


CHI LI

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FROM  
LOVE

*and Other Selected Writings*

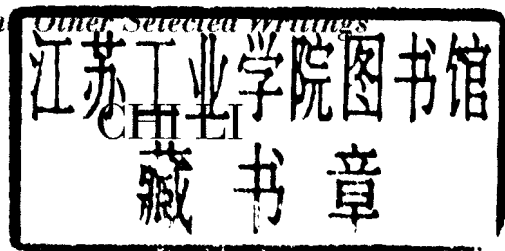
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# APART FROM LOVE

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.

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## Foreword

WHEN Chi Li's famous story "Trials and Tribulations" was first published in a Chinese literary magazine, the companion photograph captured the silhouette of the writer, sporting an apron and busy in the kitchen. Looking elegant and nimble-handed, the figure sheds precious light on what Chi Li is like: a typical oriental woman you see every day in the street.

Oriental, too, is the word for her short stories. To be precise, what she writes of are typical concerns of oriental culture or, to be more accurate, typical concerns of traditional Chinese culture.

The stories collected in this book constitute only a small portion of Chi Li's copious work but they are certainly among the best she has ever written. If it were to happen that the dozen or so protagonists should walk off these pages and appear in daily life, the Chinese reader would find them intimately familiar and be enthralled by the authenticity of their Chinese style and temperament. Such Chinese style and temperament find expression in the ideas, interests, attitudes and lifestyle of all Chi Li's heroes and heroines. An example is Ming Yuehao, her first successfully portrayed female character in the story "Fine Moon", whose attitude towards her tortuous love life and the way she copes with it are typically Chinese. In ancient Chinese literature, a man who broke a marriage promise or a husband who betrayed his wife was invariably censured as the villain and sympathy was heaped upon the disgruntled woman or deserted wife—a phenomenon which may be interpreted as the effort of ancient Chinese writers to wrest what right they could for women in a male-dominated society, and keep ideal and reality in fragile balance.

Though the changing of times and circumstances has long set love and marriage in the realm of emancipation and freedom, Chi Li's moral scale is still tipped in favour of the female world. Her attitude has nothing to do with feminism; rather, it is rooted in the traditional moral values cherished by Chinese people. This is why "Fine Moon" became an instant success and propelled



Chi Li to fame despite its apparent artistic immaturity.

If "Fine Moon" is about Chinese idealism under which everyone has a spiritual idol in his or her heart no matter what reality is, especially in the field of moral conduct, Chi Li's other story "Apart from Love" stands in striking contrast by depicting

Chinese pragmatism in matters concerning love and marriage. The story talks about love but its title serves to divert the reader's attention from it. This discrepancy can only be interpreted to mean that love, as much as its natural outcome — marriage — is intricately connected with things many believe are irrelevant to love, such as family background, social status, money, education, personality and daily trivialities.

In "Apart from Love" the clashes and the resultant sentimental crises between the male and female antagonists in daily life carry a good-natured message: When you are ready to enter the sacred land of love, please do not hurriedly embark on the chitchat about love, please think seriously about the duties and obligations attached to it, the price you might have to pay and the sacrifices you might have to make, and please be ready to endure the pains and misfortune it will inflict. Failing this you may have no alternative but to sacrifice love.

So the title "Apart from Love" is meant to "talk about life". The author believes that love is attached to life and that without life love is nothing but an hallucination or catchy word. Her concept of love may well be regarded as way too practical, but it precisely embodies the age-old, ubiquitous Chinese mode of love and marriage.

The Chinese propensity to cultivate sentimental and spiritual relationships in everyday life, including the highly idealized but rather fragile and sensitive husband-and-wife relationship, is steeped in a pragmatic tradition of love, marriage, family and other fields of ethics and value. Many of Chi Li's works serve as realistic footnotes to this pragmatic way of thinking. The stories "Sunrise" and "Trials and Tribulations" are two outstanding examples in this regard.

"Trials and Tribulations", which won Chi Li widespread

fame, is likewise tinged with elements of oriental culture. As the title suggests, the work is about the tribulations of man's life, a topic of common interest in Chinese and Western philosophy and religion. The attitude of Confucians in ancient China was to get actively involved in life and enjoy what amenities the mundane world had to offer. They never avoided the daily "tribulations" but worked to dissolve them through a series of approaches. The rise and fall in officialdom was a common problem confronting them, but their attitude was that if they received a promotion they would do their utmost to serve the country, and if they suffered setbacks in officialdom, they would, instead of being carried away with worries, work to dissolve such worries by cultivating their own moral characters. That is why the majority of Chinese Confucianists could maintain a happy-go-lucky attitude towards life. This part of Chinese culture is also a unique characteristic of the Chinese physiognomy.

