THE TRAVELS OF LAO TS'AN:  
AN EXPLORATION OF ITS ART AND MEANING  

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The Travels of Lao Ts'an (Lao-ts'an yu-chi) is the most beloved of all Chinese novels produced during the last decade of the Ch'ing dynasty. Among other signs of its popularity, it has attracted a larger amount of scholarly attention than any other novel of the same period, and yet with all this commendable industry, it would seem that its incontestable human appeal and artistic excellence have not yet been adequately accounted for in critical terms. Its champions have been content to isolate for inspection its major ideas and its more obvious kinds of literary beauty readily supportable by quotation, not realizing that in appraising any work of presumed greatness considerations of thought and style are properly inseparable. As evidence of Liu È's modern enlightenment and literary skill, we are told especially to admire his acute criticism of the officials and several elaborate passages descriptive of scenery and music. But to stress the author's concern with official injustice and tyranny has the practical effect of ignoring his larger concerns with China's fate as a whole, and to prize merely his descriptive powers implies an unawareness of his far more remarkable innovations within the tradition of the Chinese novel, in regard to both form and technique. The present essay shall examine conjointly the larger artistic and political aspects of The Travels of Lao Ts'an as a preliminary step toward a fuller appraisal of its greatness.

In a sense, the mechanical approach to the novel has been forced upon the critics because of its rambling structure and its apparent unconcern with plot. Even Professor Harold Shadick, who valiantly speaks of "the book's unity of feeling produced by the author's tireless interest in people and things, his moral integrity, and his pervading sense of humor," concedes its lack of unity in both plot and subject matter when "judged by the Western conception of a novel." But since in his management of narration, dialogue, and description Liu È shows himself to be an accomplished craftsman rather than a beginning novelist unsure of his powers, the absence of the latter kinds of unity may have been deliberate rather than due to clumsiness or carelessness. The last two chapters certainly prove that Liu È could tell a well-rounded story if he wanted to. His failure not to do so in the earlier chapters would indicate, rather, his dissatisfaction with the plot-centered novel of his predecessors and his ambition to encompass the higher and more complex kinds of unity consonant with a faithful rendering of his personal vision of China. Writing at a time when novelists were already exposed to Western fiction
through the large number of translations then available and were further urged to concern themselves with national problems, Liu Ė would seem to have enjoyed greater success than his distinguished and prolific contemporaries, Li Pao-chia 李寶嘉 and Wu Wo-yao 吳沃姚, in shedding the traditional role of the novelist as a storyteller and in subordinating all conventional elements of storytelling to the implementation of individual vision. But for its adherence to the form of a third-person narrative, The Travels of Lao Ts'an could have been the first Chinese lyrical novel in the first person, and yet at the same time, its author is so unlike the satiric novelists of his period with their self-righteous penchant for ridicule and castigation that his searching study of the country's present and future could be regarded as China's first political novel.¹

All the points maintained in the preceding paragraph shall be substantiated in the course of the essay. For the present, it suffices to mention the most striking feature about the structure of the novel—the middle section comprising Chapters 8-11, which constitutes a philosophic and prophetic interlude almost totally detachable from the main narrative about the travels of Lao Ts'an. This section records Shen Tzu-p'ing's 中子平 journey to the Peach Blossom Mountain ostensibly to look for the recluse Liu Jen-fu 劉仁甫 but actually to receive words of wisdom from the girl philosopher Yü-ku 岩姑 and the prophet Huang-lung-tzu 黃龍子 (Yellow Dragon). Since there is no urgent business awaiting Lao Ts'an at the time when Shen sets out for his journey, if the author had wanted to maintain the integrity of his novel as the hero's journal, he could have easily assigned him the trip. But for reasons to be spelled out later, it would seem that Liu Ė has deliberately risked a split in his narrative so as to state fully his complex and contradictory responses to his times as voiced by Lao Ts'an and the Yellow Dragon. Accordingly, for the convenience of critical discussion, the novel could be read in two ways: one could attend primarily to the self-sufficient narrative about the hero, a narrative with which modern readers are in ready sympathy, and then read it in conjunction with the middle section which, with all its display of esoteric learning and abstruse reasoning, contributes immensely to the emotional resonance and political meaning of the novel as a whole. I shall adopt the first approach in Section I. Since the middle section hardly differs in style and narrative method from the main narrative, I feel justified in making no reference to the former in my discussion of Liu Ė's technical contributions as a novelist in that section. But since the main narrative is itself of absorbing interest as a commentary on China charged with deep personal emotion, I shall also discuss that aspect of the narrative in order to prepare the reader for Section II, which will be mainly concerned with the philosophic and prophetic interlude. Taken together, these two sections will, I hope, contribute to a better understanding of the art and meaning of the novel.
I

Following the occupation of Peking by the Allied Powers in August 1900 in retaliation against the Boxer assault on its foreign community, even the most reactionary of the educated Chinese began to sense the approaching end of an era and fear for the future of their country. Liu È wrote his novel in 1903-4: even though it recalls a period when the Chinese empire was in less danger of an imminent collapse, it is inescapably permeated by that awareness of doom, as is made explicit in the concluding passage of the author's preface:

We of this age have our feelings stirred about ourselves and the world, about family and nation, about society, about the various races and religions. The deeper the emotions, the more bitter the weeping. This is why the Scholar of a Hundred Temperings from Hungtu has made this book, *The Travels of Lao Ts'An*.

The game of chess is finished. We are getting old. How can we not weep? I know that "a thousand lovely ones" and "ten thousand beauties" among mankind will weep with me and be sad with me.5

In the preface, then, Liu È suppresses the more self-confident voice heard in the prophetic section to call attention primarily to his deep sense of sorrow over China's senility and impotence. Chin Sheng-t'an's preface to *Shui-hu chuan* has set the fashion for novelists to compose autobiographical statements tinged with melancholy, and Liu È's essay on weeping is a particularly famous product of that tradition. Two kinds of weeping are described:

Spiritual nature gives birth to feeling; feeling gives birth to weeping. There are two kinds of weeping. One kind is strong; one kind is weak. When an addlepeated boy loses a piece of fruit, he cries; when a silly girl loses a hairpin, she weeps. This is the weak kind of weeping. The sobbing of Ch'i's wife caused the city wall to collapse, the tears of the Imperial Concubines Hsiang that stained the bamboo—these were the strong kinds of weeping. Moreover the strong kind of weeping divides into two varieties. If weeping takes the form of tears, its strength is small. If weeping does not take the form of tears, its strength is great: it reaches farther.6

In the preface, then, Liu È places himself in the second class of strong weepers: Ch'ü Yüan, Chuang Tzu, Su-ma Ch'ien, Tu Fu, Li Hou-chu, Wang Shih-fu, Pa-ta Shan-jen, and Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in. He believes that all these weepers have a great capacity for feeling, which in turn indicates the depth of their spiritual nature. Since the majority of them have transcended personal sorrows to weep for mankind, one may say Liu È believes with Keats that none are true poets
But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

Strong weeping, then, distinguishes the poet of impersonal sorrow from the "dreamer tribe" who, while capable of weak weeping, feel nothing of the "giant agony of the world."

Of the strong weepers instanced, Liu Ê bears the closest kinship to Tu Fu, and it is a measure of the novelist's greatness that he stands comparison with the poet-sage without at all being dwarfed. He is as much unexcelled among traditional Chinese novelists for his powers of description as is Tu Fu among poets. Profoundly concerned about their times, both assert an abiding faith in the Chinese tradition despite their pronounced melancholy and despondency. The poems of Tu Fu's middle period are as much a record of wandering amid scenes of sorrow as is The Travels of Lao Ts'an. With all their indignation against cruelty and injustice, both authors show a passionate love for landscape and a genial sense of humor.

My pointed reference to Tu Fu also serves to define Liu Ê's narrative method. Critics approaching the novel with their conventional expectations for a well-rounded plot or a series of well-rounded plots have inevitably found its structure wanting. But the novel, as its title says, is a record of travels, and the author appears far more indebted to nature poets and familiar essayists than to traditional novelists in his concern for the unique moment, the unique experience. The Travels of Lao Ts'an has captured a sense of felt life because it has fully lived up to its title as a third-person journal of the hero's observations, meditations, conversations, and doings. (Even the prophetic section can be taken as the journal of Shen Tzu-p'ing.) In its relative unconcern with plot and in its delight in seemingly trivial or inconsequential events, this journal has far more in common with the modern lyrical novel than any traditional type of Chinese novel, and it is a pity that, just because a new generation of writers would soon seek guidance from Western fiction, Liu Ê's almost revolutionary achievement in transforming the old novel into a lyrical vehicle capable of dwelling lovingly over a character's innermost feelings and thoughts had never been given any recognition.

The Travels of Lao Ts'an is therefore not a satiric novel in the style of The Scholars 儒林外史. Except for minor scenes like the one in Chapter 4 where two would-be officials offer Lao Ts'an money to buy a post, there is very little satire in the sense of exposing someone to shame or ridicule. Nor is it by any means a castigatory novel (ch'ien-tse hsiao-shuo 諫責小說) in the company of Kuan-ch'ang hsien-hsing chi 堯舉營理記 (Bureaucracy Exposed) and Es'h-shih-nien mu-tu chih kuai-hsien-chuang 二十年目睹之怪現象 (Strange Things Seen in the Last Twenty Years), as Lu Hsün would have us believe. Liu Ê is not a know-it-all journalist who delights in exposé for its own sake. Each time someone tells Lao Ts'an of the misdeeds of an official, he is profoundly shocked, and this sense of shock and helpless
compassion provides the proper emotional response for the reader. Though the two principal evil officials in the book—Yu Hsien 玉賢 and Kang Pi 剛弼—are almost unbelievable in their cruelty, one does not get the impression that the author has caricatured them, as Li Pao-chia and Wu Wo-yao would certainly have. Rather, he maintains with all seriousness that Kang Pi is utterly “incorruptible” and that the equally unbrivable Yu Hsien is further distinguished by his “ability.” Nearly every critic has praised Liu Ė’s originality in exposing the so-called pure officials (清官 ch’ing-kuan), but what seems to be the case is that he extends his sympathy even to these sadists, tracing their cruelty as much to their well-meaning stupidity as to their evident pleasure in persecuting the defenseless and, at least in the case of Yu Hsien, their ruthless ambition to advance their own career.

