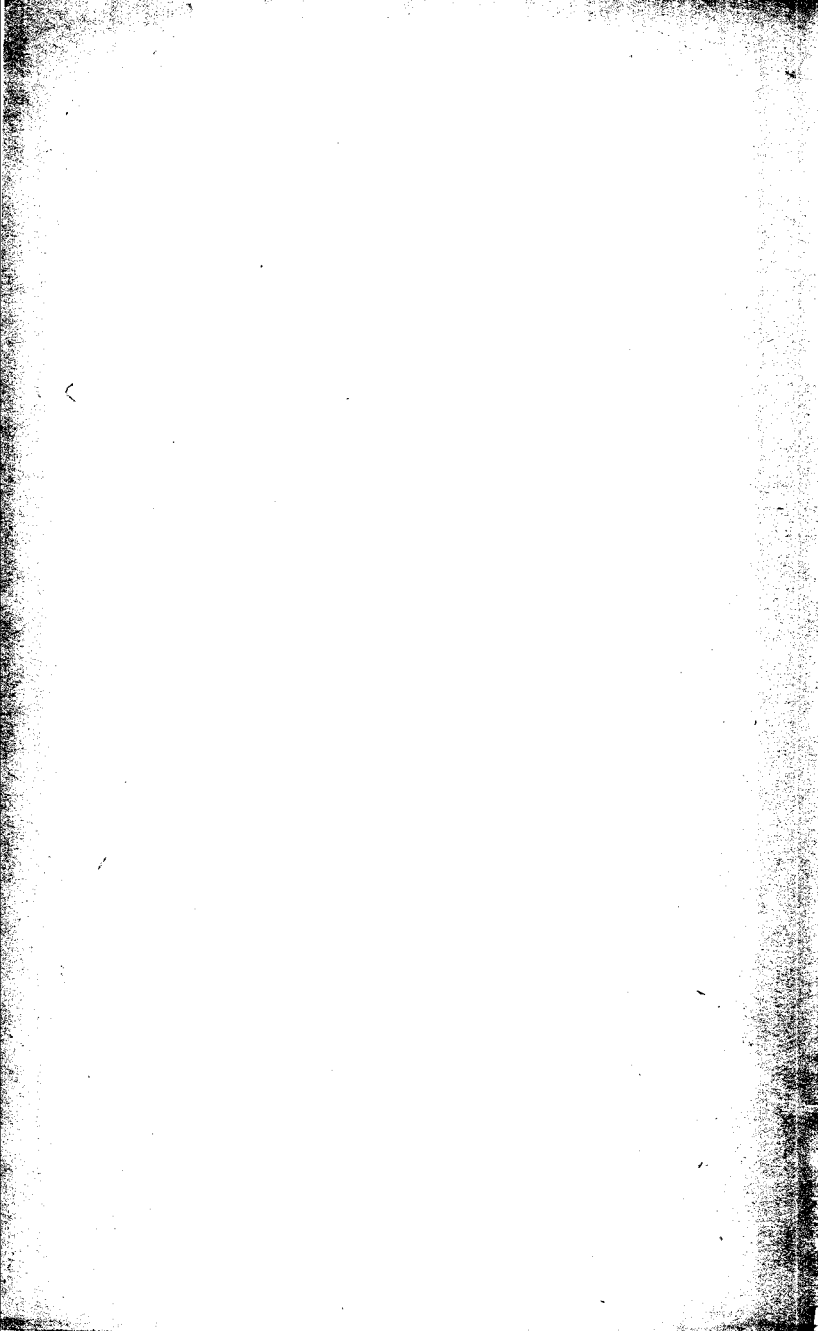
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TO DOROTHY AND JUNG-EN



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NOTE ON SPELLING

Chinese proper names in this book are spelled in accordance with a system invented by the Chinese and used internationally, which is known by its Chinese name of *Pinyin*. A full explanation of this system will be found overleaf, but for the benefit of readers who find systems of spelling and pronunciation tedious and hard to follow a short list is given below of those letters whose Pinyin values are quite different from the sounds they normally represent in English, together with their approximate English equivalents. Mastery of this short list should ensure that the names, even if mispronounced, are no longer unpronounceable.

