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978-0-521-02765-6 - Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School
Chih-P'ing Chou
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YÜAN HUNG-TAO AND THE KUNG-AN SCHOOL

Professor Chou here offers a new perspective on the rise and fall of the Kung-an school as a key to understanding the development of Chinese literary criticism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. His book focuses upon the literary theories of Yüan Hung-tao (1568–1610) – the leader of the Kung-an school – and his two brothers. Its core is a detailed study of the poetry and prose of Yüan Hung-tao, comparing his theories with his writings and analysing systematically the merits and flaws of his work. The book concludes with a discussion of the legacy of the Kung-an school, treating the school not only as the major force behind the expressive trend in the late Ming period, but also as one of the precursors of the modern Chinese literary movement.

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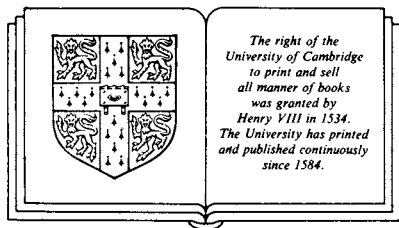
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Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School

CHIH-P'ING CHOU

Associate Professor of Chinese, Princeton University



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To Shan-chen

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PREFACE

Modern studies on the literature of Ming China have concentrated on several renowned novels written between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, in particular *The Water Margin*, *Journey to the West* and *Chin P'ing Mei*. The development of the literary criticism, poetry and prose of the Ming dynasty has attracted little attention from Western scholars. Since the early twentieth century, many scholars have treated these novels as the most prominent and innovative works of Ming literature; the novel, however, was hardly at the center of the literary scene in Ming times. For the majority of the Ming intellectuals, poetry and prose were still the only two literary forms worth their time and effort, and literary criticism, a popular and important subject, often appeared in their writings.

Offering a new interpretation of the rise and decline of the Kung-an school, this book studies the development of Chinese literary criticism from the early sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, and emphasizes the continuity of interest in the expressive quality of literature found in the theories of the Archaist and Individualist schools. This study focuses on the literary theories of Yüan Hung-tao (1568–1610), the leader of the Kung-an school, and his two brothers, giving special attention to the theoretical differences that developed among these three critics. Through a critical analysis of his poetry and prose, Yüan Hung-tao is portrayed not only as a distinctive poet and prose writer, but also as a man of considerable wit and humor. The conclusion evaluates both the influence that the Kung-an school exercised on late Ming literature, and its impact on the rise of the Ching-ling school.

This book is a revised and extended version of my doctoral dissertation written at Indiana University under the supervision of Professor Irving Lo. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Lo for his scholarly guidance in the preparation of my dissertation and his support throughout my graduate years.

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Preface

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University, who has been my mentor during my career as a teacher. His unfailing support and encouragement helped me through some very difficult times. My heartfelt appreciation goes also to Professor Frederick W. Mote for his invaluable instruction, his critical comments, and his painstaking reviews of various drafts of my manuscript. I have greatly benefited from several seminars on Chinese literature conducted by Professor Yu-kung Kao of Princeton University; his profound knowledge led me to explore late Ming literature from a new perspective. He has constantly offered me his critical insights and provided me with much-needed advice on various occasions. Professor Andrew Plaks has also carefully reviewed the entire manuscript. I appreciate very much his well-considered advice and suggestions.

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My friend Dr James Geiss helped me edit the entire final revision of the manuscript. He has taken pains to polish the language and has corrected numerous mistakes. His patience and time have greatly improved the readability of this book. I am most grateful for his help. My sincere thanks also go to my friends James Hargett, Susan McFadden and Thomas Bartlett, whose assistance in many translations has been very helpful.

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