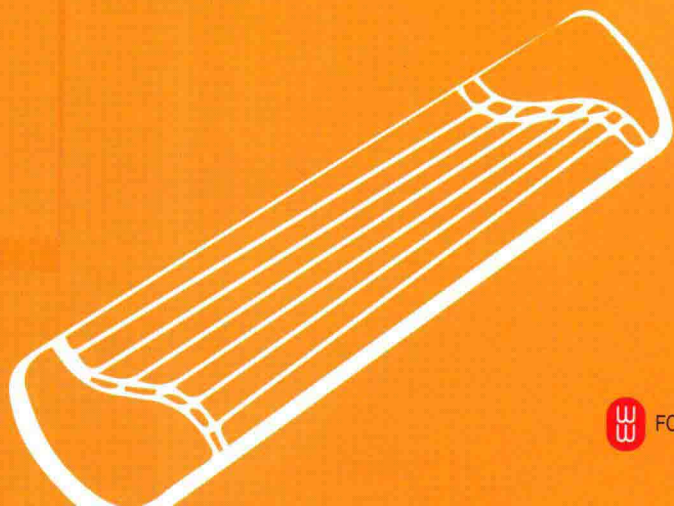


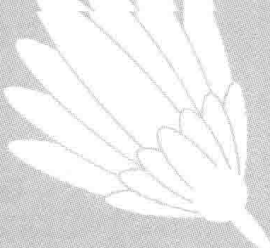


I Want to Be Your Kindred Spirit

Wu Xiaotong

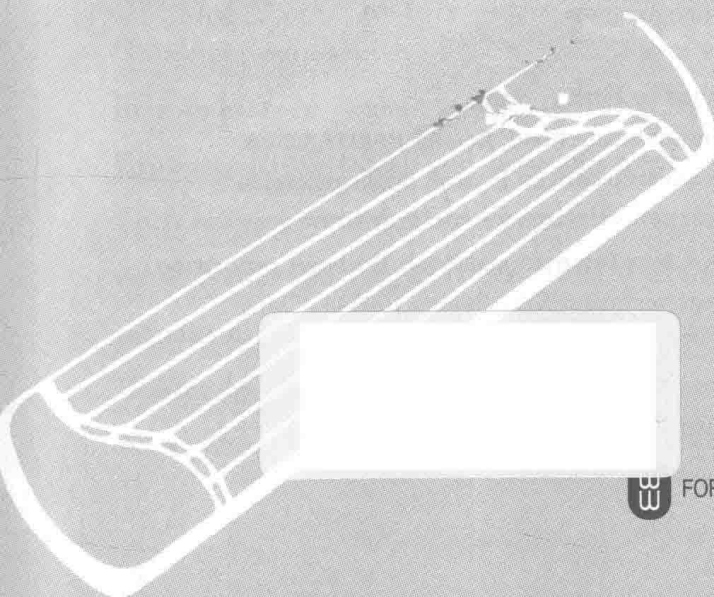


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I Want to Be Your Kindred Spirit

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A Budding Little Lotus

Preface

Peng Chengliang

After reading some of Wu Xiaotong's essays and stories published by Anhui Publishing Group, I was surprised by their rich content, witty conceptualization, and sharp penmanship. I applaud her and am happy for her because she is still at the tender and dreamful age of fourteen.

Everyone, young or old, can have a dream or two, in one way or another. What are Xiaotong's dreams then? In several of her essays, I find dreams of dialogues with illustrious personages in ancient Chinese history – the type of *déjà vu* stories told in a new light. For instance, in "Looking for Him Again and Again," she vividly describes how in her dream she sees the Tang Dynasty poet Luo Binwang (640-684) and how she wept on learning that Luo's fortune went downhill primarily because he had helped rebel leader Xu Jingye (636-684) draft an eloquent and piquant diatribe against Empress Wu Zetian (624-705). In "Passer-by," an essay in the theme of "an empty dream," she writes about the wrongful death of the noble hermit Ji Kang

