

DAVID L. ROLSTON

How to Read the Chinese Novel



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HOW TO READ
THE CHINESE NOVEL

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How to Read the --- Chinese Novel ---

Edited by David L. Rolston

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Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton,
New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Oxford

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Clothbound editions of Princeton University Press books are printed on
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Printed in the United States of America by Princeton University Press,
Princeton, New Jersey

How to read the Chinese novel / edited by David L. Rolston;
contributors, Shuen-fu Lin . . . [et al.].

p. cm.—(Princeton library of Asian translations)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-691-06753-8

I. Chinese fiction—History and criticism. I. Rolston, David L.,
1952– II. Lin, Shuen-fu, 1943– III. Series.

PL2415.H66 1989

895.1'3'009—dc19

88-37900
CIP

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | ix |
| EDITOR'S PREFACE | xiii |

I. Traditional Chinese Fiction Criticism

| | |
|---|----|
| (a) <i>Sources of Traditional Chinese Fiction Criticism</i> DAVID L. ROLSTON | 3 |
| (b) <i>The Historical Development of Chinese Fiction Criticism Prior to Chin Sheng-t'an</i> DAVID L. ROLSTON | 35 |
| (c) <i>Formal Aspects of Fiction Criticism and Commentary in China</i> DAVID L. ROLSTON | 42 |
| (d) <i>Terminology and Central Concepts</i> ANDREW H. PLAKS | 75 |

II. Chin Sheng-t'an on How to Read the *Shui-hu chuan* (The Water Margin)

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Introduction: Chin Sheng-t'an and His "Tu Ti-wu ts'ai-tzu shu fa" (How to Read The Fifth Book of Genius)</i> | 124 |
| <i>How to Read The Fifth Book of Genius</i> <i>Translated by JOHN C.Y. WANG</i> | 131 |

III. Mao Tsung-kang on How to Read the *San-kuo yen-i* (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms)

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Introduction: Mao Tsung-kang and His "Tu San-kuo chih fa" (How to Read The Romance of the Three Kingdoms)</i> | 146 |
|--|-----|

| | | |
|------|--|-------------------|
| | <i>How to Read The Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> <i>Translated by</i> DAVID T. ROY | 152 |
| IV. | Chang Chu-p'o on How to Read the <i>Chin P'ing Mei</i> (The Plum in the Golden Vase) <i>Introduction: Chang Chu-p'o and His "Chin P'ing Mei tu-fa" (How to Read the Chin P'ing Mei)</i> <i>How to Read the Chin P'ing Mei</i> <i>Translated by</i> DAVID T. ROY | 196 202 |
| V. | The Wo-hsien ts'ao-t'ang Commentary on the <i>Ju-lin wai-shih</i> (The Scholars) <i>Introduction: The Wo-hsien ts'ao-t'ang Commentary on The Scholars</i> <i>The Hsien-chai lao-jen (Old Man of Leisure Studio)</i> <i>Preface to the Wo-hsien ts'ao-t'ang Edition of The Scholars</i> <i>Translated by</i> DAVID L. ROLSTON <i>The Chapter Comments from the Wo-hsien ts'ao-t'ang Edition of The Scholars</i> <i>Translated by</i> SHUEN-FU LIN | 244 249 252 |
| VI. | Liu I-ming on How to Read the <i>Hsi-yu chi</i> (The Journey to the West) <i>Introduction: Liu I-ming and His "Hsi-yu yüan-chih tu-fa" (How to Read The Original Intent of the Journey to the West)</i> <i>How to Read The Original Intent of the Journey to the West</i> <i>Translated by</i> ANTHONY C. YU | 295 299 |
| VII. | Chang Hsin-chih on How to Read the <i>Hung-lou meng</i> (Dream of the Red Chamber) <i>Introduction: Chang Hsin-chih and His "Hung-lou meng tu-fa" (How to Read the Dream of the Red Chamber)</i> <i>How to Read the Dream of the Red Chamber</i> <i>Translated by</i> ANDREW H. PLAKS | 316 323 |

Appendixes

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Appendix 1: Finding List of Terminology Used by Chinese Fiction Critics</i> | 341 |
| <i>Appendix 2: The Authenticity of the Li Chih Commentaries on the Shui-hu chuan and Other Novels Treated in This Volume</i> | 356 |
| <i>Appendix 3: Conversion Table from Wade-Giles to Pinyin Romanization of Chinese</i> | 364 |

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Contents of Bibliographical Material</i> | 367 |
| <i>List of Journals and Anthologies Cited More than Once in the Bibliographies</i> | 371 |
| <i>General Bibliography</i> | 377 |
| <i>Descriptive Bibliography (for Commentary Editions and Traditional Works of Criticism on the Six Novels)</i> | 403 |
| <i>List of Commentary Editions of Traditional Chinese Fiction Other than the Six Novels</i> | 485 |
| LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS | 488 |
| INDEX | 491 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AMB* *All Men Are Brothers*, Pearl Buck, trans. (N.Y.: John Day, revised edition, 1937).
- CPMTLHP* *Chin P'ing Mei tzu-liao hui-pien* 金瓶梅資料彙編 (Collected Material on the *Chin P'ing Mei*), Hou Chung-i 侯忠義 and Wang Ju-mei 王汝梅, eds. (Peking: Pei-ching ta-hsüeh, 1985).
- CST* *Chin Sheng-t'an*, by John Ching-yu Wang (N.Y.: Twayne, 1972).
- CSTCC* *Chin Sheng-t'an ch'üan-chi* 金聖歎全集 (Complete Works of Chin Sheng-t'an), 4 vols. (Nanking: Chiang-su ku-chi, 1985).
- CYCPYCC* *Hsin-pien Shih-t'ou chi Chih-yen chai p'ing-yü chi-chiao* 新編石頭記脂硯齋評語輯校 (A Newly Edited Collation of Chih-yen chai Comments on the *Story of the Stone*), Ch'en Ch'ing-hao 陳慶浩, ed. (Taipei: Lien-ching ch'u-pan she, 1979).
- CYY* *P'ing-chu Chin-yü yüan* 評註金玉緣 (Annotated and Commentated Affinity of Gold and Jade; Taipei: Feng-huang ch'u-pan she, 1974).
- HLMC* *Hung-lou meng chüan* 紅樓夢卷 (Collection of Material on the *Hung-lou meng*), I-su 一粟, ed. (Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1963).
- HLMSL* *Hung-lou meng shu-lu* 紅樓夢書錄 (Bibliography of Works on the *Hung-lou meng*), I-su 一粟, ed. (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, revised edition, 1981).
- HLMTLHP* *Hung-lou meng tzu-liao hui-pien* 紅樓夢資料彙編 (Collected Material on the *Hung-lou meng*), Chu I-hsüan 朱一玄, ed. (Tientsin: Nan-k'ai ta-hsüeh, 1985).
- Hu Shih* *Hu Shih lun Chung-kuo ku-tien hsiao-shuo* 胡適論中國古典小說 (Hu Shih on Classical Chinese Fiction), I

- Chu-hsien 易竹賢, ed. (Wuhan: Ch'ang-chiang wen-i, 1987).
- HYC** *Hsi-yu chi* 西遊記 (The Journey to the West; Peking: Tso-chia ch'u-pan she, 1954).
- HYCTLHP** *Hsi-yu chi tzu-liao hui-pien* 西遊記資料彙編 (Collected Material on the *Hsi-yu chi*), Chu I-hsüan and Liu Yü-ch'en 劉毓忱, eds. (Cheng-chou: Chung-chou shu-hua she, 1983).
- JLWS** *Ju-lin wai-shih* 儒林外史 (The Scholars; Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1975).
- JLWSHCHPP** *Ju-lin wai-shih hui-chiao hui-p'ing pen* 儒林外史會校會評本 (Variorum Edition of the *Ju-lin wai-shih* with Collected Commentary), Li Han-ch'iu 李漢秋, ed. (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1984).
- JLWSYCTL** *Ju-lin wai-shih yen-chiu tzu-liao* 儒林外史研究資料 (Research Material on the *Ju-lin wai-shih*), Li Han-ch'iu, ed. (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1984).
- JW** *The Journey to the West*, Anthony C. Yu, trans., 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977-83).
- Ku-chin** *Chung-kuo ku-tai chin-tai wen-hsüeh yen-chiu* 中國古代近代文學研究 (Studies in Ancient and Modern Chinese Literature), reprint series (Peking: Chinese People's University).
- LCH** *Chung-kuo li-tai hsiao-shuo lun-chu hsüan* 中國歷代小說論著選 (Selection of Writings on Chinese Fiction Through the Ages), Huang Lin 黃霖 and Han T'ung-wen 韓同文, eds. (Nan-ch'ang: Chiang-hsi jen-min, vol. 1, 1982; vol. 2, 1985).
- Needham** *Science and Civilisation in China*, Joseph Needham, et al., projected for 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954-).
- Pan-pen** *Ku-tien hsiao-shuo pan-pen tzu-liao hsüan-pien* 古典小說版本資料選編 (Selected Material on the Publication of Classical [Chinese] Fiction), Chu I-hsüan, ed., vol. 1 (T'ai-yüan: Shan-hsi jen-min, 1986).
- RTK** *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, C.H. Brewitt-Taylor, trans., 2 vols. (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1959).

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- Scholars* *The Scholars*, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, trans. (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1957).
- SHCHPP* *Shui-hu chuan hui-p'ing pen* 水滸傳會評本 (Variorum Commentary Edition of the *Shui-hu chuan*), Ch'en Hsi-chung 陳曦鍾 et al., eds. (Peking: Pei-ching ta-hsüeh, 1981).
- SHCTLHP* *Shui-hu chuan tzu-liao hui-pien* 水滸傳資料彙編 (Collected Material on the *Shui-hu chuan*), Chu I-hsüan and Liu Yü-ch'en, eds. (Tientsin: Pai-hua wen-i, 1981).
- SKYI* *Ch'üan-t'u hsiu-hsiang San-kuo yen-i* 全圖綉像三國演義 (Fully Illustrated *San-kuo yen-i*), 3 vols. (Huhehot: Nei-meng-ku jen-min, 1981).
- Stone* *The Story of the Stone*, David Hawkes and John Minford, trans., 5 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973-86).
- TGL* *The Golden Lotus*, Clement Egerton, trans., 4 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).
- The I Ching* *The I Ching or the Book of Changes*, by Richard Wilhelm, Cary F. Baynes, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).
- TICS* *Ti-i ch'i-shu* 第一奇書 (The Number One Marvelous Book), 5 vols. (Taipei: Li-jen shu-chü, 1981).

EDITOR'S PREFACE

The title of this volume is *How to Read the Chinese Novel*. It might seem that a book bearing such a title should contain a certain number of all-purpose prescriptive rules that would dictate the range of conventional approaches to be taken by the reader in his or her encounters with works of Chinese fiction of more than novella length. The truth of the matter is simultaneously less presumptuous and more complicated.

First, what do we mean by "the Chinese novel"? Behind this universalistic terminology rests a much more modest territorial claim. This book does not explicitly deal with the Chinese novel as a whole, but only with what has been referred to as "the classic Chinese novel" by C.T. Hsia in his book of that title, *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). Two notions are involved in the word "classic": a certain removal in time (and perhaps mind-set) from our modern epoch and a level of artistic excellence justifying our continued interest no matter how much time intervenes between our age and theirs. Although the classic or traditional Chinese novel continues to have an influence on modern writers and recent years have seen the appearance of magazines featuring serialized formal imitations of traditional fiction, as a living art form it would appear that the traditional Chinese novel did not survive beyond the first two decades of this century. There is another point of similarity between Professor Hsia's book and this volume—both focus primarily on six novels: (1) *San-kuo yen-i* 三國演義 (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms), (2) *Shui-hu chuan* 水滸傳 (The Water Margin), (3) *Hsi-yu chi* 西遊記 (The Journey to the West), (4) *Chin P'ing Mei* 金瓶梅 (conventionally translated as "The Plum in the Golden Vase" or "The Golden Lotus," but the primary reference in the title is to the three most important female characters of the novel), (5) *Ju-lin wai-shih* 儒林外史 (The Scholars), and (6) *Hung-lou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber; also known as the *Shih-t'ou chi* 石頭記, "Story of the Stone"). There is no coincidence here. On at least one level, this volume was designed to complement and supplement Professor Hsia's work, which remains the only general introduction to the traditional Chinese novel in English and is used as a basic text in courses in this field. Readers requiring information on the plots or textual histories of the six classic novels can find the answers to

some of their questions in his book. However, it might be fitting to add a few words here about the authorship and dating of these six novels.

The earliest extant printed edition of any of the six novels is the 1522 printing of the *San-kuo yen-i*, but all printings agree in ascribing the authorship of the novel to a much earlier figure, Lo Kuan-chung 羅貫中 (fl. 1330–1400). Lo Kuan-chung was known in his lifetime primarily as a dramatist, and the only reliable biographical information on him comes from a work on drama and dramatists. Be that as it may, a rather prodigious number of traditional Chinese novels are attributed to him, most of them dealing with historical or pseudohistorical themes. An example of the latter is the *Shui-hu chuan* (first extant dated edition, 1589). The authorship for that novel is sometimes given to Lo Kuan-chung alone, sometimes it is shared with another figure (often described as Lo's teacher) named Shih Nai-an 施耐庵, or sometimes attributed to Shih Nai-an alone. Despite fervent efforts to provide a hometown and ancestors for Shih Nai-an in Kiangsu Province, many remain convinced that there never was such a person and that Shih Nai-an is just a pseudonym. Most scholars tend to agree in awarding the authorship of the *Hsi-yu chi* (first dated edition, 1592) to Wu Ch'eng-en 吳承恩 (ca. 1500–1582), primarily on the basis of notices to that effect in various local gazetteers, the earliest of them dating from the late Ming dynasty. The attribution, however, is not uncontested. In any case these three novels all represent, to a large extent, the reworking and expansion of pre-existent traditional material, and the editorial work of weaving together these sources may have been as important as any purely creative work undertaken by the individuals responsible for the final versions of the material in novel form.

The *Chin P'ing Mei* (earliest extant printed edition, 1617–1618) is generally acclaimed as a milestone in the development of the Chinese novel away from the earlier accretive, compilatory process of composition outlined above toward a more purely individual method of composition. Although the novel borrows heavily from other works of vernacular literature, most conspicuously from the *Shui-hu chuan* (from which the general outline of the plot and a number of the individual characters are derived), careful reading of the text reveals that the writing technique underlying the borrowing of this material tends to be ironic and is motivated by a consistent rhetorical strategy. The novel was published under a pseudonym, however, and the lack of incontrovertible evidence for any of the over twenty candidates proposed as authors by various scholars to date has prevented the development of a consensus on any single figure among them. Most prominent among the names mentioned for this honor are Li K'ai-hsien 李開先 (1502–1568), T'u Lung 屠隆 (1542–1605), and T'ang Hsien-tsu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616).

The problem of authorship for the last two novels is comparatively simple. Both rely rather heavily on autobiographical material, but neither in the case of the *Ju-lin wai-shih* (earliest extant edition, 1803) nor in that of the *Hung-lou meng* (first printed edition, 1791–1792; but prior to that circulated in manuscript copies several of which are still extant), does the author's name appear on the title page. The author of the *Hung-lou meng*, Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in 曹雪芹 (1715?–1763?), did work his name into the body of his novel, but he gave himself the status of editor and not author. Because Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in came from an extremely prominent family that lost imperial favor before he came of age, we know far more about his ancestors than about Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in himself. The author of the *Ju-lin wai-shih*, Wu Ching-tzu 吳敬梓 (1701–1754), also came from a prominent family only to end up in abject poverty, but the preservation of an earlier version of his collected works and the reminiscences of scholar friends allow us considerable insight into his life.

