

Introduction: “Middlebrow” in Perspective

By Liu Ts'un-yan

I



PROFESSOR CHI-CHEN WANG 王際真, when he published his revised translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢¹ in 1958, mentioned that P'u Sung-ling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715), the well-known author of *Liao-chai chih-yi* 聊齋誌異,² had also written a great novel, *Marriage as Retribution* (*Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* 醒世姻緣傳), which was not printed until 1870, a hundred and fifty-five years after his death. Although Prof. Wang's date for the first appearance of *Marriage as Retribution* in print is yet to be definitively established, none of the readers of this collection of Chinese “middlebrow” fiction, or of Prof. Wang's translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* for that matter, would deny that *Marriage as Retribution* is a marvellous piece of writing for the early eighteenth century, and we are fortunate that Prof. Wang has now made available to us, for inclusion in this volume, seven chapters selected from this work; adapted and translated by him into lucid contemporary English.

It seems fitting for me as Editor to make one or two observations on the basic meaning of “middlebrow” in the Chinese context. I feel the more obliged to do so because, on the face of it, the label would appear to be somewhat pejorative. To my mind there are at least two reasons why it is difficult for a scholar of Chinese

¹The passage is found in his Introduction to the abridged paperbound reprint of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, published by Doubleday, New York, 1958, by arrangement with Twayne Publishers; p. xx. The original translation was also published in that year. His earlier translation, bearing the same English title, was published by George Routledge & Son, London, in 1929.

²See Herbert A. Giles's trans., *Strange Tales from*

a Chinese Studio, 4th ed., rev., Kelly & Walsh, Shanghai, 1926. It is perhaps the most extensive selection (164 stories) from *Liao-chai chih-yi*. For new translations of a total of ten stories from *Liao-chai* by Y.K. Martin, Yuk-ying Lo, Katherine Carlitz and C.Y. Hsü, as well as the article “P'u Sung-ling and His *Liao-chai Chih-i*—Literary Imagination and Intellectual Consciousness in Early Ch'ing China” by Chun-shu Chang and Hsüeh-lun Chang, see *Renditions* No. 13, 1980, pp. 60-139.

background to define, or explain, what is meant by "middlebrow" in Chinese fiction. First, in the past, traditional Chinese intellectuals despised all of fiction outright, even more so than their Western counterparts, some of whom held that the novel by its very nature was too wide and amorphous to be considered a literary genre. The recognition of *Chin Ping Mei, the Adventurous History of Hsi-men Ch'ing and his Six Wives* 金瓶梅 and *Dream of the Red Chamber* as giants in the forest of Chinese literature was in fact a brand-new idea when advanced by the pioneer critics of the May Fourth Movement in the early years of this century. This revolutionary re-evaluation of the two works, elevating them (and the reading of them) to a high (or "highbrow") artistic level, was partly the result of Western influence, and partly a reaction against the excessive disdain suffered at the hands of genteel society by their authors, members of a thankless profession. Previously, much opprobrium had been attached to these two novels despite their tremendously large circulation, and despite the fact that they were avidly and surreptitiously read, sometimes under the cover of Confucian texts. The first was regarded as a stimulant for sexual pleasure, and the second, now shown by scholarly analysis to be an unfinished but masterly novel of manners, had been seen as just an excuse for a good sentimental weep.

Secondly, the word "middlebrow" cannot meaningfully be separated from either "highbrow" on the one hand or "lowbrow" on the other, and therefore implies a scale of judgment of both book and reader, evolved within the Western literary context. But traditional-style Chinese fiction and its readers cannot be judged by criteria and standards developed in the West during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The wholesale application of such a scale of judgment from another literary tradition would make the Chinese models of excellence (the "highbrow" works) so rare that the very concept of excellence would end up having a meaning quite different from that which it had in its original setting.

To put it in another way, our scale of judgment acquires different gradations as it moves from one historical period to another, and from one literature to another.

The history of Chinese fiction went through many a zigzag before it came to the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and in each period new trends and old remnants overlapped. In early times, fictional writings were normally regarded as frivolous by-ways of literature: "必有可觀者焉，致遠恐泥 though they are worth exploring, one may get bogged down if one goes too far."³ Needless to say, these works, largely miscellaneous jottings or sayings attributed to some historical or non-historical figure, were written entirely in the classical language. During the T'ang dynasty (618-907) conscious fiction-writing flourished, and creative pieces of this genre were used by scholar-candidates at the capital, Ch'ang-an 長安, as "presentation scrolls" 溫卷⁴—samples enabling their future examiners to appreciate

³Treatise on Bibliography, *Han-shu* 漢書, *chüan* 30.

⁴For *wen-chüan*, see Chao Yen-wei 趙彥衛, *Yün-lu man-ch'ao* 雲麓漫鈔, 8 (preface 1206). Cf. "Shang Ch'üan Te-yü pu-ch'üeh wen-chüan chüeh chin-t'ui

ch'i" 上權德輿補闕溫卷決進退啟 in Liu Tsung-yüan, *Liu Ho-tung chi* 柳河東集, *chüan* 36. See also Ch'eng Ch'ien-fan 程千帆, *T'ang-tai chin-shih hsing-chüan yü wen-hsüeh* 唐代進士行卷與文學, Shanghai, 1980, pp. 3-45.

their talent. It is said that even Han Yü 韓愈 (768-824) and Liu Tsung-yüan 柳宗元 (773-819), the two prose masters of the time, indulged in this popular style of writing, known as *ch'uan-ch'i* 傳奇 (tales of marvels and strange adventure). P'u Sung-ling, who deliberately followed the tradition of the T'ang dynasty stories, distinguished himself in the eighteenth century with his *Liao-chai* stories. However brilliant and versatile these authors were, their writings inevitably took the traditional literary form, and their contemporaries and readers of later generations, themselves accustomed to the euphuistic mode of writing, showed a very high appreciation of their ornate and decidedly "highbrow" style. When in 1679 P'u Sung-ling wrote a preface for his collection of over four hundred stories about fairies, ghosts, and fox-spirits, he did so in *ku-wen* and parallel-prose, and in it he justifiably compared himself to Kan Pao 干寶 of the fourth century, who was said to have compiled the *Records of Spirits* 搜神記.⁵

Paralleling developments in European literature, Chinese fiction felt the need to become more down to earth in content than the "tabletalk" of the Six Dynasties (222-588), and closer to common speech in form and style than the prose romances of the T'ang dynasty. To extract literary truth, fictional and creative, from all the facets and dimensions of common life, the colloquial language is far more effective than the classical, which so easily becomes an incongruous farrago of allusions and superfluous embellishments. Colloquial fiction in China probably began in the late T'ang, deeply influenced by a type of Buddhist sermon then popular. There is no doubt that many elements of Buddhist literature influenced and enriched Chinese popular fiction, particularly tales of combat between various celestial beings, and the individual characters of a host of originally Buddhist deities. But these progressive trends were counteracted by the studied nature of the Chinese language, succinct and semi-antiquated, which continued to be strongly pervasive even in colloquial literature. Fuller description, dialogue and narrative representing the actual events of daily life are not to be found in works before the sixteenth century, and even then the style is only partly colloquial. Moreover, many of the ritual conventions and stereotypes followed by the Buddhist sermons and recorded in their texts found their way into Chinese popular fiction in the form of inserted eulogizing verses, *gāthās*, as did traditional poetry and other literary forms. Sometimes part of a Chinese popular *nouvelle* may sound like a ballad, or a *chante-fable*. To mention the most notorious example, the classic formula of the Chinese story-teller, "If you wish to know what happens next, you are welcome to hear my next exposition", coined after the style of the Buddhist serialized sermon, was still reverently followed (with only slight alterations) by writers of traditional-style colloquial fiction active in the mid-forties of this century. This style of fiction is known as the *chang-hui t'i* 章回體, or fiction divided into chapters, in which the beginning of each chapter except the first is obliged to revert (*hui* 回) to what is said at the end of the preceding chapter. Although Thomas Love Peacock included verses in his tales, he was

⁵In Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang tr., *The Man Who Sold a Ghost*, Peking, 1958, 23 stories from *Records of Spirits* are translated. A selection from the same work, translated by Kenneth De Woskin, was

presented in *Renditions* No. 7, 1977, pp. 103-104 and 166-168, under the title "In Search of the Supernatural".

fortunate enough not to have shackled himself with a cangue and chain of this particular sort in his narrative exertions.

Thus the substance of Chinese fiction, one might almost say its artistic outlook, remained encumbered with irrelevances until the sixteenth century. The traditional story-tellers who eked out a living in the market-place, and the professional or semi-professional writers who pastiched these oral performances with wit and linguistic dexterity for the printing houses, provided successive generations of the reading public with numerous editions of novelettes, short stories, *chantefables* and works of a similar "lowbrow" nature, characterized by an almost unbelievable crudity and insensitiveness, which many modern scholars find perturbing. Thanks to the continuous labour of distinctive and individual talents who struggled over a period of more than two hundred years, these artistic shortcomings were, however, whittled away. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, sometimes regarded as a period of moral degeneracy, several of the best-known traditional novels were at last produced, including *Chin P'ing-Mei*, *Water Margin* 水滸 and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 三國志演義, which attained their main forms either anonymously or through controversial and complex authorship. Two others, *The Journey to the West* 西遊記 and *The Investiture of the Gods* 封神演義, have had their authorship more or less established by modern scholarship,⁶ while some of their stale and stilted prototypes have also been identified. Against a mass of mediocre works, these masterpieces of art stand out like a many-headed Triton among the minnows, distinguished by their intricacy of structure, memorable characterization, and amazingly vivid manipulation of complex narratives over wide expanses of time and space. Equally impressive are the several anthologies of short stories collected, reworked and edited (sometimes partly created) by Feng Meng-lung 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) and Ling Meng-ch'u 凌濛初 (1580-1644) of the late Ming. Without these antecedents, *Marriage as Retribution* by P'u Sung-ling, *The Scholars* 儒林外史 by Wu Ching-tzu 吳敬梓 (1701-1754), and *Dream of the Red Chamber* (also known as *The Story of the Stone* 石頭記) by Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in 曹雪芹 (1715?-1763) could never have been written.

Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in's novel, by far the most famous work of Chinese fiction, first circulated for many years in manuscript copies which still exist in several versions. Its first printed edition appeared in early 1792, nearly thirty years after the author's death. In this novel, the traditional literary paraphernalia, so fatal to the development of the writer's creative skill, have been reduced to a minimum or carefully utilized to meet the internal demands of the story and its characters.

⁶For the studies on the evolution and the authorship of these two works, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu Chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-century Chinese Novel*, Cambridge, 1970; Liu Ts'un-yan, "Wu Ch'eng-en, His Life and Career" in *Selected Papers from the Hall of Harmonious Wind*, Leiden, 1976, pp. 259-355; also Liu Ts'un-yan, *Buddhist and Taoist Influences on Chinese Novels*, Vol. I, *The Authorship of the Feng-shen yen-yi*, Wiesbaden, 1962. Besides Waley's *Monkey*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 3rd ed., 1943, for *The Journey to the West*

read Anthony C. Yu's new translation under the same title, Vols. I-III, Chicago, 1977-80. Two of the chapters first appeared in *Renditions* No. 2 and No. 13. For *The Investiture of the Gods* read Wilhelm Grube, *Feng-shen yen-i: Die Metamorphosen der Goetter: Historisch-mythologischer Roman aus dem chinesischen, Übersetzung der Kapitel 1 bis 46*, 2 vols., Leiden, 1912. This translation in German covers the first 46 chapters of the 100-chapter novel, followed by a synopsis of the remaining 54 chapters.

Professor David Hawkes, introducing his translation of this great novel, has described the uniqueness of Ts'ao's art in the following words:

But for all the little hair-cracks that the scholar's magnifying-glass reveals, *The Story of the Stone* is an amazing achievement and the psychological insight and sophisticated humour with which it is written can often delude a reader into judging it as if it were a modern novel. In fact neither the idea that fiction can be created out of the author's own experience, nor the idea that it can be concerned as much with inner experience—with motives, attitudes and feelings—as with outward events, both of which are a commonplace with us, had been so much as dreamed of in Xueqin (Hsüeh-ch'in)'s day. His numerous rewritings and the various mythopoeic "devices" with which his novel is littered all testify to his struggle to find some sort of framework on which to arrange his inchoate material.⁷

The last part of Prof. Hawkes' comment is also true of the authors and works included in this volume, even if the nature of their struggle sometimes differs. P'u Sung-ling certainly had a difficult struggle when he took up his brush, so used to writing elegant highbrow classical prose, and tried to produce with it a creative middlebrow work in *paihua*, even mixing in some of his own native Shantung dialect. Han Pang-ch'ing 韓邦慶 (1856-1894), the author of *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 海上花列傳 and a pioneer of dialectal literature, was criticized by one of his contemporaries for using Soochow dialect to produce the flexible diction which characterizes the whole of his marvellous creation. Tseng P'u 曾樸 (1871-1936) wrote his *A Flower in a Sinful Sea* 孽海花 from a nightmarish anxiety to save his country and his poor and downtrodden countrymen from further humiliation, volunteering to serve as spokesman for the intellectuals of his time. Like Tseng P'u, the remaining authors in our collection all lived in a transitional period when the literary revolution was under way; they, too, made their cool appraisals of a sordid society and social system and gave us their individual judgments on the human condition as they found it. Reading their works, even in translation, one cannot but be impressed by their imaginative faithfulness, the sensitivity of their perceptions, and their flair for depicting individual experience with artistic veracity. Except for P'u Sung-ling, who was from an earlier era, all these writers learned much from Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in.

After having charted the rise of Chinese fiction to its height, and thus set the scale against which the term "middlebrow" acquires its specifically Chinese significance, it may be appropriate for me to give a brief account here of each of the authors and works, in the order of their appearance in this volume.

⁷*The Story of the Stone*, Vol. 1, Penguin Classics, 1973, p. 43.

II



IN THE LATE NINETEEN TWENTIES a small number of rhymed pieces written in *paihua* by P'u Sung-ling were discovered, thanks to the efforts of Ma Li-hsün 馬立勛, who was from the same district in Shantung (Tzu-ch'uan 淄川) as P'u. Before that time the reading public was unaware of the fact that the distinguished author who had given us in his *Liao-chai* tales many vivid narratives in the classical style of the T'ang dynasty was in fact also a great writer in the vernacular. A collection of P'u's *paihua* drum-songs was published in 1929, and since then much new material has been added to our knowledge in this direction. Besides works gathered in China, there is a large number of transcribed manuscripts, in *paihua* or otherwise, written by P'u, which is kept as a special collection in Keiō University, Tokyo. No matter how dense the clouds of suspicion were fifty years ago over this matter of authorship, they should have been dispersed by now. Yet some lingering voices still argue that P'u Sung-ling may not be the author of *Marriage as Retribution*.

