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THE CHINESE NOVEL

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1967

THE CHINESE NOVEL

*Nobel Lecture delivered before the
Swedish Academy at Stockholm
December 12, 1938*

BY
PEARL S. BUCK



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PUBLISHERS' FOREWORD

THE NOBEL PRIZE for Literature was awarded to Pearl S. Buck on December 10, 1938, at Stockholm. The citation was as follows: "*For rich and genuine epic portrayals of Chinese peasant life, and for masterpieces of biography.*"

In his address in the Concert Hall before the presentation of the award, Dr. Per Hallstrom of the Swedish Academy discussed six of the works of the author, including in detail the biographies of her mother and father (THE EXILE and FIGHTING ANGEL) and in conclusion said: "When the Swedish Academy awards this year's prize to Pearl Buck for the notable works which pave the way to a human sympathy passing over widely separated racial boundaries, and for the studies of human ideals which have become a great and living art of portraiture, it feels that it acts in harmony and accord with the aim of Alfred Nobel's dreams for the future."

Earlier in his address Dr. Hallstrom said:

“ Pearl Buck once told how she had found her mission as interpreter to the Occident of the nature and being of China. She did not turn to it as a literary speciality at all ; it came to her without her seeking.

“ ‘ It is people that have always afforded me my greatest pleasure and interest,’ she said, ‘ and as I live among the Chinese it has been the Chinese people in particular. When I am asked what sort of people they are, I cannot answer. They are not this or that, they are just people. I can no more define them than I can define my own relatives and kinsmen. I am too near to them and I have lived too intimately with them for that.’

“ She has been right among the people of China in all their vicissitudes, in good years and famine years, in the bloody tumults of revolutions and the delirium of Utopias. She has associated with the leading classes with a modern education, and with primordially primitive peasants, who had hardly seen a western face

before they saw hers. Often she has been a stranger in deadly peril, but has not felt herself a stranger ; on the whole her outlook retained its profound and warm humanity. With pure objectivity she has breathed life into her knowledge and given us the peasant epic which has made her world-famous."

At the time of the award of the Nobel Prize, the author was asked to lecture on a literary subject. She had for many years been making a study of the indigenous Chinese novel, and chose this occasion to put some portions of it into form for the first time, since, she says, it is the Chinese rather than the western novel which has shaped her own efforts in writing.

This lecture, delivered before the Swedish Academy on December 12, 1938, was repeated as a Phi Beta Kappa address at Randolph-Macon College, Lynchburg, Virginia, on April 22, 1939, and is now printed in full in this volume.

THE CHINESE NOVEL

THE CHINESE NOVEL

WHEN I came to consider what I should say today it seemed that it would be wrong not to speak of China. And this is none the less true because I am an American by birth and by ancestry and though I live now in my own country and shall live there, since there I belong. But it is the Chinese and not the American novel which has shaped my own efforts in writing. My earliest knowledge of story, of how to tell and write stories, came to me in China. It would be ingratitude on my part not to recognize this today. And yet it would be presumptuous to speak before you on the subject of the Chinese novel for a reason wholly personal. There is another reason why I feel that I may properly do so. It is that I believe the Chinese novel has an illumination for the western novel and for the western novelist.

When I say Chinese novel, I mean the indigenous Chinese novel, and not that hybrid

product, the novels of modern Chinese writers who have been too strongly under foreign influence while they were yet ignorant of the riches of their own country.

The novel in China was never an art and was never so considered, nor did any Chinese novelist think of himself as an artist. The Chinese novel, its history, its scope, its place in the life of the people, so vital a place, must be viewed in the strong light of this one fact. It is a fact no doubt strange to you, a company of modern western scholars who today so generously recognize the novel.

But in China, art and the novel have always been widely separated. There, literature as an art was the exclusive property of the scholars, an art they made, and made for each other, according to their own rules, and they found no place in it for the novel. And they held a powerful place, those Chinese scholars. Philosophy and religion and letters and literature, by arbitrary classical rules, they possessed them all,

for they alone possessed the means of learning, since they alone knew how to read and write. They were powerful enough to be feared even by emperors, so that emperors devised a way of keeping them enslaved by their own learning, and made the official examinations the only means to political advancement, those incredibly difficult examinations which ate up a man's whole life and thought in preparing for them, and kept him too busy with memorizing and copying the dead and classical past to see the present and its wrongs. In that past the scholars found their rules of art. But the novel was not there, and they did not see it being created before their eyes, for the people created the novel and what living people were doing did not interest the scholars, who thought of literature as an art.

If scholars ignored the people, however, the people in turn laughed at the scholars. They made innumerable jokes about them, of which this is a fair sample: One day a companion

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If scholars ignored the people, however, the people in turn laughed at the scholars. They made innumerable jokes about them, of which this is a fair sample : One day a company of

wild beasts met on a hillside for a hunt. They bargained with each other to go out and hunt all day and meet again at the end of the day to share what they had killed. At the end of the day, only the tiger returned with nothing. When he was asked how this happened he replied very disconsolately, "At dawn I met a school-boy, but he was, I feared, too callow for your tastes. I met no more until noon, when I found a priest. But I let him go, knowing him to be full of nothing but wind. The day went on and I grew desperate, for I passed no one. Then as dark came on I found a scholar. But I knew there was no use in bringing him back since he would be so dry and hard that he would break our teeth if we tried them on him."

