

An Interview with Pao T'ien-hsiao

By Perry Link



PAO T' IEN-HSIAO
in 1973, aged 97.

"I HAVE NEVER BEEN a leader of my time," Pao T'ien-hsiao told me in 1973, at age 97, "but I've never felt comfortable lagging behind, either." Pao is known primarily as a writer, but his quest to stay *au courant* led him to attempt almost everything one can attempt with pen or brush. By age 40 he had been a copyist, a tutor, a translator, a news reporter, a novelist, a school administrator, an editor, a calligraphy instructor, and an organizer of literary groups.

And his times, for their part, would not let him rest: not long after passing the *sheng-yüan* exams in Soochow, his home town, Pao was somewhat astonished to find himself appointed headmaster of a "new-style" middle school in Shantung. Simultaneously fascinated and insecure in this new role, he ordered that classrooms be remodeled, maps hung, blackboards installed, and physical education courses instituted; yet, in his own Chinese class, he decided to read the *Analects*, adding in his lectures "all kinds of comments about modern things". His times also obliged him to rethink the question of women's roles in society. As a teenager he had been introduced to the "flower boats" of Soochow by his father, who also created his zest for *Dream of the Red Chamber* by forbidding him to read it. Some fifteen years later, though, Pao was teaching classes at an all-girls school in Shanghai and writing for the *Eastern Times* 時報, then Shanghai's most progressive newspaper as well as the first to allow women in its offices. A special supplement on women began appearing in the *Times* around 1906, and, beginning in 1912, a monthly magazine called *The Women's Times* 婦女時報 came out under Pao's editorship. Almost all the contributors were men, Pao recalls, as were "nine out of ten of the readers". But the

notion (the very idea!) of women doctors, women lawyers, women lion-tamers, etc., was sufficient to fuel the magazine's circulation for many months.

All things considered, Pao T'ien-hsiao did rather well at keeping up with the gallop of his times. For the years 1900-1920 he even deserves credit for some important acts of leadership, his polite disclaimers notwithstanding. After 1920 he chose to reduce his activity, he told me, in order to let "younger people" take over.

"Younger people?" I asked. "Like whom?"

"Like Kuo Mo-jo," he replied, a playful twinkle in his eyes.

Pao's most productive years are richly reflected in his volume of reminiscences called *Ch'uan-ying lou hui-i lu* 鈎影樓回憶錄. Written mostly in 1949 but not published until 1971, this is a fascinating series of vignettes on his years from the 1880s to the 1920s. His eye for interesting, concrete detail is splendid. He tells us, for example, about his first trip to Shanghai around 1885 when he saw his first rickshas. (Rickshas had come to Shanghai from Japan in 1874 and had still not arrived in Soochow.) These Shanghai rickshas rolled on great wheels of iron, since wheels with rubber were still things of the future. The ricksha pullers wore distinctive hats, which looked like inverted trumpets, and blue uniforms with numbers on them. How much classier they were, thought young Pao, than the sedan chairs of Soochow! On the same trip Pao's father suggested they eat at a Western restaurant, but the grandmother forbade it. She had heard that one puts a fork inside one's mouth at foreign restaurants, and was certain young Pao would impale his tongue.

In the same colourful style, Pao tells us about the first pencils in Soochow; about the tiny editorial offices of the *Su Pao* 蘇報 before it became famous; about the church-like atmosphere inside the Commercial Press building. For the social historian, the most worthwhile descriptions in a thoroughly delightful book are probably those of the civil service examinations which Pao took in Soochow. Unlike similar reminiscers, Pao pauses to describe the rooms which examinees rented near the exam centers, the respectful attitude of local citizens who would go to great pains to make such rooms available, the sounding of the early morning gongs summoning the examinees, the due inspection of sleeves, the circumstances under which it did or did not matter if anything were found in the sleeves, etc., etc. Pao's descriptions of the "new-style" schools during 1900-1920 are equally vivid and rich in detail. In fact, a translation of "Pao T'ien-hsiao on Education" would be a fine contribution to Western Sinology.

