

Religion and Structure in the *Ching-Hua Yuan*

By

Leo Tak-hung Chan

ABSTRACT

This essay, while conceding that Li Ju-chen's late Ch'ing novel *Flowers in the Mirror* is too diffuse in structure to be one of the great classical novels, shows that this openness of structure stems from the ambitious attempt to embody in the text, in considerable breadth and depth, the religio-philosophical traditions of Confucianism and Taoism. While the satirical and social-reformist aspects of the work (e.g. attacks on male subjugation of women) are clear enough, and although this is to some degree a satire of conventional Ch'ing (Confucian) society, there is greater emphasis on the positive qualities of Confucianism--on social harmony through genuinely virtuous behavior. But stronger still is the "Taoist" side of the novel, with its playful and fantastic yet also sincere and powerful exploration of the "immortal" world(s) of hsien-spirits and fairies, suggesting the possibility not just of an "eternal" and "perfectly happy" life but of a life free from social convention and the restrictions of official positions and the pursuit of fame and wealth. Of course, Confucius too cautions against selfish material pursuits: this is just the point. Li's novel is therefore "an imperfect Taoist tale because his deeply entrenched Confucianism kept tugging at him."

KEY WORDS

(structural) looseness  
episodic quality  
(Chinese) religion  
cross-fertilization (of religious  
thought and fiction)  
Confucian virtues  
(a life of) "free and easy wandering"

Confucian utopia  
"immortality"cult  
Taoist paradise  
hsien-spirits and  
fairies

## I. Introduction

Whatever one may say in defense of the *Ching-hua yuan* (*Flowers in the Mirror*) 鏡花緣, the consensus that it is not one of the great classical Chinese novels is unlikely to be disputed. The charges brought against it as a literary work of art are numerous, and in particular critics have taken issue with its lack of structure. It is said that several narrative strands are forcibly strung together, giving rise to much looseness and an episodic quality, and the book seems to have been brought to an abrupt and inconclusive end, with the reader still wondering about the fate of those flower-fairies who have neither died nor gone into the holy mountains. The story is also filled with digressions of all sorts and discourses on various branches of human knowledge that are of little relevance to the plot itself. It is hard to say of the *Ching-hua yuan* that it functions as a unified whole. Li Ju-chen 李汝珍 seems to have different, incompatible concerns that have not been successfully integrated in his novel, and its various parts simply fail to hang together.

It is observations like these that have prompted the present study of the *Ching-hua yuan*. Too often literary critics have joined hands in singing praises of the "great" novels, whereas failures, like the present novel, are quickly dismissed as not worthy of much attention.<sup>1</sup> The aesthetic faults of the *Ching-hua yuan*, however, are worth examining, if only for the light they shed on the complex and intriguing relationship between ideas that are religious in orientation and their representation in fiction. Much as the *Ching-hua yuan* fails as a work of art, there is within it an inner logic, which partly explains the structural problems that bewilder the modern reader.

The Chinese "religions" (*chiao*) 教 represent varying perspectives on questions raised at different levels of a universe consisting of the self, the family and the state in the visible realm and an invisible sphere inhabited by all kinds of spiritual beings, such as deified ancestors, benevolent gods and malevolent ghosts.<sup>2</sup> The extent to which such religious perspectives have influenced Chinese novels is indicated by Yang Ch'ing-k'un, who says that "no traditional fiction that at all reflects Chinese realism would omit the religious element in depicting human crises."<sup>3</sup> However, the study of the cross-fertilization of religious thought and literature, in the field of Chinese fiction, has been relatively little developed. This is easily understandable in view of the all-inclusive character of Chinese religions as mentioned above, so that a discussion of the religious themes in a book will naturally branch off into considerations of the social and

intellectual issues involved as well, and the critic has a hard time synthesizing his observations. Another difficulty is the elusive nature of the religions. Among the distinguishing characteristics of Chinese religions listed by Richard J. Smith<sup>4</sup> is "the compatibility of diverse religious beliefs." Owing in large part to syncretizing tendencies, different strands of religious thought are blended together in a novelist's vision, and while they may be readily identified, it is not always easy to disengage them for purposes of analysis.

In analyzing the process by which religious themes and motifs evolve into elements in the imaginary world of fiction, the critic has to take cognizance of possible pitfalls. Knowledge of the great religious traditions has value only insofar as it provides the wider context for interpretation. But it is the writer's personal perception of such traditions that is of ultimate significance, and in this sense the literary work indicates what has happened to the religious ideals after they have been filtered through the writer's mind. Of course the *Ching-hua yuan*, the novel must be considered a fictive world through which Li Ju-chen projects his personal vision. How then can we justify the use of a religious interpretation? Put simply, the central theme of the *Ching-hua yuan*--salvation--is a religious one. Li Ju-chen explores various possibilities of attaining it; in his search he stretches the very limits of the reader's conception of time and space. He takes him on flights of the imagination, out of the Central Kingdom, across the seas, to the four corners of the world, and finally to remote regions beyond human civilization where heavenly paradises are presumably located. In Li Ju-chen's exploration of all the available religious answers to salvation, all the models that have been posed or hinted at, the Confucian and Taoist elements in his world view come to occupy a prominent place. The lack of organic unity that critics have discerned in the *Ching-hua yuan* can partly be attributed to a duplicity of motives behind the conception of the novel. Despite the grudge he feels against the civil service examination and the society he lives in, Li Ju-chen suggests from time to time visions of a Confucian utopia, as a staunch supporter of traditional Confucian values. Yet as a scholar who has failed to realize his worldly ambitions,<sup>5</sup> the other-worldly attractions of Taoism also have a definite appeal for him. In traditional China, the only fit occupation for a 'gentleman' is a career in the civil service, which entitles him to an elite status, and to those who cannot follow the path of Confucian advancement, Taoism offers an alternative.<sup>6</sup> Such seems to have been the cause for Li Ju-chen's fascination with Taoist ideas and concepts expressed in the novel. In the *Ching-hua yuan*, we see him divided in his allegiance towards both forms of 'salvation,' eager to embrace the hopes that both hold out. Our interpretation of the *Ching-hua yuan* is grounded on the understanding that each and every part of the novel is to be

regarded as an essential component of the author's vision, and for one reason or another, he has included it there. Typical of the approach to *Ching-hua yuan* is to pick out those elements in the book that cohere and accordingly make a case for Li Ju-chen as offering a coherent vision on a particular theme. So the author has been characterized as a social reformer, a feminist, an allegorist, and even a writer of science fiction and fantasies. It goes without saying that these images projected onto Li Ju-chen can be substantiated only with reference to certain parts of the novel and refuted without difficulty by citing evidence from other parts.