The words “how to read” in the title primarily represent a translation of the Chinese phrase *tu-fa* 讀法, a compound made from the verb “to read” and a noun meaning “law” or “method.” Although this compound has wide usage with a variety of meanings depending on context, the specific reference intended in the title is to a kind of essay that appears in commentary editions of traditional Chinese novels. The history of this type of essay begins with the first example of the genre written by Chin Sheng-t'an 金聖歎 (1608–1661) as part of his commentary on the *Shui-hu chuan* and ends with the death of the traditional novel itself. The bulk of this volume consists of the translation into English of *tu-fa* essays for five of the six novels mentioned above. The first of those selected dates from sometime before 1644, while the latest was completed in 1850. They appear in the book in the order of their composition rather than in the order of the writing of the novels involved so that the reader can get some idea of the historical evolution of the genre and how the influence of earlier writers worked its effect, in both direct and indirect fashion, on those who came after. The essays themselves do deal with general problems involved in the reading of any work of fiction, such as the differing effects produced by swallowing the text whole in as short a time as possible or the other extreme of drawing out the experience by savoring to the full the implications of each and every word, but the majority of the comments are more narrowly focused on issues connected with the critic's evaluation of the characters in the novel or his reconstruction of the author's motives for inserting various features into the text. An alternative translation for *tu-fa* would be “principles for reading,” which would emphasize the fact that *tu-fa* essays for Chinese novels are made up of numerous separate items, sometimes numbering over one hundred.

Often the items were numbered consecutively in the printing of the commentaries, as in the *tu-fa* essays for the *Shui-hu chuan* and the *Chin P'ing Mei*. For the convenience of citation, that practice is retained in the translation of those two essays and supplied for the other three as well.

Some novels have been the subject of more than one *tu-fa* essay. In the case of the *Ju-lin wai-shih* no *tu-fa* essay exists, so we have substituted instead the preface and chapter comments (also broken up into separate items) from the earliest edition of that novel. In this instance many of the more general pronouncements made in the commentary as a whole appear in the preface and the comments for the first several chapters, while most of the other chapter comments deal with specific incidents or characters appearing in that chapter.

The idea of producing a volume of translations of this material dates back to the conference on Chinese narrative held at Princeton University in 1974. The purpose behind the endeavor, whether then or now, was not to say that these traditional critics were infallible and hit their mark every time. The point to be made is rather different. Aside from the important facts that early critics had a direct influence on the writing of later novels and that the mere practice of publishing novels together with commentary eventually changed the mix of narrative voices in the traditional novel, we can turn to these traditional critics for help in avoiding, in our interpretations of these novels, the imposition of foreign frameworks and literary theory onto a tradition alien to them.

To place these translated essays in perspective, the first chapter contains four essays that apply four different approaches to the field of traditional Chinese fiction criticism. The first essay explores the sources for this branch of criticism; the second outlines its early history (up to the work of Chin Sheng-t'an); the third describes the formal structure of Chinese fiction commentaries, of which the *tu-fa* essays form just one part; while the last analyzes some of the more important and recurring terminology and interpretive strategies used by the critics. The translations of the *tu-fa* essays themselves are prefaced by brief introductions on the authors by this editor. The editor has also partially or wholly annotated these translations and has compiled three appendixes and a bibliography. Appendix 1 is a finding list for the occurrence of critical terms in the translations, appendix 2 deals with the problem of the fiction commentaries attributed to Li Chih 李贄 (1527–1602), appendix 3 is a conversion table showing the Wade-Giles and *pinyin* romanization systems of Chinese, and the multipart bibliography contains one section describing the various commentary editions for the six novels.

The number of first-rate traditional Chinese novels does not extend very far past the six in this volume. These few novels formed a select

canon and they were read and reread with more concentration and fervor than most of us are inclined to give to individual works. Traditional Chinese fiction critics made rather severe demands on their readers, whom they expected to be very familiar with the text of the novel commented on. The critics also presumed that their readers would be able to extend their method of interpretation onto aspects of the novels not explicitly examined. Hopefully the annotations provided for the translations will be of some help in overcoming the inevitable gap between the commentator's ideal reader and today's general reader. On the other hand, it is sincerely hoped that this book will prove of interest to a wide range of readers with a variety of needs and that the measures taken to ensure the comfort of one type of reader are not found offensive by others who have no need for or interest in them.

Because this project was begun so long ago, the Wade-Giles system of romanization used in this volume is different from the *pinyin* system now used widely in the People's Republic of China, American newspapers and magazines, and (increasingly) Western Sinological works as well. For readers unfamiliar with the Wade-Giles system, a conversion chart is provided in appendix 3.

As editor, I would like to state here that this volume is the first of its kind in English. It is no doubt riddled with mistakes of fact and judgment that will not escape the eyes of present and future scholars. Some mistakes have been prevented from reaching a larger readership through the kind advice of various readers, chief among whom are Professor Robert E. Hegel of Washington University, whom I would like to thank for his close and critical reading of the manuscript as a whole; Professor Poon Ming-sun of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for pointing out errors in the bibliographies; and students at the University of Michigan who participated in a seminar where this material was used. The contributors and I would also like to express our gratitude to the Committee on Studies of Chinese Civilization of the American Council of Learned Societies for the generous provision of funds that facilitated meetings among the contributors and the physical preparation of the manuscript. An earlier version of chapter IV appeared in *Renditions* 24 (Autumn 1985), published by the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

HOW TO READ
THE CHINESE NOVEL

徵求批評

此書前集四十回曾將與今本不同之點畧爲批出此後集四十回中之優點欲求閱者寄稿無論頂批總批祇求精意妙論一俟再版時卽行加入茲定酬例如下

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三等 每千字 三元

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再原稿概不寄還以免周折

上海望平街有正書局啓

Advertisement for someone willing to provide marginal comments for the last forty chapters and additions to the marginal comments for the first forty chapters of an eighty-chapter version of the *Hung-lou meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber). See page 469 of the descriptive bibliography.

Traditional Chinese Fiction Criticism

(a) Sources of Traditional Chinese Fiction Criticism

What Is P'ing-tien?

The bulk of traditional Chinese fiction criticism takes the form of commentary editions on individual works. Aside from prefaces and essays of a more general nature that appear as front matter, the commentaries themselves consist of comments attached as closely as possible to that section of the text to which they refer. This type of criticism is referred to in the titles of the commentary editions by a variety of terms usually consisting of combinations of the following words: *p'i* 批 (to add a remark to a document), *p'ing* 評 (to evaluate), *yüeh* 閱 (to read or peruse), and *tien* 點 (to add punctuation dots);¹ but it is the custom to refer to this general activity, whether applied in fiction criticism or in commentaries

¹For the bulk of the first millennium A.D., *tien* also had the meaning of crossing out characters in a text by means of a circle. See the annotations of the phrase *mieh wei chih tien* 滅謂之點 in the early work on philology, *Erh-ya* 爾雅, by Kuo P'u 郭璞 (276–324) and Hsing Ping 邢昺 (932–1010), in *Shih-san ching chu-shu* 十三經注疏 (Annotated and Commentated Thirteen Classics; Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1963), “Shih-ch'i” 釋器 section, p. 5/23a. *Tien* is used in this sense in item 67 of the “Wen-hsüeh” 文學 (Literature) chapter of the *Shih-shuo hsin-yu* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World) in reference to Juan Chi's 阮籍 (210–265) ability to compose without making corrections (see Richard Mather, trans., *A New Account of Tales of the World* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976], p. 127) and in the “Tien-fan” 點煩 (Editing Prolixity) chapter of Liu Chih-chi's 劉知幾 (661–721) *Shih-t'ung* 史通 (Generalities of Historiography), which contains this passage: “where there are cases of prolixity, in all cases they are marked with a brush. All such marked characters should be completely excised.” 有煩者皆以筆點其上。凡字經點者盡宜去之。 See the facsimile edition (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1961), p. 15/1a–b. Although fiction critics were not loath to do a little editing on the texts of the fictional works on which they were working, they were generally reluctant to admit this fact.

written for dramatic, poetic, or classical works, as *p'ing-tien* 評點. Although there are those who assert that the use of *tien* in this context refers more to the idea of "pointing out" something,² a sense that *tien* certainly has in such compounds as *tien-p'o* 點破 or *chih-tien* 指點, it is most certain that in this case the operative meaning is that listed above. This latter function of punctuating a text with reading marks, when spoken of alone, is called *ch'üan-tien* 圈點 (literally, adding circles and dots). Long neglected by scholars, this type of criticism has recently begun to enjoy a certain modicum of attention. Claims are now made for the worldwide uniqueness of *p'ing-tien* as a form of criticism,³ which is certainly not true, but it would be safe to say that the strength and influence of this tradition in Chinese literature is in all probability without parallel in the literatures of the world.

The Historical Sources for P'ing-tien

The Classical Tradition of Lexical and Exegetical Commentaries Sets of informative notes designed to clarify or amplify the meaning of a text rather than to add subjective, evaluative comments are not commonly included under the heading of *p'ing-tien*. Instead, they are referred to by a different set of names: *chuan* 傳, *chu* 注, *chieh* 解, *chu* 註, or *shu* 疏. There is no hard dividing line between the two and we can point to instances where terminology more commonly applied to one sphere is applied to the other.⁴

According to Liu Chih-chi 劉知幾 (661–721), *chuan* and *chu* 注 refer to the same thing and he glosses both as enabling the meaning of the text

² See, for instance, Pai Tun 白盾, "Shuo Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo p'ing-tien yang-shih" 說中國小說評點樣式 (On the Mode of Chinese Fiction *P'ing-tien*), in *Chung-kuo ku-tai hsiao-shuo li-lun yen-chiu* 中國古代小說理論研究 (Studies in Traditional Chinese Fiction Theory; Wu-ch'ang: Hua-chung kung-hsüeh yüan, 1985), pp. 95–104, p. 96.

³ See Chang Pi-po 張碧波, "Shih-lun p'ing-tien p'ai tsai Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh shih shang ti li-shih ti-wei" 試論評點派在中國文學史上的歷史地位 (On the Historical Importance of the *P'ing-tien* School in Chinese Literature), in *Chung-kuo ku-tai hsiao-shuo li-lun yen-chiu*, pp. 79–94, p. 82; Liu Chien-fen 劉健芬, "Lüeh-t'an Chung-kuo ku-tien hsiao-shuo li-lun ti min-tsu t'e-se" 略談中國古典小說理論的民族特色 (On the Ethnic Characteristics of Classical Chinese Fiction Theory), *Ku-tai wen-hsüeh li-lun yen-chiu* 古代文學理論研究 (Studies in Ancient Literary Theory) 10: 272–87 (1985), p. 283; and Han Chin-lien 韓進廉, *Hung-hsüeh shih-kao* 紅學史稿 (A Draft History of Redology [The Study of the *Hung-lou meng*]; Shih-chia-chuang: Ho-pei jen-min, 1981), p. 125.

⁴ Toward the end of the Ch'ing dynasty (1644–1911), many editions of commentaries clearly in the genre of *p'ing-tien* were published with titles containing the words *p'ing-chu* 評註. Fiction commentators such as Liu I-ming 劉一明 (1734–1820+), who treated the novels that they worked on as esoteric texts, also use the word *chu-chieh* 注解 to refer to their work. See his "*Hsi-yu yüan-chih tu-fa*" 西遊原旨讀法 (How to Read the Original Intent of the Journey to the West), items 44 and 45, translated in chap. vi below.

to be transmitted without obstruction.⁵ The basic idea of *chu* 注, *shu*, and *chieh* is all part of this metaphorical idea of removing obstructions so that the meaning will flow unhindered from the text to the reader. What kinds of obstructions have to be removed? There are problems in lexicology that arise when the language of the text and that used by the readers diverge more and more over time and through changes in usage. Sometimes a new work is not completely understandable even to the contemporaries of the author, as was the case with sections of the *Han-shu* 漢書 (History of the Han Dynasty) by Pan Ku 班固 (32–92); or the true meaning was never committed to paper, as was supposedly the case with Confucius's (551–479 B.C.) esoteric teaching (*wei-yen ta-i* 微言大義) on the *Ch'un-ch'iu* 春秋 (The Spring and Autumn Annals), transmitted orally to his disciples and reconstructed by later commentators.⁶ With only a few exceptions, these commentaries circulated together with the texts of the classical works that they were designed to explicate.

Commentaries on classical texts tend to contain differing proportions of six general types of material: (1) linguistic glosses on the meaning and pronunciation of individual characters, (2) paraphrases of the original into the language of the reader,⁷ (3) quotation from relevant supplemental material,⁸ (4) interpretation of the meaning and/or significance of the text,⁹ (5) identification and explication of allusions, and (6) literary analysis of the style and composition of the particular work. This last category develops comparatively late and will be treated separately below.

While the production of commentaries on early canonical texts and commentaries on earlier commentaries, in turn, continued unabated, there is a marked decrease in the compilation of this kind of commentary for works written after the Six Dynasties period (222–589). According

⁵The relevant section from his *Shih-t'ung*, "Pu-chu" 補注 (On Supplements and Commentaries), is quoted in Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng 章學誠 (1738–1801), *Wen-shih t'ung-i chiao-chu* 文史通義校注 (Collated and Annotated General Principles of Historiography; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1985), Yeh Ying 葉英, ed., "Shih-chu" 史注 (Historical Commentaries) chapter, p. 245, n. 38.

⁶These two examples are mentioned by Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, *Wen-shih t'ung-i chiao-chu*, p. 237.

⁷The most prominent example is Chao Ch'i's 趙岐 (d. A.D. 201) *Meng Tzu chang-chu* 孟子章句 (Mencius by Paragraph and Sentence).

⁸Two examples of commentaries that favor this kind of material are Liu Chün's 劉峻 (462–521) annotated *Shih-shuo hsin-yu* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World) and P'ei Sung-chih's 裴松之 (372–451) *San-kuo chih chu* 三國志注 (Commentary on the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms).

⁹I refer to the distinction between these two words outlined by J.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 8.

to Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng 章學誠 (1734–1801), this was true in regard to historical works because the later writers used a long-winded and simple style without the hidden rhetorical techniques of the earlier works.¹⁰ A similar situation also holds true for Neo-Confucian philosophy, especially as three of the most favored media for promulgating Neo-Confucian ideas were the writing of commentaries on the classics, the compiling of recorded conversations (*yü-lu* 語錄), and the preparation of anthologies, none of which afterward seemed to require secondary works to reveal their true meaning.

The interpretation of the classics in Chinese society, of course, was something that touched close to the center of state power. Wang An-shih 王安石 (1021–1069), Chu Hsi 朱熹 (1130–1200), and K'ang Yu-wei 康有為 (1858–1927) all tried to transform the China of their day through the rereading of the Confucian classics. The wide divergence between the surface meaning and what was held to be the underlying truth of the text in this type of interpretation is a phenomenon that occurs in fiction criticism and in the writing of fiction influenced by this tradition.

How do the concerns of the classical exegetical tradition manifest themselves in commentaries on works of fiction and drama? The provision of phonological and semantic glosses is fairly common in commentaries written for individual plays. The glosses were added after each section or collected and printed as an appendix,¹¹ but the Wang Hsi-lien 王希廉 (fl. 1832–1875) 1832 commentary on the *Hung-lou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber) also contains a set of similar glosses.¹²

Commentaries on historical fiction, especially the most famous work in that genre, the *San-kuo yen-i* 三國演義 (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms), tend to contain informative comments designed to help the reader understand the language or the historical background of the text.

¹⁰ Wen-shih t'ung-i chiao-chu, "Shih-chu," p. 237.

¹¹ An example of the former is the 1498 edition of the *Hsi-hsiang chi* 西廂記 (Romance of the Western Chamber) printed by Chin T'ai-yüeh 金臺岳 of Peking, full title *Hsin-k'an ta-tzu k'uei-pen ch'üan-hsiang ts'an-tseng ch'i-miao chu-shih Hsi-hsiang chi* 新刊大字魁本全相參增奇妙註釋西廂記 (Newly Printed, Large-Character, Large-Format, Fully Illustrated, Expanded, Marvelous, Annotated Romance of the Western Chamber), photo-reprint (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1976) under the title *Hsi-hsiang chi tsa-chü* 西廂記雜劇. An example of the latter type is the commentary attributed to Ch'en Chi-ju 陳繼儒 (1558–1639), *Ch'en Mei-kung p'i-p'ing P'i-p'a chi* 陳眉公批評琵琶記 (The Story of the Lute with Commentary by Ch'en Chi-ju; Peking: Wen-hsüeh ku-chi k'an-hsing she, 1954 reprint).