Pao also turns his keen eye for description toward some leading figures of his day. His sundry pursuits brought him into direct contact with leaders in several spheres, including Chang Ping-lin 章炳麟, Chang Ch'ien 張謇, Shao P'iao-p'ing 邵飄萍, Shih Liang-ts'ai 史量才, Tseng P'u 曾樸, Su Man-shu 蘇曼殊, Mei Lan-fang 梅蘭芳, Hu Shih 胡適, and many others. In the late 1890s Pao worked as a copy editor at the Commercial Press, where he was assigned to examine some of Yen Fu's 嚴復 famous translations. Pao met with Yen a number of times, and describes him with characteristic colour and distinctiveness. Yen arose late in the day (the consequence of an opium habit), and often kept people waiting. He wore gold wire-rimmed glasses whose stem on one side was broken and bound up with black thread. Yet his manuscripts were immaculately written in clear black characters, with vermilion corrections. He spoke in slow, measured tones with a perfectly distinct Peking

accent, despite the fact that he was a native of Fukien. He impressed one, in general, as a real Bohemian (*ming-shih p'ai* 名士派). When he lectured he seemed to speak to a more exalted world, not caring whether his listeners could understand his abstruse utterances. He was frequently broke, and in fact handed over some of his famous translations, including Mill's *Logic* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, to pay his debtors.

Among Pao T'ien-hsiao's interesting descriptions are a few of himself. He was frail as a child, and did not eat well. He almost died of measles at age 15. (He was rail-thin at age 97, too, but in his fifties had been plump.) Throughout his active years he seemed younger than his age, partly because of an unusually high voice. Although a singing teacher once told him that he should be thankful for his voice, since a good *lao-tan* is rare, Pao never quite saw things that way. His Soochow accent only made his voice seem more "feminine".

Pao came from a gentry family, but a relatively poor one. When his father died the young Pao, aged 16, began working in order to support his mother and siblings. Soon thereafter his interest in "new-style" studies was kindled from reading *Shun Pao*, to which the Pao family subscribed in Soochow, plus the late-Ch'ing reform journals of K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao. Having passed the *sheng-yüan* degree, Pao was inclined to go to Shanghai to a new-style school, but a straitened family budget prevented him. Instead, he and some friends in Soochow formed a study group of their own called "The Society for the Encouragement of Study" (*li-hsüeh hui*); they took Japanese lessons, corresponded with overseas students, and published a magazine containing their own translations of the "new learning".

Gradually Pao's interests turned towards fiction. Always fond of traditional Chinese novels, he found in Japanese translations a wonderful storehouse of material to retranslate for Chinese readers. Even better, he discovered, was that fiction in the "new style" was not a shameful thing: the back page of Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's *China's Progress* 時務報 carried Sherlock Holmes, and in 1902 Liang's *New Fiction* 新小說 magazine announced that fiction could save and rebuild the Chinese nation.

Around 1900 Pao did leave Soochow—his family, his friends, and a fiancée—and never returned except for short visits. He went first to Nanking for two years' study with a master of foreign things, and then to Shanghai, where, save another short stay in Nanking after 1927, he lived continuously until 1948. The years under Japanese occupation were, he told me, the bitterest of his life. His children and their families had fled to Chungking, while he and his wife, already in their sixties, stayed behind. For eight long years Pao didn't write a word, resisting pressures from the Japanese that he do so. After the war Pao's wife died and his son K'o-hung 可宏 brought Pao to Taiwan, where they stayed for a year, and then to Hong Kong. In 1958 Pao published a novel, at least his 33rd by my count, called *New Story of the White Snake* 新白蛇傳. He died in November, 1973, only a few months after completing his very last work, which was a 99-page extension of his reminiscences entitled "Changes in Food, Clothing, Shelter, and Transport over One Hundred years."

Pao T'ien-hsiao's productive years between 1900 and 1920 were guided by his wish to "bring enlightenment" (*k'ai feng-ch'i* 開風氣) in China. In many ways this amounted to the adaptation of foreign influences within a Chinese context, a

program which Pao himself had ambivalent feelings about. Whatever these ambivalences, though, some of his actual innovations had lasting significance for modern China.

For one, Pao was a contemporary of Lin Shu 林紓 in the early 20th century translation of Western fiction. In fact Pao used the famous tandem method of translation (where one person reads a foreign language and the other writes Chinese) before Lin did, and today is less well known for it only because he did it less, and less elegantly, than Lin. A related aspect of Pao's and Lin's pioneering—one of those unobtrusive facts which are actually quite revolutionary—was the institution around 1900 of payment for fiction manuscripts. Pao recalls his feelings when he first received payment for a translation, an incomplete rendition of H. Ryder Haggard's *Joan Haste*:

From that time on my fascination with translating fiction steadily increased. It was a delightfully open and free job, and my thoughts of stipends from the academies came to be replaced . . . by thoughts of selling translations. The one hundred *yüan* I had received from the Civilization Book Co. 文明書局, for example, was enough for the family to live on for several months, not counting my travelling expenses to Shanghai. What could possibly keep me from pursuing this? (*Ch'uan-ying lou hui-i lu*, p. 174)

Pao did pursue it, thereby helping introduce to Chinese society the category of "professional fiction writer"—a role distinct from both literatus and popular storyteller of the past. Although the new role came to include many writers whose artistic, political, or social motives obviously outweighed their commercial incentives, very few, until the Communist revolution, rejected the principle of pay for their work, which was set at an agreed rate per thousand characters. Ironically, Pao's own success as a professional writer is demonstrated by the large number of hacks who pirated his name to sell copy.