## II. Versions of Utopia

To critics who stress either Li Ju-chen's radical position with regard to women's status or his dissatisfaction towards various aspects of society at his time, the journey section of the *Ching-hua yuan* is often the 'entire' novel itself. Hu Shih set a trend when he read the book as a feminist novel in his pioneering essay. To him the novel might well be a landmark in the history of feminism in China.<sup>7</sup> For some other critics, the *Ching-hua yuan* is to be classed with the novels of social criticism that became fashionable in the late Ch'ing. It is said to embody a radical critique of the degenerating social order and its corruption.<sup>8</sup> According to Kao Hsin-sheng, for instance, "If the *Ju-lin wai-shih* 儒林外史 satirizes the Chinese culture of the eighteenth century, Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yuan* can likewise be regarded as a 'satirical anatomy' of the nineteenth century."<sup>9</sup> Almost all base their conclusions on the account of T'ang Ao's 唐敖 journey to the overseas countries described in Chapters 7 to 40.<sup>10</sup>

A careful scrutiny of the journey itself, however, will easily unmask the conservative scholar-intellectual posing as a social reformer. Though Li Ju-chen might have realized what was wrong with traditional mores, he was far from advocating any revolutionary program of social reform. At the same time, a comprehensive analysis of the major overseas countries will prove that the author is concerned with many other issues as well. Li Ju-chen has made ingenious use of such ancient classics as the *Shan-hai ching* 山海經, *Huai-nan tzu* 淮南子, the *Po-wu chih* 博物志 and the *Shih-i chih* 拾遺記 in his description of the overseas countries,<sup>11</sup> and the reader looking for obvious contrasts between the customs and manners of the bizarre countries and those of China may well lose sight of much else that is happening underneath.<sup>12</sup>

First, we have to look closely at Li Ju-chen's attitude towards social reform. Social critics have always existed in traditional China, but it is in the late Ming and Ch'ing periods that their attacks were most vehement.<sup>13</sup> Li Ju-chen's basic literary strategy is the use of "inverted images" which act as contrasts to actual situations in

Chinese society. In none of the identified sources for the Country of Women is there mention of men leading women's lives: it is, rather, a country completely uninhabited by men.<sup>14</sup> Through the story of this country, Li Ju-chen exposes the absurdities to which Chinese women were subjected. A series of physical tortures are inflicted on Lin Chih-yang 林之洋 before he can be admitted into the "King's" chamber as Imperial Concubine:

Day after day Lin's feet were bound tightly and washed with medical potions, so that in less than a month his feet had become bent and arched, and his toes had rotten, dripping blood every day.<sup>15</sup>

Li Ju-chen invites his readers to look at the issue from a fresh perspective. While walking through the streets of the Country of Women, T'ang Ao says that the Country's customs are weird and "unnatural," but To Chiu-kung 多九公 reminds him:

"I'm only afraid that on seeing us they'd wonder why we wouldn't want to be 'women.' To them how unnatural it is to be disguised as 'men'!"<sup>16</sup>

Apart from his satire on the subordination of women, Li Ju-chen even criticizes certain central institutions upon which his society is founded: arranged marriages, extravagant feasting, *feng-shui* 風水 and other popular superstitions. On the whole he takes a very rational approach to such practices: he condemns the search for propitious burial places, the killing of animals for feasts, arranging marriages through matchmakers, divination and so on simply because they are a needless waste of money. He conveys his message through Wu Chih-ho 吳之和 and Wu Chih-hsiang 吳之祥, inhabitants of the Country of Gentlemen. The latter says:

As the common saying has it, 'Put by for a rainy day'. By exhorting everyone to be thrifty in this way, the inclination to extravagance can be slowly curbed and we can return to a simpler style of living.... With enough food, the common people will not turn into robbers. Without robbers, thefts will disappear of themselves. Peace will naturally prevail on earth.<sup>17</sup>

As a critique of the position of women in Ch'ing society and folk customs and superstitions, the *Ching-hua yuan* bears some resemblance to the *Ju-lin wai-shih*.<sup>18</sup> One significant way in which it is different, however, is that while the *Ju-lin wai-shih* is a powerful polemic against the examination system, in the *Ching-hua yuan* the system is hailed. Instead of criticizing it, Li Ju-chen in fact suggests making better use of the system. Not only has he not criticized the stultifying system, he even suggests that it is useful as a tool for selecting people with other abilities, as is evidenced in his description of the Country of Scholars. All in all, Li Ju-chen seems interested only in minor reforms. There is nothing extremely "revolutionary"--for, in seeking alternative solutions to the social ills he exposes, Li Ju-chen often simply reverts to accepted modes or conventions in society. For instance, while arranged marriages are to be deplored, he believes that social rank (*men-ti*) 門第 is an essential factor in a good marriage.<sup>19</sup> Though he speaks against the subjugation of women, the idea of a woman's chastity is so important to him that he causes some of the girls to commit suicide after the deaths of their husbands.<sup>20</sup> He speaks against some folk superstitions, yet includes others in his book.<sup>21</sup>

The over-emphasis on the "reformist" aspects of the novel is therefore misleading. In general, Li Ju-chen seems more concerned about the general human condition than he is with the specific Ch'ing context. Of the forty-two countries mentioned in the course of T'ang Ao's journey, a majority shows that Li Ju-chen is concerned, not so much with social evil, as with foibles and weaknesses common to all mankind. To cite a few examples, Li Ju-chen ridicules very directly the 'double standards' of the two-faced people (Chapter 25), the greed of the long-armed men (Chapter 27), the miserly behaviour of the gutless men (Chapter 14) and the feathered men (Chapter 15), the gluttony of the dog-headed people (Chapter 14), the laziness of those with lumps on their chests (Chapter 27), the sycophancy of the winged people (Chapter 27) and the cruelty of the heartless people (Chapter 26). None of these constitute criticism of a feudal society, as many Communist critics maintain;<sup>22</sup> they are indicative of the tilting of the moral balance. The moralist in Li Ju-chen has only portrayed the social effects of moral decline.<sup>23</sup> In any case, social reform is not the only issue with which Li Ju-chen is concerned in his depiction of exotic lands. Many of the overseas countries embody aspects of Li Ju-chen's Confucian and Taoist vision. These countries fall into two separate categories, presenting a Confucian utopia alongside a Taoist one.