¹² The full title of the commentary is *Hsin-p'ing hsiu-hsiang Hung-lou meng ch'üan-chuan* 新評繡像紅樓夢全傳 (Newly Commentated, Illustrated, Complete Edition of the *Hung-lou meng*), printed by the Shuang-ch'ing hsien kuan of Suchou. Photo-reprinted (Taipei: Kuang-wen shu-chü, 1977) under the title *Wang Hsi-lien p'ing-pen Hsin-chüan ch'üan-pu hsiu-hsiang Hung-lou meng* 王希廉評本新繡全部繡像紅樓夢 (Newly Cut, Completely Illustrated *Hung-lou meng* with Commentary by Wang Hsi-lien).

The earliest extant edition of that novel (preface dated 1522) contains notes identifying place names, vocabulary, and allusions among other things.¹³ On the title page of a later (1591) edition of this novel the publisher, Chou Yüeh-chiao 周曰校, wrote the following advertisement:

This book has already appeared in several different editions, all of them quite corrupt. I searched out old editions, employed famous scholars to compare the text against the standard chronological accounts [*ch'ien* 鑑] and repeatedly collate textual variants; punctuation marks [*ch'üan-tien* 圈點] were added to distinguish the commas and periods of the sentences, difficult characters have been given glosses [*yin-chu* 音注], geographical terms have been given explanations [*shih-i* 釋義], allusions have been traced [*k'ao-cheng* 考證], and lacunae have been filled in. . .

是書也刻已數種，悉皆謬舛。輒購求古本，敦請名士，按鑑參考，再三讐校，俾句讀有圈點，難字有音註，地里有釋義，典故有考證，缺略有增補. . .¹⁴

Although much rarer, informative glosses can also be found in commentaries on nonhistorical fiction, where commentators explain linguistic puns in the text,¹⁵ apprise the reader of the truthfulness of statements by characters,¹⁶ or indirectly convey information by referring him to other parts of the novel.¹⁷

Eventually separate commentaries and reference works appeared,

¹³ See the typeset reprint (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1980) of this edition, *San-kuo chih t'ung-su yen-i* 三國志通俗演義 (A Popularization of the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms), pp. 61 (*chuan* 卷 4, *tse* 則 2), 9 (*ch'uan* 1, *tse* 2), and 427–28 (*chuan* 9, *tse* 6) for examples of the three categories of glosses mentioned.

¹⁴ Quoted in Sun K'ai-ti 孫楷第, *Chung-kuo t'ung-su hsiao-shuo shu-mu* 中國通俗小說書目 (Bibliography of Chinese Popular Fiction; Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1982), p. 36. The full title of this edition is *Hsin-k'an chiao-cheng ku-pen ta-tzu yin-shih San-kuo chih-chuan t'ung-su yen-i* 新刊校正古本大字音釋三國志傳通俗演義 (Newly Cut, Collated, Large-Character, Ancient Edition of the Popularization of the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms with Phonetic Glosses and Explanations). In the text, the notes are often prefixed by headings such as *Shih-i* 釋義 (Explanation) or *Pu-i* 補遺 (Supplementary Material).

¹⁵ See the marginal comment on p. 32/10b of the microfilm of a copy of the so-called "Ch'ung-chen" 崇禎 commentary to the *Chin P'ing Mei* held in the Tokyo Imperial University library. The same device (a pun where the true meaning is obtained by taking every third character) is explained less directly in the copy of the commentary held at Peking University, quoted in *CPMTLHP*, p. 307.

¹⁶ See the double-column interlineal comment in which Chang Chu-p'o points out that P'an Chin-lien is lying when she talks about losing her shoe, *TICS*, 29/1b–2a.

¹⁷ See the interlineal comment of the so-called "chia-hsü" 甲戌 (1754) version of the *Chih-yen chai* 脂硯齋 (Red Inkstone) commentary to the *Hung-lou meng* on the mention of Lin Tai-yü's former incarnation, Chuang-chu 絳珠, in Yü P'ing-po 俞平伯, ed., *Chih-yen chai Hung-lou meng chi-p'ing* 脂硯齋紅樓夢輯評 (Collected Chih-yen chai Comments on the *Hung-lou meng*; Hong Kong: T'ai-p'ing shu-chü, 1975), p. 5.83.

which took as their goal the provision of nothing but informative material to aid the reader in understanding the meaning of the novels involved. The earliest instance of a work of this type is Ch'eng Mu-heng's 程穆衡 *Shui-hu chuan chu-lüeh* 水滸傳注略 (Concise Annotations to the Water Margin; author's preface dated 1779, but not printed, in expanded form, until 1845). Keyed to the seventy-chapter version of that novel but without the entire text reprinted, the commentary proceeds chapter by chapter, lexical item by lexical item.¹⁸ In a note made in 1868, Yang Mao-chien 楊懋建 mentioned that he had been working on a similar work, to be entitled *Hung-lou meng chu* 紅樓夢注 (Notes on the *Hung-lou meng*), since adolescence and had already annotated more than two thousand items.¹⁹ The work was unfinished at the time of the note and does not seem to have survived in any form, but a full-scale lexical commentary on a novel written in parallel prose, the *Yen-shan wai-shih* 燕山外史 (Informal History of Yen Mountain; by Ch'en Ch'iu 陳球, fl. 1808), became the most popular edition of that work. The bulk of that commentary consists of quotations of the original sources for the allusions used by Ch'en Ch'iu, but there are also informative notes of a more general nature as well.²⁰ Reference works collecting useful lists of characters and events, such as Yao Hsieh's 姚燮 (1805–1864) *Tu Hung-lou meng kang-ling* 讀紅樓夢綱領 (An Outline for Reading the *Hung-lou meng*; author's preface dated 1860) were also published.²¹

There was a growing feeling in some circles that certain novels were of such a high complexity of design and subtlety that they required exegetical commentary. This was especially the case first with the *Hsi-yu chi* 西遊記 (The Journey to the West) and then later with the *Hung-lou meng*. Since the latter half of the seventeenth century and the popular attribution of the authorship of the *Hsi-yu chi* to a Taoist patriarch, Ch'iu

¹⁸ The entire text of this work is reprinted in Ma T'i-chi 馬蹄疾, ed., *Shui-hu tzu-liao hui-pien* 水滸資料彙編 (Collected Material on the *Shui-hu*; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1980), pp. 270–344 and *SHCTLHP*, pp. 429–93. Informative commentaries were also produced at an early date for the *Liao-chai chih-i* 聊齋誌異 (Strange Stories from Desultory Studio), a collection of short tales in classical Chinese by P'u Sung-ling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715), the earliest of which was by Lü Chan-en 呂湛恩, published without the text of the stories for the first time in 1825.

¹⁹ The note is recorded in his *Meng-hua so-pu* 夢華瑣簿, quoted in K'ung Ling-ching 孔另境, ed., *Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shih-liao* 中國小說史料 (Historical Material on Chinese Fiction; Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1982 reprint), pp. 221–22.

²⁰ This commentary was published in 1879 under the title *Yen-shan wai-shih chu-shih* 燕山外史註釋 (*Yen-shan wai-shih* Annotated) and the commentator was Fu Sheng-ku 傅聲谷 (pseud. Jo-k'uei-tzu 若駸子).

²¹ Published posthumously under the title of *Hung-lou meng lei-so* 紅樓夢類索 (An Index to Categories of Things in the *Hung-lou meng*; Shanghai: Chu-lin shu-tien, 1940).

Ch'u-chi 丘處機 (1148–1227), a series of commentators on the novel arose who treated the text as if it were scripture and objected to the idea of literary analysis of the novel as beside the point.²² Another commentator on the same novel, Chang Shu-shen 張書紳 (fl. 18th century), took that work as an explication through parable of the meaning of the Four Books (*The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Confucian Analects*, and *The Mencius*) and provided a separate table of contents for his commentary in terms of which Confucian classic or which Confucian precept is treated in what part of his commentary.²³ This phenomenon is obviously related to the powerful influence of the official examination system on all spheres of literary life in traditional China, but we will treat that topic separately below. Chang Shu-shen's lead was followed in a commentary on the *Hung-lou meng* by Chang Hsin-chih 張新之 (fl. 1828–1850),²⁴ and the Chang Hsin-chih commentary is also an example of the use of the hexagrams of the *I Ching* 易經 (Book of Changes) to interpret the characters of a novel.²⁵

The tendency to view some of the novels as romans à clef influenced some commentators to expend a lot of energy in ferreting out the supposed models for the literary characters, and advocates of this type of analysis for the *Hung-lou meng* characterized their commentary as “i chu-ching chih fa chu *Hung-lou*” 以注經之法注紅樓 (using the method of commentaries on the classics to do a commentary on the *Hung-lou meng*).²⁶ One writer excused the need for a commentary on the *Hung-lou meng* by saying that even the works of Confucius and Mencius contain topical references (“chiu-shih fa-yen chih ch'u” 就時發言之處) and recommended that commentators on the novel should emulate Li Shan's 李善 (630?–689) commentary on the *Wen-hsüan* 文選 (The Anthology of Refined Literature), and Liu Chün's 劉峻 (462–521) com-

²² See especially, item 1 of Liu I-ming's *tu-fa* essay on the *Hsi-yu chi*, chap. vi below.

²³ “Hsin-shuo *Hsi-yu chi* ch'üan-pu ching-shu t'i-mu” 新說西遊記全部經書題目 (Topics from the Classics [Discussed in the Prechapter Comments] of the Entire New Explication of the *Hsi-yu chi*), in *Hsin-shuo Hsi-yu chi t'u-hsiang* 新說西遊記圖像 (Illustrated New Explication of the *Hsi-yu chi*; Peking: Chung-kuo shu-tien, 1985, reprint of 1888 edition), pp. 7b–9a of the table of contents.

²⁴ First appeared in manuscript form, completed in 1850, *Miao-fu hsüan p'ing Shih-t'ou chi* 妙復軒評石頭記 (Commentary on the *Story of the Stone* from Miao-fu Studio), copy held in the Peking Library.

²⁵ See items 26 and 27 in his *tu-fa* essay on the *Hung-lou meng*, chap. vii below. Other examples include item 24 of Liu I-ming's *tu-fa* essay on the *Hsi-yu chi*, chap. vi below, and an unnamed Manchu who reportedly used the hexagrams to explain features of the *Shui-hu chuan*. For the latter, see K'ung Ling-ching, ed., *Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shih-liao*, p. 37.

²⁶ From the “Li-yen” 例言 (General Principles) of Wang Meng-juan 王夢阮, Shen P'ing-an 沈瓶庵, *Hung-lou meng so-yin* 紅樓夢索隱 (The Hidden Meaning of the *Hung-lou meng*; Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1916).

mentary on the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World).²⁷ Another critic presented the problem this way:

Readers of the *Hung-lou meng* must not only be up on present affairs, they must also be fully conversant with the past. Attention to details is very important, but sharp perception is even more so. One should use Ho Cho's 何焯 [1661–1722] method of commenting on the *Shih-ch'i shih* 十七史 [Seventeen Official Histories] to comment on it. If you use Chin Sheng-t'an's 金聖歎 [1608–1661] method of commenting on the "Four Great Marvelous Books," the results will be very shallow.

閱紅樓夢者既要通今，又要博古；既貴心細，尤貴眼明。當以何義門評十七史法評之。若但以金聖歎評四大奇書法評之，淺矣。²⁸

Poetry Criticism Works in rhyme such as the *Shih-ching* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry) were part of the classical canon and received their share of lexical annotation of the type discussed above. One of the earliest extant commentaries to punctuate its text into paragraphs and sentences is the *Ch'u-tz'u chang-chü* 楚辭章句 (Songs of Ch'u by Paragraph and Sentence) by Wang I 王逸 (89?–158), and other anthologies of poetry and belles-lettres became the subject of like activity over the ages.

Because of the importance of occasional poetry in the tradition, it soon became the practice for poets to indicate the nature of these occasions. The inclusion of lengthy titles, prefaces, or glosses identifying persons and places thus attempted to forestall the efforts of later scholars to define retroactively the circumstances that gave rise to the poem.

The canonization of the three hundred poems of the *Shih-ching* gave rise to a very interesting problem in interpretation. That collection contains some love poems that are perfectly easy to understand as such, but if one feels compelled to wring out a deeper and more "Confucian" meaning from them, a certain amount of interpretive violence has to be unleashed upon them, as was actually done. Embodied most prominently in the "Great Preface" (*Ta-hsü* 大序) for the work as a whole and the "Little Prefaces" (*hsiao-hsü* 小序) treating each poem individually, this kind of interpretation provided a political background and a moral for each of the poems. This trend also carried over into the interpretation of other poetic works, such as that applied to the poems in the *Wen-hsüan* in

²⁷ Ch'en T'ui 陳銳, "Lieh Shih-t'ou chi yü tzu-pu shuo" 列石頭記於子部說 (On Classifying the *Story of the Stone* as a Work of Philosophy), published in 1914, quoted in *HLMC*, p. 270. The commentaries by Li Shan and Liu Chün (courtesy name Hsiao-piao 孝標) are known for the quantity of supplementary material quoted in them showing the linguistic and historical background of passages in the two works.

²⁸ Chou Ch'un 周春 (1729–1815), *Yueh Hung-lou meng sui-pi* 閱紅樓夢隨筆 (Notes on Reading the *Hung-lou meng*), quoted in *HLMC*, p. 67.

the so-called "Five Officials" (Lü Yen-chi 呂延濟, Liu Liang 劉良, Chang Hsien 張銑, Lü Hsiang 呂向, and Li Chou-han 李周翰) annotated edition offered to the throne in A.D. 718. One of the main features of the mind-set behind this type of interpretation was the idea that the emperor is the final reader and the poet has the responsibility to nudge the ruler away from evil without getting his head chopped off for his impertinence. Hence the need for indirect means of expression, so as to encase the barb in an outwardly pleasing form (*mei tz'u* 美刺).

The Six Dynasties period and the T'ang dynasty that followed saw the appearance of separate works of poetry criticism, such as Chung Jung's 鍾嶸 (468–518?) *Shih-p'in* 詩品 (The Evaluation of Poetry; this work tries to place the poets that it deals with into patterns of filiation that are traced back ultimately to the *Shih-ching* or the *Ch'u-tz'u* 楚辭), and manuals to help novices learn the secrets of writing poetry, such as the *Shih-ko* 詩格 (Poetic Genres) and *Shih chung mi-chih* 詩中密旨 (Secrets of Poetry) by Wang Ch'ang-ling 王昌齡 (fl. 8th century).²⁹ However, the most influential genre of poetry criticism, *shih-hua* 詩話 (talks on poetry), only dates back to the eleventh century. The first example, Ou-yang Hsiu's 歐陽修 (1007–1072) *Liu-i shih-hua* 六一詩話 (Ou-yang Hsiu's Talks on Poetry), originally was simply titled *Shih-hua*. It and its later imitators consist of a sequence of short comments on poetry in general or on specific poems or lines of poems. All of these different forms of poetry criticism contain prescriptions on composition and rhetoric expressed in terminology that was later partially adopted in fiction criticism. The genre of *shih-hua* was later adapted to the criticism of the *tz'u* 詞 and *ch'ü* 曲 styles of poetry. These works are called, predictably enough, *tz'u-hua* and *ch'ü-hua*.³⁰

Huang T'ing-chien 黃廷堅 (1045–1105) wanted to produce an edition of Tu Fu's 杜甫 (712–770) poetry with his own comments added,³¹ but never accomplished the task. The earliest examples of *p'ing-tien* volumes of poetry seem to be commentary editions by Liu Ch'en-weng 劉辰翁 (1232–1297) of the collected poetry of Meng Hao-jan 孟浩然 (689–740), Wang Wei 王維 (701–761), Li Ho 李賀 (790–816), and Lu

²⁹ The authenticity of extant copies of these two works has been questioned, but it is beyond doubt that Wang Ch'ang-ling wrote two such works since they are quoted in *Bunkyo hifuron* 文鏡秘府論 (Scholastic Commentary on the Treasury of Marvels of the Literary Mirror) by Kūkai 空海 (774–835), a work compiled from several of these manuals with the intention of providing a primer for Japanese on how to write Chinese poetry.

³⁰ *Ch'u-hua* can also refer to works of drama (*hsi-ch'u* 戲曲) criticism.