The scholar, as a class, has long been a figure of fun for the Chinese people. He is frequently to be found in their novels, and always he is the same, as indeed he is in life, for a long study of the same dead classics and their formal composition has really made all Chinese scholars look

alike, as well as think alike. We have no class to parallel him in the West — individuals, perhaps, only. But in China he was a class. Here he is, composite, as the people see him ; a small shrunken figure with a bulging forehead, a pursed mouth, a nose at once snub and pointed, small inconspicuous eyes behind spectacles, a high pedantic voice, always announcing rules that do not matter to anyone but himself, a boundless self-conceit, a complete scorn not only of the common people but of all other scholars, a figure in long shabby robes, moving with a swaying haughty walk, when he moved at all. He was not to be seen except at literary gatherings, for most of the time he spent reading dead literature and trying to write more like it. He hated anything fresh or original, for he could not catalogue it into any of the styles he knew. If he could not catalogue it, he was sure it was not great, and he was confident that he only was right. If he said, " Here is art," he was convinced it was not to be found anywhere else,

for what he did not recognize did not exist. And as he could never catalogue the novel into what he called literature, so for him it did not exist as literature.

Yao Nai, one of the greatest of Chinese literary critics, in 1776 enumerated the kinds of writing which comprise the whole of literature. They are essays, government commentaries, biographies, epitaphs, epigrams, poetry, funeral eulogies, and histories. No novels, you perceive, although by that date the Chinese novel had already reached its glorious height, after centuries of development among the common Chinese people. Nor does that vast compilation of Chinese literature, *Ssŭ KU CHUEN SHU*, made in 1772 by the order of the great emperor Ch'ien Lung, contain the novel in the encyclopaedia of its literature proper.

No, happily for the Chinese novel, it was not considered by the scholars as literature. Happily, too, for the novelist ! Man and book, they were free from the criticisms of those scholars and

their requirements of art, their techniques of expression and their talk of literary significances and all that discussion of what is and is not art, as if art were an absolute and not the changing thing it is, fluctuating even within decades ! The Chinese novel was free. It grew as it liked out of its own soil, the common people, nurtured by that heartiest of sunshine, popular approval, and untouched by the cold and frosty winds of scholar's art. Emily Dickinson, the American poet, once wrote, "Nature is a haunted house, but art is a house that tries to be haunted." "Nature," she said,

*is what we see,
Nature is what we know
But have no art to say —
So impatient our wisdom is,
To her simplicity.*

No, if the Chinese scholars ever knew of the growth of the novel, it was only to ignore it the more ostentatiously. Sometimes, unfortunately,

they found themselves driven to take notice because youthful emperors found novels pleasant to read. Then these poor scholars were hard put to it. But they discovered the phrase "social significance," and they wrote long literary treatises to prove that a novel was not a novel but a document of social significance. Social significance is a term recently discovered by the most modern of literary young men and women in the United States, but the old scholars of China knew it a thousand years ago, when they, too, demanded that the novel should have social significance, if it were to be recognized as an art.

But for the most part the old Chinese scholar reasoned thus about the novel :

Literature is art.

All art has social significance.

This book has no social significance.

Therefore it is not literature.

And so the novel in China was not literature.

In such a school was I trained. I grew up believing that the novel has nothing to do with pure literature. So I was taught by scholars. The art of literature, so I was taught, is something devised by men of learning. Out of the brains of scholars came rules to control the rush of genius, that wild fountain which has its source in deepest life. Genius, great or less, is the spring, and art is the sculptured shape, classical or modern, into which the waters must be forced, if scholars and critics were to be served. But the people of China did not so serve. The waters of the genius of story gushed out as they would, however the natural rocks allowed and the trees persuaded, and only common people came and drank and found rest and pleasure.

For the novel in China was the peculiar product of the common people. And it was solely their property. The very language of the novel was their own language, and not the classical Wen-li, which was the language of literature and the scholars. Wen-li bore some-

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The Chinese Novel by Buck, P. S.

what the same resemblance to the language of the people as the ancient English of Chaucer does to the English of today, although, ironically enough, at one time Wen-li too was a vernacular. But the scholars never kept pace with the living, changing speech of the people. They clung to an old vernacular until they had made it classic, while the running language of the people went on and left them far behind. Chinese novels, then, are in the "Pei Hua," or simple talk, of the people, and this in itself was offensive to the old scholars, because it resulted in a style so full of easy flow and readability that it had no technique of expression in it, the scholars said.