As a new kind of novel in the form of a journal, then, The Travels of Lao Ts’an is weakest in the well-plotted last two chapters where the hero assumes the active role of a detective and then unpardonably disappears from view for several pages as his assistant Hsu Liang 許亮 goes about in disguise to suspected the villain Wu Erh-lang-tzu 吳二浪子. With the tremendous popularity of detective fiction in the late-Ch’ing period, Liu Ė’s flirtation with this type of story is understandable, but in adopting a conventional plot to wind up his novel, he has destroyed the unity of a journal so ably maintained in the earlier chapters.

The detective story also weakens the novel for the reason that the crime it uncovers is of a domestic and private character and has nothing to do with the theme of official injustice. The story of the Chia 賈 and Wei 魏 families has been of primary interest to us in providing an instance of Kang Pi’s shocking cruelty and stupidity. When Kang Pi is beaten, the story has served its main function. The climax of the novel occurs, therefore, at the moment in Chapters 16-17 when, trembling with rage over Kang Pi’s order to place Mrs. Chia (賈魏氏) under torture, Lao Ts’an pushes aside the crowd and walks to the center of the court, confronts the judge and challenges his right to shackles the enfeebled woman and her old father. Liu Ė himself is aware that the domestic crime is of no relevance to his theme and he resurrects all victims of poisoning so as to nullify the crime and conclude the novel on a happy note. Ts’ui-huan 翠環 and Ts’ui-hua 葉花, two prostitutes newly released from their bondage, also face a brighter future at the end.

In the journal proper we are shown the full range of the hero’s tastes, interests, and concerns. His concern with China is fully established in the first chapter where he successfully treats the patient Huang Jui-ho 黃瑞和 (an allegorical disguise for the Yellow River) and dreams of the leaking and foundering ship of China torn by dissension and mutiny, but at the same time he is a traveling doctor who delights in nature and music, keeps a few old books by his side, reads poetry and composes verses, and enjoys the company of the humble people on the road and at the inn. When he arrives in Tsinan, the capital of Shantung, in Chapter 2, therefore, he is at first primarily interested in its scenes and attractions (the
singing of the Fair Maid 白娘, for example), as a traveler should be, and it is by the shocking stories he hears that he is ineluctably drawn to the crimes of the officials and the sufferings of the innocent. But to the end Lao Ts'an remains a person of infinite curiosity and zest whose concern with China never completely eclipses, except in moments of anger or sorrowful meditation, his many-sided interests.

It is largely in attending to his hero's interests that the author is able to leaven his narrative with humor and laughter and maintain a rich sense of life with all its odd surprises and delightful contingencies. Earlier Chinese novelists are far more businesslike in attending to the plot and far less likely to develop a scene until it is fully brought to life. Even the author of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, with all his knack for staging a lively and seemingly inconsequential conversation, has not developed the possibilities of a scene as far as Liu È. From the moment Lao Ts'an meets Huang Jen-jui 黃人鳳 one evening in Chapter 12 until they go to sleep early next morning in Chapter 16, we have the vivid transcript in nearly forty pages of the conversations and doings of these two friends in the company of Ts'ui-hua and Ts'ui-huan, and this continuous scene records undoubtedly the longest night in traditional Chinese literature and, in terms of fictional art, the most triumphant. All four characters are alive; Huang Jen-jui, especially, emerges as possibly the most lovable opium-smoker in all Chinese fiction.

It is true that the retold stories of the flood and of the murder of the Chia family have contributed considerably to the length of the night scene. But these are by no means inset tales of complete narrative autonomy, and the first story, especially, is told in such a way as to involve the active participation of all four present. While it is the ostensible purpose of the evening party to inform us of the flood and the murder case, the author has surely seized the occasion to render that party in all its actuality, to disclose further facets of Lao Ts'an's character, and to establish the identity of his three companions for their intrinsic human interest. Huang Jen-jui's repeated procrastination until he is finally ready to tell his story of the murder is typical of the author's narrative art: had he told the story immediately after the dinner as he promised to do, the party would have been soon over and we would have had no opportunity to know its principals so intimately.

Right after the dinner, Lao Ts'an complies with Huang Jen-jui's request for a new poem. He can do so because he has been composing in his head ever since he saw the frozen Yellow River the day before. The poem goes:

The earth cracks; the north wind howls;
An ice sheet covers the river below.
Ice behind pursues the ice before,
Piling up and pressing down.
The river bend jams solid;
It forms a jagged silver bridge.
The homeward-bound [sighs] long sighs,
The traveler vainly groans and plains.

Only a narrow strip of water,
But a canopied carriage cannot cross;
An elegant feast with girls and music
Makes a riot of the bitter night.13

This is an unexceptional poem in the old style of the pre-T'ang poets, though the original reads much better than the translation. But just as on an earlier occasion Lao Ts'an writes a poem to vent his anger against Yü Hsien after hearing so many stories of his tyranny,13 on the present occasion, too, he composes one to still his agitation. It is customary for Chinese writers to preface a poem with a prose account of its genesis: a justifiable procedure since the poem is usually too brief to provide the necessary biographical information for its full enjoyment. In that respect, nearly the entire twelfth chapter up to the point when the hero takes up his brush to write on the wall can be viewed as a preface to the poem. But so richly poetic is the prose account that in comparison the poem itself appears a conventional distillation of feeling little suggestive of the unique experiences that have gone into its composition.

Lao Ts'an is detained in Tung-ch'ang-fu because he cannot cross the impassable Yellow River to reach Tsinan. The day before he meets with Huang Jen-jui, a very cold day, he walks about the embankment of the river to see if there are any available means of transportation. He is, however, so fascinated by the surging masses of ice in the river and by the men in boats breaking ice with wooden clubs that, soon after supper at the inn, he puts on a sheepskin gown and again goes to the embankment to enjoy the view. Enraptured by the moonlit scene, he recalls a couplet by Hsieh Ling-yün and becomes very pensive over the swift passage of time and the troubled state of Chinese affairs. The next morning he again goes to the riverbank to inquire about transportation. The river is frozen solid now, and on his way back to the inn he takes his time walking through the desolate streets of the city. Upon reaching his room, no doubt unconsciously prompted by his earlier recall of Hsieh Ling-yün's lines, he reads a newly edited anthology of pre-T'ang poetry and compares it with earlier such anthologies. He then idles for a while at the door of the inn and a servant sent by Huang Jen-jui greets him. Huang, also stalled in town, soon invites him to have dinner with him, an extremely lively affair inadequately summarized in the last two lines of the poem.

The afternoon scene by the icebound Yellow River, which corresponds to the first six lines of the poem, is justly celebrated for its magnificent passages of description. The beautiful night scene with Lao Ts'an watching the bright moon
shining through the white clouds and upon the snow-capped mountains is also too well known to deserve quotation. More germane to my purpose is the meditative scene immediately following:

Faced with this landscape where the brightness of snow and moon met, Lao Ts'an recalled the two lines of Hsieh Ling-yün's poem:

Clear moon lights up snow drifts;
North wind strong and doleful.

If you haven't experienced the bitter cold of the north, you cannot know how well chosen the word "doleful" is, in the line: "North wind strong and doleful." By this time the moonlight was making the whole earth bright. Lao Ts'an looked up. Not one star appeared in the sky except for the seven stars of the Dipper which could be seen clearly, gleaming and twinkling like several pale points. The Dipper was resting slantwise on the west side of the "Imperial Enclosure," the handle on top, the bowl below. He thought to himself, "Months and years pass like a stream; the eye sees the handle of the Dipper pointing to the east again; another year is added to man's life. So year after year rolls along blindly. Where is an end to be found?" Then, remembering the words of the Book of Odes,

In the North there is a Dipper
But it cannot scoop wine or sauce,

he mused, "Now indeed is a time when many things are happening to our country; the nobles and officials are only afraid of bringing punishment on themselves; they think it is better to do nothing than to risk doing something, and therefore everything is allowed to go to ruin. What will the final result be? If this is the state of the country how can an honest man devote himself to his family?" When he reached this point in his thinking, unconsciously the tears began to trickle down his face, and he had no heart left for the enjoyment of the scenery. He went slowly back to his inn. As he walked along, he felt that there was something sticking to his face. He touched it with his hand and felt on each cheek a strip of smooth ice. At first he couldn't understand it. Then he understood and smiled to himself. The tears he had just shed had immediately frozen solid in the cold air. There must have been many other "frozen pearls" on the ground. He returned to his inn feeling very melancholy and immediately went to bed.
This is one of those passages which, while attracting far less attention than the elaborate descriptive passages, indicate Liu Ė's sure artistry as a lyrical novelist. If the mental condition of the hero as described here is eventually reduced to a couplet emotionally colorless ("The homeward-bound [sighs] long sighs, / The traveler vainly groans and plains"), the prose passage follows with fidelity the workings of the hero's consciousness as it juxtaposes freshly received impressions with lines of poetry suddenly retrieved from memory and reverts to melancholy thoughts in contemplation of the signs in the sky. The experience depicted here is of course nothing unusual: any serious-minded Chinese scholar well read in poetry and concerned about his times could have such thoughts while pacing under a bright moon. But whereas such poignant moments of rumination are frequently caught in Chinese verse (Tu Fu comes prominently to mind), so alien was the concept of the subjective hero to the tradition of Chinese fiction that it was nothing short of extraordinary for Liu Ė to grope toward the stream-of-consciousness technique not only here but in many equally remarkable passages as well.