³¹ Lo Ken-tse 羅根澤, *Chung-kuo wen-hsueh p'i-p'ing shih* 中國文學批評史 (History of Chinese Literary Criticism), 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1984), vol. 3, p. 362.

Yu 陸游 (1125-1210), plus a volume of Lu Yu's poetry edited by Lo I 羅椅 (fl. 13th century).³² The innovation was primarily one of form and not of substance. Ch'ien Chung-shu 錢鍾書, for instance, has maintained that a letter from Lu Yün 陸雲 (262-303) to his brother, Lu Chi 陸機 (261-303), discussing the poetry of the older man, contains in embryo much of the language and concerns of later poetry *p'ing-tien* without taking on the specific form associated with *p'ing-tien*.³³ The main difference, in the end, is one of presentation and the consequent effect on the reader who, in the case of *p'ing-tien*, can read both the original work and comments on it all at once.³⁴

Not long after Liu Ch'en-weng, Fang Hui 方回 (1227-1307) produced a very influential collection of regulated verse (*lǔ-shih* 律詩), *Ying-k'uei lü-sui* 瀛奎律髓, with short comments and marks of emphasis (*ch'üan-tien*) added to each poem.³⁵ Fang Hui used this collection to promulgate through concrete examples the literary preferences of the particular school of poetry to which he adhered, the so-called "Kiangsi school" that took Huang T'ing-chien as its founding father. This school of poetry laid great stress on technique and the copying of earlier models; therefore the *p'ing-tien* style of criticism was well suited to Fang Hui's purpose. Toward the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Chung

³² The Lo I and Liu Ch'en-weng collections of Lu Yu's poetry were printed together and are available in the first series of the *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* collection, where they are referred to as the first and second collection (*ch'ien-chi* 前集, *hou-chi* 後集). Lo I's section has only emphatic punctuation, while the Liu Ch'en-weng section also has comments, almost all prefixed by the word *p'i* 批 (comment). The Liu Ch'en-weng commentary edition of Wang Wei's poetry is also reprinted in the *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an* series. There is a record of a Liu Ch'en-weng edition of Wang An-shih's poetry where the comments are prefixed by the words *p'ing-yüeh* 評曰 (the comment says) carved in negative characters (white in a field of black). See Fu Tseng-hsiang 傅增湘, *Ts'ang-yüan ch'ün-shu ching-yen lu* 藏園群書經眼錄 (Ts'ang-yüan's Notes on Books Seen; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1983), p. 1158.

³³ See his *Kuan chui pien* 管錐編 (Pipe and Awl Chapters; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1979), pp. 1215-17.

³⁴ There is an edition of the *Hsi-hsiang chi* purporting to contain commentary done by Wang Shih-chen 王世貞 (1526-1590), but the truth is that a later editor has taken the different comments on that play that appear in Wang's *Ssu-pu kao* 四部稿 (Draft in Four Parts) and printed them next to the appropriate sections of the play. See Chiang Hsing-yü 蔣星煜, "Yuan-pen ch'u-hsiang Hsi-hsiang chi ti Wang Li ho-p'ing pen" 元本出像西廂記的王李合評本 (The Combined Wang Shih-chen, Li Chih Commentary Edition of the *Yuan Edition Illustrated Romance of the Western Chamber*), *Chung-hua wen-shih lun-ts'ung* 中華文史論叢 (Collected Articles on Chinese Literature and History), 1984. 1: 119-36, p. 133.

³⁵ Recently reprinted in an edition that preserves the comments added over the years by more than ten other commentators, *Ying-k'uei lü-sui hui-p'ing* 瀛奎律髓彙評 (Collected Commentary on the *Ying-k'uei lü-sui*; Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1986).

Hsing 鍾惺 (1547–1624) and T'an Yüan-ch'un 譚元春 (1586–1637) used works of *p'ing-tien* criticism, *T'ang-shih kuei* 唐詩歸 (Repository of T'ang Poetry) and *Ku-shih kuei* 古詩歸 (Repository of Ancient Poetry), to advance their school of poetry, the Ching-ling school, named after their native place. Even the most popular and influential of poetry collections, the *T'ang-shih san-pai shou* 唐詩三百首 (Three Hundred T'ang Poems; compiled by Sun Chu 孫洙, 1751 *chin-shih* degree), circulated in editions that contained not only annotations but also *p'ing-tien* style criticism.³⁶

Poetry and fiction are quite removed from each other in form and function, as modern literary critics like M.M. Bakhtin are at pains to point out.³⁷ Chinese poetry is also somewhat different from the poetry of other nations in that narrative poems constitute only a very minor part of the tradition. Be that as it may, fiction critics made use, often in modified form, of many items of terminology developed in poetry criticism. Critics more famous for their work on fiction and drama, such as Chin Sheng-t'an and Li Yü 李漁 (1611–1680), also published works of poetry criticism, and the concern with techniques of indirect presentation and with structuration in poetry criticism has its parallels in fiction criticism.

Miscellaneous Arts—Painting, Chess, Horticulture Art criticism, particularly the criticism of portrait and landscape painting, has a long and strong tradition in China dating back to the Six Dynasties period and before. Notions such as suggestion versus realism (*hsü-shih* 虛實), spatial composition (*chang-fa* 章法), and subordination of elements (*pin-chu* 賓主) are prominent in works of art criticism and, in turn, have their importance in fiction criticism, although in somewhat modified form. In

³⁶ Recent reprints of these kinds of editions include: *T'ang-shih san-pai shou chu-shu* 唐詩三百首注疏 (Annotated Three Hundred T'ang Poems; Hofei: An-hui jen-min, 1983 [original preface, 1835]), and *T'ang-shih san-pai shou* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1978, this is a reprint of *T'ang-shih san-pai shou pu-chu* 唐詩三百首補注 [Supplementary Annotation to Three Hundred T'ang Poems, ca. 1844]). The editor of an 1884 reprint of the first volume objected to the use of the words *chu-shu* in the title which, according to him, should be restricted to commentaries on the classics. He changed the last two words of the title of his edition to *chu-shih* 注釋 (explanations). Although the main emphasis in these works is on the explanation of allusions and lexical glosses, as can be seen from their titles, a substantial amount of attention was also paid to pointing out more literary features in the poems.

³⁷ Bakhtin consistently describes poetry as monologic (and thus, to him, of comparatively little interest), as opposed to the novel, which he conceived of as dialogic in nature. See his *Discourse in the Novel*, more particularly the section entitled, "Discourse in Poetry and Discourse in the Novel," translated in Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 275–300.

the case of some commentaries, such as the Chih-yen chai 脂硯齋 (Red Inkstone Studio) commentary on the *Hung-lou meng*, the majority of the critical vocabulary used comes from art criticism, and different techniques pointed out in the novel are explicitly labeled as painterly techniques. Anecdotes taken from the history of painting are also a part of the vocabulary of fiction criticism and are used to stress the importance of elements such as the imaginary identification of the artist with his subject³⁸ or attention to details capable of bringing out the spirit of the subject.³⁹

It should also be kept in mind that from a certain point of view Chinese painting, particularly landscape painting, was conceived of as a narrative art form. It is true that in this case narrative flow was completely spatialized; the "reader" of the painting was free to direct his attention to any part of it in whatever sequence he wished within certain physical limitations due to the fact that lengthy landscape pictures were often rolled and unrolled during the viewing process. However, it may be precisely these differences between our classical idea of narrative and Chinese landscape painting tradition that may be of some aid in understanding divergences between the ways in which Chinese and Western fictional narrative unfold. For instance, neither landscape painting nor traditional Chinese fiction is structured around the use of the convention of fixed perspective or viewpoint so important in Western painting and fiction.

There are various manuals on individual arts such as garden landscaping, chess, and medicine that also contribute technical vocabulary and illuminating anecdotes to Chinese fiction criticism. There was a perceived similarity between, for instance, the spatial interplay involved in the placing of trees in a famous garden or the organic unity of the moves of a master at chess, on the one hand, and the balance of compositional elements in the work of literature, on the other.⁴⁰

³⁸ There is an anecdote about how Chao Meng-fu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322), prior to painting a horse, first studied horses by imitation. He was so successful that his wife, finding him clothes off and on the floor one day, was startled to see so much horse in him. Chin Sheng-t'an uses this anecdote in his discussion of the author's portrayal of the tiger killed by Wu Sung in the *Shui-hu chuan*. See *SHCHPP*, p. 22.424, interlineal comment.

³⁹ The anecdote of Ku K'ai-chih 顧愷之 (ca. 344-406) adding three hairs to his portrait of P'ei K'ai to bring the whole thing to life is used in the chapter comment to chap. 11 (item 2) of the Wo-hsien ts'ao-t'ang edition of the *Ju-lin wai-shih*, translated in chap. v below.

⁴⁰ See Chiang Shun-i 江順怡 (fl. 19th century), *Pu Tz'u-p'in* 補詞品 (Addendum to The Evaluation of Tz'u Poetry), quoted in Chang Sheng-i 張聲怡 and Liu Chiu-chou 劉九州, eds., *Chung-kuo ku-tai hsieh-tso li-lun* 中國古代寫作理論 (Traditional Chinese Theories of Composition; Wu-ch'ang: Hua-chung kung-hsüeh yüan, 1985), pp. 169-70.

P'ing-tien Criticism of the Confucian Classics While most scholars in the Sung dynasty (960–1279) and earlier took the Confucian classics as sacred texts that primarily posed problems of interpretation for the reader and scholars of the Ch'ing dynasty (1644–1911) began to study them as historical texts, in the Ming dynasty there is a pronounced trend to look upon them as models of literary style. This, of course, is partly a function of the passion for archaism (*fu-ku* 復古) in Ming literature, but we can find traces of this new way of regarding the classics back in the Sung dynasty. That dynasty saw the origin of publications designed to help candidates pass the official civil service examinations, an industry that greatly expanded in the Ming. As the candidate in the examinations, especially after the institution of the so-called “eight-legged essays” as the required form, was supposed to “speak on behalf of the sages” (*tai sheng li yen* 代聖立言), this development surely favored giving more attention to the precise manner of expression used in the classics.

Some Sung dynasty writers, after acknowledging that the classics were written to convey a message and not to show off literary skills, saw them as the source from which all later writing proceeded,⁴¹ while others sought to trace certain literary techniques back to examples in the classics.⁴² Hu Ying-lin 胡應麟 (1551–1602) stated the matter in more emphatic terms:

People say that there were no men of letters in antiquity, and there is no literary technique [*wen-fa* 文法] in the Six Classics. I say that there are no men of letters who surpass those of antiquity, and there is no literary technique that surpasses that of the Six Classics.

世謂三代無文人，六經無文法。吾以為文人無出三代，文法無大六經。⁴³

The earliest example of a *p'ing-tien* edition of one of the Confucian classics is *Su p'i Meng Tzu* 蘇批孟子 (The Su Hsün Commentary on Mencius). Although the attribution of the work to Su Hsün 蘇洵 (1009–1060) seems improbable in view of the fact that one edition is supposed to have quoted from Hung Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) and the style of

⁴¹ See Li T'u 李塗 (fl. 12th century), *Wen-chang ching-i* 文章精義 (The Essential Meaning of Literature), opening sentence quoted in Cheng Tien 鄭奠 and T'an Ch'üan-chi 譚全基, eds., *Ku Han-yü hsiu-tz'u hsueh tzu-liao hui-pien* 古漢語修辭學資料匯編 (Collected Material on Ancient Chinese Rhetoric; Peking: Commercial Press, 1980), p. 226.

⁴² See Ch'en K'uei 陳騭 (d. A.D. 1203), *Wen tse* 文則 (Literary Models), printed together with *Wen-chang ching-i* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1977), especially “ting” sec., pp. 17–21 and Ch'en Shan 陳善 (fl. 12th century), *Men-shih hsin-hua* 捫蝨新話 (New Talks While Picking Lice), quoted in *Ku Han-yü hsiu-tz'u hsueh tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 206.

⁴³ Hu Ying-lin, *Shih-sou* 詩藪 (Thicket of Remarks on Poetry; Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1958), p. 2.

punctuation in the volume was not in use while Su Hsün was alive,⁴⁴ it still predates other examples. The latter half of the Ming saw the production of a wide variety of *p'ing-tien* editions of the classics. Favorite choices for this treatment included the "T'an-kung" 檀弓 and "K'ao-kung" 考工 chapters of the *Li-chi* 禮記 (Book of Rites), the *Shu-ching* 書經 (Classic of History), the *Shih-ching*, the *Ch'un-ch'iu*, and the *Tso-chuan* 左傳 (The Tso Commentary); some of these were printed in opulent two-color editions. The names of the commentators as given on the title pages include Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559), Mao K'un 茅坤 (1512–1601), Sun K'uang 孫鑣 (1542–1613), Ling Chih-lung 凌稚隆 (fl. 16th century),⁴⁵ Chung Hsing, and Ch'en Chi-ju 陳繼儒 (1558–1639).⁴⁶ Sun K'uang was the maternal grandfather of Lü T'ien-ch'eng 呂天成 (1580–1618), author of *Ch'ü-p'in* 曲品 (Ranking of the Dramas), and the ten prerequisites to writing good Southern-style dramas listed in the second half of that work are quoted from Sun K'uang.⁴⁷ Finally, the convergence of literary criticism on the Confucian classics with fiction criticism comes about in the early seventeenth century with the appearance of *Ssu-shu p'ing* 四書評 (Comments on the Four Books), attributed to Li Chih 李贄 (1527–1602), but most likely by Yeh Chou 葉晝 (fl. 1595–1624?).⁴⁸ Both of these men were involved in the first stages of the production of *p'ing-tien* editions of novels and plays. The influence of this

⁴⁴ These arguments, and others against the attribution, are made in Chi Yün 紀昀 (1724–1805), *Ssu-k'u ch'uan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Annotated Catalogue of the Imperial Library; Shanghai: Ta-tung shu-ch'ü, 1926), p. 8/22.

⁴⁵ Also involved in the publication of *p'ing-lin* 評林 (collected commentary) editions of the *Shih-chi* 史記 (Records of the Historian) and the *Han-shu* 漢書 (History of the Han Dynasty) that include comments on literary style.

⁴⁶ On Mao K'un and Sun K'uang's activities in this regard, see Kuo Shao-yü 郭紹虞, *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh p'i-p'ing shih* 中國文學批評史 (A History of Chinese Literary Criticism; Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1979), pp. 446–52.

⁴⁷ See *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsi-ch'ü lun-chu chi-ch'eng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 (Compendium of Traditional Writings on Chinese Drama; Peking: Chung-hua hsi-ch'ü, 1959), vol. 6, *Ch'ü-p'in*, p. 223. Ho Man-tzu 何滿子, "Chin Sheng-t'an" 金聖歎, in *Chung-kuo li-tai chu-ming wen-hsüeh chia p'ing-chuan* 中國歷代著名文學家評傳 (Critical Biographies of Famous Chinese Literary Figures through the Ages; Tsinan: Shan-tung chiao-yü, 1985), vol. 5, p. 29, asserts that all Chin Sheng-t'an actually did was "take the method of commentary of Sun K'uang in his *Sun Yueh-feng p'ing-ching* 孫月峯評經 [Sun K'uang's Commentary on the Classics] and Mao K'un in his *T'ang-Sung pa ta-chia wen-ch'ao* 唐宋八大家文鈔 [Selections from the Eight Masters of the T'ang and Sung] and extend them to the realm of fiction and drama." Ho Man-tzu seems to be subsuming these two works under the heading of eight-legged essay criticism (a not entirely unreasonable assumption, see the discussion of prose and examination criticism below), as elsewhere in the same biography (p. 25) he says that the heart of Chin Sheng-t'an's criticism is nothing but examination essay techniques (*pa-ku chang-fa* 八股章法).