Another important innovation for which Pao must receive partial credit was the newspaper serialization of fiction, a feature which eventually came to be standard in the modern Chinese press. Although Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and others had serialized translations of Western fiction in the late 1890s, Pao and his colleagues at *The Eastern Times* were first to serialize their own fiction on a daily basis. Beginning in 1906 Pao alternated days with a writer named Ch'en Ching-han 陳景韓. Pao's pieces, mostly humorous, were signed "Hsiao" ("laugh"), while Ch'en, whose pen name was *Leng-hsüeh* ("cold blood") wrote whodunit chillers and signed them "Leng". The tradition of linked chapters in China's traditional fiction lent itself handily to Pao's and Ch'en's purposes. They cut their episodes at tense moments in the hope of inducing readers to purchase the next day's paper.

These early fiction serializations in turn gave rise to modern China's first literary columns and literary supplements. Pao and Ch'en began a column in the *Eastern Times* called "Surplus Spirit" (*yü-hsing* 餘興), which became the prototype for the much more popular fiction columns of the 1910s and twenties, i.e., the "Happiness Grove" (*k'uai-huo lin* 快活林) of the *Sin Wan Pao* and the "Rambler" (*tzu-yu t'an*) of the *Shun Pao*, where many of modern China's most widely read

stories were published. Less directly, Pao's literary columns and supplements were also prototypes for the literary supplement of the Peking *Ch'en Pao* 晨報 and other of the more "high brow" organs of the May Fourth writers.

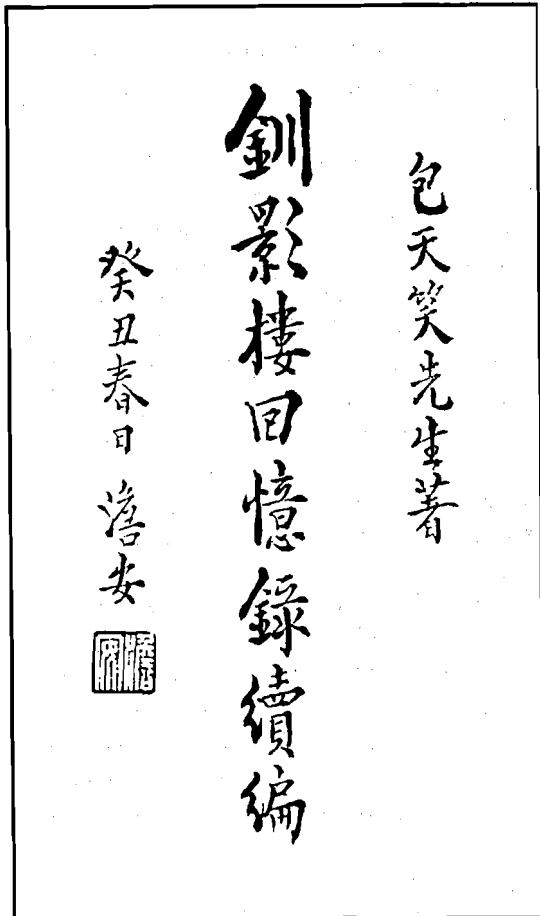
Pao T'ien-hsiao was also one of the first to encourage reader participation in newspaper columns. Among his innovations at the *Eastern Times* was a poetry column called the "Equality Chamber" (*p'ing-teng ko* 平等閣)—so named because it offered everyone an "equal" opportunity to publish poems or critical comments.¹ Pao's experiment was immediately successful; in fact enthusiastic readers soon began writing to whatever newspaper or magazine they pleased. The practice eventually became so well established that, for example, in 1929 Chang Hen-shui began complaining about the deluge of letters from readers demanding that the next installment of his best-selling *Fate in Tears and Laughter* (*T'i-hsiao yin-yüan*) take one or another turn in its plot.

