

LAO SHE

TEAHOUSE

CAMEL

XIANGZI



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

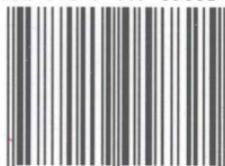




In his masterpiece *Camel Xiangzi*, he reveals his prophetic vision of the future of China. The novel depicts the life of Xiangzi, a young rickshaw-puller in Beijing, who fails to improve his life no matter how hard he works. When innocent people's hopes are destroyed, they are awakened to the truth that they are but playthings of fate, which is a Chinese concept for the unnamable in life's absurdities. The novel demonstrates the techniques of bitter humor Lao She employs in his portrayal of characters, who are caught in the endless social turmoil in the 1930s. The novel's socio-historical dimensions have made it a widely used text for the cultural analysis of modern China.

Teahouse is one of the famous dramas by Lao She. The drama is set in a typical, old Beijing teahouse and follows the lives of the owner and his customers through three stages in modern Chinese history. The play spans fifty years and has a cast of over sixty characters drawn from all levels of society. Brought together in Yutai Teahouse, they reflect the changes that took place in Chinese society.

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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.

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TEAHOUSE

CHARACTERS

(Ages given are those at first appearance.)

WANG LIFA A few years over twenty. Because of his father's early death, he became proprietor of Yutai Teahouse while still very young. He is shrewd and somewhat self-centred, but means well.

SOOTHSAYER TANG An opium addict in his thirties; makes a living telling fortunes by reading faces.

SECOND ELDER SONG About thirty years old; timid but talkative.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG In his thirties. An habitu  of Yutai Teahouse, as is his good friend Second Elder Song. Chang is a well-built and morally upright man.

THIRD-BORN LI Over thirty years old. A waiter in Yutai Teahouse; kind-hearted and conscientious.

ERDEZI In his twenties. He is engaged by the Wrestling Academy, an athletic front organization which provided muscle for the government.

FIFTH ELDER MA In his thirties. He uses his connection with the Western church to lord it over his compatriots.

POCKFACE LIU In his thirties. A cruel and treacherous flesh merchant.

SIXTH-BORN KANG Forty years old. An indigent peasant from the outskirts of Beijing.

FATSO HUANG In his forties. An important gangland figure.

QIN ZHONGYI Wang Lifa's landlord; in his twenties. Born into

wealth, he eventually turns to capitalist investment. A follower of the Reformists.

OLD MAN Eighty-two years old; alone and penniless.

PEASANT WOMAN In her thirties. So poor she must sell her daughter.

LITTLE GIRL Ten-year-old daughter of the Peasant Woman.

EUNUCH PANG A forty-year-old palace eunuch. Having become rich, he is seeking a wife.

LITTLE OX In his teens. Eunuch Pang's attendant.

SONG ENZI Over twenty. An old-style police agent.

WU XIANGZI In his twenties, he is Song Enzi's partner.

KANG SHUNZI The fifteen-year-old daughter of Sixth-Born Kang, sold to Eunuch Pang to be his wife.

WANG SHUFEN About forty years old. The wife of Proprietor Wang Lifa; more straightforward and just than her husband.

POLICEMAN In his twenties.

PAPERBOY Sixteen years old.

KANG DALI Twelve years old. The purchased son of Eunuch Pang. He and Kang Shunzi become inseparable.

OLD LIN In his thirties. A deserter.

OLD CHEN In his thirties. A deserter. Old Lin's sworn brother.

CUI JIUFENG In his forties. Formerly a member of the Legislative Assembly, he later turned from public life to Buddhism and moved into the lodging house run by Yutai Teahouse.

ARMY OFFICER Thirty years old.

WANG DASHUAN About forty years old. An upright man, he is the eldest son of Proprietor Wang.

ZHOU XIUHUA Forty-year-old wife of Wang Dashuan.

WANG XIAOHUA Thirteen-year-old daughter of Wang Dashuan.

DING BAO Seventeen years old. A "come-on hostess" who is brave and intelligent.

LITTLE POCKFACE LIU In his thirties. Pockface Liu's son, he

has carried on and expanded his father's business.

