Mandarin Ducks

and Butterflies

POPULAR FICTION IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINESE CITIES

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On the eve of the Communist success in China, Mao Tse-tung told a group of newspapermen that "we have always maintained that the revolution must rely on the masses of the people, on everybody's taking a hand . . . ." Here "we" means the Communist Party of China, but the spirit of Mao's message pervades a wide range of twentieth-century Chinese thought.

Hardly anything, in fact, differentiates Chinese political assumptions of this century from those of the last more clearly than the notion that everyone, all "the people," should participate actively in the processes of the modern nation. Full participation was felt to be vital to national strength. "Can nations be anything but strong," wondered K'ang Yu-wei in 1896, "when their rulers and the millions of their people are united in a single body?" Four years later Liang Ch'ieh-chieh theorized on the "new citizens" (hsin min) who would comprise the great new unity; and, though Liang's ideas were challenged by later revolutionaries, his category called min, and the assumption of its fundamental importance, continued to find acceptance almost as a matter of course. Attacks on Liang by anti-Manchu revolutionaries appeared in a newspaper significantly titled The People's Journal (Min pao), which was published in Tokyo after 1905. A few years later in Shanghai the revolutionary journals of Yü Yu-jen appeared under names such as The People's Cry (Min bao), The People Sigh (Min han), and The People

2. Liang Ch'ieh-chieh, scholar, editor, and bold advocate of reform, was the outstanding intellectual leader of China's modern generation during 1900-1910, the so-called Decade. See chapter 4, also Hoa Chang, Liang Ch'ieh-chieh and Intellectual Transfiguration in China; Philip C. Huang, Liang Ch'ieh-chieh and Modern Chinese Liberalism; Joseph R. Levynson, Liang Ch'ieh-chieh and the Mind of Modern China.
Not until the war against Japan in the 1930s and 1940s do we have an argument for significant "peasant" nationalism. But even this is probably best viewed, if nationalism is to mean something different from native anti-foreignism, as an extension of the urban movement, brought to the countryside by politicized youth whose training and inspiration had originated in the cities. In many ways the gap between life in modern China's changing cities and her not-so-changing countryside grew wider in the early twentieth century. The urban-rural distinction in China may never have been larger than at mid-century. The campaign of the 1960s and early seventies to send urban youth to the countryside are evidence of the gap's persistence. In short, our understanding of popular nationalism in modern China would seem to depend crucially on our view of its cities.

The study of nationalism, as of any "ism," is a study of ideas, in this case the idea of "loyalty to and the promotion of the culture and interests... of one nation" (Wright's Third New International Dictionary, 1969). For a society undergoing social change as rapidly as modern China's, the question of what "culture" a nationalist is to promote and be loyal to is complicated by a wide-ranging and off-circuit distinction between "new style" and "old style" life. To understand how people undergoing change felt about this distinction, whose simple formulations belie an extreme complexity, presents the historian of ideas with a considerable challenge.

One major problem is that of access. Aside from the several difficulties of "climbing back into" the mind of anyone anywhere, the problem has been compounded for historians of modern China by the inadequacy of sources. For some sectors of the intellectual and political elite, access has been made easier by the verbal record which has been left behind in speeches, essays, scholarship, autobiography, and creative literature. The value of these records has been amply demonstrated in a number of superior biographical studies of individuals; and some general studies, such as Tsao-tsung Chern's The May Fourth Movement, Leo Lee's The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers, and Y.C. Wang's Chinese Intellectuals and the West, have been able to reach conclusions about the outlooks of certain elite groups as wholes.


8. On the movement of urban youth to the countryside in the People's Republic of China, see Thomas Bernstein, Up the Mountains and Down to the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China (New Haven, 1977).
Crucial as these accesses are, they give us the views of only a small portion of society. Members of the elite did, to be sure, frequently try to speak on behalf of everyone, expressing their views of what the masses’ outlook appears to have been. But one should not assume these projections to coincide with the actual views of those who were spoken for. There is still a need, ideally speaking, for unmediated access to the views of the non-elite.

Who were the common people in modern Chinese cities? Generalizations must of course vary with the type of city in question, and in particular with the age and strength of its traditional functions versus the size and nature of its modern, Western-influenced activities.

As an example we might consider the cities of Soochow and Shanghai in the lower Yangtze Basin. Soochow, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was a provincial capital, the second largest city in China, and an important center of the civil service examinations and other aspects of cultural orthodoxy. Shanghai, on the other hand, was more than a county seat and foreign outpost until refugees from the Taiping Wars began to swell its population in the 1860s. After 1895, when the Treaty of Shimonoseki with Japan legalized foreign manufacturing in Shanghai, the city’s population grew rapidly to nearly a million as textiles, flour, cigarettes and other industries supplemented its banking and commercial functions. When World War I curtailed Western competition in Chinese and Southeast Asian markets, Shanghai’s economy received another impetus, attracted more immigration, and grew to more than a million and a half.9

Shanghai’s growth and Soochow’s decline should be viewed as parts of the same process. With the end of the civil service examinations in 1905 and the Republican revolution of 1911, Soochow increasingly came to be regarded as simply a pleasant residential area, a sort of backdrop for Shanghai’s “new-style” leadership in commerce and industry, and eventually in politics and even art. Soochow parents who formerly forbade their children to go to Shanghai came to permit this more freely; merchants who had scorned Shanghai business increasingly allowed themselves its profits; intellectuals who had been devoted to the civil service exams now shifted their attention to the discussion societies and new journals of Shanghai. In Shanghai itself, many of the emerging professions, both new and old, came to be known as specialties of Soochow people: lawyers, druggists, silk merchants, pawnshop keepers, newspapermen, fiction writers, money-lenders and prostitutes in Shanghai were among vocations considered Soochow specialties.10

One can easily identify upper and lower classes in sorting out the various occupations in early twentieth-century Shanghai. Wealthy bankers, merchants, and industrialists—in the economic sphere—and politicians, some writers, intellectuals, and students—in the political-intellectual sphere—must be counted as a social elite. On the other hand, a lower class consisted of industrial workers, mostly from the lower Yangtze countryside, plus manual laborers such as servants, coolies, ricksha pullers, peddlers, and many others.

But it seems necessary to posit a third major class between these two. Contemporary Chinese descriptions of Shanghai often refer to hsiao-shih-min (“little city people”) which Han-yü tz’u-nien explains as “the middle class or the petty bourgeoisie.” The term is taken to include small merchants, various kinds of clerks and secretaries, high school students, housewives, and other modestly educated, marginally well off urbanites.

Except for the obvious differences between this group and the middle class of the modern West and Japan—a class peculiar in world history for its great affluence despite considerable distance from elite power or prestige—there might be no cause to apologize for use of the term “middle class.” Hsiao shih-min were, without doubt, in the middle. Their literacy, which opened several occupational doors to them, clearly set them off from the urban laboring classes to whom these doors were closed. On the other hand, most of the new occupations did not bring the rapid wealth they seemed to promise, and hsiao shih-min were obliged to live well below the standards of the wealthy class. In intellectual terms they were also distinct from the generally more progressive elite, who advocated “new-style” ideas more readily than this urban middle class could comfortably tolerate. Many hsiao shih-min were from inland gentry backgrounds, knew little of the West, and apparently felt insecure in a modern, semi-Westernized city like Shanghai. Their basic tendency, in a Shanghai context, seems to have been conservative. While intellectual leaders often took them as the intended audience for urgent messages on reform and revolution, the fact that these attempts at leadership were so difficult is itself an important reason for distinguishing the two groups.

Returning to the question of access to the “mind” of urban China in the early twentieth century, we must now ask what is known, or knowable, about the ideas and attitudes of its two non-elite classes, the lower class and the hsiao shih-min.

The urban laboring classes have been studied by Jean Chesneaux and others.11 Though Chesneaux does not focus primarily on ideas

10. See CYHLIL, pp. 216 and 317; also CYHLIL-HP, pp. 106–107.
The present work is an attempt to crack the problem in another way. It began as an attempt to understand popular ideas and attitudes in Chinese cities during the 1910s and 1920s through the study of the urban popular fiction which bloomed during those decades. In the course of research I have become satisfied that the approach has great potential, but probably less for the working class than for the hsiao shih-min whom I have just called the urban "middle class." In the decade of the 1910s China's urban popular fiction was written primarily in a semi-classical language too difficult for the working class. Even more important is the fact that books in the 1910s cost much more than a worker could afford. The picture was somewhat different in the twenties, however, when popular fiction seems to have been enjoyed by a good portion of the working class in addition to the middle class. In the twenties almost all popular fiction was in vernacular style (influenced by, but not part of, the May Fourth Movement), while new schools in cities like Shanghai had brought minimal literacy to more people, including some parts of the working class. The prices of books and magazines came down and popular fiction also began to appear in comic books, moving pictures, and radio storytelling, all of which were cheaper to enjoy than books as well as less demanding of literacy.

Establishing that a given audience enjoyed certain stories or kinds of story is, of course, only a first step in access to the "mind" of that audience. There are obviously many possibilities for the general relation between a work of fiction and the psychology of its reader. (To say nothing of influences on the readers' actual behavior, which is another knotty problem: everyone knows that most readers of murder stories are not themselves murderers.) I do make some conjectures on the fiction-and-popular-mind relation, especially in chapter six, and my arguments there may or may not be valid. In either case, however,
“old-style” fiction, while non-Communist writings generally use it to mean love stories only. A certain amount of confusion and even acrimony has attended the ambiguity. In the present work the broader definition (usually abbreviated to “Butterfly”) is sometimes used, but only as a matter of convenience. It is intended that the reference be value-free, as the question of quality in “Butterfly” fiction should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

In addition to the context of Chinese tradition, it is important to view “Butterfly” fiction in an international context. Without overlooking its distinctively Chinese elements, one may easily recognize that various aspects of its historical setting, as well as some of its literary characteristics, are remarkably similar to those of urban popular fiction in other countries which have been part of the global spread of the Industrial Revolution. The extent to which modern life patterns are inherent consequences of industrialism may not be entirely clear; but modern-style entertainment fiction (or television, in recent decades) has, for one example, consistently appeared in tandem with industrialism around the world. From beginnings in eighteenth-century England this kind of fiction spread to Western Europe and America, in many cases through direct borrowing as stories were reprinted or translated across international boundaries.

In East Asia, Japan was first to display the trend. In the 1870s and 1880s, primarily in Osaka and Tokyo, Japanese translated and imitated popular Western writers like Charles Dickens, H. Rider Haggard, and Jules Verne as a way of supplying the needs and curiosities of a new urban audience. Other items were not fiction but popular investigations of life and manners in the West, works which should be viewed as creative Japanese contributions to international entertainment literature. All these materials were printed ever more cheaply and abundantly on modern presses.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, Shanghai, the first Chinese city to undergo modern urbanization, also produced an outpouring of entertainment fiction. Most of the early examples, especially of fiction, came via Japanese translation, and China’s pattern in modern entertainment fiction followed Japan’s in its major outlines. On a trip to Japan in the 1910s, a leading Chinese writer-translator noted similarities between the modern press in Osaka and Shanghai, including its spread to the national centers at Tokyo and Peking respectively. In the wake of its borrowings from Japan, Chinese writers looked increasingly to China’s own vernacular tradition for models for their work.

Regardless of whether inspirations were native or foreign, fundamental themes were much the same. As in Europe, America, and Japan, the major types of modern popular fiction in China were: (1) love stories, (2) righteous-hero adventures, (3) scandal, or “muckraking” stories, and (4) detective stories. Each of these themes, however altered by modern circumstances, had strong roots in the Chinese vernacular tradition, i.e., (1) The love-story tradition of  ts'ai-tzu chu-ien or "talent-meets-beauty" stories, plus, to a certain extent, Dream of the Red Chamber; (2) The Water Margin, Tale of Heroic Young Lovers (Er-ni ying-hsiung chuan) and the whole "knight-errant" tradition; (3) Forest of Scholars and the late-Ch’ing “blame” novels; and (4) Ch’ing “public case” (kung-an) stories such as The Cases of Judge Peng (P’eng kung-an).

In terms of literary styles, modern popular fiction both East and West was distinct from elite fiction in ways which generally mark it as “popular.” Stories often tell of strange, unusual events; their plots take unexpected turns; most of their leading characters are flatly all-good or all-bad; many are expressed in simple, direct language (though there are important exceptions to this) and most are filled with action, sparse with description.

Since these same stylistic features were prominent in the vernacular tradition, and since themes likewise were similar, one might ask what sets “Butterfly” fiction off from its literary predecessors. Was it a matter of social role, as a wholesale supplier of urban entertainment? Cer-
certainly popular entertainment was nothing new in Chinese cities, nor was fiction new as one of its more important modes. Yet in certain ways Butterfly fiction was distinctively a child of the early twentieth century. It was composed, published, distributed, and read (or listened to) differently from in the past. Instead of listening to storytellers at a marketplace or tea shop, increasingly people purchased books (or newspapers, where fiction was serialized), brought them home, and read in private. These changes were facilitated by a sixfold expansion of Shanghai’s printing industry from the beginning of the century to the early thirties, and by an apparent doubling or more of the urban literacy rate during the same years. The move indoors to privacy would appear to be part of the general inward-turning tendency, well remarked by sociologists since Simmel, of residents of the modern city who develop a need to escape the onrush of stimuli in increasingly complex environments. The function of Butterfly fiction as a comfort in this circumstance is another feature which tends to set it off from its literary predecessors.

New schools with lofty aims were important in the spread of popular fiction, a fact as ironic in China as in parts of the West. In England, Sunday schools had pioneered the spread of literacy to increasing numbers of town and city youth; in China, the way was led by the reform movement “new schools” ( hsin hsueh-ch’ung ), whose numbers appear to have increased from around 4,000 in 1905 to more than 120,000 by the late 1910s. In neither case had it been foreseen that an ability to read about God or national self-strengthening would afford youngsters access to love and scandal stories as well.

Though Butterfly fiction eventually spread to most parts of China, Shanghai, from the 1910s on, was always its center. (In the 1920s and 1930s Tientsin became second most important.) Most of the major authors had come to Shanghai during the first decade of the century from gentry backgrounds in interior cities, primarily Soochow. Many had lost their fathers in childhood, and had also lost, in the collapse of the civil service examination system, their traditional route to success. In searching for alternatives they hit upon fiction writing partly because, around 1900, Shanghai publishers began paying for manuscripts. Politically, they stood on the fringes of the reform-and-

20. This approximation is based on: (1) the estimates of publishers of popular material in Shanghai during these years, specifically Pao Tien-hsiao, Ch’en T’ing-shan, and Ch’eng She-wo, in interviews with the author; and (2) evidence on primary school enrollment in H. T. Montagné Bell and H. G. W. Woodhead, The China Year Book 1912 (London, 1912), p. 323, and H. G. W. Woodhead, The China Year Book 1924 (Tientsin, 1925), p. 252.

revolution ferment of their times; though firmly grounded in Confucian morality, they would stylishly adorn their stories with a few of the progressive “new-style” ideas of the day. In general they maintained lighthearted appearances, pretending detachment from the woes of the world and fashioning for themselves a variety of eccentric life-styles. They were generally friendly with one another and frequently came together for banquets, good cheer, and literary games.

