

From the Editor

The Chinese novel in its traditional form with its numerous episodes usually dealing with acts of chivalry, domestic scenes, love affairs, other worldly powers and paranormal events began to develop in the 11th century during the Sung dynasty. As a literary genre, it emerged from the roving professional story tellers who entertained the people throughout long summer evenings and even longer winter days. Depending on their memory and wit professional story tellers spun off their endless tales providing ingenious resolutions to the knottiest human and other worldly problems. Some people undertook to write rudimentary accounts of these tales. From these accounts the Chinese novel slowly emerged.

By the 14th century vernacular fiction, though not genuinely accepted by the court and scholars, and considered a lower form of literature, had achieved a certain popularity. It finally won respect and acceptance as a literary genre by the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

As the novel developed, Buddhist moral stories and accounts of Buddhist virtues and miracles surfaced as favorite themes. The 14th century historical novel, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (cf. p. 21 of this issue of *Tripod*) achieved tremendous popularity as did the 16th century *Journey to the West*, (cf. pp. 5-16, 21). This is a delightful mythological novel, issued in several versions and sequels, full of imaginative and humorous episodes. *A Dream of Red Mansions* also entitled, *The Story of the Stone* has won universal acclaim as one of the world's greatest novels (cf. pp. 24, ff).

This issue of *Tripod* features two articles on the Chinese novel. In *Continuities with Buddhist Fiction: Monkey's Enlightenment in the Xu Xiyou ji*, Professor Brandauer concentrates not so much on the 16th century popular and well-known legendary *Journey to the West* but rather on a late 17th century work by an anonymous author, based on the 7th century story of the Buddhist monk, and his disciples, and Monkey, its famous lead character. Professor Brandauer's article is a reflection on the continuities the author sees between the themes of the novel and

his own Catholic faith. As he so aptly states, our "interest is not with literary history but rather with evidence of inter-religious continuities with the Christian faith in Chinese fiction." These he finds in abundance, especially in the counter-cultural aspects of the version of the Chinese novel he has chosen to analyze. In this less well-known and accessible version of the novel, contrary to the popular and accepted notions of success, strength and bravery, the author places stress on virtues seldom encountered in Chinese literature: the importance and wisdom of passivism, the need for religious conversion, compassion and forgiveness.

Professor Roth, for his part, explores the parallels between Chinese stories and Western folk tales and classical literature. He analyzes some of China's most famous narratives pointing out how these provide "explanations for origins, celebration of mystery in the supernatural, the quest or yearning for justice in the face of oppression and the extolling of moral virtues and perseverance." He finds in the beautiful tale, *The Tears of Lady Meng*, for example, "deep religious dimensions which can only be understood in terms of revelation" (cf. pp. 18,ff). This very popular novel by C.S. Song has recently been subtitled, "A Parable of People's Political Theology." Professor Roth observes that awareness of these parallels provides us with both points of contact and contrast between cultures. They also reveal a basic commonality "that undergirds all of humanity."

In *The Conversion of Li Zhizao: An Inquiry into Reasons*, Professor Chen Mingsheng presents a significant piece of research on one of Ricci's most famous, but less well known, scholar converts.

Father Thomas Law, in an interview with Theresa Yeung, provides us with a history of and update on the liturgy in China.

Our pictorial essay celebrates the history of Hong Kong's Tai Po Catholic Church and its 130 years of uninterrupted service.

Father Peter Barry continues our series of book reviews on China missionary history. The selection for this issue is *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773*.

Also included in this issue are the 1992 *Tripod Index* and the *China Church Update*.