c = *ts*

q = *ch*

x = *sh*

z = *dz*

zh = *j*

CHINESE SYLLABLES

The syllables of Chinese are made up of one or more of the following elements:

1. an initial consonant (b.c.ch.d.f.g.h.j.k.l.m.n.p.q.r.s.sh.t.w.x.
y.z.zh)
2. a semivowel (i or u)
3. an open vowel (a.e.i.o.u.ü), or
a closed vowel (an.ang.en.eng.in.ing.ong.un), or
a diphthong (ai.ao.ei.ou)

The combinations found are:

- 3 on its own (e.g. *e*, *an*, *ai*)
- 1 + 3 (e.g. *ba*, *xing*, *hao*)
- 1 + 2 + 3 (e.g. *xue*, *qiang*, *biao*)

INITIAL CONSONANTS

Apart from *c = ts* and *z = dz* and *r*, which is the Southern English *r* with a slight buzz added, the only initial consonants likely to give an English speaker much trouble are the two groups

j q x and zh ch sh

Both groups sound somewhat like English *j ch sh*; but whereas *j q x* are articulated much farther *forward* in the mouth than our *j ch sh*, the sounds *zh ch sh* are made in a 'retroflexed' position much farther *back*. This means that to our ears *j* sounds halfway between our *j* and *dz*, *q* halfway between our *ch* and *ts*, and *x* halfway between our *sh* and *s*; whilst *zh ch sh* sound somewhat as *jr*, *chr*, *shr* would do if all three combinations and not only the last one were found in English.

Needless to say, if difficulty is experienced in making the distinction, it is always possible to pronounce both groups like English *j, ch, sh*, as has already, by implication, been suggested overleaf.

SEMIVOWELS

The semivowel *i* 'palatalizes' the preceding consonant: i.e. it makes a *y* sound after it, like the *i* in *onion* (e.g. Jia Lian)

The semivowel *u* 'labializes' the preceding consonant: i.e. it makes a *w* sound after it, like the *u* in *assuages* (e.g. Ning-guo)

VOWELS AND DIPHTHONGS

i. Open Vowels

- a** is a long *ah* like *a* in *father* (e.g. Jia)
- e** on its own or after any consonant other than *y* is like the sound in French *oeuf* or the *er*, *ir*, *ur* sound of Southern English (e.g. Gao E, Jia She)
- e** after *y* or a semivowel is like the *e* of *egg* (e.g. Qin Bang-ye, Xue Pan)
- i** after *b.d.j.l.m.n.p.q.t.x.y* is the long Italian *i* or English *ee* as in *see* (e.g. Nannie Li)
- i** after *zh.ch.sh.z.c.s.r* is a strangled sound somewhere between the *u* of *suppose* and a vocalized *r* (e.g. Shi-yin)
- i** after semivowel *u* is pronounced like *ay* in *sway* (e.g. Li Gui)
- o** is the *au* of *author* (e.g. Duo)
- u** after semivowel *i* and all consonants except *j.q.x.y* is pronounced like Italian *u* or English *oo* in *too* (e.g. Bu Gu-xiu)
- u** after *j.q.x.y* and *ü* after *l* or *n* is the narrow French *u* or German *ü*, for which there is no English equivalent (e.g. Bao-yu, Nü-wa)

ii. Closed Vowels

- an** after semivowel *u* or any consonant other than *y* is like *an* in German *Mann* or *un* in Southern English *fun* (e.g. Yuan-chun, Dan Ping-ren)
- an** after *y* or semivowel *i* is like *en* in *ben* (e.g. Zhi-yan-zhai, Jia Lian)
- ang** whatever it follows, invariably has the long *a* of *father* (e.g. Jia Qiang)
- en, eng** the *e* in these combinations is always a short, neutral sound like *a* in *ago* or the first *e* in *believe* (e.g. Cousin Zhen, Xi-feng)
- in, ing** short *i* as in *sin*, *sing* (e.g. Shi-yin, Lady Xing)
- ong** the *o* is like the short *oo* of Southern English *book* (e.g. Jia Cong)
- un** the rule for the closed *u* is similar to the rule for the open one: after *j.q.x.y* it is the narrow French *u* of *rue*; after anything else it resembles the short English *oo* of *book* (e.g. Jia Yun, Ying-chun)

iii. Diphthongs

- ai** like the sound in English *lie*, *high*, *mine* (e.g. Dai-yu)
- ao** like the sound in *bow* or *bough* (e.g. Bao-yu)

ei like the sound in *day* or *mate* (e.g. Bei-jing)

ou like the sound in *old* or *bowl* (e.g. Gou-er)