There can be little doubt that their merrymaking covered feelings of bitterness and insecurity. Deprived of the traditional ladder of success, and handicapped in climbing the new one because of their conservative orientations, they had ample reason to feel cheated of proper outlets for their talent. Much of their playful fiction may be read as the message “life is but a game”: even their tragic themes, often cast in expansive Buddhist metaphors, served to provide comfort, the comfort of demonstrating that “some people, Dear Reader, are much worse off than you and I.”

The fiction of modern cities in the West is known for a distinction of “elite” and “popular” levels. For Butterfly fiction in the 1910s such a distinction is difficult to support. This fiction generally represented the upper and middle classes together, while the masses, even the urban masses, had no modern fiction of any kind. With the 1920s, though, there came several important changes in this situation. First, the cultural revolution of the May Fourth Movement in the early 1920s brought to the fore a number of young writers—ardent, nationalistic, and comparatively Westernized—who displaced Butterfly writers from several prominent positions and challenged their leadership of the literary scene. The most important example of this changeover came in December 1920, when the Commercial Press relieved the Butterfly group of its control of a leading fiction magazine, The Short Story Monthly ( Hsiao-shuo yueh-pao ), and handed it over to May Fourth writers under the leadership of Mao Tun and Cheng Chen-to. The young writers of May Fourth proceeded to establish themselves among a better-educated, and more Westernized, but substantially smaller readership than that of Butterfly writers. For the decade of the 1910s it thus becomes easier to identify Butterfly fiction as “popular” and May Fourth literature as “elite” in the modern senses of these terms.

Another reason for calling Butterfly fiction popular in the twenties is its increased commercialization and use of new media. Before the twenties, nearly all Butterfly stories had been published in expensive fiction magazines, with the most popular works later appearing as books. Publishers in the 1910s normally operated with a target figure of only 3,000 copies for books and magazines, which was the
minimum sales necessary to recover costs. A circulation of more than 50,000 was rare. In the 1920s, however, when the most popular stories were also made into movies, comic strips, stage plays and even scripts for traditional-style drum-singing, “circulation” (including viewers and listeners as well as readers) reached well into the 100,000s, and perhaps over a million. The importance of the new media lay not only in their understandability by the barely literate and illiterate, but also in their lower cost. Instead of paying fifty cents (5 years) for a book, about half a week’s pay for many people, one could see a movie for two cents or less. Comic books could be rented for even smaller amounts, or, if bought, could be traded and passed around among friends. Fiction magazines also lowered their prices and continued to flourish. Shanghai’s leading commercial newspapers serialized some of the biggest hit novels of the twenties in daily fiction columns, the most important of which were Hsin-ven’s "Forest of Light and Treachery" ("K’u’ii-ho-lo lin") and Shen pan’s "Unfettered Talk" ("Ts’ou-yo lo’o").

Newspaper serialization of fiction had important implications for publishers, authors and readers alike. For publishers it provided the chance to sell newspapers with more regularity by hooking readers on a story line. Especially popular novels not only maintained a newspaper’s circulation but could substantially increase it. From a writer’s point of view, a leading newspaper could establish one’s reputation with a single novel. For readers, newspaper fiction was much less expensive than books. So at least it seemed to be, since the daily outcry was small and one got the news as well, making the fiction seem like a kind of bonus. Opportunity for exchange between readers and authors in newspaper letter columns increased the attraction to readers.

Much of the use of new commercialized media conforms to the general pattern of modern popular fiction in the West. In the 1920s the circulation of the London Times soared to 40,000 with the serialization of The Scarlet Pimpernel; in much the same way that the Hsin-ven pan reached a level of 150,000 shortly after its 1929–30 serialization of what was probably the most widely read Chinese novel in the first half of the twentieth century, Chang Hsin-shih’s Fate in Tsien and Lenguwu (‘Ts’u-shao pi-yu-ya’). This novel clearly establishes the “modern popular” character of twentieth-century urban fiction in China. The book, two movies, several stage plays and many comic book versions were all in circulation at once; a serialization in popular storytelling form was done for radio; the author was suing for his copyright; a leading actress in the movie was reported as “flying as a commercial device to spur interest” to have committed suicide. The story’s characters gained a kind of supra-fictional reality, as if "friends" of the public. Popular magazines referred to them as if they were real people. Serial telling of their latest adventures issued from many quarters, and readers besought the author with letters asking for more of the true story. Clearly, word-of-mouth had become an important new "medium" of the culture of popular fiction.

The new media and the expanded market of the 1920s had a significant impact on the literary and personal styles of popular authors. Many of their stories in the 1910s had been translations, but in the twenties almost all were original. Most short stories had appeared in a kind of classical, or quasi-classical language; now, influenced by May Fourth, most were in vernacular style. Payment for manuscripts, which had been systematized during the period 1900 to 1910, was a supplementary and occasional source of income for writers in the 1910s; but during the twenties such payments were sufficient to nourish a new breed of commercial writers. Rates of pay, up from the 1900s standard of two yuan per thousand characters, now reached four or six yuan, sometimes higher. Leading authors could contract in more than one city to write serialized novels for as many as six or seven newspapers simultaneously; some newspapers hired fiction specialists on a permanent basis. Movie companies also paid handsomely. Writers used Buddhist metaphors less often and their topics became more "modern." Meanwhile the group spirit that writers had enjoyed in the 1910s diminished as individual enterprise grew. Between the traditional images of the lettered gentleman on the one hand and the street-corner storyteller on the other, middle literary identity developed dramatically beyond what it had been before: this was the producer of mass commercial fiction, who wrote for the appetite of.

22. See note 32 for a calculation of readership size.
24. In the present text the titles Hsin-ven pan and Shen pan are used throughout, in accordance with the Wade-Giles romanization system. The newspapers themselves, however, romanized their names as Sin Hua Pan and Shen Pan, respectively.
writers like Pa Chin, Mao Tun, and Ts’ao Yü by then were enjoying substantial readership among students and other "new-style" readers who in the 1910s might have read Butterfly stories exclusively. (By 1935 most urban readers no doubt read both kinds of literature, though in somewhat different moods.) Of at least equal importance in the relative decline of Butterfly fiction during the 1930s were the Japanese attacks on China and the consequent feeling of acute national emergency among the urban populace. Public opinion induced some of the leading popular writers, including Chang Hen-shui, Chou Shou-chian, and Pao T’ien-hsiao, to step unequivocally into the political arena with calls for national unity and resistance of Japan. This move drew them closer to the May Fourth writers, who all along had been saying that literature should serve the modern nation.

At the same time, however, the crisis atmosphere occasioned by the Japanese threat increased the need for laughter and diversion, as the popularity of Lin Yü-t’ang’s several humor magazines attests. The conflicting pressures of patriotism and the marketplace brought about a split among the popular authors. A “higher” level turned more towards May Fourth, though still adhering to traditional vernacular style; while a “lower” level, exemplified by Feng Yü-ch’i (who may, incidentally, be the most-published writer in Chinese history) reached new depths of hackneyed content. This “lower” level produced many hundreds of novels through the thirties and forties, a flow which was curtailed only with the Communist victory in 1949. Even then the traces of Butterfly fiction were not wholly eradicated. Stage performances of _Fate in Tears and Laughter_ continued as late as 1962, and old books from the 1910s and 1920s could be found at bookstalls until the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. In Hong Kong and Taiwan the Butterfly tradition has remained very much alive, although sometimes in a more Westernized form.

It is probably impossible to achieve an accurate count of Butterfly fiction. The index of the only reference work in the field, Wei Shao-ch’ang’s _Research Materials on the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School_ (Shanghai, 1962) lists a total of 2,215 novels, plus 113 newspapers and 49 newspapers and tabloids which carried Butterfly fiction. The list of 2,215 does not include most of the serialized magazine and newspaper novels, nor does it include short stories (which easily outnumbered

30. On the stage performance of Butterfly stories after 1949, see (no author) “Yüan-yang hu-t’ieh p’ai tui hsii-chü ti ying-hsia ho p’ing-lun chieh tui t’a ti p’ing-lun,” _Hsin-hua yueh-pao_, January 1964, pp. 269–270. The availability of Butterfly fiction at bookstalls was demonstrated to me in 1972 by Pao T’ien-hsiao, who presented me in Hong Kong with a novel which he had written in the 1910s and which his friend (and fellow popular writer) Cheng I-mei had found for sale in Shanghai in early 1966.

28. “Hit” may be taken literally here. Of hundreds of better-known Butterfly writers, not one was a woman. Even ostensible “women’s magazines” were in fact dominated by men who used female pseudonyms. See Chapter 5.


Naturally, Ku’s kind of knight-errant fiction could help:

... for all the above reasons, knight-errant novels are a very good kind of reading. It is not surprising that they have seen a wave of popularity in recent years. It’s a pity that some distributors and authors, seeking selfish little profits, have produced a flood of crude works which, like fish eyes parading as pearls, contain extravagant descriptions and preposterous overstatement which borders on fantasy and insults the world. As a result, the value of knight-errant fiction has gradually declined. But how can we, just because we are chocked with putrid fare, conclude that _all_ knight-errant fiction is not worth reading? We still need it ...

Needed or not, knight-errant fiction has remained very popular to the present day.

Yet it was also in the 1930s that Butterfly fiction as a whole began to lose its predominant hold on China’s urban readership. May Fourth
recalls parallel cases in the West). A strongly negative interpretation of Butterfly fiction was created in the early twenties by the young May Fourth writers, and this view has been widely accepted, usually un- critically, right to the present day. The May Fourth view does reflect some of the truth, but it is quite inadequate to the complexity of the field it surveys.

May Fourth writers argued in the pages of The Literary Thrice Monthly (Sui-hsiu hsien-kung) that since literature should serve social progress, Butterfly works were at best useless and at worst pernicious. These authors thrived in Shanghai’s flourishing “three-mile foreign mail” (San-ma-yang-ch’ing) and were comparably, said Cheng Chen-chi, to “intellectual bats.” They were motivated by unscrupulous greed: “literary prostitutes” in Cheng’s phrase, “gold-washers” in Mao T’ung’s. Perhaps worse of all, they monopolized the fiction market and poisoned the minds of youth—“stole the show,” as Ku K’o-ch’iu saw it—thereby depriving May Fourth of its audience. The issue was so urgent and clear-cut that all the early May Fourth groups, writing aside their own factional differences, enthusiastically joined in.

By the late twenties, however, factional strife among the May Fourth writers had diverted their attention from the persisting problem of Butterfly fiction. In 1931, Lo Hsun told the League of Left-Wing Writers:

Last year and the year before, the scope of the literary war . . . has been too small. None of the old-style literature and ideology has received notice from the new people. Quite the contrary: we have a situation where the new literature people are all in one corner fighting among themselves, leaving the old-style people free to stand comfortably by as spectators to the struggle. What fundamentally disturbed Lo Hsun was not, of course, that Butterfly writers were free to be spectators, but that they were free to continue spreading “feudal” ideas. Most of the urban readership continued to prefer traditional tales and Butterfly fiction, in all of their various new media. Of comic books in particular Mao T’ung wrote: It goes without saying that the content of all comic strip fiction is poisonous, yet the strong influence of comics on the general

35. Kuo Mo-yu, “Chih Chung Hsi-hu shih shen-hua,” Hsin-hsiu hsien-kung, no. 6 (June 30, 1925) in YHFP, pp. 41–42.
masses and on children is worthy of note. And we cannot deny that the form of comic strip fiction... is worthy of adoption. The comic strip portion not only can attract barely literate readers, but also can help the barely literate, by "self-cultivation," to read and understand the written portion. 37

Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai observed:

These things, at the bookstalls on alley corners, and so on... have they a certain, in fact a very great, influence? Of course they have... the literate masses read them day by day, and the illiterate masses often hear them spoken about in casual ways by others... and unconsciously absorb the "instruction" of the stuff. 38

And:

The working people’s knowledge of their own existence, their view of social phenomena, in general their world view and life view, is practically all gained from this sort of reactionary popular literature. 39

Ch’ü’s tendency to exaggerate only underscores a frustration which was common among May Fourth writers at the continuing gap between them and "the masses."

Valuable though the May Fourth testimony is, it is also instructive to imagine the viewpoint of the popular audience. To them, May Fourth’s "literary renaissance" surely appeared as a highly elite movement in many of its basic features. In the late 1910s and early twenties, the magazine New Youth (Hsiao ch’ing-nien) was written and read primarily among a tiny number of China’s most privileged young intellectuals, many of whom had studied in Japan or the West and spent their time in China clustered around leading universities. In a new and different way, they seemed to be removed from the mainstream of popular culture as the advocates of eight-legged essays whom they sought to overthrow. Even the same Hsin ch’ing-nien had elite overtones to the popular ear, since the term ch’ing-nien had traditionally been used in reference to young males of upper-class households. To the ordinary person the name went half-way towards suggesting "new young gentlemen."

While May Fourth authors had studied abroad and were Western-oriented, the popular authors—to say nothing of their readership—had very limited experience outside China. Few of them studied abroad, and the exceptions only prove the rule that overseas study did not mix with Butterfly culture. Ch’en Shen-yen and Hsiang K’ai-ian explicitly repudiated their foreign study when they took up careers in popular fiction. In fact, Hsiang founded his writing career with the best-selling novel Infornal History of Overseas Study in Japan (Liu-tung wai-shih, 1916) which bitterly satirized the profligate lives of Chinese students in Japan.

If the main barrier between early May Fourth fiction and the common reader was the issue of new Western ideas, an associated barrier, certainly, had to do with style. The popularity of the traditional vernacular style, well established over several centuries, if anything grew stronger, vis-à-vis classical style, under early influences from the West. Writers spoke of using the vernacular to "unify the people," and in 1915, more than three years before the appearance of May Fourth vernacular fiction, the "Butterfly" magazine Fiction Pictorial began a policy of publishing vernacular stories exclusively. 40

The often heard assertion that May Fourth writers established the vernacular in modern literary use in China must, therefore, be further refined. Certainly one contribution of Hu Shih, Ch’en Tu-hsiu, and their colleagues was to establish the vernacular’s respectability in the face of the traditional elite’s scorn of anything nonclassical—a contribution not of creating the vernacular but of stooping to it. Their more positive contribution was, of course, the fashioning of a new form for the vernacular.

Perhaps still scorned the vernacular in its vulgar versions, they created a style which appeared to most readers as a strange new language strongly associated with the West and with the new Westernized elite. Missionaries had employed basically the same style for several decades, 41 but May Fourth writers were the first Chinese of any influence to adopt it, adding to it occasional bits of foreign vocabulary for purposes, depending on one’s viewpoint, of either clarity or snobbery. In the early thirties, Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai reluctantly concluded that May Fourth writing amounted to "a new classical language," 42 favored by the elite and impenetrable by the masses.

In its literary content, May Fourth writing did, of course, frequently portray lower class life and express great sympathy for the downtrodden. But the readership who found these portraits of the

40. CYL.HIL, p. 380. The first story in the modern vernacular of May Fourth was Lu Hsün’s “Diary of a Madman” (1919).
41. Missionary presses such as the Presbyterian Mission Press and the London Mission Society Press had been publishing in Westernized—often awkwardly Westernized—pai-hua since the mid-19th century. See Suzanne Barnott, "Silent Evangelism: Presbyterians and the Mission Press in China, 1807-1869," Journal of Presbyterian History 49.4 (Winter 1971): 298-300. These examples appear to have been imitated before May Fourth in the Wai-hsi pai-hua pao and similar journals which appeared around the turn of the century in the lower Yangtze area. See Chapter 3.
42. Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai wen-chi, 2:885ff.
lower classes appealing was not the lower classes themselves; it was, at least until the thirties, a highly educated minority. And the sym-
pathetic feelings of privileged people toward the less privileged must
be distinguished from the feelings of the less privileged themselves.