The earliest extant edition of *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* is undated, though it carries a foreword signed by one Master of the Green Foliage (Huan-pi Chu-jen 環碧主人), with the cyclical date *hsin-ch'ou* 辛丑. Without supporting evidence, it is difficult to know to which *hsin-ch'ou* year it refers. However, Professor Sun K'ai-ti's 孫楷第 early study indicated that in the Japanese bibliographical catalogue, *Hakusai shomoku* 舶載書目 (1728), a copy of this novel is mentioned, in which the same foreword and other identical material are recorded. This proves beyond a doubt that *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* must have been completed, even published, before 1728. The *hsin-ch'ou* in question, I suspect, was 1721, seven years before the work was included in the Japanese catalogue, and six years after P'u's death (1715). Another *hsin-ch'ou* in this connection could be sixty years earlier, 1661. But then P'u Sung-ling would have been only nineteen years (or 20 *sui*) old. It is most unlikely that he could have written such a valuable novel, recreating so many interesting experiences in life, at such a young age. Yet another possibility we should not completely overlook is the year 1781, towards the latter period of the reign of Ch'ien-lung 乾隆. Since it was established long ago by scholars that the early editions of P'u's *Liao-chai chih-yi* were published in Hupeh and Chekiang in 1765-66, it might seem unlikely that *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* could have been engraved more than forty years earlier, in 1721. However, in *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* there is a prologue from the hand of a Taoist Learner of the Eastern Peak (Tung-ling Hsüeh-tao-jen 東嶺學道人), who maintains that "this work was transcribed first from Wulin 武林 (Hangchow), collated against a copy printed in Pai-hsia 白下 (Nanking)", so that the extant edition could not be its earliest. In the absence of better and more convincing evidence, I shall hold for the time being that the novel may have been published before 1728—unless it was a transcribed manuscript copy which was brought to Japan.

Before Dr. Hu Shih 胡適 (1891-1962), few scholars had seriously probed into the question of the authorship of this work. At the end of the book's introductory remarks there are two lines: "Edited by the Scholar of Western Chou (Hsi-Chou

Sheng 西周生); collated by the Master of Burning Pigweed-wood (Jan-li-tzu 燃藜子).” The famous calligrapher and painter, Cheng Hsieh 鄭燮 (1693-1765), had used Pavilion of Burning Pigweed-wood (Jan-li ko 燃藜閣) as one of his pen-names, and between 1742 and 1753 he was magistrate of the Fan District 范縣 and the Wei District 濰縣 in Shantung. If the extant earliest edition of the work really was not printed before 1728, Cheng may have had a chance to “collate”, even if only in name, the present edition. He was himself a famous literary man known to have penned some semi-colloquial *tz'u* poems in a specific style called *tao-ch'ing* 道情. But the evidence is vague. As to the Scholar of Western Chou, there has been speculation in recent years suggesting that it could be a pen-name of Ting Yao-k'ang 丁耀亢 (c. 1620-1691), who was the author of *A Sequel to Chin P'ing Mei* 續金瓶梅 and was also a native of Shantung, having the *tz'u* (courtesy name), Hsi-sheng 西生. In general, however, I believe that recent speculation is not as convincing as Dr. Hu's discoveries of nearly half a century ago, particularly since Hu's evidence agrees with many collateral proofs and is substantiated by additional textual records.

Hu Shih was one of the pioneering contemporary scholars who turned their attention to the history of Chinese popular fiction shortly after they spearheaded the May Fourth Cultural Movement. Some of his findings have been cited in Lu Hsün's 魯迅 (1881-1936) *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* 中國小說史略, and he reciprocally mentioned his indebtedness to Lu Hsün's work.⁸ He is known to have contributed immensely to the studies of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *Water Margin*, *The Journey to the West*, *The Scholars* and a number of other important novels, such as *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* (which is presented in part in this volume), but he seems to have taken special pride in his findings on the work in question, *Marriage as Retribution*. In his long study, completed in 1935, he says:

The solution of this difficult problem has passed through many twists and turns. There were hypotheses which were courageously assumed as a starting point for an inquiry, there was evidence patiently gathered, and in the end there were proofs which were regarded as satisfactory by us.⁹

He cites a verse description of an elegant lady skilful in needle-work, who wishes to teach others her method of embroidering a pair of mandarin ducks in golden silk, and expresses his own desire to use this study of *Marriage as Retribution* to illustrate his method of analysis. As this novel has not been widely studied in the West, it may be of interest if I cite here some of his arguments and proofs.

In the novel, syphilis is mentioned several times. Syphilis was first known to the Chinese in the seventeenth century, hence Hu Shih believes that this work should be dated late Ming or early Ch'ing. The novel also mentions a few fictional characters originally found in *Water Margin* and *The Journey to the West*, which began to be circulated in their final forms at approximately this time.

The first thing about *Marriage as Retribution* which inspired Hu Shih to suspect

⁸Hu Shih *wen-ts'un* 胡適文存, Vol. II, *chüan* 2, Taipei reprint, 1953, p. 475.

⁹*Ib.*, Vol. IV, *chüan* 3, p. 329.

a connection between the novel and P'u Sung-ling was its basic theme—the sufferings of a henpecked husband—which is also found in a number of short stories in the *Liao-chai*. One which is particularly similar to *Marriage as Retribution*, he pointed out, is the story, “Chiang Ch'eng”.¹⁰

The plot of *Marriage as Retribution* is roughly as follows: in a previous incarnation Ch'ao Yüan 晁源 shot to death a fox-spirit and peeled off its skin. He was also besotted with Chen-ko 珍哥, his lovely concubine, and his proper wife, *née* Chi 計氏, felt so aggrieved that she hanged herself. In his present incarnation he has become the scholar Ti Hsi-ch'en 狄希陳: his wife, Hsüeh Su-chieh 薛素姐, is the reincarnation of the fox; and his concubine, T'ung Chi-chieh 童寄姐, was his wife Chi in the previous incarnation. Ti Hsi-ch'en is now constantly harassed, tortured, and humiliated by his two women folk, in particular by his concubine, whose extreme truculence and cruelty make life totally unbearable for him. In the end, after many ups and downs, the high priest, Hu Wu-yi 胡無醫, indicates to Ti his *karma*, and after Ti has chanted the *Diamond Sūtra* over ten thousand times in repentance, his torments end, and he is able to live a harmonious family life. Hu Shih suggests that in this story there are at least eight points which are identical with details in the story “Chiang Ch'eng”, and he believes that this similarity cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence.

In 1930, the great Chinese bibliographer Professor Sun K'ai-ti wrote to Hu Shih, who had asked him to carry out a further study using the geographical locations, the natural disasters and the historical figures described in the novel as his guide. Professor Sun had consulted a number of Shantung district gazetteers and found that the geography of the novel was restricted to the Chang-ch'iu 章邱 and Tzu-ch'uan Districts, and that the actual time of its writing was between late Ming and early Ch'ing, roughly between 1628 and 1722, but not earlier than 1628. He pointed out that Li Ts'ui-jan 李粹然, a good-hearted official in Chapter 31 of the novel, is a historical figure. He also informed Hu Shih that the many natural disasters recorded in Chapters 27, 29 and 31 of the novel were real happenings in the District of Tzu-ch'uan.

Following up Sun's leads, Hu Shih found a passage in one of P'u Sung-ling's *Collected Essays (Liao-chai wen-chi 聊齋文集)*, entitled “Chi-ts'ai ch'ien-pien” 紀災前編, in which the disastrous situation of Tzu-ch'uan in the spring of 1703 is vividly described:

In the fourth month of the cyclical year *kuei-wei* 癸未 (1703), it rained, and the two crops of wheat did not yield a good harvest. On the day *chia-tzu* 甲子, the 24th of the fifth month, it rained all day long, after which incessant rains followed, which hampered proper weeding. In the end the weeds grew as high as the stalks and blurred the marks of the dyked-fields. After the 19th of the sixth month the weather was fine again, and there was no more rain. The water stood upto the calves, and continuously sunny days made the water in the fields as hot as soup, and all the stalks of grain became withered. The highlands

¹⁰In *chüan* 7. For a recent English translation of No. 13, pp. 116-24. “Chiang Ch'eng” by Katherine Carlitz, see *Renditions*,

were not so badly flooded, but they were attacked by swarms of insects which came to gather on the grain which had a very strong smell. . . . The stalks were bitten, and soon withered, leaving only the husks. Horses and oxen would not taste them because of their odour.

He compared this record with that of an identical disaster that fell on the District of Wu-ch'eng 武城 in 1478, as described in Chapter 90 of the novel:

. . . . It happened around the 20th of the fourth month, when the wheat was about to ripen. Suddenly the rain started on the day *chia-tzu*. It rained cats and dogs for seven or eight days and nights without stopping. Then it stopped for a while, and then the downpours came again. . . . Because of this incessant rain, the ears as well as the stalks of the grain in the villages had all become rotten, emitting a repugnant odour.

Hu Shih believed these two passages to have come from the same writer, who was actually describing a real disaster in 1703-4. "The day *chia-tzu*" as found in both texts served as a key in the investigation.

The discovery of a certain amount of *paihua* literature written by P'u Sung-ling bolstered Hu Shih in his speculation that the same P'u Sung-ling might be the author of the novel, *Marriage as Retribution*, as both the other material and the novel are written in the same language, that is, *paihua* intermingled with a very strong local Shantung dialect. Explaining the methods he used in probing into the linguistic aspects of the problem, Hu Shih argued that although it was generally possible for authors of a later time to imitate the colloquial expressions used by people of an early time, nevertheless *Marriage as Retribution* was probably an exception to this rule, as much of the *paihua* found in it was in fact a very particular dialect spoken only by the people of a certain region, which would defy imitation. Besides, *Marriage as Retribution* itself was not a very popular work of fiction in Ch'ing times, and the *paihua* drum-songs and other material of P'u's had actually been buried over two hundred years before they were discovered. It would be utterly impossible for anyone to imitate the language of a mass of material not committed to print and to compose a novel of 100 chapters in that tongue.

With the assistance of another friend, Hu Shih gathered a dozen-odd pieces of evidence, identifying peculiar words found both in the novel and in P'u Sung-ling's other *paihua* material: for example, *tai-chung* (待中 going to be), *chung* (中 good for, ready), *mo-t'o* (魔駝 to delay, to linger over), *ch'u-shang* (出上 to risk), *t'an-yeh* (探業 to be content), *liu-shui* (流水 immediately), *t'ou-hsin* (頭信 might well), *shan-ch'a* (善查 an easy-to-handle person), *lao huan-tao* (老獾叨 old badger—old folk), *pien* (扁 kept secretly), *p'ien* (偏 show off), *cha* (呶 crazy, crazily), *chao* (照 to resist), and *chang sang-huang* (長嚙黃 hold one's tongue). Hu Shih further pointed out that although in some places some of these words are represented by two differently written homophones, in the majority of cases they are completely identical. This convinced him that these colloquial expressions must have come from the same hand.

All the evidence given above is of the internal kind which, though convincing,

still needs external corroboration. Many other works, to this date, are in want of this kind of decisive evidence to resolve the problems relating to their authorship. Luckily for *Marriage as Retribution*, there exists just such a piece of evidence. Professor Teng Chih-ch'eng 鄧之誠 (1887-1960) made the following note on P'u Sung-ling in his miscellaneous jottings, *Ku-tung so-chi* 骨董瑣記, published around 1929:

In 1766, when Chao Ch'i-kao 趙起杲 (d. 1766) of Lai-yang 萊陽 (Shantung) was the prefect of Mu-chou 睦州 (in present-day Chekiang), he gave the manuscript of *Liao-chai* to Pao Yi-wen 鮑以文 (Pao T'ing-po 鮑廷博, well-known bibliophile and publisher, 1728-1814) for engraving. Yü Jung-shang 余蓉裳 (Yü Chi 余集, 1738-1823) was sojourning at Chao's place at that time, so he participated in its collation. Pao Yi-wen said that P'u had another work, *Hsing-shih yin-yüan*, in which some of the characters were genuine persons. A lawsuit was lodged later against P'u by the family concerned. As a result P'u was stripped of his title as a Tribute Student. . . . (*chüan* 7)

The Chekiang edition of *Liao-chai* is known as the Ch'ing-k'o T'ing 青柯亭 edition, and appeared one year after the first edition was printed in Hupeh (1765). Although, historically speaking, P'u Sung-ling was never stripped of his scholarly title (which he only managed to obtain in 1711 at the age of 72 *sui*), Hu Shih believed Pao T'ing-po's statement about the authorship of *Marriage as Retribution* to be no mere hearsay. As a matter of fact, it later became known that Professor Teng's words were taken largely from the jottings of another Ch'ing scholar, the *Meng-lan so-pi* 夢闌瑣筆 of Yang Fu-chi 楊復吉 (1747-1820):

P'u Liu-hsien 留仙 (i.e. P'u Sung-ling)'s *Liao-chai chih-yi* was not published until a century after his death. In 1765 and 1766 it was printed in Hupeh and Chekiang simultaneously. The Hupeh edition was printed by a Mr. Wang 王, who was a magistrate, and the Chekiang edition by the Prefect, Chao Ch'i-kao. Pao Yi-wen said that P'u had another work, *Hsing-shih yin-yüan*, in which some of the characters were genuine persons. A lawsuit was lodged [later] against P'u by the family concerned. As a result P'u was stripped of his title as a Tribute Student. . . . In 1780, Prefect Chao's son encountered P'u's grandson at the examination-hall, and the latter spoke about this. He mentioned also that there are still several hundred unpublished *Liao-chai* stories.¹¹

Yang Fu-chi's record is not a hundred percent accurate, as we know that P'u Sung-ling died in 1715, only *half* a century before the first appearance of *Liao-chai* on the market in print. However, we have no reason to doubt his words concerning the authorship of *Marriage as Retribution*. Yang was a close friend of Pao T'ing-po, and in his random jottings, twice mentions Pao visiting his house. What he related he must have heard from Pao directly, and Pao, in turn, could have learned it from

¹¹ *Chao-tai ts'ung-shu* 昭代叢書, Series *kuei* 葵集, p. 53.

Chao Ch'i-kao, a native of Shantung, who had brought a transcribed copy of *Liao-chai* to the south.