The Confucian utopia Li Ju-chen presents clearly reflects age-old Confucian ideals, and it is unfortunate that Li Ju-chen's penchant for social satire has obscured

this fact. The yearning for a place of *chün-tzu* where people put the interests of others above their own and live in peace and harmony finds expression in the Country of Gentlemen in the *Shan-hai ching* and the *Po-wu chih*. Without the slightest alteration, Li Ju-chen has transplanted it into his own novel. During his visit to this country, T'ang Ao, the hero of the tale, is particularly impressed by the people's observance of the rules of decorum (*li*) 理 and their readiness to let go of their self-interests (*pu-cheng*) 不爭. To Chiu-kung comments:

Just now on our way here we saw people on the street showing courtesy and farmers giving away their land. That's already a sign that they place other people's interests before their own. Both scholars and commoners, rich and poor, are polite in action and in word. They do deserve to be called *chün-tzu*.<sup>24</sup>

Consideration for others is carried to its extreme in the account of the bargaining salesman and customer, in this case the former trying to lower the price and the latter offering a higher one.

Li Ju-chen's admiration for people of learning is seen in the fact that the ideal utopian countries in his novel are mostly places where people set store by intellectual pursuits. Wu Chih-ho and Wu Chih-hsiang are positive portraits of scholars. In the Country of Black-toothed People, the value of learning is also asserted. What happens in this country is of Li Ju-chen's own fabrication, since the accounts in the *Shan-hai ching* and the *Po-wu chih* mention nothing more than black people. Hung-hung 紅紅 and T'ing-t'ing 亭亭, who live in this country, are the most intelligent and knowledgeable characters in the novel, and their erudition is shown in the comic episode of their humiliation of To Chiu-kung. Then, there is a third image of Li Ju-chen's ideal society based on a Confucian model--the Country of Scholars, Li Ju-chen presents a third image of Li's ideal society based on a Confucian model. Because he knows his own kind so well, he is able to combine a mild, good-humoured critique of their eccentricities with his vision of a utopian society of learned men. On the one hand, there is light-hearted comedy in his story of the "sour" scholar, a miserly old man who takes home remains of the food he has eaten and asks the waiter to keep the leftover wine. Yet on the other, it is in this country that the examination system serves as a useful tool in selecting people with diverse abilities, and here, too, that virtuous action is highly commended, with golden signs posted over the doors of virtuous families.

Taken together, decorum, learning and virtuous action

can be seen as the principles upon which Li Ju-ch'en's Confucian utopia is built. Surprisingly, even for critics who concentrate almost exclusively on the journey section of the *Ching-hua yuan*, the role played by these countries has been neglected. So, too, is the Taoist longing for immortality: the countries inhabited by long-lived or immortal people have received much less critical attention. If the first country that T'ang Ao visits is that of the Confucian gentlemen, his last is most likely that of the Immortals. We are not sure whether T'ang Ao eventually reaches the Country of the Immortals or not, since it is supposedly an other-worldly, paradisiacal place not easily accessible to mortals. This country is the focus of many time-honoured Taoist tales in traditional China, and legends have grown around it, including those of the tree of immortality and the spring of immortality (the "red spring").<sup>25</sup>

The Taoist idea of immortality is linked to a wish for long life, and so it is no surprise to find, alongside the Country of Immortals, that of the Wheel of Shafts. According to the *Shan-hai ching*, in the Country of the Shaft of Wheels, people dying at eight hundred are said to be short-lived. Li Ju-ch'en stays close to this account and describes at length the King celebrating his one thousandth birthday, an occasion that T'ang Ao witnesses. Among the things to be celebrated in Li Ju-ch'en's world, longevity is just as important as scholarly achievements. Apart from this, two other overseas countries inhabited by long-lived people are described in the *Ching-hua yuan*: those of the Long-necked People and the Restless People.<sup>26</sup> While the Restless People are created to show the value of labour, for people there attain long life through hard work, the inclusion of the Long-necked People further expresses a belief in the possibility of longevity.

A comparison of the Taoist paradises in the *Ching-hua yuan* with their sources reveals a crucial point. Li Ju-ch'en has added nothing substantial to what is depicted in the classical accounts; neither has he tampered with them in any noticeable manner. This appears in stark contrast to his manipulation of the sources in his presentation of those overseas countries which give him an opportunity to direct sharp, satiric thrusts at the conventions and customs of society. There he plays with ideas of physical deformities, making them vehicles for his moral preaching. His attitude towards the Taoist tales of longevity and immortality, however, never smacks of frivolity, and a conscious reworking of the originals is not evident. He is transplanting an entire religious tradition into his novel, as he ponders on the possibilities of personal salvation. Even his descriptions of the Confucian utopias are marred by the occasional insertion of elements of satire and caricature. That goes a long way to show the seriousness with which Li Ju-ch'en views his Taoist immortality themes.

## III. Dimensions of a Taoist Novel

In fact the *Ching-hua yuan* grows out of a long tradition of tales about Taoist paradises and the quest for them. Among the earliest of such narratives is T'ao Yuan-ming's 陶淵明 (365-427) *Peach Blossom Spring*, in which the search for a faraway but quite tangible world of bliss reflects the longings of men living in restless times. D. N. Voskresensky has discussed the upsurge of such quest-tales in the late-Ming and early Ch'ing periods,<sup>27</sup> and it is interesting that most of them take the form of fairytales, despite clear references to the actual, everyday world. All are linked with specific religious and mythical views of the world, with a touch of naivete. The *Ching-hua yuan* has much in common with works of this tradition, yet clearly surpasses them in the consummate skill with which Taoist beliefs and practices related to the attainment of immortality are woven into the quest story to suggest depths of significance.

The abundance of Taoist themes and motifs in the *Ching-hua yuan*, most of them related to the immortality cult,<sup>28</sup> gives rise to a richly imaginative mode of expression that is at odds with the monotony and insipidity elsewhere in the novel. The Taoist interest in the fantastic and the supernatural has for long stood in contrast to Confucian humanist thought which explains everything in rationalistic terms, and it has been argued that the Taoist love of freedom and natural simplicity is responsible for the creation of utopian works, whereas Confucian pragmatism does not encourage the development of this genre. In what follows, we will first try to define the Taoist religious tradition that Li Ju-chen is drawing from and why he was fascinated by that tradition. Then we will be in a better position to understand the significance of the two journeys of T'ang Ao and of his daughter T'ang Hsiao-shan 唐小山, which form the backbone of the novel.

