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**A NUN OF TAISHAN**

(A NOVELETTE)

**AND OTHER TRANSLATIONS**

**TRANSLATED**

**BY**

**LIN YUTANG**

**THE COMMERCIAL PRESS, LIMITED**

**SHANGHAI, CHINA**

**1936**

A NUN OF TAISHAN

A NOVELETTE

(84189)

英譯老殘遊記第二集及其他選譯

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and

Other Translations

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著 譯 者 林 語 堂

發 行 人 王 雲 五  
上海河南路

印 刷 所 商 務 印 書 館  
上海河南路

發 行 所 商 務 印 書 館  
上海及各埠

實價國幣貳元伍角 外埠酌加運費匯費

中華民國二十五年十月初版

## PREFACE TO "A NUN OF TAISHAN"

Yiyün, the nun and heroine of the story, represents a different ideal of living from Shen Po's wife, Yünniang, the heroine of "Six Chapters of a Floating Life." Yünniang symbolizes the wife, while Yiyün symbolizes the recluse, and in each case the ideal is embodied by a woman. She represents for me a typically carefree soul, with a carefree quality which comes, not from irresponsibility, nor from gay abandon, but from a great understanding backed by the entire Buddhistic and Taoistic wisdom, and she is on that account kindlier towards her fellow-men than many austere souls so anxious to rescue young girls and save the world. I don't think Yiyün would ever enlist in the Salvation Army and rescue young girls unless young girls are ready themselves to be rescued by her. She would probably survey her victim, as she did Huants'ui in this story, take a good look at her, and only when finding grace and delicacy in her eyes, would she decide to take her as her disciple. No, a Taoist makes a bad evangelist. She knows nature too well to try to interfere and she has too much understanding to think that only in the holy way lies man's salvation. Her advice to Mrs. Teh was definitely just to stick to her husband. This is the broad view born of Taoist tolerance

and Buddhist subtlety. It is this carefree wisdom, attained by great understanding which made her so happy, and it is her carefree happiness which made her so attractive. Mrs. Teh said she would make a good housewife in the daytime and a good conversationalist under the lamp-light at night, and who can disagree with her?

The story contains a complete autobiographical account of a nun's experience of love, which is of course no different from any girl's experience of love, except under what western readers may regard as unholy surroundings. A certain *naïveté* makes up for a certain sordidness in the business of selling love. It should be understood by western readers unfamiliar with Chinese customs that there is a certain ceremony and importance attached to the occasion when a sing-song girl receives a man for the first time in her life. Monetary arrangements are officially entered into by her guardian with the man, when the girl is about to become a woman, the same monetary arrangements as seen in alimony that are made to compensate for a woman's loss of chastity in western countries. Such arrangements were the natural thing in Yiyün's society and do not reflect on her character. After all, Yiyün has not lost her chastity although she talks like a hard-boiled virgin. The love story, in sections three and four, happening under warped circumstances,

is a story of conquest of the spirit over the flesh, and leads to story of her spiritual development in the last two sections, five and six, where she emerges as a kindly and dignified young teacher of the truth. Interesting as her love story is to many readers, it is in the last sections of the novelette that her character is rounded off and the story reaches true depth.

She then stands there as the author's ideal of an emancipated person. She was happy, she was carefree, she was independent, she could wander about in this world where she liked, and she could be at home anywhere. Her happiness was decidedly attractive, and how did she do it? By what Taoist magic formula? First by a vigorous training of her body, and secondly by attaining a view of life which set her at ease wherever she went and in whatever company she found herself. Those are the two essential elements in a Taoist training, for I regard her more as a Taoist than as a Buddhist. In her opinion, Huants'ui could not be spiritually saved *until she had unbound her feet* and learned to run about the mountains like on level ground. Without such a body, no soul could be happy, and after all the only test of a soul's salvation is its inward happiness. But see how Yiyün runs up and down Taishan, and how she can go without an evening meal and sleep without a blanket at night. She has attained that stage of physical fitness and independence very much

desired by the modern boy scouts and girl guides. It is in this sense that she made a bargain with Huants'ui: if the latter wanted to be her disciple, she was to wander about every day on foot on the mountain. "When you have learnt to run up and down the steep mountain paths like on level ground, then you will have laid a sound foundation for understanding Buddhism." As for the second element, that of true understanding and learning to adjust oneself to whatever surrounding, she says:

"Recently I have decided to divide my personality into two beings, the first one called 'Yiyün of the world.' As Yiyün of the world, and as a nun in this Toumukung, I will do whatever I ought to do and talk with whoever wants to talk with me. If he wants me to drink with him at dinner, then I drink with him, and if he wants to hug or embrace me, I will let him hug or embrace me, no matter who he is—except in the matter of sleeping with a man, where I draw the line. The other self is called 'Yiyün the recluse,' who likes to spend her leisure hours associating or playing with the great founders of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, or feels contented and happy watching the changing drama enacted by the sun and the moon and the forces of the universe."

