

※ Review Essay ※

Exploring the Matter and Minds of Late Ming Dynasty Readers

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Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China. By Robert E. Hegel.
Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Pp. xxi + 489.

TO hold a copy of an illustrated edition of a late Ming dynasty novel can be a moving experience for the aesthetically-sensitive reader. For one already thoroughly familiar with traditional Chinese culture, the almost weightless fascicle of such a volume might bring to mind marvelous thoughts on Chinese culture and fiction, while for one who knows little about things Chinese, it might raise a multitude of questions about the culture and literature that produced it. *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* by Robert E. Hegel is a first-rate, groundbreaking study that thoroughly answers the questions anyone holding a fascicle of illustrated Chinese fiction might have.

One of C. T. Hsia's distinguished students, Robert Hegel, whose Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation is entitled "*Sui T'ang Yen-i: The Sources and Narrative Techniques of a Traditional Chinese Novel*," has been teaching at Washington University at St. Louis since 1975. His earlier books are *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981) and *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, edited with Richard C. Hessney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). In *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, besides presenting the historical and cultural background for China as it moved from the Ming dynasty, which ended in 1644, to the Qing, Hegel gives his readings of six novels published at that time.¹

¹ The six novels discussed by Hegel are the 1641 edition of *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 prepared by Jin Shengtan 金聖嘆; the anonymous *Sui Yangdi yanshi* 隋煬帝艷史 (1631); *Sui shi yiwen* 隋史遺文 (1633) by Yuan Yuling; *Xiyou bu* 西遊補 (1641) by Dong Yue; *Rou putuan* 肉蒲團, attributed to Li Yu (1611-1680); and *Sui Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義 (1695) by Chu Renhuo.

This impressive study of Chinese fiction in a particular period prepared Hegel well for the book now under review and attests to a life spent in the reading and study of traditional Chinese fiction. Hegel's deep understanding of all aspects of this field is further evidenced in his comprehensive article "Traditional Chinese Fiction—The State of the Field."² The years of preparation that must have been put into the writing of this book is seen in Hegel's reference to the hundreds of original editions of Ming and Qing fiction he examined (p. 114).

In the Preface to *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China*, we clearly hear the voice of Hegel as a long-time reader of Chinese fiction as he describes his process of reading traditional Chinese fiction, first as a senior in college, then as a graduate student, and finally as a professor (p. xix). Next, he asks a long list of questions that ought to be familiar to readers of traditional Chinese fiction. Certainly I have had them, and it is re-assuring to see in print that others have, too. Concluding his Preface, Hegel delineates the far-from-easy challenge he has given himself in writing this book: "[T]o present pertinent observations about the development of [traditional Chinese] fiction, how it was presented, by whom it was read, and to what end—that is, about the reading process when it involves illustrated, printed fiction . . ." (p. xxi).

In the first chapter, "Fiction and Contexts," after identifying the period of Chinese history (1500-1800) with which he is mainly concerned, Hegel further explains his task in this book using an approach followed by Roger Chartier that searches for the meaning in the "forms of fiction" (p. 3). With this and subsequent statements, it is clear that Hegel's stance is that of the literary historian. For example, he writes that he "will present a series of observations on the historical course followed by the novel through the Ming and Qing periods . . ." (p. 3). Hegel also indicates another feature of his study: it brings together findings in three traditionally distinct fields: "literary history and criticism, art history, and critical bibliography" (p. 3).

Hegel, as we will discover, has a number of points he wants to argue in the course of his book, one of which is that there occurred a "revolution in print beginning around the middle of the sixteenth century and reaching its peak in the first half of the seventeenth" (p. 5) that has not been sufficiently recognized. At the same time, he also wants to allow for "a more authentic re-creation of the diverse readings given the texts as they appeared" (p. 7), particularly two basic kinds of readings: one as "contemplating the human

² This article appeared in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53/2 (May 1994): 394-426. Another publication by Hegel that will help the reader of his book to gain a quick understanding of the history of publishing in China is his essay "The Printing and Circulation of Literary Texts" in Volume II of *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, edited by William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 118-27.

condition and the great moments of the past,” and the other simply reading for pleasure (p. 9). Interestingly, Hegel’s use of the expression “the human condition” puts him on the side of those who argue for the universality of meaning, rather than meaning being ultimately culture-created.