Li Ju-chen's starting point is the broad base of folk beliefs about immortality. The immortality cult has been so well wedded to folk superstition that it is difficult to disengage one from the other.<sup>29</sup> When Lin Chi-yang's ship passes the Country of Shadowless People, T'ang Ao recalls the idea that no shadows are cast by immortals, who owing to their spirituality are immune to all earthly influence.<sup>30</sup> The common belief was that divinities and immortals rarely travel among men because of the impurity of the world. So what they do to communicate with men is through dreams and visions. Then, in the Country of the Shaft of Wheels T'ang Ao points out the distinction between two classes of immortals: the celestial immortals (*t'ien-hsien*) 天仙 who ascend on high to take their places in Heaven, and the terrestrial immortals (*ti-hsien*) 地仙, who, for a number of reasons, remain on earth and live for an indefinite period of time. The people in the Country of the Shaft of Wheels

belong to the latter category.

The problem with this dimension of the Taoist immortality cult in the *Ching-hua yuan* is that it frequently embarrasses the modern reader, who consequently seeks to intellectualize the way the folk themes are used. On the other hand, it would be convenient to assume that Li Ju-chen only incorporated such themes in his novel for their popular appeal. Though that is certainly part of what is involved, it is also necessary to see that they can very well be what immortality is about for Li Ju-chen, and in any case he never treats these ideas in a derogatory manner. As for how Li Ju-chen could have taken concepts of immortality seriously, we need only point out the fact that, for hundreds of years in Chinese history, people (including scholars) have been devoting their lives to the practices considered to be efficacious in bringing about immortality. That would not have been the case if they had not believed in a cult.

What, in particular, characterizes Li Ju-chen's concept of immortality? To understand this, we have to take a look at the several immortality myths depicted in the *Ching-hua yuan*. In the very first chapter of the novel, as in many a traditional Chinese narrative, is figured that unseen but perfectly real dimension in the Chinese cosmos--the realm of spiritual beings.<sup>31</sup> Heavenly fairies are heading for K'un-lun 崑崙 to join in the celebration for the Hsi wang-mu's 西王母 birthday. Besides the association with the creation of the Universe, the Hsi wang-mu is, in classical literature, depicted as a donor of the elixir of immortality, and Han Wu-ti 漢武帝, an avid seeker of immortality, is said to have tried to acquire the elixir from her.<sup>32</sup> She is also linked with the magical site of K'un-lun, the most important of the immortal mountains where, as E. T. C. Werner says, one finds "perpetual leisure and happiness." It is peopled only by immortals who with perfect bodies continually live the life of ease and pleasure.

The Taoist Heaven in the *Ching-hua yuan* also includes the Holy Mountains of the East, namely P'eng-lai 蓬萊, Fang-chang 方丈 and Ying-chou 瀛洲.<sup>33</sup> Legends about these islands were spread at first by the necromancers (*fang-shih*) 方士 of Ch'in and Han times, and it is well-known that Ch'in Shih Huang in the third century B. C. was so keen on discovering these places that he sent envoys out to the sea in search of them. The islands are said to be the residence of immortals (*hsien*) 仙 who lead a leisurely life and bear no responsibilities, indulging in wine and chess and all forms of merry-making. Here is Li Ju-chen's description:

The most lovely thing about it is that the flowers are in bloom all the year round, the grass is green throughout the seasons.

Besides these, magic fruits, divine plants and precious grain are too numerous to recount.<sup>34</sup>

In the opening chapters Li Ju-chen also establishes very lucidly his image of a Taoist Heaven where pleasure abounds: the opening scenes are replete with descriptions of immortals enjoying holy peaches (*hsien-t'ao*) 仙桃, drinking holy wine (*hsien-niang*) 仙釀 and listening to heavenly music (*hsien-yueh*) 仙樂.

The two other myths in the *Ching-hua yuan* involve figures who were previously mortals but have achieved immortality. Their stories throw into sharp relief those of T'ang Ao, who has yet to gain his immortality, and of T'ang Hsiao-shan, who is to regain it. In debate with the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers (later reincarnated as T'ang Hsiao-shan) in the Feast of Peaches is the Moon-goddess, Chang O 嫦娥, who stole the nectar of immortality and fled to the Moon. At the Country of the Shaft of Wheels, T'ang Ao relates the tale of the Yellow Emperor's ascension to the *ta-lo t'ien* 大羅天, the highest of abodes for Taoist immortals. In his ascension he takes with him his harem as well as a host of ministers.

Once the unfolding of the quests of the hero and the heroine is viewed against these four myths, the Taoist "structure" of the story becomes apparent. If Li Ju-chen had not allowed his compunction to moralize to intervene, or his description of the life of the scholars to sidetrack him, the *Ching-hua yuan* would have been one of the finest statements in Chinese fiction on the attainment of immortality.

Before moving on to analyse the parallel journeys of the hero and the heroine, it has to be noted that the vision of Taoist salvation has special significance on three counts. First, there is the idea of eternal life. The immortals in the *Ching-hua yuan* are not only omnipotent deities with the power to control the destinies of men or the order in the natural world; they are also creatures who have conquered death and old age. The origin of the immortality cult shows that the fantastic countries at the end of the world were created out of a love of life and a wish to prolong it. It first took its form as a wish for longevity. This wish expresses itself also in the so-called "principle of nurturing life" (*yang-sheng chih-tao*) 養生之道 on the cure for various kinds of diseases, the lists of secret medical prescriptions, as well as the discussions on the detrimental effects of tea,<sup>36</sup> and on healthful foods of all kinds are entirely relevant. The novel abounds in references to felicity (*fu*) 福 and longevity (*shou*) 壽 and there are accounts of how virtuous people are rewarded with these. At one point in the book Li Ju-chen sums up the "five good things in life": longevity, wealth, health, virtue and a good death. Longevity is at the head of the

list.

