

YANG SHU'AN

CONFUCIUS

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS





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Panda Books
Confucius

Yang Shu'an was born in 1935 in Hunan and studied in the 1950s at Beijing University and the People's University of China. Since graduation he has worked in Wuhan as a writer and editor. In 1981 he published his first novel *September Chrysanthemums* which took as its theme the tragic peasant uprising in the late Tang Dynasty and its leader Huang Chao. In 1983, he completed his second novel *The First Emperor to Unite China*, the story of how Qin Shi Huang conquered the other states and created a unified country with one language and one system of weights and measures. In 1984 *The Tragedy of Chang'an*, a sequel to *September Chrysanthemums* appeared. Two years later, in 1986, he completed his fourth book, *Emperor Sui Yang Di*. His next novel, *The Talented and Romantic Madame Wu*, the intriguing story of Wu Zetian, China's first empress, marked a departure from his previous military themes. This was followed by *The Short Romantic Life of the Emperor*, the story of Li Yu, the last emperor of the Southern Tang Dynasty, and *Confucius* and *Lao Zi*, two of his most representative novels.

Yang Shu'an has also written many books for children. He has won numerous awards.

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.

Introduction

Miao Junjie

IT was with great interest that I approached *Confucius*, Yang Shu'an's new historical novel based on the life and times of the ancient philosopher. Upon finishing this work, I felt that not only had I gained great aesthetic enjoyment, but that also I had been guided by the author in a pilgrimage through Chinese history. Yang Shu'an has toiled so long and so fruitfully in the fields of historical writing; and I write this essay so that I may have the opportunity of congratulating my friend on reaping such a rich harvest once again.

1

Confucius has certainly been one of the most seminal and influential thinkers, educators, and political philosophers in Chinese history. His sphere of influence, however, is no longer confined to the borders of China, but has expanded throughout the world; and the spiritual wealth which he left behind has been bequeathed not only to the people of China, but to all the peoples of the world. In October of 1989, at Qufu in Shandong Province — the hometown of Confucius and the birthplace of Chinese Confucianism — an international conference on Confucian studies was held to commemorate the 2540th anniversary of the sage's birth. More than 300 scholars from 25 countries and regions from five continents gathered to celebrate and discuss the words and thought of this man who lived and died more than 2,000 years ago — a fact which fully demonstrates the extent of his influence. Over the course of these two mil-

lennia, countless numbers of men and women have studied Confucius and his thought, countless numbers of worshippers and detractors have analyzed, idolized, passed judgment upon him; and the sheer number of lines and pages which have been written on him are too great to quantify.

Confucius' identity, however, as a Chinese cultural and spiritual "paragon", is unshakable, having long taken solid root in the hearts and minds of people of varying backgrounds, levels of sophistication, and age. I dare say that in the history of China, there has not been one other thinker who has had greater influence on the Chinese, nor has there been any other Chinese philosopher who has been so universally recognized and disseminated. From a Marxist point of view, it is undeniable that much of Confucianism is seriously flawed: limited severely to its historical time, Confucian thought has long been anachronistic and has had much negative impact on the development of Chinese society as a whole. However, it is equally undeniable that Confucianism forms one of the cornerstones of traditional Chinese culture.

As to when exactly the fictional persona, "Confucius", began to appear in the realms of literature and art, I am not entirely certain. His first appearance — and transformation — in the annals of history most probably coincided with the occasion of the sage's death: in his eulogy to Confucius, Duke Ai of Lu referred to him as Ni Fu, "the Venerable Ni" (Confucius' given name), thereby showing his belated respect. Three hundred years later, when the founder of the Han Dynasty Emperor Liu Bang passed through the State of Lu, he performed grand ceremonial rituals and made sacrificial offerings at the site of the humble philosopher's tomb. Emperor Wudi of the Han during his reign, furthermore, dismissed the hundred schools of philosophy solely in favour of the teachings of Confucius. From thence began the practice of conferring honorary designations on the philosopher by imperial authority: in the course of imperial history Confucius has been named at various times, "The Duke Ni, all-complete and illustrious"; "The Illustrious

Sage King''; ''Kong, the ancient teacher, accomplished and illustrious, all-complete, the perfect sage.'' Confucius' portraits came to cover the walls of temples, palaces, examination halls; though certainly, none could compete with the display at the Temple of Confucius, where the temple's main wall is crowded with over a hundred portraits of the sage. Among them is a series titled ''Traces of the Holy Man'', which in visual images relates the story of Confucius' life, showing him with his student disciples, at home, and as an itinerant philosopher. Some of these images — rendered in paint, stone carving, sculpture, and block prints — endow him with a regal air, portraying him as ruler or king. Others choose to envisage him as a wise and sagely elder or as one of the sophisticated literati, or an erudite scholar. In recent times, the figure of Confucius has even appeared on the theatrical stage, in a play titled *Confucius the Plain-Clothed Commoner*. In the realm of contemporary literature, aside from evocations of the sage in poetic works, the most noteworthy and full treatment of the philosopher has been Japanese author Inoue Jiyoshi's full-length historical novel, *Confucius*.

