

The Fictional World of Pai Hsien-yung

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PAI HSIEN-YUNG's *Taipei People* is a profoundly complex work. The book is made up of fourteen short stories of varied lengths and writing techniques. The individual stories are independent of one another and may well be considered first-class examples of this fictional form. Taken together and as an organic whole, their effect is heightened: the stories not only mirror the myriad faces of humanity, thus expanding the horizon of the narrative, but more importantly they demonstrate the significance of certain recurring themes, which are juxtaposed and counterpointed to give us a deeper understanding of the work and some clues to the author's vision of life and of the universe.

When we approach *Taipei People* on the "surface", we discover that the major characters of the fourteen pieces have two things in common. The first concerns the question of age—these people were originally from mainland China, and after the Communist occupation they, together with the Nationalist government, moved to Taiwan; they were young men and women when they left the mainland but now in Taiwan, fifteen or twenty years later, they are either middle-aged or old people. Secondly, they resemble each other in that all of them have an unforgettable "past", and the heavy burden of this "past" directly influences their immediate day-to-day living. These two common features roughly sum up the characters' idiosyncrasies and more or less link up the fourteen stories as a whole.

There are more to be said about the characters than these two shared features. *Taipei People* boldly embraces all strata of the urban Taipei society: From the old and upright scholar-general Liang P'u-yüan ("The Song of Liang-fu") to the retired amah Shun-en sao ("Reminiscence"); from the jet-set lady Mme. Tou ("Wandering in the Garden") to the low-life woman nicknamed "Commander-in-chief" ("Lone Flower"). There is the member of the intelligentsia, Prof. Yu Ch'in-lei in "Winter Night"; the small-restaurant proprietress in "Jung's by the Flower Bridge"; the man-servant Wang Hsiung in "A Host of Blood-red Azaleas"; the armyman Lai Ming-sheng in "New Year's Eve"; and the social butterfly Yin Hsueh-yen in "The Eternal Yin Hsueh-yen"; not forgetting, of course, the vulgar dance-hall hostess, Taipan Chin in "The Last Night of Taipan Chin". All these characters, be they "big", "small" or "middling", came from various cities and provinces in mainland China (Shanghai, Nanking, Szechuan, Hunan, Kweilin, Peiping, etc.). Different as they are in occupation and in financial status, they share one thing in common—all cling to their past and are perpetually haunted by it. This "past", and its accompanying "memories", can be interpreted in one degree or another as a product of the "trouble-ridden age" which extended from the establishment of the Chinese Republic to the Communists' seizure of power.

I will attempt to explore the complicated meanings inherent in *Taipei People* in terms of its themes. To do this, and further to investigate the author's visions of life and of the universe, is a most ambitious and hazardous task. Perhaps it is this difficulty that prevents

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many a literary critic from dealing with these issues seriously, notwithstanding the fact that *Taipei People*, published three years ago, has gone through almost ten printings, and that its author is recognized as one of the most talented and successful contemporary Chinese writers of short stories.

For the purpose of analysis, I will discuss the dominant themes of *Taipei People* under three heads—that is: The Comparison between Now and Then, Soul versus Lust, and The Myth of Life and Death. This is actually an arbitrary division, since the three themes are essentially interrelated and intertwined; they form an organic unit that links up all the fourteen stories. I choose to separate them solely for technical reasons of discussion.

Comparison between Now and Then

When we read the stories in *Taipei People* either at random or all fourteen of them together, we get the impression that Pai Hsien-yung has placed the acute contrast between “now” and “then” in a special dimension. The author has, indeed, made his purpose quite plain by quoting Liu Yu-hsi’s *Black Coat Lane* as an epitaph to *Taipei People*:

*At the Bridge of the Vermilion Bird
the wild grasses flower,
At the mouth of the Black Coat Lane
sets the slanting sun.
Of old times swallows flew before
the halls of Wang and Hsieh
Now they enter the house of the
common people.*

The poem aptly introduces the overriding theme through which the author expresses his disquieting time-consciousness. We can almost say that there are only two characters in the book—Past and Present. Generally speaking, the “past” in *Taipei People* represents youth, order, sensitivity, tradition, spirit, love, soul, glory, beauty, the ideal and life. On the other hand, the “present” represents old age, chaos, paralysis, Westernization, materialism, lust, flesh, pettiness, ugliness, reality and death.