LIGHTBILL COLLECTOR In his forties.

LITTLE SOOTHSAYER TANG In his thirties. The son of Soothsayer Tang, he carries on his father's game, but hopes to become a Taoist Master.

CHEF MING In his fifties, he caters for banquets.

ZOU FUYUAN In his forties. A well-known professional storyteller.

WEI FUXI In his thirties. A student of the same master that Zou studied under, he at first worked as a storyteller, but later turned to singing Beijing Opera.

SIXTH-BORN FANG In his forties. A crafty dealer in second-hand items.

CHE DANGDANG About thirty years old. A speculator in silver dollars.

FOURTH AUNT PANG Forty years old. An ugly woman who has delusions of becoming Empress. She is the wife of Eunuch Pang's fourth nephew.

CHUN MEI Nineteen years old. Fourth Aunt Pang's bondservant.

OLD YANG A pedlar in his thirties.

LITTLE ERDEZI The thirty-year-old son of Erdezi. A hired thug.

YU HOUZHAI In his forties. Wang Xiaohua's primary school teacher.

XIE YONGREN In his thirties. Yu Houzhai's colleague.

LITTLE SONG ENZI About thirty years old. Like his father, Song Enzi, he is a police agent.

LITTLE WU XIANGZI About thirty years old. Like his father Wu Xiangzi, a police agent.

LITTLE XINYAN Nineteen years old. A "come-on hostess."

DIRECTOR SHEN Forty years old. A department chief in the Kuomintang Special Police Force.

TEAHOUSE CUSTOMERS All male.

TWO WAITERS Both male.

REFUGEES Male and female, young and old.

SOLDIERS

TEAHOUSE LODGERS All male.

EXECUTION SQUAD Seven in number.

KUOMINTANG SPECIAL POLICE Four men.

ODDBALL YANG A ballad-monger.

Act One

CHARACTERS: Wang Lifa, Pockface Liu, Eunuch Pang, Soothsayer Tang, Sixth-Born Kang, Little Ox, Second Elder Song, Fatso Huang, Song Enzi, Fourth Elder Chang, Qin Zhongyi, Wu Xiangzi, Third-Born Li, Old Man, Kang Shunzi, Erdezi, Peasant Woman, four Teahouse Customers, Fifth Elder Ma, Little Girl, two Waiters.

TIME: Early autumn, 1898. The Reform Movement of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and their adherents has failed. Morning.

PLACE: Beijing. Yutai Teahouse.

SCENE: Large teahouses like this are no longer to be seen, but a few decades ago every district in Beijing had at least one, where in addition to tea, simple snacks and meals were served. Every day bird fanciers, after strolling about with their caged orioles and thrushes, would come in to rest awhile, enjoy a pot of tea, and compare the singing abilities of their birds. Go-betweens and those who had deals to discuss also frequented such teahouses. In those days there would often be quarrels between gangs, but there were always friends about to calm things down. The two sides would crowd around these mediators who would reason first with one side then the other; then they would all drink tea and down bowls of noodles with minced pork (a specialty of the large teahouses — cheap and quickly prepared), hostility transformed to hospitality. In sum, the teahouse was an important institution of those times, a place where people came to transact business, or simply to while away the time.

In the teahouses one could hear the most absurd stories,

such as how in a certain place a huge spider had turned into a demon and was then struck by lightning. One could also come in contact with the strangest views; for example, that foreign troops could be prevented from landing by building a Great Wall along the sea coast. Here one might also hear about the latest tune composed by some Beijing Opera star, or the best way to prepare opium. In the teahouse one might also see rare art objects newly acquired by some patron — a jade fan pendant, recently unearthed, or a three-colour glazed snuff bottle. Yes, the teahouse was indeed an important place; it could even be reckoned a kind of cultural centre.

We are about to see just such a teahouse.

Just inside the main entrance is the counter and a cookstoveuse benches and stools. Through the window an inner courtyard can be seen with more benches and stools under a high awning. In the teahouse and under the awning there are hooks for hanging bird cages. Pasted up everywhere are notices: "Don't discuss state affairs."