Judging from some of the most popular works of the 1910s and
1920s, Butterfly readers of the "middle class" certainly had ambivalent
feelings about the May Fourth leadership and its advocacy of Western
influences. On one level, they felt obliged to go along with the "new
style," to some extent: they would carry a fountain pen, learn a few
words of English, read novels about new-style dating, and maybe even
write their own. On another level, they were not blind to the heart-
breaks, both personal and social, that the new style sometimes
brought in its wake. As a result, the May Fourth movement's intense
attacks onConfucian social values and customs were less deadly in
the final analysis, to be more reliable than their new-style coun-
terparts. At this deeper level, the May Fourth call for basic social
reform aroused considerable suspicion.

This ambivalence toward Western influence, like other aspects of
popular fiction, offered psychological comfort to the middle-class
readers. From identification with Western tendencies to the enjoyment
of Stylistics and the escape from those of one's own society, one could
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served as a forum for concerns about the security of the new Chinese nation. While modern communications made national news an increasingly important commodity, some authors, such as Keng Hsiao-ti in Peking, began to incorporate the day’s news into the story lines of their serialized fiction; blind storytellers, the hsia-tzu a-ping, did the same. More significantly, the large issues underlying the news also came to be reflected in the popularity of certain themes in popular fiction.

Throughout the 1910s and twenties, this popularity arrived in waves, some large, some small, each based on a particular type of story. (A “wave” here means a sudden increase in both number of stories and number of readers; waves were only matters of degree, though, as every kind of story was circulating almost all the time.) The first of the major waves—the love stories of the early 1910s—explored the issue of free versus arranged marriages. Expectations that under the new regime of the republic young people would suddenly be free of the old family system were, however unrealistic, a key factor in the popularity of these stories.

The next major wave, which crested in the later 1910s, appears to have stemmed from the troubles with Yuan Shih-k’ai and general disillusionment with the new republic. It included three types of stories. First, there was an increase in the popularity of satirical “social novels” (shou-hui hsiao-shuo), of which Li Han-ch’iu’s Tales of Yangchow (Kuang-lung chi’ao), a multi-level portrait of Yangchow society, was the leading example. Second, the Western-style detective story was widely imitated, most successfully in a series by Ch’eng Hsiao-ch’ing under the general title Cases Investigated by the Chinese Sherlock Holmes, Hsiao-sung (Chuang-kuo Fu-erh-moo-suo Hsiao-sung t’i-an-an). Third, there was a great outpouring of “scandal fiction” which exposed corruption and depravity in officialdom, business, education, journalism, entertainment, diplomacy, religion, and almost every other walk of urban life. Powerful people hired writers to attack their enemies by writing scandal fiction in single-sheet “mosquito” papers.

A third major wave, of “knight-errant” fiction, is well illustrated by Hsiang K’ai-jan’s novel Chronicle of the Strange Roving Knights (Chiang-hu t’ai-hua shuan). Though originally serialized in 1923–24, this lengthy hero-story and the many imitations which it inspired reached a peak of popularity during 1927–30. Significantly, these were also years when news reports of the Kuomintang’s Northern Expedition against warlordism had a strong hold on the public imagination in cities.

Each of these three waves can be illustrated in Chang Hen-shui’s supremely popular Fate in Tears and Laughter, which was serialized in 1929–30 and conveniently summarizes the appeal of much of the popular fiction of the first three decades of the century. Here we summarize this story, holding commentary to a minimum, in the belief that a relatively complete example may be the most effective introduction to the chapters which follow.

The story’s protagonist is a nineteen-year-old student named Fan Chia-shu who has come to Peking from Hangchow in order to take university entrance examinations. His early background is unclear, except that it was comfortably upper-class and basically “old style.” In Peking Fan Chia-shu lives in the home of his wealthy uncle, a consul general who spends most of his time overseas. The household is run by Chia-shu’s cousin T’ao Po-ho and T’ao’s wife, both of whom are a bit more tinged by the “new style” than is Chia-shu.

The story begins one day when Chia-shu is bored and goes to visit Peking’s popular amusement area at the Bridge of Heaven (T’ien-ch’iao). Amid jugglers and storytellers, biscuit sellers and drum-singers, he happens across an old martial arts practitioner named Kuan Shou-feng, aged something over sixty, who amazes a crowd by lifting tremendous weights. Chia-shu and Kuan Shou-feng (who inevitably recalls his namesake, Lord Kuan Yü) develop an immediate sense of mutual trust despite their very different social stations.

The next day Chia-shu returns to the Bridge of Heaven to look for Shou-feng, and this time runs across a Peking drum-singer to whom he is immediately attracted. Shen Fung-hsi is fifteen or sixteen, poor, illiterate, and very pretty. She lives with her mother who is referred to only as Old Lady Shen (Shen ta-niang) and an evil uncle. Shen San-hsuan. Everyday San-hsuan and Fung-hsi go to the Bridge of Heaven where they perform together and earn a few coppers. Having listened to one performance, Chia-shu makes them a generous contribution but then withdraws, immediately embarrassed. He is, after all, an upper-class student, and has to guard against the public appearance of any connection with a singing girl.

Meanwhile, Chia-shu’s cousins, the T’ao family, have been eagerly arranging a match for this handsome and successful young scholar. They have introduced him to Helena Ho (Ho Li-na), a daughter in the family of a wealthy bureaucrat. Helena, who is one year older than Chia-shu, is aggressive and very Westernized. In fact she likes to be referred to as “Mi-szu Ho” and calls Chia-shu “Mi-szu-t’o Fan.”

The novel’s love-story theme is dominated by the choice Chia-shu must make between Helena (willful, educated, Westernized) and Fung-hsi (passive, uneducated, untouched by the West). In the minds
of the urban middle class, this choice readily symbolized the cultural
classification between the whole "old" and "new" styles, and offered
the chance to test one's feelings in the privacy of a fictional
experience. Helena is strong and capable, yet unattractive in manner: pushy,
crude, superficial, un-Chinese. Feng-hsi is excessively weak of charac-
ter, yet more gentle, approachable, and "like us." The author makes
the contrast in character between the two young women all the purer
by erasing physical differences: they look practically identical, in fact
others in the story mistake them for one another.

How to conduct a modern-style "date" is one of the questions the
novel allows its readers to test. Helena provides some negative exam-
pies. She invites Chia-shu out on her own initiative, picks him up in a
car, orders two beers, down at a gulp, and sits in a new-style
dress which reveals the legs, while explaining that from "Western
civilization" Chinese women derive "Western beauty." She then
chides Chia-shu for his inability to dance.

Yet Chia-shu's courting of Feng-hsi is hardly more comfortable.
First, he must keep the whole matter absolutely secret from the T'ao
family who take an adolescent delight in finding traces of lipstick on
his cheeks, assuming, of course, that Helena put them there. Second,
Chia-shu can never be comfortable with the class barrier which separ-
ates him and Feng-hsi. On his first visit to Feng-hsi's home he ass-
unges his embarrassment by presenting Feng-hsi's mother with five
yuan for a new pair of shoes. On later visits he brings much more
money, and even pays for Feng-hsi to go to school. He feels unsure
whether these hand-outs fit into the new style; but many neighbors, as
well as Feng-hsi's uncle San-hsan, are confident in their old-style
view of the matter. They assume Chia-shu is purchasing her sexual
services.

At one point T'ao Po-ho offers Chia-shu advice on the general topic
of dating, which is that men must play their cards close to their chests.
"If you want to know how to handle girls," he says, "I'm telling you
that lying is the only requirement."  

Added to Chia-shu's pursuit of Feng-hsi and Helena's pursuit of
Chia-shu, a third relationship develops between Chia-shu and the
daughter of the old weight-lifter Kuan Shou-feng. The daughter,
Kuan Hsiu-ku, is interesting counterpoint to both Helena and Feng-
hsi. She combines their virtues in ideal forms: in life-style she is more
solitary distinctly than Feng-hsi (who does have a weakness for such
things as wristwatches and tortoise-shell glasses); yet, like Helena,
Hsiu-ku is a strong, capable person. She and her father are, in fact,
"knights-errant" (hsia-k'e), though this fact is not immediately
revealed. Hsiu-ku also falls in love with Chia-shu, and would seem
the most fitting match for him. But alas, she is not as physically attractive
as the other two.

The relationship between Chia-shu and the two Kuans develops
solely on the basis of mutual aid and respect. One day Chia-shu meets
Hsiu-ku by chance and learns that her old father is gravely ill. Chia-
shu races to the Kuan house and finds the old man about to die. He
asks whether Shou-feng believes in Western medicine (another test of
the new style) and receiving the answer that "anything that works"
is worth a try, brings Shou-feng to a modern hospital and pays the bill. 46
Shou-feng recovers, and he and Hsiu-ku feel profoundly grateful to
Chia-shu.

Hsiu-ku begins to have dreams about Chia-shu, including a dream
in which the two of them are strolling in a park together. Later in the
story the dream comes true, thus raising the question of whether such
things as dreams and omens in general deserve one's credence. Read-
ers, knowing that modern elite opinion favored "science" and dis-
paraged "superstition," felt pressure from this quarter to repudiate their
"old beliefs." And it seems that most of them did, at least superficially.

But for most the basic question still went begging: are old beliefs
really untrue? Later in the story Chia-shu reports a nightmare of his
own to Hsiu-ku. He is afraid his dream might be saying something
about Feng-hsi's fate. Hsiu-ku chides him: Does a "civilized" (even-
ning, a euphemism for "Westernized") person like you still believe
that dreams come true? Chia-shu, allowing Westernization its
due, concedes that such notions are unscientific. But he immediately
objects that this particular dream is persistent and hence must be taken
more seriously. 47 Events prove him right—the dream is true. In
another aside, the generally new-style person T'ao Po-ho defends old
beliefs on the grounds that they are true but that they are harmless.
For example, he says, China's myth of the Herd Boy and Weaving Girl
(Niu-lang chií-nů) should inhibit science in China no more than does
Santa Claus in the West. 48

Chia-shu continues his suit of Feng-hsi by bringing her more and
more presents. Eventually these include a gold ring which he cere-
moniously explains to be an engagement ring, though his manner
suggests that neither he nor Feng-hsi feels quite at home with this
new-style custom. In any case, this is the highpoint of his relationship
with Feng-hsi. Before he leaves for a short visit to his ill mother in

44. Chang Hen-shui, T'ihsiao yin-quan, 1:34.
45. Ibid., 1:54.
46. Ibid., 1:77.
47. Ibid., 3:8.
48. Ibid., 2:165.
Hangchow, he visits Feng-hsi’s home and there are omens of trouble in
their relationship: a string in Feng-hsi’s yueh-chin snaps, a noodle
bowl breaks.

More concretely, Feng-hsi’s evil uncle San-hsuan, who has a quick
eye for any profit, conceives a plan to sell Feng-hsi’s good looks to a
warlord named General Liu Te-chu. With his group of scoundrel
friends, San-hsuan arranges a showing of Feng-hsi before the general.
At the same time he begins the task of persuading Feng-hsi’s mother
and other relatives that the relationship with Chia-shu cannot last; he
is a rich young student who might be temporarily useful to them but
that’s all. Nor will Feng-hsi’s own role as a new-style student last
long: “How many of these girl students we see these days can get far
enough in their studies to do big things like the young men? There’s
no way, as I see it. After three days at the books they’re suddenly
babbling about equality and freedom.” Eventually Feng-hsi’s
mother is won over to the scheme.

While the reader hopes that Feng-hsi will resist, there are indica-
tions she may not. Not only are the omens bad, but recently an un-
healthy penchant for material wealth has emerged in her character.
After only a few days of school she has asked Chia-shu for high-
heeled shoes, a white silk muffler, a fountain pen, and other accou-
traments of new-style vanity. Will she be able to resist the riches of
a warlord? When a car with two private soldiers arrives to pick her up,
she at first refuses to join them. The reader assumes she has perceived
the perfidy of her uncle. But a moment later she reappears, without
explanation, saying “I’ll go.”

The general’s mansion is as opulent “as in the pictures.” He has a
thick rug—how thick is hard to say—a phonograph, a radio set with
short wave, and an electric fan. Servants are everywhere—holding
doors, serving tea, thrusting spittoons before guests who seem about
to clear their throats. Feng-hsi is very impressed. She then is pres-
sured into playing mah-jong, and the general arranges that she will
have large winnings to bring home. Feng-hsi’s mother, delighted with
the money, decides to go into petty usury. A few days later the general
asks Feng-hsi out to the theater and brings her home in his own car. He
presses an expensive necklace and three hundred yuan into her hands
as gifts, then proposes another date.

Meanwhile Chia-shu, still in Hangchow, is unaware of all this and
continues to write Feng-hsi letters in which he stresses that their love
is not based on money. (His presents to her are meant only to insure
her independence.) With this thought in mind, Feng-hsi stiffens her
resistance to the general. She gives his necklace and the three hundred
yuan to her mother and persuades her mother to return them to the
general with regrets. She resolves not to see him again.

But a general is not so easily stopped. Before long he sends a soldier
to Feng-hsi’s house on the pretext of taking a census. The evil uncle
San-hsuan reports that he and Feng-hsi are drum-singers by profes-
sion, and a few days later some soldiers carrying revolvers return with
the order that all drum-singers in Peking be brought to General Liu
Te-chu’s mansion to perform at a party.

At the party, the general publicly announces what has passed be-
tween him and Feng-hsi and says that his present purpose is to bring
his colleagues and her colleagues together to determine whether she is
worthy to join his household. Feng-hsi immediately faints, whereupon
the general declares he will keep her at his house for treatment. He
puts her in the private room of his former wife.

The general sends for Feng-hsi’s mother to watch over the kid-
napped maiden. Faking sleep, Feng-hsi awaits the chance to whisper
to her mother that Kuan Shou-feng, if anyone, can rescue her. The
mother notifies Kuan, who has no trouble stealing his way to Feng-
hsi’s room using martial arts. (He extinguishes a streetlight with the
toss of a coin, shatters a window blind by pinching it.)

But the general, too, has been at work, showering Feng-hsi with
gifts and arranging to marry her. When Shou-feng peers into Feng-
hsi’s room, he sees the general kneeling before her holding great stacks
of money, which Feng-hsi proceeds to accept. Shou-feng retreats in
disgust, ready to abandon the whole rescue. He is shocked a second
time when he goes to see Old Lady Shen and finds her talking in her
sleep. The general has given us so much, she is saying, how can we
have the face to refuse him?

This so angers Shou-feng that he has a monk write a letter (Shou-
feng is illiterate) to Chia-shu telling him all. Chia-shu returns to Pe-
kung and goes straight to see Shou-feng. Initially, he defends Feng-hsi to
Shou-feng. She is a poor, weak girl; how could she resist a general?

That afternoon, though, Chia-shu’s sympathy turns to shock as he
and the two Kuan is strolling in a park talking things over. They see
an automobile pushing its way along a crowded promenade, forcing
people to scatter before it. They comment on the injustice of the sit-
uation, then watch as the car pulls to a stop nearby. From inside,
surrounded by armed guards, steps Feng-hsi. As soon as she sees
Chia-shu she retreats quickly inside and the car speeds off.

