

SCANDINAVIAN INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES  
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NO. 21

# Proscribed Chinese Writing

中國現代文選

Second revised edition

Robert Tung

Curzon Press

董培炎編

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# 中國現代文選

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## FOREWORD

Apart from the inherent interest of the texts themselves, PROSCRIBED CHINESE WRITING is designed as a textbook for students who have studied the Chinese language for one or two years and who are now ready to read the literature. It is a collection of essays written over the last 30 years by Chinese scholars, all of whom have been criticised by the Chinese Communist Party or by the Government. The work of these authors constitutes an important part of Chinese literature which the world must not continue to ignore. Several Western scholars claim that Chinese literature has been strangled by the repressive actions taken by the Communist authorities. I trust this book will prove the existence of literature as a dynamic force still alive in China today.

The glossary at the back of the book defines words strictly within the context of the appropriate story, thus saving students the trouble of choosing the correct definition from many possible meanings offered by a dictionary. For example, the expression “用心” in Teng To's article *Stories about Bragging* is defined as “intention”, without listing other possible meanings, such as “diligent”, “attentively”, or “(to study) hard”. Similarly the character “講” is translated as “to be interested in” and “to be particular about” instead of “to talk”. Again, in Wu Han's article *Humans and Ghosts*, the phrase “對不起” is translated “to do injustice to”, “to be unfair to” or “to mistreat”, rather than “sorry” or “to be unable to face a person owing to some fault”.

I have adopted the Peking-sponsored pin-yin system for transliteration, with the exception of relatively well-known names and place-names. I have included, however, a conversion table for those more familiar with the Wade-Giles system.

The articles, placed in context by short explanatory introductions, are arranged according to their dates of publication. Then an appendix explains why the authors won official Chinese disapproval.

The publication of this book would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of Søren Egerod, professor of East Asian languages, University of Copenhagen and head of the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies. I am also grateful to Dr. Chang Tao-wen whose calligraphy graces the cover and to Mrs. Elsa Karlsmark who contributed some of the notes accompanying the articles by Hsia Chun and Liao Mo-sha.

## INTRODUCTION

*Sounds of wind, rain and reading of  
books all fill my ears;  
Family, state and world affairs, I show  
concern for them all.*

—Ku Hsien-cheng

It was no accident that Teng To chose to quote the above couplet by the leader of the Ming Dynasty's Tunglin Party in one of his articles. Possibly reacting against the Mandarin literati and their remoteness from everyday life, modern Chinese authors feel strongly that they must be concerned with every aspect of real life, not just with politics. Authors must write of the problems of all types of men, not solely of workers, peasants or soldiers. Chinese literature over the past 30-odd years has thus occupied itself with a wide range of subjects.

The authors have been accused of attempting to restore capitalism in China. Chinese men of letters, however, are not naive enough to believe that power grows out of the barrel of the pen or even that the pen is mightier than the sword. Their aim is purely literary—to bring fresh meaning, greater intensity and significant shape to everyday life.

Those who claim that there is no literature in China today because the Communist society admits of no freedom ignore the fact that the source of literature is life, not freedom. Chinese writers may not be as free as some others in certain other countries to write what they wish to write, or to publish what they write, some are freer than others. And almost all the authors in this collection published while they held important positions.

It may be argued that Chinese authors cannot be creatively original because Peking's rigid political "line" prevents them from thinking objectively. But this collection clearly illustrates the continuing creativity of Chinese men of letters; the political line has in no way blinkered their observation of the world. In other words, they are masters of their minds, and are as clear-sighted as any of their Western opposite numbers.

