

Real Value of Chinese Literature

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THAT literature is the birthright and inheritance of a race is a fact beyond dispute. Chinese literature is not an exception. If it is true that China is the oldest country in the world, it is equally true that China as a nation has the oldest culture since the beginning of civilization. But it is a pity that Chinese literature as a subject is much neglected in all the universities, colleges and schools in other parts of the world with the result that students often fail to understand the real value of Chinese literature. Even some of our Chinese people today are also beginning to denounce their own literature, either because they are influenced by Western civilization or materialism or that they are unable to read Chinese characters. In this connection it is advisable to divide Chinese literature under the following headings:—

Classics:—It is an undeniable fact that the Confucian classics are the most important of all Chinese literature, just as the Holy Bible is the greatest of books in Western literature. Confucius originally compiled the Six Canons, but since the loss of the Book of Music they were reduced to five Canons, namely the Book of Changes, the Book of History, the Book of Poetry, the Book of Rites, Spring and Autumn Annals. The Four Books including the Confucian Analects, the Works of Mencius, the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean, were formed by the Orthodox Philosophers in the Sung Dynasty. They are the gems of Chinese literature.

As regards the Taoist Classics, it is stated that the Five Taoist Canons, namely Tao Teh Chen Ching, Nan Hua Chen Ching, Chung Hsu Chen Ching, Tung Hsuan Chen Ching and Tung Hsu Chen Ching are the most important. A number of 5,485 Taoist Classics or the Taoist Tripitaka was declared to be written by Taoist scholars since the beginning of Taoist papacy in the Eastern Han Dynasty. The Taoist Tripitaka is of great importance in the sphere of Chinese classics as it has a great influence on Chinese history, politics, philosophy, literature, art and science.

In Buddhism Hsuan Tsang was the first to compile the Chinese Buddhist Tripitaka consisting originally of 657 works, all translations from the Sanskrit and Pali, early in the Tang Dynasty. History supports the view that the number of Buddhist Tripitaka was increased to 1,076 in 730, and that many additions have been made and more than 20 editions have been published to meet the demand of the people. The Buddhist Tripitaka is mainly divided into five sections; Sutras, Vinaya, Abhidharma, secret works and miscellaneous works.

History:—A study of ancient Chinese history will reveal the fact that the reign of the Yellow Emperor is the beginning of all historical records, and that Shih Chi by Ssu Ma Chien, an official historian of the Western Han, is

the first work of the standard histories, covering a period of about 2,500 years. This great work, notwithstanding its defects and shortcomings, has been always regarded by Chinese historians as the model of history writing in the realm of Chinese literature. Han Shu, the second work of the standard histories, by Pan Ku, of the Eastern Han, was written during 58-75 A.D., though the author himself did not actually complete the whole book, owing to his imprisonment by the Government for political reasons. The work covering the whole period of the Western Han Dynasty was finally completed by his sister Pan Chao. The third work under the title Hou Han Shu, or the History of the Later Eastern Han Dynasty, was written by Fan Yieh, an official of the Sung Dynasty in the Southern Empire, who was put to death for political reasons. According to the Chinese scholars San Kuo Chih, or the History of the Three Kingdoms, by Chen Shou, of the Western Ching Dynasty, is the fourth work containing 65 Volumes. There is a collection of 20 more works on standard histories, namely Chin Shu, Sung Shu, Nan Chi Shu, Liang Shu, Chen Su, Wei Shu, Pei Chi Shu, Chen Shou, Swei Shu, Nan Shih, Pei Shih, etc., while other great works on history are Tzu Chih Tung Chien, Tzu Chih Tung Chien Kang Mu, Fung Chien Chi Shih Pen Mo, Tung Tien, Tung Chih and Wen Hsien Tung Kao.

Poetry:—Poetry is the best medium by which sentiments, thoughts, feelings and emotions can be expressed. Chinese poetry has reached a very high standard since the dawn of Chinese literature. If we look to the history of the past, we shall find that there were many famous poets in every dynasty. It is generally agreed that the Tang Dynasty was the Golden Age for Chinese poetry, for most of the great poets were living in that dynasty. Wei Cheng, Chen Tzu Ang, Wang Po, Ho Chih Chang, Shen Chuen Chi and Sung Chih Wen were all great poets living in the early part of the Tang Dynasty. Li Po (705-762) and Tu Fu (712-770) were two great immortals living under the reign of Emperor Hsuan Tsung. Li was a great genius, wrote poems under the influence of wine and had a Taoist outlook on life, while Tu, a sage of poetry, wrote with skill and effort, and was a great follower of Confucius. Wang Wei (699-758), Meng Hao Jen (689-740), Chang Chiu Ling (673-740), Yuan Chen (779-832), Po Chu Yi (772-846), Chia Tao (777-841), Li Shang Yin (813-856) and Ssu Tu (837-908) were other outstanding poets of the age.

Though the Tang Dynasty is known as the Golden Age for Chinese poetry, the succeeding dynasties also produced many great poets. In the Sung Dynasty Su Shih and Huang Ting Chien were the most famous. In the Northern Sung Dynasty there were two noted poets, namely Mei Yao Chen and Chen Shih Tao, while Lu Yu (1125-1210) was considered to be the greatest poet in the Southern Sung Dynasty. There were not many famous poets in the Yuan Dynasty, due perhaps to lack of creative power, but Yuan Hao Wen was the greatest poet in the Chin Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty produced many poets, such as Kao Chi, Lui Chi, Le Meng Yang, Li Pang Lung and Wang Shih Chen,

*The author of this article is a young man of twenty-three. He wrote this article when he was only nineteen years old. He did not receive any college or university education. He was educated in Singapore where Chinese literature as a subject is not included in the school curriculum. He hopes that this article will create an interest in the minds of the English-educated Chinese students in Malaya.

though there were also many great poets in the Ching Dynasty.