With Shou-feng now thoroughly disgusted, and all Chia-shu’s
other friends and relatives still ignorant of the whole Feng-hsi matter,
Chia-shu has only Hsien-ku to talk with. He asks her about Buddhism,
since he, like many despondent lovers in China’s past, is considering
withdrawal from the world. (Also like those lovers, he falls ill from excessive study and injury in love.) Hsiu-ku resolves to reach Feng-hsi and make one final effort to straighten things out.

One day on the street Hsiu-ku overhears a woman who works as an introducer of servant labor talking about General Liu’s household. For an appropriate bribe the woman allows Hsiu-ku access to the mansion, and by a stroke of luck they meet the general personally. He takes an immediate liking to Hsiu-ku, and hires her to serve Feng-hsi. Within a few days Hsiu-ku is able to arrange a secret rendezvous between Chia-shu and Feng-hsi at a city park.

At this meeting Chia-shu does his best to persuade Feng-hsi to return to him. The effort includes a little speech on changing mores. In the old days when a girl “lost her body,” it was as if a white cloth had been stained with indelible black ink. Now attitudes have changed, and so long as a man and woman really love each other, it doesn’t matter at all if “one’s body has suffered a little insult.”

Feng-hsi, though, is unmoved. She responds by offering to repay Chia-shu all the money he had given her. She takes out her checkbook and writes a check—a new-style skill of hers—for the entire amount. Chia-shu then tears the check to shreds and throws it to the wind, comparing it to ten or twenty little white butterflies dancing in the sunlight. With this Feng-hsi breaks down and cries pitifully, throwing to the ground the gold ring Chia-shu had given her. Chia-shu leaves the session in a burst of exaggerated laughter.

The worst is yet to come, though, as it turns out their secret meeting has not escaped the surveillance of the general’s staff. When the general learns of the meeting he is livid with rage, and bellows at Feng-hsi that cuckoldry is the most fearsome thing a big general must endure. He whipps her crazily, and desists only when Hsiu-ku restrains him. Although the general later makes a half-hearted apology, the damage has already been done: Feng-hsi loses her sanity. When Hsiu-ku reports these developments to Chia-shu, he simply says he doesn’t care and introduces Hsiu-ku to Helena, who now is the object of Chia-shu’s attentions. Helena treats Hsiu-ku snobbishly and pretends she and Chia-shu are engaged.

Only Shou-feng and Hsiu-ku still burn with righteous indignation. Taking advantage of the general’s amorous advances toward Hsiu-ku, they carry out a plot to do away with him. Consenting to marry the general, Hsiu-ku proposes that they avoid the trouble of ceremony and banquet and simply retreat to the Western Hills outside Peking, then return a few days later with the declaration that they are married. The only requirement would be 1,400 yuan for Hsiu-ku’s father to entertain his friends. The General loves this idea. Hsiu-ku then gives the 1,400 yuan to Shou-feng, who secretly distributes it among his friends and neighbors, advising them to leave town the next day. The reader can begin to guess the Kuans’ motives.

Hsiu-ku and the general retire to an ancient temple in the Western Hills. The following day a monk at the temple becomes concerned when the nuptial couple does not emerge from their quarters. He investigates and finds the general dead in bed, Hsiu-ku gone, and a note smeared in blood on the chamber wall explaining that she killed him “to rid the nation and society of a great menace.”

The next day the police are searching everywhere for Shou-feng and Hsiu-ku. Chia-shu reads a newspaper report of the events and fears the police will come looking for him, too. He abruptly departs for Tientsin to visit relatives, explaining to the T’ao family that since he has just passed his entrance exams for university, he finally has the time to make a trip which he should have made long ago. (The reader is informed that Chia-shu studies hard, yet there is no description in the story of his spending time on anything but diversion and personal relations.)

To his and the reader’s great surprise, Chia-shu is greeted in Tientsin with a round of teasing for what his relatives assume to be his engagement to Helena. The fact that Chia-shu has never proposed to Helena offers the reader another object lesson in the hazards of new-style romance. During Chia-shu’s visit to Hangchow, it seems his mother had seen a photo of Feng-hsi whom Chia-shu owned to be his fiancée, and because of the close resemblance between Feng-hsi and Helena, the T’aos and everyone else (who still did not know about Feng-hsi) naturally assumed the photo to be of Helena. Helena herself considers this beyond question.

Chia-shu receives a phone call from Helena only hours after arriving in Tientsin. She has followed him there, and coyly asks why he is playing tricks on her, leaving Peking without telling her. Chia-shu asks her to meet him at a restaurant, where he explains the whole misunderstanding. Shattered, Helena takes the next train back to Peking. On board she dries her tears and orders a beer.

A few days later she throws a gala new-style party. There are swarms of photographers and much Western-style dancing. Helena does a hula dance—of “an uncivilized people”—and throws everyone a very stylish kiss at the end. Her parents, who pay for the party, say she is “Europeanized” and beyond their control.

Part of the entertainment value of stories like Fate in Tears and Laughter lies in their frequent reversal of the reader’s expectations. This happens once again when it turns out that Helena has not gone beserk,

52. Ibid., 3:23.
53. Ibid., 3:85.
but is preparing to devote her life to Buddhism. After her party she disappears, and everyone assumes she has gone to Europe. In fact, though, she has secretly withdrawn to the Western Hills, where Her disappearance moves Chia-shu to his own reflections on the insubstantiality of things: Having been suddenly surrounded by three attractive young women, he now just as suddenly sees all three vanish.

The story’s next turn is poorly integrated and is the only major flaw in an otherwise well-constructed plot. Chia-shu is suddenly kidnapped by mountain bandits. A 1932 review in the Ta-kung pao literary supplement offers the speculation that Chang Hen-shui included this episode only to show that his literary versatility extended to un-lisha fiction as well. A touch of “knight-errantry” has already appeared in Kuan Shou-feng’s penetration of General Liu’s mansion; here Shou-feng and Hsia-ku reveal much more of their special skills in a dramatic rescue of Chia-shu.

When the rescue is over, the Kuans join Chia-shu at a lower ontological level and they all catch a bus back to Peking. Chia-shu goes home but the two Kuans, as befits lihsia, keep their own place of dwelling a mystery. Shou-feng gives Chia-shu an address where they can meet the next day, an address which turns out to be Feng-hsi’s after she has left the general’s mansion. Feng-hsi, still insane, barely recognizes Chia-shu. But she does have his picture on the wall. It is now pasted together having once been torn apart, an obvious symbol of her admitted mistake. Chia-shu arranges to have a doctor visit her, and the doctor advises that she be put in an asylum. A family council agrees to do this.

Chia-shu proposes that the two Kuans settle down near his school, where Shou-feng could be a martial arts instructor. Again he asks Shou-feng for their new address, and this time Shou-feng supplies one in the Western Hills. But when Chia-shu goes there, he finds it to be the country villa of Helena’s father, where Helena herself has been hiding ever since her big party. The Kuans are there, but still decline to step back into the real world. They leave Helena and Chia-shu together at the villa, setting out for Shantung, they say, with two donkeys and a camel. Here the story ends.

Chang Hen-shui wrote Fate in Tears and Laughter in Nanking, and every week mailed one-chapter installments to Shanghai where they were serialized on Fridays in the Hsin-wen pao’s “Forest of Light-heartedness” column edited by Yen Tu-ho. Within a year of the novel’s completion in 1930, the publisher San-ru shu–she came out with a three-volume paper edition. While the story’s circulation grew at a rate unprecedented in China, so did the readership’s curiosity about the final resolution of its plot. Vernacular-style stories were not supposed to end until all important loose ends of the plot had been tied. But this author had left Fan Chia-shu’s relationship with Helena Ho quite ambiguous, and there were also lingering questions about his feelings for Shen Feng-hsi and Kuan Hsia-ku. Why didn’t Chia-shu get married and settle the question? A great many letters with this and other questions poured in to Chang Hen-shui and his publisher.

Eventually Chang responded by publishing a little piece called “A General Reply to My Readers,” in which he argued for the aesthetic value of not wrapping things up. “The universe is full of incompleteness,” he wrote, and “to leave some incompleteness is the only way to leave a pleasant flavor in people’s lingering thoughts, like the flavor of chewing olives. If you have to bring everything right down to its end, in one great festive occasion, it’s like having a big, fat banquet: when it’s over, it’s over. The flavor is sure to be less appealing than that persisting olive aroma.”

But his readers, unmoved, continued to send in demands for a sequel, especially one with a happy ending. Chang again replied, this time in an essay called “Whether to Write a Sequel.” When the ancients traveled in the mountains, he wrote, didn’t they deliberately leave a few mountains unvisited, as food for the imagination? Is it the same with fiction. Do we have complete, happy endings for such great heroes as Kuan Yu, Chang Fei, and K’ung Ming in Romance of the Three Kingdoms? Was the tragic ending of Dream of the Red Chamber improved upon by the dozen or so happy-ending sequels later tacked on to that great novel? Besides, Fate in Tears and Laughter is a “childish work”; a sequel would be unworthy of the reader’s respect. Thus, “I cannot, need not, and dare not write a sequel.”

He did write a sequel, though, after two years of continuing pressure from readers and his publisher. An important additional incentive arose from the fact that a number of inferior writers had already grabbed the opportunity to sell sequels of their own, some even daring to do so under Chang’s name. Chang explained his need to

57. Ibid., 2:364–365.
58. Ibid., 2:365.
answer their sequels. "I wrote the original work, so naturally know its characters more completely than anyone."^{60}

The theme of the sequel departs markedly from the original work. One almost suspects Chang of a continuing effort to shelter the artistic effect of his original ending by issuing a sequel which gave only cursory attention to the questions which most interested his readers. The question which interested Chang himself was the Japanese threat to China.

Between the serialization of Fate in Tears and Laughter during 1929-30 and the appearance of the sequel in January 1933, the Japanese had occupied Manchuria (September 1931) and attacked Shanghai (January 1932). The Nanking government's policy of nonresistance became the subject of acute controversy in Shanghai and other cities. Writers in the May Fourth tradition who pressed for resistance to Japan had to dodge government censors. Influenced by these events, Chang Hen-shui joined May Fourth writers in public declarations for "national defense"; he also resolved that resisting Japan should be the theme of the sequel to Fate in Tears and Laughter.

An important new character in the sequel is Shen Kuo-ying, a young military officer who appears in the original story only as one of Helena's admirers at her big farewell party. In the sequel he approaches Helena's father with a marriage suit, but is turned down with the explanation that Helena has a new-style engagement with Mr. Fan Chia-shu. Thereupon Kuo-ying decides to seek out Feng-hsi, nurse her back from insanity, and marry her in order to show the world he can get a wife as pretty as Helena. He embarrasses Helena's family by inviting mutual friends to a banquet where he parades Feng-hsi dressed as Helena, announcing to all that this woman is his consublime. When Chia-shu hears of this escapade, the last traces of his love for Feng-hsi turn to shame and regret.

Meanwhile Chia-shu arranges to devote his career to national service. The T'ao family and Helena convince him that the study of engineering in Germany is the best route to this end, and that the Siberian railroad might be the best route back to China. Helena decides to accompany him, and their engagement notice appears in the newspaper just before they leave.

We are then told that four years have elapsed, which is also the length of time separating the writing of the novel from the writing of its sequel. This coincidence not only preserves the fiction, implicit from the beginning, that the story is a chronology of actual experience; it also makes possible the sequel's commentary on current events. Because of censorship, the author feared to mention Manchuria or the Japanese directly. But how many readers missed the point when he wrote of heroes going "outside the pass" to "fight barbarians"?

After the four-year interlude, we find Shen Kuo-ying learning from a fellow soldier about a "righteous army" (t-ch'in) fighting a guerrilla war. The troops are ill-supplied. They get their food from the local population and their arms by capture from the enemy. Kuo-ying is eager to help, and a clandestine meeting is arranged with one of the deputy commanders.

From this valiant start towards a patriotic theme for his sequel, the author then feels obliged to integrate it with his original, and the combination is awkward to say the least. The deputy commander whom Shen Kuo-ying meets turns out to be Kuan Hsiu-ku. He agrees to join her effort and to bring a large donation of money with him. First, though, Hsiu-ku must do him a favor. Kuo-ying is still enamored of Feng-hsi, who is still insane. He believes that if he can recreate the scene which brought about her insanity she might "awaken" from it. Hsiu-ku, who witnessed General Liu's outburst, was needed to direct this reconstruction. She agrees, and it works.

Meanwhile Chia-shu and Helena have returned from Europe, where Chia-shu learned chemical engineering and prepared himself to make artificial fog in the war effort. Hsiu-ku knows of his return and goes to see him, but not at the railroad station, where secret agents would certainly be watching. Chia-shu and Helena both swear new relationships to Hsiu-ku as her younger siblings (thereby ending, incidentally, the competition to marry Chia-shu and neatly subordinating this whole question to that of the guerrilla effort). Hsiu-ku and Kuo-ying set out for Manchuria, and Chia-shu hosts a banquet to give them a hero's send off. Kuo-ying asks Chia-shu to look after Feng-hsi, and Chia-shu agrees, but Feng-hsi relapses and dies anyway.

At this point every young person in the story is contributing to the national defense effort. The rich variety of characters in the original story—new-style, old-style, student, soldier, knight-errant, Buddhist, etcetera—has collapsed almost entirely into the single identity of Japan-resister.

Helena asks her wealthy father for 800,000 yuan to build ten military hospitals in six cities, plus money for a military chemical plant for Chia-shu. When the father says "you're crazy," Helena dashes for a pistol and threatens suicide. He then gives in; only two weeks later one hospital and the chemical plant are ready. Chia-shu and Helena's father are praised in the newspapers.

Hsiu-ku, Shou-feng, and Kuo-ying all die in one glorious battle in Manchuria. When Chia-shu and Helena get the news, they go to

^{60} Chang Hen-shui, T'ii-hsiao yin-yuan (1948) 2:368.
Feng-hsi's grave where they sprinkle wine, burn paper, and burn silk in commemoration of their friends. Despite the general solidarity in resisting Japan, it is obvious that fundamental social divisions are not questioned. The lower class dies on the battlefield while the upper class runs factories and hospitals. It never even occurs to Chia-shu or Helena that they might go to the front. After commemorating their last friends, Chia-shu and Helena (and two servants) climb into their automobile and drive away.

As if to show that the morality immanent in the natural order still rules in Chinese fiction, even in the twentieth century, a sudden whirlwind carries aloft the ashes from Chia-shu's and Helena's offerings, and petals fall from the wild peach tree above their heads. The sequel ends.

It must be said that by comparison with his "Butterfly" contemporaries Chang Hen-shui has put together a very tight plot in Fate in Tears and Laughter. The "loosely linked episode" style of popular tradition tended to be all the looser in the twentieth century with the beginning of newspaper serialization. Yet Chang's novel, serialized over thirty weeks, fits together as if by careful planning. Indeed, Chang tells us that the whole plot occurred to him in one burst of clairvoyance, and that the chapters naturally fell into place "like the scenes of a movie." There are, of course, major flaws in the plot, such as the poor integration of the kidnapping incident and, if one counts it, the absurdly forced construction of the sequel. And some minor rough points, accountable to the tradition of loose plot construction, are the author's extraneous asides on Santa Claus as superstition, or on the unpopularity of May Fourth fiction.