Hegel is an inquisitive scholar. Having raised a number of general questions about Chinese fiction in his Preface, he now in this first chapter notes the questions he will address in this book besides those related to the process of reading. (1) Why did some lackluster texts have “fine illustrations”? (2) How could the same novel have “expensive” and “cheap” editions? (3) Why are the illustrations in traditional Chinese fiction so similar? (4) Why do some aspects of these illustrations “seem virtually indistinguishable from those in the paintings of the most famous literati artists”? (5) And, most important of all, were these editions really “held in contempt by everyone who held a position of cultural or political authority”? (pp. 11-12). Much of this book is directed to answering this last question and to showing that during the late Ming dynasty fiction was not held in contempt.

Returning now to our hypothetical reader who is little informed about Chinese culture and who has in hand a fascicle of traditional Chinese fiction, the first question this person might ask is what Chinese fiction is. Hegel magisterially answers this question in Chapter Two, “Fiction as Text” (pp. 18-71), by presenting a history of traditional Chinese fiction that “sketch[es] the outline of its development” as well as presents its “special characteristics” (p. 21). Though there has been a burgeoning of English-language studies on traditional Chinese fiction in the past quarter century,³ there still, as Hegel clearly states in his book, is “no proper history of Chinese fiction” except that of Lu Xun 魯迅, first published nearly eighty years ago (p. 21) and published in English in 1959. Consequently, when a scholar such as Hegel wants to write about Chinese fiction, he must include his own history. The function of this chapter is to present evidence from literary history to begin to answer the overriding question raised in Chapter One as to whether fiction was “held in contempt” by the literati during the late Ming dynasty.

Chapter Two is a very useful survey of the history of Chinese fiction and could be extrapolated from the book itself for use in a course on Chinese fiction.⁴ In re-reading this chapter after I had read the entire book, however, I had to ask if it was really necessary for the book itself. Certainly for the

³ To see how much has been written in English about Chinese fiction in recent years, one needs only to check the bibliographies related to fiction in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* and its supplement, and Hegel’s already-mentioned 1994 article “Traditional Chinese Fiction-The State of the Field.”

⁴ This chapter will be of particular value for a graduate course I will teach on “comparative fiction” that will attempt, in part, to examine the histories of both Chinese and Western fiction.

non-specialist it is necessary because there is nothing comparable, but for one already acquainted with the history of Chinese fiction, it keeps such a reader for the span of fifty pages from delving into the topics so engagingly raised in Chapter One. Could not this chapter have been better placed in an appendix to which the non-specialist could be directed? Also, much attention is given to Qing fiction in this survey, which, though important, is not discussed in later chapters to the extent of Ming fiction. What would have been especially helpful for me would have been an even more detailed presentation of the state of fiction during the Wanli 萬曆 period (1572-1620), for it is this period which is at the center of Hegel's study. Of the four tables given in this chapter, the most fascinating was the one listing the number of editions of Ming and Qing fiction (p. 65). The absence of English translations of the romanized titles in the table makes it difficult reading for one who does not know Chinese, but I also appreciate the problem of limitation of space for a table.

The next set of questions our theoretical holder of a fascicle of Chinese fiction might have possibly would relate to the book itself as cultural product. These questions are amply dealt with in Chapter Three "Text as Artifact." According to Hegel, the "purpose of this chapter is to examine what might be discerned about a work of Chinese fiction by looking at its many physical characteristics." Comparisons of books of fiction with other kinds of books will also be done. The emphasis is "on the design and production of books in a format that facilitates the rapid reading appropriate to an extended narrative" (p. 73). This chapter, nearly one-hundred pages in length, is divided into three main sections: "Physical Constituents of the Book," "The Techniques of Book Production," and "The Business of Printing Books."