It is not possible to think of such a creature as being unhappy, and it is her happiness which

attracts. From this point of view the story is worth reading a second time.

The novelette is known in Chinese as (老殘遊記二集) "Sequel" to a famous novel, *Laots'an Yuchi*, or a "Tramp Doctor's Travelogue." The latter is now acclaimed one of the few masterpieces in Chinese fiction produced in the last fifty years. The "Sequel," in its present incomplete form, consisting of six chapters, was written around the year 1900. The author, Liu Eh (劉鶚 literary name *T'ieh-yün* 鐵雲), was one of the progressive spirits of that generation, was denounced a "traitor" for advocating building railways and opening mines, and died an exile in Hsinkingiang in 1919 at the age of fifty-three, because of his caricature of a corrupt Manchu official in the above-mentioned novel. The present translator had the honour of rescuing this charming story of a nun from oblivion and having it published in 1935 from a manuscript in the possession of the author's family. With the exception of the first chapter, it has been translated in full here and forms a complete story by itself, taking place within forty-eight hours against the background of historic Tai-shan. The chief characters are two couples, Mr. and Mrs. Teh Huisheng, and Laots'an and his newly-acquired concubine, Huants'ui, whom he had rescued from a sing-song house. Besides these two couples is the heroine of the story,



Yiyün, a nun of Taishan. She is now known as a nun "who always sleeps in the breast of her readers."

LIN YUTANG.

July 21, 1936,  
Shanghai.

## CONTENTS

### A NOVELETTE

	PAGE
Preface to "A Nun of Taishan" . . . . .	iii
A Nun of Taishan ( <i>Liu Eh</i> ) . . . . .	1

### CONTEMPORARY CHINESE HUMOUR

Talking Pictures ( <i>Lao Sheh</i> ) . . . . .	115
Ah Chuan Goes to School! ( <i>Lao Hsiang</i> ) . . . . .	123
Salt, Sweat and Tears ( <i>Lao Hsiang</i> ) . . . . .	135
On My Library ( <i>Yao Ying</i> ) . . . . .	141
Summer in Nanking ( <i>Yao Ying</i> ) . . . . .	149
Unconscious Chinese Humour . . . . .	156
The Humour of Feng Yühsiang . . . . .	161

### ANCIENT CHINESE HUMOUR

The Humour of Mencius . . . . .	167
The Humour of Liehtse . . . . .	172
The Humour of Su Tungp'o . . . . .	178
A Chinese Æsop . . . . .	184
Chinese Satiric Humour . . . . .	191
Some Chinese Jokes That I Like . . . . .	198

	PAGE
The Donkey That Paid Its Debt . . . . .	203
“Taiping” Christianity . . . . .	212

### CLASSICAL SKETCHES

#### Three Sketches of Sounds:

A Chinese Galli-Curci ( <i>Liu Eh</i> ) . . . . .	218
A Chinese Ventriloquist ( <i>Lin Ts'ehuan</i> ) . . . . .	223
“T'ang P'ip'a” ( <i>Wang Yuting</i> ) . . . . .	227
On Charm in Women ( <i>Li Liweng</i> ) . . . . .	233
Ode to Beauty ( <i>T'ao Yüanming</i> ) . . . . .	240
Homeward Bound I Go! ( <i>T'ao Yüanming</i> ) . . . . .	248
The Epigrams of Chang Ch'ao . . . . .	252
Ah Chen's Death ( <i>Shen Chünlieh</i> ) . . . . .	257
A Cock-Fight in Old China ( <i>Yüan Chung-lang</i> ) . . . . .	263
Chinese Dog-Stories ( <i>Wang Yen</i> ) . . . . .	268

# A NUN OF TAISHAN

## I

It is said:

Laots'an (name of a tramp village doctor, meaning "Old Relic") was staying at an inn in Ch'ihohsien when he met Teh Hueisheng who was returning to his home at Yangchow with his family, and so they hired a mule cart for the long journey, and started off together. Early that morning, they crossed the Yellow River; the womenfolk were carried over in little sedan-chairs while the cart and mule were led gently across over the ice. After crossing the River, they did not take the road to the south-east going to Tsinanfu, but went straight south in the direction of Tient'ai. They reached this latter place about noon, and after having a light lunch there, they proceeded to Taianfu, which they reached at night, and put up at an inn outside the South Gate. As Mrs. Teh wanted to go up the Taishan to "burn incense," they told the driver that they would stop over there the following day, and since that was the case, they could take their time to arrange things more leisurely that night. . . .

Early at dawn the next morning, the womenfolk got up and attended to their toilet. Five

“mountain sedan-chairs” were engaged; these were in the form of a light (bamboo) arm-chair without its four legs, with a wooden board suspended underneath used as a foot rest. A pair of very short poles were used to carry the chair, and at each end of these poles was a very broad and strong leather strap, just a little softer than the kind used for harnessing mules. There were two chair-bearers for each chair, one in front and one behind, and the one behind would first bend underneath the leather strap and lift the chair up from the back for the passenger to take his seat. Then the one in front would also bend his shoulders underneath the strap and in this way the sedan-chair was lifted. The two ladies and an old amah occupied three chairs in front, while Teh Huei-sheng and Laot’san followed in their own chairs behind. Thus they entered the Taian city and first visited the Temple to the Mountain God to burn incense, where they loitered for some time. . . .