Nevertheless it is clear that in Fate in Tears and Laughter, which is markedly different from Chang's earlier fiction, plot is a major concern. (One suspect, although Chang nowhere admits it, that his interest in a somewhat Western-style plot was inspired by the example of May Fourth writers.) Whether consciously or not, Chang is ready to sacrifice the psychological credibility of his characters to interests of plot, as when Chia-shu calmly shrugs off the news of Feng-hsi's insanity in order to resume his relationship with Helena.

61. Ibid., 1:2.
62. Chang made his name in the mid-twenties on the serialization of Ch'ung-ming wai-shih, later published in six-volume book form. The work can hardly be said to have a plot; it is a thinly-disguised account of interesting events in the lives of famous people, mostly in Peking.

But except for this interest in plot, and for a general wish to entertain and be paid for it, it is doubtful that Chang had any conscious purpose in writing Fate (minus the sequel, of course). Chang himself says as much. Yet it has often been asserted that the story's lesson is to demonstrate the weakness of young Chinese women, particularly their weakness for gaudiness and wealth; rumor has it that Chang even chose his name "Hen-shui"—literally "hate water"—because of water's symbolic suggestion of yin or the female principle. The rumor appears to be untrue, however, and the interpretation much too simple. It does not account for the differences among Helena, Feng-hsi, and Hsiu-ku, or for the important ways in which these three represent alternatives for modern China—new-style, old-style, or something in between—which Chia-shu and every reader must deliberate upon. The reader is offered dilemmas, not lessons.

Artistically speaking, Chang's strength appears in the fine texture of his words and sentences. His writing probably benefited from what he tells us was his wide reading of traditional vernacular fiction as a youth. (His formal education did not last through high school.) But whatever its origins, his style easily engages the reader's interest and makes a scene, even a very ordinary scene, seem to come alive. A good example from Fate in Tears and Laughter (although almost any page will do) is his description in chapter one of the bustle and flavor at Peking's Bridge of Heaven. Chia-shu is going there for the first time, in search of drum-singing at the Island Pavilion (Shui-hsin t'ing):

When he arrived and the rickshaw came to a halt, the whole place was in a festive uproar. The sounds were of Sham opera, two-stringed violins, gongs, drums, and all kinds of things. There lay before him a road crowded by three or four high buildings on wooden beams. On the fronts of these buildings hung a great many red paper signs sporting gold or black characters: "The Dogmeat Jug," "Child Actors," and so on, including things like "Little Penny and Daffodil in a Joint Performance of Saving the Clay Pot."

He paid the rickshaw and walked over for a closer look. Next to the gate tower, a large number of peddlers' stalls were tightly strung together in rows. The one right in front of him was a monocoque with some big flat boards on top, and on the boards were a number of black lumps about the size of rice bowls. Great swarms of flies buzzed madly about. Two knives as white as snow rested among the black lumps. The man standing next to the monocoque would take a black lump, pick up a knife, and in a

frenzied burst of chopping slice off a number of thin brown strips. These he would place in a piece of filthy old newspaper and hold out to people. He was probably selling soy or cooked donkey meat.

Another stall consisted of a great iron kettle laid out on the flat ground and containing several very long strips of something pitch black. It looked just like dead snakes, their scales peeled, tangled to the top of the kettle. A bloody, foul stench leapt from the center of the mass. This turned out to be those boiled sheep intestines of which Northerners are fond.

Chi-shu frowned as he turned to look the other way. He now saw some dirt alleyways, both sides of which were lined with reed huts. The huts in the two alleys right in front of him, as far as one could see, had hung out all kinds of multi-colored clothing; this was probably the famous Second-hand Clothes Street. To one side was a little alley where people were coming and going in great numbers. At the head of the alley a pile of old shoes lay right on the grey earth. At several other points were stalls selling odds-and-ends; where the ground was covered with kerosene lanterns, porcelain-plated bowls, and items in iron and brass.

Chi-shu walked toward the little alley. On the south side were some reed-hut stores, and to the north was a big wide ditch. The ditch contained a mass of runny black mud with water that flowed blue. Its stench was overpowering. Chi-shu reminded himself that the Island Pavilion, with its beautiful trees and flowers, of course could not be here. So he turned around again and went toward the main street, where he asked a policeman. The policeman told him that the Island Pavilion was on the west of the street going south. (The whole city of Peking is a gathering of street going south. The whole city of Peking is a gathering of street going south. Peoples’ houses are also the square-shaped “four-attached to west.” People’s houses are also the square-shaped “four-attached to west.”) Everybody there, young and old alike, knows the four directions, and in speaking refers not to up, down, left, or right but to north, south, east, or west.) Having listened to him, Chi-shu went straight on his way...

Chang Hen-shui loved Peking and knew it well, and his descriptions such as this are hardly less loving or colorful than those of other such literary master of Peking, Lao She. Chang’s dialogue, cast in delightfully natural Peking dialect, also suggests Lao She’s, though Chang avoids the colloquial ostentation in Lao She’s early works.

Occasionally Chang challenges himself to produce a vivid and realistic account of something which others might pass over. His honest attempt to describe madness (Feng-hsi) is, for example, a rarity in modern Chinese literature. T.A. Hsia, commenting that Chang Hen-shui “has ears, has eyes, and has imagination,” rates him “a greater and better artist” than Wu Ching-tzu, author of The Scholars.

Fate in Tears and Laughter is unique in modern popular Chinese fiction for its weaving together of three major types in that tradition—the love story, knight-errant story, and “social” novel. A basic characteristic of “social” fiction, as exemplified in paradigm cases such as Li Han-ch’iu’s Tales of Yangchow or Chang’s own Informal History of Ch’un-ning, is that it describes life at several layers of society, often through thinly disguised accounts of real people. Indeed, a story’s main interest often lies in its revelation in fiction of what one dared not print as news. In the case of Fate in Tears and Laughter, the contemporary relevance of such underlying issues as the dilemma between the “old” and “new” styles was so broad that it actually matters not whether, as the author claims, the story is based on real events. What matters is that the characters represent an interesting range in society and are typical of people or trends familiar to the reader.

The particular branch of the social novel tradition best illustrated in Fate in Tears and Laughter is that of “scandal” novels or hei-mu hsiao-shuo. The spirit of these highly satirical stories, whose popularity boomed in the mid-1910s, is captured in General Liu’s wanton abuse of wealth and power. His opulent surroundings, cruel treatment of servants, sexual abandon, and contempt for the public—as when his automobile barges its way through a crowded park—are all stock examples. Positive moral values also play a role in scandal fiction, indeed a crucial role, but only implicitly. The correct norms are powerfully upheld as author and reader tacitly agree on the egregiousness of their various infractions. (When positive values are explicitly stated, they usually come in the form of limited and concrete rules: one shouldn’t believe in dreams, one shouldn’t bind girls’ feet, and so forth. Such rules are more reminiscent of the campaigns for new-style reform dating from the late-Ch’ing reform movement—and from missionary activity before that—than of the basic Chinese moral values whose implicit endorsement is the very heart of scandal fiction.)

As a kind of corollary to the satire of powerholders, a sympathetic view of the lower classes also appears in the social novels of the time, although such expressions actually are more characteristic of the knight-errant stories. The knight-errant usually comes from, and

66. Compare, for example, Lao She’s descriptions in the final chapter of Lao shih-liang-tzu.
67. Lu Hsun’s “Diary of a Madman” (1918) is a better and much more serious story than Fate in Tears and Laughter—but not, of course, because of an interest in realistic description of madness.
68. C. T. Hsia, Ai-ch’ing, she-hui, hsiao-shuo, p. 226.
mingles with, the fringe elements of the lower class—beggars, bandits, entertainers—and it is typically his or her role to defend the downtrodden from bullying abuse. Shou-feng and Hsiu-ku are nearly pure examples, except for Hsiu-ku’s tangential involvement in the question of the old and new styles.

Thus a basic assumption about the knight-errant, like assumptions about “the common man” in the West’s Enlightenment, inverts orthodox notions about the source in society of truth and justice. Such virtues may not originate among the elite and filter down, as it were, but may originate among the downtrodden who occasionally force them upward. Chia-shu must keep his visits to the Bridge of Heaven secret because a household servant tells him it is full of scoundrels and crooks. But the Bridge of Heaven is where he meets the Kuans, the story’s staunch defenders of righteousness. For principle alone Shou-feng sets out to save Feng-hsi, and for principle alone abandons his effort when Feng-hsi capitulates to the general’s money. At the end of the story, when Shou-feng has completed his heroic rescue of Chia-shu, he takes his chance to reprimand the servant who had warned Chia-shu to avoid the Bridge of Heaven. “My friend! Your young master cousin didn’t suffer too much, did he, from making friends with this old man? You can say the Bridge of Heaven is full of all kinds of shady characters, scrupling for a living, but there are also quite a few who make good friends…”

The more obvious marks of a knight-errant story are, of course, the knight-errant’s extraordinary abilities and semi-mysterious manner. With unreal case the knight-errant appears and disappears from view, as well as from the pale of normal human understanding. He or she has connections with higher principles which are perfectly real and exist everywhere, but are accessible only to those who attain a certain clarity of mind. This clarity helps them make brisk and correct judgments even in very confusing situations.

Their special abilities, both mental and physical, are a matter of occult training as well as inborn talent. We know Shou-feng’s weightlifting abilities have somehow been transmitted to Hsiu-ku when she rescues Chia-shu by carrying him on her back for miles. Shou-feng, meanwhile, fights off five bandits at once, catching flying spears between two fingers and hurling them whence they came. This pinching-in-mid-air skill, apparently a practiced one, he also uses for plain fun, as when he removes flies from the area of a dinner table by plucking them from mid-air with his chopsticks and killing them by breaking their wings—without dirtying his chopsticks. But even here Chang Hsin-shui’s interest in adjusting to the “new style” suddenly pops forward. Shou-feng ends his fly-catching performance by commenting that China’s martial arts are outdated: one cannot run onto a battlefield these days plucking bombs from the air.

The love story theme of *Fate in Tears and Laughter* must be seen in the tradition of the kind of popular love story which boomed in the 1910s, those called “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” stories in the original and proper sense. We consider them in chapter two.

CHAPTER 2

The Love Stories of the 1910s

The more popular themes in China’s modern urban fiction were always in evidence in Shanghai and elsewhere; what we refer to as popularity “waves” were matters of degree only. Major types (love stories, social stories, knight-errant stories, detective stories) developed major waves, and minor types (“imagination” stories, “moral” stories, “science” stories, and countless others) developed minor ones. A wave typically involved one or two pace-setting works followed by large numbers of imitators. Love stories, the first very large wave, boomed in Shanghai in the mid-1910s following the publication of Hsu Chen-ya’s *Jade Pear Spirit* (*Yü-li hün*). This story quickly became an item of avid discussion, especially among young people, and stimulated a more general interest in love stories as a type. Of all stories in the 1910s it was circulated and imitated most extensively, both numerically and geographically.

Popularity waves of basically the same type seem to have been common on the fiction markets of Chinese cities from late Ming times or earlier; but it is clear that in the early twentieth century they were more sudden than before and, at least in their written manifestations, larger as well.1 The greater conveniences and lower cost of the media—books, magazines, comic books, and eventually movies—during these two decades made it possible for popularity to “snowball” much more rapidly than before, and to reach more readers in doing so. Readers could even be attracted to a certain story, or type of story, less because of an independent interest in its contents than because of a wish to participate in a new, often fleeting, popular style. In an important sense, a major cause of a popularity wave was often the news of the wave itself.2


2. For interesting articles in the field of social psychology discussing fads and fashions, see Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, eds., *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Reading, Mass., 1968), vol. 3.

Hsu Chen-ya wrote in an ornate classical style which later became famous as quintessential “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” language. He had a small group of friends and colleagues who shared the style with him, exploited similar themes, and contributed to the same fiction magazines. Most important in this group were Chi’en T’ieh-hsien, a senior figure whose *Teardrop Destiny* (*Lei-chü yün*) was an important precedent for Hsu Chen-ya; Li Ting-i, whose novel *A Beauty’s Blessings* (*Mei-jen fu*) was second only to Hsu’s novels in popularity, and Wu Shuang-je, author of *Mirror of Evil Injustice* (*Nieh-yün ching*). Beyond this small circle of writers forms and styles varied somewhat, but the romantic theme epitomized in *Jade Pear Spirit* remained remarkably constant.

1. *Jade Pear Spirit*

*Jade Pear Spirit* tells of an extremely talented young man named Ho Meng-hsia, whose family has fallen into genteel poverty. Meng-hsia goes to serve as a tutor in the household of distant relatives named Ts’ai. The head of household, Patriarch Ts’ai, is a widower who lives with his 16-year-old daughter Yun-ch’ien and the 27-year-old widow of his deceased son. The young widow is called “Pear Mother,” Li Niang, and has an adorable little son called Peng-lang. Both of the young women are extremely attractive: the author likens Yun-ch’ien’s beauty to the glamorous brilliance of the *hsin-i* (*magnolia liliiflora*), while Li Niang’s beauty, he tells us, is more like the gentle and delicate comeliness of pear blossoms. The metaphors are partly evaluative—pear blossoms being preferable—and take on added meaning as the story unfolds. During the first part of the novel, Yun-ch’ien is away at a “new style” school in the provincial capital, where she learns glamorous new ideas from the West. She returns home stridently proclaiming the arrival of the new day and disturbing the smooth workings of her father’s Confucian household. Li Niang, by contrast, scarcely ventures from her inner chambers; she observes the codes of widow’s chastity and traditional feminine grace.

We should note, in passing, a parallel between the magnolia and pear types of Hsu’s novel and the contrast between Helena and Peng-lhsi in Chang Hsin-shu’s *Fate in Tears and Laughter*. In fact, the symbolic opposition of the foreign or “new” style represented by a brilliant, aggressive woman, and the Chinese or “old” style represented by a comely, retiring one was common to a good number of love stories in the 1910s and 1920s, many of which were triangular affairs involving a male protagonist and these two female types. Tendencies toward this pattern can be found in the decade preceding the appearance of *Jade Pear Spirit*, as in the adventures in Tseng P’u’s
Flower on a Sea of Evil (Nihaihua) of the glamorous Ts'ai-yun, courtseas am ambassadorial spouse and inamorata of foreign men, who contrasts sharply with the ambassador's first wife Madame Chang, an exemplar of devotional virtues. Leo Lee has shown the importance of similar love triangles in Su Man-shu's Tale of a Broken Hairpin (Sui-tsian chi) and The Lone Swan (Thuan hang ling yen chi), both contemporary with jade Pear Spirit but not written in imitation of it. In The Lone Swan, the spirited "magnolia" type, Shizuko, actually is a foreigner (representing, as much as Japan itself, Japan as door to the West), while the Chinese girl Hsueh-mei, the "pear" type, quietly suffers and dies for virtue. Lee also points out Su Man-shu's heavy debt to Dream of the Red Chamber. Although a detailed comparison is beyond our present purposes, the basic triangle of sensitive hero, magnoliatype woman, and pear-type woman has clear applications in Dream and other premodern stories, though without, of course, the connotations of Western versus non-Western styles. Viewed in this context, the twentieth-century examples are interesting for their uniform association of the West with the "magnolia" side of the general dichotomy.