The year that saw the fall of China into the Communists’ hands was the most conspicuous watershed that divided the “past” from the “present”. (The author’s concept of nationalism.) But this “watershed” can be further expounded as follows:

The “past” is a simpler and purer old-fashioned China, an agrarian society that lay heavy emphasis on order and human sentiments, while the “present” is the complex, industrial and commercial society characterized by materialism, selfish interest and impersonal human relationship.

The “past” also connotes grandeur and glory of the celebrated traditional Chinese culture of the spirit, while the drab and spiritless “present” is characterized by the meanness, and niggling over material profit and loss, of a Westernized, technologically-oriented civilization. (The author’s cultural judgement.)

The “past” is the pure and invigorating state of youthfulness. However, the “present” is the rotten and decayed body on which time had left its corruptive and corrosive marks. (The author’s view of the individual.)

The author’s judgement on nationalism, society, culture and the individual can be used to interpret more or less, explicitly or implicitly, the contrast between now and then that is a running theme in *Taipei People*. The gripping sense of loss that runs as a deep undercurrent through these fourteen stories can be traced back to the author’s obsession with his country’s rise and fall and with the cataclysmic social changes; his nostalgia for a traditional Chinese

civilization in the face of crisis; and, most basically, his everlasting regret over the "finiteness" of human life and over man's inability to preserve his youth and to stop the torrential flow of Time.

It is no accident that all the major characters in *Taipei People* are either middle-aged or old folks. Their glory or otherwise unforgettable "past" relates not so much to the history of the Republic of China, or to the culture of a traditional society, but quintessentially to their own irrevocable youth. Take for example the once heroic figures such as Liang P'u-yüan and General Li Hao-jan. Both men had performed great historic deeds for their country while in their youth or early manhood. Other lesser characters, too—like Mr. Lu ("Jung's by the Flower Bridge") and Wang Hsiung ("A Host of Blood-red Azaleas")—cherish and cannot shake loose from a past that is intimately bound up in the golden years of their youth. Mr. Lu and the "Lo girl" were lovers when they were young, and Wang Hsiung unconsciously longs for the "Little Sis" who was engaged to him many years ago in rural Hunan. (Of course, their tragedies are apparently, and as a matter of fact, caused by the turmoil of war in the Republican era.) The "past" that these small people treasure is different from that of Liang P'u-yüan and General Li, and utterly without historical significance in the eyes of others. But to themselves, it also embodies life's total meaning.

What makes the many characters in *Taipei People* pathetic is not so much their *inability* but their *refusal* to cast away their past. They stubbornly cling to the "what's then is now" illusion and try to seek the meaning of life in the self-mockery of "recapturing the past". This ambivalence over the "past" and the "present" can be found everywhere in *Taipei People*, where scenes and settings are created to resemble the past in "appearance" but differ from it in "reality". This difference between "appearance" and "reality" constitutes the major source of irony of the book; it is also where Pai Hsien-yung reposes his deepest sympathy, and where he has succeeded in arousing in his readers the greatest compassion.

The term "Taipei People", by which Pai Hsien-yung calls those who have taken refuge in Taiwan, is in itself meaningful. These people have been living in Taiwan for quite some time; they appear to be Taipei people, but actually are not. The Jung-chi Restaurant in Taipei, though the same little dining place, is by no means the one situated near the "Flower Bridge" outside the Water East Gate of Kweilin. The shy and fresh-faced young man whom Taipan Chin takes in her arms and dances with in that last scene in "The Last Night of Taipan Chin" is no longer Yueh-zu, the inexperienced young man who patronized the Shanghai cabaret and won her heart in the old days. In "A Touch of Spring", the narrator after coming to Taipei lives in the Air Force dependents' quarters by coincidence also called Jen-ai East Village—but it has nothing whatsoever to do with her old home in Nanking. Yin Hsueh-yen, on the other hand, would "never let (her home) fall below the impressive standards of those mansions on Shanghai's Avenue Joffre"—though her home is patently in Taipei, and not Shanghai. Lai Ming-sheng in "New Year's Eve", as he is reminiscing about the glorious battles of the National Army in fighting Japanese invasion, suddenly hears "from outside the sound of an explosion rent the air, and an intense white light flashed twice across the window." But this is no match for the cannon fire at Taierhchuang; for it is only the sparks from the Kung-ming lanterns that people fire off on New Year's Eve. Chüan-chüan of the girlie restaurant in "Lone Flower" seemingly resembles the call-girl Wu-pao, while actually she is not. Mme. Hua in "Autumn Thoughts" has in her garden dozens of snow-white chrysanthemums, but those are a poor substitute for the hundreds of blooming white chrysanthemums in her Nanking home in the autumn of the year that celebrated China's victory over Japan. In "Winter Night", Prof. Yu's son is the spitting image of the father in his young days, but in reality the son is not the least like the young and romantic Yu Ch'in-lei, but a most practical-minded student whose immediate desire is to go to an