The above summary is aimed at giving readers some plausible reasons why we still prefer to believe P'u to be the author of the novel, though detailed analysis in this respect is beyond the requirements of our present task. Hu Shih, in his investigation, criticizes as superstitious and artistically lame P'u's use of *karma* to link up the lives of two henpecked husbands in different incarnations, though he admits that he may be judging anachronistically, using the views of a twentieth century man to comment on a great realistic novel of the seventeenth century. Hence at the end of his study he writes:

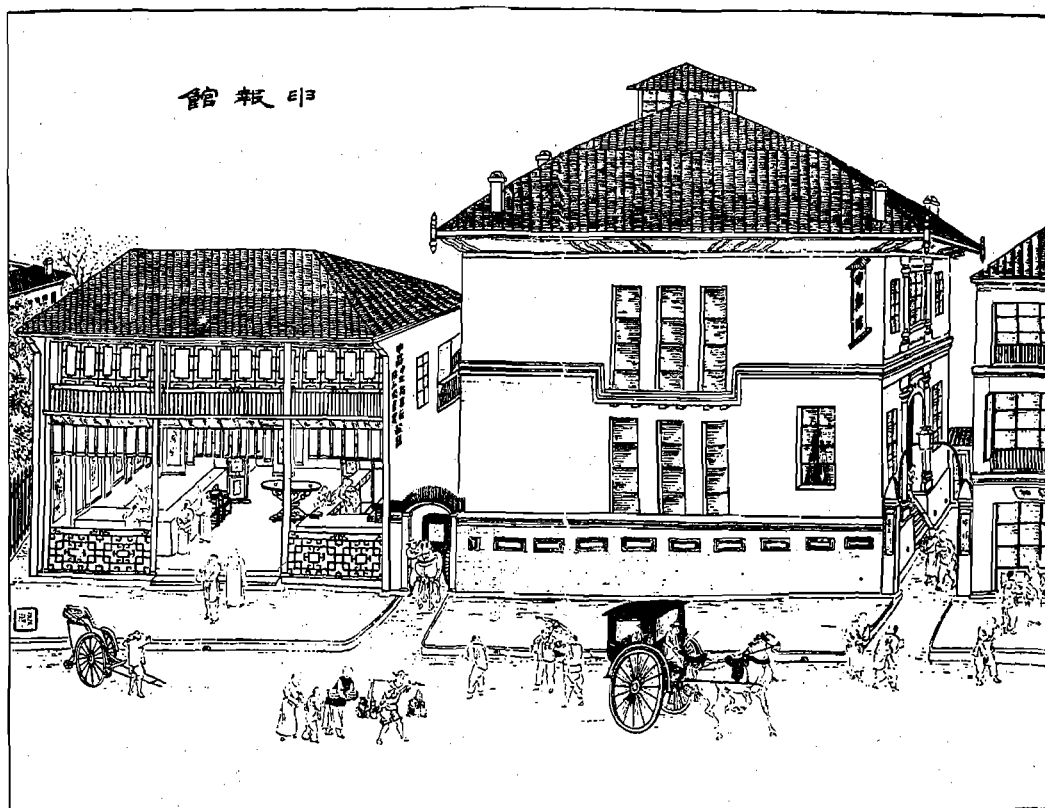
Marriage as Retribution is truly a most valuable source for the study of social history. Side by side with the incredible, the insoluble and the ridiculous, we find valuable social data. P'u Sung-ling believes in fox-spirits—this belief was true for him; he believes in ghosts—ghosts were true for him too. Likewise he believes in *karma* and incarnation, he believes that "divorce is something one should never attempt", he believes that there is no relief from the sufferings of married life except through tolerance and the chanting of Buddha's names for deliverance. These were all true for him, and they represent the most common beliefs of his time.¹²

In his translation of selected chapters from this novel, Professor Chi-chen Wang—himself originally also from Shantung—uses his admirable style to provide us with an English version almost as colloquial as the original. What we have here is a guide to the manners, customs and social milieu of P'u Sung-ling's time, in a work of fiction that is greatly different in style and language from the supernatural stories in the *Liao-chai* collection, which have the T'ang tales as their model.

III

MARRIAGE AS RETRIBUTION is the only work included in this anthology which raises a problem of authorship. *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* (*Hai-shang hua lieh-chuan*) appeared first in serial form in a bi-weekly journal, *Hai-shang ch'i-shu* 海上奇書, published in Shanghai in 1892. The author, Han Pang-ch'ing (*tzu*, Tzu-yün 子雲), was also the editor of the magazine, though he cleverly gave himself a pen-name, Flowers Too Feel For Me 花也憐儂. His story, set in the bustling port city, portrayed the lives of the local courtesans of different grades, from the high to the low, with whom he was extremely familiar. The background of the author is given in various contemporary memoirs

¹²Hu Shih *wen-ts'un*, Vol. IV, *chüan* 3, p. 383.



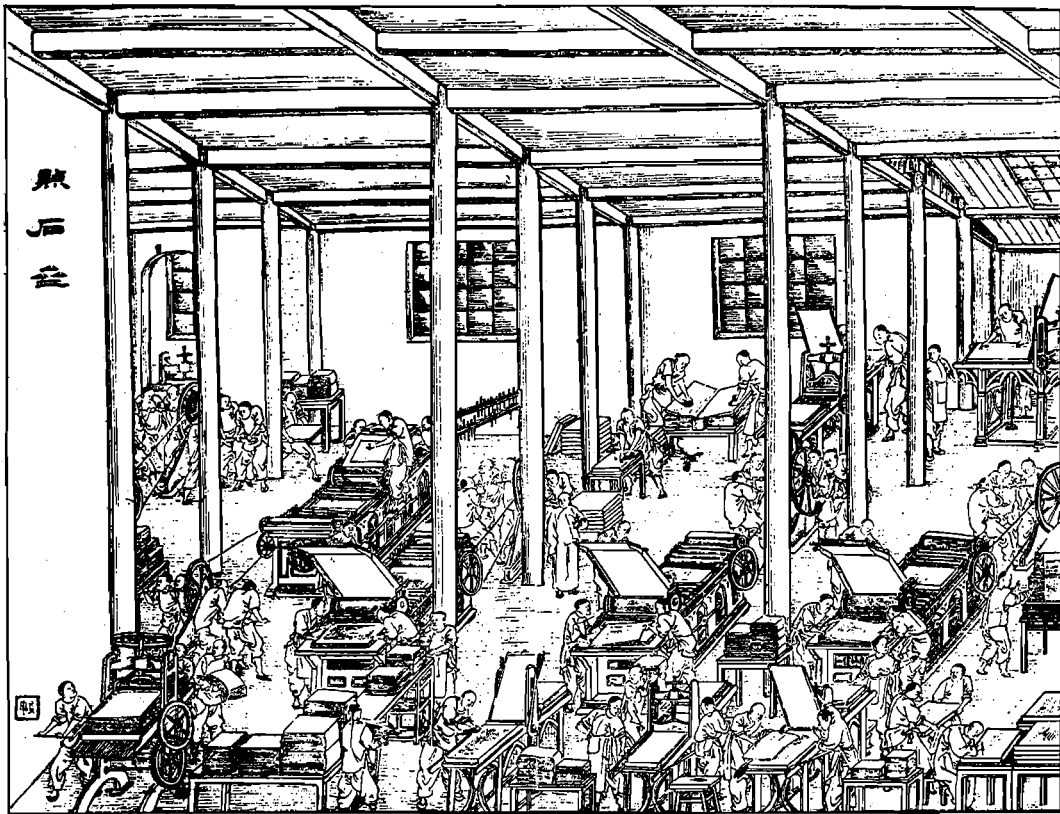
THE SHUN PAO EDITORIAL OFFICES in Shanghai, early 1880's; depicted by Wu Yu-ju 吳友如.

(*pi-chi*), as well as in Lu Hsün's *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. In a preface to the Ya-tung 亞東 edition of this novel (1926), Hu Shih made an even more detailed study, incorporating additional material gathered from Sun Yü-sheng 孫玉聲, the journalist-author,¹³ and Lei Chin 雷瑋, both friends of Han. Han died in 1894, when he was a mere 39 *sui*. It was in the same year that the novel was completed, 64 chapters in all.

Han Pang-ch'ing came from a gentry family in Sungkiang 松江, Kiangsu. In his childhood he went to live in Peking with his father, Han Tsung-wen 韓宗文, a licenti-

¹³Sun Yü-sheng, whose formal name was Sun Chia-chen 孫家振, was born probably in 1862, in Shanghai. He worked at the *Sin Wan Pao* 新聞報 in the early years of this century, and was also the proprietor of the *Hsiao-lin Pao* 笑林報, a paper mostly devoted to the lives and movements of the sing-song girls in the International Settlement. His novel, *Dream of the Gay Life in Shanghai* 海上繁華夢, written under a pseudonym Ku-hu Ching-meng Ch'ih-hsien 古滬警夢痴仙 (A Silly Immortal Sounding Alarms on the Old River Banks of Shanghai) between 1903-6, was published in

three Series and 100 chapters. During the Republic he mainly used the name Hai-shang Sou-shih-sheng 海上漱石生 (The Scholar Who Rinses His Mouth with Rocks) for his new publications. He lived into the mid-thirties. The allusion in his new pen-name is taken from the *Shih-shuo hsün-yü* 世說新語, a collection of anecdotes, short conversations and clever remarks attributed to historical figures who lived between about 150 and 420 A.D. See Richard B. Mather tr., *A New Account of Tales of the World*, Minneapolis, 1976, p. 402.



THE TIEN-SHIH STUDIO LITHOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP in the early 1880's, again depicted by Wu Yu-ju.

ate (1858) who served as a secretary in the Ministry of Justice. Pang-ch'ing returned to the south later and took his Bachelor degree when he was barely twenty. However, providence begrudged him any further advancement in the state examinations, and after several unsuccessful attempts in Nanking, and one in Peking in the autumn of 1891, he decided to stay in Shanghai and offered regular contributions to *Shun Pao* 申報 (Shen Pao), a newspaper established in 1872 by the Englishman Frederick Major. Among his friends in Shanghai were Ho Kuei-sheng 何桂笙 and Ch'ien Cheng 錢徵 (*tzu*, Hsin-po 忻伯), the latter a son-in-law of Wang T'ao 王韜 (1828-1897?), who assisted James Legge in the translation of the Chinese Classics. Like Wang T'ao, Pang-ch'ing was an opium addict, and is known to have frequented a certain brothel for one particular prostitute whom he loved ardently. He practically edited his journal and wrote his novel in her boudoir. It was very attractively printed, with exquisite illustrations produced by artists of the Tien-shih Studio 點石齋, and was sold at ten cents per copy. It was one of the forerunners of later fictional journals, but did not have a very wide circulation because it was never published on time. The contents, two chapters of the novel to each issue and some miscellaneous jottings on the customs and products of remote places in China, together with short stories in the classical style, were largely a one-man show.

As a novelist Han Pang-ch'ing seems to have realized the importance of designing and developing his work, scattering subplots and subtle clues throughout, in such a way that in the end a solid, linear structure emerges, clear, vivid and fresh. He admitted, in the forewords which appeared inside the cover of each issue of his journal, that he patterned his writing after the discursive style of Wu Ching-tzu's *The Scholars*, but the methods of haphazard presentation and casual insertion of episodes which he employed were entirely his own. Lu Hsün has pointed out the weakness of *The Scholars* in these words: "The novel has no central plot Various characters are introduced in succession, their stories starting with their appearance and ending with their exit from the stage. So this long novel is like a group of short stories or a patchwork quilt of silk; though it lacks one great design, the rich and rare episodes which run through it make it entertaining and worthy of serious attention."¹⁴ Although Han Pang-ch'ing modelled his work on *The Scholars*, his claim, and it seems a fair one, is that he did have a grand design. This centres in the first part on the vicissitudinous life of a young man, Chao P'u-chai 趙樸齋 (Simplicity in Eileen Chang's 張愛玲 translation), who squanders all he has on prostitutes, and in the second part on the sad fate of his younger sister, a sing-song girl whose single-minded devotion is betrayed by her heartless lover, the scion of a rich family whom she had planned to marry though it meant giving up all her possessions. Within this broad framework there are a large number of subplots dealing with the wanton lives led by various other dissolute characters, and episodes describing drinking parties held by literary celebrities, merchants in the foreign concessions, and so forth. These many episodes the author manipulates with great skill, inserting a character here, revealing a clue there. "There is not one episode in the novel that can be described as complete," the author writes, "but there is not one thread of the silk which cannot be traced back to the skein." Among his characters Chao P'u-chai was a real person, while many others, including Wang T'ao already mentioned, Li Sheng-to 李盛鐸 (1860-1937), the official and bibliophile, Sheng Hsüan-huai 盛宣懷 (1849-1916), the politician and financier, Hu Kuang-jung 胡光燾 (Hsüeh-yen 雪巖, 1823-1885), the well-known nineteenth-century banker, Ma Chien-chung 馬建忠 (1884-1900), the author of the first grammar of Classical Chinese, based on Latin, and Yang Yüeh-lou 楊月樓 (father of Yang Hsiao-lou 楊小樓 1877?-1938), the distinguished actor whose sobriquet was Monkey Yang, were all given fictitious names.¹⁵

In fact, characterization is an area in which the author scored a conscious success in his novel. He asserted that the nature, the temperament, the attitude and manner of each character, appearing for a second time in the book, should not be inconsistent with what has been ascribed to him or her on an earlier occasion, so that a proper link can be maintained. In this respect he proved himself a great master, capable of delineating distinctive features in the characters he created:

¹⁴ A *Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang), Peking, 1959, p. 290.

¹⁵ See the anonymous work *T'an-ying-shih pi-chi* 譚瀛室筆記 quoted in Chiang Jui-tsao 蔣瑞藻, *Hsiao-*

shuo k'ao-cheng 小說考證, *chüan* 8, Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1935, pp. 221-2. For an interesting and reliable biography of the late *wu-sheng* 武生 actor Yang Hsiao-lou, read Chou Chih-fu 周志輔, *Yang Hsiao-lou p'ing-chuan* 楊小樓評傳, Seattle, 1978.

some are ferocious and spiteful, some are loveable and innocent, some are infatuated with blind passion and others are flirtatious and full of sensual desire. Dr. Stephen Cheng 鄭緒雷 gives a full analysis of the novel's narrative method in his article, and it would be superfluous for me to dwell further on this aspect of Han's work.