I should pause to make an exception of certain scholars who came to China from India, bearing as their gift a new religion, Buddhism. In the West, Puritanism was for a long time the enemy of the novel. But in the Orient the Buddhists were wiser. When they came into China, they found literature already remote from the people and dying under the formalism of that period

known in history as the Six Dynasties. The professional men of literature were even then absorbed not so much in what they had to say as in pairing into couplets the characters of their essays and their poems, and already they scorned all writing which did not conform to their own rules. Into this confined literary atmosphere came the Buddhist translators with their great treasures of the freed spirit. Some of them were Indian, but some were Chinese. They said frankly that their aim was not to conform to the ideas of style of the literary men, but to make clear and simple to common people what they had to teach. They put their religious teachings into the common language, the language which the novel used, and because the people loved story, they took story and made it a means of teaching. The preface of FAH SHU CHING, one of the most famous of Buddhist books, says, "When giving the words of gods, these words should be given forth simply." This might be taken as the sole literary creed of the Chinese

novelist, to whom, indeed, gods were men and men were gods.

For the Chinese novel was written primarily to amuse the common people. And when I say amuse I do not mean only to make them laugh, though laughter is also one of the aims of the Chinese novel. I mean amusement in the sense of absorbing and occupying the whole attention of the mind. I mean enlightening the mind by pictures of life and what that life means. I mean encouraging the spirit not by rule-of-thumb talk about art, but by stories about the people in every age, and thus presenting to people simply themselves. Even the Buddhists who came to tell about gods found that people understood gods better if they saw them working through ordinary folk like themselves.

But the real reason why the Chinese novel was written in the vernacular was because the common people could not read and write and the novel had to be written so that when it was read aloud it could be understood by persons

who could communicate only through spoken words. In a village of two hundred souls perhaps only one man could read. And on holidays or in the evening when the work was done he read aloud to the people from some story. The rise of the Chinese novel began in just this simple fashion. After a while people took up a collection of pennies in somebody's cap or in a farm wife's bowl because the reader needed tea to wet his throat, or perhaps to pay him for time he would otherwise have spent at his silk loom or his rush weaving. If the collections grew big enough he gave up some of his regular work and became a professional storyteller. And the stories he read were the beginnings of novels. There were not many such stories written down, not nearly enough to last year in and year out for people who had by nature, as the Chinese have, a strong love for dramatic story. So the story-teller began to increase his stock. He searched the dry annals of the history which the scholars had written,

and with his fertile imagination, enriched by long acquaintance with common people, he clothed long-dead figures with new flesh and made them live again ; he found stories of court life and intrigue and names of imperial favourites who had brought dynasties to ruin ; he found, as he travelled from village to village, strange tales from his own times which he wrote down when he heard them. People told him of experiences they had had and he wrote these down too, for other people. And he embellished them, but not with literary turns and phrases, for the people cared nothing for these. No, he kept his audiences always in mind and he found that the style which they loved best was one which flowed easily along, clearly and simply, in the short words which they themselves used every day, with no other technique than occasional bits of description, only enough to give vividness to a place or a person, and never enough to delay the story. Nothing must delay the story. Story was what they wanted.

And when I say story, I do not mean mere pointless activity, not crude action alone. The Chinese are too mature for that. They have always demanded of their novels character above all else. SHUI HU CHUAN they have considered one of their three greatest novels, not primarily because it is full of the flash and fire of action, but because it portrays so distinctly one hundred and eight characters that each is to be seen separate from the others. Often I have heard it said of that novel in tones of delight, "When anyone of the hundred and eight begins to speak, we do not need to be told his name. By the way the words come from his mouth we know who he is." Vividness of character portrayal, then, is the first quality which the Chinese people have demanded of their novels, and after it, that such portrayal shall be by the character's own action and words rather than by the author's explanation.

Curiously enough, while the novel was beginning thus humbly in tea-houses, in villages and

lowly city streets out of stories told to the common people by a common and unlearned man among them, in imperial palaces it was beginning, too, and in much the same unlearned fashion. It was an old custom of emperors, particularly if the dynasty were a foreign one, to employ persons called "imperial ears," whose only duty was to come and go among the people in the streets of cities and villages and to sit among them in tea-houses, disguised in common clothes and listen to what was talked about there. The original purpose of this was, of course, to hear of any discontent among the emperor's subjects, and more especially to find out if discontents were rising to the shape of those rebellions which preceded the fall of every dynasty.

But emperors were very human and they were not often learned scholars. More often, indeed, they were only spoiled and wilful men. And the "imperial ears" had opportunity to hear all sorts of strange and interesting stories,

and they found that their royal masters were more frequently interested in these stories than they were in politics. So when they came back to make their reports, they flattered the emperor and sought to gain favour by telling him what he liked to hear, shut up as he was in the Forbidden City, away from life. They told him the strange and interesting things which common people did, who were free, and after a while they took to writing down what they heard in order to save memory. And I do not doubt that if messengers between the emperor and the people carried stories in one direction, they carried them in the other, too, and to the people they told stories about the emperor and what he said and did, and how he quarrelled with the empress who bore him no sons, and how she intrigued with the chief eunuch to poison the favourite concubine, all of which delighted the Chinese, because it proved to them, the most democratic of peoples, that their emperor was after all only a common fellow

like themselves and that he, too, had his troubles, though he was the Son of Heaven. Thus there began another important source for the novel that was to develop with such form and force, though still always denied its right to exist by the professional man of letters.

From such humble and scattered beginnings, then, came the Chinese novel, written always in the vernacular, and dealing with all which interested the people, with legend and with myth, with love and intrigue, with brigands and wars, with everything, indeed, which went to make up the life of the people, high and low.