Inoue Jiyoshi is one of Japan's most famous authors, noted for his historical novels which often have ancient China as their setting. His works vividly portray the many facets and hues of ancient Chinese culture, leading his readers into reveries of the ancient, faraway past, allowing them to feel for themselves the spirit of an ancient civilization. His latest work, *Confucius*, provides full evidence of the depth and breadth of his understanding of, as well as his love for, ancient Chinese culture. Inoue Jiyoshi's novel is a masterful work, filled with deep philosophical truths expressed with skill and grace. After I read this work, I felt my soul had been deeply touched. But upon further reflection, I immediately realized that this was still a book written by a foreigner. Confucius came out of China, so why hadn't a Chinese writer sought to depict this Chinese philosopher? Just at this time, I received the manuscript of Yang Shu'an's novel *Confucius* sent to me by the author, and it was with much antici-

pation and pleasure that I embarked upon it.

Following in the formidable footsteps of Inoue Jiyoshi's work, what kind of reception will be given to Yang Shu'an's *Confucius*? At present it is difficult to predict, but after I finished reading Yang Shu'an's book, I at least felt that the Confucius and his times revealed under Yang Shu'an's pen was one which fully captured the mood and psychology of ancient China, filled with the rich colours and flavours of that society, and wholly different from Inoue Jiyoshi's portrayal of Confucius.

2

Confucius represents a milestone in Yang Shu'an's career as a writer of historical fiction: a conclusion to one phase of his writing and the beginning of another. In his retelling of the life of Confucius, Yang Shu'an displays a masterful and intimate knowledge of an era and endows his portrayal of the sage with a strong sense of history, giving his readers a keen insight into the cultural milieu of Confucius' time.

Though Yang Shu'an first made his name as a writer of children's tales, his interests led him to historical fiction, and it is chiefly his writings in this genre that have established his literary reputation. In 1981, his first full-length historical novel, *September Chrysanthemums*, was published, which chronicled the unsuccessful peasant uprising during the late days of the Tang Dynasty, bringing to life the indelible and tragic figure of Huang Chao, the movement's leader. A second novel followed in 1983: it recounted the turbulent saga of Qin Shi Huang's rise to power, how he conquered the six feuding states, ending a long period of internecine warfare, and became the first emperor to unify China in a single kingdom with one language and an uniform system of weights and measures. *Sorrow at Chang'an*, published in 1984 as a sequel to *September Chrysanthemums* further developed the character of Huang Chao and that of the doomed peasant army, tracing the trajectory of their fortunes, from the height

of their success to their tragic fall. Two years later Yang Shu'an completed his fourth historical novel, on Emperor Yangdi of the Sui and the important events which took place during his reign, from a palace coup to the construction of the Zhaozhou Bridge and the Grand Canal. Following these four works, there was a perceptible shift in Yang Shu'an's interest and choice of historical subject matter, as his focus turned from writing about military events to chronicling palace intrigue, a new direction which resulted in two new works of fiction. *The Romantic Madame Wu* is the legend of Wu Ze Tian, who became the first empress in Chinese history. The brief and tragic life of Li Yu, who was a talented poet and the last emperor of the Southern Tang Dynasty, formed the subject of another novel by Yang Shu'an published in 1988.

