

Abstract

The dissertation is a study of the early Chinese vernacular novel, P'ing-yao Chuan (The Sorcerer's Revolt and Its Suppression by Three Suis).

It first re-examines the issues of authorship and edition of the novel. The authorship of the 20-chapter San-Sui p'ing-yao Chuan has by general scholarly agreement been assigned to Lo Kuan-chung. And Feng Meng-lung was known as the compiler of the New p'ing-yao Chuan in 40 chapters. It has been believed that the 40-Chapter edition is compiled on the basis of the 20-Chapter edition with additional details. However, some scholars argue that the 20-chapter version should be abridged from the elaborated version and the 40-chapter edition should be also attributed to Lo Kuan-chung.

As a result of our research based on a detailed and meticulous textual comparison, the dissertation has come to the conclusion that the 20-chapter edition is quite antiquated in style. It differs substantially from the popular edition. The 20-chapter edition could not have been an abridgement of the elaborated version, however it might not be a full text.

Concerning the issue of the authorship of the work, we know very little about Lo Kuan-chung's record. He was only known as a great playwright and an author of many popular fictions. Therefore we are not certain that he compiled San-Sui p'ing-yao Chuan in 20 chapters. However, there is no doubt that the 40-chapter edition was created by Feng Meng-lung.

P'ing-yao Chuan tells of the Revolt of the Soldiers in Beizhou of the Northern Sung dynasty. Some sorcerers had organized the revolt. From then on, the major characters and events of the revolt had been romanticized by the storytellers. A major point of this work is that it shows a great independence of historical sources; however, the compiler adapted his sources from many stories. These stories have actually a very early origin, which can be traced back to the p'ing-hua of Sung-Yuan period or ancient supernatural fictions before Tang dynasty.

Compared with the 20-chapter version, New p'ing-yao Chuan has advanced the work in many respects: The 40-Chapter edition is flourished by creatively transplanting the material from other novels to the plot of the P'ing-yao Chuan. It completes the whole story and perfects the composition of the work. Its language flows smoothly, neither too difficult nor vulgar, yet sarcastic and expressive. Artistically, as a work of comic fantasy, it has the style of supernatural stories as well as characteristics of secular world.

The P'ing-yao Chuan gives rise to novels and dramas with similar topic. Such a type of work, which describes military officers suppressing the heresies, can develop its own branch, which the researchers call "the series of squashing evils". Although the sequels or the rewritten works have their own characteristics, they still cannot surpass the 40-Chapter P'ing-yao Chuan on overall artistic level.