American university to study Physics. In Mme. Tou's garden party, Mme. Ch'ien, in a nostalgic mood, momentarily leaps over the time barrier and returns to the day she herself threw a thirtieth birthday party in her Plum Gardens home in Nanking for Cassia (which was her name before she became Mme. Tou). While in her present reality the staff officer Ch'eng attending her is after all not the young and handsome aide Cheng Yen-ch'ing, she herself, now aging and considerably declined in social status, will never again be the once elegant Mme. Ch'ien, General Ch'ien's lady, with all her fame and fortune.

Pai Hsien-yung, in his depiction of these characters and their very "reluctance" to give up their past, satirizes them a little. But I feel that his attitude as an author is one of sympathy rather than criticism, and his humanity far exceeds his derisiveness.

Three Types of Characters

On further reading, we can roughly divide the characters of *Taipei People* into three categories:

1. Those who live completely or almost completely in the "past"

Most of the major characters in *Taipei People* belong to this category, the obvious example being Yin Hsueh-yen, Lai Ming-sheng, Shun-en sao, Liang P'u-yüan, Mr. Lu, Mme. Hua, the "High Priest", Mme. Ch'ien, and Ch'in I-fang. The less apparent ones who symbolize this psyche in the form of schizophrenic behavior are: Chu Ch'ing of "A Touch of Spring" and Wang Hsiung of "A Host of Blood-red Azaleas". These two have "stagnated" in the period prior to their personal tragedies (in Chu Ch'ing's case it was the death of her husband, in Wang Hsiung's it was his capture in the war against the Japanese). Consequently, Chu-ch'ing has developed "a taste for the 'young chickens' and always picked the boys in the Air Force as lovers"; Wang Hsiung is infatuated with Li-erh to compensate for his nostalgia for his lazy, plump and fair Hunan girl, "Little Sis".

Many minor *Taipei People* are also creatures who live completely in the past. Friends of Yin Hsueh-yen and those Kwangsi diners at the Jung-chi Restaurant come readily to mind.

These people, who could not or would not face reality, are lost in self-exile from the practical world around them. Pai Hsien-yung portrays these characters with calm detachment, suggesting explicitly or implicitly their inevitable disillusionment. However, the author has a soft spot in his heart for these people and assigns to them his deepest sympathy and pity.

2. Those who manage to retain memories of their "past" and at the same time display an ability to accept the "present"

Among the *Taipei* types who do not give up their past entirely but are at home in their present reality are Major Liu and his wife ("New Year's Eve"), Taipan Chin, the Air Force instructor's wife in "A Touch of Spring", the proprietress in "Jung's by the Flower Bridge", and the scholars Yu Ch'in-lei and Wu Chu-kuo in "Winter Nights". These people have their unforgettable past, but as circumstances require they let go of most of it and of their ideals as well, only sparing themselves an occasional retrospective glance. Less burdened as they are, they have the strength to carry on, despite some pitfalls on the way, and slowly make their way forward in the world of reality. They are aware, in varying degrees of consciousness, of their being forced to relinquish their past. Some, like the instructor's wife, do not seem to be bothered by it in the least; others, like Yu Ch'in-lei and Wu Chu-kuo, brood over the compromise they have had to make in order to survive. This sense of infinite regret is reflected in the concluding lines of "Winter Nights":

The winter night of Taipei is deepening by the minute; outside the window, the cold rain is still falling incessantly.

