

## BOOK REVIEW

EDITED BY QUENTIN PAN

## Living China

*(Modern Chinese Short Stories)*

Edited by EDGAR SNOW

*(360 pp. 1936, George Harrap Co., London, Obtainable from the Commercial Press)*

TEN out of nine foreigners (really it is more than nine out of ten) coming to the land of Cathay have no other purpose than to make money or find a more comfortable livelihood. In their leisure, they find a most intriguing pastime in making researches and collections of small shoes for Chinese women, opium pipes, pictures of executions, chopping off human heads, or collections of curios. The higher and intellectual class of these foreigners, of course, also make a elaborate studies of the various branches of Chinese history in art, politics, paintings, etc. Most of them cater to the "quaint," and the "queer" or historical things Chinese and nobody ever takes any notice of the Living China.

Happily there came Edgar Snow, now the correspondent of *The Daily Herald* (London) in Peiping who has an ever unquenchable thirst to dig China down to the core, who is not satisfied with reading the 'interpretive' books on China, who wants to know "what the Chinese talks and writes about himself in Chinese.....or especially how does he articulate it in the imaginative literature he writes for others like himself—exclusively for Chinese eyes and appreciation, and not with the notion of pleasing foreign readers, or of catering to foreign prejudices, or of feeding the Western avidity for the 'exotic', the 'quaint', and the 'picturesque'". The result of such an inquiry is this book which was written during the past five years while working for a London newspaper.

To undertake such a work is really no easy task. It is so difficult indeed that nobody ever contemplated such an ambitious undertaking. As Mr. Snow says, "had I divined a fuller notion of the sheer fatigue and tiresome manual labor attached to such a work, I should never have 'rushed in'". We must gratefully acknowledge our profound indebtedness to Mr. Snow for conquering this almost unconquerable difficulty.

This book is divided into two parts. Part I contains six short stories and an essay all from one author, Lu Hsun, who is universally recognized as the founder of modern short stories. Part 2 includes 17 short stories from 13 authors. In his Introduction, Mr. Snow has given due credit to all his able collaborators, to Yao Hsin-nung for his help in translating Lu Hsun's works in Part 1 and to many others for the translations in Part 2, while he holds the full responsibility for the volume itself and for the translations. When we take into consideration the fact that this work took the author five years to complete while doing his many other more important (though transient) work, we must take our hats off and make a low

bow to Mr. Snow, for the collection of materials on the Modern Literary Movement in China which is something less than 20 years old and presents a very great difficulty even to us. After reading over the whole book, we do not wonder why he prefers to write three books of his own rather than "repeat the operations that have gone into the making of this one." The wonder is how he ever did it. That he is liable to make a few mistakes, therefore, should be very natural.

It is perfectly true that Chinese writers are miserably paid and that the average rate rarely exceeds \$5 per thousand words. But to generalize that "hence there is a temptation for all but the best authors to string beads on the necklace of their stories indefinitely" is really an exaggeration which shows that Mr. Snow still cannot fully appreciate the "dialogues and narrative which contribute nothing to the development of the story." As some one has pointed out, when a Chinese takes a pleasure trip or pays a visit to some famous place, he usually enjoys all the "side shows." A quaint little wild flower or a strange rock on the side of the road often absorbs his attention, gives him pleasure and intrigues him while on his way to his destination. When he has finally arrived at his destination, however, he might not like it at all. A European tourist may come to China and visit the Yangtze Gorges by the fastest and largest steamer, or better still, by airplane. He thus escapes all the *ennui* of the strange rocks and wild flowers. A Chinese, on the other hand, much prefers to visit the Gorges by taking a comfortable and slow junk and miss nothing of the fun of stopping every now and then to get ashore to pick up a wild flower or stop awhile to admire some strange mighty rocks. This is perhaps why Mr. Snow says, "Curiously enough, this defect has appeared in some of the finest stories written, and becomes decidedly marked in the English translation. Chinese do not seem to mind such purposeless rambling....." However, we must accept Mr. Snow's friendly advice, for, after all, this is a fast age of machines. We must keep in quick jazz tempo even in art and literature. Not being a literary man, however, I still cannot understand what is wrong with such stories like "*All Men Are Brothers*" and "*Ching Hua Yuen*" for instance, where the main interest seems to be concentrated on the episodes and dialogues "which contribute nothing to the development of the story."

There are a few mistakes in the dates which might have escaped the author's attention. The more important of these is that the execution of the five "leftist" authors at Lunghua, a few miles from Shanghai, was on February 7, 1931, before the "Mukden Incident," and not in 1932, as Miss Nym Wales has incorrectly stated in her essay on the Modern Chinese Literary Movement appended to this book which is certainly one of the best, if not *the* best, summary of this subject ever written in English. Any one who has read this essay can imagine the amount of time and energy she must have spent on it. But, like all pioneering works, hers is not free from errors, as shall be pointed out later on. She can, however, challenge any foreigner and even most of the Chinese to make a lesser number of mistakes. Other mistakes in dates from Mr. Snow's most

useful and certainly very well-done biographical sketches attached before the works of each author are: Mao Tun's year of birth is 1892 and not 1902. He is now about 44 years old. Pa Chin was born in 1905 and not 1896. There might be some other mistakes in dates which are perhaps not far from accurate and therefore, *maskee*.