(223-262) during the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280) and eulogizes him for his bravery in facing death squarely. As a tribute to Ji Kang's immortal spirit, she quotes from *In Memory of Good Friends* by Xiang Xiu (c. 227-272) and genuinely feels as if the "peerless melodies played by Ji were being heard again." In "Legend," a story in another dream of hers, she writes about Bao Ji (dates unknown), vice minister of defense under the first Ming emperor. Bao was ordered by the Ming emperor to search for descendants of the Altan Urug (Mongol golden tribe) and Bao was actually one of them. On arriving at the deserted grassland in post-war Mongolia, Bao was led by a child to a cave called "Wolf's Lair" where he magically met his elder brother. The elder brother told him something profound, which then paved the way for a profound story. Such legendary "dreams" make interesting stories because they all have themes, characters and action. The unusual backgrounds and settings and the elegant tones of voice are thought-provoking too.

Wu Xiaotong uses dialogues for scene setting, plotting, and characterization. The essay "My World Is Never Solitary Because of You" is a dialogue with Tang Dynasty poet Wang Bo (650-676), while "My Eyes Are Fixed on You" is a dialogue with Xiang Yu (232-202 BC), a prominent warlord of the late Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). The former is a

paeon to a genius who made a name at the author's age. Wu briefly summarizes the scene in which Wang Bo stunned his audience with *Preface to Tengwang Pavilion*, an essay he wrote impromptu at a feast with the cream of society. Wu's essay tactfully uses the words of those present at the feast to express her high regard and admiration for the young writer. How could one possibly stay unmoved by a genius of one's own age? Our author here is likewise a broad-minded fourteen-year-old who shares Wang's talent in writing, isn't she?

The essay on Xiang Yu is a tribute to a star-crossed hero. "The surrendering dukes who knelt before you in your army tent must have done so out of reverence and admiration for you rather than out of fear of your power. How I rejoice at seeing your valor at this very first meeting of ours after I have traveled through a thousand years! You are indeed a hero of heroes!" These are deep expressions of admiration for and succinct evaluation of Xiang Yu, which reminds me of the well-known *Stanza Written in Summer* by Li Qingzhao (1084-c. 1155):

To live is to be outstanding,

To die an immortal hero.

I so frequently miss Xiang Yu

Who chose death over returning to Jiangdong.

Xiang Yu eventually killed himself when he found himself besieged at Gaixia (in present-day Suzhou, Anhui Province). Ashamed of running back to his fellow villagers on the other side of Wujiang River after a decisive defeat, Xiang slit his own throat with his sword. Precisely because of the tragic end, his story has been told over and over again in numerous works of literature, art and drama throughout history. *Farewell My Concubine*, a classical Peking Opera play, is a typical example. In a calm and detached manner, Wu Xiaotong examines this period of history with deep thinking and penetrating insight and narrates in an aesthetic and enlightening approach that rivals stop-motion photography in clarity.

Writing and art follow no fixed rules. The beauty of writing lies not in similarity, but in originality. "A Thousand Miles Apart" is an article in memory of Liu Zongyuan from the perspective of Han Yu or it can be seen as a letter from Han to Liu. Between the lines, we can feel how accurately and thoroughly the author has figured out Liu's moods and emotions at the time of the story. Meanwhile, the article portrays in great detail, with all appropriateness, Han's intimate relationship with Liu.

"I Wish to Be Your Kindred Spirit" and "A Game without You" are both about Zhuge Liang (181-234) from

the perspectives of Zhou Yu (175-210) and Sima Yi (179-251), respectively. The former is a probing portrayal of Zhou Yu's jealous, narrow-minded, and irreconcilable attitudes towards Zhuge Liang, while the latter vividly depicts Sima Yi's fear of Zhuge Liang whenever they confronted each other in battle. The stories are touching and the characters are real. The author's admiration of Zhuge Liang and her appreciation of his ingenuity and exceptional ability are palpable from different perspectives.

Wu's probing, brilliant essays embedded with genuine feelings are artistically crafted. They contain a lot of allusions, quotes, poems and touch upon numerous sages, artists, and poets, including, apart from those mentioned earlier, Confucius (551-479 BC), Mencius (372-489 BC), Guiguzi (dates unknown), Wang Changling (698-756), Li Bai (701-762), Li Yu (937-978), Fan Zhongyan (989-1052), Yan Shu (991-1055), He Zhu (1052-1125), and Master Hong Yi (1880-1942). Obviously, the author has been burying herself in piles of literary classics and navigating with the ancient sages and other gifted people in thought communication.

