

XIAO HONG

SPRING IN
A SMALL
TOWN

and Other Selected Writings



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS





SPRING IN

ASIA TOWN
and Other Selected Writings

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Preface

Literature may reflect the ethos of a country or a nation, while at the same time it can transcend the limits of time and space to most widely resonate a truly universal humanity. Literary works of art that move hearts may even inspire the compassion of strangers toward a people or country...

This "Panda Series" of books, expertly translated into English, compiles the works of well-known modern and contemporary Chinese authors around themes such as the city and the countryside, love and marriage, minority folk stories and historical legends. These works reflect the true spirit and everyday lives of the Chinese people, while widely resonating with their changing spiritual and social horizons.

Published from the 1980s, through more than 100 titles in English, this series continues to open wider the window for readers worldwide to better understand China through its new literature. Many familiar and fond readers await the latest in this "Panda Series." This publication of the "Panda Series" consolidates and looks back at earlier released literary works to draw new readers, while stirring the fond memories of old friends, to let more people share the experiences and views of the Chinese people in recent decades. We express our sincere appreciation to all authors, translators and editors who have engaged in their dedicated and meticulous work over the years to bring out these works. It is their passion and endeavor that have enabled this series to appear now in luminous distinction.

**This book is dedicated to the members
of Harbin's literary community**

Acknowledgments

OF the nine stories included in this collection, three have been previously published in anthologies of modern Chinese short stories. "Hands" and "The Family Outsider" were included in Joseph S. M. Lau, C. T. Hsia, and Leo Ou-fan Lee, eds., *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas, 1919-1949* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); "On the Oxcart" appeared in Vivian Ling Hsu, ed., *Born of the Same Roots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). "Spring in a Small Town" is a slightly altered version of the original translation by Sidney Shapiro, which appeared in *Chinese Literature* No. 8, 1961.

Xiao Hong's best known and perhaps most artistic story, "Hands", has been published in two earlier translations, but I have found it advisable to present it here in a totally new translation.

Many people have contributed both to my understanding of the stories included here and to the quality of the translations. To them, particularly Professor Joseph Lau of the University of Wisconsin and Judi Wong of San Francisco State University, I extend my thanks. I also wish to thank Miss Lu Weiluan of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, who not only discovered the story "North China" in a Hong Kong magazine, but who also made it available to me.

Finally, I hope that by dedicating this volume to the many writers, scholars, and teachers of Harbin, who have devoted years of work to giving Xiao Hong the recognition she so richly deserves, I can express a measure of appreciation for the support and encouragement they gave me during my two trips to their lovely city.

HG
Los Angeles

Introduction

IT is generally agreed that the reputation of a novelist is not always well served by anthologies of his (or her) short stories, for the two genres are so radically different that few writers have been able to master both. Xiao Hong seems to be a notable exception, for two compelling reasons: the novels for which she is justifiably famous among modern Chinese writers tend to be so episodic and cinematic that one can often discern the essence of one or more short stories buried in the body of the novels;* and the themes, character types, and writing styles of both her short and long works have marked similarities.

Given what we know of Xiao Hong's life and artistic temperament,** including the fact that while she was physically ill and caught up in the war with Japan, she wrote one full-length novel and the first two volumes of a planned trilogy, we must conclude that she

* Her first novel, *The Field of Life and Death* (*Shengsi chang*), was published in 1935. Part I of *Ma Bole* was published in 1940, while Part II appeared the following year in serialized form in a Hong Kong literary magazine. *Tales of Hulan River* (*Hulanhe zhuan*) was published in 1941. All of these novels have recently been republished by the Heilongjiang People's Publishing House. Translations of *The Field of Life and Death* and *Tales of Hulan River* (two volumes in one) have appeared in the Indiana University Press translation series (1979).

** See Howard Goldblatt: *Hsiao Hung (Xiao Hong)*, Boston, 1976.

was by nature a novelist, a writer who required a broad canvas on which to create her most memorable literary works. However, as any student of modern Chinese literature knows, it was far easier and more expedient to write short stories, which could be sold to the many literary journals of the day — keeping the wolf from the door was always an urgent concern of twentieth-century Chinese writers, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. So for six of Xiao Hong's nine creative years she wrote nothing but short stories, essays, and an occasional poem or short play. Yet she is known primarily as a writer of novels, the first of which (*The Field of Life and Death*) she wrote at the age of 23, the final two of which (three, if Parts I and II of *Ma Bole* are counted separately) were written shortly before her death nearly a decade later.*

In thematic terms, Xiao Hong generally deals with the plight of women from the deprived classes; her stories are almost invariably tragic and seldom offer much hope for change. As a woman who felt herself demeaned, abused, and valued primarily as a feminine object by the men with whom she was associated, Xiao Hong was revolutionary in her desire to expose the cruelties in a male-dominated "feudalistic" society. Her

* Xiao Hong was born in Hulan County, Heilongjiang Province in 1911. After attending high school in Harbin, she ran away from her landlord family, eventually settling down with the Northeastern writer Xiao Jun. They both fled the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1933, travelling to Shanghai, where they came under the wing of Lu Xun (1881-1936). Following the outbreak of war with Japan, Xiao Hong went to the interior, where she left Xiao Jun and married another Northeastern writer, Duanmu Hongliang. In 1940 she and Duanmu flew to Hong Kong, where Xiao Hong died two years later, on January 22, 1942. Her remains are now buried in the city of Guangzhou.

stories are extremely touching and evocative, and, we can assume, effective tools in the awakening process that characterized the period during which she lived and wrote. Most of her stories are set in northeast China, although only a few (including the first story in the present anthology, her first work of fiction) were written there. The only notable exceptions are the stories in her volume *A Cry in the Wilderness*, which are set in the Chinese interior. In only three of the nine stories included here do men play the leading role, and one of these — "The Family Outsider" — is a piece of autobiographical fiction.* To take this last point further, a large percentage of Xiao Hong's fictional works, which are told in the first-person narrative mode, are more or less autobiographical, the narrator being a secondary character.

If there is one story that seems out of place here and in Xiao Hong's corpus generally, it is "Flight from Danger"; with a male protagonist, and written in a satirically humorous vein, it is like nothing else Xiao Hong wrote up to that time. It is, however, the story upon which the trilogy she began but never completed — *Ma Bole* — is based.

Taken together with her novels, the short stories included here should strengthen the claim that Xiao Hong was not only a first-rate story-teller and an artist who painted vivid scenery in words, but a literary genius whose potential was never realized owing to a lack of editorial assistance, the difficult times in which she lived, and her tragic death at the age of thirty.

* This story is the basis for chapter six of *Tales of Hulan River*

Bibliographic Note

THE stories in this anthology are arranged in chronological order. All but the story, "North China", have appeared in anthologies of works by Xiao Hong, as follows:

"The Death of Wang Asao": *Trudging (Bashe)*, Harbin, 1933, co-authored by Xiao Jun. Reprinted by the Heilongjiang Branch of the Chinese Writers' Association in 1979.

"The Bridge" and "Hands": *The Bridge (Qiao)*, Shanghai, 1936.

"On the Oxcart" and "The Family Outsider": *On the Oxcart (Niuche shang)*, Shanghai, 1937.

"Flight from Danger" and "Vague Expectations": *A Cry in the Wilderness (Kuangye de buban)*, Chongqing, 1939.

"Spring in a Small Town": *Spring in a Small Town (Xiaocheng sanyue)*, Hong Kong, 1961.

"North China" was published in a Hong Kong newspaper in 1941.

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