For this type of Taipei people, Pai Hsien-yung also has sincere sympathy. He makes us realize that in his own heart he shares this same feeling of ineluctable regret: that the greatest luxury we can afford without impairing our day-to-day survival is an occasional backward glance at our "past".

3. *Those who do not have a "past", or have cut themselves entirely from their "past"*

In *Taipei People*, those who do not have a "past" are either the younger generation who are born and raised in Taiwan or the ones who went to Taiwan while they were very young and have not really known mainland China. They are the kind of Chinese who have no "roots" and no "past". For instance, the son in "Winter Nights" and the young couple Li-chu and Yu Hsin in "New Year's Eve" belong to this category. Since they have not personally experienced the rise and fall of their country, nor have been involved in the emotional turmoils typical of this age, they are unable to respond to, understand or sympathize with what their elders do and think. An unbridgeable gap remains between the two generations.

On the other hand, there are those who cut themselves off from the "past." For example, Shao Tzu-ch'i of "Winter Nights", Wan Lü Ju-chu in "Autumn Thoughts", and Wang Chia-chi in "The Song of Liang-fu". They cut themselves from their past for reasons different from those of Chu Ch'ing (who does not really succeed in doing so), to whom looking back means unbearable heartaches and pain. It is their rationality that makes them come to terms with reality; in their haste to keep up with the times, they leave behind the burdensome load of tradition without hesitancy or regret.

It is with these people alone—those who forswear their "past" for the sake of the "present"—that Pai Hsien-yung cannot help being somewhat reproachful. But it appears as if he tries to balance his criticism with worldly understanding: "Of course, of course, when we have analyzed the whole thing, you people are right after all." We might say that, on a rational basis, Pai Hsien-yung approves of their behavior, but it is plain to see that his heart is with those poor souls who cling to their "past".

To illustrate this point, let us compare the two characters in *Taipei People* who have returned to Taiwan from abroad: Wang Chai-chi in "The Song of Liang-fu" and the young Mr. Li in "Reminiscence". The former is apparently a rational, thoroughly Westernized figure who shows no concern for Chinese traditions. Upon the death of his father Wang Meng-yang (an "Elder Statesman" of the Nationalist Revolution), he returns from the United States to arrange for the funeral. He is most impatient with Chinese customs and rules of propriety; on matters that the members of the Funeral Committee wish to clear with him, he "rejected them all one after the other". Though Wang is devoid of the spirit of a traditional Chinese, he is most successful in the world of reality and swims, rather than sink, with the tide.

The contrary is the case of young Mr. Li. He came from an old-fashioned aristocratic family, and his father used to be one of the great generals in the old days. When he went abroad and became "uprooted" he found it difficult to adapt himself to his external environment, and eventually became disoriented. We do not know specifically what has caused his mental breakdown, but we sense that his withdrawal into the world of lunacy is due mainly to his inability to cope with reality. He is essentially a backward-looking rather than a forward-looking character.

This leads us to the question of "tone". No matter how objectively a writer tries to write, it is through his "tone" that he betrays his attitude toward the characters of his invention—whether he is sympathetic or otherwise, whether he likes them or not. When we read "Reminiscence", we detect through the tone employed by Pai Hsien-yung that he is sympathetic toward young Mr. Li. We are reminded of the American writer William Faulkner,

who is similarly full of sympathy for the idiot Benjy of the Compson family in *The Sound and the Fury*. Pai Hsien-yung's book is different from Faulkner's in many ways (take their "tone" for example—Pai's is calm, while Faulkner's is impetuous). But they do have two things in common: First, they have a pet love for those retrospective and "sentimental" characters who are losers in the sense that they cannot cope with reality. Second, both writers devise phenomenal insanity, corruption and death to mark the collapse of a big aristocratic family, and further to suggest the gradual breakdown of an entire civilization. What Faulkner writes about is the withering "Southern culture" of the post-Civil War period. The spirit of the "Southern culture" parallels to a degree that of traditional China: both are agrarian societies that respect tradition and honor and lay great store by human sentiments and gentle manliness. Faulkner, also, was nostalgic for the old culture and social order; the only difference is, American "Southern culture" has but a history of less than two hundred years, while Pai Hsien-yung labors under the burden of a civilization that is five thousand years old.