The reputation of *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* is due in particular to the dialectal expressions and dialogues it contains. The dialect Han Pang-ch'ing adopted in this novel is that of Soochow, which is the main spoken language in the region comprising Soochow, Sungkiang, Ch'ang-chou 常州 (Wuchin 武進), Taitsang 太倉 of Kiangsu Province, and Hangchow, Kashing 嘉興 and Hu-chou 湖州 (Wushing 吳興) of Chekiang Province. Shanghai, being a metropolis and an international seaport, with a mixture of dialects spoken by people and travellers from both provinces, belongs dialectally to this *Wu* group. Most of the courtesans doing business in Shanghai at this time came from Soochow. Han Pang-ch'ing wished to depict their lives and everyday conversation vividly, and believed that without dialect the quality of the sentiment and the intimate feelings of the persons described, and the nuances and colour of their speech, could not be preserved. His inspiration for this was actually Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in. In the autumn of 1891, on the steamship sailing south to Shanghai from Tientsin, he debated the point with Sun Yü-sheng, who had resolutely advised him against experimenting with the Soochow dialect in fiction. Han's argument was: "Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in used the Peking dialect (Mandarin) successfully in his *The Story of the Stone*; why can't I try to write mine in the Soochow dialect?"¹⁶

The Chinese national language, which is designated *Putong hua* in the Pinyin system of romanization today, is the same as what used to be called *kuo-yü*, or Mandarin. It is the standard language throughout the country. But this standard language, like standard languages elsewhere, is basically a local dialect, which through its common adoption by a leading social group was elevated to a position of prestige. The phenomenon of its elevation was a gradual, evolutionary one, a historical process of perhaps more than a thousand years. During the larger part of the period between the mid-tenth century and the late nineteenth century, Peking was sometimes one of the capitals, sometimes the only capital city, and the elevation of the northern dialect to a position of prestige is socially and politically justified. Historically speaking, many of the vernacular aspects of standard Chinese which were consolidated in the early Republic had their roots in the earlier literature, notably folk-songs, fiction and drama. Needless to say, as a standard but artificial language, it also preserves to a very great extent literary elements of the classical language, which had perhaps ceased to be a spoken language since the second century B.C., and became ever less so with time. The goal set for this language, that of making it a standard national language completely identical in its written form with the living speech, is still far from being realized.

The Soochow dialect is distinctive in China for having a written literature. Other dialectal literatures exist, in Cantonese, and to some degree also in the Foo-chow, Swatow and Hakka dialects. Like dialectal literatures the world over, the earlier Soochow and Cantonese dialectal works were folk-songs and librettos; dia-

¹⁶Sun, *T'ui-hsing lu pi-chi* 退省廬筆記, *chüan hsia* 卷下, Shanghai 1925, pp. 11a-b.

lects were also used in the farcical and burlesque interludes inserted in operatic performances. The most famous collection of Cantonese folk-songs is the *Yüeh-ou* 粵謳, compiled by Chao Tzu-jung 招子庸 (d. 1846), in 1828. But there has not yet been a distinguished novel written in any other dialect in China comparable to *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, and on this count, we may elevate Han Pang-ch'ing to a position as high, for example, as that of Belgian novelists such as Léon Mahy or Dieudonne Boverie, who produced highly individual works of modern literature in the Walloon dialect.

Many Chinese dialects preserve a certain trace of an earlier language, and sometimes residual expressions and pronunciations of many centuries ago still form an active component of the dialect. For instance, in *Putong hua*, the verb for "to go" is *qu* 去 (*ch'ü*), but in the Peking dialect sometimes it is *shang* 上, reminiscent of an earlier expression as seen in the traditional idiom, *shang-ching kan-k'ao* 上京趕考 (journeying to the capital for examination). In *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, the pronoun for "you" is *nai* 耐 (pronounced *nieh*) which is probably a variant form of another character, *nai* 乃, standing for the second person possessive case in ancient times, as early as the fourteenth century B.C.¹⁷ In the same novel, there are also prepositional usages different from those of the standard language, just as Australians "give away" a hobby, whereas Britons "give it up". But there are many other instances where the expressions used in a dialect sound strange to the ears of an outsider, but come naturally to the native speaker as the most vigorous and distinctive features of a sub-standard colloquial form. For instance, someone who does not speak "Aussie" English may nevertheless grasp the meaning of "to get the raw end of the pineapple" in a given context, but he will be understandably puzzled when confronted with "drongo", to describe a total loser, or "chucking a mental," meaning "throwing a tantrum". Many similar expressions can be found in the Soochow dialect. In the second chapter of *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. Simplicity is brought by a merchant friend, Chang Hsiao-ts'un 張小村 (Hamlet), to a brothel where Hsiao-ts'un has a girl, Wang Ah-erh 王阿二 (Second Wong), whom he knows very well, but has not called on for quite some time. The girl is now angry with him for his "heartlessness":

Hsiao-ts'un smiled sheepishly and beseeched her: "Don't be angry. Let me explain." So he whispered something in her ear. Before he could complete his fourth sentence, Wang Ah-erh leapt to her feet and said with a wry face: "How smart you are! You want to throw a wet blanket on someone else so that you can get away. Isn't that so?"¹⁸

The term translated here as "wet blanket" is in Han Pang-ch'ing's original *shih pu-shan* 濕布衫, literally "wet cotton shirt". Normally made of very thin material, when soaked in the rain such a shirt sticks to the skin, hence is difficult to get off. "Wet blanket" might sound a plausible English equivalent, but really it means someone who dampens or discourages enthusiasm. Here, the original "wet cotton shirt" describes the awkward situation graphically, because of the particular thinness

¹⁷See B. Karlgren's translation of the *Book of Documents*, Stockholm, 1950, p. 21.

¹⁸*A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, p. 350, adapted LTY.

of the material involved, but the very liveliness of the dialect expression makes it difficult to render into equivalent English. Eileen Chang's version is indeed a valiant attempt: "Smart, aren't you! You want to put the wet shirt on somebody else and be well out of it, is that it?"

In his preface to the novel, Hu Shih cited especially the words of Wei Hsiah-sien 衛霞仙, the eloquent courtesan, talking to Mrs. Yao 姚奶奶, when she comes to the brothel to seek her husband. He commented that "her light, sharp and satisfying tones cannot be rendered into any other language without losing their original flavour."¹⁹ For the fun of it, I have asked my friend, Dr. Anne McLaren, of the Australian National University, to help me render that passage into colloquial English, and what we have ended up with reads as follows:

So you are looking for your lord and master. Why don't you search in your *own* house? Or did you give him to us to look after? Is that why you've come here? We women of the town have never gone to *your* home to get customers—no, it was you who made the first move to come here to get your hubby. How idiotic! Don't you know we're a brothel, here to do business with all comers? What do we care if he *is* your lord and master? Let me tell you a thing or two. When your husband is at home he is master of your house, but when he comes here he is our customer. If you were a decent piece of talent you'd be able to keep him hooked. How come you lost your grip and let him wander down here to get his fun? Anyway, what if he *is* here? Are you really going to drag him out? I ask you, has the smart set of Shanghai laid down any point of etiquette in such matters? I'm telling you, he is not here; but even if he were, don't you dare give him a tongue-lashing or a hiding. We don't give a stuff if you insult your own lord and master, but just watch out if you thrash one of our customers! (Ch. 23)

There are a few words here such as "hiding" and "hubby" which are either colloquial or "not often in formal use"; but we thought they might convey to some extent the strength of the original expressions (though not being veteran translators or dialect experts, we are not sure).

The above perhaps illustrates some of the serious difficulties faced by Miss Eileen Chang in translating *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* into English. For an English reader, a translation of a Chinese dialectal work does not have to be in an English dialect, though shades of meaning in the original, sometimes even the social strata it represents, may be better revealed and understood through the use of dialect in translation. Miss Chang has a great advantage in this respect. She grew up in Shanghai, and has in addition spent many years researching the Soochow dialect. I understand that she has already completed the first draft of a full translation of this unique novel, although we are able to publish only a few chapters from it in this volume. Besides Han's narrative, on which she has worked with meticulous care and sensitivity, she has also paid great attention to the chapter-titles of the novel which, like those of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, are written in couplets. Some of them

¹⁹Hu Shih *wen-ts'un*, Vol. III, *chüan* 6, pp. 490-1.

are not easy to understand even for Chinese readers nowadays. For instance:

*Planting poison berries, the patron gets a bargain;
Playing "flower borders", the courtesan provides a pastime.*
(Chapter 16)

The antithetical nature of these couplets in the original has been carefully preserved. However, what are "poison berries" and what is meant by "playing flower borders"? Here we do need an explanation for each. The translator's note adds: "Syphilis is called *yang-mei ch'uang* 楊梅毒, strawberry sores, because the lesions look like strawberries." She also explains that *wa-hua* 挖花, literally "dig up flowers", is "a game of four, played with a variation of dominoes. Some of the tiles have a floral border, which enhances their value. These tiles range from 2 (two ones) to 12 (two sixes); sevens, in different combinations, yield the most points and are called the Seven Stars. Unlike mah-jong, the player who ends up with the most points, not necessarily the winner, gets paid the most. So the aim is to get the flower bordered tiles from the tile pool." With detailed descriptions like this to whet the reader's appetite, it would indeed be tantalizing to have to wait long for the chance to read her complete translation.

Influenced by the work of Han Pang-ch'ing, Li Po-yüan 李伯元 (1867-1906) wrote a serialized work called *Hai-t'ien hung-hsüeh chi* 海天鴻雪記 (*Talon Marks on the Snow*), which is also a novel in the Soochow dialect about the life of prostitutes in Shanghai. But this was never completed.

IV



LL CHINESE READERS born in the early Republican era, as well as many of their seniors, would have been familiar with the sombre title, *The Sick Man of Eastern Asia* 東亞病夫 (*Tung-ya Ping-fu*), one of the pen-names used by Tseng P'u, the author of *A Flower in a Sinful Sea* (*Nieh-hai hua*). Written originally in 1905-6, this novel is an eyewitness account of the political and social upheavals of the time, and expresses the nightmarish anxiety of an author who, though born into a scholar-gentry family and already qualified as a licentiate in the State Examinations (1891), saw China doomed to an inexorable decline. Depicting the anti-Manchu and revolutionary sentiments of the time, some parts in the earlier edition of this novel seem to have verged on overt social and political propaganda, though these were balanced by subtle descriptions and intricacy of structure. The influence of this novel, at the time of its first publication, was tremendous. Within two years of its first appearance, it had been reprinted fifteen times and is said to have sold fifty thousand copies. In 1927-8 the author made an effort to revise his earlier work and enlarged it from twenty-four to thirty chapters. It is on this later edition that the full trans-

lation of the first five chapters which appears in this volume is based. In the revised edition, some of the didactic, propagandist discussions were removed, but the multifarious aspects of revolutionary movement and the author's enthusiasm for the Republican cause can still be found. Lu Hsün, in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, comments that *Nieh-hai hua* "often exaggerates like other novels of exposure", but praises it as "having the merits of a compact and well-conceived plot and an elegant style" (p. 385). Ah Ying 阿英 (Ch'ien Hsing-ts'un 錢杏邨, 1900-1977) also thinks that "the revised version of this novel is technically more experienced and dexterous",²⁰ though not denying the impact which the earlier edition had on the intellectual mind of the time.

It may be of interest to the readers of our volume to know that when Tseng P'u planned the plot of this novel, he deliberately chose not to centre it on the spectacular life of a single, remarkable woman—the celebrated courtesan, Fu Ts'ai-yün 傅彩雲—as had been the original plan of his collaborator, Chin T'ien-he 金天翹 (*tz'u*, Sung-ts'en 松岑, 1874-1947). Tseng believed that in this way they could avoid producing "a mere repeat of *Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*". Tseng's ambitious plan was no less than a panoramic historical romance set against exciting and exotic backgrounds, with scenes shifting from Soochow, Shanghai and Peking to Berlin and St. Petersburg. In his "A Few Necessary Words after Revision" (1927), he writes:

My view was somewhat different [from that of Mr. Chin]. I wanted to use her (Fu Ts'ai-yün), the leading character of this novel, as a principal clue in this work, and at the same time absorb into it as far as possible more than three decades of recent history, without giving direct historical accounts. Instead we would use interesting anecdotes and minor personal affairs to bring out the background against which the significant events occurred. In this manner, I thought, the scope of the novel might be broadened.

Chin T'ien-he, a local scholar from Sungkiang, Kiangsu, was also known at that time as a progressive writer and political activist in Shanghai, and had translated some volumes from the Japanese. Chin had started a few chapters of the novel, two of them having already appeared in the journal *Kiangsu* (1903), published by a group of Chinese students in Japan. He showed his manuscript to Tseng, who was operating a bookstore (The Forest of Fiction 小說林 Bookstore) with several friends in Soochow. Tseng urged Chin to complete the work, but Chin proposed that Tseng should take up the task instead. Thus began Tseng's work on this new enterprise. According to Tseng P'u, in the end product, some of Chin's work is retained, though homogeneously merged with Tseng's own. On the title-page of this novel there are the following two lines commemorating their close collaborative relationship: "Initiated by A Lover of Liberty 愛自由者 (i.e., Chin) and Compiled and Recorded by the Sick Man of Eastern Asia." In later life, Chin became a well-known *ku-wen* essayist, and published two collections in his *T'ien-fang Lou wen-chi* 天放樓文集.

²⁰ *Wan-Ch'ing hsiao-shuo shih* 晚清小說史, Hong Kong reprint, 1966, p. 25.