⁴⁸ On this question, see app. 2.

way of approaching the classics can also be seen in the third preface of Chin Sheng-t'an's commentary on the *Shui-hu chuan* 水滸傳 (The Water Margin), where he speaks of the fine construction (*chia kou* 佳構) of the wording in the *Lun-yü* 論語 (The Confucian Analects).⁴⁹

Fiction P'ing-tien and Examination Essay Criticism Ever since Hu Shih 胡適 (1891–1962) and others inaugurated the serious study of traditional vernacular fiction early in this century, fiction *p'ing-tien* has been closely linked with that popularly detested literary form, the so-called “eight-legged essay” (*pa-ku wen* 八股文), and more specifically with eight-legged essay criticism and how-to manuals.⁵⁰ This development occurred not long after the abolition of the old-style civil service examinations in which one's answers had to be written according to very stringent formal rules and the content was restricted (in the lower-level examinations) to rehashing Sung dynasty interpretations of the Four Books. Originally presented more as a reason to ignore fiction *p'ing-tien* than to further our understanding of it, such claims were never backed up with either facts or interpretation. This attitude has persisted in the older generation of scholars⁵¹ and can be found in somewhat milder form in the middle generations as well.⁵² Some Chinese critics with positive evaluations of fiction *p'ing-tien*, such as Yeh Lang 葉朗 of Peking University, have tried to deny any connection between it and the examination essays,⁵³ but even he has had to admit the common pool of terminology between the two.⁵⁴ Partisans of traditional fiction criticism in the West who do not have an instinctive negative reaction toward the examination essays as a literary form have been more open to examining the mutual influence of these two bodies of criticism.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ SHCHPP, p. 10.

⁵⁰ For instance, see Hu Shih on Chin Sheng-t'an, “*Shui-hu chuan k'ao-cheng*” 水滸傳考證 (A Critical Study of the *Shui-hu chuan*), in *Chung-kuo chang-hui hsiao-shuo k'ao-cheng* 中國章回小說考證 (Critical Studies on Chinese Novels; Shanghai: Shang-hai shu-tien, 1979), p. 2.

⁵¹ Ho Man-tzu, “Chin Sheng-t'an,” p. 25.

⁵² See LCH, vol. 1, p. 455, and Tseng Tsu-yin 曾祖蔭 et al., eds., *Chung-kuo li-tai hsiao-shuo hsu-pa hsuian-chu* 中國歷代小說序跋選注 (Annotated Selections of Prefaces to Chinese Fiction through the Ages; Hsien-ning: Ch'ang-chiang wen-i, 1982), p. 52.

⁵³ *Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo mei-hsueh* 中國小說美學 (The Aesthetics of Chinese Fiction; Peking: Pei-ching ta-hsüeh, 1982), pp. 16–17.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 18. See also p. 45 on Chin Sheng-t'an.

⁵⁵ Andrew H. Plaks, in the prepublication version of “After the Fall: *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* and the Seventeenth-Century Chinese Novel,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 45.2: 543–80 (1985), p. 43, n.32, remarked, “I believe this critical interest in matters of structural arrangement is also related to the predominance of *pa-ku* theory and practice beginning from the end of the 15th century.” Professor Plaks is also the author of

In Ming and Ch'ing dynasty China, learning to write examination essays was one of the main parts of every literate person's education, and success in the examinations was the only respected path to high office. Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find that masters of the examination essay were at the heart of literati culture and, conversely, the literati took the writing of examination essays very seriously. One of the earliest mentions of the *Shui-hu chuan* is in a work by Li K'ai-hsien 李開先 (1502-1568) entitled *Tz'u-nüeh* 詞譚 concerned mostly with drama.⁵⁶ In Li K'ai-hsien's list of names of those who rate that novel on a par with the *Shih-chi* 史記 (Records of the Historian) in narrative accomplishment are T'ang Shun-chih 唐順之 (1507-1560) and Wang Shen-chung 王慎中 (1509-1559). Both men were instrumental in the introduction of *ku-wen* 古文 (classical prose) style into examination essay writing and were as famous for their examination essays as for their other prose works which, for T'ang Shun-chih's part, included a *p'ing-tien* edition of selections from T'ang and Sung prose stylists. On the other hand, some of the early fiction commentators tried to distance themselves and their beloved fiction from the "eight-legged essays" and those who wrote them, but if we examine their remarks we find that their real targets are holders of the lowest degree in the examination system. In the commentary on the *Hsi-yu chi* attributed to Li Chih the commentator says: "This writing is the utmost in marvelousness and imagination. How can holders of the *hsiu-ts'ai* degree working on their examination essays come up with anything like this?"⁵⁷ Elsewhere, the same commentator jokes about old men who shave their beards to cover up their ages, so that they can sit for the preliminary examinations and try to gain *t'ung-sheng* 童生 (literally, child candidate) status.⁵⁸

During the years 1616 to 1621 Chung Hsing published several collections of examination essays⁵⁹ and his name appears on the title page of several commentary editions of individual novels, but there is no reason to believe in the authenticity of these attributions. The situation is different with Chin Sheng-t'an. A biography of him by a contemporary

the essay on the eight-legged essay in William Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 641-43.

⁵⁶ *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsi-ch'ü lun-chu chi-ch'eng*, vol. 3, *Tz'u nüeh*, p. 286.

⁵⁷ Microfilm of *Li Cho-wu hsien-sheng p'i-p'ing Hsi-yu chi* 李卓吾先生批評西遊記 (Commentary Edition of the *Hsi-yu chi* by Li Chih), original held in Japan, p. 30/16b, chapter comment.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40/16a, chapter comment.

⁵⁹ See his biography in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 1, p. 409.

states that a collection of examination essays with his commentary was in circulation,⁶⁰ but does not mention the name of the collection. The preface to a collection of classical prose with commentary by Chin Sheng-t'an, *T'ien-hsia ts'ai-tzu pi-tu shu* 天下才子必讀書 (Required Reading for the Geniuses of the World), mentions the title of the collection of examination essays as *Chih-i ts'ai-tzu shu* 制義才子書 (Geniuses of the Examination Essays),⁶¹ but there is also extant a list of Chin Sheng-t'an's works that gives an alternate title with the same meaning, *Ch'eng-mo ts'ai-tzu* 程墨才子.⁶² Although the existence of this collection of examination essays with commentary by Chin Sheng-t'an seems beyond doubt, there is no record that it is now extant.

The third preface (dated 1641) of Chin Sheng-t'an's commentary on the *Shui-hu chuan* is written as if it were a private letter to his son. He talks about his days in school reading the Four Books when he was the same age as his son (ten years old) and remembers saying to his fellow students, "I don't see why we are studying this stuff."⁶³ There are various rumors about how Chin Sheng-t'an was disrespectful to the examining officials in the wording of his examination essays and was several times expelled from the roster of registered students. In one version, he exults over the freedom he has gained by being expelled.⁶⁴ Some of his displeasure with the last act of the *Hsi-hsiang chi* 西廂記 (Romance of the Western Chamber) seems to be related to disapproval of the way the hero, Chang Chün-jui 張君瑞, wins success in the examination system and how this affects the other characters. Also, the Shunchih emperor's (r. 1644–1661) remark about Chin Sheng-t'an, which was transmitted to Chin and clearly made him quite proud, praises him as an adept at classical prose (*ku-wen kao-shou* 古文高手) and cautions people not to judge him according to examination essay standards ("mo

⁶⁰ See the biography of Chin Sheng-t'an by Liao Yen 廖燕 (1644–1705), in his *Erh-shih-ch'i sung t'ang chi* 二十七松堂集 (Collection from the Hall of Twenty-seven Pines; Tokyo: Hakuetsu dō, 1862), pp. 14/5b–7b.

⁶¹ See the original preface, by Hsü Tseng 徐增, reprinted by Shu-hsiang ch'u-pan she (Taipei, 1978), p. 2b.

⁶² Liu Hsien-t'ing 劉獻廷 (1648–1695), ed., *Ch'en-yin lou shih-hsuan* 枕吟樓詩選 (Selected Poems of Chin Sheng-t'an), manuscript copy dated 1727 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1979), pp. 155–56. The list, which includes published as well as unpublished works, also mentions a *Hsiao-t'i ts'ai-tzu* 小題才子 (Geniuses of the Small Topics), which might also be a collection of examination essays with commentary.

⁶³ *SHCHPP*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ For the details of several of these sometimes apocryphal stories, see Ch'en Wan-i 陳萬益, *Chin Sheng-t'an ti wen-hsueh p'i-p'ing k'ao-shu* 金聖歎的文學批評考述 (Analysis and Description of the Literary Criticism of Chin Sheng-t'an; Taipei: College of Liberal Arts of National Taiwan University, 1976), pp. 5–6.

i shih-wen yen k'an t'a" 莫以時文眼看他).⁶⁵ As for the terminology used by Chin Sheng-t'an in his fiction and drama criticism, many of these terms are also used in examination essay criticism, but they have been adapted to the differing concerns of these two new media. We can also see the effect of Chin Sheng-t'an's fiction and drama criticism on examination essay criticism where some of the terminology popularized by him also shows up in *p'ing-tien* collections of examination essays.

Li Yü never wrote a major commentary on a work of fiction or any major piece of fiction criticism, but his dramatic theory as worked out in several chapters of his *Hsien-ch'ing ou-chi* 閑情偶寄 (Random Repository of Idle Thoughts) with its attention to structure, characterization, and stress on innovation was very influential on fiction criticism. Li Yü was a professional literary man who supported himself through publishing and performing his plays with his troupe of actors. He is supposed to have published volumes of examination essays with commentary, but no copies seem to have survived. Li Yü's fiction abounds with references to and metaphors from the whole process of taking the examinations and writing eight-legged essays,⁶⁶ and he continues this practice in the sections on drama in *Hsien-ch'ing ou-chi*.⁶⁷ Contrary to what one might expect, in his writing on drama Li Yü often points to the spirit of innovation in examination essay writing, rather than to any inherent conservatism. On further reflection, we realize that the intense competition and the high degree of sophistication in essay criticism over the years would certainly be a good incentive to innovation.

Mao Tsung-kang 毛宗崗 (fl. 17th century and author of a commentary on the *San-kuo yen-i*) makes comparatively few overt references to examination essays or to those involved in taking them or writing criticism on them. In the few examples that there are, he tends to restrict himself to mocking examination takers for copying the essays of others or trying to get by without real learning.⁶⁸ Various later commentators on fictional works relate the writing of fiction to the writing of examination essays⁶⁹ or use the terminology of the different sections of the eight-legged essay to identify the structural function of different sections

⁶⁵ The remark is related in the preface to a set of poems that Chin Sheng-t'an wrote to commemorate hearing this news, "Ch'un-kan pa-shou" 春感八首 (Spring Reflections, Eight Poems), *Ch'en-yin lou shih-hsuan*, in *CSTCC*, vol. 4, p. 585.

⁶⁶ The consistent use of this feature in the *Jou p'u-t'uan* 肉蒲團 (The Prayer Mat of Flesh) and in Li Yü's fiction is one reason for crediting the traditional attribution of this novel to Li Yü. The commentary to this novel is also probably by Li Yü.

⁶⁷ See *Li Li-weng ch'ü-hua* 李笠翁曲話 (Li Yü on Drama), Ch'en To 陳多, ed. (Ch'ang-sha: Hu-nan jen-min, 1981), pp. 4, 49, 102, 110, and 114.

⁶⁸ See *SKYT*, pp. 102, 1022 and 113, 1124, interlineal comments.

⁶⁹ See the *San-chiang tiao-sou* 三江釣叟 (pseud.) preface, *T'ieh-hua hsien shih* 鐵花仙史 (History of the Iron-Flower Immortal; Shenyang: Ch'un-feng wen-i, 1985).

in a novel.⁷⁰ Yet what is surely one of the most amusing examples of the joining of fiction and drama criticism with examination essay criticism occurs in the text of a novel, *Ch'i-lu teng* 歧路燈 (The Warning Light at the Crossroads) by Li Lü-yüan 李綠園 (1707–1790). Chapter 11 presents the example of a tutor using the *Hsi-hsiang chi* and the *Chin P'ing Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum in the Golden Vase) to teach his charge how to write winning examination essays.⁷¹ Although not explicitly indicated, it is clear from the context and the tutor's remarks that the editions of these two books that he has in mind are those with commentary by Chin Sheng-t'an and Chang Chu-p'o 張竹坡 (1670–1698), respectively. The whole episode is treated by the author with palpable distaste for the very idea, but many of the commentaries on fiction repeatedly insist that if a young person can learn all the techniques of writing fiction pointed out by them he will have no trouble with other types of writing, including the examination essays. According to Chou Tso-jen 周作人 (1884–1969), his grandfather was a believer in this kind of pedagogy and had his students read novels such as the *Hsi-yu chi*, *Ju-lin wai-shih* 儒林外史 (The Scholars), and the *Ching-hua yüan* 鏡花緣 (The Fate of the Flowers in the Mirror) in preparation to learning how to write examination essays.⁷²

The so-called “eight-legged essay” became the required form for many of the individual sessions of the civil service examinations around the middle of the Ming dynasty. Civil service examinations had become increasingly important in the selection of government officials starting from the T'ang dynasty, but the examination papers prior to the Ming had been written according to different formal rules and had also emphasized the ability to write poetry and rhyme prose (*fu* 賦). As can be seen from the name most often used to refer to this particular type of examination essay, “eight-legged essay,” the formal requirements for the essays were considered, in popular perceptions of the genre, to be the main characterizing feature. It thus comes as somewhat of a disappointment to find that the formal requirements for these essays contained a substantial amount of flexibility. Although the structure of a model essay does tend to break up into eight parts, not all of these parts can be described as “legs” (*ku* 股, literally “thigh”), sections of the main body of the essay in which the argument is advanced through means of parallelism and whose actual number, although usually kept to four,⁷³ could be in-

⁷⁰ See item 1 of Wang Hsi-lien's “Tsung-p'ing” 總評 (General Remarks) for the *Hung-lou meng*, quoted in CYY, p. 21.

⁷¹ *Ch'i-lu teng* (Cheng-chou: Chung-chou shu-hua she, 1980), pp. 11.120–21.

⁷² Chou Tso-jen, “*Ching-hua yüan*,” dated 1923, *Chih-t'ang shu-hua* 知堂書話 (Talks on Books by Chou Tso-jen; Ch'ang-sha: Yüeh-lu shu-she, 1986), p. 102.

⁷³ These four sections of the essay are most often labeled as *ch'i-ku* 起股 (opening leg), *hsu-ku* 虛股 (indirect statement leg), *chung-ku* 中股 (middle leg), and *hou-ku* 後股 (final

creased. There was also considerable historical change in the formal requirements for the essays from their initial institution to their abolition at the end of the Ch'ing dynasty. The particular form of the essays forced the writer to present his argument from several points of view, usually in pairs because of the requirement for parallelism, and thus encouraged attention to the effect of rhetoric and structure in a very concrete way. In any case, strict formal requirements are not insurmountable obstacles to creative expression, *per se*, as was eloquently proven in the history of Chinese "regulated verse."

Besides being an outgrowth of the forms used in previous civil service examinations in the T'ang and the Sung,⁷⁴ the eight-legged essay was traced back to sources in classical prose (*ku-wen* 古文) and drama. The classical prose (literally, "archaic prose") movement associated with Han Yü 韓愈 (768–824) is usually seen primarily as the championing of the prose style of the Ch'in and Han dynasties in opposition to parallel prose (*p'ien-t'i wen* 駢體文), which dominated prose writing in the Six Dynasties and the T'ang, and classical prose style is also usually taken to be a radical freeing up of prose writing from the cumbersome strictures of parallel prose. Nevertheless, the fact remains that classical prose as written by Han Yü and those who came after him preserved a heavy bias toward parallelism in the language of each section and toward balance between the sections of the argument. Different writers, both ancient and modern, have pointed to individual pieces of classical prose writing by figures such as Han Yü, Fan Chung-yen 范仲淹 (989–1052), and Wang An-shih as stylistic sources for the eight-legged essay.⁷⁵

leg) (see Maeno Naoaki 前野直彬, ed., *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh kai-lun* 中國文學概論 [Survey of Chinese Literature], Hung Shun-lung 洪順隆, trans. [Taipei: Ch'eng-wen ch'u-pan she, 1971], pp. 184–85), but the *ku* are also sometimes referred to as *pi* 比 (paired sections) and the two parallel parts of each section are then referred to as *ku* (as opposed to being called *shan* 扇 [literally, "fan"] in the other terminology), thus bringing to eight the total number of *ku* in a standard essay (see Li Yü's description, *Li Li-weng ch'u-hua*, p. 49).

