August Sladek

University of Flensburg

CHINA’S LAST GREAT CLASSICAL NOVEL AT THE CROSSROADS OF TRADITION AND MODERNIZATION

Abstract
“The Red Chamber’s Dream” from the middle of 18th century is the youngest of China’s “Four Great Classical Novels”. In the cloak of traditional story-telling it deploys a
plentitude of narrative modes – realistic, psychological, symbolist fabulating. Written in colloquial Chinese (Beijing dialect) it has become an important source for establishing modern Standard Chinese (putong hua) in the sway of the ‘New Cultural Movement’ since the 1920ies. Highly appreciated by Mao Zedong, the communists tried to enforce a “progressive” appreciation of the novel. Its hidden religious (Buddhist) message seems to be neglected both by readers’ reception and research work.

KEY WORDS: China’s literature, classical novel, tradition and modernization.

In my later years I became acquainted by chance with a Chinese novel written in the middle decades of the 18th century. A Chinese provided me with a copy of a German translation of HLM (Der Traum der roten Kammer/Dream of the Red Chamber). I had to work through more than 500 pages of text. The translator Franz Kuhn, whose translation from Chinese to German in 1932 have been retranslated into several European languages, boasted of having given for the first time nearly the full text of the novel in a Western language. In fact he has put forth about one third, the last part being more of a summary than a translation. Later I red the unabridged translation of Hawkes and Minford of The Story of the Stone, yet even the mutilated version of Kuhn had been able to impress me deeply: what a treasure-house of realia, objects, persons, events of a past time – seemingly real, even if they would be mostly fictitious – saved from oblivion by a novelist’s and poet’s inexhaustible art of vivification. The novel invites to several interlaced stances of reception, different levels of reading and understanding. My remarks on HLM are put forth in a dozen items.

1. HLM can be used as a quarry of historic-socio-economical information: A first reader will be overwhelmed by the wealth of information about economy, craftsmanship, social relations etc. either through descriptions or through plenty of dialogues (a lot of gossip being divulged by maids and servants), about China’s society in the middle Qing era within the framework of a noble Manchu residence in the capital. There are about 400 figures, servants, slaves, maids and masters, mistresses, friends, acquaintances, from outside; about two dozen are important characters and half a dozen might be called protagonists and there is one hero, Jia Bao-yu, and exposing his (quite un-heroic) adolescence from about his 12th to his 19th year is the main subject of the novel. It is tied with a lot of side-threads into a dense narrative net, a first reader easily gets tangled up within.
2. *HLM* is a novel of manner: Men’s and women’s creeds, superstitions, prejudices, morals and deficiencies are exposed, criticized gently or humorously or sarcastically, directly by the narrator or indirectly through the comments of some figure or just by the expressions selected for description. I give two examples, one deriding fear of ghosts, the other demonstrating how deeply the author is kept under the thrall of commonly believed superstition.

(a) After the *Prospect Garden* (Da guan yuan) is mostly deserted by the young ladies having dwelt inside for some years, there are spread rumors that it is haunted. Master Jia She, an out-spoken non-believer in ghosts, participates in an inspection and is frightened by the tricks of his servants. Thus he orders a great and expensive Daoist exorcism. The ghosts are banished into jars, which are sealed and stored off and the servants are entertained by a spectacle which gives them a lot of gleefulness.

(b) There is an elderly Buddhist nun Ma Mu (*Mother Ma*), pretenting to collect money for pious works, for candles and incenses, who is highly respected by the Jia family as a saintly person. She devotes special prayers to Jia Bao-yu and is called his godmother. Yet she is bribed with some ounces of silver to destroy him as well as the household’s manager, young Lady Wang Xi-feng by black magic (ch. 25). *Concubine Zhao* (Zhao Yiniang) wants to promote her miserable sun Jia Huang and to have her revenge on Xi-feng (*Phoenix*). Both are saved from the very fringe of death by the powers of the jade-talisman Bao-yu bears round his neck. Indeed he was born with it in his mouth. Its powers are restored by that scabby Buddhist who is (jointly with a lame Daoist monk) his psychagogue, bringing him into this world from his outer-worldly resting place in *Greensickness Peak* and escorting him back after he has outlived his life within the “red dust” of worldly pleasures and sufferings. These supernatural settings are to be taken at face value by the reader, as they belong to the novel’s fictitious framework. But he must swallow as well the sympathetic magic *Mother Ma* has inflicted upon her victims: She uses to pierce images (dolls) of them with needles thereby imposing sufferings and death. Later her misdeeds are discovered and she will be executed. Her victims are tortured by demons and devils – and a late victim is *Concubine Zhao* herself, who dies a horrible death and experiences hellish punishment at the end of her life. It is little surprise, that mental pain and fear are molded in images like
that; the novel just reproduces common ideas of retribution of one’s sins by the underworld judge Yama. Yet one wonders, that there is not even any faint signal in the text, nourishing a tiny bit of doubt on the efficiency of black magic. On the other side there is a lot of mockery about traditional Chinese medicine. Doctors are introduced infallibly as pedants with little understanding of true causes of disease. Their medicine will cause no damage at best and patients will recover, if their good karma has not run out; otherwise medical prescriptions are useless. (There is one exemption: good and expensive ginseng might support one’s self-healing abilities.)

3. *HLM* is a realistic novel, if you are prepared to use the label “realistic” in a broad sense as it is done frequently. It would be anachronistic to bring a 18th century Chinese novel into line with an European literary epoch between romanticism and naturalism, even if convergences – more with style and psychological cogency than with content – have been noticed: *HLM* has been compared with quite a lot of great Western novels from Honoré de Balzac, Lew Tolstoy, Fjodor Dostoevsky, Charles Dickens, Henry James to Marcel Proust. If you understand realistic simply as true to the facts, than you are close to the arguments about the worth of stories which are exchanged between the Stone with magical powers (to change size, to move, to speak) and the Daoist *Vanitas* on his pilgrimage to the Great Void – ironically in quite a transreal setting: in *Greensickness Peak*. The Stone has his (not yet quite finished) story written on his surface and wants to get it published. *Vanitas* finally is convinced: »He could see that its main theme was love; that it consisted quite simply of a true record of real events; and that it was entirely free from any tendency to deprave and corrupt.« (I, 51) The novel’s infatuation with details is overwhelming and every reader will be amazed by the varieties and developments of talks, testifying the speakers’ stances and traits. What a plethora of speakers from every rank and place mostly within the precincts of the Jia residences! *HLM*’s so-called realism is outstanding within the story-telling classical literature of China (written before the fall of the Qing dynasty), yet it has its predecessors. It could not have been composed without *Jing Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase* ²), a late anonymous Ming novel, which had

² *Jing Ping Mei* should only be translated tentatively, as the three syllables/characters are part of the given names of three consorts of Ximen Qing, the anti-hero of the novel, and provide erotic connotations.
become notorious because of its full-length descriptions of sexual practices. 3 *HLM* was never banned by authorities but criticized sometimes to seduce young people to debauchery. In *HLM*, ch. 1, the ensouled Stone anticipates reproaches of this sort, pleading before *Vanitas* for the innoxiousness of his text. It is far from an »”erotic” novel, by whose filthy obscenities our young folk are all too easily corrupted.« (I, 49f)

4. *HLM* is a novel with some moralistic-didactic bias. Even nowadays, there is a lingering expectation within Chinese society, that literature would not deprave and corrupt, but cultivate morals, be useful for man and society. As a traditional Chinese novel *HLM* cannot exist without some didactic undertone; it is rarely a straight one (some examples of backing Confucianist morale might be found in the last third of the novels and give you some doubts about its authenticity); more often moralistic admonishments are garnished by ironic mirroring. Moralism is tempered and twisted by artful narration. I give two examples:

(a) In ch. 5, central for the novel’s development, Bao-yu takes a nap in the precious apartment in the upper floor of his niece of law Qin-shi alias Qin Ke-qing. (The title *HLM* alludes to his dream in the “red” camber: ‘red’ we would better substitute in English by ‘golden, sumptuous’; a ‘lou’ is a tower or just a building with an upper floor, the proper dwelling for womenfolk of high degree.) Our hero pays a dream-visit to the *Land of Illusion*, where registers are kept about past and future lifes particularly about passionate persons, and where their karmic debts are balanced. Mysteries of the future are shown to him, which he might understand later in due time and fairy *Disenchantment* gives him her sister *Two-in-One* (Ke-qing) as a bride and tells him:

»My motive in arranging this [marriage] is to help you grasp the fact that, since even in this immortal precincts love is an illusion, the love of your dust-stained, mortal world must be doubly an illusion. It is my earnest hope that, knowing this, you will henceforth be able to shake yourself free of its entanglements and change your previous way of thinking, de-

---

3 Thus *Jing Ping Mei* had to cede its place to *HLM* as the fourth and last outstanding classical masterpiece within the *Four Major Classical Novels* (sì dà míng zhù). The three older ones are *San Guo Yan Yi* (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) by Luo Guanzhong (attributed), *Xi You Ji* (*Journey to the West*) by Wu Cheng’en (?), *Shui Hu Zhuan* (*Water Margin*) attributed to Shi Nai’an, Luo Guanzhang and others, which was banned by Ming and Qing emperors as inciting rebellion.
voting your mind seriously to the teaching of Confucius and Mencius and your person wholeheartedly to the betterment of society.« (I, 146)

What a funny mix-up of Confucianist precepts of duty, Buddhist and Daoist ideas of disillusion with carnal joys, first in dream and shortly afterwards repeated in the “world of dust” with his maid Hua Xiren (Aroma) as a sex-partner.

(b) Bao-yu’s father Jia Zheng is the only respectable dutiful character of all the senior Jia males. His elder brother Jia She as well as his nephews Jia Zhen and Jia Lian are lustful, greedy, irresponsible figures, two of them dually punished later by exile. Jia Zheng is a literate and a stout Confucian but he is a failure as a householder, father and even as a civil servant. He does not care about the expenses not balanced for a long time by the Jia’s revenues, so that they finally get ruined. He wants his sons and his grandson to study the Four Books and Five Classics (Sìshū Wŭjīng) of Confucianism and thus to pass examinations, but he has no time left to look after the education of his children in a sturdy and benevolent way. Being discontent with Bao-yu’s progress he inflicts a heavy beating upon him from time to time; fear is the only filial emotion he gets back. Jia Zhen is quite all right in as a metropolitan bureaucrat in touch with papers, but not with men. He is appointed Provincial Grain Intendant and was expected to run administration with his own staff. First he stops every sort of extortion and bribery and his disappointed servants are driven to refuse service. He has to connive and now extortion exceeds the limits which would be tolerated and indeed would be necessary to run affairs smoothly. Being unable and unwilling to control his staff he is impeached, removed from his office, degraded and resumes his office at the Board of Works in the capital.

5. HLM is a love story and ironically one title appropriate for it A Mirror for the Romantic is proposed by an fictitious Confucian: »Old Kong Mei-xi from the homeland of Confucius« (I, 51). Young people from one generation to the next were moved to tears by the tragic and unfulfilled love of Dai-yu. This is certainly the main cause for the novel’s growing popularity from the 1760ies, when first manuscripts circulated and were copied, to the 1930ies, when public education provided young people with reading and writing competence and broad social classes could afford printed copies. Its popularity did not dwindle in the People’s Republic,

4 Kongzi was born and died in Qufu in the small state of Lu.
even the *Cultural Revolution* would not impair it permanently. It is a well-known constellation ‘young lad between two lasses’, yet worked out in an original and most touching way. In the *Dreamland of Illusion* Jia Bao-yu is married to *Two in-One*, but in real life he may marry just one wife; women of lower social status he might take as concubines, but his cousins Lin Dai-yu and Xue Bao-chai are of equal high rank. The girls’ given names Dai-yu (*Black Jade*) and Bao-chai (*Precious Hairpin*) each share one character with Bao-yu (*Precious Jade*) being one of many examples of the author’s inclination for plays with words. There is a deep affection between Bao-yu and Dai-yu since they have met (ch. 3). Dai-yu is a delicate person who gets quickly offended and bursts out in tears. Her nickname is ‘frowner’. Her health is fragile, she suffers from consumption. When Bao-yu misses his jade (it is taken away by his psychagogues to *Greensickness Peak* for some time), he loses his wits and his health. His mother and above all his grandmother Jia Mu think the best way to save her darling is to marry him to a sensible and prudent young person like Bao-chai, the model for a perfect Chinese spouse, a beauty and a hobby poet not less gifted than Dai-yu. Idiotic Bao-yu is cheated. He imagines to be married to Dai-yu who dies her lonely death, at the very moment when Bao-cha is given to her cousin. Ch. 98 belongs to the last third of the novel, whose authorship is contested; it does not fall short of earlier parts praised for Cao Xueqin’s art of storytelling. To make the hero lose his jade and thereby making him dull and a victim of deception is more of an artificial design than an artful one, but it matches the novel’s scheme given in ch. 5.

6. *HLM* is a deep-rooted religious novel; superficial religious practices are described at the full length. They are brought forth in a neutral non-engaged mood of description or they are ridiculed mildly, rarely sarcastically and belong to the layer of *HLM* as a novel of manner. Furthermore the author takes care to construct a tier of mystery, sometimes yet not frequently intruding the prevailing realistic tier stuffed with details. He exploits myths for his own targets: e. g. *Disenchantment* keeps registers of the amorous girls, where their karmic debts are balanced imitating the well-

---

5 A similar crude “mechanema” has to be applied by Richard Wagner in order to expound why Siegfried throws away his bride Brunnhilde for Gudrune in *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*). After having been offered by Gudrune a drink of oblivion he is willingly manipulated by Hagen.
known under worldly Yamen (court of justice) of *Yama* with his extensive filing departments. Social ranking on earth is conserved in fairyland: The young mistresses of the Jia residence are kept in the main register, the maids in the supplementary register and *Aroma* who has failed to commit suicide after the disappearance of her master Bao-yu is downgraded to the second supplementary register. The novel’s mythopoetic strain seems to convey a lot of diversion to the author and his readers. The passages are fluent between laughing and sighing, joke and earnestness. ⁶ Even the apparent bearers of truth are clothed by the author in some ridiculous, in fact disgusting disguise. The reader is invited to look through the veils of illusion to their true nature in order to get the benefit of enlightenment. This applies to the two guides of the Stone, the lame Daoist »illuminate Misterioso« (ch. 1, I, 48) and the scabby Buddhist, always taking the lead in their common actions, »mahāsattva Impervioso« [mahāsattva, chin. móhé sāduò: great boddhisattva]. *Impervioso* not only behaves like a madman but seems to be a mean and greedy character, demanding to be paid to him instantly ten thousand teals (ounces of silver) for bringing back Bao-yu’s jade (ch. 116f) but vanishing with a laughter, when they are offered to him. There is an illuminate of some lower degree, »a certain Taoist called Vanitas in quest of immortality« (I, 48), a dense character, rebuked several