Nor was the novel in China shaped, as it was in the West, by a few great persons. In China the novel has always been more important than the novelist. There has been no Chinese Defoe, no Chinese Fielding or Smollett, no Austin or Brontë or Dickens or Thackeray, or Meredith or Hardy, any more than Balzac or Flaubert. But there were and are novels as great as the novels in any other country in the world, as

great as any could have written, had he been born in China. Who then wrote these novels of China ?

That is what the modern literary men of China now, centuries too late, are trying to discover. Within the last twenty-five years literary critics, trained in the universities of the West, have begun to discover their own neglected novels. But the novelists who wrote them they cannot discover. Did one man write SHUI HU CHUAN, or did it grow to its present shape, added to, rearranged, deepened and developed by many minds and many a hand, in different centuries ? Who can now tell ? They are dead. They lived in their day and wrote what in their day they saw and heard, but of themselves they have told nothing. The author of HUNG LOU MENG, or DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER, in a far later century says in the preface to his book, "It is not necessary to know the times of Han and T'ang — it is necessary to tell only of my own times."

They told of their own times and they lived in a blessed obscurity. They read no reviews of their novels, no treatises as to whether or not what they did was well done according to the rules of scholarship. It did not occur to them that they must reach the high thin air which scholars breathed nor did they consider the stuff of which greatness is made, according to the scholars. They wrote as it pleased them to write and as they were able. Sometimes they wrote unwittingly well and sometimes unwittingly they wrote not so well. They died in the same happy obscurity and now they are lost in it and not all the scholars of China, gathered too late to do them honour, can raise them up again. They are long past the possibility of literary post-mortems. But what they did remains after them because it is the common people of China who keep alive the great novels, illiterate people, who have passed the novel not so often from hand to hand as from mouth to mouth.

In the preface to one of the later editions of SHUI HU CHUAN, Shih Nai-an, who had much to do with the making of that novel, writes, "What I speak of I wish people to understand easily. Whether the reader is good or evil, learned or unlearned, anyone can read this book. Whether or not the book is well done is not important enough to cause anyone to worry. — Alas, I am born to die. How can I know what those who come after me who read my book will think of it? I cannot even know what I myself, born into another incarnation, will think of it. I do not know if I myself then can even read. Why therefore should I care?"

Strangely enough, there were certain scholars who envied the freedom of obscurity, and who, burdened with certain private sorrows which they dared not tell anyone, or who perhaps wanting only a holiday from the weariness of the sort of art they had themselves created, wrote novels too, under assumed and humble names. And when they did so they put aside pedantry

and wrote as simply and naturally as any common novelist. For the novelist believed that he should not be conscious of techniques. He should write as his material demanded. If a novelist became known for a particular style or technique, to that extent he ceased to be a good novelist, and became a literary technician. ✓

A good novelist, or so I have been taught in China, should be above all else "*tse ran*," that is, natural, unaffected, and so flexible and variable as to be wholly at the command of the material that flows through him. His whole duty is only to sort life as it flows through him, and in the vast fragmentariness of time and space and event to discover essential and inherent order and rhythm and shape. We should never be able, merely by reading pages, to know who wrote them, for when the style of a novelist becomes fixed, that style becomes his prison. The Chinese novelists varied their writing to accompany like music their chosen themes.

These Chinese novels are not perfect accord-

ing to western standards. They are not always planned from beginning to end, nor are they compact, any more than life is planned or compact. They are often too long, too full of incident, too crowded with character, a medley of fact and fiction as to material, and a medley of romance and realism as to method, so that an impossible event of magic or dream may be described with such exact semblance of detail that one is compelled to belief against all reason. The earliest novels are full of folk lore, for the people of those times thought and dreamed in the ways of folk lore. But no one can understand the mind of China today who has not read these novels, for the novels have shaped the present mind, too, and the folk lore persists in spite of all that Chinese diplomats and western trained scholars would have us believe to the contrary. The essential mind of China is still that mind of which George Russell wrote when he said of the Irish mind, so strangely akin to the Chinese, ". . . that mind which in its folk im-

agination believes anything. It creates ships of gold with masts of silver and white cities by the sea and rewards and faeries, and when that vast folk mind turns to politics it is ready to believe anything."

Out of this folk mind, turned into stories and crowded with thousands of years of life, grew, literally, the Chinese novel. For these novels changed as they grew. If, as I have said, there are no single names attached beyond question to the great novels of China, it is because no one hand wrote them. Beginning as a mere tale, a story grew through succeeding versions into a structure built by many hands. I might mention as an example the well-known story, *THE WHITE SNAKE*, or *PEI SHÊ CHUAN*, first written in the T'ang dynasty by an unknown author. It was then a tale of the simple supernatural whose hero was a great white snake. In the next version in the following century, the snake has become a vampire woman who is an evil force. But the third version contains a more gentle and human

touch. The vampire becomes a faithful wife who aids her husband and gives him a son. The story thus adds not only new character but new quality, and ends not as the supernatural tale it began but as a novel of human beings.