⁷⁴ See the remarks on the origin of the eight-legged essay in the "Hsüan-chü chih" 選舉志 (Monograph on Civil Service Recruitment) of the *Ming-shih* 明史 (History of the Ming Dynasty), Chang T'ing-yü 張廷玉 (1672–1755) et al., comps., quoted in Kuo Shao-yü 郭紹虞, ed., *Chung-kuo li-tai wen-lun huan* 中國歷代文論選 (Selections in Traditional Chinese Literary Theory), 4 vols. (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1980), vol. 3, p. 544, n. 16 and Maeno Naoaki, *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh kai-lun*, p. 183.

⁷⁵ On Han Yü, see Maeno Naoaki, *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh kai-lun*, p. 186. On Wang An-shih, see p. 183 of the same work. As for Fan Chung-yen, in *T'ien-hsia ts'ai-tzu pi-tu shu* Chin Sheng-t'an comments on a piece of prose by that writer, "Yen hsien-sheng tz'u-t'ang chi" 嚴先生祠堂記 (A Record of Mr. Yen's Sacrificial Hall), "This is the source for today's examination essays" ("tz'u chin-jih chih-i chih so ch'u yeh" 此今日制義之所出也), p. 15/24a.

A new feature of the eight-legged essay was the custom that the candidate was supposed to express himself on behalf of the sages using their manner of expression ("tai ku-jen yü-ch'i wei chih" 代古人語氣爲之).⁷⁶ Perhaps this is one of the reasons that a strong connection between Yüan dynasty drama and this form of examination essay is often felt to exist. The notion that the writing of arias was part of the Yüan dynasty examination system, undocumented but championed by such people as the editor of the most influential collection of Yüan plays, Tsang Mao-hsün 臧懋循 (1550–1620),⁷⁷ and portrayed on stage in scene eight of Ming dynasty versions of the *P'i-p'a chi* 琵琶記 (Story of the Lute), might have contributed to this view. The specific form that parallelism takes in the operas and the requirement to speak on behalf of others certainly have their relevance to the eight-legged essay. In any case, there were those who complained of the influence travelling the other way, from the essays to drama. Hsü Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593), in his *Nan-tz'u hsü-lu* 南詞叙錄 (A Record of Southern Drama), describes the fashion of writing dramas preaching Neo-Confucian ideals in very flowery language that began with the writing of *Hsiang-nang chi* 香囊記 (The Story of the Perfumed Bag) by Shao Ts'an 邵燦 (fl. 15th century) as writing plays as if they were essays ("i shih-wen wei Nan-ch'u" 以時文爲南曲).⁷⁸

Although it is now the fashion to view the examination system as a government instrument for controlling intellectuals and some officials admitted as much,⁷⁹ collections of examination essays were also pub-

⁷⁶ *Ming-shih*, "Hsüan-chü chih," quoted in *Chung-kuo li-tai wen-lun hsuan*, vol. 3, p. 544, n. 16.

⁷⁷ See his second preface to his *Yuan-ch'u hsuan* 元曲選 (Anthology of Yüan Drama). This kind of link posited between Yüan drama and the contemporary examination system has similarities to the theory that the prominence of the classical tale in the T'ang dynasty was related to the alleged practice of examination candidates who used the tales to arouse the examiners' interest in them (*wen-chuan* 溫卷).

⁷⁸ *Chung-kuo ku-tien hsi-ch'u lun-chu chi-ch'eng*, vol. 3, p. 243.

⁷⁹ "It's not that we don't know that the eight-legged essays are worthless, they are specifically good for co-opting men of ambition. For keeping control of the talented, no technique is better than this." 非不知八股爲無用, 特牢籠志士, 騙策英才, 其術莫善於此. This statement was made by E Erh-t'ai 鄂爾泰 (1677–1745), and preserved in a work called *Man-Ch'ing pai-shih* 滿清稗史 (Anecdotal History of the Ch'ing Dynasty). See Ch'en Mei-lin 陳美林, "Lun Ju-lin wai-shih ti feng-tz'u i-shu" 論儒林外史的諷刺藝術 (On the Satiric Art of the *Ju-lin wai-shih*), in his *Wu Ching-tzu yen-chiu* 吳敬梓研究 (Studies on Wu Chung-tzu; Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1984), p. 199. In an essay on the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty who was seen as the first ruler to institute the use of eight-legged essays in the examination system (*Ming T'ai-tsu lun* 明太祖論), Liao Yen says that that emperor achieved the same effect desired by the first emperor of the Ch'in dynasty (221–206 B.C.) when he burned the Confucian classics by the mere use of the examination system. This essay is included in his *Erh-shih-ch'i sung t'ang chi*, pp. 1/12a–14a.

lished by organizations usually seen as politically progressive, such as the Fu-she 復社 (Restoration Society), active at the end of the Ming dynasty.⁸⁰ The latter part of the Ming saw the development of a major industry devoted to the printing and circulation of examination essays with or without commentary centered in Suchou and Hangchou.⁸¹ The way that these essays forced their writers to put themselves into the shoes of not only the sages but also the manner of men with whom the sages came into conflict, such as King Hui of Liang 梁惠王 (r. 370–335 B.C.), must have encouraged the practice of imaginative identification with characters (historical or not) different from oneself (*she-shen ch'u-ti* 設身處地), a facility so very important to creative work in fiction or drama.⁸²

The rudiments of examination essay criticism come out of two main sources—the practice of examination candidates marking up examples of essays with punctuation marks and comments as part of their education in how to write essays⁸³ and the fact that part of the grading system of the examination papers involved the adding of emphatic punctuation and comments by the examining officials.⁸⁴ Apparently, friends also liked to add their comments to the copies of the examination papers taken home by the candidates,⁸⁵ to say nothing of how teachers marked the essays of their pupils. In the *Ju-lin wai-shih*, an essay by K'uang

⁸⁰ Maeno Naoaki, *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh kai-lun*, p. 189.

⁸¹ See the section on the printing of examination essays ("K'o shih-wen" 刻時文) in Chao I's 趙翼 (1727–1814) *Kai-yü ts'ung-k'ao* 陔餘叢考 (Collected Studies from Retirement), preface 1790, quoted in Ho Tse-han 何澤翰, *Ju-lin wai-shih jen-wu pen-shih k'ao-lueh* 儒林外史人物本事考略 (Brief Study of the Models for the Characters of the *Ju-lin wai-shih*; Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1985), p. 132.

⁸² See T'an Chia-chien 譚家健, "Shen-mo chiao 'pa-ku wen'?" 甚麼叫八股文 (What is the "Eight-Legged Essay"?), *Wen-shih chih-shih* 文史知識 (Literary and Historical Knowledge), 1984.3: 112–15; Chou Chen-fu 周振甫, *Wen-chang li-hua* 文章例話 (Prose Criticism with Examples; Peking: Chung-kuo ch'ing-nien, 1983), p. 91; and Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 33–34.

⁸³ For a fictional portrayal, see the description of Miss Lu in the *JLWS* marking her texts with different colored ink and writing comments in tiny characters, p. 11/2a.

⁸⁴ See Hsü K'o-wen 徐克文, "Shih-t'an Chung-kuo ch'uan-t'ung ti wen-hsüeh p'i-p'ing hsing-shih: p'ing-tien" 試談中國傳統的文學批評形式:評點 (On a Traditional Chinese Mode of Literary Criticism: *P'ing-tien*), reprinted in *Ku-chin*, 1983.6: 211–14, p. 213. In *Ch'i-lu teng*, the reason for the rejection of Lou Chao's examination paper (two lines critical of the emperor) becomes clear from the fact that the reading punctuation of the examining official stops abruptly at that point (see p. 10.112).

⁸⁵ In Wen K'ang's 文康 (fl. 19th century) *Erh-nü ying-hsiung chuan* 兒女英雄傳 (Tales of Male and Female Heroes), An Hsüeh-hai 安學海 justifies not bringing home a copy of his essays because "even if people want to read them, they will only add on some consecutive circles [*mi-ch'uan* 密圈] to a couple of sentences and add a few lines of ready-made comments [*t'ung-t'ao p'i-yü* 通套批語]." (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1983), p. 1.15.

Ch'ao-jen is looked at by his mentor, Ma Ch'un-shang:

He took the essay and put it on the desk. Taking up his brush and marking dots with it, he went through the essay from beginning to end, telling him all about techniques like the alternation of abstract and concrete [*hsü-shih* 虛實], indirect and direct [*fan-cheng* 反正], rhetorical hesitation [*t'un-t'u* 吞吐], and meaning through implication [*han-hsü* 含蓄].

將文章按在桌上，拏筆點着，從頭至尾，講了許多虛實反正吞吐含蓄之法與他。⁸⁶

Ma Ch'un-shang, of course, makes his living by publishing his selections with commentary of examination essays. In the *Ju-lin wai-shih* we also get to hear his principles for writing these commentaries,⁸⁷ learn something of the financial arrangements between commentator and publisher,⁸⁸ and even get a glimpse of the actual stages of publication.⁸⁹ Aside from the scattered remarks in commentary editions of essays and in their prefaces, there are a few works that take examination essay criticism as their topic. One of these, *Chih-i ts'ung-hua* 制義叢話 (Collected Comments on Examination Essays) by Liang Chang-chü 梁章鉅 (1775–1849), uses the same rambling format as *shih-hua* poetry criticism, while the “Ching-i kai” 經義概 (Outline of the Examination Essay) section of the *I-kai* 藝概 (Outline of the Arts) by Liu Hsi-tsai 劉熙載 (1813–1881) is more focused and organized.

Almost from the beginning, *p'ing-tien* criticism of classical prose was tailored to the needs of examination candidates. This is not only the opinion of later scholars,⁹⁰ but can be seen from the prefaces of the works themselves. For instance, in Wang Shou-jen's 王守仁 (1472–1529) preface to Hsieh Fang-te's 謝枋得 (1226–1289) *Wen-chang kwei-fan* 文章軌範 (The Model for Prose), he says:

Hsieh Fang-te of the Sung took examples of classical prose that were of use to one when taking the examinations. . . and by use of headings [*piao* 標] explicated each piece. . . . The mysteries of classical prose are not exhausted by this. This is designed solely for examination candidates.

宋謝枋得氏，取古文有資於場屋者... 標揭其篇... 蓋古文之奧，不止於是。是獨為舉業者設耳。⁹¹

⁸⁶ *JLWS*, p. 15/12a–b.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13/7a.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18/1a–b.

⁸⁹ See the story of Chu-ko T'ien-shen's hiring of Nanking literati to help him produce a collection of essays, chaps. 28–29, esp. pp. 29/6a–b and 29/8b–9b. This material is presented satirically, but the general details should be realistic enough.

⁹⁰ See, for instance, Lo Ken-tse, *Chung-kuo wen-hsueh p'i-p'ing shih*, vol. 3, pp. 262–63.

⁹¹ Kuang-wen shu-chü (Taipei, 1970) reprint of the *Wen-chang kwei-fan*. See also Lin Yün-ming 林雲銘 (fl. 17th century), “Fan-li” 凡例 (General Principles) to his *Ku-wen*

This was true as well for later examples of this genre, such as the *Ku-wen pi-fa pai-p'ien* 古文筆法百篇 (Examples of Classical Prose Technique in One Hundred Selections).⁹² One of the prefaces to this work claims that all of the great critics on classical prose of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties such as Kuei Yu-kuang (1506–1571), T'ang Shun-chih, and Fang Pao 方苞 (1668–1749) treated classical prose as if it were examination essay prose (“i ku-wen wei shih-wen” 以古文為時文).⁹³ T'ang Shun-chih and Kuei Yu-kuang are generally credited with introducing classical prose stylistics into examination essay writing⁹⁴ and, in the T'ung-ch'eng school (*T'ung-ch'eng p'ai* 桐城派) founded by Fang Pao, there is also a close connection between classical prose and examination essay aesthetics.⁹⁵ Of course, there was also no lack of people who thought that the aspects of classical prose pointed out in these *p'ing-tien* collections for the use of students learning to write examination essays represented only a fraction of the marvels of that genre. We have already mentioned Wang Shou- jen's views on this subject, and he is seconded by Fang Pao and others.⁹⁶ Chin Sheng-t'an compiled a collection of short passages of classical prose with his comments, *T'ien-hsia ts'ai-tzu pi-tu shu*,⁹⁷ patterned on an earlier

hsi-i 古文析義 (Analysis of Classical Prose), where he maintains that other collections of classical prose do not contain selections from works such as the “T'an-kung” chapter of the *Li-chi* or the Kung-yang or Ku-liang commentaries to the *Ch'un-ch'iu* because “the editors think they are not very useful for [writing] examination essays” (“hsüan-chia wei i pu shen ch'ieh yü chih-i” 選家惟以不甚切於制義), pp. 3a–b of the Chin-chang t'u-shu edition (Shanghai, 1922).

⁹² Compiled by Li Fu-chiu 李扶九 and Huang Jen-fu 黃仁黼. See the 1881 preface by the latter in the *Yüeh-lu shu-she* reprint (Ch'ang-sha, 1983).

⁹³ Ibid., Li Yüan-tu 李元度 preface, 1881. This collection also has an essay, “Lun hua ku-wen wei shih-wen ssu-tse” 論化古文為時文四則 (Four Points on Transforming Classical Prose into Examination Essays), left out of the reprint mentioned in the note above. In the editorial principles (“Fan-li” 凡例) to *Ch'in-ting ssu-shu wen* 欽定四書文 (Imperial Collection of Essays on the Four Books) in *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu chen-pen* 四庫全書珍本 (Rare Books from the Quadripartite Imperial Library), series 9, vols. 325–40 (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1979), vol. 325, item 1, p. 1a, Fang Pao himself said, “Writers of the Cheng-te [1506–1521] and Chia-ching [1522–1566] reign periods were the first to be able to use classical prose to write examination essays” 正嘉作者, 始能以古文為時文.

⁹⁴ Maeno Naoaki, *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh kai-lun*, p. 187.

⁹⁵ David E. Pollard, *A Chinese Look at Literature: The Literary Values of Chou Tso-jen in Relation to the Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 155.

⁹⁶ See Fang Pao's “*Ku-wen yüeh-hsuan hsü*” 古文約選序 (Preface to the Concise Selection of Classical Prose), quoted in Kuo Shao-yü, ed., *Chung-kuo li-tai wen-lun hsüan*, vol. 3, p. 395. For Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng on this subject, see below, “Contemporary Evaluation of *P'ing-tien* Criticism.”

⁹⁷ Reprinted under this title by Shu-hsiang ch'u-pan she (Taipei, 1978), and in typeset edition under the title *Chin Sheng-t'an p'i ts'ai-tzu ku-wen* 金聖歎批才子古文 (Classical Prose by Geniuses with Commentary by Chin Sheng-t'an), Chang Kuo-kuang 張國光, ed. (Wuhan: Hu-pei jen-min, 1986).

collection of the same type by Chang Nai 張鼐 (courtesy name, T'ung-ch'ü 侗初), and Chin's work was in its turn the model for the most popular of all the collections in this genre, the *Ku-wen kuan-chih* 古文觀止 (Pinnacles in Classical Prose).⁹⁸

Fiction was not an overly respectable genre in traditional China. Some of its most fervent advocates, such as Chang Chu-p'o, still used the word fiction as though it had negative connotations for them as well as for their audience.⁹⁹ Other fiction critics claimed that the examinations and poetry of the people who accused them of being overly interested in "base" literature were not even one ten-thousandth part as good as their novels,¹⁰⁰ but it was also common to use the readers' familiarity with the genre of the examination essay as an aid in describing certain features in drama and fiction. This is particularly the case in drama criticism,¹⁰¹ but examples in fiction criticism also abound.¹⁰² Some fiction critics claimed that the relationship was even closer than that. Chang Shu-shen 張書紳 (fl. 18th century), in his *Hsin-shuo Hsi-yü chi* 新說西遊記 (A New Explication of the *Hsi-yü chi*), claimed that after a certain amount of effort by the reader, he will realize that that novel is "just like a collection of provincial or metropolitan examination essays" ("ssu i pu hsiang-hui chih-i wen-tzu" 似一部鄉會制義文字).¹⁰³ The author of *Hai-shang hua lieh-chuan* 海上花列傳 (Biographies of the Flowers Adrift on the Sea), Han Pang-ch'ing 韓邦慶 (1856–1894), stated flatly, "The method of writing fiction is the same as that for examination essays" ("hsiao-

⁹⁸ The title of Chang T'ung-ch'ü's collection is alternatively *Chang T'ung-ch'ü hsien-sheng hui-chi pi-tu Ku-wen cheng-tsung* 張侗初先生彙輯必讀古文正宗 (The True Transmission of Classical Prose, Required Reading, Edited by Chang T'ung-ch'ü) or *Tseng-ting* 增訂 (Expanded and Revised) *Ku-wen cheng-tsung*. The relationship between this collection and Chin Sheng-t'an's is discussed by him in item 14 of his "Tu Ti-lu ts'ai-tzu shu Hsi-hsiang chi fa" 讀第六才子書西廂記法 (How to Read The Sixth Work of Genius, The Romance of the Western Chamber), in *CSTCC*, vol. 3, p. 12. On the relationship between *Ts'ai-tzu ku-wen* and *Ku-wen kuan-chih*, see the introductory essay by Chang Kuo-kuang in *Chin Sheng-t'an p'i Ts'ai-tzu ku-wen*, pp. 1–11.