---

⁶ Three novels more from the *Great Masterpieces* deal with religious matters in a rather relaxed way. It seems to me that the lust of fanciful narration overrides respect, even taboos of religion. *Shui Hu Zhuan* (*Water Margin*) is garnished by a frame of mystery: 108 ghosts are released to unite in human forms as a group of bandits fighting against corrupt Song mandarins. You must not wonder, that Daoist values and personalities up to the Jade Emperor are ridiculed in *Xi You Ji* (*Voyage to the West*) based on an early Tang time record of the monk Xuanzang about his voyage to India. The novel’s central theme tells about bringing suttas of the Mahayana Buddhism to China for the salvation of the many. Yet the Pure Land, where Buddha (satyamuni) preaches all the time has its deficiencies. In this Paradise of the West, next to the Perfect One beasts gain spiritual forces from his teaching to perform evil deeds, creating hellish dominions and trying to destroy the five pilgrims. As Ananda, Buddha’s chief disciple, gets no bribe from Xuanzang, he gives him empty rolls instead of the promised suttas and is to be forced to do better. In *Jing Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*) the widow of Ximen Qing flies 1127, at the very end of Northern Song, from the Nüzhen invaders and takes refuge in a Buddhist monastery. By a warning dream and the persuasive words of a Buddhist monk she is ready to give her only son to Buddha’s service. The reader is left alone to decide, whether this monk is an impostor or a saint. So *HLM* keeps within the manner of popular narration to handle grave things in a light manner, yet it provides them with more weight and depth.
times for his thick-wittedness. He has to be admonished by the Stone to read the text on its surface twice, before he is convinced of its value.

»As a consequence of all this, Vanitas, starting off in the Void (which is the Truth) came to the contemplation of Form (which is Illusion); and from Form engendered Passion; and by communicating Passion, entered again into Form, and from Form awoke to the Void (which is truth). He therefore changed his name from Vanitas to Brother Amor, or the Passionate Monk (because he has approached Truth by way of Passion) and exchanged the title of the book from The Story of the Stone to The Tale of Brother Amor.« (I, 51)

These lines at the novel’s very beginning demonstrate the author’s propensity to artful irony, to be playful with even those matters, which he is earnestly committed to. They provide in Daoist terms an abbreviated explanation (with ironic highlights) of Vanitas’ way and of the hero’s biography as well: HLM might be read as a “Bildungs- or Entwicklungsroman”, yet in its Buddhist-Daoist version: Bao-yu’s way to enlightenment, to the Great Void, is artistically made visible in the image of »Greensickness Peak in the Incredible Crags of the Fable Mountains«, the Stone’s first and final resting place. (I, 48) A western counterpart of a “Bildungsroman” is Henry Fielding’s The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling, published in 1749, at a time when Cao Xueqin probably has run through his first draft of the Story of the Stone. The English picaresque novel no longer pretends to report true facts as Daniel Defoe and Cao Xueqin still thought to be appropriate. It tells how the character of a good-natured boy develops, is formed through vicissitudes, luck, benevolent and hostile encounters. A common propellant of both novels is love or passion, yet it leads to different goals: a happy marriage with true love versus disenchantment. It is the idea not of an Buddhist or Daoist illuminate, but the unorthodox notion of an artist, deeply permeated by Zen Buddhism and the early Daoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi, that through passion you penetrate illusion and reach salvation in the Void, when all passion has leaked out. To be purified from passion after having been incited to passion, an imagination brought forth by Vanitas and shortly afterwards by fairy Dischantment, is like Aristoteles’ idea of tragedy’s purifying effects upon the spectator (“accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions”), a sort of homeopathic purge by pathogenes of pathogenic infiltration of one’s mind, transferred to one’s life. HLM exemplifies in many ways the Buddhist doc-
trine: passion is suffering, corroborated by the sad fate of young females, the companions of Bao-yu and by his own experiences. 7 There is quite a lot of mythology in the novel, mostly of Daoist descent, the central mythologemes having been invented by the author. Thus Cao Xueqin’s idea to make a sentient stone the hero of his novel is linked with the popular myth of the goddess Nü-wa repairing the sky. She needed 36 500 stones (ch. 1: I, 47). Now the author plugs in: one unhappy stone was left over, our Stone, whose lust for earthly experiences was quenched by his incarnation as Jia Bao-yu. Before that he was made by Disenchantment

”Divine Luminescent Stone-in-Waiting in the Court of Sunset Glow [...] he found the beautiful Crimson Pearl Flower, for which he conceived such a fancy that he took to watering her every day with sweet dew, thereby conferring on her the gift of life. [...] The consciousness that she owed the stone something for his kindness in watering her began to prey on her mind and ended by becoming an obsession. "’The only way in which I could perhaps repay him would be with the tears shed during the whole of a mortal lifetime if he and I were ever to be reborn as humans in the world below.’” (I, 53)

As Lin Dai-yu she is sent down into the world together with her benefactor and a group of romantic souls. This is told off-handedly by ImperVIOUSO to his companion Mysterioso and overheard (yet not understood) by a gentlemen Zhen Shi-yin in a dream-like state. Easiness, artistic playfulness are the author’s trademarks one encounters at every turn of the novel, when dealing with minor as well as with major matters.

7. HLM is a novel imbued with lyricism, far beyond the case that it contains a lot of poetry (more than 200 poems) like the other great classical novels. Central theme of classical poetry is not love, but separation from worldly affairs to the pure serenity or melancholy of landscape in accordance with the sensitivity of the lyrical self. Indeed most poems produced by the youths in the frames of poetry games and contests (inside and outside their “academy of poetry”, the Crab Flower Club) are about nature, seasons, pittoresque views. “Ut pictura poesis” – Cao Xueqin was indeed a landscape painter, thereby earning a modest subsistence for himself and his family. Descriptions in the novel – among them accurate de-

7 The Chinese word for passion is ‘qing’. There are quite a lot of meanings of qing, but none corresponding to the English ‘passion’, which unites vehement desire and suffering.
tails of *Grand Prospect Garden* – have been classified as lyrical, whereas the dialogues make up the novel’s realistic features. For some time Cao Xueqin was on the way of molding his stuff into a drama, but later switched to another genre. Classical Chinese drama is decidedly a lyrical genre. Plays come across to us as librettos with a lot of songs and arias at the expense of spoken text. *Xi Xiang Ji (The Story of the Western Wing)* by the Yuan time playwright Wang Shifu is worked into the novel. It is a “forbidden” text for young family members, censured by its critics as appropriate for seducing youths to harmful love affairs, but it is loved by Bao-yu and Dai-yu. The “Four Dreams”, i. e. four plays by Ming dynasty poet Tang Xianzu – the best-known is *Mudan Ting (The Peony Pavilion)* – would have given a model to Cao Xueqin’s drama, but he had to tell far too much. Even if Chinese classical drama usually lasts half a day and more, if not abridged, the abundance of details in *HLM* could only be housed within the prose text of a novel.