To return to the Jade Pear Spirit story, the young man Meng-hsia falls in love with the young widow Li Niang after a few weeks of tutoring her son P'eng-lang. Before the lovers have ever spoken face-to-face, he is tremendously impressed by her needlework and a few letters and poems that she has sent him. He is impressed by her obvious glimpses of her beauty. She, in turn, is impressed by his obvious talent (they pass letters and poems back and forth) and by the special love he lavishes upon her little boy. He bemoans his ill fate: possessing great talent, he lacks the opportunity to develop it through study in Japan, where all the other young men are. He, appropriately reciprocals, bemoans her lot: possessing great beauty, she must live as a widow. Their romance grows through secret missives, innocently delivered back and forth by P'eng-lang.

The love stories of the 1910s usually included some social "problem" currently on people's minds (though it is difficult to say whether the problems were considered seriously by readers or served primarily to divert nagging worries to harmless directions). The "problem" in this story is a woman who is forced to marry Meng-hsia. As a widow, she must be chaste. And by tying Meng-hsia down in a small Kiangsu village, she is hurting his future. She communicates her thoughts to Meng-hsia in a letter; he responds, with the spontaneity of the super-sensitive romantic he is, by vowing never to marry in this lifetime. Li Niang is determined that he should retrace this oath, and falls seriously ill, thereby demonstrating both her grief and her sincerity. Meng-hsia responds by falling ill himself. But finally he accedes to the solution Li Niang presses upon him, which is that he should marry her young sister-in-law Yun-ch'ien.

Up to this point, the whole romance has been a closely guarded secret. But now Meng-hsia confides in his very close friend Shib-ch'ih, a young man who has been doing very well in the world of "new studies." Shib-ch'ih feels the match with Yun-ch'ien to be the perfect solution and rushes to speak with Patriarch Ts'ai on Menghsia's behalf. Patriarch Ts'ai plaintively reports that he has little control over his "new-style" daughter—that she has already refused several times to hear of any matchmaking from him. Since this particular match seems so fine, however, he agrees to try having Li Niang approach Yun-ch'ien with the proposal. Li Niang, pretending the idea is new to her, succeeds in gaining Yun-ch'ien's acceptance, though Yun-ch'ien still regards it as an arranged, unhappy marriage. Thus Meng-hsia, who still loves Li Niang, and Yun-ch'ien, who suddenly sheds her "new-style" vencer and accepts all Confucian rules, both agree to marry not for love but in order to please others. Yun-ch'ien still does not know of the secret love between Li Niang and Meng-hsia.

Seeking to free Meng-hsia completely from any responsibilities to her, Li Niang sends him a cut strand of her hair symbolizing a total severance of their relationship. When Meng-hsia resists this idea, Li Niang resolves to die. Only then will it be possible for Meng-hsia to forget her and transfer his affections to Yun-ch'ien. While Meng-hsia is away visiting his parents, she simply lies down on her bed, thinks of dying, refuses medicine, and dies. She is attended throughout her illness by a tearful Yun-ch'ien, who does not understand the secret cause of Li Niang's death until she reads a letter which Li Niang has left behind. The revelation shocks Yun-ch'ien, who then herself falls ill. In order to repay Li Niang's amazing purity and devotion, Yun-ch'ien also resolves to die, and does so.

Meanwhile Meng-hsia has gone to study in Japan, to fulfill his potential and to serve the country as Li Niang would have wanted him to.

3. Lee, Romantic Generation, pp. 65–72. The precedents for the assertive "magnolia" type of woman may be as old as the Northern Dynasties (A.D. 386–581) and the famous story of Mu-lan, a young woman who fearlessly dressed as a man to replace her father and lead his troops into battle. "Mu-lan" is another name for the Magnolia liliiflora.

4. Though closely guarded, the secret actually had been discovered by one outsider, identified only as So-and-so Li (Li moy). Li uses the secret to blackmail Li Niang, taking advantage of Meng-hsia's absence for a few days. Li forges Meng-hsia's hand and writes an obscene poem to Li Niang. He then reveals to her that he knows of the obscene poem, and demands that she be given the same favors accorded Meng-hsia. The rate causes considerable grief between the two lovers, but does not succeed.
do. At the same time he feels intensely that he must repay his love debt to Li Niang. He finds an opportunity to serve both ends simultaneously in 1911 at Wuchang, where he joins the revolutionary forces. Foolishly rushing out on the front lines, clutching his love poetry to his breast, he quickly achieves death-for-love and death-for-the-nation in one fell swoop.

At this point the narrator emerges as a character in the story to wrap things up. Playing the “detective” (and thus adding to the novel a touch of detective story interest, which was on the increase during the 1910s), the narrator goes back to discover the fate of the remainder of the Ts’ui household. Patriarch Ts’ui himself had died shortly after Li Niang and Yun-ch’ien. The little boy P’eng-lang had been taken away to live with distant relatives. In the courtyard, the pear tree and magnolia tree had died following the deaths of Li Niang and Yun-ch’ien, respectively. At the base of the dead pear tree lay little balls of hardened mud, which appeared to have been formed by the teardrops of a broken-hearted lover.

Little is known of Hsu Chen-ya’s early life, except that he was born around 1876 in Ch’ang-shu, Kiangsu Province. His given name was originally Chueh, and his several pen names included “The One Who Watches for the Wild Swan” (wang lang lou) and “Third Son of Tung-hai” (Tung-hai san lang). (Tung-hai in northern Kiangsu was the home prefecture of the Hsu family, and Shanghai writers of the surname Hsu collectively preserved their identification with that area. In the twenties they founded a magazine called Tung-hai which carried only fiction written by authors named Hsu.) Of Hsu Chen-ya’s immediate family, we know only that he had an elder brother, Hsu T’ien-hsiao, though it appears likely he had an elder sister as well. After his schooling, he spent several years in and around Ch’ang-shu as a family tutor. Said to be a morose youth, Hsu’s best friends were his elder brother, who was very quiet, and Wu Shang-je, the only one of the three who often laughed. These three friends swore an oath of brotherhood which lasted through the years in Shanghai when they wrote love stories together.

Hsu was married, probably around 1910, to Ts’ai Jui-chu, and he moved to Shanghai about the same time. There his writing and editing career began almost immediately with a position at Chou Shao-heng’s People’s Rights Journal, where Hsu often contributed to the fiction page. Following the closing of the journal in 1914 (a forced closing for political reasons) Hsu took a regular job at the Chung Hwa Book Company (Chung-hua shu-ch’i) working on textbooks and contributing to the company’s fiction magazine, The World of Chinese Fiction (Chung-hua hsiao-shuo chieh). This job he was soon ready to quit, however, both because his moods did not suit the routine of daily desk work and because the editor of The World of Chinese Fiction insisted on altering his carefully-worded phrases. Hsu needed little persuading when his friend Liu T’ieh-leng, with whom he had worked on the People’s Rights Journal, raised capital for a new fiction magazine and asked Hsu to be its editor. The new magazine was Thicket of Fiction (Hsiao-shuo ts’ing-pao, 1914–1919), and Hsu’s salary was a comfortable three hundred yuan per month. Hsu later helped found a publishing and distributing company, the Ch’ing-hua shu-ch’i, and another major magazine, Fiction Quarterly (Hsiao-shuo chi-pao, 1918–1920). Altogether he published at least seventeen classical-style “mournful” (ai-ch’ing) love novels, Jade Pear Spirit being the first. All were reprinted many times. He also produced four volumes of miscellany under the title The Wasted Ink of Chen-ya (Chen-ya chia-pan), plus several volumes of letters and poems.

During the 1910s Hsu apparently suffered the emotional strain of an unhappy family life, but details are unavailable. He is said to have worn a sour expression constantly. He often was in conflict with his fellow writers and editors, and even violated the generally convivial spirit among the Shanghai literary circles of the 1910s by engaging in public vituperation with his enemies. His brother T’ien-hsiao also had an unhappy family life, including the unexpected death of a wife and an infant daughter. The two brothers would spend time consoling one another, often sitting a whole afternoon in the offices of Thicket of Fiction sipping wine. Hsu Chen-ya especially enjoyed wine but drank very slowly, sometimes spending hours to the cup.

In 1924 Hsu’s wife Ts’ai Jui-chu died, and the events following her death came to provide Butterfly culture’s dealers in anecdotes with one

9. See chapter 5 below for details.
10. Eleven novels by Hsu are listed in YYHTP, p. 320; ones which are not listed include My Husband (Yi chih fu); The Heart and Soul of Mandarin Ducks (Yun-yang tan-kuan); Wicked Mama (Ni-ch’i pao); One Year Per Word (I-fu lei); Regrets of the Boudoir (Long-kuei hua): and Thirty-six Mandarin Ducks (San-shi-liu yun-yang). It is possible that some of Hsu’s stories were ghostwritten with his permission, a practice which became more common in the 1920s. There is no direct evidence for this, however.
of their strangest and best-known stories. Chang Hen-shui was the first to record it in print, but in fictional disguise, in his late-1920s novel This Person’s Notes (Sui-jen chi.). The anecdote begins with Hsu’s composition of an extremely sentimental, hundred-verse mourning poem (tsao wang tz’u) for his deceased wife. He published it under the name “Weeper of pearls” (Chi chu sheng) and used this pen name for the rest of his life. “Weeping pearls” was a mythical reference to a guest who felt so thankful to his host that he wept pearls instead of tears; but the character chu—pearl—was also the last character in Hsu’s wife’s name. According to the story, the mourning poem reached the eyes of Liu Yuan-ying, daughter of Liu Ch’un-lin, who was the last chuang-yuan under the imperial examination system before it was abolished in 1905. Immensely moved by the poem, the daughter of the chuang-yuan sought out more works by the ”Weeper of pearls.”

She pored over Jade Pearl Spirit—so the anecdote goes—until she had grown literally sick with pity and grief. When her father inquired about her health, she could only hand him a copy of the book and weep. At the time already thirty years old and still unmarried, the daughter is said to have implored her father to arrange that she become Hsu’s second wife. At first there was considerable difficulty with the idea that a chuang-yuan’s daughter should marry a popular novelist. But the daughter persisted, it is said, and the chuang-yuan, who read Jade Pearl Spirit himself, had to admit Hsu’s “genius.” He consented to make an initial enquiry about marriage. Hsu, for his part, was pleased at the prospect of the respectability such a match would bring him. For despite the immense popularity of his fiction, Hsu had recently been a major target in the attack by May Fourth writers on Butterfly fiction, and respectability from any source was most welcome.12

Accordingly, the match was made. On the marriage invitation cards, the customary fu lu shou (“fortune, happiness, long life”) was replaced by fu lu yu-an-yang (“fortune, happiness, mandarin ducks”). Apparently, though, Hsu’s second marriage turned out no happier than his first. According to his friends Hsu’s refined, over-sensitive temperament made him no match for the chuang-yuan’s daughter, whose sentimentalism turned out to come in a spirited and aggressive form. On their wedding night she persistently interrogated Hsu regarding the real story of Jade Pearl Spirit. Was Li Niang a real person? Where was she now? What had been Hsu’s relationship with her? Hsu’s answers only involved him deeper and deeper in details he could not satisfactorily explain. Ever after that time, according to the story, Hsu was henpecked. He continued to spend a good deal of time out-

that when Meng-hsia agrees to Li Niang’s plan that he marry Yun-ch’ien, his private thoughts were only of himself and Li Niang, not of Yun-ch’ien.\(^{19}\)

When the main part of the novel ends with Li Niang’s death, the entire story seems to become much more fictionalized. Meng-hsia, who had always been sombre and inhibited, suddenly rushes off to Japan, then rushes back to die at Wuchang. It is clear that in real life Hsu rushed to neither place, but continued to live the sombre life. The author’s oft-repeated concern to “report the facts” also changes subtly near the end as he seems to speculate with the reader about the advantages and disadvantages of the several ways he could have arranged to have Meng-hsia die.\(^{20}\) It appears, in short, that Hsu recorded his own experiences during the years 1908–1909, years which are carefully identified in the novel, then added an imaginative ending to the story in an attempt to bring it to a close and perhaps to intensify its tragic theme.

Hsu also may have added a fictional ending in order to divert readers from the autobiographical trail. In particular he would not want readers to know that Meng-hsia had “in reality” married Yun-ch’ien, since this obviously would pull both characters from their noble pedestals. Yet it is precisely such a tie that the readership would naturally suspect from the apparent similarities between Ts’ui Yun-ch’ien and Hsu’s wife Ts’ai Jui-ch’u. Hsu eventually decided to give in to his readers on this point. In 1924 his old friend Cheng Cheng-ch’iu produced a movie version of Jade Pear Spirit in which Meng-hsia and Yun-ch’ien do marry in the end. Hsu contributed a few stanzas of poetry as an introduction to the movie, tacitly confirming that the real-life Yun-ch’ien was indeed Ts’ai Jui-ch’u.\(^{21}\)

In the novel, Hsu is obviously concerned to imply that autobiographical is out of the question, a task which becomes somewhat thorny because of his simultaneous wish to insist that the story is true. He handles the dilemma by inserting himself into the story in the role of witness. Identifying the narrator as himself, he makes the narrator the “detective” who investigates events after Meng-hsia’s death. The narrator also explicitly states that he has never met Meng-hsia: he has learned the whole story only through a mutual friend named Shih-ch’ih who sent a packet of materials which Meng-hsia had left behind in Japan.\(^{22}\) The calamitous end of the story moves the narrator to tears, yet he repeats that the events “bear no relation” to himself.\(^{23}\)

Hsu’s efforts to preserve the semblance of truth are rhetorically important. Occasionally he provides details which seem unnecessary, even clumsy, but which do have the effect of seeming to lock into concrete fact a story which otherwise would be unbelievably ideal. For no particular reason, for example, we are told to the minute the time of Li Niang’s death.\(^{24}\) There are tangential vignettes on a lascivious blackmailer, on a peasant festival, on P’eng-lang the little boy, and on Meng-hsia’s parents—all descriptions whose ad hoc quality suggests factual report. The sense of truth is especially important as the story nears its end where, in a fashion dating from Ming times, it takes on an ethereal, partly supernatural quality: its leading characters die for the highest principles, and nature itself responds as magnolias and pear trees wither. Good storytellers have always known that nothing adds to the enjoyment of such accounts more than the intimation that “I saw this with my own eyes.”