Novels:—If we study the ancient Chinese novels carefully, we shall find that myths, legends, strange occurrences and supernatural phenomena were the favourite themes of the novelists. Chi Hsieh or Jokes of the Chi State, Shan Hai Ching or Classics of Mountains and Seas, and Mu Tien Tzu or Biography of King Mu were the oldest Chinese novels in literature. According to historians, Yu Chu, of the Western Han Dynasty, was the greatest and earliest novelist in ancient times. In the Tang Dynasty two popular collections of novels entitled Tang Tai Tsung Shu and Tai Ping Kuang Chi could be found. Since the Tang Dynasty novels of realistic character were abundant. San Tsang Chu Ching Ping Hua about Hsuan Tsang's pilgrimage to India, Wu Tai Shih Ping Hua about the Five Short Dynasties and Hsuan Ho Yi Shih about the reign of Emperor Huei Tsung, by Sung novelists; Shui Hu Chuan about the 108 bandits by the Liang Shan Lake and San Kuo Yen Yi about the warfares of the Three Kingdoms period, by Yuan novelists; Lieh Kuo Chih about the Belligerent States and Swei Tang Yen Yi about the rise and downfalls of the Swei and the Tang Dynasties, by Ming novelists; Yueh Wei Tsao Tang Pi Chi, Hung Lou Meng about the family of a young noble who was in love with many girls of various dispositions, and Ju Lin Wai Shih about the literary men's life by Ching novelists; all these are some of the typical novels of realistic character in Chinese history.

With the introduction of Western literature, novel writing in China has undergone many changes. Many classical English and French novels by Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Alexandre Dumas, Harriet Beecher, etc., had been translated into Chinese by Lin Shu (1825-1924). It is a fashion of Chinese novelists to-day to write after the Western style since the victory of literary revolution. Just turn over the pages of Chinese magazines and newspapers and we will find the so-called "creative-novels" by the modern

novelists of the day. But it is a pity that the modern novelists have not as yet produced any works of permanent value. Whether the so-called "creative-novels" will benefit China in the sphere of literature remains to be seen.

Drama:—Drama plays one of the most important parts in the progress of Chinese literature. It is a well-established fact that Chinese dramas are all of classical value and the Chinese theatre is mainly a representation and interpretation of life. Chinese dramas are chiefly classified under the following headings: civilian plays, military plays, comic plays, exciting plays and lusty plays. It has been recorded in Chinese History that the Yuan Dynasty was the Golden Age for Chinese dramas. There are two types of Chinese drama—the official plays and the court yard plays. In the Yuan Dynasty both these types of plays were developed to a very high degree, and more than 100 masterpieces by Yuan literature are still played by modern actors and of Yuan literature are still played by modern actors and actresses. In the Ming Dynasty many popular dramas were produced and the two outstanding dramatic writers were Yuan Ta Cheng and Tang Hsien Tzu (1550-1617). The Ching Dynasty is also noted for dramatic writers. Tao Hua Shan or the Tan of Peach Blossoms by Kung Shang Jen, Chang Sheng Tien or the Place of Long Life by Hung Sheng, The Ten Dramas by Li Yu, and The Nine Dramas by Chiang Shih Chuan were the most important works in the Ching Dynasty.

In conclusion every Chinese youth should have a thirst for Chinese literature in order that the old Chinese culture handed down by our own ancestors as a rich legacy may not degenerate as time goes on. It is the duty of every one of us to have a deep study of Chinese literature with a view to knowing the glories, achievements and great works of the past, the conditions of the present, and to preparing the way of the future.

Singapore,
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The Chinese In Sarawak

By JAMES P. HWANG (黃賓)

UNDOUBTEDLY, many writers have, in the past, dealt with the subject of the South Seas Chinese. Now, I want to present to our countrymen what has very seldom appeared in the papers. The place I am going to write about is Sarawak, an independent state in northwest Borneo, which is bounded on the north by the South China Sea.

When our Chinese people began to settle in Sarawak is not definitely known. Chinese annals speak of tribute paid to the empire by Pha-la on the north east coast of Borneo as early as the 7th century, and later documents mention a Chinese colonization in Borneo in the 15th century. Traditions of Malays and others seem to confirm the statements, for many of the leading families in Sarawak to-day claim to have Chinese blood in their veins. Other knowledge regarding this still remains for keen study.

The flourishing condition of Sarawak was largely due to the energy of Chinese settlers and to trade with China. In the early stage, it is believed that the Chinese were mostly encouraged to emigrate from China by the Malay chiefs

with a view to developing the mineral resources of the island. This group of Chinese immigrants are still to be found in considerable numbers in upper Sarawak, engaged in such business. In recent years, many Chinese went to Sarawak and other places in the South Seas simply in the hope of getting a better living there. The Chinese in Sarawak to-day acquire their peculiar position in all respects. They form the most valuable elements in the civilization and development of Sarawak, just as do our fellows in the mining states of the Malay Peninsula. They are, as a whole, very industrious, frugal, intelligent, hard-working and possessed of a keen business acumen. Their great contributions to the state cannot be measured by statistics; they are invisible and immeasurable.

In the year 1935, the Chinese in Sarawak were estimated at 200,000. The places in which they mostly settled down are Kuching, Sibu and Miri, which are also the chief towns of the state. Kuching, the capital (1°13'10"N., 110°20'13"E.) is situated on the Sarawak river about twenty three miles