In the first section, "Physical Constituents of the Book," after subsections on terminology for books, paper and ink, there is the long subsection "Book Size and Format," which first carefully argues that "when printing was developing its standards, book paper was approximately the same height as paper for horizontal paintings and calligraphy" (p. 85) and that during the Yuan dynasty, works of fiction and drama were similar in size to other types of books (p. 86). A similar situation is then described in detail for Ming works of fiction (p. 96).

In the subsection "Book Binding and Storage," the main point is that in the Yuan "a new type of binding . . . 'bound-back binding' came into use" that permitted "much faster reading" (p. 98). This advance occurred "just as plays and novels came to be printed in large number for the first time" (p. 103). The information presented here is used to argue the various points Hegel has raised in Chapter One, but at times in these discussions it is not easy to separate historical overview from argumentation. A reader not familiar with the history of books in China may want to read first Hegel's essay "The Printing and Circulation of Literary Texts."

First discussed in the second main section of this chapter, “The Techniques of Book Production,” are the process of block-printing, its development as an art, and the standardization of the form of the printed Chinese character. Comments relevant to various hypotheses Hegel proposes include that by “the late Ming. . . even the names of the engravers of text were seldom recorded” (p. 109); that a refinement of illustrations and “standardization of the printed style of writing” (p. 110) took place during the Ming; that standardization led to “more easily read” texts, with this reading able to be done “*quickly*” (p. 112); and that “from the Yuan until around 1800 . . . most books had about the same number characters per line on every page” (p. 113), that is, “ten columns of twenty characters.”

In the fourth subsection, “The Faces of Fiction,” Hegel statistically shows that “from the Wanli through the Qianlong 乾隆 period, the paper used for printing fiction was consistently only slightly smaller than that used to print books on other subjects.” He also concludes that “[s]mall-format . . . editions of fiction became ever more common through the Qing period” and that in the Qing the number of characters per page for fiction became larger (p. 121). These conclusions will then be used to argue that value placed on Ming fiction was equivalent to that on other works, and that the book as product reached a stage of development in the Ming dynasty that allowed for the spread of interest in reading fiction.

Hegel excels in presenting histories of a various topics related to books. In the final main section of this chapter, “The Business of Printing Books,” he reviews the history of printing in China. Especially relevant to the history of fiction are these facts: books with “illustration-above/text-below” began in Kaifeng in the Song dynasty (pp. 128-29); Fujian publications in the 1320s “mark the beginning of narrative literature for a broad reading audience” (p. 129); “the Jianyang 建陽 area of Fujian” was the center of “the book trade throughout south China from the Song through the Wanli era of the Ming . . .” (p. 130); and subsequently Nanjing and Suzhou came to the fore (p. 132).

The next subsection, “Fujian Publishers and the Printing of Vernacular Fiction,” first explains why the publication of fiction began in Fujian and then looks at the career of Yu Xiangdou 余象斗 (c. 1560-c. 1637), who was from a distinguished family of Fujian printers, and who made “illustration-above/text-below” a “popular form” for fiction (p. 139).

In the fourth subsection, “Specialization among Commercial Publishers,” after discussing studies of the number of publishers of fiction in traditional China, Hegel proceeds to show that “late Ming printing houses did specialize to a degree” and that “plays and fiction were not generally published by the same printers” (p. 142). He then looks at various publishers of drama (Fuchuntang 富春堂, Wenlinge 文林閣, Huancuitang 環翠堂) and the important publisher of fiction, Shidetang 世德堂.