The syllable *er*, sometimes found as the second element in names, is a peculiarity of the Pekingese dialect which lies outside this system. It sounds somewhat like the word *err* pronounced with a broad West Country accent.

INTRODUCTION

It is a somewhat surprising fact that the most popular book in the whole of Chinese literature remained unpublished for nearly thirty years after its author's death, and exists in several different versions, none of which can be pointed to as definitively 'correct'.

From 1763, the year in which Cao Xueqin died, until the appearance of the first printed edition in January 1792,¹ *The Story of the Stone* circulated in manuscript copies, at first privately, among members of the Cao family and their friends, and then more widely, as copies began to find their way on to bookstalls at the temple markets of Peking. One such copy was bought in 1769 by a future Provincial Judge who happened to be staying in Peking at the time to sit for an examination. It was published in Shanghai in a somewhat garbled form a century and a half later.

These manuscript copies included a commentary consisting of the remarks, in many cases signed and dated, of two or three different commentators, evidently made over a period of years, and written, often in red ink, in the manuscripts' margins and in the spaces between the text. They circulated in several different versions, both the commentary and the text differing somewhat from copy to copy, but they all had two things in common: they were all entitled *Red Inkstone's Reannotated Story of the Stone*; and they all, to the intense disappointment of their readers, broke off at the end of chapter 80, just as the plot appeared to be drawing towards some sort of climax.

The appearance of a complete version in 120 chapters in Gao E and Cheng Weiyan's first printed edition of 1792 did not immediately end the lucrative traffic in hand-written copies, because the first printed edition was an expensive one;

1. Chinese authorities mostly refer to this as 'the 1791 edition', though in point of fact it was not published until January of the following year.

but its subsequent pirating in cheaper reprints by other publishers did; and though a dwindling number of *cognoscenti* still clung to their Red Inkstones and denounced Gao E's edition as an impudent (or ignorant) imposture, the majority of readers were well satisfied with the completed version. No longer was the *Stone* to be found only in the drawing-rooms of Manchu noblemen. Soon everyone in Peking was reading and talking about it, and throughout the whole of the nineteenth century its popularity continued to grow and spread. Old gentlemen nearly came to blows over the relative merits of its two heroines and every languishing young lady imagined herself a Dai-yu.

As the Gao E version became more and more established, continuing to hold its own against a crop of competing but quite obviously spurious 'complete versions' – including one equipped with a forged testimonial by Xueqin's mother – so Red Inkstone and his commentaries were gradually forgotten. Indeed, people even forgot about Cao Xueqin; for although he mentions himself by name in the first chapter, he does so in a spoofing, ironical way which seems to imply that he was only the book's editor and not its author, and when Gao E and Cheng Weiyuan introduced the book to the general public in 1792 they told their readers that the author's name was unknown.

Once Cao Xueqin's authorship was forgotten, all sorts of fanciful theories about the author and his characters could flourish unchallenged. Readers assumed that the novel was a *roman à clef*, but now that they had ceased to know about Cao Xueqin and his family they had lost the key. *Stone* studies became a sort of literary hobby, like identifying Mr W. H. or proving that Bacon wrote Shakespeare.

In modern times such facts as we know about this novel have had to be laboriously rediscovered. The publication of the Judge's manuscript in 1912 was a beginning. Unfortunately the manuscript itself was burned only a few years later and the printed version was a somewhat garbled one. But since 1927, when an important fragment of Red Inkstone came to light, more and more manuscripts have emerged from obscurity, and by studying them and comparing what could be learned