

Chronicler of Taipei Types



PAI HSIEN-YUNG

A NEW GENERATION of creative writers rose in Taiwan in the 1950's, many of whom studied English literature at the National Taiwan University under the late Tsi-an Hsia (夏濟安) and broke into print in *Literary Review* (文學雜誌), the pathfinding journal which he edited. Pai Hsien-yung belongs to this generation.¹ His work, like that of his contemporaries, has now matured and is recognized by critics and the public alike as contributing to a fresh chapter in the history of Chinese *pai-hua* literature.

Pai Hsien-yung's maiden effort in short-story writing appeared in the September 1958 issue of *Literary Review*, just after his Freshman year at college. Since then he has published thirty-odd stories, including the 14 collected under the generic title *Taipei People* (台北人) and an earlier volume called *A Fallen Fairy* (謫仙記).² His inspiration for these stories, and much of his raw materials, have sprung from a personal background covering childhood in wartime Kweilin, residence in Shanghai immediately after victory over Japan, and resettling with his parents in Taiwan when he was a middle school student. (He is the son of General Pai Chung-hsi, one of the military leaders of the Nationalist Revolution and a high Government defense official in the war against Japanese invasion.)

"The Eternal Yin Hsueh-yen", the first of the *Taipei People* stories, originally appeared in the magazine *Modern Literature* (現代文學)³ in 1965, two years after he went to the United States to study. He won a Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop, and since 1965 has been teaching Chinese at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

¹Which includes, among others, Yu Kwang-chung (余光中, see p. 73 of this issue), Yu Li-hua (於梨華), Wang Wen-hsing (王文興), Yeh San (葉珊), Wai-lim Yip (葉維廉), Ch'ung Shu (叢甦), Ch'en Jo-hsi (陳若曦), Ouyang Tzu (歐陽子) and Shui Ching (水晶).

²*Taipei People*, first published in 1971 by the Ch'en-chung Company (晨鐘出版社), Taipei, is now in its 10th printing. Two of its stories, "Jung's by Blossom Bridge" and "One Winter Night", have been translated by Limin Chu in *An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature, Taiwan: 1949-1974* (中國現代文學選集), National Institute for Compilation and Translation, Taipei, 1975. *A Fallen Fairy*, or *A Celestial in Mundane Exile*, was published by Book World (文星書店), Taipei, 1967. Its title story was translated into English as "Li Tung: A Chinese Girl in New York" by the author and C. T. Hsia in *Twentieth Century Chinese Stories*, Columbia University Press, 1971. Other English translations of Pai Hsien-yung's stories are "The Elder Mrs. King" (i.e. "The Last Night of Taipan Chin") in *New Voices* (1961) and "Jade Love" in *New Chinese Writing* (1962), both translated by Nancy Chang Ing and published by the Heritage Press, Taipei; Hongkong—1960", translated by the author, in *Literature East and West*, IX, 4, December 1964.

³Published in Taipei between the years 1960-1973, another periodical that exerted a wide influence among the younger writers.

Prof. C. T. Hsia, critic and historian of modern Chinese fiction, considers Pai Hsien-yung a "rare talent" whose artistic achievement has excelled that of all but half-a-dozen of the short-story writers who published during the 30-year interval between the May Fourth Movement and the fall of mainland China.⁴ He believes that in delineating the "moral features" of those Chinese who have settled in Taiwan or emigrated to the United States in the past two decades or so, Pai has demonstrated the "historical sense" which T. S. Eliot said a poet must have if he is to continue writing after 25. In accepting this discipline of "objectivity" and performing brilliantly under it, Prof. Hsia wrote, Pai "has shown that he possesses the qualifications for creating a great novel".

Ouyang Tzu, who wrote the critical study of *Taipei People* presented in the foregoing pages, has commented elsewhere: "Pai Hsien-yung is an out-and-out Chinese writer. He has absorbed the diverse techniques of contemporary Western literature to temper and modernize his writing; however, the characters he writes about remain Chinese people and the stories he tells remain Chinese tales."⁵

The two stories translated in the following pages came to us under the aegis of Prof. Joseph S. M. Lau of the University of Wisconsin, who has written an analysis of *Taipei People* in the *Journal of Asian Studies* for November 1975, entitled "'Crowded Hours' Revisited: the Evocation of the Past in *Taipei jen*". Along with the several translators, responsibility for this English version of "The Eternal Yin Hsueh-yen" and "New Year's Eve" is shared by Prof. Lau, Mr. Dennis Hu, and the editors of *Renditions*.

OUYANG TZU (歐陽子) is the pen-name of Beatrice Hung Yen (洪智慧), herself a young writer from Taiwan with a number of fine stories to her credit, who has been a close student of Pai Hsien-yung's works. Besides the critique of *Taipei People* as a book, she has written an in-depth analysis of each of the 14 stories, and the Introduction to Pai's first collection of stories, *Fallen Fairy*. Mrs. Yen now lives in Austin, Texas.

⁴"On Pai Hsien-yung", in *Modern Literature*, No. 39, December 1969.

⁵Introduction to *Fallen Fairy*.