The fifth subsection “Reflections on the Historical Course of the Fiction Publishing” presents “a few speculations” based on the material presented so far in this chapter, the most important of which are: in the late Ming “fiction was valorized on a par with more serious literature” (p. 154); and “[t]he seventeenth century was probably the high point for the publication of fiction” (p. 155). The final part of this third main section of Chapter Three, “Print and Exclusivity,” begins with the question “When, how, and by whom was the decision made to publish a book in late imperial China?” (p. 157). These are very good and basic questions, but Hegel is not able to give thorough answers due to the intrinsic difficulties of answering such questions. The answers offered include that books were published to preserve “the works of older writers and the recorded deeds of men long dead” as well as for “financial considerations” (p. 158). Next, there is a long discussion of fiction in manuscript form (pp. 158-62), the existence of which is seen as a choice not to publish. Hegel points out, among other things, how *Sanguo zhi tongsu yanyi* 三國志通俗演義 and other novels first circulated in manuscripts and argues that “financial concerns and the author’s personal artistic commitment to his text” (p. 161) accounted for these examples of works not published.

Concluding Chapter Three, Hegel succinctly summarizes the state of his argument so far: “The spread of printing occasioned the rise of written fiction and drama; in turn, the commercial needs of the popular culture industry responded, and may have contributed, to the standardization of woodblock printing” (pp. 161-62).

Paging through the fascicle in hand, the reader with little knowledge of Chinese culture could not fail to notice the illustrations atop each page and wonder why they are in a novel. In Chapter 4, Hegel studies the fact of illustrations in traditional Chinese fiction in the two main sections of this chapter: “Illustrated Texts” and “Illustrations and Art.” The former, which considers the illustrations in traditional Chinese fiction *per se*, has these subsections: “The Historical Development of Book Illustrations,” “Picturing Fiction: Iconographic Conventions,” and “Origins of Book Illustrations.” Let us consider the last subsection first. Here Hegel looks for antecedents of influence for “the dramatic narrative illustrations in the Yuan period *pinghua* 平話” in specifically “religious art for mass audiences and painting traditions supported by the cultural elite” (p. 241), and examines “the question of narrative versus iconic presentation” (p. 243) first in Six Dynasties and Tang *bianwen* 變文 and *bianxiang* 變相. What is impressive in this section is the proposal that it is in “the structural conventions,” such as using trees as a scene divider, that possible influence exists (p. 244). It is not surprising that Hegel finds in *bianwen* 變文 the earliest examples of narrative presentation and illustrations “seemingly meant to be viewed in conjunction with particular segments or even lines of text” (p. 245). Overall, in Hegel’s view, the antecedents for novel illustrations

are from Tang Buddhist art. In this regard, one striking insight is that “the view is looking slightly downwards at the scenes portrayed” (pp. 246-47), a feature an admirer of fiction illustrations cannot fail to notice.

In the first subsection of the first main section of this chapter, “The Historical Development of Book Illustrations,” Hegel describes the parallel historical development of illustrated fiction and drama going from the Yuan dynasty “*Quanxiang pinghua* 全相平話 (Fully illustrated plain[ly told] tales) ca. 1320s,” to the 1498 *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (pp. 172-76), to the Ming *shuochang cihua* 說唱詞話 (*chantefable*) discovered in the last century, to the replacement of the *shangtu/xiawen* 上圖下文 format in the Chenghua period (early 16th century), which led to “the ‘golden age’ for Chinese woodblock printing during the Wanli period” (p. 183). Though Qing illustration is discussed, “it would appear that illustrated books fell out of favor during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: increasingly they were considered to be less intellectually and artistically serious during the Qing” (p. 213).