Immortality is not just life infinitely prolonged; it is ultimate happiness. As places where joy is to be had, paradises are created in response to the human desire for lasting bliss. Unfulfilled and unrealizable desires for happiness, peace and harmony are satisfied in these paradisiacal realms. But since the only joy that man can conceive of comes from his experience in the earthly realm, worldly joys are transported to these paradises. This is why the Taoist Heaven actually duplicates the world below, and the bliss there is the same as that on earth. The heavenly banquet at the beginning of the *Ching-hua yuan*, for instance, acts as a reflection of the earthly banquet at the end of the novel.

Thirdly, since immortality legends are the result also of a quest for a peaceful, untroubled life beyond the fetters of human society, it is easy to see why it had its particular appeal for the disillusioned Li Ju-chen. Immortals are supposed to lead lives of freedom beyond human civilizations; the "mountains" are places of retreat for men eager to escape the constraints of society, for men discontented with worldly reality. Because the paradises are not only beyond the world but also outside society, they offer an image of happiness for the escapist as well. In this manner the Taoist subject matter in the *Ching-hua yuan* must be relevant to Li Ju-chen in a deeply-felt, personal way. These three patterns of significance are fully wrought out in the quests of the hero and the heroine. The name of T'ang Ao itself has a double significance. In the first place, the word 敖 is an allusion to the journeying idea. As his wife says, T'ang Ao is so fond of travelling that he hardly ever thinks of going home. Though T'ang Ao is interested in an official career, "he nevertheless loves travelling, and often for the better half of a year he is out in the mountains."<sup>37</sup> Of course the idea of free and easy wandering has for centuries been associated with the Taoist immortal, and the connotation of aimless roaming about is quite antithetical to the Confucian concept of a life of duty. T'ang Hsiao-shan's name, too, literally meaning "little mountain," contains a veiled allusion to Little P'eng-lai, her final destination.

The use of the two journeys is not accidental. The quest for immortality has for a long time been represented in terms of an outward journey. The central shift in the immortality cult concerns the transition from one realm of being into another. As the cult developed over the course of centuries in China, the concept of ascension to Heaven began to fall out of favour, no doubt owing to the impossibility of its ever occurring outside of legend, and the transition is described on another spatial dimension, with the creation of paradises at the edges of the human world. This was, as Wolfgang Bauer says,<sup>38</sup> an attempt to reintegrate heavenly paradises in this world. With the specific geographical accounts of the Isles of the East, the

transition to the other realm in fact becomes a kind of voyage into a country outside the Central Kingdom.

(a) T'ang Ao's Quest

T'ang Ao's journey is, basically, a transforming experience. It takes him not just from one geographical plane to another, but also from one state of being to another. This transformation works through his encounter with bizarre phenomena not found in the mundane world of daily living. There is an abundance of exotic in the *Ching-hua yuan*, most of them created out of a mixture of fact and fantasy. Based on his sources, Li Ju-chen fabricates a world full of strange varieties of flora and fauna, bird and animal kingdoms (Chapters 20-21), unheard-of species of animals and people. At one point, To Chiu-kung tells T'ang Ao a story of tall men as they wander around in the Country of Tall People. The tallest man on earth, according to him, has a belly that reaches to the sky even when lying down.<sup>39</sup> All this, of course, is part of the fascination of the immortality cult, which breaks through the limits of the known world and poses the challenges of the world beyond. That there are things unimaginable lying beyond our ordinary areas of experience is a fundamental idea behind the cult. T'ang Ao must break free from the known world before he can be accepted into the land of the immortals. Hence the quest for a blissful, eternal world happens not only on an outward, fantastical level; it is developed on an inward, philosophical plane as well. At the end of the *Ching-hua yuan*, T'ang Ao not only enters Little P'eng-lai; he also has spiritually attained a particular cast of mind that earns him a place among the immortals.<sup>40</sup>

It is well-known among adepts of Taoist immortality that people "in harmony with the Tao" are visited by divinities. T'ang Ao is sent off on his journey by a dream-meeting he has with an immortal in a temple called the Dream Spirit Temple. He is told that he is destined for immortality, and the only task will be to set off on a journey to look for twelve famous flowers. Ridiculous as this may seem for the modern reader, the whole enterprise is in keeping with popular Taoist beliefs.<sup>41</sup> In fact, dreams and visions were viewed as among the most important means whereby mortals and divinities make contact.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, various elixir substances are taken by T'ang Ao on his way to P'eng-lai, including a "flesh mushroom" (*jou-chih*) 肉芝 which is in the form of a tiny man riding a horse: presumably it brings longevity. But the most important prerequisite for *hsien* status in Taoism is that the mind and the heart be "prepared." To qualify for a position in the other-world, adepts must free themselves from emotions and feel a disdain for the ordinary desires and attractions of the world of dust and tumult. Wealth and high positions are giant obstacles to be overcome. When his name is slandered because of his association with the T'ang

loyalists and his hopes for an official career are dashed, T'ang Ao begins to learn about the meaninglessness of status and wealth. At the end of his trip, he comes to reflect on the folly of ministers hanging onto the dragon's whiskers in the hope that they too can be carried to Heaven with the Yellow Emperor:

If one has not honestly given up one's attachment to the world, what's the use of that? If one is determined to leave the red dust and one's heart is dead like ashes, where can't one go? Why the need to cling on to the dragon's whiskers? Isn't that ridiculous? <sup>43</sup>

Thus T'ang Ao has fulfilled the requirements for immortality and he goes into seclusion in Little P'eng-lai.

Essentially it is the idea of the renunciation of human society that is expounded through T'ang Ao's quest. The two other aspects of the immortality cult that we have mentioned--eternal life and perpetual happiness--are seen even more clearly in T'ang Hsiao-shan's earthly journey and her eventual return to Heaven.

#### (b) T'ang Hsiao-shan's Quest

Numerous approaches are possible with regard to the interpretation of the story of the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers. Some considered her story as an allegory on the problems of human perception;<sup>44</sup> some analysed the parallels drawn with the Christian myth of the Fall;<sup>45</sup> others gave a psychological interpretation making the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers a symbol of the superego while the other ninety-nine fairies become part of an individual's consciousness.<sup>46</sup> While these are all interesting ways of looking at her, none takes account of the reality of the Taoist Heaven as depicted in the novel.