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Wang Shih-wei joined the Communist Party in 1926 and was one of the first to write about the problems of young people under Chinese communism. For those holding out in Yen-an in the Forties, according to his description in *Wild Lilies*, life hardly fulfilled youthful idealism. Young people did not eat well; nor did they enjoy the companionship of the opposite

sex (there being eighteen boys to every girl). Recreational facilities were few, and life was boring. Cadres showed little concern for those who fell ill. Brought up in the old society, they were servile to their superiors and hostile to their inferiors. Young people's complaints were flippantly brushed aside as trifles. Those who objected to the hierarchical system were accused of being egalitarian. Wang Shih-wei compared those who defended the stratified hierarchy by mouthing the slogan "Learn from the Soviet Union" with those "masters who cite Greece whenever they speak" and adjured them to "keep their mouths shut". Shortly after the publication of *Wild Lilies* in March 1942, Wang was arrested as a Trotskyite. He has not been heard of since May of that year.

While Wang Shih-wei was writing about the disillusionment of the young, Ting Ling concerned herself with women's troubles. In an article *Thoughts on March 8 Day* published in the *Liberation Daily* (she was editor of the newspaper's literary page) Ting presented another aspect of life in the revolutionary cradle. It was not ethical for a woman to be friendly with men; marriage was criticised. Intellectuals alleged that a woman had eyes only for leading personalities if she married a man who rode on a horse (the horse being the symbol of a high social position). Those in authority complained that she despised uneducated veteran cadres if she married an intellectual. When she had children, she was "Nora who had returned home", meaning she had regressed politically. Applications for divorce were almost always filed by the husband. A woman's only alternative was to have an "immoral" affair, thus rendering herself worthy only of a curse. Ting Ling did not hold in high regard the way in which the political power of the proletariat had responded to the challenge of the women's liberation movement. Instead, she proposed, women should stand on their own feet. Only then could they demand equality with men.

Ting's considerable literary influence kept her out of trouble until 1957. But then she crossed swords with Chou Yang, formerly deputy director of the propaganda department of the CCP Central Committee, and was "purged"

A poet by name as well as by nature, Ai Ching was arrested by the Nationalists in 1932 for "harbouring dangerous thoughts". In 1942, he appealed to the communist authorities to give due regard to writers. In his article *Understand and Respect Writers*, he asked only for freedom for writers to publish what they write. Writers demanded no other privileges. They had fought all their lives for communist democratic politics precisely to win protection for the independent spirit of their artistic creations. Those who wished writers to describe boils as if they were flower buds, who were unable



to see their own ugliness (much less change themselves) were hopeless. Those who did not, like other men, take baths, but wished the writer to scratch them where it itched were informed that writers did not regard it as their function to scratch itches.

Hsiao Chun is best-known for his novel *Village in August*. In his article *On Love and Tolerance among Comrades*, published in 1942, Hsiao quoted a passage from this novel in order to underline the importance of tolerance—or of understanding—between the leaders and their followers:

“Anna, who had drunk some wine, now picked a quarrel with commander Chen Chu, who would not grant her request to go to Shanghai. Chen Chu did not affect pomposity as a responsible person, and refrained from punishing her. Instead, he felt somewhat sad as he looked at the child who was in love for the first time. He well understood why Anna acted as she did to-night.”

Hsiao maintained that love and tolerance were inseparable. Love could only exist with tolerance, without which the great cause of Chinese revolution would suffer.

In his *Sketches of Chirping Cicadas*, published in 1957, Hsiao revealed that, like a cicada, he had been silent for some years due to the chilly climate. Now that those who preyed on insects were not after him, the change of climate allowed him to chirp on.....

His “chirpings”, inspired by the greater tolerance of the “Hundred Flowers”, included the observation that some Marxists were good at teaching but bad at learning themselves. They were also good at criticising what others learned. Some who had believed the theory that creative works of art involved “no conflict” rejected that idea only a year later, because the Soviet Union opposed the theory. Even more recently, they had switched their position again, advocating the idea that “poisonous weeds” should contend. A Marxist must keep two things in mind if he wanted to maintain his position, he said. One was to remember to be ultra-leftist when struggling with rightist-opportunist deviations and ultra-rightist when struggling with leftist-opportunist deviations. The second tip he gave was: always say something which the masses could not read in the newspapers, keeping them constantly wondering if the Marxist indeed boasted “confidential” sources of information.