So in early periods of Chinese history, many books must be called not so much novels as source books for novels, the sort of books into which Shakespeare, had they been open to him, might have dipped with both hands to bring up pebbles to make into jewels. Many of these books have been lost, since they were not considered valuable. But not all — early stories of Han, written so vigorously that to this day it is said they run like galloping horses, and tales of the troubled dynasties following — not all were lost. Some have persisted. In the Ming dynasty, in one way or another, many of them were represented in the great collection known as T'AI P'ING KUAN SHI, wherein are tales of superstition and religion, of mercy and goodness and rewards for evil and well doing, tales of dreams

and miracles, of dragons and gods and goddesses and priests, of tigers and foxes and transmigration and resurrection from the dead. Most of these early stories had to do with supernatural events, of gods born of virgins, of men walking as gods, as the Buddhist influence grew strong. There are miracles and allegories, such as the pens of poor scholars bursting into flower, dreams leading men and women into strange and fantastic lands of Gulliver, or the magic wand that floated an altar made of iron. But stories mirrored each age. The stories of Han were vigorous and dealt often with the affairs of the nation, and centred about some great man or hero. Humour was strong in this golden age, a racy, earthy, lusty humour, such as was to be found, for instance, in many of the books of tales, some presumed to have been collected, some to have been written during the period. And then the scenes changed, as that golden age faded, though it was never to be forgotten, so that to this day the Chinese like to call them-

selves sons of Han. With the succeeding weak and corrupt centuries, the very way the stories were written became honeyed and weak, and their subjects slight, or as the Chinese say, "In the days of the Six Dynasties, they wrote of small things, of a woman, a waterfall, or a bird."

If the Han dynasty was golden, then the T'ang dynasty was silver, and silver were the love stories for which it was famous. It was an age of love, when a thousand stories clustered about the beautiful Yang Kuei Fei and her scarcely less beautiful predecessor in the emperor's favour, Mei Fei. These love stories of T'ang come very near sometimes to fulfilling in their unity and complexity the standards of the western novel. There are rising action and crisis and denouement, implicit if not expressed. The Chinese say, "We must read the stories of T'ang, because though they deal with small matters, yet they are written in so moving a manner that the tears come."

It is not surprising that most of these love

stories deal not with love that ends in marriage or is contained in marriage, but with love outside the marriage relationship. Indeed, it is significant that when marriage is the theme the story nearly always ends in tragedy. Two famous stories, PEI LI SHI and CHIAO FANG CHI, deal entirely with extra-marital love, and are written apparently to show the superiority of the courtesans, who could read and write and sing and were clever and beautiful besides, beyond the ordinary wife who was, as the Chinese say even today, "a yellow-faced woman," and usually illiterate.

So strong did this tendency become that officialdom grew alarmed at the popularity of such stories among the common people and they were denounced as revolutionary and dangerous because it was thought they attacked that foundation of Chinese civilization, the family system. A reactionary tendency was not lacking, such as is to be seen in HUI CHEN CHI, one of the earlier forms of a famous later work, the story of the

young scholar who loved the beautiful Ying Ying and who renounced her, saying prudently as he went away, "All extraordinary women are dangerous. They destroy themselves and others. They have ruined even emperors. I am not an emperor and I had better give her up" — which he did, to the admiration of all wise men. And to him the modest Ying Ying replied, "If you possess me and leave me it is your right. I do not reproach you." But five hundred years later the sentimentality of the Chinese popular heart comes forth and sets the thwarted romance right again. In this last version of the story the author makes Chang and Ying Ying husband and wife and says in closing, "This is in the hope that all the lovers of the world may be united in happy marriage." And as time goes in China, five hundred years is not long to wait for a happy ending.

This story, by the way, is one of China's most famous. It was repeated in the Sung dynasty in a poetic form by Chao Teh Liang, under the

title THE RELUCTANT BUTTERFLY, and again in the Yuan dynasty by Tung Chai Yuen as a drama to be sung, entitled SUH HSI HSIANG. In the Ming dynasty, with two versions intervening, it appears as Li Reh Hua's NAN HSI HSIANG CHI, written in the southern metrical form called "ts'e," and so to the last and most famous HSI HSIANG CHI. Even children in China know the name of Chang Sen.

If I seem to emphasize the romances of the T'ang period, it is because romance between man and woman is the chief gift of T'ang to the novel, and not because there were no other stories. There were many novels of a humorous and satirical nature and one curious type of story which concerned itself with cockfighting, an important pastime of that age, and particularly in favour at court. One of the best of these tales is TUNG CHEN LAO FU CHUAN, by Ch'en Hung, which tells how Chia Chang, a famous cock-fighter, became so famous that he was loved by emperor and people alike.

But time and the stream pass on. The novel form really begins to be clear in the Sung dynasty, and in the Yuan dynasty it flowers into that height which was never again surpassed and only equalled, indeed, by the single novel HUNG LOU MENG, or DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER, in the Ts'ing dynasty. It is as though for centuries the novel had been developing unnoticed and from deep roots among the people, and spreading into trunk and branch and twig and leaf to burst into this flowering in the Yuan dynasty, when the young Mongols brought into the old country they had conquered their vigorous, hungry, untutored minds, and demanded to be fed. Such minds could not be fed with the husks of the old classical literature, and they turned therefore the more eagerly to the drama and the novel, and in this new life, in the sunshine of imperial favour, though still not with literary favour, there came two of China's three great novels, SHUI HU CHUAN and SAN KUO — HUNG LOU MENG being the third.