In this section Hegel makes new observations about readers’ responses to the illustrations. For instance, when, in the late Ming, continuous illustrations at the top of each page were replaced by sections of illustrations strategically located within pages of text only, Hegel suggests: “In effect, then, the sixteenth-century reader was encouraged to read—or at least leaf through—the entire text, not merely to view the pictures as he might in a text with continuous illustrations” (p. 192). Moreover, Hegel’s many hours spent looking at Ming editions handsomely pays off when he writes: “This aesthetic separation of text from illustrations produced the phenomenon widely observable in rare book collections today: the fascicle containing the illustrations in many late Ming novels may be well worn whereas the text seems scarcely to have been opened, much less given extensive use” (p. 200). Even more perceptive is Hegel’s comment about “the delayed gratification occasioned by the dislocation of picture from text” that “would create a kind of suspense akin to that created by the formal manipulation of conclusive elements within the text itself . . .” (p. 204). Such an interpretation allows illustrations separate from the text to be understood as an intentional textual strategy.

The second subsection of the first part of Chapter Four, “Picturing Fiction: Iconographic Conventions,” is one of the most interesting parts of this book and groundbreaking as well, in so far as it is a topic, as the author himself states, about which “little has been written.” This subsection focuses on “the characteristics of fiction illustration.” Hegel’s first point is that there are “commonalities” in fiction illustrations “with all other forms of [Chinese] art as well” (p. 216). He next observes that the illustrations in fiction “portray common images and familiar scenes far more frequently than they present the strange or exotic” (p. 217). Why this should be the case, Hegel does not speculate, but I wonder if it is simply that in most cases the work, at best, was

done by a craftsman rather than an artist. As for the differences in these illustrations over a large span of time, Hegel indicates that “the late Ming [book illustrations] differ far less in their subject matter than they do in the amount of background detail, the level of art in the drawing, and the precision and craft in block carving” (p. 217). Again, Hegel, perhaps wisely, does not interpret this phenomenon, but might it not be seen as yet another example of continuity rather than change dominating the Chinese tradition.

Other characteristics discussed with appropriate example illustrations include: “the decorative rock garden” (pp. 220-21), “action scenes” (p. 224), “romantic interludes” (p. 224), “representation of dreams” (pp. 224-25), “scenes of supplication and submission” (pp. 225-29), “lack of individuality in the faces” (p. 229). Each of these types of illustrations is treated but briefly. His treatment, however, provides a good start for longer studies, especially about the rock garden, action scenes, romantic interludes and scenes of supplication appearing in the illustrated Chinese fiction from the late Ming. Further, with such an analysis, perhaps the individuality of presentation might begin to appear. The final part of this subsection discusses the important centers of printing during the Wanli period: Nanjing and Hangzhou.

The second main section of Chapter Four, “Illustrations and Art,” will not be discussed here in detail since my primary interest is illustrated fiction itself.⁵ Hegel begins by saying his “observations can serve as little more than suggestions for further research.” The idea developed in this section is that illustrations in fiction can be meaningfully placed “in the greater context of the formal arts of late imperial China” (p. 251). With this section, Hegel brings together, perhaps for the first time in English, the worlds of Chinese fine arts and illustrated fiction. It is also here that two questions raised in Chapter One are answered: Why did some lackluster texts have “fine illustrations”; and why do some aspects of these illustrations “seem virtually indistinguishable from those in the paintings of the most famous literati artists”?

If the reader of a fascicle of Chinese fiction has not yet tired of asking questions, a final one might be: how did a Chinese in earlier times read such a novel? This question is then taken up in Chapter Five, “Art as Text,” which is divided into seven sections. Unlike the previous two chapters, this chapter has only a set of main sections and no subsections. Each section is related in one way or another to the reading process. This chapter is designed not to argue a point as the earlier chapters were but rather to undertake a phenomenological description. It is with this chapter too that Hegel is taking an approach that would be rare among Chinese scholars of fiction, who traditionally were more interested in the mind of the author rather than the mind of the reader, as is seen in the quotation that Hegel gives at the start of Chapter Two for the

⁵ An historian of Chinese art is the proper reviewer for this section.

Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍: “[T]he reader . . . experiences the words [of the author] first, and then works himself back into the feeling of the author.” Traditionally, the only thinking a reader was expected to have was about the meaning of the author. If Hegel can show that readers thought more than this, he has made an important contribution to the study of Chinese fiction.

In the first section, “Redefining Reading for the Illustrated Book,” Hegel indicates that the purpose of this chapter is “to draw together evidence for how these illustrated texts were *read*—in the several senses of that action—when they initially appeared and later, before the major cultural changes beginning in the late nineteenth century” (pp. 290-91). Following the suggestion of various late Ming authors of “the ability of picture to convey meaning *beyond the capacity of prose to do so*,” he especially wants “to explore the ways in which this additional meaning might have been invested in illustrated texts and how it was perceived and interpreted” (p. 292). He also carefully distinguishes texts with illustrations at the beginning and those with illustrations at the top of each page. In my discussion of the other sections of this chapter, I will mainly limit my comments to illustrated fiction with pictures at the top of each page.

The second section of this chapter, “Reading Audiences for the Novel in Late Imperial China,” is an excellent summary of the latest studies on who was reading fiction at that time. Hegel concludes that “the potential reading audience for vernacular fiction in late imperial China was undoubtedly very broad” (p. 302), and lists its audiences as the literati, “women of wealthy families and the sons of merchants,” and those “with considerably lower reading skills” (p. 303).

In the third section, “First Impressions, Suggestions, and Clues for Reading Texts,” Hegel cleverly describes his understanding of how a reader would go into a book store and select a title, as well as what might be the reader’s reaction to looking at the book selected for consideration, especially emphasizing how various parts of the book are “meant to suggest a link between the fictional text and the cultural elite” (p. 304). His description of such a scene of purchase is perceptive and an impressive re-creation of what might have happened, but it should be seen as only one possible way of a reader getting a book. Many of the potential readers previously described would, I suspect, more likely than not simply send a servant to the bookstore to purchase a book of which they had heard, so great the power of word of mouth in China.

With the fourth section, “Readings Guided by Commentaries,” we are now following Hegel into the minds of the readers. Again revealing his first-hand research, he begins with an observation based on extant editions of traditional Chinese fiction: “wear patterns” suggest that “the pages in the better-quality editions devoted to prefaces, usually in an elegant handwritten script, the contents, and illustrations frequently show signs of heavy use with numerous

sheets worn through at the fold. The readers . . . seemingly were willing to allow their reading to be directed, guided, and shaped by those who had read before them and who had provided this prefatory material in order to do just that . . .” (p. 305). I agree with the conclusion but am not sure if the fact of apparent heavy use of preparatory materials leads to it. Nonetheless, Hegel’s first point about the reading process is that it is not only the author whom readers care about, but also the commentators.

Jin Shengtan’s edition of *Shuihu zhuan* provides Hegel with material for the start of his next foray into the mind of a reader, and he comes to see the commentaries in “old Chinese novels” as functioning to “assert . . . the privilege interpretation of the commentator over all others, including those made independently by experienced and well educated readers.” Next, Hegel gives two possible ways of reading the same commentary: for the educated reader, they “might even be seen as parodies of the work of canonized classical scholarship” (p. 310), but for “the less experienced and less detached reader” “the interpretive apparatus” might be seen as “a privileged and thereby authoritative reading of the text” (pp. 310-11). Here, it would have been interesting to have Hegel suggest which commentaries might have been read as parody.

“Habits of Viewing Pictures,” the fifth section, turns to the question of the influence of the illustrations on the reading. What would have been useful to have before this section, since in the previous section was Hegel’s description of the reader’s relationship with the commentaries, is one on how a reader would have read the text itself, and in a way other than searching for the author’s meaning. First discussed in this fifth section is the question why fiction had illustrations. Hegel notes it was a business proposition as others have suggested but adds that another factor in this was the use of “style of illustration that had already enjoyed commercial success” (p. 313). One fascinating remark in this section has to do with the arrangement of the persons in the illustrations: “Figures generally move toward the left, consonant with the movement of the reader’s eyes as he proceeds through a text.” (p. 315). This suggests that the illustrations were designed so that the reader would read a few columns of text, look at the illustrations, then go back to reading, only to look up again at the illustration after a few more columns of text.