Lu Hsün, in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, gives a summary of the plot of the novel, based upon the earlier edition, while Professor Peter Li 李培德 has written a detailed account of Tseng P'u's life and literary career. Chin Wen-ch'ing 金雯卿 (Chin Chün 金洵), the protagonist of the novel, who took Fu Ts'ai-yün, the celebrated courtesan, as his concubine, is described by Prof. Li as a tragic figure, because of his dual role: at home a refined Chinese gentleman of learning, overseas a complete misfit and bungling minister. Treating the work as a political novel, Peter Li elaborates:

Chin Wen-ch'ing belongs to the social and political élite in the mainstream of traditional Chinese society, and he has had a distinguished public career. Moreover, he is not a bookish pedant. In his private life, he was once a winsome gentleman skilled in poetry and the winecup. As a promising young scholar, he frequented the courtesan's quarters; even in middle age he takes a fifteen-year-old courtesan [i.e., Fu Ts'ai-yün] as his concubine. If times had not changed, he would have ended his days in security and comfort. But in a rapidly changing world his position is jeopardized. When he is in Germany and Russia, his concubine dominates the spotlight while he cowers in his study with his books and lets his official duties go untended for days. Although he has ambitions of protecting China's national boundaries, his abilities are not commensurate with these aims. His crowning achievement in his own eyes, the purchase of a set of Sino-Russian border maps, turns out to be the cause of his downfall.²¹

Ah Ying, who has grouped Tseng P'u, Li Po-yüan, Wu Chien-jen 吳畊人 (1867-1910) and Liu E 劉鶚 (1850-1910) as the four great novelists of late Ch'ing times, praises Tseng for his skilful and elaborate description of these celebrated scholars (*ming-shih* 名士), of whose lives the author had some vivid, personal experiences. He says: "Those prominent officials and celebrated scholars wished to show off their scholarship and elegant taste, and this extended even to courtesans. In Soochow, we find Ch'u Ai-lin 褚愛林, who has in her possession invaluable antiques, and who herself is also conversant with the composition of *shih* and *tz'u* poems. At the capital, there are the Three Yüns (Ai Yün, 菱雲, Su Yün 素雲 and Yi Yün 怡雲), the learned young catamites, who have a relationship with either Li Ch'un-k'e 李純客 (the historical Li Ch'un-k'e 純客 or Li Tz'u-ming 李慈銘, 1829-94) or others. T'ai-ch'ing 太清, the wife of the Manchu nobleman, Ming-shan 明善, although not a courtesan herself, is a mysterious character and a poetess whose character has been very clearly delineated in the novel. In the revised edition, this character is even more successfully drawn than that of Fu Ts'ai-yün. Through its descriptions of the experiences of these individual characters, *A Flower in a Sinful Sea* unfolds a panorama of late Ch'ing society. The rottenness at the court and in the inner palace, the open corruption of the officials, the fear of and consequent yielding to the foreigners, the befuddled life of the intellectuals and the rise of the revolutionary movement are all touched upon. In this work is envisaged the certain collapse of the Ch'ing and

²¹Tseng P'u, Twayne, 1980, p. 82.

success of the revolution." (*op. cit.*) Some of the scenes related above by Ah Ying are included in the chapters translated here.

Like Han Pang-ch'ing, Tseng P'u was very proud of his own artistic skill. When he wrote his "A Few Necessary Words after Revision", he refuted Hu Shih's earlier criticism (1917) charging him with looseness in the structure of this novel and comparing its defects with those of Wu Ching-tzu's *The Scholars* and Li Po-yüan's *Exposure of the Official World* 官場現形記.²² Tseng writes:

He [Hu Shih] charged me with having structured my novel in a similar way to that of *The Scholars*—this is something with which I cannot agree. Although both novels make use of a number of short episodes to form a connected work, they are nevertheless very different. Let me use the stringing of beads as an analogy. *The Scholars* may be likened to stringing through from the beginning to the end on one string, the result being a string of pearls. My way of stringing is to turn and twist the beads so that they form coils, they move towards the east and the west, sometimes tightened, sometimes loosened at my will; but I never lose sight of the centre. Instead of making a string of pearls, mine is a pearl-flower.

Those who have read the whole novel, would not, I think, consider this an exaggeration.

Of the late Ch'ing writers, Tseng P'u may be singled out as one of the very few who mastered a foreign language—in his case, French. He was admitted to the T'ung-wen Kuan 同文館, or College of Foreign Languages, in Peking, in late 1895. According to his Chronological Biography (*nien-p'u* 年譜) written by his eldest son, Tseng Hsü-po 曾虛白 as an appendix to the novel,²³ there were only three scholars there learning English, and two, including Tseng P'u, studying French. Tseng P'u studied for only eight months, laying a rough groundwork under the instruction of two successive banner-men-scholars, Mr. Shih-tseng 世增 and Mr. Te-yu-hsüan 德友軒. Tseng, however, was an extremely diligent scholar, and he did not give up French after he left the College, but studied it privately, using grammar books and dictionaries as his guide. In 1898, when he was in Shanghai, he was introduced by Chiang Piao 江標 (1860-99, the Chiang Piao 姜表 in Chapter 11 of the novel)²⁴ to a Ch'en Chi-t'ung (陳季同 Général Tcheng Ki-tong), a French-returned scholar who had married a French lady, and who became Tseng's real teacher of French literature.

²²See *Hu Shih wen-ts'un*, Vol. I, *chüan* 1, pp. 38-9. Cf. Dr. Cheng's article in this volume, p. 112.

²³World Book Company ed., Taipei, 1966.

²⁴Chiang Piao, alias Chiang Chien-hsia 建霞, an active reformist from Soochow, was awarded a *chin-shih* degree in 1889. According to Chang Shih-chao 章士釗 (1881-1973) who was a candidate both in 1895 and 1897 at the *hsü-ts'ai* examinations held in Changsha 長沙, Hunan, when Chiang was the Provincial Education Intendant, Chiang was "romantic,

dashing and good looking" 俊俏風流, 容觀甚美. Chiang was married to Wang Ming-feng 汪鳴鳳, a talented lady of the time and a younger sister of Wang Ming-luan 汪鳴鑾 (1839-1901, the Ch'ien Tuan-min 錢端敏 in Chapter 2 of the novel *A Flower in a Sinful Sea*). Chiang had a seal made to read "Appreciated by Chien-hsia and Ming-feng together" 建霞鳴鳳共賞之作 and had it imprinted on some of the successful examination scripts. See Chang Shih-chao, *Liu-wen chih-yao* 柳文指要, *hsia*, *Chüan* 8, Peking, 1972, 2nd ed., p. 1756.

Originally a student of ship-building, Ch'en Chi-t'ung was well versed in literature, had published his *Contes Chinois, Les chinois peints par eux-mêmes* (1889) and *L'homme de la Robe Jaune* in France, and was a friend of Anatole France. In a letter to Hu Shih, written in March 1928, Tseng P'u tells of his course of study under the guidance of Ch'en:

After meeting him, I visited him nearly every day, and he also advised me unreservedly and untiringly. He instructed me on the significance of the Renaissance, the differences between classical and romantic works, also on the tendencies towards free development of the Naturalists, the Symbolists and writers of other branches. Among the Classics, he advised me to read Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Ronsard's poems, the melodramas of Racine and Molière, the theory of poetry of Boileau, the *Pensées* of Pascal, and the short pieces of Montaigne. Of the works of the Romantic School, he told me to read Voltaire's writings on history, Rousseau's monographs, Hugo's novels, de Vigny's poetry, Alexandre Dumas' dramas and Michelet's historical works. Of the Naturalists he advised me to read the novels and short stories of Flaubert, Zola and Maupassant, the poems of de Lisle, the dramas of Alexandre Dumas fils, and the literary criticism of Taine. From there he advised me to look into the history of literature written by Brunetière, as well as the works of Daudet, Bourget, France and Loti. He again informed me of a number of Italian, Spanish, English and German works of literature translated into French. It was on his advice that I communicated with several bookstores in Paris, and for three or four years studied a considerable number of French works of literature and philosophy.²⁵

The above explains why Tseng P'u, after a period of active political life in the early Republic, was able to pluck up enough courage in 1928 to establish, with his son, Tseng Hsü-po, a bookstore in Shanghai called the Chen-mei-shan 眞美善 (The True, the Beautiful and Good, or *Verum, Pulchrum et Bonum*). They ran the store with some success until 1933, when it shut down because of financial difficulties. While it lasted, their bookstore maintained the atmosphere of a salon, where a large number of literary followers gathered, many of them twenty or thirty years younger than Tseng P'u. The bookstore also published a journal bearing its own name, in which Tseng P'u published his new writings, and the additional Chapters 31-5 of *A Flower in a Sinful Sea*, which have not been incorporated in most of the editions published after his death. He died in June 1936 in his native city Changshu 常熟.

Although there have been many interesting studies published on the four late Ch'ing novels mentioned above, in particular those recent publications produced in mainland China on Wu Chien-jen and Li Po-yüan, there has not been a full translation of any of their representative works except *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* 老殘遊記, which is lucky enough to have appeared in both English and French, and its

²⁵ Appended to Hu Shih's letter to Tseng, "On Translation", *Hu Shih wen-ts'un*, Vol. III, *chüan* 8, pp. 711-2.

sequel, known in English as *A Nun of Taishan*.²⁶ In recent times, however, Douglas Lancashire has published part of his translation of Li Po-yüan's *Wen-ming hsiao-shih* 文明小史, under the title, *Modern Times* or *A Brief History of Enlightenment*,²⁷ and Liu Shih-shun 劉師舜 has rendered into English Wu Chien-jen's *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades* (*Erh-shih nien mu-tu chih kuai Hsien-chuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀) in an abridged form.²⁸ The present translation of five chapters of *A Flower in a Sinful Sea* by Dr. Rafe de Crespigny, with some minor assistance from Liu Ts'un-yan, may enable interested readers to know more about the style and content of the original work, which so stirred the minds of the people living in that tumultuous time, when a pervasive literary transformation was taking place. The novel is not easy to translate, as it presupposes some understanding of recent history, in particular knowledge of Ch'ing officialdom and the social life of the celebrated scholars in that era. Dr. Colin Modini's translation of Tseng Hsü-po's preface to the Chinese version of Peter Li's *Tseng P'u* provides us with further material for understanding a man who was one of the shining lights of his time.

V



SEVERAL RESEARCH ARTICLES have also been included in this volume. Stephen Cheng's "Sing-song Girls and Its Narrative Method" supplements Eileen Chang's translation of the first two chapters. In addition to discussing the novelist's approach to his craft, Dr. Cheng gives the reader, in the many extracts quoted, a taste of the later stages of the novel. The other articles, contributed by Professor C.T. Hsia 夏志清, Dr. Sally Borthwick and Professor Perry Link, deal with individual persons and works from which, with the exception of *Fate in Tears and Laughter* 啼笑因緣, we have not provided sample chapters in translation, though various excerpts are to be found in the articles themselves. The authors discussed, although on the fringes of the traditional literary arena, had a considerable impact on the general readers of their day. In the early years of the Republic, these readers undoubtedly found many of the works produced in accordance with the pronouncements of the May Fourth Movement too revolutionary, or too serious in substance and too Europeanized in form, to swallow, and looked for milder tonics for enlightenment or relaxation. If we may be permitted to summarize, without over-simplifying facts and motives, these works of fiction are mostly products of the big cities along the coast, in

²⁶ Harold Shadick tr., *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1952; Cheng Tchong, *L'Odysée de Lao Ts'an*, Gallimard, Paris, 1964; Lin Yutang, *A Nun of Taishan and Other Translations*, Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1936. "A Nun of Taishan" is also found in Lin tr., *Widow, Nun and Courtesan*, John Day, New York, 1950; Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1971, pp. 115-180.

²⁷ The first five chapters and the author's preface are found in *Renditions* No. 2, 1974, pp. 127-64.

²⁸ Published by the Chinese University Press, 1975. Parts of it first appeared in *Renditions* No. 4, 1975, pp. 129-48.

particular Shanghai. Their creation was stimulated by the wide circulation of newspapers, a newly-introduced enterprise at the turn of the century; their authors were inspired by the wanton life-style of the merchants, of the sanctimonious and corrupt officials, and of the compradors who dominated the Chinese economic scene in the International Settlement and Concessions. In the comparatively open and peaceful environment of these enclaves, isolated as they were administratively from the interior, such literary activity flourished. Here revolutionists and political agitators gathered, protected indirectly by foreign authorities, unless pressures became too intense. These places also provided a refuge for adventurers and their criminal activities, and a paradise for political losers, parvenus, rich landlords and gentry newly arrived from the interior, and conservative diehards, some of whom were honest but disappointed scholars, disillusioned after many futile attempts to save their country from its tragic predicament. Since the late nineteenth century, many of the newspaper editors had come from the nearby cities and towns in the Lower Yangtze Valley. Their easy existence and gay night life brought them into close contact with the sing-song girls, whose boudoirs they frequented and sometimes even occupied—as did Han Pang-ch'ing when creating his masterpiece, reproducing the diction and the tones of his paramours. Serialized novels and short stories published in journals and pictorials also helped the growth of this popular literature. Bourgeois urban life and the new mass medium increased tremendously the demand for romantic stories composed with comparative sophistication and dealing with the common denominator of metropolitan life.

When Lu Hsün gave a talk to members of the Social Science Study Group in Shanghai in 1931, entitled "A Glance at Shanghai Literature", he touched upon the early life of these traditional novelists, whose works were in vogue at the time:

These talented scholars were delicate, sensitive souls, enraged by a cock's crow and upset by moonlight. Once in Shanghai, they met prostitutes. When they went whoring they could surround themselves with ten or twenty girls, much as in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, till they fancied themselves the young hero of that novel. Since they were talented scholars, the prostitutes of course were beautiful girls—and so were born the books about scholars and beauties. The general thesis was that only scholars could sympathize with fallen beauties, and only beauties could appreciate ill-fated scholars; but after many, many trials they would marry happily or become immortals.²⁹

In this observation, Lu Hsün differentiated these talented scholars from the orthodox scholars who "confined their reading to the *Four Books and Five Classics*, wrote *paku* essays, and were extremely correct."³⁰ This is, of course, generally true, though individually some of these talented scholars had also gained a degree in the examinations before they changed course and settled in the foreign concessions, and many others had sat for the examinations without success. The sentence,

²⁹ Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang in *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, Vol. 3, Peking, 1959, p. 115.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

“enraged by a cock’s crow”, cited above, though used satirically, is actually a literary allusion. In the late third century, a heroic-minded scholar, Tsu Ti 祖逖, hearing a cock’s crow, rose from his bed, kicked his room-mate awake and started to dance.³¹ The complex psyche of these writers is vividly conveyed by Lu Hsün through his reversal of this allusion.

In a subsequent passage Lu Hsün castigates the dark side of these talented scholars and tells us they “devised clever means to deal with the prostitutes, so that far from being cheated themselves they could take advantage of the girls; and stories describing their tactics were highly popular as textbooks for whoring.”³² Comparing the degenerate, worthless booklets of this kind with the novel of Han Pang-ch’ing, Lu Hsün writes in his *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*: “At the beginning of this century there were many such novels in Shanghai, which usually stopped after the publication of a few chapters when the blackmailer had succeeded. Similar novels were written not for purposes of blackmail but simply to expose the evils of prostitution. However, most of these exaggerate and introduce shocking or sensational incidents. None of them had the subtlety and natural style of *Lives of Shanghai Sing-song Girls*.”³³

Novels of exposure of this type gradually became fewer. After that, the new scholar-and-beauty novels became popular. Lu Hsün recalls:

... the beauty was a girl of good family who shared the scholar’s pleasures and would not leave him. Under the willows and blossoming trees they were like two butterflies or love-birds; but because their parents were cruel or fate unkind, they sometimes came to an unhappy end instead of living happily ever after—and we must admit that this was a great advance. When not long ago the magazine *Innuendo* 眉語 appeared, edited by Mr. T’ien-hsü-wo-sheng 天虛我生, who also manufactures tooth powder which can be used as face powder, that was the heyday of this “scholar-and-beauty” writing.³⁴

This “scholar-and-beauty” school was referred to by Lu Hsün in the original as the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” school. This rather clumsy title, though strange, is not difficult to understand. “Mandarin ducks” was used as the title of a poem included in the *Book of Odes*, and even at that time these birds were regarded by the Chinese as symbols of inseparability. The idea of love-birds is not new in the history of Chinese literature (cf. the *t’ung-ming niao* 同命鳥 or *jīvāmjīvaka*, found in Buddhist literature). Although nowadays readers may think the title “Mandarin Ducks & Butterflies” somewhat derogatory, originally it was created for fun at a drinking party, by authors who technically belonged to this school themselves, and was not meant to suggest any strong disapproval.