In the 1910s and twenties Pao was already an elder figure among Shanghai writers, and he began to spend more time editing and organizing than actually writing. His record for innovation as an editor is impressive. *The Fiction Times* (*Hsiao-shuo shih-pao* 小說時報), which Pao edited, came out in 1909, and was followed one year later by its major competitor, the *Short Story Monthly* (*Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao* 小說月報), the same magazine which was to become famous as an organ of May Fourth fiction. In 1912 Pao came out with a fiction magazine about (and purportedly for and by) women called *The Women's Times*; this effort also gave rise to several imitations, the most important of which were *The Woman's World* (*Nü-tzu shih-chieh* 女子世界, 1914) and *The Woman's Magazine* (*Fu-nü tsa-chih* 婦女雜誌, 1915).

These two publishing experiments were followed by two more. In 1915 Pao conceived the notion of a jumbo fiction magazine—one large enough to publish most of its stories in their entirety instead of breaking them into serialized bits. The result was called the *Hsiao-shuo ta-kuan* 小說大觀 ("Panorama of Fiction"), which was called *The Grand Magazine* in English. Each issue contained a minimum of 300,000 characters or more than 300 pages, including about ten complete stories plus three or four serializations. The magazine came out quarterly, cost one *yüan* (more than twice its most expensive competition), and survived six years. Even more remarkable as an innovation was Pao's conception of the *Fiction Pictorial* (*Hsiao-shuo hua-pao* 小說畫報) which, Pao tells us, occurred to him one night when he had insomnia. The magazine appeared in January, 1917 under three principles: 1) all stories were to be in *pai-hua* (this was more than a year before Lu Hsün's *Diary of a Madman*); 2) all stories were original creations, not translations; 3) the whole magazine was printed not with lead type but with the more artistic stone lithography, and each story was accompanied by hand-drawn illustrations.

¹Equality Chamber was in fact the name given to one floor of the *Eastern Times* building, the floor on which the editorial office was located. The *Eastern Times* was first published as a daily in April 1904, and was known as a mouth-piece for the Royalists. Ti P'ing-tzu 狄平子, alias Ti Pao-hsien 葆賢 was the *de jure* owner of the paper. Ti had a *chü-jen* degree, and

was a close comrade of K'ang Yu-wei, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Tang Ts'ai-ch'ang 唐才常. See Ting Wen-chiang 丁文江, *Liang Jen-kung hsien-sheng nien-p'u ch'ang-pien ch'u-kao* 梁任公先生年譜長編初稿, Vol. I, Taipei 1962, pp. 62, 101, 104, 117, 131-33, 138 and 194-5. See also Liu Ts'un-yan's Introduction in this volume, note 41.



CALLIGRAPHY BY LU TAN-AN for the second volume of Pao's reminiscences (1973).

The success of Pao's editing activities depended upon his friendly relations with several groups of writers in Shanghai. In fact Pao devoted much time and effort to developing younger talent, and drew around him a group to whom he was almost a father figure. Among this group Pao's highest praise went to Pi I-hung 畢倚虹, who wrote social novels such as *Hell on Earth* (*Jen-chien ti-yü* 人間地獄) about the darker sides of Shanghai society. Other Pao protégés included Chou Shou-chüan 周瘦鵑, who began, as Pao himself did, translating from Japanese, and who eventually became a major figure in his own right, editing *Shun Pao's* "Rambler" and several fiction magazines; Hsü Cho-ai 徐卓呆, a humorist, drama critic, and China's first administrator of physical education schools; Chang I-han 張毅漢, who co-authored several works with Pao; Chiang Hung-chiao 江紅蕉, a love-story specialist who could effectively imitate the tone of *Dream of the Red Chamber*; and Fan Yen-ch'iao 范烟橋, a school administrator, fiction specialist, and historian of Chinese fiction.

Pao cemented his professional ties with warm personal ones. Chiang Hung-chiao, for example, was a cousin of Pao's wife, and Pao was best man at Chou Shou-chüan's wedding. When Pi I-hung met an untimely death in his early thirties, Pao immediately adopted one of Pi's eight children and saw to the proper care of all the others. Pao had originally met Chang I-han through Chang's mother, an educated widow who supported her family by translating English novels into Chinese. Pao

published some of her manuscripts, and it had been the job of the boy I-han to deliver the manuscripts back and forth. The suggestion that Pao was a surrogate father to his group hardly stretches a point. Most in fact had lost their natural fathers early: Chang in infancy, Chou at age 5, Hsü aged 6, and Chiang aged 9.