Soul versus Flesh

The war between the soul and the flesh is the same as that between now and then, since, in the world of *Taipei People*, "soul" is reflected in "then," and "flesh" is identified with "now." Soul is represented by love, the ideal and the spirit, while flesh is sexuality, reality and the body. In the fictional world of Pai Hsien-yung, the soul and flesh engage each other in an uncompromising battle characterized by overt force and violence.

Mr. Lu of "Jung's by the Flower Bridge" has settled down in Taiwan for years. But he still clings fervently to his "past" and wishes with all his heart to marry Miss Lo, who is "soulful to the core" and with whom he fell in love while he was a young man back in Kweilin. This one ideal means everything in life to him. While he hangs on to this remote dream, the hardships and pain of his workaday life become less acute, inasmuch as "flesh" is well under the control of the "soul." But once his dream is shattered under the harsh blow of reality, "flesh" immediately triumphs over the "soul", and he finds himself a voluptuous and vulgar washerwoman Ah-ch'un and spends all his time in sexual indulgence. To compensate for the loss of his "past", he clutches desperately whatever he can lay hold of in the "present". But when he discovers that even the ugly present is not his for the keeping (having surprised Ah-ch'un making love to another man in his own room, and the woman, in a fit of anger, bites off a good portion of his ear), he at once collapses totally and dies of a "paralysis of the heart". The tragedy is a direct result of the clash between the soul and flesh.

The message of Wang Hsiung's story is a basically similar one. Although Wang Hsiung is a man-servant with no educational background and has no analytical power whatever over his own behavior and emotion, somehow we are able to tell, from Pai Hsien-yung's allusion to the "past" through some casual dialogue, the reason of Wang's infatuation for Li-erh: He wishes to recapture his "past" in Li-erh, for the young girl is an image of his childhood sweetheart, "Little Sis". His unreasoning passion for Li-erh today is nothing but his passionate longing for the "past". So long as he is living under the shadows of the "past", the triumph of the "soul" is ensured. Meanwhile, "flesh" rears its ugly head in the "robust" and "fleshy" housemaid Shi-mei. This acute hostility in the battle between soul and flesh is aptly illustrated by the author as follows:

My aunt said, the stars Wang Hsiung and She-mei were born under must be incompatible one way or another, else they would not be such total enemies. Every time Wang catches the sight of Shi-mei he avoids her like a pest, but few things please the maid more than to tease him and to watch him blush into a crimson red.

But time will not stand still and Li-erh must grow up. As she becomes a high school student she no longer fits in with Wang's stagnant image of his "Little Sis", who is always ten years old. When the young daughter of the house no longer has any use for the man-servant—that is to say, when the "past" is at last done with him—he immediately loses all meaning in life. The "soul" having withered, he is left with the voided "present", which is all flesh and all Shi-mei. Still, the "soul" refuses to concede defeat and seeks vengeance by way of the final violence done to Shi-mei and Wang's suicide. After his death, his soul returns once more to Li-erh's home to water the plants in the garden every night. Those azaleas, well over a hundred of them, have all turned a blood-dripping red, "blooming with such abandon and such fierce anger."

We have already witnessed the uncompromising war between "soul" and "flesh", "past" and "present", that takes place in Pai Hsien-yung's fictional world. It signifies a basic fact that everyone of us is well aware of: Time waits for no one, and in due course youth will pass away. Therefore in this world of Pai Hsien-yung's creation, "love" and "youth" are essentially inseparable. Since everything is on the move and is subject to change, the only love that lasts is one frozen in a person's sustained memory (his love stories are invariably associated with crucial moments of parting in life or death). But these poor mortals apparently will not settle for well-kept memories; they must transmute what is past into the present, thinking that things will always remain what they used to be. What they don't know is that Time, ever-flowing, will not harbor any frozen moments. What Pai Hsien-yung's Taipei People are after simply will not materialize, since what is past is forever irrevocable.

The Riddle of Life and Death

And time, ceaselessly and relentlessly, flows ever onward. Time leaves its mark on everyone. It waits for no one—whether a mighty General, an uneducated man-servant, a glamorous lady or a low-class prostitute. It eats away one's youth so that at the end a handful of ashes is all that is left. Wealth, power and glory are all transient, subject to ultimate, total oblivion. And life is too short to hold all the laughter, tears, joy and pain, so that in the end they amount to nothing but emptiness. Life is nihilistic. A dream. A memory.

