



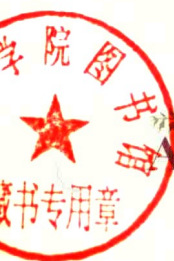
Classics of Modern Chinese Literature

Zhang Tianyi Reader

Translated by Liu Jun and Erik Nilsson



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A Zhang Tianyi Reader

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Introduction

Like many parents, I cherish the time I spend sharing bedtime stories with my son. In early 2011, we discovered some recordings of Zhang Tianyi's tale *Da Lin and Xiao Lin*. We truly enjoyed the experience. In fact, we both relished it so much that we wished children in other countries and regions could also enjoy this wonderful work, just as we Chinese are able to enjoy *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Anderson, *The Adventures of the Little Onion* by Gianni Rodari and *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren.

It is unfortunate that the translation and study of Chinese literature primarily focuses on works intended for adults. Other than the books of a few masters like Bing Xin, children's literature in this country has remained largely unknown to the outside world. After working on a number of books to introduce Chinese culture to a global audience, I was delighted to discover that China Intercontinental Press understands the value of producing a children's literature series.

Luckily, my long-time translation partner Erik Nilsson decided to join me again in this endeavour.

We both believe this little book is a terrific read for schoolchildren – and their parents. The English translation provides children with an opportunity to enjoy the humour of a different culture, even if they are hiding under their quilts for fear of the green-bearded monster.

The author is a story in his own right.

Zhang Tianyi (1906-85) is one of China's important writers. He was born as Zhang Yuanding in Nanjing, the capital of East China's Jiangsu Province. He showed an early interest in writing and painting, and supported himself doing odd jobs, working as a teacher, accountant, journalist and clerk. These experiences gave him ample opportunities to observe society. In the 1930s, he joined other writers to try to rejuvenate the nation. His health deteriorated drastically during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), when he was sent to the countryside to do hard labour. For several years, he was paralysed and couldn't speak. However, he survived the ordeal and regained enough strength to persist with his writing until he passed away at the age of 79.

Zhang wrote many works that reflect social realities. This aspect of his work weaved its way into his tales for young readers as well. *Da Lin and Xiao Lin* (1933) and *The Bald King (Tutu Dawang)*, 1936) were acknowledged as milestones in the history of Chinese children's literature together with *Scarecrow (Daocaoren)*, 1922) by Ye Shengtao. After 1949, his work *Secret of the Magic Bottle Gourd (Baohulu de Mimi)*, 1958) gained a level of acclaim only equaled by Yan Wenjing's *The Port Where*

Ships Sail the Next Time (Xiaci Kaichuan Gang, 1957). In 2007, *The Magic Bottle Gourd* was adapted for cinema.

Many critics have pointed out the political undertones running through *Da Lin and Xiao Lin*. This is true, but there's much more to this work than social commentary. The author is superb at establishing unforgettable characters with just a few lines. Take the king: A monarch who cries after tripping on his own beard, and hungers after wontons and stinky tofu in the middle of the night – but is unwilling to pay for his snacks.

The fox brothers are also very interesting. They are obsessed with appearances. Bao Bao, who becomes the imperial minister through his own sly design, is a high-jump champion who disguises himself as an angel – with a pair of chicken wings. Oh, how colourful he looks with sweat trickling down his black face covered in powder and rouge!

Perhaps because he was a teacher, the author also has his characters dabble in the language of mathematics. The maths teachers at the Imperial Primary School are buffoons, although Teacher “Cat” still gets more cake than he deserves. Surprisingly, the most unlikely couple – Prince Red Nose and Miss Crocodile – turns out to be the best at maths, even though the prince is often in the process of fleeing Miss Crocodile's passionate pursuit.

The protagonists, Da Lin and his younger brother Xiao Lin, represent the most striking of contrasts. One cannot help but wonder what would happen if Xiao Lin were sent as a son to Mr Ba Ha, the billionaire, and if

Da Lin were sold off to make diamonds for Si Si Ge. Would Xiao Lin allow the two hundred servants to shove food down his gullet? It seems unlikely. Would Da Lin ever think of throwing the iron ball into the air to kill the monstrous boss? Who can say.

But that's not the story of this adventure, as you'll discover as you turn the pages...

This work could not have realised without kind encouragement and helpful suggestions from my friends. Thomas Hale, in particular, out of passion for good literature, braved what is said to be the coldest winter in Beijing's recent history to help fine-tune the story. It is my sincere hope that this little book will open a window for that mysterious land called China.

Translators


Liu Jun, Erik Nilsson

contents

Chapter One	A Dangerous Journey	1
Chapter Two	The King's Law	9
Chapter Three	The Auction	19
Chapter Four	Foot Torture	27
Chapter Five	Xiao Lin's Strength.....	39
Chapter Six	At Uncle Zhong Mai's Home	47
Chapter Seven	A Letter From Xiao Lin to Da Lin	56
Chapter Eight	A Beautiful Angel.....	62
Chapter Nine	The Happiness the Angel Brought Ba Ha	72

Chapter Ten	At Ba Ha's Home	80
Chapter Eleven	Grand Banquet	89
Chapter Twelve	The Imperial Primary School	102
Chapter Thirteen	Two Races	112
Chapter Fourteen	Misfortunes	125
Chapter Fifteen	Train Conductors	134
Chapter Sixteen	The Sea	148
Chapter Seventeen	"I really want to eat"	161
Chapter Eighteen	Millionaire's Island.....	178
Chapter Nineteen	News From Qiao Qiao and Xiao Lin	187

Chapter One A Dangerous Journey



Long, long ago, there was a very poor farmer, who lived in the countryside with his wife. Both of them were very old – so old that they couldn't tell how old they were. One day, the farmer's wife gave birth to two sons. The old farmer was very happy. "We have sons! I never dreamed of having sons at such an old age!" he exclaimed.