In time Pao's patronage grew beyond this circle, especially when he began editing *The Grand Magazine* and *The Weekly* (*Hsing-ch'i* 星期, 1922-23). His regular contributors to this group included Yeh Hsiao-feng 葉小鳳 (Yeh Ch'u-ts'ang 楚儉), who later was well known as director of the propaganda department and general secretary of the KMT, but who, during the 1910s, was the author of social novels like *A History of the Alleyways* (*Nung-t'ang hsiao-shih* 弄堂小史), a hilarious account of Shanghai society as viewed by a cobbler sitting on a street corner; also Yao Yüan-ch'u 姚鵠雛, who wrote historical novels and later became a Kiangsu Provincial Secretary; and Yao Su-feng 姚蘇鳳 (Yao Keng-k'ui 慶夔), who began by writing small filler pieces and in the thirties became a well-known cinema critic and writer of screen-plays.

When I met Pao T'ien-hsiao in Hong Kong I was anxious to ask him what, among his various lifetime activities, he now regarded as the most successful. "None has been in the least successful," he answered, with the due self-effacement of a kind old gentleman. When I pressed him further, though, I was surprised to find that his proudest achievement turned out to be none of the above but a little book called *Little Hsing Goes to School* (*Hsing-erh chiu-hsüeh chi*).² This was an "education novel" published by the Commercial Press and widely distributed during the 1910s as a Chinese language textbook for the "new-style" schools. Pao said he was always surprised and delighted that, wherever he travelled in China, he could find this little book for sale. He showed me a copy which his friend and fellow author Cheng I-mei 鄭逸梅 had bought at a used book stall in Shanghai in early 1966, only a few months before the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Pao felt—correctly, no doubt—that *Little Hsing* had done more to help China than any of his other work.

Pao's claim that he wished to help China is more than rosy retrospection. In fact C.T. Hsia's astute generalization about May Fourth writers—that they were "obsessed with China"—can be seen to apply in considerable measure to Pao and his colleagues as well. Pao's efforts to "bring enlightenment" with his innovations were never made in the spirit of disparaging China or exalting the West. He actually was highly sensitive to condescending attitudes from Westerners. He refused to use Reuters wire services in the late-Ch'ing years "because they demanded payment in English pounds". And though he sought to copy the form of Western short stories and short story magazines, he deliberately avoided a "foreign flavour" in their content.

At a deeper level, Pao's popularity among urban readers is a noteworthy

² Actually *Hsing-erh chiu-hsüeh chi* 馨兒就學記 is a translation of *Cuore* (*Heart*, first published in Italy 1886, English translation *An Italian Schoolboy's Journal* published 1887) by Edmondo de Amicis (1846-1908). The book was later translated by Hsia Mien-tsun 夏丕尊 into *pai-hua* as *Ai-te chiao-yü* 愛的

教育, once again a best-seller. Pao's translation was reprinted in the early seventies by the Commercial Press, Taipei, who added a *pai-hua* translation to the text, without, however, mentioning that Pao's work was itself an adaptation.

comment on the cultural crisis of China's modernizing cities. Immigrants to the treaty port cities were a new, young, mobile population—bearing high hopes for success in “the new style”, yet profoundly insecure as they found themselves cut off from traditional ladders of success, family ties, etc., and confronted with strange new customs. To them, the new-style occupations and life patterns of the half-Western city were simultaneously a great promise and a great peril. The boom in popular urban fiction in the 1910s and twenties in China must be seen, in considerable measure, as springing from the immense psychological pressures generated by this intense dilemma; the use of humour in Pao T'ien-hsiao's fiction is but one of many ways in which pressures were relieved and people comforted.

A good example from Pao's writing of this working out of ambivalent feelings toward the modern city is a story he serialized in the *Shun Pao* in 1931 called “The Countryman Arrives in Shanghai Again” (*Hsiang-hsia jen yu tao Shang-hai* 鄉下人又到上海). In it a loveable old man naively wanders into the fast-moving, heartless, foreign-dominated city and is the butt of many jokes. He notices, for example, whole rows of shops lined up selling the same kind of thing, and is bewildered. He takes it upon himself to approach two adjacent sweets shops and suggest that they get together and cooperate. The shop-owners assume he is crazy, and tell him so. Later he tries to find a friend but discovers that nobody on the street has heard of this friend. He sets out on a street-car and gets hopelessly lost in the maze of roads with their foreign-sounding names. All in all, the city appears to him strange, intimidating, and unreasonable.