I wish I could convey to you what these three novels mean and have meant to the Chinese people. But I can think of nothing comparable to them in western literature. We have not in the history of our novel so clear a moment to which we can point and say, "There the novel is at its height." These three are the vindication of that literature of the common people, the Chinese novel. They stand as completed monuments of that popular literature, if not of letters. They, too, were ignored by men of letters and banned by censors and damned in succeeding dynasties as dangerous, revolutionary, decadent. But they lived on because people read them and told them as stories and sang them as songs and ballads and acted them as dramas, until at last grudgingly even the scholars were compelled to notice them and to begin to say they were not novels but allegories and if they were allegories perhaps then they could be looked upon as literature after all, though the people paid no heed to such theories and never read the long

treatises which scholars wrote to prove them. They rejoiced in the novels they had made as novels and for no purpose except for joy in story, and in story through which they could express themselves.

And indeed the people had made them. SHUI HU CHUAN, though the modern versions carry the name of Shih Nai-an as author, was written by no one man. Out of a handful of tales centring in the Sung dynasty about a band of robbers there grew this great, structured novel. Its beginnings were in history. The original lair which the robbers held still exists in Shantung or did until very recent times. Those times of the thirteenth century of our western era were, in China, sadly distorted. The dynasty under the emperor Huei Chung was falling into decadence and disorder. The rich grew richer and the poor poorer and when none other came forth to set this right these righteous robbers came forth.

I cannot here tell you fully of the long growth

of this novel, nor of its changes at many hands. Shih Nai-an, it is said, found it in rude form in an old book shop and took it home and rewrote it. After him the story was still told and re-told. Five or six versions of it today have importance, one with a hundred chapters entitled CHUNG I SHUI HU, one of a hundred and twenty-seven chapters, and one of a hundred chapters. The original version attributed to Shih Nai-an had a hundred and twenty chapters, but the one most used today has only seventy. This is the version arranged in the Ming dynasty by the famous Ching Shen T'an, who said that it was idle to forbid his son to read the book and therefore presented the lad with a copy revised by himself, knowing that no boy could ever refrain from reading it. There is also a version written under official command, when officials found that nothing could keep the people from reading SHUI HU. This official version is entitled TUNG K'OU CHI, or LAYING WASTE THE ROBBERS, and it tells of the final defeat of the robbers by the

state army and their destruction. But the common people of China are nothing if not independent. They have never adopted the official version, and their own form of the novel still stands. It is a struggle they know all too well, the struggle of everyday people against a corrupt officialdom.

I might add that SHUI HU CHUAN is in partial translation in French under the title LES CHEVALIERS CHINOIS and the seventy-chapter version is in complete English translation by myself under the title ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS. The original title, SHUI HU CHUAN, in English is meaningless, denoting merely the watery margins of the famous marshy lake which was the robbers' lair. To Chinese the words invoke instant century-old memory, but not to us.

This novel has survived everything and in this new day in China has taken on an added significance. The Chinese Communists have printed their own edition of it with a preface by a famous Communist and have issued it anew as

of thirst Communist literature of China. The
Shihf of the novel's greatness is in this timelessness-
an old. It is as true today as it was dynasties ago.
it. People of China still march across its pages,
priests and courtesans, merchants and scholars,
women good and bad, old and young, and even
naughty little boys. The only figure lacking is
that of the modern scholar trained in the West,
holding his Ph.D. diploma in his hand. But be
sure that if he had been alive in China when
the final hand laid down the brush upon the
pages of that book, he too would have been
there in all the pathos and humour of his new
learning, so often useless and inadequate and
laid like a patch too small upon an old robe.

The Chinese say "The young should not read
SHUI HU and the old should not read SAN KUO."
This is because the young might be charmed
into being robbers and the old might be led
into deeds too vigorous for their years. For if
SHUI HU CHUAN is the great social document of
Chinese life, SAN KUO is the document of wars

and statesmanship and in its turn HUNG LOU MENG is the document of family life and human love.

The history of the SAN KUO or THREE KINGDOMS shows the same architectural structure and the same doubtful authorship as SHUI HU. The story begins with three friends swearing eternal brotherhood in the Han dynasty and ends ninety-seven years later in the succeeding period of the Six Dynasties. It is a novel rewritten in its final form by a man named Lo Kuan Chung, thought to be a pupil of Shih Nai-an, and one who perhaps even shared with Shih Nai-an in the writing, too, of SHUI HU CHUAN. But this is a Chinese Bacon-and-Shakespeare controversy which has no end.