For Ying Jiahou, the protagonist in "Trials and Tribulations", all the "tribulations" in man's life are concrete problems closely associated with everyday matters such as housing, wages, bonuses, wife and children. Though Ying is merely a worker, not a Confucianist, his attitude towards life is Confucian in essence. Although he is often embarrassed and helpless when dealing with the various worries in his life, he never regards his embarrassment and helplessness as a tragedy of his existence in this world. Rather, he takes a conformist attitude and seeks spiritual consolation and psychological balance between gain and loss, and between good luck and bad.

As the saying goes, "Contentment brings happiness". A man in contentment knows how to keep his desire within bounds; he never allows his desire to inflate until it becomes so insatiable as to bring him worry and pain. It is from this Confucian "naturalization" approach that Ying Jiahou derives his method of coping with his tribulations.

In "Hand of Gold", the antagonist copes with life's injustice in the spirit of another Confucian tenet; forbearance. However, because Chi Li is a story-teller rather than an expert in

Confucianism, this story has' gone beyond Confucius' admonition "You may become resentful, but on no account should you lose your temper" to take an antagonistic stand against established social norms. This is another salient feature of her works, and it makes sense because softness and good-naturedness are not what Confucians were all about. They too, had the courage and resolve to face up to injustice and, when need be, argue their cause in front of the emperor. Art and philosophy are vastly enriched because of the coexistence of opposites.

"Hot or Cold, It's Good to Be Alive" is yet another well-written piece in this book. It eulogizes Confucian optimism by recounting how a group of men and women struggle for survival in harsh weather and poor living conditions. Just like the worker Ying Jiahou's unstoppable quest for the essence of survival from the myriad tribulations in man's life, the ordinary citizens in this work are, too, enduring the taste of "being alive" in the vicissitude of life.

A short preface like this does not suffice to cover Chi Li's creative work in its entity. But, it should be mentioned too that the unsung aspects of Chi Li's story-telling art, are no less exuberant in their Chinese cultural sentiment.

*Yu Kexun*

## Hand of Gold

ONE day five years ago I woke up early. I stayed in bed, my eyes fixed at the ceiling. Why, I wondered, had Jianhui suddenly mentioned the lack of snow this winter when it was already late spring? I hadn't found it odd at the time so I had said nothing and fallen asleep. After the incident, when I recalled Jianhui's every word and action, I thought her remark about the lack of snow very peculiar. Jianhui always said strange things at impending disaster. How come I had felt so sleepy?

Old Chu, on the other hand, found nothing in the least peculiar. Jianhui was just that type of person, he said, her chain of thoughts would race ahead and she'd come out with surprising remarks. At this critical moment Old Chu looked so stupid and confused. He admitted he had no idea what to do. When his innocent wife was in jail, instead of running about to get her released, all he did was to frown and apologize to his wife's colleague for "being so useless." What a spineless man, with his misleadingly tall, strong build, his square masculine face and dignified manner. I had once been in love with him. I had felt guilty for falling in love with my best friend's husband. After it happened, my affections towards him vanished. I felt relieved. "Let me do it," I said crisply.

I believed Jianhui was innocent. I knew her too well. She was a capable gynaecologist. She might have her faults — even Homer sometimes nods. But dereliction of duty was not one of them. It was unfair to label her with that.

After the tragedy Jianhui was suspended from work. She stayed in the office writing about the accident and her attitude towards it. She read what she had written to her colleagues, then started writing again. The director of the hospital and the head of the gynaecological department wanted Jianhui to fully comprehend what had happened.

But one day, Jianhui was taken away by the police.

This caused a big stir. The first person I met in the hospital that morning said to me in a strange voice, "Dr Li has been arrested."

Arrested? It sounded like the war.

I rushed up to the third floor to pound on the office door. Everybody rushed out of their rooms to see what had happened.

"Calm down," the department head shook my shoulders. "Don't get worked up. Dr Li's been taken away, but it may turn out all for the best. Laws are just and fair, and we should trust them."

"No — No —" I cried. My heart was on fire. What an insult for an innocent person to be arrested. Unblinking eyes stared at me as if I had just had a narrow escape from a perilous situation. I knew what was on their minds. The night shift during which the tragedy had occurred had been mine. Jianhui had substituted for me. This seemingly predestined accident could not have been avoided. It was just a matter of whom it would happen to. Was this dereliction of duty?

Head Nurse Li dispersed the crowd. "Back to your room and have a rest," she told me. "Don't get so worked up, making a fool of yourself like that."