The quoted passage is of further interest in the light of the author's stated intention to equate his book with the kind of strong weeping that "does not take the form of tears." In a novel concerned with human suffering tears are of course unavoidable: one especially remembers Mrs. Yū Hsüeh-li 尹學理 crying her eyes out in front of her husband's corpse before slitting her own throat to join him in death; Ts'ui-huan restraining her tears as she begins to tell her life story before Lao Ts'an and Huang Jen-jui and at the end breaking into a wail over their promise of help; and Mrs. Chia sobbing plaintively over the impossible task of supplying her torturer with the name of her non-existent paramour. These women are all strong weepers who could cause "the city wall to collapse" if Heaven had listened to their cries. Even the street urchin knocked over by an official's chair bearer in Chapter 2 is a strong weeper since in a just society the latter would be more careful and considerate. If the accident was unavoidable, the chair bearer or, better still, the official inside the sedan chair would have consoled the boy and made proper apologies to his mother. As it is, she has no other recourse than to mutter imprecations and drag the crying boy home.

Lao Ts'an does not cry as befits a hero trying his best to help the sick and persecuted in the guise of a doctor and a knight-errant without arms. But on a few occasions tears well up in his eyes as he contemplates the atrocity of official injustice or the future of his country, just as once when he is seized with the desire to kill Yū Hsien his hair bristles in anger. But Lao Ts'an's usual restraint in giving way to his sorrow or indignation speaks for a deeper disquiet over the futility of individual action when "the game of chess is finished." In the present instance tears again trickle down his cheeks, but it is only moments later when they have turned into ice that he becomes aware of their presence. And he good-humoredly uses a cliché ("frozen pearls") to describe those uselessly spilled on
the ground. His ironic self-awareness has not only visualized the cold but averted the threat of sentimentality that could have obscured the impersonal character of his profound sorrow. His kind of weeping can indeed find no satisfactory outlet in tears.

For, despite the happy events that temporarily conclude his journey, the questions that have prompted Lao Ts'an to shed tears during his evening walk remain unanswered in the main portion of the novel. With all his kindness and chivalry, he is by no means a mighty swordsman who provides the reader with the vicarious thrill that justice is indeed done once the wrongdoers are punished. Even if Lao Ts'an rectifies all cases of injustice that come his way, he is aware of the numberless wrongs perpetrated every day without his knowledge,18 and, beyond that, the national situation in general about which he can do nothing. Though his knowledge of flood control promises his greater usefulness in the future, within the novel itself, one may even ask, what has Lao Ts'an done in the way of counteracting tyranny and relieving suffering? He takes Ts'ui-huan as a concubine and arranges for Ts'ui-hua's future as Huang Jen-jui's secondary wife. He writes a letter to Governor Chang Yao 蒲耀 (Chuang Yao 莊耀, in some editions) which causes the latter to relieve Kang Pi of his special assignment to preside over the murder case and thus obtain justice for Mrs. Chia and her father. But an earlier letter he wrote to Governor Chang concerning the misdeeds of Yü Hsien gets no results at all. In Chapter 19 he has an interview with the Governor:

The Governor said, "Until I read your letter, I had no idea that Prefect Yü was so ruthless. I am indeed to blame. I shall certainly have to do something about it. But at the moment I dare not 'recommend a man and then cashier him'; it would appear disrespectful to the Emperor." Lao Ts'an said, "'To save the people is to serve the King.' It seems to me that this principle is also sound." The Governor made no reply to this. They continued chatting for about half an hour, and then the Governor raised his teacup and Lao Ts'an took his leave.19

For with all his independence of mind and action, Lao Ts'an can exert his influence in Shantung mainly because officials know that Governor Chang esteems him highly and wishes to employ him. Without the Governor's backing, a traveling doctor without an academic degree could not have challenged Kang Pi at court. But ironically, the governor, though a conscientious administrator of evident good will, has misplaced his confidence in Yü Hsien and Kang Pi as two of his ablest subordinates, and even when convinced of the former's harshness, he is too much of a career bureaucrat to want to cashier him and thereby earn the Emperor's displeasure over his contradictory recommendations. And with even less excuse, he has earlier adopted a scholar's plan to let the Yellow River flood over its dikes,
thus causing the death of several hundred thousand people. Ts'ui-hua, a direct victim, tells of his reluctant consent to this most inhumane plan: "Governor [Chang] could do nothing. He nodded his head, heaved a sigh, and I have heard he shed a few tears." These, too, are perhaps strong tears of commiseration, but his uneasy conscience on this momentous occasion as on the later occasion when he declines to answer Lao Ts'an's reproach seems to say that it is unavoidable for a man of his importance to make or agree to wrong decisions. For all its chivalrous fervor, *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* is a novel grounded in political reality: the success the hero enjoys in delivering a few individuals from the clutches of injustice and misery only renders the more poignant the plight of multitudes oppressed by bad officials and victimized by misguided policies.

II

*The Travels of Lao Ts'an* is a political novel especially in its explicit and implicit concern with the Boxer Incident. As is well known, Liu Ė's personal fate is tragically involved in the events of 1900. In the fall of that year, he went from Shanghai to Peking and successfully negotiated through his Russian friends for the purchase of large quantities of rice stored in the Imperial Granary then under the control of the Russian troops. He distributed this rice at a nominal price to the hungry in the city, and yet for this philanthropic deed he was accused of the treasonous crime of misappropriating Imperial property by his enemies, prominently Yüan Shih-k'ai. In 1908 Liu Ė was banished to Sinkiang partly for this crime and he died in Tihwa the next year at the age of fifty-three. At the time he warmed to the idea of writing a novel for *Illustrated Fiction* 錦圖小話 (*Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo*), the thought must have occurred to him to draw upon his personal experiences during the siege of Peking since novels about Boxers were then very popular. (Liu Ė turned novelist to provide a source of income for his friend Lien Meng-ch'ing 銀夢青, a victim of government persecution then living in hiding in Shanghai. A few issues before *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* appeared, *Illustrated Fiction* had already begun serializing Lien's own novel, *The Words of Neighboring Women* 鄰女語 (*Lin-nü yü*), which featured a hero remarkably suggestive of Liu Ė in undertaking a northward journey to the occupied capital.) But even though Liu Ė turned to an earlier period of his life for inspiration probably because the other topic was too difficult to manage, still he contrived by various devices to include in his novel his concern with the Boxer catastrophe.

Judging by biographical evidence, the novelist must have drawn heavily upon his memories of 1890, the year when he began serving in Shantung as one of Chang Yao's advisers on flood control. Governor Chang died in August, 1891, and since the novel places Lao Ts'an's meetings with him in the fall and winter season, they could have happened only in 1890. Liu Ė, then thirty-four years (sui) old,
agrees in age with Lao Ts'an ("some years above thirty"—fu-kuo san-shih-to-su
不過三十多歲). The Manchu Yü-hsien 穆賢 was then prefect of Ts'ao-chou-fu (as is
his counterpart Yü Hsien), though he was not officially confirmed in his post until
1891.24

Kang Pi, however, cannot be similarly placed among the author's fellow officials
in Shantung if he is to be taken as a disguise for the Manchu Kang-i 剛毅. No
scholars, however, have challenged this hypothesis since Liu Ta-shen 劉大紳, the
novelist's son, proposed it in 1940, and there can be little doubt that Liu Ė intended
to equate the two not only because their rhyming names contain the same character
kang but because, among his bad attributes noted by novelists and popular historians
of his time, Kang-i was indeed known for his perverse obstinacy (kang-pi 剛愎).25
But from 1888 to 1892 he was governor of Kiangsu and could not have served
under Chang Yao in Shantung.26 Though Kang-i could have perpetrated injustice
in the manner suggested in the novel during his earlier years as a provincial
official, in the light of our present knowledge it is safer to maintain that Liu Ė
had quite arbitrarily assigned him his unflattering role as a judge since the murder
story involving the Chia and Wei families is by design fictitious. Kang-i, after
all, once accused Liu Ė of treason; there would seem to be far greater personal
cause for the novelist to portray him in a bad light than is the case with Yü-
hsien.27

But principally, Liu Ė must have singled out these two as prime symbols of
cruel and blundering government not so much to settle old scores or denounce
their earlier tyranny, as has been generally emphasized, as to stress their eventual
crime of inciting and supporting a fanatic movement of grave national consequence.
As governor of Shantung (1899), Yü-hsien was the first official of his importance
to abet the antiforeign activities of the Boxers and legitimize their status, and as
governor of Shansi (1900), he killed countless Chinese Christians, lured all foreign
missionaries in his province to come to the capital Taiyuan with their families,
and personally supervised their massacre.28 As Grand Councilor and Associate
Grand Secretary, Kang-i was perhaps the most fervent supporter of the Boxer
cause among the high ministers enjoying the confidence of Empress Dowager
Hsiao-ch'ın 孝欽, and at the time it was generally believed that it was mainly upon
his recommendation that she opened the gates of Peking to the Boxers to usher
in a reign of unbelievable terror.29 Both Kang-i and Yü-hsien were listed by
the Allied Powers among the chief war criminals, and certainly next to Prince
Tuan 瑞王, they were most instrumental in inciting the Boxer uprising. Kang-i
died of an illness (brought about by his rage and mortification over the Boxer
fiasco, if popular historians are to be believed) while accompanying the Imperial
court to Sian, but he was posthumously deprived of his titles and honors to
appease the Allied Powers.30 Yü-hsien, on his way to Sinkiang to serve his
sentence of exile, was decapitated in Lanchow after the Empress Dowager had
submitted to the Allies' demand for his death. He faced his end, however, with impressive dignity.\textsuperscript{31}