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After 1957 and the unhappy end to the Hundred Flowers and the Hundred

Contending Schools of Thought, Chinese writing suddenly became much more subtle and oblique in its approach. Instead of directly confronting the regime on topical issues of common interest, writers turned to nature and to historical events as their subject matters. They often quoted relevant and telling passages from Chinese classics, and by analogy produced logical and convincing reasons. Thus they forced their readers to think deeply, drawing their own parallels with modern times. The writers chose their words with great care and during this period the use of modern Chinese language reached its highest degree of excellence and readability.

*From Choosing Theatrical Programmes*, written by playwright Hsia Yen, uses the story from the eighteenth chapter of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* dealing with the kindness shown towards actors by Chai Yuan-chun. Thus he is able to make a telling point about the desirable relations between the man responsible for choosing theatrical programmes and those who perform them.

Meng Chao (better known as Chen Po in literary circles) wrote the unpopular historical play *Li Hui-niang*. His article *Chang Hsien-chung Kills or Kills Not?* was written during a heated debate among Chinese historians about the famous Chang, the man who revolted against the Ming Dynasty. Some historians, sympathetic with the idea of peasant uprisings, denied that Chang killed. Meng argues that Chang did kill; that is an undeniable historical fact. Whether his killings were justifiable was another matter. In the piece entitled *Secret of the Palace of White Ants*, Meng attempts, by means of a description of the discovery of the king and queen ants by Lee Shi-mei, to demonstrate the importance of flexibility in methods of study, observation, investigation and judgment.

A distinguished writer, Chin Mu published at least seven volumes of essays, the most popular of which is *Gathering Shells in the Sea of Art*. We have chosen four from this collection.

In *Chrysanthemum and Goldfish*, Chin Mu points out that in cultivating rare flowers and breeding tiny creatures to brighten an otherwise dull world, the Chinese people have specialised in chrysanthemums and gold fish. Over three thousand years, they have developed over 2,000 varieties of chrysanthemum and hundreds of different goldfish. But, in choosing a favourite type of flower or fish, one need not denigrate all other varieties. Similarly, he goes on, the lover of novels need not decry all other forms of literature.

Another essay, *To Imitate Steps from the People of Han Tan*, also elaborates the importance of artistic individuality. It retells the ancient story

of a young man from the state of Yen who tried to imitate the style of walking of the people of Han Tan, the capital of Chao. But he failed to match the grace of the Han Tan people, and succeeded only in forgetting his own walking style. In great distress, he was reduced to crawling. Chin drives his point home by quoting the words of the late Chi Pai-shih, a well-known contemporary Chinese painter, who said: "He who learns from me lives; he who imitates me dies."

In *The Complication of River Branches*, Chin Mu uses the varying interpretations of minor points of Chinese folklore to illustrate the kaleidoscopic variety of life. The Yangtze flows from west to east. But in places it flows from east to west, or even northwards or southwards. Chin Mu warns that unless the unusual and extra-ordinary is tolerated in literary works, and instead a "common plot" is demanded, writers will be unable to embrace the huge variety of life.

Poison is not necessarily harmful. Some have become medicines in the hands of doctors. Such things also happen in the field of art and literature. A man went to a wine and poetry party. Those present, while drinking, were extemporising couplets. The man was not well-educated, but nevertheless scribbled a line:

**"One after another come fluttering willow catkins red."**

Those round the table sneered; how could catkins be red? But one picked up a brush and added the line:

**"Over peach valleys goes shining the setting sun."**

—thus transmuting a far-fetched sentence into a striking line of verse.

Similarly, a poet wrote a birthday poem for an old, rich lady surrounded by her family. The first line went:

**"This old lady is not human;"**

The faces round the table ceased smiling. Undisturbed, the poet went on:

**"An Angel descending from the heaven."**

The anger of the old lady's children and grand children turned to ecstasy.