Though Yang Shu'an has masterfully essayed the lives of many famous figures in Chinese history, Confucius poses a particular challenge for any author. The difficulty in rendering Confucius as a fictional persona stems from two problems: one, that Confucius is too "well known", and every reader already possesses an image, a preconceived notion of the sage in his mind. Secondly, Confucius lived so far back in history that there exists very little information and few concrete facts about his life. Scholars have had recourse only to the *Analects* to reconstruct his thoughts on philosophy, education, and ethics; for a fiction writer, this is scant material indeed from which to reconstitute a life rich enough to captivate a reader's attention. *Confucius* is the product of Yang Shu'an's profound knowledge and rich imagination. Using the meagre material gleaned from fragments of history and the elliptical remarks of Confucius from the *Analects*, the author has created a living flesh-and-blood person out of the distant legends surrounding the figure of Confucius. Take for instance Yang Shu'an's treatment of the contentious subject of Confucius' origins. The grand historian Sima Qian recounts in his *Historical Records* that "He (Confucius' father) and the daughter of Yan cohabitated in the

wild and gave birth to Kong (Confucius)”. This enigmatic account of Confucius’ birth has generated a profusion of explanations all greatly at variance with one another, and the circumstances of the philosopher’s birth has become a historical mystery of sorts. The Tang scholar Sima Zhen chose to elucidate the elliptical phrase, *ye he*, as referring to the irregular circumstances of the couple’s marriage: “Since the husband was aged and the wife young, their union was not altogether proper; therefore it may be said that they ‘cohabitated in the wild’, since their marriage was not one of full propriety.” In Yang Shu’an’s fictional account, Confucius is not born of an adulterous or illegitimate union, but is the product of Kong He’s marriage to Zheng, a woman more than forty years his junior. Thus, it is apparent that the author had chosen to follow Sima Zhen’s interpretation of the circumstances of Confucius’ birth over other competing theories, such as that of Han scholar Zheng Xuan which postulates that Confucius’ birth resulted from Kong He’s rape of Zheng. As a fictional writer working with historical materials, the author has the prerogative to select those details which he feels are cogent to his story; and in this particular case I feel that Yang Shu’an’s treatment of the mystery surrounding Confucius’ birth is not only extremely plausible but also adds greatly to the force of his narrative.

The author, in his depiction of Confucius, has avoided the main pitfall of writers in the past — which is to arrive at a political or ideological assessment of the ancient sage. Instead, he chooses to show Confucius as a person living and struggling within the cultural and ethical confines of his historical time. In both the slogans of the May Fourth Movement which exhorted, “Down with the Confucianism Peddlers!”, to the Cultural Revolution’s “Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius”, the personality of Confucius has been confined to a mere stereotype. It has been said that he was a servile follower of authority, obsequiously respectful of the Zhou King and the Duke of Lu, always upholding the rights and privileges of those in power; or that

Confucius's political theories greatly abetted the newly risen feudal class and the eventual development of capitalist production. Though these views of Confucius differ from, and are almost in conflict with, one another, they are similar in that they are all stereotypes; and the method of analysis by which these conclusions were reached is one and the same, employing a rather simplistic notion of "class" to typecast Confucius. If in fiction writing the same route were to be followed, then the author would have characters on his hands who would amount to no more than stick figures and caricatures. Yang Shu'an has fortunately avoided this easy trap of simplistic typecasting and labelling in his writing of *Confucius*. Instead, he delves deep into the ethos and mores of traditional China, seeking to place Confucius in the socio-historical climate of the late Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, attempting to understand Confucius' moral and political concerns within the framework of his historical time, and thereby gaining a better picture of the underlying psychology which motivated his convictions.

Permeating this work, as well as Yang Shu'an's other historical novels, is a sense of failed purpose, of tragedy. Confucius was an extremely intelligent, knowledgeable, well-read man — an intellectual in the true sense of the word. Yet, even in his homeland, the State of Lu, where he was appointed to the office of "Minister of Crimes", he failed to gain the true appreciation of the Duke. In his teachings Confucius emphatically upheld the authority of kings; yet in practice, he was never well used by any ruler, and was never given a chance to fully display his talents and capabilities as a statesman. Fortunately he was able to throw his energy into education, leading a troupe of students through a tour of the various neighbouring states, hoping to find a place which would allow him to put his abilities to practical use. But his travels into foreign lands did not bring him any better luck. First he arrives in the State of Wei where he is treated with honour and respect by the Duke, yet he is forced to leave, after feeling shamed and humiliated by the Duke's wife

Nan Zi; then, on his way to Jin, he is almost assassinated by an enemy. Confucius then turns around to go to Song, but the Duke there refuses to meet with him. He settles down to wait for a meeting and to teach in the shade of a giant tree, but the Duke of Song orders the tree to be chopped down and Confucius and his followers are thrown out of the land. Trapped between the borders of the states of Chen and Cai, Confucius finds himself without food for seven days, and has to eat whatever wild herbs and weeds he can forage.