Soon after the Imperial court returned to Peking in 1901, popular writers began to turn out largely factual accounts (in the form of novels and ballads) of the national catastrophe as well as stories told against the background of the Boxer Incident.\textsuperscript{32} Whatever their attitude toward the foreign powers, all these writers held the Boxers in the utmost contempt, and since they could not attack the Empress Dowager, who was still alive and powerful, they denounced her principal advisers, now dead or disgraced, with all the greater vehemence. Prince Tuan, Kang-i, and Yü-hsien appear especially infamous in such works as Li Pao-chia's ballad, Kung-tzu kuo-pien t'an-tzu 迦嫂國變彈詞. Liu Ė, however, did not join the chorus of direct denunciation, choosing rather to give us revealing glimpses of Yü-hsien and Kang-i in their pre-Boxer days. But no contemporary readers could have failed to grasp the nature of his indictment, especially in view of his strong condemnation of the Boxers in the prophetic section. By the 1920's, however, most of this anti-Boxer literature was forgotten, and even leading scholars like Hu Shih would read the novel out of its historical context, stressing its critique of the pure officials but dismissing its diatribe against the Boxers and revolutionaries as at best an interesting appendage unrelated to the main theme.\textsuperscript{33} However, even in the main narrative, Liu Ė has hinted at the vital connections between official tyranny and national calamity, as in Lao Ts'an's prophetic comment on Yü Hsien:

But just because he is overanxious to be an official, or rather hankers after being a great official, he acts as he does, wounding heaven and damaging all principles of justice. And with so great a reputation as an administrator I fear that within a few years he will become provincial governor. The greater the official position such a man holds, the greater the harm he will do. If he controls a prefecture, then a prefecture suffers; if he governs a province, then a province is maimed; if he [administrates (ts'ai 宰) the affairs of] the Empire, then the Empire dies!\textsuperscript{34}

Yü-hsien never rose above the rank of a governor, but both Kang-i and Prince Tuan were in a position to guide the destiny of the Empire and hasten its death. Though the post of prime minister (ts'ai-hsiang 宰相) had long been abolished, it was the practice of some popular writers occasionally to refer to Kang-i as Kang hsiang-kuo 相國, in deference to his high position at court.\textsuperscript{35}

The thesis that China is doomed, endorsed in the preface and dramatized in the allegorical dream of Chapter 1, is therefore also confirmed by the behavior of the bad officials in the novel. But at the same time it is the author's refusal to accept this thesis that dictates his insertion of the philosophic and prophetic interlude. Though his many ventures as a businessman and industrial entrepreneur
exemplified his great admiration for the West (his hero tries to offer Western nautical instruments to save the ship of China), Liu É was of the generation of late-Ch'ing intellectuals which, quite unlike the succeeding generation of Lu Hsün and Ch'ên Tu-hsiu, was incapable of repudiating the Chinese tradition. In a way, Liu É weeps for China not only because of his strong attachment to its humble people and to its mountains and waters which are so lovingly depicted in the novel but because of his unswerving commitment to its intellectual and cultural heritage. In his early twenties he had studied under Li P'ing-shan 李平山 (hao Lung-ch'uan 龍川), an exponent of the so-called T'ai-ku 太谷 school which stressed the essential identity of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in their moral aspect. Liu É valued this teaching highly and maintained a lifelong friendship with his fellow disciples, among them Huang Kuei-ch'ün 黃ギ章. Liu Ta-shen maintains that the Yellow Dragon was modeled after this friend, presumably because their names contain the same character huang. But since we know nothing of the Yellow Dragon's past history except for a series of six cryptic poems which, again on the authority of Liu Ta-shen, tell among other things of Liu É's spiritual enlightenment under the guidance of Li P'ing-shan, we are certainly justified in regarding this character as a portrait of the author's ideal self, whose prophetic faith in the future of Chinese culture opposes and transcends the despondency of his other self, Lao Ts'an the passionate weeper.

The sketchy biographies of the two characters, while drawing upon the author's personal experiences, are accordingly different. While the disillusioned Lao Ts'an once harbored the ambition to serve his country and made friends with a select group interested in military and practical studies, the Yellow Dragon appears in his autobiographical poems primarily as a seeker of truth who has found abiding peace in the wisdom of the T'ai-ku school. Lao Ts'an refuses to be a high-minded recluse though he prefers to render useful service under the anonymous mask of a traveling doctor rather than under an official appointment; the Yellow Dragon, who clearly foresees the portents of the times, remains a recluse because he is able to place them in an optimistic scheme of Chinese history and cosmic struggle. To maintain the continuity of Lao Ts'an's travels, as I have earlier suggested, the author could have easily dispensed with the character Shen Tzu-p'ing and assigned his hero the journey to the Peach Blossom Mountain. But he could not do so because he did not want a confrontation of the two aspects of his self that are in unreconciled conflict. A more naive person without the mature experience of Lao Ts'an will be far more receptive to the discourses of the Yellow Dragon and Yü-ku.

Yü-ku appears to be the author's central intellectual spokesman whose analysis of the Chinese situation lends support at once to Lao Ts'an's gloom and the Yellow Dragon's optimism. What she expounds before Shen Tzu-p'ing is the main tenet of the T'ai-ku school that the three teachings are alike in "encouraging man to be
good, leading man to be disinterested [大公 ta-kung].” She speaks with a clearly Confucian emphasis, however, and accounts for the weakness of China during the last thousand years primarily in terms of moral intolerance as exemplified by Han Yu's unreasoned attack on Buddhism and Taoism and of the Neo-Confucian repression of natural impulses. The sadism of the bad officials, we may draw the legitimate inference, stems directly from this tradition of moral inflexibility and obsessive concern with evil. To be disinterested is to be unselfish, and to be good is to be natural and human in the pristine Confucian fashion. Yu-ku herself exemplifies this type of goodness that moves in natural accord with Confucian li. In the sequel to the novel Liu Î depicts in the nun I-yûn 逸雲 the even more rarefied condition of Buddhist grace that equates human freedom with natural transcendence (as versus Neo-Confucian repression) of desire.40

Few Chinese readers outside the mainland would quarrel with Yu-ku's moral philosophy, which anticipates to a remarkable extent the anti-puritan thought of such influential modern thinkers as Hu Shih, Chou Tso-jen, and Lin Yutang. It is with the Yellow Dragon's esoteric learning and mystical speculations, his discredited predictions and unjustified alarm over the “southern revolutionaries” that many Chinese feel uncomfortable or out of sympathy. (For readers in Communist China, of course, his diatribe against the Boxers is the author's major offense.) The southern revolutionaries, after all, overthrew the Manchu dynasty and founded the Republic, and no one in this scientific age should build a cosmic philosophy upon Indic mythology and the Book of Changes and cite a hexagram to prove the dangers of revolution. But even those who feel superior to the Yellow Dragon should at least appreciate the moral imagination that has compelled the author to adopt the pose of a prophet not merely to justify his fears for the immediate future of China but to affirm its continuing cultural vitality. Thus, according to the Yellow Dragon, the troubles brewed by the revolutionaries will culminate in the political reforms of the year chia-yin (1914):

After Chia-Yin will be a time of cultural florescence, but although brilliant to look upon, still it will not equal the development of other countries. Chia-Tzu [1924] will be a time of a real independent cultural harvest. After that the introduction of new culture from Europe will revivify our ancient culture of the Three Rulers and Five Emperors, and very rapidly we shall achieve a universal culture. But these things are still far off, not less than thirty or fifty years.41

It has been the fate of all Western apocalyptic thinkers to have their predictions proved wrong by history.42 But prophecy, nevertheless, is a mode of utterance necessary to certain writers concerned with political or eschatological problems. In English literature Blake and Yeats are prominent examples of a poet compelled
to construct a private system of myth or philosophy in order to clarify his vision and ensure his gift of prophecy. Cleanth Brooks has finely stated the poetic function of *A Vision*: "The system, to put it concisely, allows Yeats to see the world as a great drama, predictable in its larger aspects (so that the poet is not lost in a welter of confusion), but in a pattern which allows for the complexity of experience and the apparent contradictions of experience (so that the poet is not tempted to oversimplify)." Precisely the same can be said of the Yellow Dragon's system, which is actually far more in accord with traditional Chinese thinking than is Yeats' system with traditional Western thinking. The Yellow Dragon's contemplation of the hexagram *ke* 卩 (revolution) as an unstable mixture of water (marsh) and fire, as the explosive situation of two women married to the same person living together, would have delighted Yeats. And in castigating the Boxers and revolutionaries, Liu È should not be looked upon as a Manchu loyalist sentimentally attached to a doomed cause; he is defending civilization, and not merely Chinese civilization, against the forces of unreason and anarchy. Few would disagree with his diagnosis of the Boxer madness as barbaric antiforeignism rooted in a superstitious regard for gods and spirits, and to some extent he is certainly justified in seeing the southern revolutionaries as atheists determined to desecrate ancestor worship and destroy the family system. The resurgence of militant antiforeignism and antitraditionalism in Communist China especially since the Proletarian Cultural Revolution would seem to indicate that, though Liu È had overestimated the destructiveness of the actually moderate revolutionaries around Dr. Sun Yat-sen, whose respect for Confucian culture equaled his own, his fear of the eventuality of a violent revolution undermining the very existence of civilization was not unfounded.