⁹⁹ See, for instance, item 37 of his *tu-fa* essay on the *Chin P'ing Mei*, chap. iv below.

¹⁰⁰ See item 18 of the "*Hsueh Yueh Mei tu-fa*" 雪月梅讀法 (How to Read the *Hsueh Yueh Mei*), by Tung Meng-fen 董孟汾 (fl. 18th century), *Hsueh Yueh Mei* (Tsinan: Ch'ü Lu shu-she, 1986), p. 5.

¹⁰¹ See *Li Li-weng ch'ü-hua*, "Pieh chieh wu-t'ou" 別解務頭 (An Alternative Explanation of "Wu-t'ou"), p. 77 and "Chia-men" 家門 (The Prologue), p. 99; and Wang Chi-te 王驥德 (d. 1623), *Wang Chi-te Ch'ü-lu* 王驥德曲律 (Wang Chi-te's Rules of Dramatic Prosody), Ch'en To and Yeh Ch'ang-hai 葉長海, eds. (Ch'ang-sha: Hu-nan jen-min, 1983), "T'ao-shu" 套數 (Song Sequences), p. 138.

¹⁰² See, for instance, a comment by Chang Hsin-chih, *CYY*, p. 84.1099 (interlineal comment), and the chapter comments to chap. 1 of *T'ieh-hua hsien shih*, p. 1.10.

¹⁰³ See item 72 in his "Tsung-p'i" 總批 (General Comments), quoted in *HYCTLHP*, p. 235.

shuo tso-fa yü chih-i t'ung" 小說作法與制義同),¹⁰⁴ while Wang Meng-juan 王夢阮 claimed that the author of the *Hung-lou meng*, judging from his fictional writing, must have been good at writing examination essays.¹⁰⁵ There are also anecdotes that tie fiction and drama together with the examination essays, such as the one about Chou Tso-jen's grandfather using novels as textbooks mentioned above and the story that a person named Huang Chün-fu 黃君輔 was successful in the examinations after intensive study of the famous play, *Mu-tan t'ing* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion).¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, for the writer of the commentary in the Jung-yü t'ang edition of the *Shui-hu chuan* attributed to Li Chih, passages in the text that incurred his wrath might be compared to examination essays: "Saying it over and over again, what's the difference between this and an examination essay?"¹⁰⁷

Historiographical criticism, as exemplified in works such as Liu Chih-chi's (661-721) *Shih-t'ung* 史通 (Generalities of Historiography), was originally written for people engaged in writing history or interested in the problems of historiography. Although some of the critics' attention was directed to the topic of literary style, the proportion was not very great. During the Ming dynasty, editions of historical works with *p'ing-tien* style criticism began to appear in increasing numbers. Most prominent among these were editions of the *Shih-chi* with collected commentary, but other histories such as the *Han-shu* were also treated in this way. The most important of the early *p'ing-tien* editions is the *Shih-chi p'ing-lin* 史記評林 (Forest of Comments on the *Shih-chi*), published by Ling Chih-lung with a 1576 preface by him. The total number of commentators represented is said to be 146,¹⁰⁸ and that number includes critics such as Liu Ch'en-weng, Yang Shen, and Mao K'un, whom we have had occasion to mention above. Later expanded

¹⁰⁴ Han Pang-ch'ing, *Hai-shang hua lieh-chuan* (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1985), "Li-yen" 例言 (General Principles), item 9, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ "*Hung-lou meng so-yin t'i-yao*" 紅樓夢索隱提要 (Abstract of the *Hong-lou meng so-yin*), quoted in *HLMC*, p. 295.

¹⁰⁶ Ch'ien Chung-lien 錢仲聯, "T'ung-ch'eng p'ai ku-wen yü shih-wen ti kuan-hsi wen-t'i" 桐城派古文與時文的關係問題 (The Problem of the Relationship of the Classical Prose of the T'ung-ch'eng School to Examination Essays), *T'ung-ch'eng p'ai yen-chiu lun-wen chi* 桐城派研究論文集 (Collected Research Papers on the T'ung-ch'eng School; Hefei: An-hui jen-min, 1963), p. 152. For examples of other men who got inspiration or technical help for their examination essays from reading the *Mu-tan t'ing* and the *Hsi-hsiang chi*, see Ch'ien Chung-shu 錢鍾書, *T'an-i lu* 談藝錄 (A Record of Investigations into the Arts; Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, revised edition, 1984), "Fu-shuo ssu" 附說四 (app. 4), p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ *SHCHPP*, p. 67.1475, marginal comment.

¹⁰⁸ Hsü K'o-wen, "Shih-t'an Chung-kuo ch'uan-t'ung ti wen-hsüeh p'i-p'ing hsing-shih: p'ing-tien," p. 213.

editions add the comments of people such as Chung Hsing and Li Chih. Ch'ing dynasty scholars such as Fang Tung-shu 方東樹 (1772–1851) thought that these collections were very similar to the annotated collections of examination essays,¹⁰⁹ but the relationship is spelled out explicitly in a commercial abbreviation of the *Shih-chi p'ing-lin* that appeared in 1591. At the head of the first chapter of this work, whose full title is *Hsin-ch'ieh T'ao hsien-sheng ching-hsüan Shih-chi sai-pao p'ing-lin* 新銓陶先生精選史記賽寶評林 (Newly Cut, Precious Forest of Comments on the *Shih-chi*, Finely Edited by T'ao Wang-ling 陶望齡, 1562–1609), the editor and the commentator have put before their names the information that one was ranked first in the metropolitan examination and the other was number one in the provincial examination. In item five of the “Fan-li” 凡例 (General Principles) for the edition, they explain that the selections that they included were chosen with the requirements of the writing of examination essays in mind (“so ts'ui wei chü-yeh erh she” 所萃為舉業而設).¹¹⁰

In the sections above, we have shown that the examination essays and the body of criticism devoted to them were influential not only on traditional fiction and drama criticism, but also on the criticism of classical prose and history alike. As for the concrete manifestations of this influence in fiction criticism, that will have to be left for another time.

Dramatic Criticism The very earliest examples of drama criticism in traditional China consist, for the most part, of little more than notes about performances, actors, or technical problems in prosody. Although drama flourished in the Yüan dynasty (1279–1368), we do not even have contemporary editions of complete scripts for any of those plays. In the Ming dynasty that situation changed. The earliest extant printed edition of the *Hsi-hsiang chi*, printed in 1498, has a wealth of prefatory material and lexical and phonetic glosses, but none of that material has very much to do with literary criticism. The rest of the Ming dynasty saw the publication of growing numbers of plays with *p'ing-tien* style commentary. The actual bulk of the comments in each of these editions remained rather small, even the comments after each act rarely exceeding a sentence or two, until the publication of Chin Sheng-t'an's commentary on the *Hsi-hsiang chi* in 1658. The real contribution of dramatic criticism to fiction criticism probably did not come from these commentary editions but from the tradition of publishing treatises on drama, a phenomenon unparalleled in fiction criticism.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by Ch'ien Chung-hien, “T'ung-ch'eng p'ai ku-wen yü shih-wen ti kuan-hsi wen-t'i,” p. 152

¹¹⁰ Copy held in Peking Library.

Drama criticism included a type of criticism similar to the *shih-hua* and *tz'u-hua* of poetry, known as *ch'ü-hua* 曲話. For the most part, that genre of criticism shared the rather random form of its models, but there are a couple of works whose breadth and organization almost put them into another class altogether. The two most impressive examples are Wang Chi-te's 王驥德 (d. 1623) *Ch'ü lü* 曲律 (Rules of Dramatic Prosody) and the appropriate sections of Li Yü's *Hsien-ch'ing ou-chi*. In the latter case in particular, the author has set himself the job of writing a manual for the dramatist that includes all stages of the art from script-writing to makeup. Leaving aside the technical sections that treat problems of interest only to dramatists, there are also sections on structure and characterization that are equally applicable to fiction. For instance, Li Yü's term *chu-nao* 主腦 (literally, the main brain) referring to the central incident or character upon which the whole play hinges was taken over by fiction critics as well as drama critics.

Li Yü praised Chin Sheng-t'an's commentary on the *Hsi-hsiang chi* for his thoroughness in ferreting out the secrets of its composition, but condemned the other man's ignorance of the performance side of drama.¹¹¹ Although Li Yü was perfectly correct to attack Chin Sheng-t'an for treating the *Hsi-hsiang chi* solely as a work of literature to be read rather than also as a play to be performed, the fact remains that there was a very strong trend at the time to write plays without thought of producing them and to read plays almost as if they were novels.¹¹² This is quite different from the very earliest edition of Yüan dramas, where the dialogue is missing or very sketchy. This partial convergence of drama and fiction encouraged the cross-fertilization of ideas and techniques between the two genres.

Contemporary Evaluation of P'ing-tien Criticism

Generally speaking, *p'ing-tien* criticism has a very bad name. This is true not only in modern times, but also in the period when it flourished as the most influential form of criticism. The most common complaint by Ming and Ch'ing writers is that only formal techniques that could be

¹¹¹ Li Li-weng *ch'ü-hua*, "T'ien-tz'u yü-lun" 填詞餘論 (Leftover Comments on Dramatic Writing), p. 103.

¹¹² The "Fan-li" (p. 5b) to the Ling Meng-ch'u 凌濛初 (1580-1644) edition of the *Hsi-hsiang chi* says, "This printing is really intended to provide refined entertainment and should be taken as a piece of writing. It should not be taken as a work of drama." In item 3 of the "Fan-li" for *Ch'ing-hui ko p'i-tien Mu-tan t'ing* 清暉閣批點牡丹亭 (*Ch'ing-hui Lodge Commentary on the Peony Pavilion*), the play is called *an-t'ou chih shu* 案頭之書 (a book to be read at home; as opposed to a playscript). See Mao Hsiao-t'ung 毛效同, ed., *T'ang Hsien-tsu yen-chiu tzu-liao hui-pien* 湯顯祖研究資料彙編 (Collected Research Material on T'ang Hsien-tsu; Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1986), p. 858.

applied mechanically were to be learned from reading such works, while the true individuality of the works criticized got lost in the shuffle. In a letter Wu Ying-chi 吳應箕 (1594–1645) said:

Most likely, the fact that the real spirit of the ancients has been lost is the fault of the commentator-editors [*p'ing-hsüan-che* 評選者]. I say that the commentating of examination essays by Chang T'ung-ch'ü, the commentating of poetry by Chung Hsing, and the commentating of classical prose by Mao K'un are superbly able to bury the real spirit of the ancients, and that people on the contrary look up to them and are all in a hurry to emulate them is really a pity. They provide explanations and comments for every sentence and every character; every section and every paragraph have been marked off with emphatic punctuation [*ch'üan-tien* 圈點]. They themselves are convinced that they have captured the very marrow and essence of the ancients and have opened up the way for later people to emulate them. What they don't know is that their real crime against the ancients and their misleading of later people lies precisely there.

大抵古人精神不見於世者，皆評選者之過也。弟嘗謂張侗初之評時義，鍾伯敬之評詩，茅鹿門之評古文，最能埋沒古人精神，而世反效慕恐後，可歎也。彼其一字一句，皆有釋評，逐段逐節，皆為圈點，自謂得古人之精髓，開後人之法程，不知所以冤古人，誤後生者，正在此。¹¹³

Wang Fu-chih 王夫之 (1619–1692) also had harsh words to say about Mao K'un and his selections with commentary of T'ang and Sung classical prose stylists: "Once *Pa-ta chia wen-ch'ao* 八大家文鈔 [Selections from the Eight Masters] appeared, that spelled the end of writing [*wen* 文]. He thought that this was a good way to teach young students, but he did not see that he was leading the students right into a thicket of brambles."¹¹⁴ The most eloquent attack on *p'ing-tien* and *p'ing-hsuan* came from Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng in two of the sections of his *Wen-shih t'ung-i* 文史通義 (General Principles of Historiography).¹¹⁵ In the "Wen-li" 文理 (Principles of Writing) chapter of that work, he tells of seeing a copy of Kuei Yu-kuang's commentary on the *Shih-chi* done with five different colors of ink to show different levels of language and technique in that text. The copy is owned by a friend of his, who explains that his former reverence for the work as the source of the true transmission of the way of writing (he compares this to the transmission of the Way in Buddhism) has since changed, but although he no longer

¹¹³ "Ta Ch'en Ting-sheng shu" 答陳定生書 (Reply to a Letter from Ch'en Ting-sheng), quoted in Kuo Shao-yü, ed., *Chung-kuo li-tai wen-lun hsuan*, vol. 3, p. 83.

¹¹⁴ From his *Hsi-t'ang yung-jih hsü-lun wai-pien* 夕堂永日緒論外編, quoted in Kuo Shao-yü, ed., *Chung-kuo li-tai wen-lun hsuan*, vol. 3, p. 304, n. 22.

¹¹⁵ For a summary of Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng on *p'ing-tien*, see Chou Chen-fu, *Wen-chang li-hua*, pp. 2–3.

treasures it, he feels that there are a few redeeming features about the work and so has preserved it. Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng remarks that Kuei Yu-kuang and T'ang Shun-chih have the same status in the history of the eight-legged essay as Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷 (b. 145 B.C.) in historiography and Han Yü in classical prose, and both took the *Shih-chi* as their guide. Unfortunately, according to him, what they grasped about the *Shih-chi* was only mere externals (*p'i-mao* 皮毛). To him, the compilation of *p'ing-tien* style books was of the least concern to writing (*wen chih mo-wu* 文之末務), not to be shown to others but only to aid one's own memory, to be passed down neither from father to son, nor from teacher to pupil. Why is that? "Because they are afraid to take the inexhaustible books of the ancients and put them on the procrustean bed of the limited perception of one man at any one point in time."¹¹⁶

In the other section of the *Wen-shih t'ung-i* that deals with this problem, "Ku-wen shih pi" 古文十弊 (Ten Faults in Classical Prose), Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng describes the genesis of *p'ing-tien* style criticism and its terminology:

When instructors teach [their pupils] the style and meaning of the Four Books and how to write examination essays, the essays must have technique [*fa-tu* 法度] so as to comply with the formal requirements [*ch'eng-shih* 程式]. But technique is difficult to speak of abstractly, so they often use metaphors to teach their students. Comparing [the essays] to buildings, they speak of the framework [*chien-chia* 間架] and structure [*chieh-kou* 結構]; comparing [the essays] to the human body, they speak of the eyebrows and eyes [*mei mu* 眉目], tendons and joints [*chin-chieh* 筋節]; comparing [the essays] to painting, they talk of "filling in the pupils of the dragon" [*tien-ching* 點睛]¹¹⁷ and "adding the whiskers" [*t'ien-hao* 添毫];¹¹⁸ and comparing [the essays] to geomancy, they speak of "lines of force" [*lai-lung* 來龍] and "convergence points" [*chieh-hsüeh* 結穴]. They make these up as they go, but it's all just for teaching elementary students, there is no help for it, so there is no need to upbraid them for it.