His wife was also very happy. "We must give them good names," she said.

What kind of names? The old man was clueless. Let's check the dictionary, he thought. Whatever word they chanced upon would be the name.

One, two, three! He opened the dictionary, and saw the word "meal." Should the elder boy be called "Big Meal," and the younger one "Small Meal"?

"Humph! We can't even afford rice, let alone a 'meal'!" the old man muttered to himself.

The second time, the word "chubby" showed

up. It was, of course, just as unsuitable.

The old man turned page after page. A whole night passed, and he didn't find a single good word. At dawn, the old man walked out of his front door, carrying his hoe. Outside, the sun had just risen and illuminated the forest. "Good, let's settle on '*lin*,' as in '*shu lin*' (forest)," the old man exclaimed happily.

Thus, the names were chosen. The elder child was called "Da Lin," and the younger one? "Xiao Lin," of course.

Ten years passed, and the old farmer and his wife died. Before they passed away, they told Da Lin and Xiao Lin, "There is nothing left at home. You should go out to work. After we die, carry us to the hill behind our home. The crows on the hill will build us a tomb. Then you can take whatever you need and go out looking for work."

So when their parents died, Da Lin and Xiao Lin carried their bodies to the hill. As soon as they left, the crows in the trees suddenly flew into the air. Cawing, they fetched earth with their beaks and piled it up to create a tomb for the old couple.

"Brother," Xiao Lin said to Da Lin, "let's gather our belongings and set out soon."

Back home, they put a small sack of rice on each of their backs, and then found a linen bag for their ragged clothes and simple, unglazed bowls. Then they left home.

"Where should we go?" Da Lin wondered out loud.

They had lost their parents, and they did not know which road to take. The boys sat down and cried.

Around them, the mountains, fields and trees all belonged to others. They didn't know where to settle down or what they should do with themselves. It was getting late. The sun hid behind the mountains to sleep. The moon brought out the stars, who winked at the boys.

Da Lin and Xiao Lin were still crying. They cried and cried. The sun woke up and crawled into the sky in the east, smiling with eyes creased.

Xiao Lin wiped away his tears. "Do you still want to cry? I don't feel like crying anymore," he said.

"Fine. I'm too tired to cry. Let's go."

Neither knew where to go. They just walked on. After some time, they finished the little rice they had brought.

"We've finished our food. What should we do?" Da Lin asked.

"Let's take a rest and then look for something to eat. OK?"

They sat down at the foot of a black dirt hill.

Looking at the bag, Da Lin sighed. "I want to be a rich man in the future. The rich eat and dress well, and they don't have to do anything at all."

Xiao Lin disagreed. "Um, Father always said 'One has to work,'" he replied.

"That's because Father was poor. The landlord doesn't need to work. Father always used to say, 'How wonderful it must be to own land and rice paddies!'"

"Mother and Father were both poor. But Mother and Father were both good, unlike the landlord," Xiao Lin said.

"But, the rich are so happy," Da Lin said loudly. "The poor aren't happy at all. The poor must work, must..."

Suddenly, a very loud voice thundered, "Must what? Must eat you!"

Da Lin and Xiao Lin were so frightened, they fell to the ground. The bag trembled.

Who was speaking?

No one, it seemed.

The brothers embraced each other, sweat dripping down their faces like rain, their legs shaking violently. They looked around, but saw nothing.

"Who on earth was talking?" Da Lin asked.

"No idea."

Little did they know, they'd find out very soon.

The black hill in front of them was beginning to move!

"Earthquake! Run!" Xiao Lin yelled.

Before they could get away, the hill moved even more and seemed to stand up!

Good heavens! It was a monster – neither human, nor animal.

The monster had been sleeping. They had mistaken him for a black hill. Now the monster stood up, its eyes as big as gongs, glittering green. He stretched out his grass-covered arms to grab Da Lin and Xiao Lin. He wanted to eat them!

How unfortunate! Da Lin and Xiao Lin would certainly be eaten by the monster!

"We've lost Mother and Father. The food is gone. We have no land and no money, nothing at all. Just let the monster eat us!" Da Lin thought.

Xiao Lin, however, was anxious. He knew they couldn't run away. The monster had long arms. Even if they ran far, far away – for example, one mile – he could still reach out and catch them.

Knowing he had something to eat, the monster eyed Da Lin and Xiao Lin, grinning.

"Do you have to eat us?" Xiao Lin asked.

"It's possible that I won't eat you, but you must first give me a few jewels."

"What jewels? We've never seen one."

"Ha, ha, ha! Then, I'm sorry!"

"Let's run," Xiao Lin whispered into Da Lin's ear.

"He can catch up with us."

"Then let's split. He can't catch both of us."

One, two, three! Da Lin ran to the east, Xiao Lin to the west.

The monster wanted to catch Da Lin, and Xiao Lin, too. A few steps east, a few steps west; he didn't catch either.

Da Lin and Xiao Lin fled, leaving only the linen bag behind. The monster was so hungry, he picked up the bag and gobbled it. But his mouth was so big and the bag so small, that it got stuck between his teeth. He uprooted a big pine to use it as a



toothpick, and struggled to get the bag out.

I'll go back to sleep, he thought.

The moon had come out, curved like an eyebrow.

The monster stretched out his arms sleepily, scratched the sharp corner of the moon and scraped his hand. "Ugh! What a bad day!" he spat viciously.