Whatever our reactions to the pronouncements of the Yellow Dragon, Liu È has provided for the inhabitants of the Peach Blossom Mountain an idyllic environment of freedom and peace which contrasts powerfully with the prevalence of injustice and suffering in the rest of the novel. (In the sequel even the nunnery on Mount T'ai is not free from the molestations of bullies enjoying the backing of officials.) Yü-kù, the Yellow Dragon, and their relatives and friends have by no means escaped the vexations of the human condition and the inconveniences of their mountain retreat: the son of Yü-kù's elder sister suffers from ailments incidental to childhood and the crude oil used for lamps cannot compare with kerosene. But having at least transcended the Neo-Confucian obsession with evil, they converse with intelligence and candor and express their joy in life by playing music. The recital by the Yellow Dragon and Yü-kù, each playing a different instrument to a different score and yet producing a richer harmony than that provided by the Chinese custom of having all performers following the same score, is impressively described, and so is their subsequent contrapuntal session with the Sang 槿 sisters participating, though the dazzling account of the Fair Maid's singing in Chapter 2 has deservedly earned higher praise. But, philosophically, the later
sessions are more indicative of spontaneous joy and creativity since the Fair Maid, no matter how exceptional, is a professional entertaining a commercial audience.

The Peach Blossom Mountain also echoes with the roaring of tigers and the howling of wolves. To Yü-ku and the Yellow Dragon these wild animals are as entitled to their “freedom of speech” as they, and a tiger’s roar, though it would paralyze with fear a stranger to the region like Shen Tzu-p’ing, is as natural and pleasing as the “Melody of Sea Water and Heavenly Wind” they will later improvise for their guest. But if in the idyllic world of Taoist freedom the tiger is a proud symbol of Blakean energy, in the human world below it remains the traditional Chinese synonym for “harsh government.” Agitated by the tyranny of Yü Hsien, Lao Ts’an asks the people in the street about his administration:

All with one voice said it was good, but all wore a look of gray misery; unconsciously he nodded his head as he realized that the ancient writer’s saying, “Harsh government is fiercer than a tiger,” is absolutely true.⁴⁵

Even at the mountain retreat, with all their natural sympathy for the tiger in its state of freedom, the inhabitants still regard it as a pejorative symbol once they touch the topic of politics. Thus while sorry for the tiger that has left the mountain to forfeit its freedom in the human world, the Yellow Dragon can at the same time jokingly compare it to a court official under a cloud who can only go home “to vent his feelings on his wife and children.”⁴⁶ Not unexpectedly, therefore, the tiger appears as a powerful symbol in the four quatrains of prophetic verse concerning the Boxer Indicent which Shen Tzu-p’ing reads at Yü-ku’s home. These quatrains are titled “The Riddle of the Silver Rat 銀鼠詭”:

First Clue:
Eastern mountain, suckling tiger,
Lies in wait atmenand hu:
A year from now devours the roebuck,
Sorrow comes to Ch’i and Lu.

Second Clue:
Dry bones in wolfish disorder,
Suckling tiger unappeased;
Flies aloft to visit heaven,
[Where a standing swine rules.]

Third Clue:
Suckling tiger brindled over,
Tyrannizes Western Hill;
Father Adam's sons and grandsons,
Persecutes and wastes at will.

Fourth Clue:
Neighbors four are stirred to anger,
Heavenly house takes flight to west;
Violent death for swine and tiger,
Black-haired people live at rest.\(^{47}\)

Precisely because of its obscure symbolism, this riddle tracing the four stages of the Boxer Incident mainly through the career of the suckling tiger, i.e., a mother tiger which is the more ferocious in guarding its brood,\(^{48}\) conveys powerfully the Yeatsian mode of prophetic indigation. But when one realizes that the suckling tiger represents Yü-hsien and the standing swine Kang-i,\(^{19}\) then the poem's crucial relevance to the novel as a whole becomes crystal clear. While Lao Ts'\(\bar{a}\)n himself is involved in the earlier misdeeds of these beasts, the poem summarizes their later career and foretells their death. The prophetic section of the book therefore places the hero's concern with injustice and suffering in a larger historical and political perspective: the persecution of the innocent by Yü-hsien and Kang-i confirms their later crime of precipitating a national calamity. The author's complex responses to that event, ranging from flat despair for the country's future to defiant hope for its cultural renascence, in large part account for the rich emotional appeal and structural peculiarity of *The Travels of Lao Ts'\(\bar{a}\)n*, a lyrical novel steeped in politics.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

Ch'\(\text{\'u}\)-erh-chi: *Lao-ts'\(\bar{a}\)n\(\text{\'u}\)-chi ch'\(\text{\'u}\)-erh-chi chi-ch'i yen-chiu* 老銘遊記初集及其研究 (Taipei, Shih-chieh shu-chu, 1958)\(^{10}\)


T'an-tz'u: Li Pao-chia, *Keng-tzu kuo-pien t'an-tz'u* 庚子國變彙録


**A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Thirteen chapters (chüan) of *Lao-ts'\(\bar{a}\)n\(\text{\'u}\)-chi* were first serialized in *Hsiao-shiang Hsiao-shuo* (Shanghai, Commercial Press), Nos. 9–18. No. 9 is dated the first of the sixth month in the year *kuei-mao* (1903). No. 18 is undated, but since the magazine was a biweekly and if we presume that the undated issues (Nos. 13–18) were published on schedule, then No. 18 should have appeared on the fifteenth of the twelfth month (according to *Tzu-liao*, p. 93, January, 1904). These consecutively numbered chüan correspond to Chaps. 1–14 of the standard version except for the deletion of Chap. 11, which contains the Yellow Dragon's condemnation of the
Boxers and revolutionaries. The unauthorized removal of that chapter and the accompanying revision of chieu 10 and chieu 11 (Chap. 12) must have decided Liu E against serializing his novel in the magazine after Chap. 14. The editor Li Pao-chia (cf. Ah Ying, Wan-ch'ing hsiao-shuo shih 晚清小說史 [Rev. ed. Peking, Tso-chia ch'u-pan-she, 1955] p. 2) or his superiors at the Commercial Press must have suppressed Chap. 11 because of its unpalatable political content.

Liu Hou-tse 劉厚澤, the novelist’s grandson, has supplied in Tzu-liao, pp. 101-2, the interpolated text of Chaps. 10 and 12 as well as the commentary for Chap. 10 presumably penned by Li Pao-chia. However, since Tzu-liao is not available to scholars in some parts of the world, it may be useful to reprint this material exactly as it appeared in Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo (Liu Hou-tse has reproduced the text with modern punctuation and in the Communist-style abbreviated script). First, the concluding section of Chap. 10 and the commentary as found in No. 15 (“Lao-ts' an yu-chi,” chieu 10, pp. 5a-b—all the interpolated material in brackets):

子平問。是好是壞呢。答自然是壞。[又問] 壯年的是何等樣人。黃龍道。叫做北帝廟前趙
佛人家外邊 道光年間地獄門開 至今未封 所以顏。一批批來的 就是南邊北閥同開 殘亂了”。好寒作
第二批出來的 就在時光之間永人 趙現在總要發作了 北拳之害 如乾旱著火 一烘即熾 南漢之害
如流注疾 湧流到那裏 倒到那裏 結之所致天下亂 是他們之主。主南者詭時在地獄。誰去見過的呢。然
然而那些兵痞 可以知道 定是地獄裏面的材料了。子平聴了。點點頭。黃龍子道。夜已深了。請安息罷。我們回去罷。子平遂到門口。看信下了台階。從廂房出去。自己也就回來。

到下邊榻上。翻開了幾本書。多半是武世之作。正在翻書的時候。忽然又聽得一聲
如霹靂巨聲。從空而落。 窗時大風滿屋。眼睛都睁不開。直把子平嚇得心都呆了。正在冷汗
交流。驚疑不下一時。似乎覺得耳旁邊有人喚他。急忙睜眼一看。原來身子仍坐於石壁
之間。喚他的不是別人。卻正是──箇軍夫。軍夫告訴他廟已過去。我們怕虎再來。一擊沒
敢動彈。如今天已大亮。料想老虎不會再來。請你老醒醒。好起來趕路。此處離集亦不遠了。
子平聴了軍夫之言。凝神一想。原來是黃龍（說）快點。同思冥想。歷歷如在。幸他平日是
箇極通達的人。從不相信趙家神仙之事。曾自言自語道。此處四面亂山。看來未曾家。至於夢
中所見的事。所謂之話。尤多不實之談。細想來生平從不涉於此種事。何以今日此種
事。想是為虎作鬼。若不親見如此。仔細想來。甚覺好笑。是時軍夫同已將獵首配好。子平看帶來的人。並無
一箇虎豎虎狗。便亦欣賞。急忙討了些帶來的乾糧。掙扎了（扎）着起來趕路。不知子平此去。究
竟會見到劉同休否。且聽下回分解。

[從第八回問起。至此回閱止。所符各節。極濃密絕麗之觀。忽然以一夢了之。使世人再
想於神仙之事。及一切不經之說。此是作者一片苦心。世人昏昏。迷信不悟。箇無異於日
在夢中。茲仍借子平口中。自行道破。順便大大做一話。]

The altered opening for Chap. 12 (No. 16, “Lao-ts' an yu-chi,” chieu 11, p. 1a) is

quite brief:

[話說子平夢醒之後。立刻騎了腳。急忙趕路。雖然是晴天。北方寒地。路上已仍不錯路。不多
一時已進入山集了。] 看那集上。人煙稠密。……

In 1904 the twenty chapters of Lao-ts'an were serialized in the Tientsin newspaper, jih-jih Hsins-ven 日日新聞. Commenting on a bound volume of the first ten chapters in his possession which consists entirely of clippings from that newspaper, Ah Ying notes in 1940 that the chapter headings for these chapters are identical with those in the Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo version and that the only
thing new in his volume is the author's preface (自敘). However, his brief article
(reprinted in Ch’u-erh-chi, pp. 267–69) gives no dates for these serialized chapters nor compares them for possible textual discrepancies with their counterparts in either Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo or the more recent editions. Liu Hou-tse has informed us that the Jih-jih hsien-wen she 日日新聞社 subsequently ran off the original plates and issued the novel as a two-volume book (cf. Tzu-liao, p. 95). This undated edition must have preceded the two-volume edition put out by Shen-chou jih-pao kuan 神州日報館 (Shanghai, 1907). For a description of the latter, see Ah Ying’s article in Ch’u-erh-chi.

