Abstract

The Water Margin or Shui-hu Chuan 水浒伝 is hailed as one of the “Four Masterworks of the Novels of the Ming Dynasty”. The story depicts the rise and fall of the Liang-shan Rebellion which occurred during the Xuan-he period (1119-1125AD) of the Song Dynasty. When the rebellion was at its height, the leader of the heroes, Song Jiang led them into accepting amnesty. Before that, the heroes were split into two camps: one for accepting amnesty and the other against.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse why the heroes took different stands. Song Jiang and Lu Junyi are chosen from those for acceptance while Lu Zhishen, Li Kui and Wu Song belong to the opposite camp. These five heroes are chosen because they were most outspoken about their views. The different aspects being examined include the family background, personality, ideology and experience of the heroes. These aspects are important as they were likely to influence how the heroes view the amnesty.

It is observed that both Song Jiang and Lu Junyi came from the upper strata of the society. They had proper education and were nurtured by Confucian teachings of loyalty to the sovereign. Hence, though they were forced by circumstances to join the rebellion, they had a strong sense of guilt. To them, accepting amnesty was the natural course. On the other hand, the heroes against accepting amnesty came from humble families. They did not have the chance to receive proper education and were greatly influenced by Mohism which gave them a sense of chivalry and righteousness. The corruption of the officials weakened their faith in the government. Hence, in their view, accepting amnesty was not the best alternative. However, they ultimately joined Song Jiang in accepting amnesty as they were bound by the ethical codes of brotherhood.