Lo Kuan Chung was born in the late Yuan dynasty and lived on into the Ming. He wrote many dramas but he is more famous for his novels, of which SAN KUO is easily the best. The version of this novel now most commonly used in China is the one revised in the time of

not
the
novel

K'ang Hsi by Mao Chen Kan, who revised as well as criticized the book. He changed, added and omitted material, as for example when he added the story of Suan Fu Ren, the wife of one of the chief characters. He altered even the style. If SHUI HU CHUAN has importance today as a novel of the people in their struggle for liberty, SAN KUO has importance because it gives in such detail the science and art of war, as the Chinese conceive it, so differently, too, from our own. The guerillas, who are today China's most effective fighting units against Japan, are peasants who know SAN KUO by heart, if not from their own reading, at least from hours spent in the idleness of winter days or long summer evenings when they sat listening to the story-tellers describe how the warriors of the Three Kingdoms fought their battles. It is these ancient tactics of war which the guerillas trust today. What a warrior must be and how he must attack and retreat, how retreat when the enemy advances, how advance when the enemy

retreats — all this had its source in this novel, so well known to every common man and boy of China.

HUNG LOU MENG, or THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER, the latest and most modern of these three greatest of Chinese novels, was written originally as an autobiographical novel by Ts'ao Hsüeh Ching, an official highly in favour during the Manchu regime and indeed considered by the Manchus as one of themselves. There were then eight military groups among the Manchus, and Ts'ao Hsüeh Ching belonged to them all. He never finished his novel, and the last forty chapters were added by another man, probably named Kao O. The thesis that Ts'ao Hsüeh Ching was telling the story of his own life has been in modern times elaborated by Hu Shih, and in earlier times by Yuan Mei. Be this as it may, the original title of the book was SHIH T'OU CHI, and it came out of Peking about 1765 of the western era, and in five or six years, an incredibly short time in China, it was famous

everywhere. Printing was still expensive when it appeared, and the book became known by the method that is called in China, "You-lend-me-a-book-and-I-lend-you-a-book."

The story is simple in its theme but complex in implication, in character study and in its portrayal of human emotions. It is almost a pathological study, this story of a great house, once wealthy and high in imperial favour, so that indeed one of its members was an imperial concubine. But the great days are over when the book begins. The family is already declining. Its wealth is being dissipated and the last and only son, Chia Pao Yü, is being corrupted by the decadent influences within his own home, although the fact that he was a youth of exceptional quality at birth is established by the symbolism of a piece of jade found in his mouth. The preface begins, "Heaven was once broken and when it was mended a bit was left unused, and this became the famous jade of Chia Pao Yü." Thus does the interest in the supernatural

persist in the Chinese people ; it persists even today as a part of Chinese life.

This novel seized hold of the people primarily because it portrayed the problems of their own family system, the absolute power of women in the home, the too great power of the matriarchy, the grandmother, the mother, and even the bondmaids, so often young and beautiful and fatally dependent, who became too frequently the playthings of the sons of the house and ruined them and were ruined by them. Women reigned supreme in the Chinese house, and because they were wholly confined in its walls and often illiterate, they ruled to the hurt of all. They kept men children, and protected them from hardship and effort when they should not have been so protected. Such an one was Chia Pao Yü, and we follow him to his tragic end in HUNG LOU MENG.

I cannot tell you to what lengths of allegory scholars went to explain away this novel when they found that again even the emperor was

reading it and that its influence was so great everywhere among the people. I do not doubt that they were probably reading it themselves in secret. A great many popular jokes in China have to do with scholars reading novels privately and publicly pretending never to have heard of them. At any rate, scholars wrote treatises to prove that HUNG LOU MENG was not a novel but a political allegory depicting the decline of China under the foreign rule of the Manchus, the word Red in the title signifying Manchu, and Ling Tai Yü, the young girl who dies, although she was the one destined to marry Pao Yü, signifying China, and Pao Ts'ai, her successful rival, who secures the jade in her place, standing for the foreigner, and so forth. The very name Chia signified, they said, falseness. But this was far-fetched explanation of what was written as a novel and stands as a novel and as such a powerful delineation, in the characteristic Chinese mixture of realism and romance, of a proud and powerful family in decline. Crowded

with men and women of the several generations accustomed to living under one roof in China, it stands alone as an intimate description of that life.

In so emphasizing these three novels, I have merely done what the Chinese themselves do. When you say "novels," the average Chinese replies "SHUI HU, SAN KUO, HUNG LOU MENG"; yet this is not to say that there are not hundreds of other novels, for there are. I must mention HSI YÜ CHI, or RECORD OF TRAVELS IN THE WEST, almost as popular as these three. I might mention FENG SHEN CHUAN, the story of a deified warrior, the author unknown but said to be a writer in the time of Ming. I must mention RU LING WAI SHI, a satire upon the evils of the Ts'ing dynasty, particularly of the scholars, full of a double-edged though not malicious dialogue, rich with incident, pathetic and humorous. The fun here is made of the scholars who can do nothing practical, who are lost in the world of useful everyday things, who

are so bound by convention that nothing original can come from them. The book, though long, has no central character. Each figure is linked to the next by the thread of incident, person and incident passing on together until, as Lu Hsün, the famous modern Chinese writer, has said, "they are like scraps of brilliant silk and satin sewed together."