Liu È wrote at least the bulk of the novel in Shanghai during 1903. According to Liu Ta-shen, “Kuan-yü Lao-ts’an yu-chi 關於 ‘老殘遊記’” (first published in 1940; reprinted in Ch’u-erh-chi and with additional notes by his son Liu Hou-tse in Tzu-liao), Liu È wrote the last part of his novel (Chaps. 15–20?) in 1904 after he had moved to Peking and Tientsin. But since Liu Ta-shen has been proved wrong in several important instances, one cannot rule out the possibility that the twenty-chapter ch‘u-pien was completed in 1903.

Liu È notes in his diary that he had completed sixteen chapters of erh-pien by the fifth of the tenth month in the year i-ssu (1905)—Tzu-liao, p. 94. Liu Ta-shen maintains with questionable authority that only fourteen of these were serialized in Jih-jih Hsien-wen. Liu Hou-tse rather doubts his father’s statement that the erh-pien was still being serialized in that paper in the early months of 1907 since its serialization could have started in 1905—Tzu-liao, p. 94. Liu È also started a wai-pien 外編, most probably in 1906, though it is doubtful whether he wrote more than the fragment of ch‘uan 1 now reprinted in Tzu-liao, pp. 43–52.

In 1934 Lin Yutang obtained the permission of Liu Ta-chün 劉大鈞, the novelist’s nephew, to serialize the first four chapters of the erh-pien or erh-chi 二集 in his magazine Jen-chien-shih 人間世; in the next year the first six chapters of the sequel were published in book form (Shanghai, Liang-yu t‘u-shu kung-ssu) with a preface by Lin. Chaps. 7–9 are now available in Tzu-liao, pp. 13–52. But unless the relevant numbers of Jih-jih Hsien-wen come to light, there is now little hope of recovering the other supplementary chapters. However, since the new material reprinted in Tzu-liao is decidedly inferior, Liu È’s fame as a novelist must rest upon the ch‘u-pien and the first six chapters of its sequel.

Since I have not seen the Jih-jih Hsien-wen version of the novel nor its earliest editions, it would be rash of me to make a textual study of the editions generally available. However, I have seen the chapters serialized in Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo (available in the East Asian Library, Columbia University), and to examine the latter editions in the light of this earliest version should be of interest to scholars. For years the most prestigious modern edition was that prepared by Wang Yuan-fang 汪原放 and Hu Shih (Shanghai, Ya-tung t‘u-shu-kuan, 1925), which served as the text for Harold Shadick’s translation. However, by Wang’s own admission, the editors had only seen the pocket edition of Lao-ts’an published by the Commercial Press in 1913 and subsequent popular editions put out by other firms; they had not seen the Commercial Press large-character edition of 1912 or the two earliest editions I have mentioned, and they had made no attempt to obtain the relevant issues of Jih-jih Hsien-wen and Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo (a complete run of the latter should then be easily available). While Hu Shih was alert in detecting misprints in the editions at his disposal, he made emendations without consulting the earliest versions, thereby introducing new errors into the text. In “Chiao-tu hou-chi 校讀後記”, p. 2, Wang Yuan-fang cites two cases of emendation to prove Hu Shih’s editorial brilliance; he has changed 上 to read 止 in the passage 上船進
去（Chap. 2）and inserted 河 in the passage 到此即為河 (Chap. 12). But the *Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo* version tells us that 上 should have been 下 and that the second passage should have read 到此即為河.

The edition prepared by Ch’en Hsiang-ho 陳翔鴻 with ample explanatory notes by Tai Hung-sen 戴鴻森, which has restored the original readings in both instances, is decidedly to be preferred. Judging by the format and typography of its Hong Kong reprint (Commercial Press, 1958), it must have been originally published in Communist China and most probably by the Commercial Press there. Ch’en Hsiang-ho, however, provides no information as to how he arrived at his text. The more recent edition edited and punctuated by Chao Ts’ung 趙聰 (Hong Kong, Yu-lien t’u-shu kung-ssu, 1963) is almost totally identical in text with that edition except that its paragraphs are longer. Both editions contain the first six chapters of the sequel.

The most popular edition in Taiwan has been the aforementioned Ch’u-erh-chi, which includes much useful material on the novel and its author. But it reprints only the first four chapters of the sequel and the text of the novel proper contains not only misprints but also emendations which are difficult to account for. Thus, whereas in all the other editions I have seen the first nineteen chapters end with the formula 且聽下回分解, the Shih-chieh shu-chü edition has substituted k’an 看 for t’ing 聆.

In all the more recent editions the influence of the Ya-tung text is still observable. In *Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo*, No. 11, Lao Tung 老董 begins Chap. 5 with a continuation of his tragic story of the Yü family:

可不是呢。那吳舉人到府衙門。請見的時候。他女兒也跟到衙門口。

The corresponding passage in the Ya-tung text reads, however:

可不是呢！那吳舉人到府衙門請見的時候。他女兒（子學體的媳婦）也跟到衙門口，...  

The Shih-chieh shu-chü edition has shortened the first paragraph of Chap. 5, but it agrees with the Ch’en Hsiang-ho edition in adopting the Ya-tung text for this particular passage, but substituting dashes for the parenthesis:

...他女兒—子學體的媳婦—也跟到衙門口，...

The Yu-lien text unaccountably omits the second dash. I strongly suspect that the phrase 子學體的媳婦 was inserted by Hu Shih for the convenience of the reader, forgetting that in the latter part of Chap. 4 (*Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo*, No. 11) Lao Tung has already identified Yü Hsüeh-li’s wife as Wu’s daughter:

這裏子學體的媳婦。是城裏吳舉人的姑娘。

Lao Tung speaks here with a kind of colloquial grace conspicuously absent from his later speech as emended by Hu Shih. Since Liu É did not use modern punctuation marks like the dash or parenthesis, it would have never occurred to him to add the superfluous phrase 子學體的媳婦 even if he had wanted to revise Chap. 5 for publication in *jih-jih Hsia-wen*. He would have rewritten the passage with proper regard for the rhythm of colloquial speech.

None of the modern editions have retained the forms of certain characters as recorded in *Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo*. Thus they have uniformly substituted 個 for 個, and 狼 for 狼 (meaning “very”). Certain other characters less often seen in modern pai-hua writing have been arbitrarily replaced. Thus, in Chap. 8 of the *Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo* version, the frightened Shen Tzu-p’ing asks:

問道我們是死的活的哪
The modern editions have all changed the last particle to read 哪. Though I have not seen editions earlier than that prepared by Wang Yuan-fang and Hu Shih, I suspect that it was they who initiated these minor changes.

In the Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo version and its commentaries no disguise for Yü-hsien and Chang Yao has been attempted by substituting 玉 for 蕃 and 莊 for 番. Most probably, when submitting his novel for publication in Jih-jih Hsin-wen, Liu Ė had changed 蕃 to read 玉 while retaining the surname of Governor Chang. Wang Yuan-fang says of the editions he has consulted ("Chiao-tu hou-chi," p. 3):

(1) 莊官保有時作張官保，其實是一個人。這也是錯誤，毫無意義。這書只用莊官保一名。

The Shih-chieh shu-chü edition has followed the Ya-tung text in this respect, but the Ch'en Hsiang-ho and Yu-lien editions have restored Governor Chang's surname while keeping the form 玉賢.

NOTES

1. In Chinese Fiction: A Bibliography of Books and Articles in Chinese and English (Yale University, Far Eastern Publications, 1968), Tien-yi Li lists seventeen critical and scholarly entries for Lao-ts' an as against sixteen for Nieh-hai hua 孽海花, the late-Ch'ing novel next in popularity. However, there are three complete and abridged English translations of Lao-ts'an and one translation of the first six chapters of its sequel, whereas Nieh-hai hua has none. Lao-ts'an has also been translated into Russian, Czech, and Japanese. Cf. Tzu-liao, "前言," p. 1.

2. Hu Shih has set the fashion for this type of critical approach in "Lao-ts'an yu-chi hsü," reprinted in Ch'ü-ehr-chi and in Hu Shih wen-ts' an, III (Taipei, Yuan-tung t'u-shu kung-ssu, 1953). Harold Shadick follows this approach in his "Translator's Introduction" to LT.

3. LT. p. xxi.

4. In a sense, of course, nearly all Chinese historical novels have political significance insofar as they implicitly endorse a stable Confucian political order as the ideal. In calling Lao-ts'an a political novel, I have in mind mainly the kind of modern novel discussed in Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (New York, Horizon Press, 1957). See especially Chap. 1: "The Idea of the Political Novel."