By the sixth section, “Picturing Texts and Textualizing Pictures,” Hegel has already made us comfortable in our exploration of the readers’ minds, and now takes us to the readers of manuscripts such as *Shitou ji* 石頭記 and *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史, which of course are without illustrations, to suggest: “The reader of such texts more likely identifies thus with the commentator as ideal reader rather than with supposed authorial voice or with the character” (p. 317). With this insight he then returns to the reader of illustrated fiction and explains: “. . . [I]f the text is dominant, then the illustrations on the same page must serve as a sort of ‘running commentary’ on the narrative and can either

augment or distract from it” (p. 318). Based on this distinction, he then proposes a difference in reading between the “ordinary reader” and the “better educated and more sophisticated reader” (pp. 318-19). The latter, in Hegel’s highly sophisticated argument, would see the illustrations in the same way that he sees a painting. Here is Hegel’s description of this “seeing”:

[A] picture, specifically a Chinese picture consisting of familiar, conventionalized-and emotionally charged—elements, transcends time: its effect is not only to suspend time but further to unite times and events long past with those of the present, to re-create by invocation rather than any mere representation the emotional power and even the moral significance of a human situation, to identify the viewer with the artist as he participated in the (re-)creation of the human experience depicted or implicit in the picture. (p. 320)

These illustrations thus present “the archetypal situation” (p. 321). These just-quoted passages represent to me the high point of this book, for Hegel has ingenuously given us a new understanding of how one type of traditional reader might have read late Ming illustrated fiction. Furthermore, of added interest is Hegel’s explanation of the function of an illustration’s background: “The regular reliance of book illustrators on cranes, banana leaves, Lake Tai rocks, and a host of other extraneous details served to make the individual scene familiar and thereby facilitate the more intense experience of identification with the persons and action in it” (p. 321). This interpretation is a convincing explanation of one function of background material.

The final section of this chapter, “Picturing through Texts-and Pictures,” considers yet another kind of reader: “the person who read fiction primarily . . . for pleasure” (p. 322). Such a reader is not concerned with the author’s mind, but only with his own. Hegel develops his argument by first noting that “several characteristics of late imperial Chinese novels seem specifically designed to stimulate the reader’s imagination: the frequent use of [vivid] imagery, coupled with the narrator’s invitations to visualize, the commentator’s instructions on how to do so, and the visual hints offered by the illustrations” (p. 323). These characteristics then “elicit imaging on the part of the reader: the reader is invited thereby to supply the details, the distance, the color, the texture, the lifelike qualities” (p. 325). For the reader seeking pleasure, in a text with illustrations, the imagining is especially “pleasurable”: “What more suitable means for emotional escape can there be than an illustrated text that allows the greatest degree of pleasurable creative imagining on the part of the reader?” (p. 326). With this analysis of the reader for pleasure, Hegel has taken us from the elite reader who penetrates archetypal reality to one who luxuriates in escapist enjoyment, thereby showing two radically different ways of reading illustrated fiction.

In the Epilogue of this book, “New Contexts, New Texts,” Hegel offers “general speculations on the career of Chinese vernacular fiction” (p. 328). While some of this concluding material recapitulates what has already been said, new remarks appear as well that are deserving of further study and research. For instance, the opening discussion on *Hunglou meng* 紅樓夢 and “the number of different readings” of this novel suggests it to be an excellent choice if one would want to continue Hegel’s general study of reading by looking at the reading, or readings, of one traditional novel. Also, Hegel’s view that the best fiction of the late Ming and early Qing needs “the close and interactive reading traditionally reserved for poetry” (p. 329) whets the appetite to see such a reading done.