Yet the author’s literary embellishments are evident almost everywhere, even when the narrative seems closest to facts. Hsu surely labored over his manuscript, and tells us in the text itself that he expects the story to sell an extraordinary number of copies.\(^{25}\) The story is in linked chapter format, comprising thirty chapters of about equal length. In the manner of Lin Shu’s translations, most chapters begin with a few lines of parallel prose reviewing the previous chapter’s ending (but without resolutions of artificially developed climaxes, as in traditional vernacular style). The flashback device, also quite fashionable since the late-Ch’ing decade, is prominently employed in the first chapter. In an airy midnight scene we see Meng-hsia burying flowers andweeping for Li Niang, and only later are we told how he came to be a tutor with the Ts’ui family in the first place. The whole narration is heavily laden with lyrical description, poetry and love letters. Its debt to Dream of the Red Chamber is obvious, and Hsu proudly displays this connection by frequently pointing out parallels.\(^{26}\)

Yet Jade Pear Spirit is much more compact sentimental than Dream of the Red Chamber. Short and few indeed are the intervals between its intense moods. Meng-hsia and Li Niang abruptly fall in love, abruptly make sweeping vows, abruptly die. Relations between young people of the same sex— Li Niang and Yun-ch’ien, Meng-hsia and Shih-ch’ih—are almost equally sudden and effusive. (One has to imagine the readers of the 1910s, who made this story a bestseller, de-

\(^{19}\) YLH, p. 112.
\(^{20}\) YLH, pp. 158–160.
\(^{21}\) Ch’eng Chi-hua, Cheng-kuo tien-yang fa-chau shih 1:64; YYHTIP, p. 407.
\(^{22}\) YLH, p. 156.
\(^{23}\) YLH, p. 165.
\(^{24}\) YLH, p. 146.
\(^{25}\) YLH, p. 157.
\(^{26}\) In addition to the evident reference to Dream of the Red Chamber in Meng-hsia’s burying of flowers in chapter one, see also the stated or implied references on pp. 9, 24, 126, 142, and 157 of YLH.
lighting in the quick alternations of intense emotion.) Though Hsu generally does a good job of preserving the psychological credibility of his major characters, he is also willing to exaggerate or distort for the sake of magnifying sentiments. On several occasions the lovers send one another letters which the reader can see very clearly will be heartrending to the recipient. Yet the letters are sent, the hearts rent, and a celebration of emotion follows for several pages. If the author were consistent about the supersensitive concern his lovers felt for one another, the injuries inflicted by their letters would surely be anticipated and avoided. The sacrifice of consistency to sentimentalism seems quite deliberate.

Several times in the text Hsu offers explanations, all rhetorical, of his purposes in writing. He begins in chapter 5 with a standard disclaimer. In writing this novel, he says, he is not wasting precious ink to offend his readers with simple stories of bodily desires—stories of which there are thousands, all alike; no, he is writing of true and extraordinary love. Near the end of the story he repeats this claim, not merely pro forma but neatly woven into the drama of his final two chapters. Chapters 29 and 30 impress a tragic picture upon the reader. Everyone in the Ts'ui household dies except P'eng-lang, who is taken far away. A lonely white flag is all that stirs at the desolate homestead. This denouement, Hsu tells us, "can serve as a mirror for youth;" it can warn all future generations of young men and women about the danger hidden in the character ch'ing. Hsu thereby extends the circle of the story's tragedy to encompass potentially his readers as well. In a second shocking enlargement of this circle, he reveals that he himself is a victim of ch'ing. "I, too, am a brokenhearted person, writing this brokenhearted tale," he tells us, four pages from the novel's end.

The novel being entertainment fiction primarily, one cannot, of course, take its warning about ch'ing at face value. The effect of the warning could hardly have been to inspire a mass swearing-off of romantic interest among young readers. On the contrary, it surely increased the readership fascination with ch'ing, and with melancholy and pathos, and surely whetted their appetites for more of the same. In any case more of the same was on its way, from both Hsu and his imitators.

Hsu was not as prolific as many other Shanghai love story writers, but the several short novels he did write stand out from the crowd.

27. YLH, pp. 34ff, 62ff, 132ff and 139ff; pp. 148ff is another case in point, though here the letter is from Li Nian to Yun-ch'ien.
30. YLH, p. 165.

Though he always aimed at extreme sentimentalism, his relative success must be attributed to his ability to preserve verismilitude. He obviously had an unusual sensitivity to human psychology. Having appreciated a certain person's feelings, he could embroider and enlarge them in fiction until he had shaped a gripping story. Most of his imitators, largely lacking these abilities, based their stories on a more speculative imagination or even on other fiction. Combined with extreme sentimentalism, this yielded a mawkish fare less moving than Hsu's because it seemed more removed. (This is not to say the imitators lacked readers, however.)

Besides Hsu's psychological sensitivity, it cannot be denied—despite his bad reputation ever since the May Fourth Movement—that he possessed a remarkable ability with words. His lyrical descriptions are sometimes extremely graceful, and fit well with the mood of his narrative. His numerous poems and parallel phrases, though not great art, are far from incompetent. They effectively draw out the sentiment implicit in his stories and, by encapsulating it, invest it with a heightened poignancy. Over several pages the poems and parallelisms can generate an intense, rarefied atmosphere which prose alone could not achieve (and which makes Hsu's art difficult either to translate or to excerpt). True, it is easy to fault his fiction, as the May Fourth critics did, as anti-progressive in content, old-fashioned in style, and oversentimental. But there is no doubt that a peculiar kind of genius was necessary to produce it. Certainly there was no lack of writers in the 1910s trying to duplicate his feats, yet none really succeeded.

The record of Jade Pear Spirit's publication is as stormy as the novel's popularity was contagious. This record begins in 1912 when Hsu was hired on the regular staff of the People's Rights Journal and began writing Jade Pear Spirit for serialization on the entertainment page. In 1914, when the novel's great appeal had become obvious, the People's Rights Publishing Section (Min-ch'üan chu-pan pu), an affiliate of the newspaper, published it in book form. Within a few months it had gone through five printings and brought the publisher handsome profits. Hsu, though, received nothing. Ma Chih-ch'ien, the manager of People's Rights publishers, took the position that his press was merely reprinting material which had appeared earlier in its own newspaper, and for which the writer had been duly paid in the form of his salary at the time. Hsu, on the other hand, argued that he had been hired as a news editor only and that his fiction contributions had been voluntary; in such a case, that new, Western thing known as the "legal copyright" should remain with the author. The dispute grew increasingly antagonistic and eventually broke into the newspapers. Ma's and Hsu's public railings against one another (they took out advertise-
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In general, the ethical quality of Jade Pear Spirit’s romantic theme is diminished in Chronicle and replaced by a greater stress on Confucian relations and the tragedy of the family as a whole. The change in emphasis may have been due to the greater distance in time between Hsu and his personal experience of the romance. Meng-hsia is a less infatuated character in the 1915 writing. In the end he does not run blindfold off to die for the country as in Jade Pear Spirit, but it is foreshadowed that he eventually will.

Chronicle of the Great Tears of Bygone Days is considerably longer than Jade Pear Spirit, includes more poetry, and is a better designed work. It was published first in Thicket of Fiction and then at the Ch’ing-hua shu-chi, where it was probably the company’s most profitable book. Since Hsu and his friends owned that company, we may assume that Chronicle brought Hsu a measure of monetary as well as moral restitution after the Jade Pear Spirit affair. Yet there is no question that the total market for the story of Li Niang and Meng-hsia continued to extend far beyond the reach of his copyright. Though statistics are unavailable, both Chronicle and Jade Pear Spirit are generally estimated to have reached a total circulation somewhere in the hundreds thousands, including large-scale reprintings in Hong Kong and Singapore. Some have even estimated a total circulation of over a million, counting continued reprints in the 1920s and later. Hsu and his friends probably sold only a few tens of thousands.

Besides its magazine and book forms, the story received circulation in stage plays and movies. The Shanghai Min-hsing was the first of many groups to produce a dramatization, which they began presenting shortly after the serialization of Chronicle was complete. In spite of the fact that they altered the story’s ending to make it a happy one, they drew a tolerably favorable response from Hsu in the form of twenty-four lines of sentimental ch’iu-ch’iu. The first movie was directed by Cheng Cheng-ch’iu in 1924 at the Star Film Company (Ming-hsing ying-p’ien hung-su). The film’s happy marriage between Yun-ch’ien and Meng-hsia, which was only part of a general de-emphasis of the story’s pervasive pessimism, was surely due in part to May Fourth charges in the early twenties that the story was “useless” and “backward.” Cheng Cheng-ch’iu, besides toning down the sentimentality, accentuated the story’s “social problem.” It was advertised, in fact, as a “problem-of-widow-chastity” film, and Hsu


33. As with many of Hsu Chen-ya’s titles, Hsueh shih lei shih is ambiguous and difficult to translate. The meaning of ‘shih’ as “snow” is suggested by the idiom liang hua meaning literally “traces of the wild snow in the snow and mud” or figuratively “traces of bygone days,” appropriately suggestive of the novel’s sentimental theme. To further complicate the matter, Hsu sometimes wrote under the pen name Hsueh shih lei shih, “The One Who Watches for the Wild Swan,” which suggests that he may have stood for one of his loves in life. See Ch’en Tieh-i, “K’n-yu ‘Hsueh shih lei shih’,” Hsing-tao jih-pao, November 1 and 2, 1973.

34. Hsueh Chen-ya, Hsueh-chang lei shih, p. 6.


himself publicly concurred in the changes. In later years at least two other film versions of the Jade Pear Spirit story were made in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

2. The Love Story Wave

In literary terms, the love stories of the 1910s derived from precedents in the classical and vernacular traditions which are centuries, even a millennium, old; hence their general potential to "catch on" from time to time should hardly cause surprise. The particular wave of love story interest which crested in the mid-1910s had begun its swell some fifteen years earlier. Leo Lee has shown how Lin Shu's discovery of sentiment in La Dame aux Camelias set a trend in the romantic mood of Shanghai fiction. The trend grew during the late-Ch'ing decade with more translations of Western romantic literature, with stories of the pleasure quarters such as Sun Chia-ch'en's Magnificent Dreams in Shanghai (Hai-shang fan-hua meng) and the closely related "writing of sentiment" novels (hsien-ch'ing hsueh-shue) of Wu Wo-yao and Chang Ch'un-fan. All these inspired similar works during 1906-1911 and led directly to the "Butterfly" stories of the 1910s. By the time of the Jade Pear Spirit became a hit in the mid-1910s, there were quite a number of authors and author-translators ready to meet the crescendo in public demand for love stories. Several leading magazines cultivated their own groups of contributors, and literally thousands of short stories appeared.

The stories grew more blatantly sentimental as their readership grew. Their literary quality suffered as most aspects of fiction, including plot, characterization, and moral lesson, were de-emphasized in comparison with the primary concern of evoking emotion. Authors would simply piece together one intense scene after another into a story line, seeking to evoke a range of emotions—love, anger, pity, sorrow—of maximum intensity in minimum space. Advertisements in contemporary magazines promised that novels would grip the reader's heart and call forth strong and true feelings.

Cultural historians of the modern West have often associated an interest in sentiment, especially the sentimental novel, with the emergence of an urban bourgeois class. The growth of such a class has further been seen as a forerunner of industrialism and all the far-reaching economic and social changes which stem from it. New social patterns, in particular new roles for women, have been seen as causes for the expression, and psychological exploration through fiction, of the individual's changing relation to the social, and even cosmic, order.

The social background of bourgeois fiction in China has not been adequately studied in these terms. Marxist literary historians in China have used the word "bourgeois" without carefully examining its applicability. Passing reference is sometimes made to the emergence of Sung and Yuan urban storytelling as the artistic manifestation of a bourgeois or proto-bourgeois urban class; the urban circulation of Feng Meng-Lung's collections of written stories in the late Ming has also been called a "bourgeois" development, but without detailed argument. In fact, it seems that neither of these cases is so close to the Western "bourgeois" experience as the social background of the sentimental stories of the 1910s. If we consider the original example of bourgeois sentimentalism in the West to have appeared in eighteenth-century England, where the novels of Samuel Richardson grew in popularity as the Industrial Revolution unfolded, nothing in China resembles the prototype quite so closely as Shanghai in the early twentieth century. (Shanghai's modernization is of course best viewed not as "similar to" Western modernization but as part of the single global process which happened to begin in England.) Chinese scholars since the May Fourth Movement who have referred to Butterfly love stories as "bourgeois" seem to have found firm ground for the application of the term to Chinese fiction and society.

Justification for using the term can be more than a general pointing out of the coincidence of industrialism and sentimental fiction. Specific similarities appear in how changing social patterns left the individual, especially among the young, with less support from traditional family and community ties; how the pattern of one's life was more in one's own hands than before; how a person's psychological security, which began with the basic ties of marriage and family, thus became cause for worry; how possibilities of new wealth in the city enticed people to try new social and economic roles; how fiction could help "socialize" the socially mobile into the class to which they aspired; how failure, or fear of failure, created a need for escape from present realities; and how these changes required the formation of new behavioral norms.

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and their testing against the old, still domineering moralities of Christianity in Victorian England and Confucianism in the Shanghai of the 1910s. In both cases, there is little doubt that popular fiction served as a forum for the working out of new norms, as well as a source of comfort from the anxieties which attended the great scare.

The importance of women in the rise of popular urban fiction in England, both as readers and as fictional protagonists, is often pointed out. Though there are notable differences in the Chinese case, the trend is similar. In both cases, the differences are remarkable: In abbreviated form, the role of the protagonist is a novel one, as illustrated in the female protagonists of two leading love stories: Li Niang's *Jade Pearl Spirit* and Clarissa of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Both women are scrupulously virtuous, at least in their intentions: Li Niang is a chaste widow and Clarissa a virgin. Yet each is enticed, by circumstances and a handsome young lover, into what they and society agree to be the “fallen condition” of illicit love (sex in Clarissa's case, affection in Li Niang's). On trial before Morality, each resolves that suicide is the only solution and literally thinks herself to sickness and then to death. Both are presented sympathetically, as characters with whom young readers might wish to identify.

An attempt to account for these similarities can be intriguing. If one rules out coincidence, and the possibility that Hsu imitated Richardson—an almost unthinkable chance given the lack of any evidence and given *Jade Pearl Spirit*'s cultural authenticity—it is tempting to seek an explanation in the appetites of similarly conditioned readerships. The question becomes not “Why were the themes similar?” but “Why did novels with similar themes become popular?”

Discussions of emerging bourgeois readerships in the West usually assume that love stories answered a need which was primarily emotional. Richardson's novels helped, as were, to release reservoirs of feeling which social change had generated. The particular anxieties of a female readership could be played out in the fictional world of female characters. It is here that one must notice some differences between Richardson and Hsu Ch'en-ya, and between their readerships. In Richardson's Clarissa much more than in Hsu's Li Niang, the reader gets an inner view of a young woman's mind. Clarissa's trials and her struggles in their full complexity are laid bare, and the reader is invited to become involved in her outlook. The handsome Lovelace is an objective force—an attraction, a threat, an enemy—in any case something whose management is part of Clarissa's trial. Our view of Li Niang, on the other hand, is primarily external. She, too, is on trial, but we have only an idealized version of her feelings. Fate, more than her lover, is her adversary. Meng-Hsia's feelings are given to us much more fully and sympathetically than Lovelace's, while Li Niang's

apothecary as a chaste widow is presented to the reader from a point of view which, if not entirely "male," at least was sufficiently orthodox by late imperial times to deny much scope for ambiguous or complex feelings.