5. LT. p. 2

6. LT. p. 2

7. The two lines of verse as well as the quoted phrases are from Keats' poem "The Fall of Hyperion."

8. In Chung-kuo hsiao-shuo shih-lüeh 中國小說史略, Lu Hsün discusses these three works along with Nieh-hai hua as four major works exemplifying the spirit of the castigatory novel in the last decade of the Ch'ing dynasty. Because of his immense prestige and of the many surveys of Chinese fiction patterned after his pioneering study, the term ch'ien-tse hsiao-shuo has acquired a currency which seems to me unfortunate, especially since it is Lu Hsün's contention that the castigatory novel is generically inferior to the satiric novel as exemplified by The Scholars. While the castigatory intent of Bureaucracy Exposed and Strange Things Seen in the Last Twenty Years is obvious the prominent attention accorded them by Lu Hsün and other literary historians actually does little justice to the careers of their authors as a whole. If Lu Hsün had
discussed Li Pao-chia's true masterpiece, *Wen-ming hsiao-shih* 文明小史, rather than the much cruder *Bureaucracy Exposed* and paid attention to other important works by Wu Wo-yao besides *Strange Things*, especially the grimly memorable *Chiu-ming ch'i-yüan* 九命奇冤, he would have given us a fuller idea of the creative vitality of the decade. But then he would have to redefine or abandon the term *ch'ien-te hsiao-shuo*.

9. Lao Ts'an acknowledges Yü Hsien's ability at the end of Chap. 6, and Huang Jen-jui refers to Kang Pi's incorruptibility in Chaps. 15-16. See also the conversation between Kang Pi and Pai Tzu-shou 白于壽 in Chap. 18 (*LT*, p. 205).

10. Liu Ė appended to Chap. 16 a comment on *ch'ing-kuan* which has been quoted by both Hu Shih and Lu Hsün in their respective studies of *Lao-ts'an*. Lu Hsün's partial quotation of this comment has been translated in Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, trs., *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1959), pp. 382–83:

> All men know that corrupt officials are bad, but few know that strict officials are even worse. For whereas a corrupt official knows his own faults and dares not play the tyrant openly, a strict official imagines that since he never takes bribes he is free to do as he likes. Then self-confidence and personal prejudice may lead him to kill the innocent or even endanger the state. I have seen many such officials with my own eyes: Hsiu T'ung and Li Ping-heng are notable examples. . . .

What has so far escaped notice is that, like Yü-hsien and Kang-i, Hsu Tung 徐桐 and Li Ping-heng 李秉衡 were fanatic supporters of the Boxer Movement. Liu Ė has certainly not chosen these names at random. See my subsequent discussion of the novel in relation to the Boxer uprising in Section II.

Wei Shao-ch'ang has included Liu Ė's comments on the first seventeen chapters in *Tzu-liao*, pp. 6–12. Checking these against the commentaries in *Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo*, I have found one misprint. In *Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo*, No. 11, the second half of the commentary on Chap. 4 reads:

> **鍔賢 捎山西。其潔待諸士。立令兵丁。強奸女數士。種種毆打。人多知之。至其守青州。大得賢跡。當時所為。人多不知。幸賴此書傳出。將來可資正史採用小觀云乎哉**

In *Tzu-liao*, p. 8, the last particle 則 appears as 經. Also, in all the commentaries reprinted in *Tzu-liao*, 鍔賢 has been disguised as 王賢.

11. In the Yu-lien edition the night scene comprises 37 pages (pp. 95–132). It takes up 41 pages of the annotated edition prepared by Ch'en Hsiang-ho and Tai Hung-sen.

12. *LT*, p. 140. In the seventh line I have substituted “sighs” for “sigh” since the “homeward-bound” and “traveler” both refer to the poet.


14. Hu Shih quotes from both scenes in his preface to *Lao-ts'an*.


17. "And now he became so angry that 'his angry hair pushed up his hat,' angry that he could not immediately kill Yü Hsien and so give vent to his anger" (LT, p. 67).
18. Lao Ts'an tells Huang Jen-jui in Chap. 16, "There are many injustices in this world. When they come to my knowledge, I do what I can to help, and that's all" (LT, p. 179).
19. LT, p. 216.
20. LT, p. 150.
22. Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo began serializing Lin-nü yü 鄭女譜 in No. 6 (the fifteenth of the sixth month, 1903), while Lao-ts'an first appeared in No. 9. The magazine serialized Lin-nü yü irregularly until its 20th number, which featured the twelfth chapter. Ah Ying has included this incomplete novel in KSW, I, and commented on it favorably in Wan-Ch'ing hsiao-shuo shih, pp. 44-48.
   Liu Ta-shen maintains that his father wrote for Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo to provide financial assistance to Lien Meng-ch'ing. However, Liu also tells us that the magazine paid only five Chinese dollars per thousand characters, and it would seem that, if Lien were really desperate, he could have asked for a sizable sum of money from his friend without imposing upon him the additional chore of writing a novel. While Liu Ē probably did turn over the proceeds from Lao-ts'an to his friend at least during its serialization in Hsiu-hsiang Hsiao-shuo, I am more inclined to the belief that he agreed to write a novel more for the fun of engaging in a friendly competition with Lien, who had already begun one. The hero of Lin-nü yü—Chin Chien 金堅, tzu Pu-mo 不屑—undertakes a northward journey in Chaps. 1-6, and his surname obviously alludes to the character t'ieh in Liu Ē's courtesy name, T'ieh-yün 鐵雲. In his turn, Liu adopted the name T'ieh Ying 鐵英 for his hero as much to call attention to his own name as to allude to the name Chin Chien, which parallels T'ieh Ying in meaning.
23. In both his earlier chronology of Liu Ē's life included in "Lao-ts'an yu-chi k'ao-cheng ‘老殘遊記’ 考證" (Ch'u-erh-ch'i, pp. 251-61) and his much enlarged "Nien-p'ŭ" (cf. Note 21), Chiang I-hsüeh maintains that Liu Ē was invited by Chang Yao to serve as the river下游提調 in 1891 while listing under the year 1890 no biographical information other than that Liu was then 34 sui old. I believe Harold Shadick must be right in maintaining that "Chang Yao, Governor of Shantung, invited him to his yamen as an adviser on flood control, with the rank of subprefect, later raised to prefect. He remained in Shantung in this capacity from 1890 to 1893" (LT, p. xi). Fang Chao-ying 劉北陽 also agrees that Liu started working for Chang in 1890 (cf. Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period, I, 517). It is extremely unlikely that Chang should have employed a conservancy expert but did not give him an official post until the next year. We know for sure that Chang died on the 23rd of the seventh month in 1891 (August 27). Cf. Kuo T'ing-i 郭廷以, Chin-t'ai Chung-kuo shih-shih jih-chih 近代中國史事日錄 (Taipei, Academia Sinica, 1963), II, 845.
For the novel Liu Ė has utilized a great many of his personal experiences in Shantung, especially during the period 1889–91, but he has wisely left the year unspecified in which the travels of Lao Ts'an took place. One event retold in the novel is precisely dated. While Ts'ui-huan is telling the story about the flood, Huang Jen-jui interjects, “I arrived [in Shantung] in the year Keng-Yin [1890]. This all happened in I-Ch'ou [1889]”—LT, p. 154. In his commentary on Chap. 14, Liu Ė endorses the truth of Ts'ui-huan’s story by saying that, as a surveyor of the Yellow River in Shantung, he himself witnessed that year the flooding of many villages (Ts'ai-liao, p. 11). But since Huang Jen-jui does not specify how much time has elapsed since his arrival in Shantung, we cannot date the events in the novel by reference to his statement. The timescheme for the novel proper does not seem to apply to the prophetic interlude, which refers to the Sino-Japanese conflict of 1894 as an event of the past (LT, p. 119).

24. For Lao Ts'an’s age see Ch’u-erh-chi, p. 1. Both Ch'ing-shih kao 清史稿, lieh-chuan 252, and Ch'ing-shih lieh-chuan 清史列傳 (Shanghai, Chung-hua shu-chu, 1928), ts'e 62, pp. 5a–6a, contain biographies of Yü-hsien.

25. Liu Ta-shen’s article, “Kuan-yü Lao-ts'an yu-ch’i,” was originally published in Yü-chou-feng I-h'an 宇宙風乙刊; for further data see my “Bibliographical Note” and Tien-yi Li, Chinese Fiction, p. 221. Professor Li, however, has mistranscribed Liu’s name as Liu Ta-k’un 劉大坤. In nearly all popular fiction and history concerned with the events of 1900 Kang-i is depicted as a fanatic conservative currying favor with Prince Tuan 端王 and placing blind faith in the magic might of the Boxers. In Keng-tzu kuo-pien chi 建子國賛記 (Chung-kuo shih-hsüeh-hui 中國史學會, ed., T'ao-p'ien 覃和園 [Shanghai, Shanghai jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1957], I, 30), Li Hsi-sheng 李希聖 says that “Kang-i was more kung-pi 董秘 than Jung-lu 楊臘 but less crafty and cunning.” Li Pao-chia describes Kang-i as both kung-pi and chien-hsien 勝險 (T'an-tzu, KSW, II, 751).

26. Though the career of Kang-i during and after the Boxer uprising is embroidered with rich detail in popular history and fiction, its early phase has been little explored. In The Boxer Catastrophe (New York, Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 29–30, Chester Tan gives an account of his activities in 1899 as Imperial High Commissioner in the southern provinces, but his earlier role in Ch‘ing government is not studied. For a listing of Kang-i’s official posts, see Ch‘ing-shih lieh-chuan, ts'e 62, pp. 10b–14a. Before returning to court as a Grand Councilor in 1894, he had served from 1880 on in Kwangtung, Kiangsi, Chihli, Yünnan, Shansi (as governor, 1885–88), Kiangsu, Kwangtung (as governor, 1892–94), but never once in Shantung. Liu Ta-shen’s assertion that his father and Kang-i were in Shantung during the same period cannot be true. Several popular accounts of the Boxer Incident make note of the fact that Yü-hsien was Kang-i’s men-sheng 門生 (see, for example, T'an-tzu, KSW, II, 711). Both instigators of the Boxer Movement should make fascinating subjects for study.