**"All her children and grandchildren are thieves;"**

was his third line. Anger again. But the poet skilfully softened the sharpness of his brush:

**"Stealing a heavenly peach for the dearest one."**

All smiled and nodded happily in approval. Chin Mu uses these two vivid tales in *Poisons and Medicines* to push home the importance of flexibility.

A biographer and historian from Chekiang province, Wu Han's best known works are *Mirror of History*, *The Biography of Chu Yuan-chang*, and a series

of articles on Hai Jui. These were regarded as a deliberate challenge to the Party's verdict on the purged former Defence Minister Peng Te-huai, and were some of the sparks which touched off the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

His *Hai Jui Scolds the Emperor* (included in this collection) is simply a biography of an upright government official under the Ming Emperor Chia Ching.

In *Humans and Ghosts*, Wu admits that the development of science has resulted in the lessening of superstitious beliefs in ghosts. But some of the living talk and act like ghosts, so study of the best ghost stories is still worthwhile. Living ghosts frighten people, conspire, create tensions and cause trouble. But as ghosts prey on people's fears, they can be rendered harmless by a refusal to be frightened. Wu gives a few examples.

A man named Keng moved into an abandoned, haunted house. One night, a long-haired, black-faced ghost appeared, laughing at the startled Keng. Keng started laughing himself. He smeared his own face with black ink from the desk and outstared the ghost, who shame-faced stole away.

Another man, Tsao was sleeping at a friend's house. At midnight, a piece of paper slid under the door and turned into a woman. Tsao was not frightened. The ghost dishevelled her hair and stuck out her long tongue. Tsao jeered: "Your hair is like anybody's hair, only slightly dishevelled. Your tongue is like anybody's tongue, only slightly longer. What is there to fear?" The ghost then took off her head and placed it on the table. Tsao burst out laughing. Puzzled, the ghost vanished. When she re-appeared Tsao simply shouted, "How boring! Here she is again!" she left.

The third story is about a brave man named Tai, who moved into a huge house. One night, a ghost appeared:

"Is it true that you are not afraid?" said the ghost.

"It is."

The ghost then made all kinds of ghastly faces.

"Still not afraid?"

"Of course not."

"In fact, I do not intend to turn you out," the ghost said politely, "I will go if you admit that you are scared."

"This is unheard of! How can I say I am when I am honestly and truly not afraid?"

The ghost begged, but to no avail. Eventually he sighed, "I have lived here for more than thirty years but never met anyone half as stubborn. I cannot live under the same roof as such an idiot." So saying the ghost walked out.

Wu Han was disgraced in 1966 for "attacking the Party and revolution" and for portraying "our country as a world full of ghosts".

In *Stories about Bragging*, Teng To (a long-time editor of the *People's Daily*) relates historical examples of the dangers of boasting. One "should exercise caution in handling matters, should do more, talk less and, still less, court fame".

Liao Mo-sha was chairman of the departments of Education and United Front Work of the Peking Municipal Party Committee up to his purge during the Cultural Revolution. In the first of three articles selected from his collection of essays entitled *Report What Comes Handy*, he criticises the "eight-legged essay" in order to expose the equally obnoxious stereotypes in Party writing, education and leadership.\*

In other articles, he deplores the fact that those who wield the greatest power and occupy the highest positions are the least criticised. The arrow of criticism should be aimed at department chiefs and above, since they are the people whose bureaucratic attitudes do the state the most harm.

Liao laments the poor quality of new poetry which, according to him, is no more than prose arranged in spaced-out lines. No matter how the written lines are arranged — vertically or otherwise — they still resemble an up and down escalator leading nowhere, or uneven garments hanging on a bamboo pole to dry in the sun. He questions Tu Fu's attitude to poetry — that a poet should be "kind to the new and love the old". Liao asks whether a poet should be kind when the new is not better than the old. He advises the young to work harder if they want to compose good poems.

