Visualizations of "A Dream of Red Mansions" as a Case for Image-text Relationships in the Late Imperial China

Summary / Zusammenfassung
Since the first publication of Honglou meng (Dream of the Red Chamber) in 1791, the novel stirred a veritable craze among readers. Illustrated editions of Honglou meng as well as separate albums of illustrations have substantially contributed to the cult surrounding this text. The dissertation project expands the research into the visualization and reception of illustrated editions of Honglou meng in the Qing dynasty, viewing the narrative text and its pictorial representations as sharing a dialogic relationship. The project is mainly focused on Wang Xilian’s Xinping xiuxiang Honglou meng quan zhuan (A Fully Illustrated New Critical Edition of a Dream of the Red Chamber) printed in 1832 by the Shuangqing xianguan publishing house. The book illustrations that are grouped together in a separate volume at the beginning of the publication are accompanied by verbal inscriptions derived from the Yuan dynasty drama Xixiang ji (The Story of the Western Wing). The project considers, first, how Xixiang ji inscriptions extended the interpretation of Cao Xueqin’s text and how they enriched the readers’ perception in the 19th century. Secondly, the project attempts to connect Xixiang ji excerpts to famous scenes onstage and relate them to concrete Honglou meng protagonists. The verbal inscriptions, so the dissertation argues, offered a way to invoke wider cultural-historical implications by adding a new, mostly erotic, layer of depth to the protagonists, thereby shifting the reader’s perception.

Keywords / Suchbegriffe
Hong lou meng, late Qing illustrated fiction

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