The reader of the story is invited to laugh at both sides of the city-countryside conflict. On the one hand the reader is made to feel superior to the old man (and thereby China's unenlightened hinterland) for his parochialism and ignorance; on the other, though, one cannot but appreciate the simplicity and honesty with which the old man faces the confusion and coldness of the modern city.

Be it the new China or the old China, though, there was never a time in Pao's life when he doubted that China was his favourite country. He always wished the best for her. Hence it came as a considerable blow when, in the early sixties, literary historians in China began disparaging Pao as a leader of the “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School” (*Yuan-yang hu-tieh p'ai*), a group of writers of supersentimental love stories which flourished in the 1910s and were roundly denounced by May Fourth writers in the early twenties for their allegedly irresponsible motives. Hsü Chen-ya, Li Ting-i 李定夷, and Wu Shuang-je 吳雙熱 were the standard-bearers of this group, but *A History of Chinese Literature*, produced by researchers at Peking University in 1959, places Pao T'ien-hsiao first on a list of fourteen “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” writers.

When I met Pao in Hong Kong, he pointed out that there were many kinds of fiction current in the 1910s—social novels, knight-errant novels, detective stories, love stories, science fiction, and many, many others—and that the several kinds should not be lumped together. He himself, he said, had never written a Mandarin Duck and Butterfly type of story and had never even met Hsü Chen-ya. His supreme effort in fiction (although he considered it a failure) was a social novel called *Liu-fang chi* 留芳記 in which the events of the early republic were woven into an account of Mei Lan-fang's life.

民國十八年以前，我到北京好幾次，因為寫小說留芳記搜集材料，朋友在北京甚多。十八年以後，國民黨北伐成功，遷都南京，我常常到南京南京的朋友更多。四十年代抗日時期，我的兒子都在重慶，我們一封老婦，因居上海，那是最窮苦的日子了。

PAO'S WRITTEN REPLY to the question:
“包先生在三十、四十年代(民國十八到三十八年)在什麼地方?”

But the designation of Pao T'ien-hsiao as a “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” writer, though strictly speaking a classificatory error, does raise the important question of how good a writer Pao was. Measured by Western literary criteria—which is not quite fair, of course—he inevitably ranks rather low. His stories seldom exhibit unified plot or sustained dramatic tension, and his characters seem to be complex only when their real-life models happen to have been complex.

But the question of whether Pao was a good writer in these terms is essentially moot, because, unlike the May Fourth generation, Pao never put much emphasis on these standards. In fact, “high art” in any form, Western or Chinese, was never his aim so much as exploration and innovation.

Once accused of being a “jack of all trades” (*jan-chih* 染指), Pao happily admitted the truth of the charge. He recalls that he could not tolerate the atmosphere inside the editorial offices of the Commercial Press because it was too “scholarly”, and he once declined a position at Peking Women's Normal College, protesting that he was unqualified, and received the public scorn of Lu Hsün for doing so. Through the twenties he began to feel more and more remote from the Westernized elite of May Fourth, remaining, in effect, a representative of the “still-Chinese” majority of the urban populace.

In a larger sense, though, it would surely be a mistake to say there is no art in the work of Pao and his "middlebrow" colleagues. All of them sought to impart to their writing a distinctive "character" (*ch'i* 氣) or "flavour" (*feng wei* 風味) which matched their own personalities and could be found in any sample of their writing. Thus Hu Chi-ch'en 胡寄塵 (Hu Huai-ch'en 胡懷琛) aimed to be "pure and simple" (*chen su* 真素), Ho Hai-ming 何海鳴 "rash and reckless" (*fang tan* 放誕), Hsiang K'ai-jan 向愷然 "spirited and chivalrous", (*hsia lieh* 俠烈), etc.

Pao's own style dates from his passing of the *sheng-yüan* degree, when the examiner wrote on his scroll that "your writing has an easy-going air." Being himself of an easy-going disposition, Pao worked to cultivate a sense of ease, fluency, and clarity in his work. "Whenever I've written anything," he has recalled, "I've never done a draft and never revised"—a policy which certainly helps to explain the volume of his writing as well as its freshness. His eye for vivid and interesting detail is matched only by Chang Hen-shui, Ch'en Shen-yen 陳慎言, and a few others among the middlebrow writers; in this regard he is also superior to most May Fourth writers. He had a true gift for describing ordinary events in daily life without their seeming at all dull or ordinary.