Liao argues in *Those Being Served by People* that the phrase "serve the people" is often interpreted as "being served by the people". If a bus driver does not treat his passengers courteously, they scold him; if a salesgirl does

\*Stereotyped writing, or the "eight-legged essay", was the special form of essay prescribed in the imperial examinations under China's feudal dynasties from the 15th to the 19th centuries; it consisted in juggling with words, concentrated only on form and was devoid of content. Structurally the main body of the essay had eight parts — presentation, amplification, preliminary exposition, initial argument, inceptive paragraphs, middle paragraphs, rear paragraphs and concluding paragraphs, and the fifth to eighth parts each had to have two "legs", i.e., two antithetical paragraphs, hence the name "eight-legged essay". The "eight-legged essay" became a byword in China denoting stereotyped formalism and triteness. Thus "stereotyped Party writing" characterizes the writings of certain people in the revolutionary ranks who piled up revolutionary phrases and terms higgledy-piggledy instead of analysing the facts. Like the "eight-legged essay", their writings were nothing but verbiage. — *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. III, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1965, p. 50.

not smile pleasantly, they say she does not want to serve the people. Their attitude is: "As long as I pay, they will have to wait on me!" Liao writes with fine delicacy and observes with rare discernment the new intricate relations between the serving and the served in socialist China.

The last piece in this collection is Chang Pai's *Manner of Contention*. Chang Pai could be the pen name of either Wu Han or Liao Mo-sha. However, Chang Pai's style seems more closely to resemble that of Liao.

Chang says that everyone agrees that hundreds of schools should contend, but that it is not easy to practise the theory because the arguments are so irrational: "I am reasonable and you are not"; "My facts are right; yours are not"; "One talks about this, another about that".

In order to carry on healthy scholarly contention, Chang suggests that each participant should realise no one is more equal than others. Everyone is entitled to argue, but logically and scientifically.

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I have thus presented typical extracts from ten authors who deal with different subjects in different styles, but who have in common the anger they aroused in official quarters and their subsequent disgrace. There is a certain pattern to their experiences. Each supported revolution in China and held important government positions. None of them opposed the dictatorship of the proletariat. They were all originally accepted by the regime but discredited later.

Mao wrote in his article *On Coalition Government*: "Provided they serve the people credibly, all intellectuals should be esteemed and regarded as valuable national and social assets". How, then, did these authors not serve the people credibly? Did they not follow the Party line? Is there no freedom in China to criticise? Or did they criticise too pointedly? Is it treason to quote the past in order to satirise the present? If these suggestions are true, then Mao himself would be most vulnerable to attack for being an anti-revolutionary.

Mao himself called stereotyped Party writing "a vehicle for filth" in *Rectify the Party's Style of Work*. In his article *Reform Our Study*, he quoted:

"The reed growing on the wall — top-heavy, thin-stemmed and shallow of root;  
The bamboo shoot in the hills — sharp-tongued, thick-skinned and hollow inside."

Mao was describing those who lack "a scientific attitude", who "indulge in verbiage" and enjoy a reputation unwarranted by any real learning", and who are "crude and careless", behaving like "a blindfolded man catching sparrows" or "a blind man groping for fish".

His criticisms could very plausibly be applied to those who helped discredit the intellectuals — bureaucrats like Lin Chieh, Mao Tse-min, Yen Chang-kuei, Chou Ying, Teng Wen-sheng and Chin Tien-liang, who chastised Teng To's *Evening Chats at Yenshan* as anti-Party and anti-socialist double-talk. Double-talk, maybe. But certainly not anti-Party or anti-socialist. Instead of "seeking truth from facts", the "six gentlemen" twisted the facts, creating tension and trouble, pursuing their own self-interest. By attacking others, they made themselves more important. The intellectuals were killed by "ghosts" — the same variety of trouble maker vividly described in Wu Han's essay. They were the victims of the prejudices and the petty intrigues of bureaucrats.

It is tragic that any government, which seeks objective truth, should be fooled by the high-sounding words and benevolent facades of such petty men, who actually do more harm to the revolution than the loyal men of letters who dare to expose social injustice.