This journal *Innuendo* (*Mei-yü*—literally, eyebrow messages) was but one of the publications which mushroomed during the two decades from 1909, when the famous *Short Story Magazine* (*Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao* 小說月報) made its first appear-

³¹See *Chin-shu* 晉書, *chüan* 62.

³³Lu Hsün, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁴“A Glance at Shanghai Literature”, *ibid.*, p. 118.

ance. T'ien-hsü-wo-sheng or Heaven Gives Birth to Me in Vain is the pen-name of Ch'en Hsü 陳栩 (c. 1877-1940), alias Ch'en Shou-t'ung 壽同, K'un-shu 昆叔, also Ch'en Tieh-hsien 陳蝶仙 (Butterfly-Immortal), from Hangchow, who was for a number of years during the early Republic the editor of "The Rambler" (*Tzu-yu t'an* 自由談, a literary supplement of the *Shun Pao*). Ch'en was also an industrialist whose well-known "Matchless" (*wu-ti* 無敵) brand³⁵ of tooth powder was said to have driven the Japanese brand, "Diamond-stone", off the market, when Japanese goods were being boycotted in protest against China's national humiliation. He devoted a special column in his supplement to popular scientific knowledge for family consumption, published several novels in serial form, and translated some short stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle.

T'ien-hsü-wo-sheng published in both the classical language and *pai-hua*, while Hsü Chen-ya 徐枕亞, the author of *Yü-li hun* 玉梨魂, wrote exclusively in literary Chinese, especially in the parallel-prose style. As C.T. Hsia has written extensively on the background of this lachrymose, heart-rending work, its author, his associates and their influences, it might be useful to our readers if I dwelt a little here on its prose style. As pointed out in Prof. Hsia's article, compared with Ch'en Ch'iu's 陳球 *Yen-shan wai-shih* 燕山外史 (*A Tale of Yenshan*, c. 1810), the only pre-Republican work of full-length fiction set in parallel-prose, "Hsü Chen-ya is much more flexible in style, alternating the more formally structured passages of descriptive or lyrical emphasis with the more relaxed passages of dialogue or narration where a *ku-wen* type of prose is admitted." As a matter of fact, many of the creative or translated works of fiction published in late Ch'ing and the early Republic were still written in *ku-wen*, the literary prestige of which had been greatly enhanced by the translations of Lin Shu 林紓 (1852-1924), a distinguished *ku-wen* master. But the *p'ien-wen* or parallel-prose style was not neglected; it still had many admirers, though comparatively few skilful practitioners. Originally, this more traditional, stilted type of prose used pairs of sentence-units containing four and six characters, in which the main concerns were antithetical euphuism, rhyme and suitable literary allusions. Ch'en Ch'iu, the author of *A Tale of Yenshan*, claimed in the nineteenth century that his novel was "the first attempt at a narrative in the euphuistic style" (i.e., the four-and-six style), but Lu Hsün points out that he would not have said so had he read Chang Tsu's 張鱗 (c. 660-740) *The Fairies' Cavern* (*Yu-hsien k'u* 遊仙窟), which was lost to China for many generations, but preserved in Japan. To illustrate the similarity, I will quote first a few lines from *The Fairies' Cavern* describing the entertainment at a feast, and then an extract from *A Tale of Yenshan*.³⁶

.... and it seemed that fairies were playing the lute and trumpet (4),
angels the cithern and the pipe-organ (4),
so that even dark storks must bend their heads to hear (6),
and white fish leap in the waves in time to the beat (6).

³⁵ *Wu-ti* (Matchless) is a Shanghai pun for *wu-ti* 蝴蝶 ("Butterfly"—which is the trademark found on its package), as well as the name of the famous movie-star 胡蝶.

³⁶ From Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang's translation in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, p. 89 and p. 328 respectively.

Those liquid notes sent dust rising from the rafters (4 and 6 plus one particle as a patch-word),
 those charming melodies brought snow fluttering from the sky (4 and 6 plus one patch-word in the last line);
 even the sage Confucius would have lost all thought of food in his enchantment (4 and 6),
 for like the songs of the peerless singer Han Ngo this music lingered for three days in the house (4 and 6).

Han Ngo 韓娥 was a great singer in the state of Han 韓, as recorded in *Lieh-tzu*, Ch. 5, and the allusion to Confucius is taken from *Analects*, Ch. 7. From *A Tale of Yenshan* we have the following, when the young scholar, Tou Sheng-tsu 竇繩祖, is forced by his father to desert his love, Li Ai-ku 李愛姑:

The father,
 concerned at heart for his son (6),
 behaves outwardly in an overbearing manner (6).
 One who strikes at a rat does not care if a vessel is broken (6);
 one who chases a duck may frighten love-birds as well (6).
 The pig is driven back to its sty (4),
 the dog is ordered home (4).
 The sheep has gone astray (6 plus a particle)
 and its pen must be mended (6);
 the tiger is locked up (6 plus a particle)
 where it cannot escape (6);
 the rampant dragon (6)
 is chained to an iron pillar (4);
 the agile monkey (6)
 is humbled by a straw whip (4).

I am afraid that I might overburden our readers if I were to trace all the allusions. Take the first few sentences alone: "concerned at heart for his son" (*ai-tu* 愛犢, the love of a cow for a calf), derives from the biography of Yang Piao 楊彪 in *Hou-Han shu*, *chüan* 84, while "strikes at a rat" (*t'ou-shu chi-ch'i* 投鼠忌器) is from the biography of Chia Yi 賈誼, *Han-shu*, *chüan* 48. The artistically desired effect was that such allusions should be skilfully and inconspicuously inserted, so that a reader unfamiliar with them could still appreciate the description and get the message, without bothering too much with the literary subtleties.

At the beginning of the novel *Yü-li hun* (*Jade Pear Spirit*), the blossoms of a pear tree are very fully and sentimentally described as a symbol of the widow-protagonist in the story, whose name is Pai Li-niang 白梨娘 (literally, Lady White Pear). The young scholar who is to fall in love with her soon is Ho Meng-hsia 何夢霞 (so named because his mother dreamed of a puff of rose-tinted cloud during her pregnancy). To present Ho's tender heart and languishing health, the author shows him in the first chapter alone and weeping for the fallen blossoms gathered in a Flower Grave—an episode reminiscent of Tai-yü burying the flowers in *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Ch. 27). The fact that here it is not a woman but a man performing the burial, suggests that the idea may even ultimately derive, not from *Red*

Chamber, but from "The Old Gardener" in a Ming collection of short stories.³⁷ I will try to translate here the last passage of the first chapter of this novel so that our readers may compare it with the earlier citations (the *p'ien-wen* sections are printed in italics):

Alas! Short and hurried the dream, rude the East Wind's awakening; endless the threads of yearning, grief burgeoning in this Southern land. When Nature falls into decay, can this wretched soul live on? When bees and butterflies lament their fate, can this broken heart still feel?

As soon as Ho Meng-hsia arrived at the side of the rockery, he found a square of clean earth and dug a hollow, into which he stuffed the bag of petals. He added some loose soil to cover it and make it look like a mound, so that it could be found afterwards. Then he returned to his room, took the glass which he often used, and poured into it some wine. He revisited the mound, making a libation in all directions. Suddenly his face assumed a sad and gloomy expression. For it occurred to him that he too led a wandering life, like catkins and duckweed, like the petals of those short-lived blossoms. The flowers were at least lucky enough to have met someone like him to feel for their folly, to collect their charming remains and build for them a propitious tomb. Although it was merely a simple mound, surely their souls would find in it a suitable lodging, and who could say they were not fortunate? "As for me," he thought, "*adrift for half my life, a solitary tutor, homeless lodger, floating broken stem, the stream flows on forever, and brings no friend, no Chung Tzu-ch'i 鍾子期. Days without number, nor path ahead, nor road behind, naught but endless bitterness, for one born out of his time.* Who will be able to discover my talent and reward me after my death, as they did for that lucky fellow, Fang Kan 方干?"

Having spoken thus, he chanted loudly the lines:

Let others laugh flower-burial to see:

In another year who will be burying me?

originally composed by Frowner (P'in-ch'ing 顰卿, i.e. Lin Tai-yü 林黛玉) in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. They made him feel even sadder. He thought: "*Birds and flowers are fast fading, Nature has no heart; Spring will not come again, the quest for a true friend has no end.*" Stupefied by the boundless uncertainty of the future, he allowed a host of melancholic thoughts to enter his mind, and tears started to his eyes. Then he thought: "When Lin Tai-yü built her Flowers' grave, she had at least a Pao-yü to sympathize with her. Now that I, Ho Meng-hsia, have succeeded her in her folly, where is my Tai-yü? And who will be the one to ridicule me? Who will shed tears of sympathy over what I have done?" Only the petals in the tomb were his soul-mates. With tears in his eyes, Meng-hsia went on to summon the souls of the petals and cried out: "Dear petals! Have you awoken from the foolish dream of your three previous lives? *Why are your*

³⁷ *Hsing-shih heng-yen (Stories to Awaken Men* 醒世恆言, 4.) Cf. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang tr., *The Courtesan's Jewel Box*, Peking, 1957, pp. 323-56;

also *Lazy Dragon*, tr. by the Yangs and edited by Geremie Barmé, Joint Publishing Co., Hong Kong, 1981, pp. 183-208.

lives so short, and my sorrow so enduring! I have raised handfuls of fragrant clay to keep your bones in safety, and your souls are kept company by a growth of sweet grass. The pouring of wine from my goblet was my offering to you, and the cries of the birds are my words of mourning. Do you hear me, or do you not? Alas! *Your former charms are now mere shadows, though your pure skeletons remain in the mortal world. The feelings at Swallow Tower are a sad memory, and [Kuan] P'an-p'an 關盼盼 the fair is remembered in empty name alone. The resurrection [of Tu Li-niang 杜麗娘] is told in The Peony Pavilion 牡丹亭, but who has ever seen her beauty save in fantasy? Though [Wang] Chao-chün 王昭君 lived in a barbarian region under a sorrowing moon and amidst the sounds of bugles, she still had an appointed time for her return to the Han court; and with the imprint of a ring left on her finger, Jade Flute 玉簫 fulfilled her promise to be reborn for a predestined marriage.* So, if you have some trace of compassion, *when the East Wind blows again next spring, may you bloom into wondrous flowers* to requite my deep affection, my heart's folly." He sobbed bitterly for quite some time until his anguish became so intense that he could no longer support himself outdoors. Heart-torn and fatigued he returned to his room to rest, as he had slept but little the night before. Silence now filled his courtyard where the solitary new mound was still surrounded by the sprinkling of his tears, a patch of drenched soil.

As in other chapters throughout this novel, literary allusions are inlaid into nearly every passage, and some of them a reader with general knowledge may skip without its seriously hampering the depth of his or her appreciation. In the passage here, the allusions to Chung Tzu-ch'i, Kuan P'an-p'an and Wang Chao-chün are of course, to be found in any minor source-book, while those to *The Peony Pavilion*³⁸ and even the T'ang anecdote concerning a Jade-flute Lady are not too difficult to trace (there is no need to labour over the fact that there is also a Yüan drama utilizing the same plot). The name of Fang Kan, an unsuccessful scholar of late T'ang times, misprinted as Fang Ch'ien 方千 in some editions, would present some difficulty for the reader. A brief account of Fang Kan's life is contained in Hsin Wen-fang's 辛文房 *Biographies of Talented T'ang Scholars (T'ang ts'ai-tzu chuan 唐才子傳, 7)*, informing us that he was awarded a degree posthumously, together with fourteen other scholars, in recognition of their talents. Ho Meng-hsia is contrasting his own fate with Fang's.

Although the language of this novel is ornate and involved, it also contains a large number of phrases and terms which are strangely modern and which may help the reader to swallow its lugubrious content more easily. Euphuistic phrases are also used in other novels in *ku-wen* style published around this time, such as Su Man-shu's 蘇曼殊 (1884-1918) *The Lone Swan (Tuan-hung ling-yen chi 斷鴻零雁記)*.³⁹ As a classical novel depicting the tragic lack of freedom for two lovers

³⁸Read Prof. Cyril Birch's new translation, Indiana U.P.

mercial Press, Shanghai, 1924; Hong Kong, 1961. See also Liu Wu-chi, *Su Man-shu*, Twayne, 1972, pp. 83-96.

³⁹George Kin Leung tr., *The Lone Swan*, Com-

within the bonds of the traditional family system, I believe *Yü-li hun* has a more dramatic impact than *The Lone Swan*, in which the story is told with numerous digressions. It is easy to write about rebellious sentiments, even the heroic actions of revolutionists, but it is more difficult to describe a rebellious mind constrained by a system which held on to a code of time-honoured and obsolescent morality as though it were universal truth. It is through this ornate yet magnificently-controlled style and language that Hsü Chen-ya managed to convey the psychological suffering of his characters, gaining the sympathy of a multitude of readers and stirring their minds to new thoughts. To his faithful followers, who had yet heard little or nothing of Ibsen, Hsü Chen-ya might not without justification have seemed a Chinese Alexandre Dumas *films*.

VI



THE TRADITIONAL-STYLE urban fiction published during the early Republic was not restricted in nature to melancholic treatments of romantic themes, a category which could itself be sub-divided into novels of tragedy, fate, revenge, jealousy, mortification and so on. Other fiction might be classified into works of chivalry, crime and detection, society and manners, and so forth, in a way reminiscent of the categorization devised to describe the professional storytellers of the Southern Sung. Fiction translated directly from one of the European languages or indirectly through Japanese also influenced the novels and short stories published at this time. The colloquial language began to take the lead, but there were quite a few such works still written in literary Chinese, or *ku-wen*. Lu Hsün's short story, "Huai chiu" 懷舊 ("Reminiscences of the Past"), describing the confusion in the locality of his native Shaohsing 紹興 during the revolution of 1911, which appeared in the *Short Story Magazine* (1913), was written in *ku-wen*. This short story has appended to it a few lines of praise by the editor of the journal, Chiao-mu 焦木 (scorched wood), a pen-name of Yün T'ieh-ch'iao 惲鐵樵 (Shu-chüeh 樹珏, a native of Wuchin, Kiangsu). These read:

[In writing] the concrete parts are possible for one to elaborate, but the unsubstantial parts are not. Should someone be right in his first attempt, it would not be difficult for him to carry on along the right track, as intelligence is a natural endowment. I have, on the other hand, seen people barely capable of wielding a brush launch into a great spate of writing, and in the end produce nothing more than a lot of embellished rubbish. Their [illness] should be cured by inviting them to study this piece of writing, or its like.