In the Epilogue, Hegel continues to give attention to the matter of the decline of the novel, identifying its beginning “before the middle of the eighteenth century” and giving reasons (pp. 329-30) and “pressures” (pp. 332-34) for this occurrence.

A question I have often wondered about is the number of copies printed for any one edition of a work of Chinese fiction. Hegel touches upon this topic here by saying that “finely illustrated editions or those with copious commentary” might, per edition, number “a few hundred, a thousand at the most” (pp. 330-331). I would be quite interested in knowing more about how these figures were reached.

In the closing paragraph of the Epilogue, Hegel gives his final words on the novel during the Qing: it was actually becoming “more popular,” had “an ever broader range of reading,” and was read for “pleasure,” but there was little “aesthetic appreciation of the text as beautiful artifact” (pp. 335-36). This almost nostalgic conclusion brings out clearly Hegel’s admiration, enjoyment, and perhaps love of magnificently illustrated late Ming novels.

Allow me to conclude this review with a few general observations. In the publication of a book, the author usually does not have the last say in many decisions related to the final product. Having just spent many days with this book, I would like to mention some aspects of the format that, if they had been a little different, would have made my time devoted to this book even more enjoyable. First, regarding the table of contents. For Chapters 2-4, only the titles of the main sections of these chapters are listed. Had the titles of the many subsections also been included, I would have been able much more easily to understand the structure of these chapters. Next, being one who enjoys returning to the notes for a chapter, I would have found it easier to do so if, as is often the case for scholarly books, the page numbers for the pages in which the note numbers originally appeared had been given atop each page of the “Notes.” Thirdly, an important audience for this book are readers who already know Chinese characters. If the format of this book, which is literally packed with romanized Chinese characters, had followed the example of works such as

The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature that give together both the romanization and the Chinese characters for Chinese names, titles, places, and so on, it would save readers who know Chinese a great deal of time and make the reading experience even more pleasant. Decisions on such matters are of course often governed by cost factors, and I understand fully why some of these suggestions are not cost efficient. In a similar vein, in a book on illustrated fiction, to include examples of these illustrations is essential. It is to the credit of Stanford University Press that so many illustrations and photographs were a part of this book. However, as one who has had the privilege to see the original illustrations from some fine editions of late Ming fiction, I cannot help but to urge the reader to go to the nearest rare book library of Chinese fiction and look at these illustrations in their original form.

There were many pleasures in reading this book. One immense one was the thorough and detailed notes for each chapter. Another was the almost complete absence of any typos. The style of writing was controlled, yet expansive, and while objective, did not shield the reader from the feelings of the author.

As a student of Comparative Literature, I have always been interested in problems of periodization. The title of this book speaks of “Late Imperial China,” which here seems to refer to China during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. But others might give a broader meaning to this expression. A note from Hegel on this point would have been helpful. This term also intrigues me in so far as it is almost untranslatable into Chinese. Hegel, whose first book was entitled *The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China*, continues to use the expression “Seventeenth-Century” as a period of Chinese history as well as that of “late Ming and early Qing.” I probably would prefer to see only the latter, as the former inevitably makes me pause to think of the problem of periodization, and to begin comparing China with seventeenth-century England and Continental Europe.

Recently, when I showed a Sinologist from England a manuscript I had written regarding traditional Chinese fiction, one of his comments after reading it was that he found it strange that I should refer to “the Ming” and the “Qing” without adding each time “dynasty.” I had no explanation other than common usage. Hegel also employs the same usage as I did. Perhaps this is a characteristic of Americans writing about China.

In conclusion, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* is an impressive and significant contribution to the study of traditional Chinese fiction. Moreover, by calling attention to the traditional Chinese reader Professor Hegel has opened new paths of study. I hope that not only scholars of Chinese novels have the opportunity to read and enjoy this remarkable work of scholarship but also those who have yet to enter the enchanting world of traditional Chinese culture.