The following piece, which typifies the pleasant, life-like quality of Pao's writing, may serve as an example. Translated from his *Reminiscences*, it describes a trip Pao and his wife Ch'en Chen-su 陳震蘇 made to Soochow in 1908 for the purpose of sweeping his parents' gravesite:

When the day came, my wife and I set out taking our three-year old daughter K'o-fen 可芬 with us. Our old family home was on a little lane in a district known as the Western Island, which was in front of the Ch'eng-t'ien Temple 承天府 inside the Ch'ang-men Gate 閩門. There was an ancient well in front of our house, the same well where Cheng So-nan 鄭所南,³ as I described earlier, hid his "Heartfelt History" in an iron casket. We of course were going to stay at our old home on this trip; in fact I'd already written to notify my sister, so that she could tidy up the upstairs and all would go smoothly.

It was that time of year just between spring and summer, and the weather was exceptionally fine, just right for a springtime outing. However, I had asked for only a few days' leave in Shanghai, so we still had to rush along our way.

The first thing we did upon arriving was to go hire a boat, seeking out the same one which our family had always employed and knew well. It was a little packet with six glass windows, and it moored itself in front of the old residence of Lu Jun-hsiang⁴ by the bridge facing the Ch'ung-chen Taoist Monastery. There were no men on the boat—a mother and daughter made it their home, and also depended on it for

³Cheng So-nan (Cheng Ssu-hsiao 思肖, 1206-1283) was a Sung loyalist who retired from office and lived in Soochow when the Mongols took the South. His *鐵函心史*, also known as *井中心史*, was recovered from the temple well during the last years of the Ming

dynasty.

⁴The Lu Jen-hsiang of *A Flower in a Sinful Sea*, Ch. 2.

a living. The old boat lady was a widow, and the daughter, who was called "Little Dragon" and was about 18 or 19 years old, had grown to be smart-looking indeed, a pleasure to behold. Since we were old customers of theirs, there was no need to waste time bargaining for a price. Their boat was free the next day, and we simply reserved it.

In the past, when people from Soochow went to sweep their ancestors' gravesites, women and children seldom made the trip. The women had bound feet, making it difficult to move along the mountain paths; and because the women didn't go, the children didn't go either. But we no longer felt bound by these conventions, and since we were going to ride in sedan chairs anyway, we spent the evening cooking the sacrificial foods, and preparing the sacrificial offerings, and the next day, bright and early, set out.

Our boat headed briskly out the Ch'ang-men Gate, and passing the Iron Ridge Pass 鐵嶺關, entered the outlying districts. It had been a long time since I'd travelled in the countryside, especially in such fine weather. The peach blossoms had not yet entirely departed, and sprang to view in a cluster here, a cluster there, without anyone's tending to them, blooming just as they pleased. The rapeseed blossoms along the way were also yellow enough to dazzle one's eyes.

When the boat reached the Huan-lung Bridge 環龍橋, there were already quite a few sedan-chair carriers, both men and women, milling and crowding around it. One middle-aged country woman saw us and shouted out: "It's the young master of the Pao family! I've carried him before!"

"He never came last year to sweep the graves!" shouted another, older woman.

All of their memories were very good. Once you'd had any contact with them, they remembered absolutely everything.

We climbed ashore amidst great bustle and commotion. It was still quite a distance to the gravesites, and we had to ride in the mountain sedan chairs. We needed two of them, one for me, and one for my wife and daughter. The sedan chair people decided among themselves how to handle us, and, oddly enough, assigned two women to carry me and two men to carry my wife and daughter. I asked why they arranged things this way and they said: "You by yourself are light (at the time I was extremely thin, scarcely one hundred pounds), but your young madam has a little miss with her." I thought it over and saw that they were right: why should men have to carry men and women carry women? I asked my wife and she had no objections. We added to the party a boy of fifteen or sixteen years to carry the sacrificial items, and together took to the path.

When we reached the gravesite, our tomb-retainer (that's what Soochow people called a grave keeper) came promptly out to meet us. She was a middle-aged widow, and we called her the Cloak Lady. We went straight to the gravesite and offered our sacrifices, checked that the gravesite trees were in good shape, swept everything clean, and felt much comforted. Then, as was the custom, we gave the food which the ancestors had not eaten to the tomb-retainers. We also distributed "earth-replenishing money". ("Earth-replenishing money" was a

custom whereby all the young children from homes neighbouring the gravesite would come and look on, and you would give them each a few coppers as inducement not to trample the gravesite.) When this was over, our tomb-retainer invited us to her house to rest a while, preparing tea and offering it to us. Normally her household did not drink tea, since they could afford only hot water.

