LORD GUAN IN YUAN DRAMA

A SYNOPSIS

Lord Guan embodies many of the ideals of the Chinese manhood. A study of literature about him is as much a study of the Chinese view of human relationship as it is of the literary genre in the Chinese people.

Chapter 1 of Part One traces the genesis of Lord Guan as a literary subject and offers a wider perspective, hitherto shaded, on the growth of the Lord Guan motif through the Jin (晋 265-420), Tang (唐 618-907), Song (宋 960-1279) and Yuan (元 1271-1368) periods. Chapters 2 and 3 of this part point to the spread of the Lord Guan legend in the official and popular consciousness of early dynastic China. These chapters seek to shed light on how the ground was prepared for the later flowering of the Lord Guan za-ju (杂剧).

The contention of this part is that the great impact of Lord Guan in Yuan drama is significantly due to innumerable contributions from nameless story-tellers and the common folklore in building up the plots, myths and characteristics of the Lord Guan legend. This is examined in Chapter 3. The impact of official deification of Lord Guan is also examined. Although Lord Guan as a historical figure appeared as early as the early third century (c. 219 AD), his prominence as a literary figure was a long and complex process.

Chapter 4 of this part attempts to trace the Lord Guan motif in Jin-Yuan-ben (金院本) and Nan-xi (南戏). It is a fruitless task as many of the records of these works are not in existence now.

Part two explores the contents of Yuan drama about Lord Guan. In a critical textual analysis of the preserved Yuan drama scripts,
Chapters 2 and 3 attempt to show the debt which these dramas owe to previous sources and also to show what are the original and important contributions from Guan Han-qing (關漢卿, 1230–1280). The characterisation of Lord Guan in these dramas is also revealed to show the complex literary processes and genius that has given flesh and blood to Lord Guan and made him into the epitome of Chinese manliness. Chapter 4 attempts the same analysis another two Yuan dramas about Lord Guan. Through a close examination of aesthetics and blending of art with history, Chapter 5 highlights what is of great literary importance about these Yuan dramas about Lord Guan.