Two unidentified patrons, their eyes narrowed, their heads nodding, are softly singing an opera tune, beating the time with their hands. Two or three more patrons are totally enthralled by a cricket in an earthenware jar. Song Enzi and Wu Xiangzi, wearing grey gowns, are talking secretively. Judging by their appearance they are police agents from the Northern Yamen.

Today, another quarrel has broken out between two gangs; the dispute is said to be over a pigeon. It seemed that it could not be settled without resort to violence, in which case someone would surely have been killed because vicious thugs from the Wrestling Academy and the Guards from the Imperial Storehouses had been hired. Fortunately, before they could come to blows, a mediator intervened. The two sides are about to meet in the teahouse. In twos and threes, looking fierce and arrogant, and dressed in short fighting attire the thugs enter

the teahouse and head for the inner courtyard.

Fifth Elder Ma sits by himself in an inconspicuous corner drinking tea.

Wang Lifa is sitting on a high stool behind the counter.

Soothsayer Tang enters in tattered shoes, wearing a very long and very filthy cotton gown, some scraps of paper tucked behind one ear.

WANG LIFA: Older Tang, why don't you take a walk, eh?

SOOTHSAYER TANG (*with a wan smile*): Proprietor Wang, show a little kindness to old Soothsayer Tang a bit. Give me a bowl of tea and I'll tell you your fortune. Come on, let me see your palm — won't cost you a cent. (*Not waiting for Wang's agreement, takes hold of his hand.*) It's 1898, the twenty-fourth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. And your age....

WANG LIFA (*snatching his hand away*): Forget it! There's no need to ply me with that old fortuneteller's gab — I'll give you a bowl of tea. Fortunetelling's useless. In this country people like us are always the underdogs anyway. (*Comes out from behind his counter and guides Soothsayer Tang to a seat.*) Sit down. You know, if you don't break that opium habit nothing good will ever come your way. That's my way of telling fortunes — much more effective than yours.

(*Carrying bird cages, Second Elder Song and Fourth Elder Chang enter. Wang Lifa greets them. After hanging up their cages they look for a place to sit. Second Elder Song, who has a scholarly air about him, has a small oriole cage; Fourth Elder Chang, a vigorous looking fellow, has a much larger thrush cage. The teahouse waiter, Third-Born Li, comes over quickly, fills their bowls with boiling water and replaces the lids. They have brought their own tea leaves. When the tea has properly steeped, Song and Chang politely proffer some to the guests around them.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG and FOURTH ELDER CHANG: You

should really try this. (*They then look in the direction of the inner courtyard.*)

SECOND ELDER SONG: Looks like trouble again.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: But nothing will come of it. If they really wanted to fight they'd have gone outside the city long ago, eh? What's the point of coming to the teahouse? (*Erdezi, a hired bully, enters just in time to overhear Fourth Elder Chang.*)

ERDEZI (*confronting him*): You. Who do you think you're talking about?

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*unwilling to back down*): What's it to you? I've paid for my tea — surely I don't have to answer to anyone.

SECOND ELDER SONG (*sizing up Erdezi*): Well, sir, I'd guess that you're from the Wrestling Academy, eh? Come on — sit down and have some tea. We are all men of the world.

ERDEZI: What I do is none of your business.

FOURTH ELDER CHANG: If you want to frighten someone why don't you take on the foreigners? — they're a tough lot. You're in the government's pay, but I didn't see you rushing into the fray when the English and French destroyed Yuan Ming Yuan.

ERDEZI: To hell with the foreigners, I'm going to teach you a lesson instead. (*Raises his fists.*)

(*Other customers in the teahouse ignore the disturbance, but Wang Lifa rushes over.*)

WANG LIFA: Now, brothers, we're all neighbours. We should settle things reasonably. Sir, why don't you join them in the inner courtyard?

(*Erdezi, ignoring Wang Lifa, suddenly brushes a teabowl off the table, smashing it. He reaches out to grab Fourth Elder Chang by the collar.*)

FOURTH ELDER CHANG (*dodging*): You want to start something?

ERDEZI: Start something? So, I can't handle the foreigners, eh? Well, I can sure handle you.