China Research Seminar Series (Michaelmas 2020)
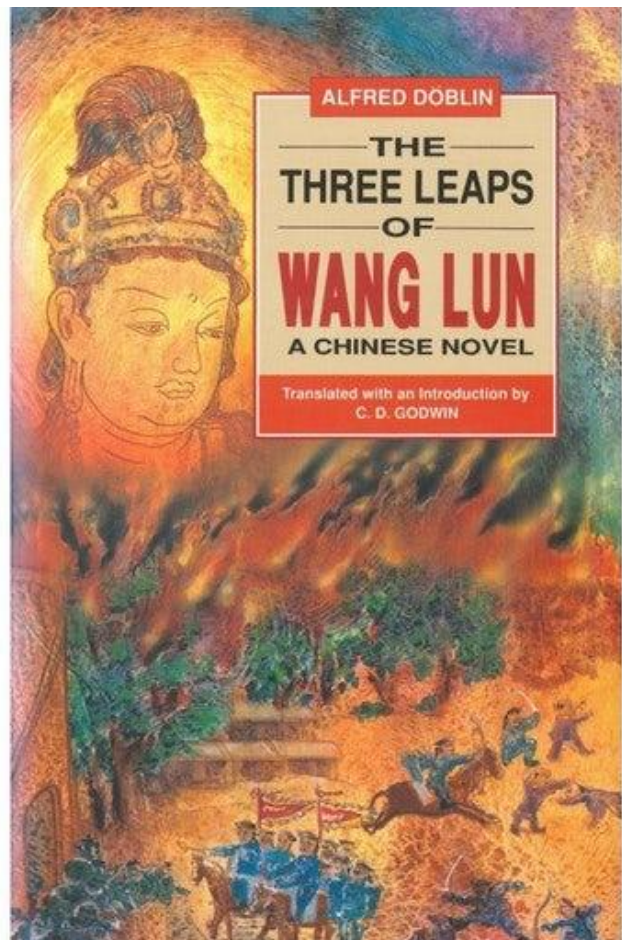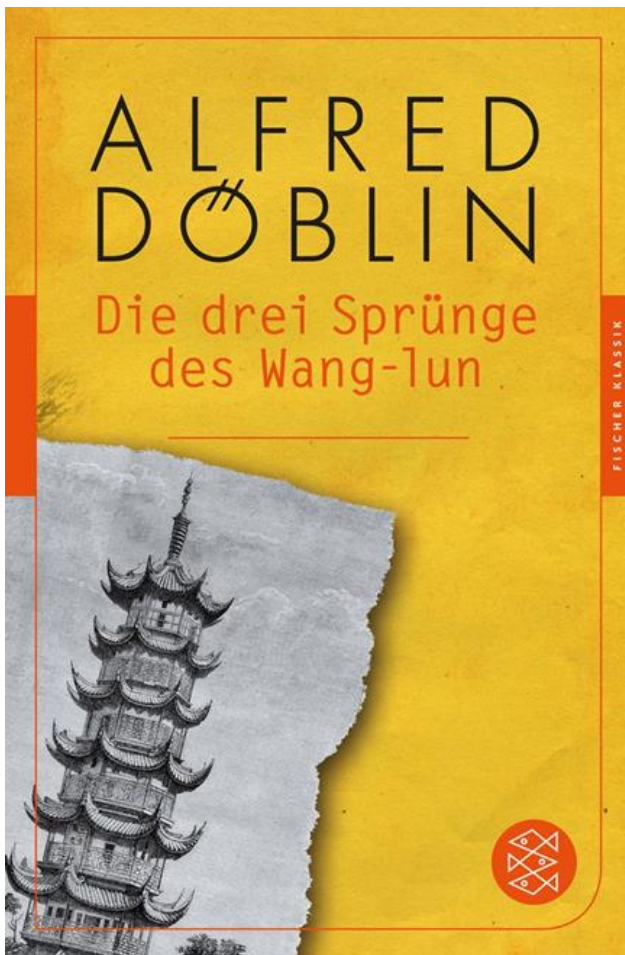
A Chinese Novel from the Wilhelmine Empire: Alfred Döblin's *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun*

Professor David Midgley

(Faculty of Modern & Medieval Languages, University of Cambridge)

5pm (London time), 14 Oct, 2020 (Wednesday) via Zoom

Please **register in advance** for this seminar:
https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYodOGhqDMjG9xS0jt435Jqkdv_bGS59aKT
After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Abstract

Alfred Döblin's first major literary success, his "Chinese novel" *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun* (German title: *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun*), was written shortly before the First World War and published in 1916. The title figure is based on the historical leader of a popular revolt in 18th-century China, and the work draws on a wide range of publications about the history, culture, folklore and religions of China, as well as on the highly regarded German translations of the Chinese philosophical classics by Richard Wilhelm. In my presentation I shall briefly introduce the author and the work, illustrate the uses Döblin made of particular sources in writing the novel, and invite discussion of the purposes he is pursuing by adopting a specifically Chinese theme and setting for the work.

Speaker Bio

David Midgley is Professor emeritus of German Literature and Intellectual History at the University of Cambridge, and Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge. His major publications include *Arnold Zweig: Zu Werk und Wandlung 1927-1948* (Frankfurt am Main 1980) and *Writing Weimar: Critical Realism in German Literature, 1918-1933* (Oxford 2000). He recently produced a new edition of Alfred Döblin's Indian epic *Manas* (Frankfurt am Main 2016; first published in 1927), has written extensively on the use of ethnographic sources in Döblin's South American novel *Amazonas* (1937-38), and is currently preparing a book in English that will serve as a guide to all the major fiction of Alfred Döblin.