Thus, despite the similarities between Clarissa and Li Niang, the fact that Li Niang still upholds the rigid framework of Confucianism, and does not reveal the ramified and unsure psychology of a Clarissa, suggests that we must seek differences in the nature and tendencies of the two readerships. It does seem, first, that the Shanghai readership of the 1910s included a much smaller proportion of women than did Richardson's readership. That the best-selling stories were told mostly from a masculine viewpoint is, of course, an initial reason to suspect a predominantly male readership. More concrete evidence, insofar as it is available through interviews with publishers and authors, and through school enrollment figures, supports the hypothesis of a readership at least four-fifths male.44

More broadly, while there can be no doubt that Shanghai in the 1910s was beginning to undergo the general kind of social change which had accompanied industrialization in Western cities, the changes were not as far-reaching as those in the West (and therefore at once more ominous and more easily called irrelevant) than in the London and Manchester of Richardson's England. Shanghai differed from the English case in two fundamental ways: first, modern changes in Shanghai arrived together with an alien culture; and second, from a Chinese point of view, they arrived with astonishing rapidity, at least in their outward forms. In effect they presented an alternative life style whose contrast with existing forms was much more developed and explicit than the contrast between “new” and “old” had been in England or in other Western countries where industrialism was largely indigenous. While the new urban classes in England used novels to grapple with obscure “inner” upheavals (obscure because they were inner), readers of Shanghai love stories tended to deal in overly simple comparisons between two clearcut and outwardly-defined alternatives for life. In fictional form, “new-style” Western behavior patterns could be tried on and taken off as easily as a Western hat, whether for fun or as a serious experiment.

Many of the “experiments” concerned Western-style courtship and new social roles for women (as we saw reflected in *Fate in Tears and Laughter* in chapter 1). Beginning in the late Ch'ing decade there was little room for doubt among the Shanghai reading public that change in these matters was on its way. Old customs which held women back—footbinding, forced marriages, and the giving of child

44. See chapter 5 below.
brides—had all been denounced, while women’s education in the new style was being advertised and promoted. Theoretical essays as well as works of fiction explored and advocated new social roles for women outside the household. By the end of the decade, the first of the women’s magazines specially devoted to these questions had appeared.

In the late Ch’ing decade, though, experimentation with new roles for women was almost entirely limited to the realm of thought. Reality lagged far behind, even in Shanghai. Women’s schools received a great deal of public notice, but in reality were not numerous; the women’s magazines which did appear were read mostly by men. A few real-life heroines, such as the revolutionary Ch’iu Chin, received great public attention not because they were typical but precisely because they were so extraordinary.

The gap between ideas and reality is easily understandable, given the obvious need for due consideration before using anything too new or alien. But at the same time, reformist zeal demanded expression, and to some extent the difficulty of putting theory into practice was simplistically linked with the issue of removing the Manchu government. It was widely imagined among those who spoke of revolution that once the Manchus were out the new life would naturally spring forth on its own. Hence 1912 marked a high tide of anticipation: China would finally be free to reform herself as she wished.

Yet what, at a concrete level, was to be done? How were young women in the new day actually to behave? And how were young men to relate to them? In dealing implicitly with these questions, the love stories of the 1910s allowed their readers to try out their notions in a fictional context and “observe” the results. It is significant that most of the love stories were short stories, and even the ones of novel length were not very long. Young readers wanted their lessons quickly, and wanted the latest views. The excitement of the times would hardly permit lengthy works. Magazines often promised that they would wind up serialized stories within two or three issues at most.

The literary forms and styles of the 1910s also illustrate the confusion and eclecticism of the times. Although there was less real experimentation with new literary and linguistic influences than during the previous decade, authors did draw upon a variety of forms and styles, both Chinese and Western. Some stories were in traditional vernacular style, but many employed a mixture of styles—causing May Fourth detractors later to describe the standard mode as “half-classical—but-not-vernacular” (pan wen pu pai). Allowing for some degree of intermixture, one can generally distinguish four styles, two classical and two vernacular.

Most common was a ku-wen style, in which stories were fashioned after T’ang ch’ien-ch’i or, more importantly, Lin Shu’s elegant translations of La Dame aux Camelias and other Western fiction. In the 1910s stories in this style were short, had clearly shaped plots, made great use of standard clichés, and were often interlarded with seven-character ch’ueh-ch’ii.

A second important classical mode was the p’ien-li style which had developed in the Six Dynasties and was also called “four-six” style because it linked parallel lines of four and six characters. The style was not originally intended for fiction, and the appeal of its parallelism extended to the classical-style love stories of the 1910s centuries later. No author of the 1910s is known to have attempted a duplication of Ch’en Ch’iu’s feat of doing a whole novel, or even a short story, in “four-six” style. But the style was widely used in the 1910s, especially in the opening lines of chapters.

When the fiery youth of May Fourth attacked popular love stories in the early 1920s, “four-six” parallelism was singled out as especially absurd. Its rigidity suited the technical show-off but not the serious literary artist. On the defensive, practitioners of “four-six” were obliged either to explain their interests or to conceal them. One reason they routinely cited Dream of the Red Chamber as a literary inspiration was that this novel was as beyond reproach as a Chinese literary prec-

45. Chapter 9 of Ch’ien Hsiing-t’uan’s Hsiao-ch’ing hsiao-shao shih reviews important late Ch’ing fiction dealing with the liberation of women. The issue was pervasive among progressive circles in the treaty ports, and appeared with varying degrees of explicitness in a wide variety of works.
46. See chapter 5 below.
47. Some lengthy social novels were written and read during the 1910s, but were popular among somewhat older audiences.
48. This was Travels to the Lodgings of Immortals (Yun-hsien k’ou) by Chang Cho, a book which was lost in China but preserved in Japan and rediscovered in the 20th century. See Lu Hsun, Chung-hou hsiao-shao shih-kuo (Shanghai, 1931), pp. 91–93.
49. Lu Hsun, Chung-hou hsiao-shao shih-kuo, p. 311.
50. Interviews with Ch’en Ting-shan, July 25, 1973, and Ch’eng She-wo, July 26, 1973; see also Chih-Hsi in Hsia Ch’ou 1:1, (January 1919).
expanded upon this tradition. Magazines carried special sections for t’au-tz’u, clearly labeling which portions were to be sung and which read. The pieces were not intended for actual performance any more than their Ch’ing predecessors had been; nor is it likely that Shanghai readers often sang to themselves. Yet the rhythm of the lines in the sung portion certainly remained important in “brining the story home” to readers who were familiar with the form and enjoyed its lit.

Many love stories of the 1910s showed some degree of stylistic influence from Western fiction. An influence which the authors themselves were quick to claim was the use of psychological description, an “inner” view of the minds of fictional characters. Their association of Western influence and psychological description stemmed from the early translations by Lin Shu and others who first brought Western psychological novels to the Shanghai literary scene. Yet this self-perceived influence may not have been as important as the authors claimed. One can, with Jaroslav Prseck, trace a tendency toward “subjectivism” in Chinese fiction to the middle Ch’ing or earlier, and in such a context it is unclear that the love stories of the 1910s (excluding translations) were substantially more “psychological” than their Ch’ing predecessors. Moreover, though certainly emotional (perhaps “psychological” in that sense), the stories are not strong on “inner” descriptions; most description is of externally observable events.

Some authors claimed a Western influence in the use of flashbacks and of direct quotations in dialogue, unmediated by a narrator. An early example which became famous for both of these was Wu Yao’s Fantastic Grievances of Nine Lives (Chun-ming chi-i-yuan), published in the fourth issue of Liang Chi-ch’ao’s New Fiction (1902). The story begins:

“Hey—partner—now we’ve had it. Look at the door—it’s shut tight. How’re we going to break in?”

“Tch! Idiot! You think there’s no way to knock open a couple of measly wooden doors like this? Come on! Come on! Give me that iron hammer.”

The dialogue continues with a total of thirty-seven direct quotations before the narrator finally breaks in saying:

“My goodness! Dear Reader, look how I have lost my head and so suddenly related this whole story of bandits at work . . . .

51. YYHTP, p. 294.
53. See CYLHL, pp. 44–48. Ts shu were also called yen-chiang and p’ing-hua.
While this use of the flashback was startling in the context of tradition, it cannot be said that flashbacks were new in Chinese fiction. "Ch'i . . ." ("in the beginning . . .") had been standardly used to go back and fill the reader in on material which could explain a present circumstance. In this particular function it had been quite unobtrusive.

The coincidence of the "Western" flashback and its Chinese counterpart may explain why the device quickly became a foreign convention in the 1910s. For all its "newness" it did not inspire Butterfly writers toward creative experimentation with the use of time in fiction. After a beginning flashback, most stories proceeded in straight-line chronological order, one episode at a time (like a novice playing go, as Mao Tun once quipped).26 The real reason for calling the flashback "new" and "Western" was its stylistic flourish. Like other things from the West, it was accepted by Butterfly culture as a gimmick, while deeper concerns of both writers and readers lay elsewhere.

By the mid-1910s the plots of most of the love stories converged into a few standard patterns. Two basic types emerged, the happy ending and the tragic ending, with tragic endings increasingly numerous. In both cases, the stories typically involved a struggle against some "social problem" such as widow chastity, child marriages, dowries, treacherous matchmakers, the difficulty of marriage between social unequals, and so on—all things which in one way or another put barriers between lovers. Besides dramatizing a story, the inclusion of such problems helped readers keep abreast, though still in a formulaic way, of "new" ideas about solutions to the problems. In happy-ending stories, the lovers naturally overcome their problems and blissfully unite, while in the tragic endings, whose realism, as Lu Hsun acutely observed, "has to be regarded as a great step forward," the lovers are separated absolutely, usually by death.27

Readers could choose which type of ending they wished to read, because of the way a story's title was labelled. Love stories generally, but especially the ones with happy endings, were called yen-ch'ing hsiao-shuo (usually the yen2 meaning "words" but sometimes you4, "beauty"), the sad endings were called ai-ch'ing (ai1, "lament") or k'u-ch'ing stories. The appropriate labels were given in small characters before a story's title in books, magazines, and newspapers alike. Even translations of Western works were categorized. Mark Twain's The Californian's Tale, which tells of a young man who waits in vain year after year for the return of his dead wife, was translated in 1915 as

"Ch'i" ("Wife"). Chou Shou-chuan, the translator, duly categorizes and labels it an "ai-ch'ing" story.28

One must recognize the substantial truth of the charge brought by May Fourth writers, and those who have followed their lead, that the 1910s love stories were often unimaginative re-runs, "a thousand stories in the same mold." The charge referred to hackneyed themes and characters, a limited repertoire of "problems," tiresome use of poetry, and "frozen" use of flashbacks and standard plots.

But one must not infer from the stereotyped nature of the stories that they were dull to readers at the time; quite the contrary, they were hits. The standards of taste of Butterfly readers obviously differed significantly from those of the much more highly educated and widely read May Fourth literati. The common reader could find "sentimental" and exciting works which literary scholars found unbearably sentimental. In this he matched popular fiction audiences elsewhere. The appeal of Samuel Richardson's sentimental novels has, for example, been explained by Arnold Hauser in terms of "the frankness of the self-exposure of their characters . . . however affected and forced the tone of these confessions seems to us today."29 And like a Butterfly novel's hackneyed poems, the super-sentimental and woolly rhymed messages of greeting cards in the West, as Richard Hoggart points out in The Uses of Literacy, are despised only by those who do not buy and treasure them. The English common people, says Hoggart, find sentimentalism "real."30 The basic principle of "four-six" style must likewise be recognized as having very broad appeal. In the West, it has been known at least since the Book of Psalms that the human mind responds emotionally to verbal parallelism. Americans who remember John Kennedy's Inaugural Address in 1961 know the principle still works, even if superficially.

Thus the Butterfly stories of the 1910s, with the undeniable allure of both their style and their sentimental content, as well as their introduction of Western and reformist ideas and the excitement of popular "waves," offered much to compensate for clumsy or repetitive art.

For the social historian, the stories are, as we shall attempt to show in the next section, an invaluable access to popular conceptions and attitudes. These popular ideas may be discovered by examining stories for what the reader was obliged to think and feel in order to enjoy them, as we know many readers did. In practice this method is less difficult than it might seem. Almost all popular stories in Shanghai

56. Mao Tun, Hsiao-shuo yu-chia-pao (July 1922), excerpted in YYHTP, p. 11.
58. Chou Shou-ch'uan, Hsiao-shuo ta-kuan, no. 1 (August 1915).
Ch’ing period ts’ai-tzu chia-jeu formula, according to which a poor but
talented scholar finds solace with a beautiful woman who alone
appreciates his genius, also plays a part, although these stories usually
end in marital bliss. In the love stories of the 1910s written in basic
imitation of Jade Pear Spirit, it is possible to discern a common pattern
of important features which seems to have served authors and their
reading public as a new composite myth. We might call this new com-
posite myth the Romantic Route through life. The great number of
stories which exemplified one or several parts of the Romantic Route
not only reinforced its status as a paradigm but also gave it a com-
pleteness over the human life cycle, explaining everything from cradle
to grave.

The Route may be analyzed in six stages: (1) Extraordinary Inborn
Gifts, (2) Supersensitivity, (3) Falling in Love, (4) Cruel Fate, (5)
Worry and Disease, and (6) Destruction. Although the six stages are
roughly sequential in the actual telling of stories, they are not merely
sequential. They are linked by an inescapable determinism; each stage
bears within its whole conception either the recapitulation or the
foreshadowing of every other. In fact they are better viewed as phases
of a single experience than as separate experiences. Besides implying
one another, the stages stand in a parallel complementarity whose
suggestion of *yiuj* and *yung* is perhaps too obvious to need comment.
The first, second, and third stages are positive; the fourth, fifth and
sixth are negative. The first and fourth stages, a linked pair, both issue
from the hand of fate, which never deals out one without the other.
The second and fifth, which are the human reactions to the first and
fourth, are also parallel and contrasting (and lavishly presented by
novelists in bittersweet combination). The third and sixth stages are
the inevitable ends of the positive and negative sub-cycles of the
Route, yet, again in perfect reciprocity, are also the beginnings of
change toward their opposites. Young people are attracted to love, yet
love traps them in tragedy; normally they shun death, yet only death
offers escape. We summarize below the character of each of the six
stages of the Romantic Route.

Stage 1, Extraordinary Inborn Gifts, gives the reader that impres-
sion which is so important in popular, as opposed to elite, storytelling,
namely, the impression that the author does not speak of ordinary
persons and events. The young lovers of the story can, it is true, serve
as examples for thousands of young lovers in the real world; but this is
not because they are typical but because they are ideal. Right from
childhood they exhibit remarkable talent, beauty, sentimentality, and
sometimes willful independence. Their parents are surprised at them;
neighbors marvel. In the absence of any normal, earthly way of ex-

3. The Romantic Route

Young lovers are continually trapped by social custom, the hand of
fate, and the tracheries of the love relationship, into hopeless predic-
aments whose consequences are worry, pain, remorse, sickness, and
often death. The poignancy of all this is enhanced by the beauty,
genius, sensitivity, innocence, and promise with which the young love-
ers began. In their most basic features, these love stories drew upon
cultural myths of long-standing importance. *Dream of the Red Cham-
ber* (in its form as an idealized love story myth) is continually in evidence
in descriptions of supersensitive, crazily infatuated young lovers. The

61. The historian is on safest ground, of course, drawing conclusions from stories
which he knows to have had large circulations. The observations in the following sec-
tion, “The Romantic Route,” are based on best sellers as well as a sampling of other love
stories with more modest circulations. But the validity of an impression based on a
story which circulated only in the thousands, let us say, does not decrease by a factor of
one hundred from the validity of conclusions based on *Jade Pear Spirit* which circulated
in the hundreds of thousands, because of the manifest high degree of similarity among
the love stories of the 1910s. A small-circulation story can be assumed to reveal the
feelings and attitudes of a large group of readers if we know that it belongs to a
stereotype representing thousands of others. This assumption discounts only the absurd
possibility that that one small group of readers was doing all the reading of thousands of
similar stories.