27. Liu Ė really detested Yü-hsien as a harsh official; cf. his commentary on Chap. 4 given in Note 10. They must have met each other while in Shantung, but it is difficult to say whether Liu could have hated Yü-hsien for personal reasons.

In 1897, when Liu Ė got involved with an English company trying to build a railway into Shansi and open coal mines there, Kang-i accused him of being a traitor. As an antiforeign conservative and former governor of Shansi,
Kang-i had ample cause to be alarmed, and I see no reason to believe with Shadick (*LT*, p. xiii) that his action against Liu was dictated by personal animosity. But Liu must have borne a grudge against his accuser, and during the Boxer Incident he had further cause to detest him. The two might have known each other personally, but we have no direct evidence for this.

While I see no reason to doubt that the name Kang Pi was intended as an allusion to Kang-i, Liu Ė may have modeled the character after some unidentified colleague of his in Shantung. In Chap. 15, Huang Jen-jui says of Kang Pi: "He is a disciple [門生] of Lù Chien-t'ang [呂賢業] who imitates his master in everything and is utterly incorruptible!" (*LT*, p. 171). The Ch'en Hsiang-ho edition provides a note on Lù: "We suspect that Lù Hsien-chi 呂賢基 is meant here. Lù flourished during the reign of Hsien-feng. Because he once served in the capacity of a 畫諭 (畫事中), people called him Chien-t'ang. He died a victim of the Taiping Rebellion and was regarded by the Ch'ing court as a good official of 'integrity and forthrightness'"—*Lao-ts'an yü-chi* (Hong Kong, Commercial Press), p. 149. But Lù Hsien-chi was killed in action in 1853 (cf. Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, II, 949) and any men-sheng of his surviving in 1890 would have been quite old. Kang Pi, however, gives the impression of a man in his prime.

28. According to Yü-hsien's biography in *Ch'ing-shih kao, lieh-chuan* 252, the foreign missionaries and their families massacred in Taiyuan numbered over seventy. Popular sources give larger numbers.

29. When hostilities broke out between the Boxers and the troops under the command of General Nieh Shih-ch'eng 熙成 in the Chochou 深州 area in June, 1900, Kang-i was finally dispatched there to settle the dispute and report on the case. According to Chester Tan, *The Boxer Catastrophe*, pp. 69-70, "The assertion that the Imperial Court decided to utilize the Boxers and called them into the capital after the return and personal report of Kang I is not accurate. Kang I left Chochou for Peking about the midnight of June 14. He probably did not arrive at Peking before June 16...[On June 13] the Boxers entered the capital in force, and a reign of lawlessness set in. It was apparent that before the return of Kang I the Court had decided to utilize the Boxers, although it was quite possible that the Imperial Commissioner contributed to the decision by reports sent from Chochou."


31. According to *Hsiao-hsien yen-i*, *KSW*, I, 513, 5,000 people in Lanchow protested against the imperial order for Yü-hsien's decapitation. Even in Li Pao-chia's unsympathetic account (*T'an-t'zu*, Chap. 32), Yü-hsien is not robbed of his dignity. It would seem that, unlike Kang-i, he was genuinely incorruptible and that, though denounced by novelists and popular chroniclers, his antiforeign measures were not without popular support.

32. Cf. *KSW*, chüan 2 and 3. In my opinion the novel that gives the most touching account of ordinary people suffering from the Boxer uprising is Wu Wo-yao's *Hen-hai* 恆海.

33. Hu Shih speaks for many intellectuals of his time when maintaining in his preface (*Ch'ü-erh-chi*, p. 223) that "the most ridiculous thing in *Lao-ts'an yü-chi* is its prophecy concerning the 'northern Boxers and southern revolutionaries.'"
34. LT, p. 70. Shadick renders tsai 矣 as “rules.” I have changed the word because a minister, no matter how powerful, only assists the emperor in ruling the country.

35. Cf. T’an-te’an, passim.

36. See my comments on Liu ê and Lu Hsün in “Obsession with China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature,” included in China in Perspective (Wellesley College, 1967), pp. 106–9. In that paper I rather conventionally called Lao-t’s’an a “major novel of satiric intent” and discussed it mainly with reference to the dream sequence in Chap. 1. I now believe that Lao-ts’an should be more properly described as a political novel.


38. Lao Ts’an tells of his past in Chap. 7. Cf. LT, p. 76.

39. LT, p. 98.

40. I-yün’s long confessin to Mrs. Te Hui-sheng 德慧生 in Chaps. 3–4 of the sequel, telling of her love for Jen San-yeh 任三益 and her final awakening, is the most astonishing proof of Liu ê’s genius. Few Chinese novelists, traditional and modern, could match his ability to lay bare the heart of a girl with such psychological acumen and endow her tongue with such natural eloquence.

41. LT, p. 120.


44. In a famous meditative passage in Chap. 6, Lao Ts’an refers to the “freedom of speech” 言論自由 enjoyed by the cold and hungry crows (LT, pp. 66–67). “Freedom of speech” must have been a rather new term in 1903.

45. LT, p. 63.

46. LT, p. 104.

47. LT, pp. 111–12. Shadick has translated the eighth line as “Leaves a swine to rule at ease.” This is misleading since it would mean that the tiger, flying “aloft to visit heaven [the imperial court],” has left a swine to rule Shantung in his place.

48. Professor Shadick may have intended “suckling tiger” to mean a young tiger not yet weaned. But according to Chiang I-hsüeh (Ch’u-erh-chi, pp. 240–41), the original term 膨 vs refers to a mother tiger and further connotes a harsh official.

49. Yü-ku immediately enlightens the puzzled reader Shen Tzu-p’ing that the suckling tiger refers to Yü Hsien. All commentators are agreed that the standing swine designates Kang-i: 立 plus 豕 equals 豬, the main component of the character i 豬.

50. I have not seen the 1962 edition of Ch’u-erh-chi which, Dr. H.C. Chuang 莊信正 informs me, contains Chaps. 5–6 of the erh-chi. I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Chuang for summarizing this article in Chinese for me.
老殘遊記的藝術成就與政治意義

夏志清

一般人論老殘遊記，往往重視於它對清宮政事的批判或描寫文字的優美。這篇文章想深入一點，就思想與風格、形式與技巧各方面探討這本小說的藝術成就和政治意義。（老殘遊記不是類似蕪林外史的諷刺小說，也不是魯迅所謂的“譏誚小說”。它是中國第一本嚴肅的政治小說；如果在行文上不是用的第三人稱，它也會是中國第一本用第一人稱寫的抒情小說。）文章分為兩節，第一節把全書當做老殘的遊記來談，第二節則想針對中問四回（八至十一）裏的獨立插曲，研究一下這本小說的帶預言性的政治和哲學觀點。

老殘遊記是八國聯軍攻佔北京以後三、四年寫的。作者自序中透露出的憂國憂民的心境，令人想起杜甫中期的憂憤詩篇。小說的敘事方式也有些像山水詩和小品文，不重結構的完整性。最後兩回的情節（老殘忽而大作其“私家侦探”，忽而又銷聲匿跡）很難致完整，但是破壞了這本遊記體政治小說本身的完整性。相反地，作者不願敘事構架，化了四回（十二至十六）大書特書老殘遊黃人瑞的一個夜晚，卻和全書息息相關，不但連着寫了黃河災，提出一個謀殺案，而且成功地剖刻了在場二男二女的背景和性格。第十二回老殘在雪月交輝的黃河岸上，由古人的詩句聯想到個人及國家的前途，因而落淚的一段，證明劉鹗是一個卓越的抒情小説家。他很少提到老殘哭過，在這段的結尾也說他發覺淚水在臉上結了冰以後，自解嘲地想：“地大必定還有幾多冰珠子呢。”這樣，一方面避免了感傷性的詩情主義，一方面暗示老殘對當時中國處境的強烈的感情使他常欲哭無淚。事實上，作為一個“走方郎中”，老殘也難以補救眼前國危民難的局面。儘管他有見識，有才具，他可只能施些小恩小惠，或最多依賴張撫臺在山東一個地方行點善舉。

這些都反映了庚子事變前後中國的政治現實。從劉鹗的生平看來，他的小說很多地方帶自傳性。他對國事極其憂心，但對中國的文化傳統和長遠前途抱着信心。在第八回至第十一回中看得出他自己有不能相容的兩面，而對國家前途抱着深切信
心的一面（黃龍子）克服了悲傷國事、欲哭無淚的一面（老殘）。就是為了不使這
雙重性格發生衝突，他暫時撇開小說的主人公，送了比較單純平庸的中子平到桃花
山去。孫姑對中子平所說儒、釋、道三家同旨的話其實是在代作者宣揚他所服膺的
太谷學派的宗旨，也表示他兼有老殘的消沉和黃龍子的達觀。黃龍子之攻擊北洋南
革，不能解作劉鴻鴻護滿清，他只是為了護滿文化，而反對無理性、無政府。桃花
山是他理想中自由和平的樂園。值得特別注意的是，照說在這世外桃源中連狼虎
也不凶惡，但在“銀鼠譜”中全虎卻公然地成了為一個苛虐官僚的代表，他的一生象
徵了庚子事變的本末。這四段詩交代了毓賢（玉賢）和剛毅（剛弼）在小說故事結
束以後因挑起事變而致誤國喪身的結局，對全書來說有極大的重要性。劉鴻鴻用了這
種特異的結構，忠實地表達了他對當時國計民生的個人看法，也使老殘遊記成為一
本感人至深、富有政治意味的抒情小說。