The crux of the problem is how one looks at the mythological frame-story with which the *Ching-hua yuan* opens. The fall of the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers has been ascribed completely to her desire for worldly pleasures. It is said that the moment she chances to see the stone tablet in Little P'eng-lai sending off a dazzling red light, indicating that some celebrated event is going to occur in the human world, marks the beginning of her "fall." But the fact is that countless heavenly divinities have been sent down to earth for one reason or another, and the Chinese have always believed in the co-existence of the heavenly and earthly realms, between which there is constant interpenetration.<sup>47</sup> To put undue weight on the "humanity" of the character of the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers also

distorts the true purport of the narrative. It would be hard to maintain that the Fairy of the Hundred Flowers is a soul searching for her real self, for the single most remarkable fact about her earthly sojourn is that she never comes to any moment of "self-understanding." She learns not so much about earthly suffering as about the transience of life and her immortal nature. Unlike T'ang Ao, she is not disillusioned with the pleasures of the mundane world. The Fairy's course on earth is, as it were, charted out for her at every stage so that she can fully enjoy the honour of being a female scholar. She is not shown to have undergone any kind of moral progress or any change of character. The whole story is a perfect fairytale and cannot be considered only on a realistic basis.

Another of the explanations given for the fairy's "fall" is her "intellectual curiosity."<sup>48</sup> Obvious enough, however, is the fact that she is not described as an intellectually complex being. She is punished not for intellectual curiosity, but for not carrying out her duty; all the hundred flowers have bloomed in the middle of winter at the instigation of the ruler of the earthly realm, violating thereby the proper seasonal rhythms. By contrast, the Heart-Moon Fairy is sent down to the human world with a special assignment: to disrupt the T'ang reign. The story of these two characters makes evident the interrelatedness of the two realms of Heaven and Earth. Interestingly enough, the spiritual world is viewed in social and bureaucratic terms of hierarchy and well-defined concepts of power and responsibility.

What has happened, conceivably, is that modern readers are uneasy with the superstitious elements in the *Ching-hua yuan*, and seek to rationalize them. On the other hand, one can discern the application of the model of interpretation derived from some eminent studies of the *Hung-lou meng*.<sup>49</sup> The allegorical model with its two levels of literal and abstract meanings has been applied without discrimination. While the *Ching-hua yuan* does contain minor allegories like that of the Four Passes, it does not seem as though Li Ju-chen intended the main thread of the story to be allegorical.

On the whole, T'ang Hsiao-shan's quest can hardly be said to repeat her father's, for not only are the fairytale elements more pronounced, but it also has greater significance for the author. Of course popular ideas about immortals figure in her quest. She takes elixirs and meets with deities who, like those in the *Hsi-yu chi* 西遊記, help her to fight the demons of the spiritual world. In keeping with Taoist immortality lore, 'tests' are given to T'ang Hsiao-shan by the divinities on her way to P'eng-lai. Even mortals destined for immortality, it is believed, have to be tested by divinities to see if they are good enough to qualify. Among the most common of these tests is one in which a god appears in disguise and must be recognized. Li Ju-chen has made use of this to generate narrative interest.

As T'ang Hsiao-shan begins on her first voyage to Little P'eng-lai, a Taoist nun appears to present her with a numinous mushroom.<sup>50</sup> To Lin Chi-yang, however, the nun is a demon who does nothing but harm. It may simply be that he is not qualified for a place in the world of the immortals precisely because he is unable to perceive true spirituality. Finally, in the episode at Little P'eng-lai, in keeping with beliefs about Taoist immortality, Li Ju-chen introduces the Register of Death and the three Registers of Life: people with their names entered in any of the latter are destined for entry into the paradisiacal realms as immortals or divinities of one kind or another. The stone tablet T'ang Hsiao-shan sees there thus gives more than the positions of the examination candidates. As the reader knows well, it lists the names of those destined for immortality.

The lesson that T'ang Hsiao-shan learns is certainly more serious in its import than T'ang Ao's. She finds out that the pleasures of earthly life are transient, and permanence is to be sought in the world beyond. The names of the various places in Little P'eng-lai symbolically point out the illusory and insubstantial nature of human life--for instance, the Moon-in-the-Water Village and the Flowers-in-the-Mirror Ridge. The inscriptions on the stone tablet foretell the destinies of the flower-fairies, and misfortune is in store for some. Ultimately, it is death which will come. Shortly before her final departure, T'ang Hsiao-shan also learns of the following from the Long-fingered Fairy:

We live our lives worrying and troubled,  
struggling to win and get the better of  
others. But all is illusion. Life and death  
are but a game of chess. We are cheated  
because we haven't realized that this is a  
maze formation.<sup>51</sup>

This solemn and despondent note is, as C. T. Hsia says,<sup>52</sup> disruptive of the dominant mood of the novel. Probably the only excuse for its being there is that it explains the human quest for immortality. Life in the world has a transient and illusory quality, and Death is the great annihilator of all forms of human happiness. There is only hope for the other world, though glimpses of it are vague and rare.

#### IV. Conclusion

In this light, it is T'ang Hsiao-shan's story that is the focus of the *Ching-hua yuan*, the basis for understanding T'ang Ao's journey. Its mode is that of the Taoist fairy-tale, rather than that of allegory or a realistic story. Yet although a Taoist conception is clearly at the heart of the *Ching-hua yuan*, there is much else that is not structurally related to the central storyline. One can

speak of the two worlds of the *Ching-hua yuan*, that of the scholars and that of the immortals. While not incompatible, the Confucian and the Taoist traditions pose such different answers to the problems of life that they have serious implications for the unity of the novel as a whole. The world of Taoist immortality and the world of Confucian social order remain basically separate and equally viable. The novel begins with a heavenly banquet of immortals but ends with the overthrow of the Empress by the T'ang loyalists. Scholarly life is exalted though the life beyond is said to be the ultimate reality. On the whole, thematically considered, the way of the immortals seems to be preferred to the Confucian path, especially when the destinies of the central hero and heroine are taken into consideration. Yet at times the novel gives the impression that both paths are equally admirable.