In fact, the authorities might review what Mencius once said in reply to the Emperor Chi Hsuan. Mencius warned: "When all those about you say that you should not employ this man, do not listen to them; when all your ministers say that you should not employ him, do not listen to them; when all the people say that you should not employ him, look into the matter yourself and dismiss him only when you find him unworthy. Likewise, when all those about you say that this man deserves death, do not listen to them; when all your ministers say that he deserves death, do not listen to them; when all the people say that he deserves death, examine the case carefully and put him to death only when you find him so deserving."

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## APPENDIX

### TENG TO'S EVENING CHATS AT YENSHAN IS ANTI-PARTY AND ANTI-SOCIALIST DOUBLE-TALK

COMPILED BY LIN CHIEH, MA TSE-MIN,  
YEN CHANG-KUEI, CHOU YING, TENG WEN-SHENG  
AND CHIN TIEN-LIANG

#### FOREWORD

*Since 1961 Teng To has published a series of anti-Party and anti-socialist articles in Frontline (Qianxian), the Peking Daily (Beijing Ribao) and the Peking Evening News (Beijing Wanbao), launching fierce onslaughts on the Party and on socialism. As early as the time of their publication, these anti-Party and anti-socialist views aroused opposition among many comrades who sent in criticisms to Frontline, the Peking Daily and the Peking Evening News. But the latter refused to publish these contributions and suppressed them.*

*As a result of the recent thorough exposure of the anti-Party and anti-socialist features of Wu Han, Liao Mo-sha and others, it was no longer possible to cover up Teng To's features either. Therefore, Frontline and the Peking Daily hurriedly printed some excerpts from Evening Chats at Yenshan with an editorial note.*

*In their editorial note, Frontline and the Peking Daily kept quiet about Teng To's opposition to the Party and socialism and, with the same intention of hushing things up, arranged their extracts from Evening Chats at Yenshan in such a way as to hide the fundamental issue of Teng To's opposition to the Party and socialism.*

*In our opinion, Teng To's Evening Chats at Yenshan is a lot of double-talk against the Party and socialism. Therefore, we have made our own compilation of passages from the Evening Chats and added a number of comments. It is our hope that the readers will make a comparative study of our extracts and those compiled by Frontline and the Peking Daily.*



## I. VENOMOUS ATTACKS ON OUR GREAT PARTY

### Viciously Attacking the Scientific Thesis That “The East Wind Prevails Over the West Wind” as “Great Empty Talk” and a “Cliche”

“Some people have the gift of the gab. They can talk endlessly on any occasion, like water flowing from an undammed river. After listening to them, however, when you try to recall what they have said, you can remember nothing.”

“Making long speeches without really saying anything, making confusion worse confounded by explaining, or giving explanations which are not explanatory — these are the characteristics of great empty talk.”

“We cannot deny that in certain special situations such great empty talk is inevitable, and therefore in a certain sense is a necessity. Still, it will be quite awful if great empty talk should be made into a prevalent fashion indulged in on every occasion or even cultivated as a special skill. It will be still more disastrous if our children should be taught this skill and turned into hordes of experts in great empty talk.”

“As chance would have it, my neighbour’s child has recently often imitated the style of some great poet and put into writing a lot of ‘great empty talk’ . . . . Not long ago he wrote a poem entitled ‘Ode to Wild Grass’ which is nothing but empty talk. The poem reads as follows:

*The Venerable Heaven is our father,  
The Great Earth is our mother  
And the Sun is our nanny;  
The East Wind is our benefactor  
And the West Wind is our enemy.”*

“Although such words as heaven, earth, father, mother, sun, nanny, the East Wind, the West Wind, benefactor and enemy catch our eye, they are used to no purpose here and have become mere cliches.”

“Recourse to even the finest words and phrases is futile, or rather, the more such cliches are uttered, the worse the situation will become. Therefore I would advise those friends given to great empty talk to read more, think more, say less and take a rest when the time comes for talking, so as to save their own as well as other people’s time and energy.”

(“Great Empty Talk”, *Frontline*, No. 21, 1961)