蓋塾師講授四書文義，謂之時文，必有法度以合程式；而法度難以空言，則往往取譬以示蒙學，擬於房室，則有所謂間架結構；擬於身體，則有所謂眉目筋節；擬於繪畫，則有所謂點睛添毫；擬於形家，則有所謂來龍結穴。隨時取譬，然為初學示法，亦自不得不然，無庸責也。¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, *Wen-shih t'ung-i chiao-chu*, pp. 286-88.

¹¹⁷ Anecdote about the Six Dynasties period painter Chang Seng-yu 張僧繇, who painted four dragons without pupils. When he finally did fill in the pupils, the dragons flew away. This anecdote is used to refer to that final touch that brings life to a work of art.

¹¹⁸ See n. 39 above.

¹¹⁹ Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, *Wen-shih t'ung-i chiao-chu*, "Ku-wen shih-pi," item 9, p. 509.

The real problem, according to Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng, is when this method is directed toward classical prose. He is opposed to the influence of *p'ing-hsüan* on two grounds. One is historical—he accuses *p'ing-hsüan* critics of having only a very imperfect understanding of classical prose to begin with.¹²⁰ The other is theoretical—for him, theory or technique comes into being only after the event of creation (*wen ch'eng fa li* 文成法立),¹²¹ and thus always lags behind, making universal prescriptions useless. “Writing is always changing and no set law can encompass it” (“wen-chang pien-hua fei i-ch'eng chih fa so neng hsien yeh” 文章變化非一成之法所能限也).¹²² However, from the material from Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng introduced above, we can see that he was not against the formulation of laws of writing for the use of the student; what he was protesting against was mature writers allowing those very same laws to restrict their creativity. Critics in several fields of artistic endeavor in China called on their students to escape this trap by studying the various laws but applying them flexibly and creatively to match the particular needs of the moment. “One cannot do without laws, but one cannot let oneself be stifled by them” (“pu wei wu-fa, tan pu k'o ni” 不爲無法,但不可泥).¹²³ “It is the case with all laws that the truly marvelous comes from transformation [of them]” (“fan fa miao tsai chuan” 凡法妙在轉).¹²⁴

Speaking in their own defense, some in the industry of producing *p'ing-tien* volumes complained of sloppy reprints that distorted the texts of the comments.¹²⁵ Others confessed that the job of commenting on books was very difficult. Chang Shu-shen said:

It is said that writing books is difficult, but people do not know that writing explications of books is also difficult. Why is this so? If you write too little, the meaning is not clear; if you write too much the meaning is obscured. The more you write the more mistakes, until one ends up going through with a fine-toothed comb looking for errors. They do not know how many

¹²⁰ Ibid., item 10, p. 509.

¹²¹ Ibid., item 9, p. 508.

¹²² Ibid., “Wen-li,” p. 289.

¹²³ Li Tung-yang 李東陽 (1447–1516), *Lu-t'ang shih-hua* 麓堂詩話 (Lu-t'ang Talks on Poetry), quoted in Cheng Tien and T'an Ch'üan-chi, eds., *Ku Han-yü hsün-tz'u hsueh tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 420.

¹²⁴ Lu Shih-yung 陸時雍, *Shih-ching tsung-lun* 詩鏡總論 (General Remarks from the Mirror of Poetry), quoted in Chang Pao-ch'üan 張葆全 and Chou Man-chiang 周滿江, eds., *Li-tai shih-hua hsuan-chu* 歷代詩話選注 (Annotated Selections from Talks on Poetry; Hsi-an: Shan-hsi jen-min, 1984), p. 258.

¹²⁵ See item 30 of the “Fan-li” to Yü Ch'eng 余誠, ed., *Ch'ung-ting ku-wen shih-i hsün-pien* 重訂古文釋義新編 (Revised, Newly Edited Classical Prose Explained; Wuhan: Wuhan ku-chi, 1986 reprint), p. 4b and item 7 of the “Fan-li” of Ch'ing-hui ko p'i-tien Mu-tan t'ing, quoted in Mao Hsiao-t'ung, ed., *T'ang Hsien-tsu yen-chiu tzu-hao hui-pien*, p. 859.

fine books have been buried in this way, how much marvelous writing has been ruined through commentary. It's really too bad.

嘗言著書難，殊不知解書亦不易。何則？蓋少則不明，多則反晦，而言多語失，以致吹毛求疵，不知淹沒多少好書，批壞無限奇文，良可惜也。¹²⁶

A different commentator on the *Hsi-yu chi*, Chang Han-chang 張含章 (fl. 19th century), recognized the possible problems arising from his commentarial procedure:

As for how I have annotated the sentences and marked off the paragraphs in this volume, it is nothing more than unnatural manipulation [literally, making the ducks' feet long and the cranes' feet short], I have been forced into it, but it is a fact to be recognized. As for the breadth and depth of thought of the author and whether I have managed to capture it with my circumscribed vision, the book itself still remains, let the reader ponder it carefully. What need is there for me to say more?

則今之注句分章，其續鳧斷鶴耶，亦出于不得已也，是亦不可不知者也。至于作者之弘深精詳，與管見之是否，全書具在，請細玩之，又何贅焉？¹²⁷

Conclusion

The fact that traditional Chinese fiction criticism was so closely connected to several other types of literary and aesthetic criticism is simultaneously a source of strength and limitation. Much effort was surely saved by the implementation of ready-made terminology, but at the same time much confusion was engendered as a result of this practice due to imprecision in the definition of terms and weakness for facile analogies. In terms of the problem of the relatively low status of fictional composition in the vernacular language, the equation of fiction with other more respected genres, such as classical prose and painting, no doubt had a positive effect on some. However, the equally close association with genres held in low esteem in some literati circles, such as the examination essay and the whole practice of *p'ing-tien* itself, was liable in the end (especially for the modern reader) to produce just the opposite effect.

¹²⁶ See item 75 in his "*Hsin-shuo Hsi-yu chi tsung-p'i*," quoted in *HYCTLHP*, p. 235.

¹²⁷ See the preface to his commentary on the *Hsi-yu chi*, *T'ung-I Hsi-yu cheng-chih* 通易西遊正旨 (The True Intent of the *Hsi-yu chi* Explained by Way of the *I Ching*), quoted in *HYCTLHP*, p. 239.

(b) The Historical Development of Chinese Fiction Criticism Prior to Chin Sheng-t'an

Liu Ch'en-weng

In China the practice of writing *p'ing-tien* commentaries for works of fiction can be traced back to Liu Ch'en-weng's 劉辰翁 (1232–1297) commentary on the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World) by Liu I-ch'ing 劉義慶 (403–444). That work, which is a collection of historical anecdotes, is not strictly speaking a work of fiction, but under traditional Chinese classification systems it was not placed with the standard historical works. Instead it was given pride of place near the beginning of lists of *hsiao-shuo* 小說 (usually translated as "fiction") in the *tzu* 子 or philosophy section. Six Dynasties fiction is usually divided into two main traditions, *chih-kuai* 志怪 (records of anomalies) and *chih-jen* 志人 (records of men). We can take Kan Pao's 干寶 (fl. A.D. 340) *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記 (A Record of Searching Out Spirits) as representative of the *chih-kuai* tradition and *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* as representative of the other. Both volumes put themselves forward as records of true events but were not accepted as history because of their subject matter, which was anecdotal rather than concerning itself with affairs of state. The anecdotes in *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* are arranged under more than thirty topical headings and are generally selected so that they point to a moral connected with their respective headings or reveal an aspect of the personality of the anecdote's main character.

Liu Ch'en-weng was a prolific writer of *p'ing-tien* commentaries for many different literary genres, but of all these it is only his *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* commentary and, to some extent, his work on the *Shih-chi* 史記 (Records of the Historian) that contain remarks dealing more specifically with the writing of fiction. The *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* commentary itself is very sketchy, but parts of it represent a very clear example of an important trend in traditional fiction criticism, the comparative evaluation of characters against each other. This concept is integral to the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* itself as well as to other works of the Six Dynasties period such as Liu Shao's 劉邵 (fl. 3d century) *Jen-wu chih* 人物志, which was designed to help the ruler or the reader recognize human talent. One of the most common terms for this kind of comparative evaluation, *yüeh-tan* 月旦, also comes from this general time period, as does the institution of dividing the civil service into the so-called nine grades (*chiu-p'in* 九品). For instance, Liu Ch'en-weng draws attention to the implicit ranking of Kuan Ning (158–241), Hua Hsin (156–231), and Wang Lang (d. 228)

in items eleven through thirteen in the first section of *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*, "Te-hsing" 德行 (Virtuous Conduct): "Kuan Ning is better than Hua Hsin, but Hua Hsin is better than Wang Lang. One cannot not discriminate between them."¹

Li Chih

The next important figure in the development of traditional fiction criticism and fiction *p'ing-tien* was born almost three hundred years after Liu Ch'en-weng. It is true that, prior to or at approximately the same time as Li Chih 李贄 (1527-1602) was writing his commentary on the *Shui-hu chuan*, publishers such as Yü Hsiang-tou 余象斗 (ca. 1550-1637) were bringing out editions of longer-length fiction with commentary attached. Although these works are interesting for some of the attitudes toward fiction revealed obliquely in them, their comments do not generally extend beyond historical notes and subjective remarks on characters in the novels. In the case of the Yü Hsiang-tou editions of the *Shui-hu chuan* and the *San-kuo yen-i*, although the fact that they contain commentary is loudly proclaimed in the titles and a separate register is reserved in the top fourth of each page for the comments, it is fairly clear that the commentary was added to increase sales rather than project any particular interpretation of the texts. In addition, the commentator, usually identified as Yü Hsiang-tou himself, can never seem to set aside his identity as publisher of the work in his comments. Li Chih was a very different kind of figure and, like Liu Ch'en-weng, he had a great affection for the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*.²

Li Chih was an iconoclastic figure whose dwelling was once burned by a mob and who, in the end, committed suicide in prison, where he was being held on charges based on complaints about his writings and style of life. His official career came to an end long before then. His highest appointment was Prefect of Yao-an in Yunnan Province, and it is reported that he was a good official who ruled through the force of

¹ Liu Ch'en-weng's comments are available in later editions of the work with commentary from several hands entitled *Shih-shuo hsin-yü pu* 世說新語補 (Supplement to a New Account of Tales of the World). His comments on Kuan Ning, etc., are quoted in *LCH*, vol. 1, p. 69.

² Li Chih's *Ch'u-t'an chi* 初潭集 (First Collection from Lung-t'an) contains his comments on the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* and an updating of it by his friend Chiao Hung 焦竑 (1541-1610). Although its authenticity has been questioned, the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü pu* mentioned in n. 1 above also contains commentary by Li Chih and supplementary material by Chiao Hung, a preface by Chiao Hung mentioning Li Chih's commentary, as well as a preface and a "Statement of Editorial Principles" ("Fan-li" 凡例) signed Li Chih. If the latter piece is truly by Li Chih, then he was also responsible for the editing of that volume.

example. Be that as it may, one day he decided that he had had enough and, failing to get official permission, simply abandoned his post of office. The last several decades of his life were spent in writing his own works and writing commentaries on the works of others.

From his letters and the testimony of friends we know that Li Chih wrote a large number of commentaries on a variety of works that include fiction and drama as well as philosophy and belles-lettres. It is clear that he regarded some works of fiction and drama very highly, listing the *Shui-hu chuan* as part of a list of five great works that included the *Shih-chi* and the poetry of Tu Fu 杜甫 (712–770). Short remarks on four plays appear in the earliest published collection of his writing, the *Fen-shu* 焚書 (Book for Burning; first printing 1590). The commentary that receives the greatest amount of attention is one on the *Shui-hu chuan* which, if the testimony of Yüan Chung-tao 袁中道 (1570–1623) on the matter is to be believed, was in a state of completion justifying the making of a fair copy in 1592.³ Even earlier, what is assumed to be the preface for this commentary appeared in the *Fen-shu*. Currently, however, the only major piece of writing on the *Shui-hu chuan* demonstrably attributable to Li Chih is just this preface. Although at least a half-dozen commentaries on that novel attributed to him are extant, there are reasons to be suspicious of them all; nevertheless, our suspicion should not lead us to rule out the idea that some of Li Chih's original commentary on the novel is partially preserved in one of these editions.⁴ In terms of general interpretation, the extant "Li Chih" commentary on the *Shui-hu chuan* most in line with the preface preserved in the *Fen-shu* is that published by Yüan Wu-yai 袁無涯 in 1612 or slightly later. However, that interpretation, which takes Sung Chiang seriously as a nonproblematic example of a loyal servant of the state done wrong by petty men close to the throne, is rather disappointing in its lack of depth. That reading of the novel is also more similar to the preference for content over form expressed in his preface and elsewhere in his literary criticism, most particularly in "Tsa-shuo" 雜說 (Miscellaneous Remarks), which is included in *Fen-shu*. On the other hand, Li Chih is responsible for popularizing some important concepts, such as the difference between *hua-kung* 畫工 (artisanly achievement) and *hua-kung* 化工 (divine achievement) and the idea that literature is written to express resentment. He

³ See his *Yu-chu Fei lu* 游居柿錄 (Travels in the Fei Region), relevant section quoted in *SHCTLHP*, p. 223

⁴ For a discussion of the authenticity of the commentaries on major novels attributed to Li Chih, see app. 2. For a review of recent scholarship on the problem, see the appendix in Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 513–17.

referred to this latter concept by borrowing a famous expression from Ssu-ma Ch'ien, *fa-fen chu-shu* 發憤著書 (express resentment through writing a book), or by the phrase "to t'a-jen chih chiu-peí chiao tzu-chi chih lei-k'uai" 奪他人之酒杯澆自己之壘塊 (borrow the other man's wine glass to assuage your own troubles).

In any case, for later commentators what seems to have been of the utmost importance in regard to Li Chih is the mere idea of such a well-known, albeit controversial, man spending his time writing them. The example was picked up by others, some of whom, such as Chin Sheng-t'an, attacked the "Li Chih" commentaries while at the same time being very indebted to them.

Yeh Chou

Besides the Yüan Wu-yai edition of the *Shui-hu chuan* with commentary mentioned above, the other most influential early commentary on a work of fiction is the Jung-yü t'ang edition of that novel, also with commentary attributed to Li Chih. That commentary was reprinted in 1610, but the date of the first edition is uncertain. Although conclusive evidence is lacking, scholarly opinion is now generally in agreement that this edition's commentary was by Yeh Chou 葉晝 (fl. 1595–1624).⁵ He is also thought to be the author of commentaries on the *San-kuo yen-i* and the *Hsi-yü chi*. His name appears three times in the commentary on the *San-kuo yen-i*. In the words of one of his contemporaries: "He was always down on his luck but remained untrammelled. Although he was poor, he had a long-lasting fondness for wine. Sometimes he would sell the services of his pen to buy it."⁶ He is supposed to have been beaten to death by the husband of a woman with whom he took up.⁷ His contemporaries also claimed that he was the author of several commentaries on drama attributed to Li Chih, a number of which were also published by the Jung-yü t'ang of Hangchou.

Whether or not we need to take seriously the claim that Yeh Chou was the author of all of these commentaries, they do have a sort of family resemblance that seems to justify our taking them as the work of one

⁵For information concerning the evidence on Yeh Chou's connection with this commentary and others, see app. 2.

⁶Ch'ien Hsi-yen 錢希言, *Hsi-hsia* 戲瑕, *chuan* 3, "Yen-chi" 贗籍 (Forged Works), quoted in *SHCTLHP*, p. 151.

⁷See Sheng Yü-ssu 盛于斯, *Hsiu-an ying-yü* 修庵影語, and Chou Liang-kung 周亮工, *Yin-shu wu shu-ying* 因樹屋書影, quoted in Ts'ui Wen-yin 崔文印, "Yüan Wu-yai k'an-pen *Shui-hu* Li Chih p'ing pien-wei" 袁無涯刊本水滸李贄評辨偽 (On the Authenticity of the Li Chih Commentary on the *Shui-hu chuan* Printed by Yüan Wu-yai), *Chung-hua wen-shih lun-ts'ung* 中華文史論叢 (Collected Articles on Chinese Literature and History), 1980.2: 311–17, p. 315.