And there is YEA SHOU PEI YIN, or AN OLD HERMIT TALKS IN THE SUN, written by a famous man disappointed in official preferment, Shia of Kiang-yin, and there is that strangest of books, CHING HUA YUEN, a fantasy of women, whose ruler was an empress, whose scholars were all women. It is designed to show that the wisdom of women is equal to that of men, although I must acknowledge that the book ends with a war between men and women in which the men are triumphant and the empress is supplanted by an emperor.

But I can mention only a small fraction of the hundreds of novels which delight the common

people of China. And if those people knew of what I was speaking to you today, they would after all say "tell of the great three, and let us stand or fall by SHUI HU and SAN KUO and HUNG LOU MENG." In these three novels are the lives which the Chinese people lead and have long led, here are the songs they sing and the things at which they laugh and the things which they love to do. Into these novels they have put the generations of their being and to refresh that being they return to these novels again and again, and out of them they have made new songs and plays and other novels. Some of them have come to be almost as famous as the great originals, as for example CHING P'ING MEI, that classic of romantic physical love, taken from a single incident in SHUI HU CHUAN.

But the important thing for me today is not the listing of novels. The aspect which I wish to stress is that all this profound and indeed sublime development of the imagination of a great democratic people was never in its own time

and country called literature. The very name for story was "hsiao shuo," denoting something slight and valueless, and even a novel was only a "ts'ang p'ien hsiao shuo," or a longer something which was still slight and useless. No, the people of China forged their own literature apart from letters. And today this is what lives, to be part of what is to come, and all the formal literature, which was called art, is dead. The plots of these novels are often incomplete, the love interest is often not brought to solution, heroines are often not beautiful and heroes often are not brave. Nor has the story always an end; sometimes it merely stops, in the way life does, in the middle of it when death is not expected.

In this tradition of the novel have I been born and reared as a writer. My ambition, therefore, has not been trained toward the beauty of letters or the grace of art. It is, I believe, a sound teaching and as I have said, illuminating for the novels of the West.

For here is the essence of the attitude of Chinese novelists — perhaps the result of the contempt in which they were held by those who considered themselves the priests of art. I put it thus in my own words, for none of them has done so.

The instinct which creates *the arts* is not the same as that which produces art. The creative instinct is, in its final analysis and in its simplest terms, an enormous extra vitality, a super-energy, born inexplicably in an individual, a vitality great beyond all the needs of his own living — an energy which no single life can consume. This energy consumes itself then in creating more life, in the form of music, painting, writing, or whatever is its most natural medium of expression. Nor can the individual keep himself from this process, because only by its full function is he relieved of the burden of this extra and peculiar energy — an energy at once physical and mental, so that all his senses are more alert and more profound than another man's, and all

his brain more sensitive and quickened to that which his senses reveal to him in such abundance that actuality overflows into imagination. It is a process proceeding from within. It is the heightened activity of every cell of his being, which sweeps not only himself, but all human life about him, or in him, in his dreams, into the circle of its activity.

From the product of this activity, art is deducted — but not by him. The process which creates is not the process which deduces the shapes of art. The defining of art, therefore, is a secondary and not a primary process. And when one born for the primary process of creation, as the novelist is, concerns himself with the secondary process, his activity becomes meaningless. When he begins to make shapes and styles and techniques and new schools, then he is like a ship stranded upon a reef whose propeller, whirl wildly as it will, cannot drive the ship onward. Not until the ship is in its element again can it regain its course.

And for the novelist the only element is human life as he finds it in himself or outside himself. The sole test of his work is whether or not his energy is producing more of that life. Are his creatures alive? That is the only question. And who can tell him? Who but those living human beings, the people? Those people are not absorbed in what art is or how it is made — are not, indeed, absorbed in anything very lofty, however good it is. No, they are absorbed only in themselves, in their own hungers and despairs and joys and above all, perhaps, in their own dreams. These are the ones who can really judge the work of the novelist, for they judge by that single test of reality. And the standard of the test is not to be made by the device of art, but by the simple comparison of the reality of what they read, to their own reality.

I have been taught, therefore, that though the novelist may see art as cool and perfect shapes, he may only admire them as he admires marble

statues standing aloof in a quiet and remote gallery ; for his place is not with them. His place is in the street. He is happiest there. The street is noisy and the men and women are not perfect in the technique of their expression as the statues are. They are ugly and imperfect, incomplete even as human beings, and where they come from and where they go cannot be known. But they are people and therefore infinitely to be preferred to those who stand upon the pedestals of art.

And like the Chinese novelist, I have been taught to want to write for these people. If they are reading their magazines by the million, then I want my stories there rather than in magazines read only by a few. For story belongs to the people. They are sounder judges of it than anyone else, for their senses are unspoiled and their emotions are free. No, a novelist must not think of pure literature as his goal. He must not even know this field too well, because people, who are his material, are not there. He is a story-

teller in a village tent and by his stories he entices people into his tent. He need not raise his voice when a scholar passes. But he must beat all his drums when a band of poor pilgrims pass on their way up the mountain in search of gods. To them he must cry, "I, too, tell of gods!" And to farmers he must talk of their land, and to old men he must speak of peace, and to old women he must tell of their children and to young men and women he must speak of each other. He must be satisfied if the common people hear him gladly. At least, so I have been taught in China.



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