水問湖西
persons for my third marriage, and even to perform the good office of go­
between. My parents were undecided, and they bade me go to the Temple
of Patriarch Lü57 at the Leaping Spring58 in Tsian, the capital of Shantung
Province, to pray for enlightenment. There I obtained an oracular sortilege,
saying: “The pledge revealed in the former dream.” Just then the ssu-­ma
Wang Ku-yu 王古愚 came to discuss a marriage proposal from the young
lady Ch’eng Chia 程佳 of the Plain White Chinese Banner. Her year of birth
tallied with the prediction in the “dream document,”60 and so the decision
was taken, a proposal of marriage was offered and accepted, and a formal
engagement, a ‘presentation of fowl’, was made and announced.61 Since
our marriage, the lady has been dutiful in her attendance and service to the
elders and has educated our sons and daughters with wisdom. Consequently
during all my official peregrinations through Anhui, Honan, Kweichow and
Huai-an, I have never had the least worry about family matters. This
celestially ordained union of ours was thus revealed to me long before­
hand in a dream.

All the illustrations in this book of mine represent real scenes and actual
experiences, except for this dream and the “Roaring Waves at the Gate of the
Emperor Yu,”62 which are imaginary scenes included to commemorate
propitious omens.

Paying my Compliments to West Lake63

In the first month of the year ping-yin [1806], my father was appointed
Prefect and assigned to the province of Chekiang. He proceeded there
immediately. In the following month my mother and I accompanied my
great-grandmother on the river-trip to the South. When we were about to
weigh anchor, I received a poem sent to me as a parting gift by Uncle64 Chii
Shan-t’ao 車珊藻.65 The poem included the following lines:

The year contains so little spring enchantment;
When you visit West Lake, enjoy it to the full.

When I did reach Hangchow it was already the beginning of the sixth
month. Just then Uncle Li K’ang-chiieh 李康偕66 came from Shan-yin67 and
invited me to visit West Lake with him. That very day, accompanied by my
brother Chung-wen, we went to the Water Pavilion outside the Yung-chin
Gate68 of the city, and hired a boat to sail downstream. All around us the hills
stood like screens of azure and jet, while purple halls and crimson palaces
shone to right and left, as if we could pluck them from our very sleeves. Then
we paid our respects at the Temple to the Prince of the Water Immortals.

Evening was approaching as we sailed into the thick of the lotus flowers;
we smelt the fragrance of the wind on the gentle ripples of the water, and
became oblivious of the cruel heat. I cut a lotus stem and used it as a straw
with which to sip my wine. The moon was up by the time we left.

57 (YTH) Lü Yen 吕僧, or Lü Tung-pin 吕洞賓, known as Ch’un Yang-tzu 鍾陽子,
a historical person in the Tang dynasty, who later became in popular Taoist legend one
of the Eight Immortals and was referred to as Patriarch Lü.
58 (Ed) See the photograph on p.19 of
Harold Shadick’s translation of Liu E’s
59 Name Shu-wu 珠涅, Master of Arts, native
of Chihli. (YTH) Again the detestable and
disgusting way of designating a Prefect,
using an ancient name which was abrogated
and became defunct a thousand years ago.
60 (YTH) This refers to the Year of the Pig
(bai), the year of birth of this young lady and
also of the author, both having been born in
the year hsin-bai (1791) in the reign of
Ch’ien-lung.
61 (YTH) A traditional literary expression for
the formal pledge and engagement, since a
goose was regularly offered in ancient days
as a token from the man’s family.
62 (Ed) Series I, no.42.
63 (YTH) Wen 閲 is used here in the ancient
classical meaning, to ‘pay compliments with a
gift’, as in “The Ruler of Wei sends his
compliments to Tzu-kung (a notable pupil
of Confucius) with the gift of a weapon.”
This did not mean that the Ruler of Wei
‘asked some questions’ about the bow. See
also Tso Chuan, 11th year of Duke Ch’eng
(576 bc).
64 (YTH) The term used here, chang 丈, is
the common Chinese courtesy appellation
for a father’s close friend or a family close
friend of rather advanced age. The word
literally means an elder, senior, venerable
old man.
65 Name Wangdorgi 旺多爾濟, a Mongol
and a Student in the Imperial Academy,
admitted by Special Grant.
66 Name Pu-ying 步瀛, Academy Student
from Shan-yin, later served as Chief County
Education Officer.
67 (Ed) Shao-hsing.
During my days as an official in the Capital, I would recollect this happy experience, and fly there in my imagination.

I have written a series of sixteen “truncated poems” entitled “Reminiscences of West Lake,” and I beg to append one here:

Outside the Tower to Welcome Auster
the green flow is rich;
Visitors are loth to leave
the fragrance drifting these many miles.
If this mortal frame can change
into a butterfly dreaming,
Surely tonight it will fly
around the lotus flowers.

On investigation there are altogether in our Empire thirty-one expanses of water bearing the name West Lake, but the Ming-sheng Lake of Ch’ien-t’ang is the most famous. In the ancient Han dynasty, there occurred the miracle of the Golden Cow, as recorded in Li Tao-yuan’s Notes on the Water Classic. And West Lake is not merely a picturesque scenic spot, it is also a useful source of water. In the T’ang dynasty, the Duke of Yeh drilled six wells, Po Hsien-shan constructed stone conduits to irrigate the farm land, and Su Tung-p’o of the Sung dynasty introduced vegetable farms. The economic benefits of West Lake have been enhanced from age to age.

During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, it was left unattended and came to be more and more in need of dredging. In the present dynasty, during the second year of the Yung-cheng Reign [1724], the Governor of Chekiang, the posthumously canonised Lord Li Min-ta received an Imperial order to dredge the Lake and make other necessary improvements. The Lake thus came to be of great benefit to the livelihood of the people in the western part of Chekiang. Moreover the same Governor restored the antiquities and revised the gazetteers. He certainly did much for West Lake, and it is fitting and proper that he should be worshipped together with the Prince of the Water Immortals.

70 (YTH) The auspicious South Wind which symbolises Well-being and Happiness.
71 (YTH) A variant name of Hangchow.
72 (Ed) Li Tao-yuan (d. 1527).
73 (YTH) Li Pi 李泌 (722–89), a fascinating, enigmatic and talented character in Chinese history.
74 (YTH) The courteous name for Po Chu-i 白居易, the famous poet and renowned civil administrator of the T’ang dynasty.
75 Name Wei 衛, Provincial Academy Student of Kiangsu. (Ed) Hummel, or rather Fang Chao-ying, in the biography of Tien Wen-ying, gives Li’s dates as (?1667–1738), and leaves a somewhat different impression of the man: “A provincial official highly favoured by Emperor Shih-tsung (Yung-cheng) ….” Although in his term at Hangchow he improved greatly the architecture and scenic beauties of West Lake, he saw nothing incongruous in having an image of himself placed in the main hall dedicated to the Spirit of the Lake, a divinity known also as the Spirit of the Flowers. In a smaller structure to the rear of this image was placed a group of figures representing himself and his wives. When, some five decades later (in 1780), Emperor Kao-tsung (Ch’ien-lung) visited Hangchow he ordered these figures removed and replaced by others more in harmony with the Spirit of the Lake.”