Yün T'ieh-ch'iao must have been an editor with a unique insight into the literary mind. His "Kung-jen hsiao-shih" 工人小史 ("The Life of a Workman"), a short story which appeared in his journal in November 1913, and several other pieces about

village life, have won him some renown in recent scholarly analysis.⁴⁰ He left his job before 1921 when the *Short Story Magazine* was reorganized, and took up the practice of Chinese medicine, in which he also specialized, and enjoyed some fame until his retirement in the mid-thirties. Other well-known writers who contributed substantially to journals of the traditional school before they joined the New Cultural Movement were Liu Pan-nung 劉半農 (Liu Fu 劉復, 1889-1934), Yeh Shao-chün 葉紹鈞 (Sheng-t'ao 聖陶) and Chang T'ien-yi 張天翼, to mention only a few. These journals provided an arena for a literary canter, perhaps not at full speed, and many of the stories published in them, and other independently published works of a similar nature, are worthy of full and thorough research.

During the twenty years from the 1910s to the late thirties, many of these journals bloomed and faded, newspaper supplements were reorganized, and their contributors either shifted ground to join the new literature camp or simply changed profession and stopped writing. One of the reasons the writers changed ground was the increasingly frivolous tone of these publications, which, since the late twenties, had become highly commercialized and even vulgar and tasteless. A typical journal of this kind was the *Li-pai liu* 禮拜六 (*Saturday*) Weekly, which advertised in 1921, that "one might give up the idea of taking a concubine, but one would never want to relinquish the pleasure of reading a copy of *Saturday*". Though some of these publications were of questionable taste, there were other journals which had been established for a certain time and still enjoyed the support of the general reading public. These were *Hsiao-shuo ta-kuan* 小說大觀 (*Panorama of Fiction*), *Hsiao-shuo hai* 小說海 (*Sea of Fiction*), *Hsiao-shuo shih-chieh* 小說世界 (*World of Fiction*), *Hung mei-kuei* 紅玫瑰 (*Red Rose*) and *Tzu lo-lan* 紫羅蘭 (*The Violet*).

Among the veteran writers who contributed regularly to these journals, I would like to mention a few whose high literary reputations were well-earned and will possibly prove lasting. Ho Hai-ming 何海鳴, a revolutionary general who had held an independent Nanking for about a month (1913) during the campaign against Yüan Shih-k'ai 袁世凱, published a number of short stories about the miserable life of courtesans, under a pen-name, The Master of the Blessed Studio (Ch'iu Hsing-fu Chai-chu 求幸福齋主). Some of his best efforts were "The Old *Hu-ch'in* Player" ("Lao ch'in-shih" 老琴師) and "Marriages from a House of Pleasure" ("Ch'ang-men ch'ien-chia lu" 倡門遺嫁錄), which appeared in *Pan-yüeh* 半月 (*Fortnight*) and *Hsing-ch'i* 星期 (*The Weekly*) respectively in 1922. Chou Shou-chüan 周瘦鵑 (Kuo-hsien 國賢, 1894-1968) was editor of "The Rambler" literary supplement of the *Shun Pao*, succeeding T'ien-hsü-wo-sheng, and also editor of *The Violet*, a monthly magazine. He was a skilled writer of stories about love-affairs and happy marriages, and romances with a melancholy touch. In 1919 he published his "Diary of a Slave without a Country" ("Wang-kuo nu jih-chi 亡國奴日記") which evinced

⁴⁰Ch'ien Chung-shu 錢鍾書 mentions in his article, "Lin Shu de fan-yi" 林紓的翻譯 a letter written by Yün Tieh-ch'iao to Ch'ien's father, Ch'ien Chi-po 錢基博 dated October 29, 1914, in which Yün criticized rather strongly Lin Shu's sloppiness and carelessness in his contributions to the journal as a creative *ku-wen* writer. Ch'ien Chi-po, a distinguished *ku-wen*

prose writer of the time, also wrote some short stories for *The Short Story Magazine*. Read Ch'ien Chung-shu *et al.*, *Lin Shu de Fan-yi*, Peking, 1981, p. 30. Ch'ien's article, abridged and translated into English by George Kao under the title "Lin Ch'in-nan Revisited", appeared in *Renditions* No. 5, 1975, pp. 8-21.

his patriotic feelings. He also translated, from English, many short stories by European and American writers, particularly Continental authors whose names were as yet unknown to the Chinese. Ch'eng Hsiao-ch'ing 程小青 and Lu Tan-an 陸澹齋 (Yen-wen 衍文) were the two best writers of stories of detection at the time. Besides his many translations from Conan Doyle, Maurice Leblanc, Earl Derr Biggers, Leslie Charteris and S.S. van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright), Ch'eng's creation in Chinese of a hundred-odd cases involving the great detective, Huo Sang 霍桑 (probably derived from Hawthorne in transliteration), and his exploits in Shanghai, earned him tremendous fame. Lu has shifted his interest to serious research since the early fifties, and has published his *Shui-hu yen-chiu* 水滸研究 (*Studies of Water Margin*) under a pseudonym, Ho Hsin 何心, and *Hsiao-shuo tz'u-yü hui-shih* 小說詞語彙釋 (*A Dictionary of Phrases and Idioms in Traditional Fiction*), both highly acclaimed by specialists.

Stories of chivalry belong to a particular school with its origins in T'ang literature. Such stories aroused an extraordinary enthusiasm among readers at this time, when the poor and down-trodden all over China were struggling for survival amidst the debris of civil war. The great skill of Hsiang K'ai-jan 向愷然, The Worthless Scholar from P'ing-chiang (P'ing-chiang Pu-hsiao Sheng 平江不肖生), who was able to blend indigenous mystery, long-revered Taoist traditions and improbable happenings from real life into a homogeneous whole, contributed greatly to the development of this genre. In the late twenties, he wrote a very popular 134-chapter novel which was serialized first in *Red Magazine* 紅雜誌 (*Hung tsa-chih*) and then in *Red Rose*, entitled *Strange Stories of Roaming Swordsmen* (*Chiang-hu ch'i-hsia chuan* 江湖奇俠傳). Several editions of this novel are still on sale today overseas, and remain in continuous demand, kept in print by various publishers and even issued in pirated editions. Another writer, Yao Min-ai 姚民哀, published novels of adventure but concentrated more on the lives of the defiant ruffians, salt-smugglers, gamblers and gangsters who were active around the region of Lake T'ai (T'ai Hu 太湖) and belonged to a tightly-organized underworld gang known as the Green Gang, or Ch'ing-pang 青幫. His most famous work on this theme is *Dragon-Kings of the Four Seas* (*Ssu-hai ch'ün-lung chi* 四海羣龍記). Yao was also a trained story-teller in the traditional mode who used a metrical-form Soochow dialect. He practised this professionally in Shanghai and Soochow, to the accompaniment of stringed instruments, and was known by his professional name, Chu Lan-an 朱蘭庵. In his novels Yao showed great mastery of the gangster cant of the Lower Yangtze area. His works form a rich source for the study of the social history and secret societies of China, since these gangs were completely rooted out in the early fifties in mainland China. Even as literature, these works are hardly inferior to some Western paperback best-sellers.

Many of the novelists and writers mentioned above, who were active in the twenties, have now passed away; those still alive would be octogenarians and may be assumed to have more or less withdrawn from active literary production. Pao T'ien-hsiao 包天笑 (1876-1973), one of the very senior authors of this group, is an exception. He had an active career as an author for over seventy years, and at the time when he approached the venerable age of four score years and ten, published his two volumes of memoirs in Hong Kong, and also gave a most interesting interview to Perry Link, which is included in this volume.



A MEETING OF THE STAR SOCIETY at Hsu Pi-po's 徐碧波 home on Weihaiwei Street, Shanghai, late thirties. First row, from left: no. 2, Fan Yen-ch'iao; no. 4, Cheng I-mei; no. 5, Ch'eng Hsiao-ch'ing. Second row: no. 2, Chiang Hung-chiao; no. 5, Pao T'ien-hsiao. Third row: no. 2, Lu Tan-an; no. 5, Hsü Pi-po; no. 8, Yao Su-feng.

From his memoirs, we learn that in his early years Pao taught in Ch'ing-chou 青州, Shantung, though his native place was Soochow. When he returned to the south (1906), staying mainly in Shanghai, he was engaged by his Buddhist friend Ti P'ing-tzu 狄平子 (alias Ti Pao-hsien 葆賢, Ch'u-ch'ing 楚青) to become an editor of *Eastern Times* 時報 (*Shih Pao*) which Ti owned as well as a leading publishing house, the Yu-cheng Bookstore 有正書局.⁴¹ The Yu-cheng Bookstore published a number of valuable works, including Ti's own random notes relating to the intellectual life of late Ch'ing, titled *P'ing-teng ko pi-chi* 平等閣筆記 (*Miscellaneous Jottings from the Pavilion of Equality*), the Ch'i Liao-sheng 戚蓼生 edition of *Dream of the Red Chamber* in eighty chapters, and a large number of rubbings and calligraphical books in collotype. It also published some of Pao's translated novels.

⁴¹Ti Pao-hsien, a native of Liyang 溧陽, Kiangsu, was a royalist in the late Ch'ing and had very close friendships with K'ang Yu-wei 康有為 (1858-1927), Liang Ch'i-ch'ao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) and T'ang Ts'ai-ch'ang 唐才常 (1867-1900). After the failure of T'ang's revolt in Hankow in 1900, Ti became more involved in local and constitutional politics, serving as a member of the Kiangsu Provincial Assembly 諮議局, in 1909. The first issue of the *Eastern Times* was published on 29 April, 1904, under the auspices of K'ang and Liang, the latter writing a leader which

added some lustre to the issue. In 1921, the paper was sold to Huang Po-hui 黃伯惠 by Ti, when Ti was suffering from severe illness. However, Ti seems to have been still active as late as 1932, when he contributed an article "Shih Pao wan-sui" (時報萬歲 Long Live the *Eastern Times*!) to the 10,000th issue of the paper published on 27 June of that year. Pa Chin's 巴金 novel *Chia* 家 (Family), the first part of his trilogy *Chi-liu* 激流 (Torrent), made its first appearance as a serial in this paper at about this time.

In those days the editorship of a newspaper was comparatively light work, but it was a night job. An editor might be busy at certain hours, but free at others, and the long and lonely nights drove him to visit the brothels and become familiar with life in these "pleasure houses". Each of these "nocturnal scribes" was apt to have one or two intimates there, or at least someone, perhaps a maid or a young unspoilt prostitute, whom he befriended. This explains why in his novels Pao T'ien-hsiao displays a great familiarity with Shanghai night life; he wrote from first-hand information and with penetrating insight. However, Pao's fame as an author of novels of this nature was eclipsed by that of Pi I-hung 畢倚虹 (named Chen-ta 振達, from I-cheng 儀徵, Yangchow), whose dramatic and sympathetic novel, *Hell on Earth* (*Jen-chien ti-yü* 人間地獄), earned even greater gratitude from the sing-song girls. Pi was originally a petty official in Peking during the late Ch'ing, and also held one or two posts as revenue administrator in Chekiang during the early days of the Republic, but the rest of his life he spent in Shanghai among the demi-mondaines, celebrated scholars and politicians, where he was a colleague and great friend of Pao. He died in 1925, still under forty, and a detailed biography of this talented novelist is found in Pao T'ien-hsiao's memoirs, written with great depth of feeling.

According to his memoirs, Pao was particularly pleased with one of his own novels, *Everlasting Fragrance* (*Liu-fang chi* 留芳記), which was published in 1925. This novel was primarily intended to depict the early life of the most famous Chinese actor of this century, Mei Lan-fang 梅蘭芳 (1895-1961), who specialized in playing female roles in Peking opera. In his life story many current events and political developments of the time, together with the idiosyncratic features of some of the personalities involved, are truly and vividly portrayed. In educational circles Pao T'ien-hsiao was known as the first translator of *Joan Haste* by Sir Henry Rider Haggard (1856-1925), the author of *King Solomon's Mines*. The translation Pao made in collaboration with a friend was, however, not published in its entirety, because it was found that later in the plot Joan has an illegitimate child, and the translators were rather afraid that this development might displease their readers. Another work translated and adapted by Pao from the Japanese was *Cuore* (1886) by Edmondo de Amicis (1846-1908). This Pao translated into classical Chinese, in the form of a diary, like the original, and gave it the title *The Boy Hsing Goes to School* (*Hsing-erh chiu-hsüeh chi* 馨兒就學記). This educational novel saw its eighth Chinese imprint in 1926, and was not superseded until ten years later by a modern translation by Hsia Mien-tsun 夏丏尊. Excerpts from *The Boy Hsing* stories were also included in some textbooks; one I read in my high school years was signed Pao Kung-yi 包公毅 which is Pao T'ien-hsiao's formal name. In his early days Pao signed his novels T'ien-hsiao Sheng 天笑生 (*The Scholar Laughed at by Heaven*). Hiding behind such fanciful pseudonyms was traditionally a legitimate practice for writers of popular literature. In a similar vein, Lin Shu, the well-known *ku-wen* translator, wrote his creative work under the pen name *The Scholar Cold to Females*, or *Leng-hung Sheng* 冷紅生, though he was not necessarily a misogynist.