I knew that certain people in the hospital were gleeful about the accident. That's why I felt it was doubly unjust for Jianhui.

"Excuse me, but who's handling Li Jianhui's case?" I asked at the district prosecutor's office without introducing myself.

A short, pale, skinny young man, a lighted cigarette between his fingers, pushed his official cap into position before saying sternly, "You want to tell me something about the case?"

"Yes."

He snapped his fingers twice, and another uniformed man, even younger than he, came over with a pen and paper and sat at the table.

"Your identity," the first man asked me.

He was a court official, I understood. "Why did you arrest Li Jianhui? What's the charge?" I leafed through a copy of *Judicial Handbook* that I had just got from a bookstore. "First, an arrest may be made only when the crime is proved beyond doubt. Has this been done? I was a witness throughout the accident, but you've never approached me. Second, a jail sentence is possible. Does this mean you are ready to sentence her?" I couldn't go on, tears were running down my face.

"Control yourself," the court official warned me.

I snapped the book shut and hurled it at him. He hastily reached out his hands to catch it. "Control yourself," he said angrily.

The other young man jumped to his feet and shouted, "This is a judicial body and we have bailiffs here!"

"You are being unreasonable—" I shouted back, "Li Jianhui could not have neglected her duty. You should have investigated the case thoroughly."

"Bailiff—"

I was furious. Can a bailiff forceably remove a person who has simply come to reason? Where could I get justice?

"Li Jianhui was innocent! I was there all the time!"

"Bailiff—"

A bailiff rushed over. He pointed his electric baton at my face. His voice was menacing. "You're a doctor, that's why I ask you to leave right away!"

"What if I don't?"

For a moment I wanted to do something reckless, even at the risk of being jailed like Jianhui. I hated the idea of living the rest of my life with a guilty conscience.

A woman court official stood between me and the bailiff. She handed me a cup of hot water.

"Calm down, doctor," she urged me, "a person in your profession ought to be able to face reality. Arrest takes place after due judicial processes, not just at the word of a judge."

Her eyes were those of a kind wife and mother. Confronted by those eyes my tears welled up again. "Can I see Li Jianhui?"

"No, you can't," she said. "Before the court convenes no relatives or friends may see the accused."

I believed that what she said was the law. I averted

my eyes in despair.

As she walked me to the door she told me that only the lawyer could see the defendant at this moment, that was, of course, if she had one.

I talked about this with Old Chu. "Do we have to have one?" he asked doubtfully. "I mean, does it help?"

"I don't know, but there's a wall between us and Jianhui that only a lawyer can penetrate."

"How can we get one?"

"I've never done anything like this before."

"How long does it take?"

"Don't worry about it. Just pay the fee." I had to get him involved, at least financially.

"Do you want money right now?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Two hundred yuan for the time being."

He thought for a while, then gave me the money.

"You really want to get involved?" Head Nurse Li asked me.

"Yes."

A lock of my hair was falling out of place. She gently pushed it back for me. Then, in a low voice, she told me that the relatives of the deceased had connections with the judiciary, and that someone in the hospital had taken this opportunity to add fuel to the fire. Be cautious, she warned me, and don't go too far when dealing with a judicial body. She said she had a nephew who had been jailed by mistake, and because his attitude was not "right" he had been beaten up,



and received a broken rib as well as a fifteen-day detention. A wise person avoided head-on collisions with judicial bodies, she emphasized.

"I'll be careful," I said.

Forgive me, Jianhui, I said to myself, all I can do for you is to get a lawyer. They have bailiffs behind them, getting you out of prison by force is just a joke. Anyway, I will find you a good lawyer.

Head Nurse Li showed me a book. It was *Rage of Angels*, an American best seller. "Read it," she said. I told her I wasn't in the mood. She stuffed the book into my handbag, saying, "Read it while waiting for a lawyer. It's like a textbook on legal issues. It's about a brilliant woman lawyer who won many cases. There are a lot of things we don't know about legal matters. Only lawyers can help. I hope you find such a lawyer."

After running several days from one legal office to another, I went to the Municipal Legal Office. I wanted to see Mr Jia, the most famous of all its excellent lawyers. He was a smoker, I was told, and smoked only the best cigarettes. With a carton of 555 in my bag I sat on a bench the whole morning waiting for him. The queue of clients in the corridor moved forward slowly. Everyone assumed a miserable expression the moment he or she took a seat before a lawyer. For a moment I thought I was in a hospital.

But Mr Jia didn't come. At lunch time I strolled out into the street and had a little snack and a cup of coffee that tasted like sugar water. I was the first to sit on the bench that afternoon. An hour later, an impressive old man, with silvery hair and a dignified