8. *HLM* is a semiautobiographical novel. 8 For decades it was taken as a “roman à clef” about a Mandschu noble family from Beijing. It was not before 1922 that research work on the novel took a new turn, when Hu Shi, literate, philosopher of pragmatism and liberalism (translator of John Dewey), language reformer, diplomat, involved in the *May Fourth* and the *New Culture Movement*, a leading figure in “Chinese Renaissance” had published his essay *Proofs of HLM* and established Cao Xueqin as its author. Hong Xue (Redology i. e. research on *HLM*) was to become mainly Cao Xue (research on the Caos, the author’s family) for decades. Again the novel was regarded as a “roman à clef”, this time as a disguised autobiography of Cao Xueqin. Yu Pingbo, pupil of Hu Shi and an industrious redologist, advocating *HLM*’s autobiographical reading, has brought to light a vast bulk of information about the Caos from Nanjing. They were not Manchu aristocrats, but Han Chinese, enslaved in Manchuria, being attached to the Plain White Banner (a Manchu banner, not one

---

8 One must be cautious with previous Chinese autobiographical texts. Apparently the *Six Records of a Floating Life (Fú Shēng Liù Jì)* by Shen Fu, born in the year of Cao Xueqin’s death, is an autobiographical novel, yet indeed it is (as well) a novel intending to promote morality, sensitivity to nature, art of living, preparedness for the pleasures of travelling. The last two of the *Six Records* are forged, parts of them are copies of other writings; that is proven. The claim, that the last third of *HLM* is forged as well, cannot be confirmed as easily.
of the Chinese banners later established by the Qing rulers). The Caos made their fortune in the wake of the Qing conquest of southern China and the heads of the family became the emperor’s confidents and Imperial Textile Commissioners. We know a lot about Cao Yin, who was honored to receive the Kangxi emperor several times during his southern trips of inspection, but our knowledge of the Cao genealogy remains sketchy. Was Cao Yin the author’s grandfather or the granduncle? What about the two commentators partaking in the novel’s development? Is Red Inkstone a women or a male relative, a brother or cousin of Cao Xueqin, is Odd Tablet his father or uncle? And who is his father, Cao Yong or Cao Fu, the unfortunate last Cao Textile Commissioner, whose residence was ransacked by the imperial Golden Jackets, when the Yongzheng emperor imposed one of his infamous confiscations upon the Nanjing Caos? Ch. 105 of the novel gives a somewhat mellowed description of this sort of imperial punitive action. There is a lot of evidence that the author has incorporated experiences of his youth into the novel: written exclamations by the early commentators (his relatives, friends) – like: “yes, I remember, that’s him/her, that has happened” – and particularly the author’s confessions, in ch. 1 and foremost in a preceding entry recorded in some manuscripts, but not in the Cheng-E-editions:

> In consequence of a certain dream fantasy which I experienced, I have concealed the real facts and made use of Spiritual Intelligence in telling this story, The Tale of the Stone. This is why I say zhen shi yin [true facts concealed, and modulo homophony, the name of a figure in chapters 1, 103, 120] [...] I found myself one day in the midst of my poverty and wretchedness, thinking about the female companions of my youth. As I went over them one by one, examining and comparing them in my mind’s eye, it suddenly came over me, that those slips of girls – which is all they were then – were in every way, both morally and intellectually superior to the ‘grave and mustachioed seignior’ I am now supposed to have become [...] There and then I resolved to make a record of all the recollections of those days I could muster – those golden days when I dressed in silk [...] I resolved that, however unsightly my own shortcomings might be, I must not, for the sake of keeping them hid, allow those wonderful girls to pass into oblivion without a memorial [...] I might lack learning and literary aptitude, but what was to prevent me from turning it all into a story and writing it in the vernacular?«

---

9 I, 20f, except the first two sentences of the quotation. Hawkes claims, that this text was written by Cao Xueqin’s younger brother »by quoting Cao Xueqin’s own words«.
Yet it is Cao Xueqin, a volatile figure at the novels beginning and end who

»in his Nostalgia studio worked on it for ten years, in the course of which he rewrote it no less than five times, dividing it into chapters, composing chapter headings, renaming it The Twelve Beauties of Jingling« (I, 51)

Jingling i. e. Nanjing, not Beijing, where the Jias had their residences! The novelist has taken pains to introduce a counterpart-family to the Jias of Beijing, the Zhens of Nanjing. Zhen family members rarely appear in the novel, in spite of the purported close relations between both clans. Their residence is sequestrated (ch. 92: IV, 260), before the stroke will fall down upon the compromised Jia seniors. (The novelist plays a pun on the family names Jia and Zhen: a homophone of Jia means “false, fictious”, a homophone of Zhen “true, real”.) There is another title for the novel: A Dream of Golden Days [Hawkes’ rendering of Honglou Meng], the heading of the future revealing song-cycle, performed by command of fairy Disenchantment in The Land of Illusion for Bao-yu (ch. 5: I, 139). This title underlines the dreamlike character of the novel, its profound persistent melancholic, nostalgic mood, by evoking the splendor, the passions, the figures of past times lost. The text reveals the author’s obsession with those wonderful girls he kept company with in former days. The most sustainable invention within the novel is Grand Prospect Garden, constructed for the unique family visit of Jia Yuan-chun, who has been raised to the high rank of an imperial concubine (ch. 17, 18). By her order it is given to the young ladies and to her brother Bao-yu, the only lad permitted to live in this “hortus conclusus”. I maintain, this paradise for young people, secluded from outer-world is the author’s invention, though it might have been modeled after existing Chinese gardens, either the southern ones (some of them have survived e. g. in Suzhou) or those in the capital. 10 Indeed, we late-comers will never be able to disentangle the author’s deliberate and playful confusion, which conforms to the couplet written on either side of the entrance arch into The Land of Illusion:

»Truth becomes fiction when fiction’s true;
Real become not-real where the unreal’s real.« (I, 130)

---

10 John Minford in his Preface to Vol IV, 15–20 of the Hawkes-Minford translation claims to have visited its model in a squalid state in Beijing.
Instead of disentangling the novel’s fabric, we easily get entangled into guesswork, e.g.: Bao-yu is a composite character of two different persons, Dai-yu and Bao-chai are two complements of one real person. This looks persuasive, but cannot be proven.

9. *HLM* is an unfinished novel. Yet we have a complete text since the Cheng-Gao prints. There are a lot of traces elucidating, that the text would be in need of a final revision. The Red Ink manuscripts give not more than the first 80 chapters, and even within that fragment there are quite a lot of variants and inconsistencies, more than angry Horace would have to concede to Homer: »Indignor, quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus.« Since Hu Shi’s pioneering essay Cheng and Gao have been regarded as liars and cheaters by a majority of redologists. Contrary to their forewords – they claimed to have done no more than putting together the parts and pieces of the novel’s missing text Chang had collected – they were put in the pillory: Gao E being the main culprit, who has fabricated the last forty chapters. Since the detection of two manuscripts written before 1792 and giving the full text, it is probable, that Cheng Weiyuan and Gao E have told the truth: they were mere editors, no coauthors. Yet doubts remain about the status of ch. 81 to 120. They might have been the result of an early draft of Cao Xueqin with additions, alterations by some other hand (supposedly not by the commentators *Red Inkstone* or *Odd Tablet*). Nowadays questions of authenticity are regarded to be of less momentum than the setting, wherein a text cropped up. *HLM* has been transmitted to us as a work in progress with a mastermind (Cao Xueqin) and a circle of readers and contributors. Its main author either was not be able to finish it or not willing to come to an end. What might be flaws of the novel’s last third? I list nine arguments for its inferior status and parry them with counter-arguments.

(a) **Claim**: In the final part there would be too much servility to the emperor and his servants. **Answer**: Yet the whole novel demonstrates absolute subservience to the throne.