In the mid-fifties, when people became interested in studying the history of the so-called Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School, Pao T'ien-hsiao was designated by some scholars its doyen. Sally Borthwick believes the genre to be a "bastard offspring" of *Water Margin* and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. I believe that

this description requires some clarification. The works of the "Scholar-and-Beauty" School surely continued a much earlier tradition. Speaking only of the late Ch'ing scene, Ah Ying suggested that Wu Chien-jen's *Sea of Woe* (*Hen-hai* 恨海, 1905) and *After the Disaster* (*Chieh-yü hui* 劫餘灰, 1907-8) had actually led the way, and Wu was followed by T'ien-hsü-wo-sheng, Li Han-ch'iu 李涵秋 and many others, who swam with the tide in publishing their romantic tales at the beginning of this century.⁴² Notwithstanding these earlier practitioners and their contributions, among many of his contemporaries Pao T'ien-hsiao enjoyed much greater fame, and he exerted a much greater influence in the community. He enjoyed a long life, and even in his later days did not show any sign of mental decline but was still able to contribute, albeit shorter pieces, to some journals. In his seventy-odd years of active literary life, he was the editor-in-chief of no less than four journals, each lasting from four to six years, as well as having a long-time connection with *Eastern Times*. His novels were published by several leading book companies, and he was also an important figure in the literary organizations the Green Society (Ch'ing She 青社) and the Star Society (Hsing She 星社), both established in 1922. His deservedly popular novel, *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Shanghai* (*Shang-hai ch'un-ch'iu* 上海春秋), serialized in 40 chapters (1922-4), is a work of refined taste and polished language. In my estimation, it better warrants study as a record of the living history of this time than Chu Shou-chü's 朱瘦菊 (pen-named A Dream-teller On-the-Sea, Hai-shang Shuo-meng Jen 海上說夢人) *Tides on the Shanghai Shore* (*Hsieh-p'u ch'ao* 歇浦潮, 1921) which was translated into German by Franz Kuhn in 1931 as *Fräulein Tschang*.

VII



ARDLY LESS THAN the renown enjoyed in the south by Pao T'ien-hsiao was that of Chang Hen-shui 張恨水 (Hsin-yüan 心遠, 1895-1967)⁴³, who flourished in the north from the mid-twenties, when he published his first novel, *Romance of the Imperial City* (*Ch'un-ming wai-shih* 春明外史) in the *Peking World Evening Post* 世界晚報.

Pao T'ien-hsiao was a southerner who had been to Shantung and Peking, where he made many acquaintances with distinguished scholars, short-lived politicians, warlords, financiers, artists, actors and actresses. Many of them Chang Hen-shui also knew. *Romance of the Imperial City* is essential-

⁴² Ah Ying, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁴³ The pen-name Hen-shui implies that the author was a woman hater, as it is said in *Dream of the Red Chamber* that women are made of water. According to Chang Ming-ming 張明明, a daughter of Chang Hen-shui, this name was taken from a line in a *tz'u* poem, sung to the melody of *Crow Cries at Night*, composed

by the exiled Southern T'ang emperor, Li Yü 李煜 (937-978). The line reads in translation: "Life is a misery, even as the water that flows ever eastward 自是人生長恨水長東". See Chang Ming-ming, *Hui-yi wo-te fu-ch'in Chang Hen-shui* 回憶我的父親張恨水, Hong Kong, 1979, p. 6. Cf. Liu Yih-ling and Shahid Suhrawardy, *Poems of Lee Hou-chu*, Oriental Longmans, 1948, pp. 46-7.

ly an exposé novel, infused with a social consciousness through the character of its protagonist, Yang Hsing-yüan 楊杏園, a journalist deeply concerned with the prevailing national crisis, the political corruption and moral decadence of his age. Its style is quite similar to that of *The Scholars* of Wu Ching-tzu, and one self-contained story is strung onto another without there being necessarily any connecting link to thread through the structure of the entire work, and eventually, in Tseng P'u's words, bring all the clues together to form a "pearl-flower". To some extent it is also modelled on the style of Wu Chien-jen's *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades*, which was published in book form in 1907-9. Chang's inclination to adopt such a style is not difficult to understand. He was himself a reporter and editor, and in his daily routine he had contact with a variety of people and heard things which he could not forbear to record. Hence the chief figure in his novel is also a journalist. A number of anomalous and aberrant happenings written into this novel—the wanton behaviour of the Shantung warlord and a young marshal, the charlatantry of the performers at a planchette-séance, the funny goings-on back-stage at a charity-show, and the unheard of art of sketching the human figure in the nude—have been chronicled elsewhere in journalistic literature. But for a perceptive understanding of the social surroundings of the old capital in the twenties, there is no work which will stand comparison with the graphic and lively style of Chang's *Romance of the Imperial City. A Record of That Couple* (*Ssu-jen chi* 斯人記, 1929) is another novel by him of a semi-autobiographical nature, centred on the drifting and sometimes rotten life of some of the petty politicians, free-lance journalists and middle-class intellectuals in early Republican Peking.

Chang Hen-shui had begun his career as a reporter with a local newspaper in Wuhu 蕪湖, a river-port in Anhui Province to the northeast of his native town, Ch'ien-shan 潛山. He came to Peking in 1919 and worked on the Catholic newspaper, *Yi-shih Pao* 益世報. Later he became an editor of the *World Evening Post* and the *World Daily News* 世界日報, both owned by the veteran journalist Ch'eng She-wo 成舍我. Among his friends were Kung Te-po 龔德柏, Chang Yu-luan 張友鸞, Wang Hsin-ming 王新命, Tso Hsiao-hung 左笑鴻, Ma Yen-hsiang 馬彥祥, Chang Yu-yü 張友漁 and Hu Ch'un-ping 胡春冰, all of whom had worked on one or other of the papers at one time or another. From the early thirties, except for the few years Chang spent in Chungking during the war and several sojourns in Shanghai and Nanking before it, Peking (Peiping, in those years) was his main base. Most of his books were published in that city, and it was from there that he also sent his manuscripts off to newspapers in other cities. As the foremost writer of popular novels in his day, his active career lasted from the late twenties to the late forties.

Shanghai, the centre of modern publication and cultural activities, was at this time also the dominant power over a writer's fate. Local publications from other places were considered provincial, much less sophisticated in form and content, and they enjoyed a much smaller circulation. Peking, on the other hand, was the centre of the New Cultural Movement, where many highly respected scholars lived and taught. After the transfer of the capital to the south, newspapers and journals published in Peking were regarded as a notch below their counterparts in Shanghai. Li Han-ch'iu, whose name I have mentioned in passing, was a famous writer from Yangchow, where he wrote his *Torrents in Yangchow* (*Kuang-ling ch'ao* 廣陵潮),

also named *The Mirror of Transition* (*Kuo-tu ching* 過渡鏡), the first instalment of which was published in Shanghai in 1914. Because of his growing fame among readers, Li was personally invited to work in Shanghai (with *Eastern Times*), and did indeed come down for a short while. But he soon returned to Yangchow because he was not used to the nocturnal life-style of a newspaper editor in the big city and the increasing pressure to which he was subjected there. He died in 1923. Chang Henshui was Li's junior and was originally from the south. Having made a name in the old capital, he wanted very much to try his luck in the great commercial metropolis.

Fate in Tears and Laughter (*T'i-hsiao yin-yüan*, 1929-30) was the first novel Chang Henshui offered to the literary supplement "Happiness Grove" ("K'uai-huo lin" 快活林), which appeared daily in *Sin Wan Pao* 新聞報 (*Hsin-wen Pao*). *Shun Pao* and *Sin Wan Pao* were the two leading papers with the largest circulations in Shanghai and Central China. This supplement was then under the editorship of Yen Tu-ho 嚴獨鶴 (Yen Chen 嚴楨, 1889-1968), another traditional novelist whose trenchant writings enjoyed a fame equal to those of Chou Shou-chüan, who had succeeded T'ien-hsü-wo-sheng as editor of the rival supplement "The Rambler". In contrast to novels serialized in the Shanghai newspapers in the early thirties, some of them stale and stilted and with no semblance of a plot growing organically out of character and situation, *Fate in Tears and Laughter* came as refreshing fare to the multitude of middle-class readers who were often repelled by an increasingly commercialized society and thirsted for the most improbable kind of romance and excitement. What is more it came from the pen of an arch-entertainer, and was delivered with conscious technical expertise and creative realism.

The setting of *Tears and Laughter* is old Peking, which had changed its historical name to Peiping in late 1928 after the capital moved to Nanking, but retained its bewitching atmosphere of antiquity and tranquillity. The plot, outlined in Dr. Sally Borthwick's introduction, is simple. Fan Chia-shu 樊家樹, a young man from the south, is studying in Peiping. While sauntering to the fields where open-air entertainments were put on for the populace, he meets Shen Feng-hsi 沈鳳喜, a young girl who is a drum-singer by profession and who lives with her mother. He also makes the acquaintance of Kuan Shou-feng 關壽峯, a retired entertainer skilled in acrobatic and martial arts, and his daughter, Hsiu-ku 秀姑. Chia-shu rapidly falls in love with Feng-hsi and has decided to marry her when he has to hurry away to the south on urgent business. The relatives with whom Chia-shu lives, knowing little about this incident, have introduced him to another girl, Ho Li-na 何麗娜, who is from a rich and prominent family. When Chia-shu returns, he learns from Shou-feng and his daughter that Feng-hsi has fallen into the clutches of General Liu 劉將軍, a debauched warlord who has enticed her with riches and taken her by force. The ending of the novel finds Feng-hsi insane after her secret meeting with Chia-shu is discovered and she is incarcerated by the General. Chia-shu and Li-na, who in gentle and pleasing appearance is a twin of Feng-hsi, are thrown together through the manipulation of Chia-shu's relatives. The iniquitous General Liu is murdered in a temple on the outskirts of the city by Hsiu-ku, who pretends to yield to him in order to avenge Feng-hsi's tragic fate.

In great contrast to *Romance of the Imperial City*, which is picaresque and lyrical, the story of *Fate in Tears and Laughter* is well-organized and compact. It

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張恨水第一部

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ADVERTISEMENTS for two of Chang Hen-shui's novels, carried by *Shun Pao* in the mid-thirties.

is much shorter than the former work, but among the handful of characters deployed in a single plot, I do not find one that is undeveloped. The background scenes against which the main story unfolds—the exciting performers and the boisterous crowds at the entertainment grounds, the zigzag paths leading to a quiet park by the city wall, where numerous cypresses and pines provide welcome shade from the sun, a vigorous demonstration of martial arts in a spacious courtyard, and the daring but ineffective attempt to rescue Feng-hsi from the General's heavily guarded mansion by Shou-feng and his daughter—all conjure up a compelling sense of physical reality and infect the readers with the power and nobility of the artist's imagination. The author makes a striking distinction between the two kinds of poor folk. Kuan Shou-feng and his group represent those eking out a livelihood in sordid surroundings but committing no moral transgressions. Shen San-hsüan 沈三玄, a ruffian who is a third-class street musician and also an uncle of Feng-hsi, together with Feng-hsi's mother, represent the type of unscrupulous poor whose actions seal the fate of the innocent young lovers. The author gives a cool appraisal of social conventions and provides a clear and luminous narrative faithful to his individual experience and his notion of an imperfect world. Expert in the storyteller's art, his flexible language and psychological probings uncover the meanings that his characters create for themselves in their dilemmas. It is this, and his consistent moral attitude towards suffering, that give his otherwise pedestrian tale the kind of reality that a vast audience finds utterly satisfying.

The plot of this novel is not without blemishes. The untrained ear of a university student who comes to Peking from the south would not normally be attuned to the performance of a drum-storyteller who sings her metrical verses in a protracted recitation, and the resulting romance created for them seems to be unnatural and far-fetched. The uncanny resemblance of two faces (that of Shen Feng-hsi and Ho Li-na in the story) is, of course, a fictional cliché which may be traced back to the Ming short stories of the seventeenth century, if not earlier. Likewise, the setting up of some incidents in the novel, such as Chia-shu's separation from Feng-hsi, thereby providing the chance for the latter to be lured away from him, could

with some justification be regarded as heavy-handed and melodramatic. The hint of a happy ending given to the readers in the dénouement is no doubt calculated to satisfy the desire of the urban bourgeoisie, whose dream it is to gain entry into plutocratic society through simple wedlock. Chang Hen-shui's success as a creative writer is largely due to his ability to observe and report vividly and sympathetically the life and erring ways of a certain stratum of society, though his tendency to sentimentalize his material prevents him from gaining a deeper insight into the innermost reaches of man's heart and mind.

Chang Hen-shui had several dozen novels published before 1950. Besides *Eighty-one Dreams* (*Pa-shih-yi meng* 八十一夢) and *Your Obedient Servants* (*Niu-ma tsou* 牛馬走), also known as *The World of Mountain-spirits and Devils* (*Wang-liang shih-chieh* 魍魎世界), which he wrote in Chungking during wartime, two others warrant further mention. One is *The Hereditary House of Gold* (*Chin-fen shih-chia* 金粉世家), in which he deliberately imitated the panoramic structure of Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in's *Dream of the Red Chamber*; the other is *New Tales of the Water Margin* (*Shui-hu hsün-chuan* 水滸新傳), for which he used the Sung-Ming sagas as a blueprint. Personally, I find this last work particularly interesting because Chang was able to master the vocabulary of Middle Chinese, which he learned faultlessly from his model, the classic historical romance.

VIII



CRITICS IN THE WEST have sometimes decried middlebrow works as products of the unreality characteristic of so-called middle class culture. They fail to offer serious comment, let alone accurate judgment, on the actual conditions and values of life. Chinese middlebrow fiction is similar in nature though slightly different in its antecedents and therefore in its place on the scale of judgment. It occupies a proportionately larger section of the literary spectrum than its Western counterpart, and this section contains many works of a relatively higher quality.

Before the May 4th movement traditional fiction had already reached an advanced stage of evolution. The pace of change had accelerated at the turn of the century, following the establishment of many newspapers which required serialized works and other materials for the entertainment of their increasing number of readers. The conventional *chang-hui* style of fiction was generally maintained; of the major novels dealt with in this volume, only Hsü Chen-ya's *Yü-li hun* does not have chapter-topics written in couplets, apparently following the style of Lin Shu's Chinese translation of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in allocating two characters only to each chapter heading. As far as content is concerned, we cannot expect these works to depict in detail the struggle of individuals with the world around them, the eternal problems of human relationships or timeless moral perplexities.

These things were beyond their time and environment. But within their confines, and comparing them with works of similar nature produced by their contemporaries in other lands, I would say that they are unsurpassed in their own way. When we choose the word "middlebrow" to describe them, we mean only that they belong to the rank below the very highest.

The very highest model of imaginative writing in the Chinese context remains Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in's unfinished *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a work that strives for a frank exploration of self-experience, and distinctly implies moral subversion, both areas that preoccupy the writers of our own time. Nearly all the authors discussed in this volume shared an admiration for Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in. But none of them scaled his heights. They produced their own fictions in a setting different from Ts'ao's, and at a different time. They rose to the height of the tide, then sounded their retreat, having surged forward, wave upon wave, to great if somewhat ephemeral popular acclaim.



ONE OF THE EARLIEST CHINESE COPYRIGHT DEVICES, from the 1904 Commercial Press publication 英文漢語 *English Grammer* (sic), "Explained in Chinese by Julin Khedau Yen-Fuh"—i.e. Yen Fu 嚴復 (1853-1921).