Poring over the stories, I cannot help but suspect that the Buddhist doctrine of "everything is nothing" runs like an undercurrent through *Taipei People*. It is no mere accident that Pai Hsien-yung places "The Eternal Yin Hsueh-yen" at the opening of the book. Though this story can be taken as a social satire, its purpose is much more than realistic. When we reckon the heroine Yin Hsueh-yen in symbolical terms, she becomes a demon and not a human being. She is essentially a spiritual being, the Goddess of Death. She transcends time and space: "Yin Hsueh-yen somehow never seemed to age" . . . "No outside disturbance could affect her natural poise" . . . "(She) had her own rhythm; she moved to her own beat". Pai Hsien-yung repeatedly uses the "wind" or "breeze" metaphor to suggest her spiritual significance—drifting "like a wind-blown catkin", intoxicating as a "light breeze in March", "stepping as lightly as the breeze", entering "like a breath of wind". Also, "she seemed a priestess clad all in silvery-white" . . . she "looked like the Goddess of Mercy . . . dressed all in white, her arms folded across her breast" . . . she "strode out of the Ultimate Bliss Funeral Parlor, moving lightly as the wind". Numerous implicit or explicit suggestions, coupled with the objective fact that all the men in close relationship with her are bound to die at the end, make it quite plain that the author has deliberately cast her in the role of a spirit.

I stress this point to reinforce my belief that the concept of "everything is nothing" is basically at work throughout *Taipei People*. As Yin Hsueh-yen is to be interpreted as a demon or a spirit, her every utterance and gesture necessarily surpass those of an average human being. The effect of her total being is close to that of a "prophet", passing the author's

comment on men from high above and functioning like the chorus in Greek plays or the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

"There, there, Sister Sung. As the saying goes, 'Flowers don't last forever, neither do people'. Whoever heard of anyone being happy and prosperous a whole lifetime?"

This is Pai Hsien-yung commenting on the human world from his vantage point high above the battle. And when Yin Hsueh-yen "stood to one side, a gold-tipped cigarette-holder between her lips, casually blowing smoke-rings and watching with condescending sympathy as this crowd of once-mighty men and once-beautiful women, some complacent and some despondent, some aging and some still youthful, fought each other to the death" (ostensibly mah-jong playing), we seem to hear Pai Hsien-yung's voice sighing from behind the ancient tombs and saying, "Poor, poor creatures! So stubborn, and yet unaware that death awaits in the end!" And so, like Yin Hsueh-yen, the Goddess of Death from high above, patiently and all smiles, watches men kill and destroy themselves and, in the end, takes them one by one with sublime impartiality, and enfolds them in her ice-cold bosom.

Thus "The Eternal Yin Hsueh-yen" not only paints for us a picture of this human world, but also serves as a kind of hidden prologue from behind which the author announces his purpose. This reminds me of the opening chapter in *Dream of the Red Chamber* in which the lame Taoist priest murmurs words of prophecy to the same general effect. But while Tsao Hsueh-chin's prophecy is a direct statement, Pai Hsien-yung, employing modern literary techniques, puts his thesis metaphorically.

The old monk Liu Hsing-ch'i, who makes an abrupt appearance in the funeral parlor in the concluding story "State Funeral", plays a role similar to that of Yin Hsueh-yen, and like her this monk is not a "human". Bowing three times before General Li's coffin and with his palms pressed, he answers Chin I-fang briefly, sheds a few tears, and then "walked out of the room without glancing back; his black cassock trailing in the cold wind soon vanished, leaving behind nothing but a dark cloud". If Yin Hsueh-yen is a spirit, then Liu Hsing-ch'i is a Buddha of great humanity—since he himself has experienced extreme sufferings and has gone through a process of sublimity that enabled him to transmute his personal grief into a kind of universal compassion for all the common suffering people. This all but unutterable compassion and humanity on the part of the old monk is that which is shared by the author of *Taipei People*.

Chronicler of Taipei Types



PAI HSIEN-YUNG

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵Introduction to *Fallen Fairy*.