(b) **Claim**: The fall of both branches of the Jias is not deep enough, the raid of their residence not harsh enough, compared with the rigorous treatments of the Yongzheng emperor. **Answer**: This complaint matches the autobiographical bias. But the novel is at most semiautobiographical, giving selected experiences of the author in disguise. The ruin of the Cao
bondservants and bannermen has been complete and irreversible, but the emperor’s punitive rigor against two fictitious ducal Manchu houses (having provided the court with eligible consorts) happened after the decease of the imperial concubine Jia Yuan-chun, after the loss of this essential protector and might be tempered by later clemency within the scope of a general amnesty.

(c) **Claim:** Ch. 1 to 80 are superior in artistic value. **Answer:** I think, there are poignant passages within the novel’s last third in no way inferior to former ones. The record of Lin Dai-yu’s death belongs to the novel’s highlights.

(d) **Claim:** Yet shortly afterwards in the same ch. 98, when Bao-yu, himself on the fringe of death, has an otherworldly encounter, he receives a sermon without an inkling of humour. Likewise Bao-yu’s second dream-voyage to otherworld is rather sinister. It ends in a nightmare, yet this resembles his first dream. But now he does not enter *The Land of Illusion*, but the *The Paradise of Truth* and there is another couplet inscribed on the arch: »When Fiction departs and Truth appears Truth prevails. Though Non-real was once Real, the Real is never unreal.« (V, 285) That slaps into the face of Cao Xueqin’s artistic convictions, his twilight humor. **Answer:** Bao-yu is still rebuked to snatch truth, is pushed around and brought to utter confusion – far off indeed from paradise-like truth! He is sure that the *River queen* alias *Crimson Pearl Flower* over this paradise is Dai-yu, the serving fairies being girls who have shared his life and have died, yet this is denied and he is reprimanded. You might take this first part of ch. 116 as an ordeal full of grim irony, fitting for a cowed and helpless hero who has come near but is not yet ready to enter the state of enlightenment.

(e) **Claim:** It is a rupture in Bao-yu’s character, if after such a long and stubborn resistance he finally submits himself by studying the Confucian classics in order to pass the provincial examinations (ch. 119). **Answer:** It is a sudden turn indeed and Bao-chai has bad presentiments about it. But it has been prepared for a long time: *Disenchantment* wants her protégé to gain some recognition in the world (ch. 5). The Zhens are forerunners of the Jias in this case too. Zhen Bao-yu, the counterpart of Jia Bao-yu strives as well against the four classics, but he has changed for the better – or for the worse: Jia Bao-yu is deeply disappointed after he »recognized by now the telltale rhetoric of the ‘career worm’ and fell silent«. (V, 274) Shortly
afterwards he seems to emulate his lookalike. But his surrender to Confu-
cian morals is short-lived, his evasion after having passed the examina-
tion brilliantly, is a slap into the face of what would be filial submission
and gratitude, is desertion from his duties, after having incited the fam-
ily’s pride and hopes and His Majesty’s benevolent interest. Zhen Bao-yu
becoming a shallow conformist demonstrates what would have been the
inevitable fate of our hero, if he had not got his otherworldly background.
This is quite a bitter critic of society’s superficiality and hopelessness, sof-
tened a bit by the last encounter of Jia Zheng with his son. The uncom-
prehending father gets a glimpse of insight in his son’s profound otherness
(ch. 120; V, 360f).

(f) **Claim:** After the fall of the Zhens a servant, Bao Yong, is sent to Jia
Zheng to get from him protection and employment. He reports about his
young master Zhen Bao-yu, who had fallen seriously ill a year ago:

> »When he came around, he said he had been through a great archway, where
he met a lady, who showed him a room full of cabinets. And in these cabinets
were a number of registers, which he saw. Then he went to a room full of girls,
which turned into ghosts and skeletons. He was scared and cried out, and that was
when he woke up.« (ch. 93; IV, 270)

These lines mark the imitator: eager to strengthen the Jia-Zhen par-
allelism he puts secrets of intimate personal experience into a servant’s
mouth in order to get them divulged within the text. **Answer:** The novelist
will be censured of making to less as well as to much use of the hero’s fam-
ily’s duplicate. Duplication surely is an artificial instrument of narration.
In *HLM* the enforced parallels breed antagonisms: Zhen Bao-yu com-
municates about his otherworld encounters and afterwards he will become
one of society’s useful men; Jia Bao-yu keeps silent, his secrets being dis-
closed by the narrator in a much more explicit and refined way, and he
will turn away from society.

(g) **Claim:** There are only sparse hints about Bao-yu’s progress in his
severing worldly ties and gradual immersion into enlightenment. If Cao
Xueqin would have finished his novel, he certainly would have given more
about Bao-yu’s reasons to vanish into homelessness. **Answer:** His disap-
pearance remains mysterious to a certain degree and this is as it should
remain. I believe firmly, if the whole text would have been worked over
by Cao Xueqin, he would not have revealed much more; the deepest level of human existence is allowed only to be hinted at within the layout of the novel and its author was not ready to switch at its very end from the novel’s genre to legend. There exists quite a bulk of Buddhist stories of salvation in China; \textit{HLM} would not be one of them.

(h) \textbf{Claim}: The reply of the saintly hermit Zhen Shi-yun to the question, »'whether the Ning and Rong houses will ever rise again to their former heights of prosperity?'«, is rather trivial: »'It is preordained that prosperity comes with virtue, and calamity with evil.'« (V, 372) \textbf{Answer}: Indeed it is commonplace, and some more hints for a favorable future are added.

»'In time to come orchid and cassia [i. e. Jia Lan, Bao-yu’s nephew and Jia Gui, Bao-yu’s son] will bloom and the family fortunes will indeed prosper again. This is natural and right.'«

Whoever has written these phrases, was anxious, I think, to convey some comfort to the reader, who had to undergo a lot of tribulation jointly with his hero. (Numerous sequels of the novel, published for a century after its first print, provide much more consolation and have much less merit.)

(i) \textbf{Claim}: If there would have been a draft of the novel’s last part by Cao Xueqin, the distributors of the early manuscripts were likely to withhold it. Perhaps he himself destroyed it. There was lot of dread to get seized by the infamous literary persecution of the Qianlong emperor. A true record of the imperial raid on the Jias might have appeared to be too tantalizing. A mitigated version far off Cao Xueqin’s vein was fabricated and published later. \textbf{Answer}: The direction of impact of Qianglong’s literary inquisition did not touch a text like \textit{HLM}. It was ridiculous what minor matter could ruin somebody, alive or dead: It was fatal to use the character qing (clear) if some derogatory connotation against the ruling dynasty could be derived. Insulting former barbarian dynasties was regarded as an insult of the Manchus. Cao Xueqin was cautious not to deliver any dynasty name at the very beginning of his novel. What could abuse imperial government more than the behaviour of the Golden Jackets, in the “soft” Cheng-Gao version? The emperor’s elite task force is described as a bunch of robbers, stealing the gold and silver from Wang Xi-feng’s chests. Yet not even the imperial authorities would take offence at; despite the good will of the Son
of Heaven and his repeated anti-corruption actions, bribery, peculation, abuse of power, perversion of justice were omnipresent in daily life and in every part of the HLM.