Li Ju-chen was on all counts a typical Ch'ing scholar, yet as a *hsiu-ts'ai* 秀才, he was but a scholar of the lowest rank. He was denied the chance to pursue an official career, the most creditable way of earning a living open to traditional scholars.<sup>53</sup> His frustration is seen in the outburst of sarcasm that he expresses at one point in the novel, through one of his characters: "My feet have enjoyed the freedom which scholars who are not interested in official careers enjoy! How can you think of binding them?"<sup>54</sup> While his disappointment in an official career may have been a cause for his interest in Taoism, it is likely, too, that he was a freedom-loving soul, much given to drinking and merry-making, to whom Taoism has its appeal. In a colophon written by his friend, Shih Wen-k'uei 石文燧, there is also a hint of his frankness and unconventionality. Yet Li Ju-chen never quite abandoned his allegiance to his Confucian background. And in the *Ching-hua yuan* we see how the two visions play their own parts, as though Li Ju-chen were fulfilling some of his own personal needs while he was writing, and such needs pulled him off in conflicting directions.<sup>55</sup> His novel is, in all probability, an imperfect Taoist tale because his deeply entrenched Confucianism kept tugging at him.

## NOTES

1. For a list of critical works on *Ching-hua yuan* up to 1977, the reader is referred to the bibliography at the end of Kao Hsin-sheng's dissertation, "Allegory and Satire in Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yuan*" (University of California Ph.D. dissertation, 1977), pp. 176-77.
2. See Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction* (Encino, California: Dickenson, 1975), pp. 3-15.
3. Yang Ch'ing-k'un, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), P. 17.
4. Richard J. Smith, "An Approach to the Study of Traditional Chinese Culture" in *Chinese Culture*, XIX, No. 2 (1978), p. 66. The other features are: (i) the lack of a Creator or Supreme Law-giver; (ii) the weakness of institutional religion; (iii) the strength of diffused religions; (iv) polytheism; (v) a tendency to view the spiritual world in social or bureaucratic terms of heirarchy and carefully defined spheres of authority; (vi) the lack of an emphasis on theology; and (vii) the tendency for religious practice to be an individual rather than a group activity.
5. See the bibliographical note in Kao Hsin-sheng, "Allegory and Satire in Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yuan*," p. 172.
6. Frederick Mote has discussed this at some length in his "Confucian Eremitism in the Yuan Period," in *The Confucian Persuasion*, ed. Arthur F. Wright (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1960), pp. 204-40.
7. Hu Shih 胡適, "*Ching-hua yuan ti yin-lun*" 鏡花緣的引論, in *Chung-kuo chang-hui hsiao-shuo k'ao-cheng* 中國華國小說考証 (Taipei: Yun Feng, 1976), p. 560.
8. The majority of the articles on *Ching-hua yuan* are of this category. The reader is referred to: Hsieh Chifang 謝志芳, "*Ching-hua yuan chung ti chung-kuo ch'uan-t'ung she-hui*" 鏡花緣中的中國傳統社會, in *Hsien-tai hsueh-yuan* 現代學苑, VIII, No. 8 (1971), pp. 13-19; Wolfgang Eberhard, "Ideas about Social Reform in the Novel *Ching-hua yuan* ('Insubstantial Connections')," in *Festschrift fur Ad. E. Jensen*, Vol. 1, eds. Eike Haberland, Meinhard Schuster and Helmut Strabe (Munich: Klaus Renner, 1964); and Li Changzhi, "Some Notes on *Flowers in the Mirror*," in *Excerpts from Three Classical Novels*, trs. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Peking: Chinese Literature, 1981).
9. Kao Hsin-sheng, "Allegory and Satire in Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yuan*," p. 98.
10. T'ang Hsiao-shan also undertakes another journey in search of her father (and then a third one after taking the Imperial Examinations), but T'ang Ao's trip is by

- far the liveliest and most memorable. The descriptions of the overseas countries he comes across are, as we shall see, central to the novel's conception.
11. Much of the following discussion is indebted to Liang Chen-ch'ien's 梁鎮乾 listing of the sources used by Li Ju-chen in the *Ching-hua yuan*. See Liang Chen-ch'ien, "Ching-hua yuan tsa-k'ao" 鏡花緣雜考, in *Hsin-ya shu-yuan chung-kuo wen-hsueh nien-k'an* 新亞書院中國文學年刊, III (1965), pp. 82-97.
  12. In most cases Li Ju-chen still subscribes to the traditional view of overseas people as barbarians who should come under the civilizing influence of China. This is another aspect of the pride he has in his own culture. For Chinese attitude towards the so-called barbarians, see Yu Ying-shih, *Trade and Expansion in Han China: A Study in the Structure of Sino-barbarian Economic Relations* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1967). Historical accounts can be found in the *Chu-i chuan* 諸夷傳 of the *Liang-shu* 梁書 (Peking: Chung Hua, 1973).
  13. See, in particular, Paul S. Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China: Ju-lin wai-shih and Ch'ing Social Criticism*. The entire tradition of social criticism in the Chinese novel is traced back to as early as the seventeenth century by Robert E. Hegel. See his *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China* (New York: Columbia UP, 1981), esp. Chapter 2.
  14. See Liang Chen-ch'ien, "Ching-hua yuan tsa-k'ao," p. 93.
  15. *Ching-hua yuan* (hereafter abbreviated as *CHY*), Chap. 34, p. 240. All page references are to the Hong Kong Chung-hua shu-chu edition in 1959. This edition is based on the Chieh-tzu yuan edition preserved in the Peking University Library.
  16. *CHY*, Chap. 32, p. 231.
  17. *CHY*, Chap. 12, p. 79.
  18. A comparison of the two novels has been made by Paul S. Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China: Ju-lin wai-shih and Ch'ing social Criticism*, esp. Chapter 4.
  19. *CHY*, Chap. 12, p. 78.
  20. See *CHY*, Chap. 98.
  21. For instance, the idea of reincarnation is figured in the story of the unfilial bird. *CHY*, Chap. 10, pp. 62-63.
  22. See Hsü Shih-nien 徐士年, "Lueh t'an *Ching-hua yuan*" 略談鏡花緣, in *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsiao-shuo p'ing-lun chi* 中國古典小說評論集 (Peking: Peking, 1957).
  23. In ten of the overseas countries human vices are said to be the cause of physical peculiarities (the numbers in brackets refer to the chapters where they are described):
    - the Long-eared People (14)
    - the Gutless People (14)
    - the Dog-headed People (14)
    - the Deep-eyed People (16)
    - the Dwarfs (19)

- the Two-faced People (25)
- the Heartless People (26)
- the People with Lumps on their Chests (27)
- the Long-armed People (27)
- the People with Pings' Snouts (27)

By comparison, explicit social criticism occurs only in three of the overseas countries. They are:

- the Country of Gentlemen (11)
  - the Country of Scholars (22)
  - the Country of Women (32).
24. Liang Chen-ch'ien, "*Ching-hua yuan tsa-k'ao*," p. 83.
  25. See Ho Peng-yoke and Yu Wang-liuen, "Physical Immortality in the Early Nineteenth Century Novel *Ching-hua yuan*," in *Oriens Extremus*, XXI (1974), p. 45.
  26. There is also the Country of Sexless People, who are resurrected 120 years after their death, but they have not, strictly speaking, conquered death. See *CHY*, Chap. 16.
  27. See D. N. Voskresensky, "Utopian Motifs in Chinese Fiction of the Seventeenth Century: The Theme of the Search for a Blissful Land," tr. Jeanne Kelly, in *Tamkang Review* VIII, No. 2 (1977), pp. 133-46. Examples of similar works at the time include *Lu-yeh hsien-tsung* 綠野仙蹤 and some of the stories of Feng Meng-lung 馮夢龍 (1574-1646).
  28. Ku Yen-wu's 顧炎武 (1612-1681) view that the immortality cult began in the late Chou has been endorsed by most scholars. The cult then became linked to that of Lao-tzu in the Former Han period. It seems that Taoism in fact succeeded in establishing its influence in court through its association with the immortality cult. But it is even more likely that religious Taoism, always ready to assimilate strange and fantastic ideas, found the concept of immortality congenial and the two were thus fused. See Yu Ying-shih, "Life and Immortality in Han China," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, XXV (1964-65), pp. 80-122; and T'ang I-chang 唐亦璋, "Shen-hsien ssu-hsiang yu yu-hsien-shih yen-chiu" 神仙思想與遊仙詩研究, in *Tamkang Journal*, XIV (1976), pp. 121-76.
  29. Yu Ying-shih discusses in detail the way the cult struck its roots in popular thought. Yu Ying-shih, "Life and Immortality in Han China," pp. 108-19.
  30. *CHY*, Chap. 26, p. 187.
  31. Michael Loewe distinguishes four of the traditional answers to man's question of what it was like after death. Besides the holy mountains of the East and West, there are (i) the Yellow Springs and (ii) the structure of being that underlies the Universe. See Michael Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth and Reason in the Han Period* (202 B.C.-A.D. 220) (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), Chapter 3.
  32. For an account of the Hsi wang-mu and Han Wu-ti, see Loewe; for the development of the Hsi wang-mu cult, see

- Homer H. Dubs, "An Ancient Chinese Mystery Cult," in *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXV (1942), pp. 221-240.
33. There were, in fact, five Holy Mountains in the East, the other two being Yuan-chiao 員嶠 and Tai-yu 岱輿. But only P'eng-lai, Fang-chang and Ying-chou retained their popularity. For classical accounts of the islands, see T'ang I-chang, "Shen-hsien ssu-hsiang yu yu-hsien-shih yen-chiu," pp. 31-32.
  34. *CHY*, Chap. 1, p. 4.
  35. *CHY*, Chap. 38, p. 269.
  36. Yen Tzu-chiao's 顏紫綉 discussion on tea occurs in *CHY*, Chap. 61, p. 449.
  37. *CHY*, Chap. 7, p. 37.
  38. See Wolfgang Bauer for an excellent discussion of the nature of the paradisiacal regions on earth, which he shows to be evidence of man's "intensive effort to join Heaven to Earth." Wolfgang Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness: Recurring Themes in Four Thousand Years of Chinese Cultural History*, tr. Michael Shaw (New York: Seabury P; 1976), p. 102.
  39. *CHY*, Chap. 20, p. 139.
  40. For full discussions of the Taoist practices pertaining to the attainment of immortality, see Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, tr. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1981); Anna Seidel and Holmes Welch, *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979); and William Coligny Doub, II, "A Taoist Adept's Quest for Immortality: A Preliminary Study of the *Chou-shih Ming-t'ung Chi*" (University of Washington Ph.D. Dissertation, 1971).
  41. See William Coligny Doub's study of what is probably the most extensive surviving report of the religious experience of immortality, *Chou-shih Ming-t'ung chi* 周易冥通記. William Coligny Doub, II, "A Taoist Adept's Quest for Immortality," pp. 89-100.
  42. Prior to T'ang Hsiao-shan's birth, T'ang Ao's wife also dreams of entering a colorful paradise filled with the scents of a hundred flowers. Lin Chi-yang knows from a dream that he will be rescued in the Country of Women by an immortal.
  43. *CHY*, Chap. 38, p. 269.
  44. See Kao Hsin-sheng, "Allegory and Satire in Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yuan*."
  45. Yueh Heng-chun 樂衡軍, "P'eng-lai kuei-hsi: lun *Ching-hua yuan* ti shih-cheih-kuan" 蓬萊詭戲：論鏡花緣的世界觀, in *Hsien-tai wen-hsueh* 現代文學, 49 (1973): 93-105.
  46. It is again Yueh Heng-chun who suggested this possibility; see *ibid*, p. 98.
  47. See Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, Chap. 1.
  48. To Kao Hsin-sheng, "The emotional, sensual and intellectual factors--in fact sum up an ordinary human soul that, while imprisoned in a divine body, craves for

- earthly experience" (*italics mine*). Kao Hsin-sheng, "Allegory and Satire in Li Ju-chen's *Ching-hua yuan*," p. 28.
49. See, for example, Lucien M. Miller, *The Masks of Fiction in Hung-luo meng: Myth, Mimesis and Persona* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1970).
50. *CHY*, Chap. 44, p. 325. The nun is in fact the Fairy of the Hundred Plants.
51. *CHY*, Chap. 90, p. 689.
52. According to C. T. Hsia, "A comic observer of genial humour, Li Ju-chen appears particularly unwise in contemplating the collective fate of the hundred girls in the melancholy tone of *Hung-lou meng*" C. T. Hsia, "The Scholar-Novelist and Chinese Culture: A reappraisal of *Ching-hua yuan*," in *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Andrew H. Plaks (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), p. 283.
53. It has to be understood that the identity of the traditional scholar in China is in part defined by his place in the hierarchical society, and examination success is important in that it gives one entrance to the official bureaucracy. See Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility 1368-1911*.
54. Quoted from Lin Tai-yi tr., *Flowers in the Mirror*, p. 5.
55. Biographical elements also figure prominently in other novels of the period, for instance, in the *Hung-lou meng* and the *Ju-lin wai-shih*.