The Dream of the Red Chamber

Book 1

Cao Xueqin

The Dream of the Red Chamber is considered the greatest of the Four Great Classical Novels of China. Almost 40 main characters and some 500 minor characters tell the fortunes of the Chia family; the book details mainly the life of Chia Pao-yü, the heir apparent, who is described as very intelligent, but also as carefree and self-indulging. The wealthy Chia family rises to new heights when Pao-yü's elder sister becomes an imperial consort. On her first visit home, a lush garden is built, where much of the rest of the story takes place. The intrigues surrounding Pao-yü and his cousins, especially Lin Tai-yü who he loves, and Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai who he is finally tricked into marrying, make up a large part of the story. The decline of the Chia family begins with the death of the imperial consort, and when they fall into disfavour with the emperor, their mansions and the garden are eventually destroyed.

The whole book has 120 chapters, only 80 of which were written by Cao Xueqin before his death in 1764. Henry Bencraft Joly translated part of the book written by Cao. Book I contains the first 24 chapters.

Total running time 19:20:40

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