They were busy raising silkworms at the time, and also had their own little strip of mulberry bushes. Chen-su and I had already seen silkworms being raised, but for our daughter K'o-fen it was the first time. When she saw all those snow-white silkworms, sleeping on the emerald-green mulberry leaves, she was all set to grab some for herself and take them home to Shanghai. But her mother scolded her and put a stop to it.

Throughout the area of White Horse Stream village 白馬澗村, where this gravesite of ours was located, the womenfolk were blessed with an extraordinary range of talents. Besides raising silkworms, they could embroider. Soochow at the time had a special kind of industry which produced "spirit robes and theatre costumes". There were at least ten or a dozen shops in the city which dealt in these "spirit robes and theatre costumes". The so-called "spirit robes" were the gowns worn on the bodies of the various idols, and they had to be covered with embroidery of all kinds of splendid and beautiful things. This was all the more true for theatre costumes: whether it was Peking opera or K'un-shan drama, whether a male or female role, a painted face, or a clown—all had to wear embroidered upper garments. So these shops which sold "spirit robes and theatre costumes" did not do badly at all, as people would come to Soochow from all around to place their orders. The embroidery was all done with thick thread and didn't need to be terribly refined, so the shops sent all the orders out to the countryside for village women to do. It was this kind of "life" which the women in this region "made". (The village women called embroidery "making life".) But remarkably, they could always put aside their painstaking embroidery and go join the rough and tumble of carrying mountain sedan chairs. This was more than versatility—it was an actual combination of the martial and the fine arts.

When we returned to the boat it was already approaching two o'clock in the afternoon. We started back immediately, and had our mid-day meal on board. The dishes were prepared by the mother and daughter who ran the boat: red-roasted silver carp, shepherd's purse with fried pork shreds, shrimp and egg-white soup—two dishes and one soup prepared in true Soochow style. What's more, by this time we were extremely hungry, so the meal seemed all the more appetizing and savoury. Afterwards, we sat and watched as the farmland scenery passed before us along the riverbank, the little bridges and running water, the tranquil grass and leisurely flowers. Although it was the busy season for farmers, they set about their work appearing completely carefree and at ease. We re-entered the city in the shadows of the setting sun, and by the time we reached home dusk had fallen. We chatted for a few

minutes with my sister and brother-in-law, then peacefully retired.⁵

I met Pao T'ien-hsiao four times between December, 1972 and June, 1973. His close-cropped hair was still surprisingly dark for age 97, as was his handshake surprisingly firm. He was hard of hearing, and had some difficulty speaking clearly; but there was no question that behind these barriers of frailty lay an outgoing personality still very much interested in life. Through a pair of thick glasses (he had worn glasses since 1885) the twinkle in his eyes never ebbed. He asked me where I had learned Chinese, and then asked how many young Americans now study Chinese. He was delighted with the idea that college enrolments in Chinese were rising because of ping-pong diplomacy, and began excitedly slapping the back of one hand into the palm of the other as he remarked on the irony that ping-pong, "a Western thing", had now come to represent China. It was obvious, without needing to ask, that one of the keys to his longevity was an unflagging zest for life in all its twists and turns. He apologized for his difficulty in communicating orally and suggested that I write my questions down if I wanted proper answers. He had taught calligraphy 75 years ago and knew he was still pretty good at it.

He chose to begin his responses in this written interview with the words, "I am an ordinary person, who has passed his days in ordinary ways. . . ." Though the interview was generally very good, this particular statement must be attributed more to Pao's humility than to his eye as a reporter. He certainly was not an ordinary person, nor were his times at all ordinary.

⁵*Ch'uan-ying lou hui-i lu*, pp. 363-66. The above passage has already appeared in my book *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies* (Univ. of California Press, copy-

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IN 1963 TWO FILM VERSIONS of *Fate in Tears and Laughter* were made in Hong Kong, one by Motion Picture and General Investment (M.P.G.I.), the other (rushed out in competition) by Shaw Brothers. As examples of the lasting popularity of this 'Story of Three Loves', as the film synopsis translates the title, we include here some scenes from the M.P.G.I. version, directed by Wang T'ien-lin 王天林, and produced by Wang Chih-po 王植波.

(Top) GRACE CHANG 葛蘭 played both Shen Feng-hsi and Ho Li-na, following the tradition established in the thirties by Butterfly Wu (see p. 26, n. 35).

(Below) FAN CHIA-SHU was played by Chao Lei 趙雷. In this scene he meets secretly with Feng-hsi in the park, when she has already married General Liu.

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