There is an episode in ch. 111, which shows intimate knowledge with some early planned course of action Cao Xueqin was compelled to abandon. Odd Tablet comments on ch. 13, that he had forced the novelist to exchange some pages. We are pretty sure, what was replaced. Qin-shi alias Qin Ke-qing, who let Bao-yu have a nap in her “red chamber” and dream his predictive dream, suffers from a mysterious illness and dies quickly. Yet the author did not change the twelfth song of the fairy’s song cycle alluding to Qin-shi’s suicide and he did not delete a dark and dirty allusion of a drunken retainer. There is no doubt, that Qin-shi, the wife of Jia Rong, would have hanged herself, after her sexual intercourse with her father in law Jia Zhen was revealed, probably by her maid Gem. Gem in despair about the suicide of her mistress would see no way to escape retaliation and was to commit suicide by dashing her head on a pillar. Odd Tablet regarded the incest between daughter and father in law being too disgusting to be taken into the novel; the maid’s suicide passed his censorship. After revision of the text it could be regarded as an act of supreme loyalty and Gem was promoted to the rank of a grand-daughter of Nin guo house. After the death of Lady Jia (i.e. Lady Shi, called Jia mu, grandmother Jia, the matriarch of both Jia houses), her maid Faithful (Yuanyang) thinks about a way to follow her mistress to otherworld, as she had vowed previously. An apparition of Qin-Shi shows her how to hang herself and some time later she meets her in otherworld. Faithful is sure to have encountered Jia Rong’s first wife, yet she denies, as all otherworld beings use to do when they are recognized as former human beings. Yet Ke-qing (the maiden name of Qin-Shi) confesses:

“I once occupied the highest seat in Disenchantment’s Tribunal of love. [...] I went down to the human world, where naturally I was destined to become the world’s foremost lover [...] As part of this mission it was my Karma to hang myself.” (V, 210)

Faithfull’s suicide is praised gustily by Jia Zheng as a model for a servant’s fidelity. Suicide seems to be a prerogative of the novel’s females. About half a dozen girls and more kill themselves; two couples are united
by death. All in all, there are no sweeping arguments for Cao Xueqin’s not authoring any part of the last 40 chapters, and there is no proof that he is their unique author.

10. HLM had considerable influence on the formation of Modern Standard Chinese which started at the beginning of the past century and brought to a provisional end in the 1930ies. Language reform was part of the New Cultural Movement, which advocated a radical rupture with tradition in education, ideology, literature, science, religion – radical in its aims, but not strong enough to overthrow altogether outdated manners, mentalities, structures. Since Ming times there were some half-hearted efforts to improve communication between Han Chinese of different regions, but guan hua (language of the officials, i. e. Mandarin Chinese) was split into different dialects and speakers of some northeast and southwest Mandarin variant would hardly understand one another. Cao Xueqin reportedly kept his Nanjing Mandarin for lifetime and would not accommodate himself to the Beijing vernacular. (Prestigious Nanjing Mandarin was upheld at the imperial court in the northern capital up to the first decades of the 19th century.) But pronunciation did not impede to work the novel into the new dictionary and grammar of the National Language. The dialogues in his novel did matter; they were adapted as written patterns of cultivated speech in pure Beijing mode. Because of its popularity, its affinity to (written) Beijing vernacular, being the youngest of the four or five Prestigious Masterpieces 11, HLM had gained more influence than other texts upon vocabulary, grammar, style – but naturally not upon phonetics – of the emerging modern National Language (guo yu) which was based chiefly on the Beijing Mandarin and vernacular. (Competing terms to guo yu are hua yu and putong hua (common speech), adopted by the PRC.) It was radiologist Hu Shi who made a case for bai hua (plain speech) in his Baihua wenshi (A History of Vernacular Literature). Since the end of Han time a diglossia has emerged. The traditional language, called gu wen (classical Chinese) was preserved through the high rated genres poetry, official, historical, political, critical writing; the progressive vernacular was used in low rated genres as xiao shuo (short story, novel), drama. The low rated genres were upgraded frequently by poems and were authored, read, appreciated, commented, reworked by the literati. Yet the

11 See above, p. 143, footnote 31!
story tellers and novelists were reluctant to disclose their plain names. Authorship of the five classical novels is debated over and three of them have been reworked, including *HLM*. Chinese narrative literature before modernization has preserved an oral attitude: The narrator pretends to speak to an audience. Thus he must use an understandable language. Classical Chinese can be read and understood even now by non-professionals, but they won't grasp the meaning if an unknown classical text is recited or sung to them in modern standard pronunciation. The large number of homophones in contemporary pronunciation confines classical Chinese to an existence as a written language. Spoken story-telling as well as spoken dialogues in drama have to be presented in plain speech (bai hua). Bai hua as well as Mandarin Chinese vary from epoch to epoch, from area to area and a prestigious text in Beijing bai hua, if not too old fashioned, was to have the edge over its rivals in the crucial epoch, when modern Chinese was worked out. As *HLM* sticks to the conventions of story telling – e. g. the authorial narrator addresses himself from time to time to the gentle reader, chapters have a divided headline alluding to two strings of action, at the end of a chapter the reader is encouraged to look to the next one, which tells him how matters continue – it cannot make use of advanced narrative techniques as stream of consciousness. Therefore its influence to modern Chinese novel is slight. The time of its greatest effect on Chinese language was the time, when Chinese novelists embraced Western models.

11. For some time of post-war China the correct against deviant understanding of a literary work like *HLM* was a political issue. Mao Zedong appreciated the novel, having read it five times and as a trained Marxist and communist leader he brought forth his own interpretation: Dai-yu and Bao-yu were to be good characters, early revolutionaries against inhuman feudalism and autocracy; Bao-yu’s sister-in-law Wang Xi-feng was to be a bad greedy character, the personification of an exploiter, a murderous capitalist. It is rather funny to think of capricious and fragile Dai-yu and of that pampered boy Bao-yu as revolutionaries. Bao-yu utters perfect loyalist feelings and an unshaken belief in the emperor’s office and person, the mandate of Heaven being entrusted to the worthiest person (ch. 36; II, 206). As society is looked after in the best possible way, he himself can take leave to look just for his own way of life. Wang Xi-feng is a central figure of the novel, a mixed character, an oppressor and an oppressed
women, cruel and charitable, beautiful, witty, exhilarant and a harassed creature, dying a lonely death at last, despised by her mother-in-law and her husband, regarded as the doom of the Jias. What’s good to heap more blame on her? Yet some artistic understanding of chairman Mao was not an opinion among competing opinions; it was uttered in 1954, on the eve of _Hundred Flowers Campaign_ (Baihua yundong) with the full weight of his political and ideological authority and combined with attacks against false readings of reactionaries, rightists, individualists, bourgeois idealists, failing to emphasize that the novel exposed the decadence and depravity of feudal society and the issue of class struggle. A reactionary in the eyes of a Chinese communist was the stout liberal Hu Shi who went to Taiwan and later had some problems with the authoritarian regime of Chiang Kai-shek. A rightist, idealist and individualist was Hu’s pupil Yu Pingbo. Mao’s critic did after all not destroy Yu Pingbo’s position as head of the redologists. In 1958 he published the first preliminary variorum edition of _HLM_. (A historical-critical edition taking in account all relevant sources has not been accomplished until now.) Years later, within the Cultural Revolution’s purges he was sent to a reeducation camp, but reassumed his functions in Beijing two years later. Jointly with him a host of intellectuals, amongst them China’s redologists, suffered a similar, sometimes a worse fate. Even nowadays a work of literature may become a political issue, i.e. a target of persecution. But the classics have been taken away now from the firing line. There is an exception: Works of ancient or recent times classified as pornographic are still suppressed.