Through all these setbacks Confucius never loses heart, and he holds on to his optimism; a fact which perplexes even his closest disciples Zi Lu and Zi Gong, who ask him, "I have heard that Heaven bestows good fortune upon those who do good and inflicts evil on wrongdoers. But how is it teacher that, though you have always been accumulating virtue and doing righteous deeds, you are still impecunious and down at heel?" Confucius answers, "You should not think in such absolutes, so simply. If you believe all talented people can be raised to office, then why was Prince Bi Gan disembowelled by King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty? If you believe all loyal people can be entrusted with important positions, why did Jie Zitui burn himself to death? There are many learned scholars and far-sighted superior men who have not been recognized. I am not the only one. Virtue and vice derive from different cultivations; good fortune and misfortune depend on chance. There are many instances of people whose talents are not appreciated, because they were not born at the right time.... Orchids grow in the depth of the mountains and if you don't find them there you will never smell their fragrance. So long as a superior man does not stop learning and improving himself, sooner or later he will have his day." In Confucius' reply, one senses the sage's profound understanding of life, but also the man of talent's deep sense of tragedy in "not being born at the right time". Through this dialogue and numerous other ones in the novel, a credible, likeable, and ultimately moving figure of Confucius emerges out of the shell of

his legend; and it is a credit to Yang Shu'an's intimate understanding of the sage and his times, and to his skill as a novelist.

3

Confucius is not limited to a portrait of the philosopher, but also brings to life a whole cast of characters: Confucius' disciples Zi Lu, Yan Hui, Zi Gong and Zeng Sen; the Duke Ling of Wei and his wife Nan Zi, Ji Huanzi, Yang Hu, Gu Boyu, whose indelible portraits all add to the authenticity and vividness of the work. However, Yang Shu'an's most successful creation is still the eponymous character, Confucius. Over the course of the past several millennia, Confucius has been a "spiritual paragon" in the hearts of many — an idol to be worshipped and emulated. The degree to which he is exalted and venerated has made him inaccessible, placing him on a pedestal at a great distance from the common man. Yet in this work, Yang Shu'an has sought to reconstitute for his readers Confucius' identity as a ordinary mortal, one who lived some two thousand years ago, a man who struggled ceaselessly and tragically for his convictions but who repeatedly met with failure. The author follows clues to Confucius' character found in various fragments of history books and other records, and travels down those paths in hopes of gaining a fuller understanding of the philosopher, fleshing out his image as a many faceted, complex person struggling amidst the turmoil of his times.

Yang Shu'an perceptively makes use of what few details we know of Confucius' life and the times in which he lived to shed insight on the formation of the philosopher's extraordinary character. Confucius was born under irregular circumstances, a product of a "cohabitation in the wild." However that enigmatic phrase may be interpreted, it is without doubt that he was born outside the bounds of full propriety — a fact which may have formed his character at an early age and spoke to him of the importance of observing formal etiquette and ritual. Furthermore,

he was born into turbulent, lawless times, into an era in which customs and rituals had gone by the wayside, and he felt that it was of dire necessity that customs, traditions, rituals be honoured and preserved. As Confucius grew slightly older, he began to sense the importance of maintaining a polite distance between men and women, and he voluntarily decided to live apart from his mother. When he first masters the art of archery, he brings the fowl he has shot down to his mother, showing his filial piety. When his mother asks that he should marry, he promptly obeys her request. Confucius worshipped the rituals of Zhou to an extreme, and wished to emulate them at every turn. This respect for ancient customs and learning, the stringent demands he made on his own virtue and uprightness, his insistence on propriety and ritual — all of these early character traits laid down the groundwork for the political and moral philosophy upon which he was to expound later.

The tragedy in Confucius' life could be said to have commenced with his entry into the world of politics. Though he spent many years in Lu as an official, this scholarly, talented and capable intellectual never gained the true appreciation of the ruler of Lu. For what reason did he finally leave the land of his birth? Because he felt that he could never come to see eye to eye with the politicians and high officials of Lu. He left certainly because he needed to find another job, but more importantly, he wanted to find a more ideal environment in which to test his political theories, to have a chance to rule a nation with virtuous and humane principles. Upon reaching the State of Wei, however, things do not go as well as he previously hoped. Instead of obtaining an audience with the Duke of Wei, he is met first by the Duke's wife Nan Zi. Though the occasion of this meeting is known, its details were never found to be significant enough to be recorded in the annals of history; yet, 2,500 years later "Confucius meeting Nan Zi" becomes an excuse for some to smear the good name of the philosopher. Perhaps not even the highly propriety-conscious Confucius would have predicted that