When they came out, Laots’an saw from the watch in his *talien* (a band tied around the waist and used as a pocket by travellers) that it was already a little after ten o’clock. The party then began to pass out of the city again through the North Gate and went in a north-westerly direction. About less than half a *li*, they came across a big stone inscription with the big characters: “Here Confucius went up the

Taishan." Hueisheng pointed it out to Laots'an and they looked at each other with understanding smiles. From this point on, the ground began to go up gradually, for it was already near the foot of Taishan.

Laots'an surveyed the Taian city from his sedan-chair and saw that there was a round hill in the south-west, with a big temple on top, surrounded by a great many trees on all sides, which indicated that this must have been a point of interest for travellers.

"Look at the hill in the south-west. Surely you know what it is called?" asked Laots'an of the bearer.

"That is Kaolishan and the temple on its top is Yenlomiao (or Pluto's temple), and below are the Golden Bridge, the Silver Bridge, and the Bridge of Sorrow, which everybody has to pass when he dies and goes to hell. Therefore, it will be to their great advantage for people to burn incense there a few times, so that they will be more familiar with the road to hell when they die," replied the bearer.

"Yes, indeed," replied Laots'an humorously. "To burn incense a few times is just like giving a few dinners to King Yenlo. After all, Yenlo is also a human being, and he cannot entirely ignore personal courtesies."

"Ah! you've said it, sir."

By this time they had come to what was really the foot of the mountain; the road be-

came narrower and more crooked and hemmed in on both sides by hills. After going along for about an hour, they reached a temple, and the sedan-chair bearers halted outside its door.

"This is Toumukung, and there are only nuns inside," said a bearer. "It's a good place for the ladies to stop over for lunch. All gentlemen and ladies stop here for lunch on their way up."

"Let's stop here since it is a nunnery," said Mrs. Teh, and speaking to the sedan-chair bearers, she continued, "Are there no eating places ahead?"

"Here is where you gentlemen and ladies eat," said one of them. "There is a little mat-shed ahead where only wheat cakes and salted vegetables are served, and everyone has to squat on the ground. No stools there. That's where *we* eat." ? mash

"All right then, let's go in," said Hueisheng.

So they entered the parlour which was very neat and tidy and two old nuns came out to welcome them, one between fifty and sixty and the other over forty years old. After they were all seated and had gone through the usual exchange of courtesies, the old nun asked, "I suppose Madam hasn't had her lunch yet?"

"No," replied Mrs. Teh. "We haven't taken anything since we started out early this morning."

"We have always a kind of ordinary fare

ready for our guests," replied the old nun, "but I see the ladies are on their way to burn incense on top of the mountain. Shall it be vegetarian or non-vegetarian food?"

"It's all right for us women; we can take either," replied Mrs. Teh. "But the gentlemen are not quite used to vegetarian food, and it would be best to have meat courses. But no elaborate dishes, please. There's no use preparing more than what we can take, and wasting food like that."

"Don't worry. In a place like this, we could not prepare many dishes even if we wanted to," replied the old nun courteously. "Are the gentlemen going to eat at the same table with the ladies, or separately?"

"We are all of the same family," replied Mrs. Teh. "We'll eat together, but please be quick about it."

"Why, are you going down the mountain to-day?" asked the old nun. "I'm afraid you won't have time for that."

"Still we don't want to reach the top after dark," replied Mrs. Teh.

"Don't worry on that score," said the old nun. "It only takes a short time to reach the top."

During all this conversation, the other nun, who was over forty years old, had left the room, and now she came back and whispered something in the ears of the old nun and the latter



was whispering something back. The old nun then turned to Mrs. Teh and said, "Please come over to the southern room." She then bade the other nun to lead the way, and they all asked Mrs. Teh and Huants'ui (who was formerly a girl of good family sold into a brothel and who had been rescued by "Old Relic" and taken as his concubine) to go in front, while Mr. Teh followed next, with Laots'an bringing up the rear. Coming out through the back door of the parlour, they made a turn to the south and after passing through a little corridor, reached the southern court. This court faced south, with five big rooms\* on the northern side and six small rooms on the south, besides three rooms on the east and two on the west of the corridor. The nun led Mrs. Teh through the corridor, and after going down some steps, they turned east and reached the northern house. The central room had no wall in front, but six latticed panels, and over the door hung a thick padded screen made of red woollen cloth and held together with wooden boards to guard against the wind. The rooms on the both ends, however, had a low brick wall coming to about the waist, over which were a series of glass panes pasted over with paintings and calligraphy on silk, and on top of these window

\*"Room" here refers to a definite width in a house, about twelve or fifteen feet, rather than an actual room of indefinite size.