Good preparation brings about good outcome. The author certainly has more in mind than what is already written. Well-versed in the classics and all kinds of

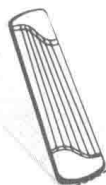
knowledge, she can easily and deftly apply what she has learned. As an older-generation writer and critic, I am definitely happy to see how hard she has been working and how persistent she is about reaching her goal.

If we were to compare Wu Xiaotong to a burgeoning little lotus, it would be fit to say she has now revealed a tiny bud in creative writing, which is quite commendable and worth celebrating. As an old saying goes, "In shallow waters one sees shrimps and crabs, in waters of medium depth, one can expect to catch fish and turtle, but only in real deep waters can one catch dragons." I hope Wu Xiaotong will not stop at what she has achieved, but will work harder and wade into deeper waters to "catch dragons." By doing that and focusing on the right niche, she will in all likelihood reap a lot in creative writing. That is none other than what I expect of her and I wish her all the best.

About Peng Chengliang

Peng Chengliang is a famous writer, painter and calligrapher in Chinese mainland. He has worked alternately at the Ministry of Culture and the chief editor's office at the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television. He was a member of the National Film Review Board and a jury

committee member both of the Huabiao Film Awards and of the China TV Drama Flying Apsaras Awards. As a movie and TV drama professional, he has produced dozens of movie and TV dramas, often acting concurrently as script writer or editor or both, and has overseen large-scale stage performances organized by CCTV. He is also a master of Chinese painting and calligraphy who has won top prizes in more than a dozen nationwide painting and calligraphy contests and has won honorary titles such as "Top 100 Contemporary Calligrapher" and "Artist of Talent and Integrity." He is currently president of the Literature Association of Seniors attached to the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, council member of the Chinese Painters and Calligraphers Association, and member of China Film Association, China Film Critics Society, China Television Artists Association, and Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Association. He has been listed as a celebrity in a number of publications, including *Compendium of Distinguished Experts in the People's Republic of China*, *Who's Who in China*, *Who's Who*, and *Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese Painters and Calligraphers*.



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My Eyes Are Fixed
on You

My Eyes Are Fixed on You

As I clicked on “The Basic Annals of Xiang Yu” in *The Records of the Grand Historian* by Sima Qian (c. 134-90 BC) and rested my eyes on the name Xiang Yu (232-202 BC), known as the Overlord of Western Chu, immediately the deep running waters of Wujiang River that had carried his body, the river bank that had absorbed his blood, and the cold light of his sword that had shone in the darkness of the night, played out before me like a short movie.

You mighty warrior! I can’t imagine you’ve been hiding in the book of history for more than a thousand years.

First Look

As I begin to read your story slowly, I feel compelled to pause and ponder.

207 BC, just a year before the end of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), was a year of change. After assassinating Qin

Ershi (Second Qin Emperor) and installing Ziyang (Third Qin Emperor) as a puppet on the throne, the treacherous and ruthless eunuch Zhao Gao ruled over the country with a bunch of yes men who went so far as to follow him in calling a deer a horse (Zhao was killed by Ziyang later in the same year). As a native of Chu, you were confident enough to predict that "Chu would be the terminator of Qin even if there were only three Chu households left." And indeed, the 300,000 strong Qin army was not your match.

You made your name after winning the Battle of Julu (in present-day Xingtai, Hebei Province) in 207 BC.

The surrendering dukes who knelt before you in your army tent must have done so out of reverence and admiration for you rather than out of fear of your power. How I rejoice at seeing your valor at this very first meeting of ours after I have traveled through a thousand years! You are indeed a hero of heroes!

Second Look

My second look at your life finds you at a shockingly tight spot.

That moonlit night, the stars were fading away. Behind the curtains of your tent you sipped a lonely drink as your pale-faced Yu danced gracefully. You looked at each other silently, eyes streaming with tears. It was the