12. I am not informed about Chinese field studies on recent reception of classical texts in comparison with modern ones, diversified by the readers’ age, descent and educational level. _HLM_’s popularity might have increased as a result of movies, television-series. 12 The pictorial qualities of the novel have initiated a plethora of illustrations, colored and uncolored woodcuts, starting with the first print. But classical literature is under pressure by contemporary offers from the print and non-print media. This seems to be a side-effect of modernization in China as well as abroad. I believe that the apex of the novel’s influence is transgressed now due

---

12 Ballets and operas with the novel as a template were produced, but they won’t carry much weight for its popularity. It is not suitable being transformed into comics as it was done with _Journey to the West_.

to China’s modernization since the mid 80ies. There has been and there will be a small group of readers being brought onto the way of personal insight, even enlightenment alias disenchantment by absorbing a fictional and artful text like *HLM* rather than by some homily, some sutta, some guru. Most of the novel’s admirers will handle it in a more profane way proposed by the author through his mouthpiece, the Stone:

«My only wish is that men in the world below may sometimes pick up this tale when they are recovering from sleep or drunkenness, or when they wish to escape from business worries or a fit of the dumps, and in doing so find not only mental refreshment but even perhaps, if they will heed its lesson and abandon their vain and frivolous pursuits, some small arrest in the deterioration of their vital forces.» (ch. 1; I, 50)

In this advertising speech there is expressed much of “delectare” and a bit of “prodesse”. Some readers within or without redology will try again and again to come behind the guises of the novel and its hiding author, will try to belie him:

»Pages full of idle words
   Penned with hot and bitter tears:
   All men call the author fool,
   None his secret message hears.« (I, 51)

This is the introductory quatrain announced some lines before in the novel’s text, and with this rhyme I shall terminate my approach to *HLM*. 
APPENDIX

[For romanization of Chinese characters in Standard Mandarin (putong hua) pronunciation we use the Hányú Pīnyīn wénzì (Alphabetical Writing System for Chinese Language, short: Pinyin, mostly omitting the diacritics over vowels indicating the four tones, in accordance with general practice. Pinyin was introduced in 1958 in the PRC and is now international standard. Yet the Wade-Giles romanization system has been used by the English-speaking communities for a long time and has not yet been completely replaced by Pinyin. We note a few spelling conventions of Pinyin deviant of English ones: b, d, g, z, zh, j are voiceless unaspirated, p, t, k, c, ch, q, x, s, sh, h voiceless aspirated consonants. c, q, x, z, zh, j, r roughly sound like English ts, ch, sh, dz, j, dy, rsh. The glide i palatalizes following a, an to [short, central] e, en; j, x, q palatalize following u, un to ü, ün (like German ü, French u). Pinyin vowel ü follows n, l. i after z, zh, c, ch, s, sh, r is a glottal sonorant. Syllables yi(n/ng), wu, yu(an/e/n), __long sound like i(n/ng), u, ü(en/e/n), __ung. After the velar nasal ‘ng’ there is no stop. h is a glottal fricative. "Diphthongs, triphthongs” are variable vowels pronounced without interruption; tone/stress lying on the most open part of them.]

[Transmissions of Chinese names into English, Latin, Italian and Indian language are borrowed from the Hawkes & Minford translation and italicized in my text.]

**Hóng Lóu Mèng** [title most frequently used: abbreviation HLM] (Dream of the Red Chamber/Red Chamber’s Dream/A Dream of Red Mansions) or

**Shítóu Jì** [alternative title] (The Story of the Stone) 13

**author:** Cáo Xuěqín (* between 1715 and 1724 Nanjing, † 1763 or 1764 (near) Beijing), married twice. His son died shortly before the father’s decease.

**ancestors:** great grandfather Cáo Xi († 1684) was made Jiangning Zhi-zao (Commissioner of Imperial Textiles in Jiangning [Nanjing]), a position inherited by Cáo Yang († 1712) – either Cáo Xueqin’s grandfather or granduncle – and by Cáo Yong († 1715) – either Cáo Yueqin’s father or uncle – and Cáo Fu – either Cáo Xueqin’s uncle oder father. Cáo Xi

---

13 In ch. 1 (I, 51) four persons are mentioned – the first three being fictitious, the last having a real counterpart – bringing forth four titles more replacing the first one (Shìtòu jì): Qing Seng Lu (The Tale of Brother Amor) by Vanitas, Fengju Baojian (A Mirror for the Romantic) by Kong Mei-xi, Honglou Meng (A Dream of Golden Days [transl. Hawkes!]) by Wu Yu-feng, Jingling Shier Chai (The Twelve Beauties of Jingling) by Cáo Xueqin.
and Cao Yang had been favored by the Kangxi Emperor. In 1728 Cao Fu was dismissed, thrown into prison, his estate confiscated after having been impeached of mismanagement by the Yongzheng Emperor. The impoverished family moved to Beijing.

early manuscripts
Cao Xueqin did not establish a final version of his novel. Drafts circulated within his lifetime and after his death. Frequently they contained comments and were copied together with some comments. The best early copies are the “red manuscripts” (zhi ben for zhiyanzhai ping chong shitou ji: Red Inkstone Comments Again on The Story of the Stone): comments often written in red ink (zhipi) appear above or below or between the text. Two commentators (perhaps relatives, certainly friends of the author) sign by nom de plume: Zhiyan{zhai} (Red Inkstone {studio}) 14 and Jihusou (Odd Tablet) About a dozen manuscripts have survived giving at most 80 chapters of an unfinished text. 15

first prints
[Anonymous:] Xiu xiang hong lou meng (Illustrated Red Chamber’s Dream) (Cheng Weiyuan & Gao E eds.) Beijing, Suzhou: Cui Wen Shu Shi [Cui Wen Book House] 1791, first 120 chapter edition, followed by a revised print in 1792. 16 The Cheng-Gao ben movable types editions from 1791 and 1792 had commentaries omitted and illustrations added. The 1792 Cheng-y Version is the basic text for later editions and translations.

later edition (among up to one hundred Chinese editions)

14 Up to now a minority of scholars disputes the authorship of Cao Xueqin, a vast majority relies on Red Inkstone’s comment in ch. 1. There Cao Xueqin is named (and again at the end of ch. 120) as having received the text and worked it over five times: »If, according to this, Xueqin is only the work’s editor, who then wrote the preface so far? You see now how extremely cunning the author could be.«

15 The Wang Fu manuscript and the “Red Chamber Draft manuscript” give the full 120 chapter text. They have been written well before 1791. Relations to the Cheng-Gao-editions are not yet established clearly.

16 About 21 000 characters of the 1791 Cheng-jia print have been changed in the 1792 Cheng-y-editions, about 15 000 in ch. 1–80. There are at least two more versions with alterations, called Cheng-bing ben, Cheng-ding ben from 1792 and 1793.
Complete Translations:

English


Russian


German


Hong Xue (Redology: research on Red Chamber’s Dream), some Hong Xue Jia (Redologists) are

Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940) educator engaged in May Fourth Movement

Hu Shi (1891–1962): Hongloumeng kaozheng (Investigation/Proof of HLM) (1922) has inaugurated the novel’s autobiographical exegesis.

Yu Pingbo (1900–1990): Hónglóumèng Biàn (Debating Dream of the Red Chamber 1923), worked over and published in 1954: Hónglóumèng Yánjiū (Researching Dream of the Red Chamber)

Zhou Ruchang (1918–2012): Hongloumeng Xinzheng (New Evidence on Dream of the Red Chamber) 1953

Value and status of ch. 81–120 are debated over since 90 years. There are about a hundert sequels of the Cheng-Gao version and a 28 ch. sequel starting from ch. 80, published in 2011 by the novelist Liu Xinwu.