Regarding Mr. Snow's translations, it is no use to praise them as superb, magnificent, or search for superlatives to describe them. All we can say is that translations of modern Chinese short-stories of like standard by a foreigner (or even by Chinese for that matter), to use a pidgin expression, we simply "no have got." Lu Hsun's writings proverbially defy translation. Mr. Snow admits that the translations are not always "literal" or even "accurate" and that he is "so bold as to omit certain passage and episodes" in order to avoid the necessity of having half a page of foot-note to explain one little phrase. This is perfectly excusable. But in doing so, much of the style in Lu Hsun's writings is sacrificed, for I believe that at least half of the popularity of Lu Hsun's writings is due to his sharp, biting, and powerful style which has no equal in the whole blessed world. But under the circumstances, we can find no other way out.

In the story "Medecine," on page 36, Mr. Snow has translated Hsia Tzu-nai-nai (夏四奶奶) as the "fourth daughter-in-law of the Hsias" and Hsia San-yeh (夏三爺) as the "third Father of the Hsia family" which are a bit far-fetched, for nai-nai does not mean "daughter-in-law" and san-yeh does not mean "third father." Besides, Hsia Tzu-nai-nai is an old woman and the title of "fourth daughter-in-law of the Hsias" does not fit her role at all.

In Mao Tun's story, "Mud", on page 147, "Sooner or later the whole thing must lead to communism" is wrong, for in the original text the idea was that "sooner or later it must come to communize," of course, to communize wives. The idea of communism as an "ism" was then still unknown among the villagers.

There are other points in his translation on which we may not entirely agree with Mr. Snow. For instance, besides those surgical operations acknowledged in his Introduction, in Shen Tsung-wen's "Pai Tzu," Mr. Snow had cut down quite a lot of the description of the sailors' life and thus arrived so abruptly and suddenly at the main theme of the romance. On the other hand, he appended to this story what seems to me an anti-climax at the end which is not in the original text.

Besides these and a few other minor mistakes, or rather differences of opinions, of which space does not permit a detailed finding, we must admit that Mr. Snow has accomplished an almost unaccomplishable feat. The good points in his "free" translations are too many. In some places his translations are probably the only possible translations in retaining the original vigor and flavor.

His choice of authors is apparently one-sided, being all leftist writers. The fact that Mr. Snow dedicated the book to "S.C.L." clearly indicates his task and inclinations. This is perhaps because there are so few popular or indifferent "right" authors. For instance Miss Ping Hsin is very popular, but her writings are only beautiful in their rich

and pretty language. The only outstanding short-story writer whose name was noticeably unmentioned in this book is Lao Hsiang (Wang Hsiang-chen). While his stories are without any left morals, they are nevertheless very popular among the Chinese readers. But *maskee!* Mr. Snow will do lots more in the years to come. Other notable writers' names may also have been left unmentioned but it is hard to remember who they are without spending many hours' head-scratching.

Regarding the romanization of Chinese names, it is really a shame that up to now there is still no standard. Lu Hsun's "Na Han" has appeared a few times as "No Han" which is wrong, of course. In Miss Nym Wales' admirable essay, I have found a number of names to be quite confusing. For instance, on page 344; Wei Chih-shih is probably Wei Chin-chih; Liu Yen is probably Lu Yen; Tsao Ching-tsen probably Chao Ching-shen. A few other names were romanized in different ways referring to the same persons.

Among Miss Wales's comments again there are points which are open to question. For instance, to put Tsao Yü as a lesser prominent dramatist and playwright than Tien Han, I, for one, can *never* agree. While Mr. Wen Yuan-ning's comparing Tsao Yü as an equal to Ibsen may be over-praised, Tsao Yü is at least the leading and the most promising playwright of this country. And to say that Yü Ta-fu still holds his popularity that he used to enjoy over ten years ago is to give him too much credit. Among the Creationists, by the way, after Kuo Mo-Jo and Yu Ta-fu, the most important person was Cheng Fang-wu. On page 354, "Cement" was, of course, written by the Russian author Gladkov and not by Upton Sinclair, which is an obvious error. Another point of interest is that while Mr. Snow was not informed about Ting Ling's whereabouts, Miss Wales correctly brought it up to date that she is still living, but under Nanking surveillance. To bring it up to the minute, Miss Ting Ling is now actively working with the communists in Sian (see *The China Press*, Jan. 28).

This book cannot be over-praised. It is absolutely the very best work that was ever written since since Pearl Buck's translation of "All Men Are Brothers." *Heil, Edgar Snow!*  
I. C. S.

## THE CHINA CRITIC

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