Some Books in English on Hongloumeng


Miller, Lucien: *Masks of Fiction in the “Dream of the Red Chamber”*. Tuscon: U. Arizona P. 1975


**List of Figures from Honglou Meng and some other Chinese Names Mentioned in my Discourse**

Bao Yong servant of the Nanjing Zhens, sent to Jia Zheng

Chang’an Now: Xi’an, ancient capital of several dynasties

Da Guan Yuan *Grand Prospect Garten*, lying between the residences of the Nin guo and Rong guo Jias in the capital

Disenchantment fairy *Disenchantment*, mistress of the *Land of Illusion*

Gem maid of Qin-shi, committed suicide after the death of her mistress

Han (a) Han dynasty (Han chao), 206 BC – 220 CE, (b) Han Chinese: member of the Chinese speaking majority nation of China

Hua Xiren *Aroma*, one of Jia Bao-yu’s chief-maids and his furtive concubine
**Impervioso**  *mahāsattva Imperioso*, a scabby Buddhist monk and a Boddhisattva

**Jia** family name of a ducal Manchu family; two branches: Nin guo and Rong guo house

**Jia Bao-yu** son of Jia Zheng, born with a piece of jade in his mouth: the miniaturized Stone of *Greensickness Peak*

**Jia Gui** *(Cassia)* son of Xue Bao-chai, born after the disappearance of his father Jia Bao-yu

**Jia Huang** son of Jia Zheng and Zhao Yiniang

**Jia Lan** *(Orchid)* son of Jia Zhu (Jia Zhu is the elder brother of Jia Bao-yu and had died before the novel’s opening.)

**Jia Lian** son of Jia She, husband of Wang Xi-feng

**Jia Mu** née Shi, *Grandmother Jia*, mother of Jia She and Jia Zheng, grandmother of Jia Yuan-chun, Jia Bao-yu, Jia Huang, Jia Lian, Lin Dai-yu, great-grandmother of Jia Lan

**Jia Rong** son of Jia Zhen

**Jia She** head of the Rong guo branch of the Jias, elder brother of Jia Zheng, son of Jia Mu

**Jia Yuan-chun** “the imperial concubine”, daughter of Jia Zheng and elder sister of Jia Bao-yu

**Jia Zhen** head of the Nin guo branch of the Jias after his father has retired as a Daoist hermit

**Jia Zheng** son of Jia Mu, younger brother of Jia She, father of Jia Bao-yu, Jia Yuan-chun, Jia Huang, grandfather of Jia Lan

**Jing Ping Mei** *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, a late Ming time anonymous novel

**Kangxi**(di) era name “Thriving Wellbeing” of the Kangxi emperor of the Qing (r. 1661–1722)

**Ke-qing** *Two-in-One*, younger sister of fairy *Disenchantment*, maiden name of Qin-shi

**Kong Mei-xi** an out of hand invented figure from the homeland of Confucius and thus a Confucianist

**Luo Guanzhong** ca 1315/18–1400, acknowledged as author of *San Guo Yan Yi* and two more narrative texts, perhaps editor of *Shui Hu Zhuan*

**Kongzi** Confucius (551–479 BC); the *Analects* *(Lun yu)* above all exhibit his genuine thinking
Laozi (a) alleged author of *Dao De Jing* (*Classic of the Way and Virtue*), (b) title of his book

Ma Mu *mother Ma*, a witch under the cover of a pious Buddhist nun

Mengzi (a) Mencius (about 372–289 BC), the first outstanding Confucianist, (b) title of his book

Ming Ming dynasty (da Ming chao), 1368–1644

*Mudan Ting* *The Peony Pavilion*, a play by Tang Xianzu (first performance 1598)

*Mysterioso* *illuminate Mysterioso*, a lame Daoist monk and immortal

Nü-wa goddess who has created mankind and repaired the wall of heaven

Nüzhen the Jurchen tribes, predecessors of the Manchus, their Jin(n) dynasty lasting from 1115 to 1234.

Qianlong(di) era name “Lasting Eminence” of the Qianlong emperor of the Qing (r. 1735–1796/99)

Qing the “barbarian” Manchu dynasty (da Qing chao), 1644–1912

Qin-shi sometimes referred to by the name Qin Ke-qing, first wife of Jia Rong

*San Guo Yan Yi* *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* [historico-heroic record on China’s division and reunion after the fall of Han dynasty], probably authored by Luo Guanzhong

Shi Nai’an ca 1296–1372 from Suzhou; named as compiler-author of *Shui Hu Zhuan*, teacher of Luo Guanzhong (?) or the same person (?)

*Shui Hu Zhuan* *Water Margin/The Outlaws of the Marsh*, Ming time novel in different versions attributed to different authors

Song Song dynasty (Song chao), 960–1279: Northern Song (bai Song), 900–1127, Southern Song (nan Song), 1127–1279

Tang Tang dynasty (Tang chao), 618–907

Tang Xianzu 1550–1616; his five extant plays (including *Mudan Ting*) being the fund of Kunqu opera

Vanitas Daoist monk in search of immortality

Wang Xi-feng *Phoenix*, wife of Jia Lian

Wang Shifu from Dadu [later: Beijing], fl. 1295–1307. From his 14 plays three are extant, *Xi Xiang Ji* being the most famous.
Wu Cheng’an 1501/05–1580; authorship of *Xi You Ji* has been defended by Hu Shi, yet is not accepted unanimously

Xuanzang Tang Sanzang, “Tripitaka” (602–644), traveled to India from 629 to 645, brought back Buddhist texts to Chang’an, translated them, wrote *Da Tang Xi Yu Ji* (*Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*)

*Xi Xiang Ji* The Story of the Western Wing, play by Wang Shifu

*Xi You Ji* Voyage to the West, attr. Wu Cheng’an, fantastical transformation of Xuanzang’s record of his Indian voyage

Xue Bao-chai daughter of Aunt Xue (née Wang, younger sister of Jia Zheng’s wife)

*Yama* chin. Yan(luowang), god of hell/underworld, judge of the dead, borrowed from Indian mythology

Yongzheng(di) era name “Harmonic Stability” of the Yongzheng emperor of the Qing (r. 1722–1735)

Yuan the Mongol dynasty (da Yuan di guo: great Yuan empire), 1271–1368

Yuanyang *Faithful*, chief maid of Jia mu

Zhao Yiniang *Concubine Zhao*: one of two concubines of Jia Zheng

Zhen Bao-yu lookalike of Jia Bao-yu, descendant of the Nanjing Zhens

Zhen Shi-yin a gentlemen from Suzhou, later a hermit, overhears the mysteries of the Stone

Zhuangzi (a) fl. late 4th century BC, at least coauthor of *Nánhuá Zhēnjīng* (*True Classic of Southern Florescence*), (b) title of his book.

---

**August Sladek**

**NAUJAUSIAS IŠ KETURIŲ DIDŽIŲJŲ KINIJOS KLASIKOS ROMANŲ: TRADICIJA IR MODERNUMAS**

**Santrauka**

XVII a. kinų romanas „Raudonjojo kambario sapnas“ (*Hong lou meng*, sutr. *HLM*) yra naujausias ir didžiausias iš keturių kinų klasikos meistrų romanų.Autorius duoda trumpą romano apžvalgą dvylika aspektų: 1. *HLM* – puikus šaltinis tirti aristokratijos, tarnautojų, tarnų, vergų, pre-
August Sladek
China’s last great classical novel
at the crossroads of tradition and modernization