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**CAMEL XIANGZI
THE QUEST
FOR LOVE OF LAO LEE**



YILIN PRESS



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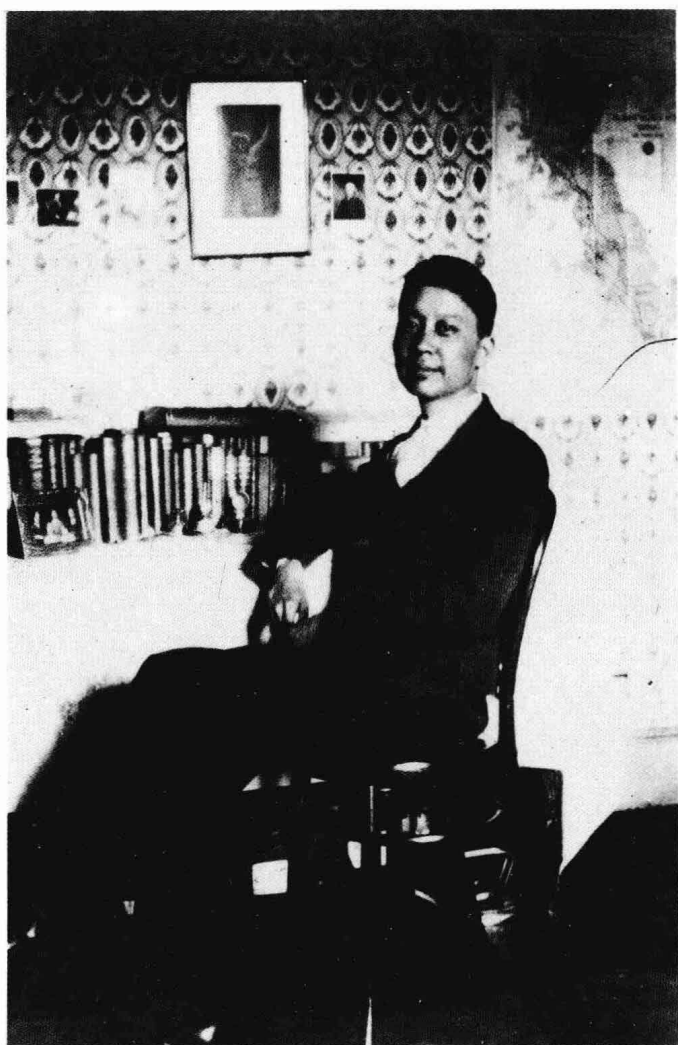
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Lao She at his London apartment in 1928



Lao She in Qingdao in 1936 when he was working
on *Camel Xiangzi*



Lao She at the Spring Festival in 1961

骆驼祥子

老舍

(一)

我们就

先洗裤子，随车先

我们所要介绍的是祥子，不是骆驼，不是骆驼，
把骆驼与祥子那点关系说过去，也就罢了。

因为骆驼只是个外号

■北平的洋车夫有许许多多：有力气，腿脚灵利的，

浑身黄黑漂亮的，拉整天儿，爱什么时候出车与收车都有

自由，拉出早来，在固定的车口或宅门一放，等着坐快车的

主儿，弄好了，也许一下子弄个一坨两坨的，碰巧了，

连车带人也带着溜，

大概

也许白耗一天，但也不在乎。这一派哥儿们的希望有两个

Part of the Camel Xiangzi manuscript

Preface

This collection includes selected works of five writers, Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Lao She and Shen Congwen, all literary giants in Chinese new literature. By "new literature" it means that it differs from the traditional, classical literature. The year 1919 was the demarcation line. On May 4th of that year the students and professors in Beijing, then the national capital, staged a huge demonstration calling upon the people to stand up against the corrupt government and pool their strength to build up a new country. It was provoked by the peace-makers at Versailles after conclusion of the first world war. They treated China, theoretically a victor in the war, as a defeated nation by transferring the territories and privileges wrested by the Germans from China before the war to Japan, also a theoretical victor. The movement soon spread all over the country. The impact was tremendous. In the field of culture it generated a new cultural movement known as Chinese Renaissance. New literature was an offshoot of this event.

The main feature of the traditional, classical literature was poetry with essays as accessories couched in a language unintelligible to the laymen. The popular novels such as *Outlaws of the Marsh* and *Romance of Three Kingdoms* were regarded as mere entertainment with little literary value since they were originally coined as prompt books by village story-tellers who were supposed to be uncultured. The new literature for which Lu Xun laid the foundation with Mao Dun and Guo Moruo as associates adopted the vernacular as literary medium, the kind of language akin to that of the story-teller. Thus literature was brought closer to the people. There was, however, a difference. The subject matter centred on the life of the people and the nation. "Literature for the sake of life," for the sake of the people, for the promotion of reforms in politics and social life and scientific advancement, so pronounced the members of the then very influential "Literary Study Society" headed by Mao Dun. Advocates of the new literature took the great realists of 19th century European

literature as their models. They had indeed produced brilliant writings, of which the works of Lu Xun, Mao Dun and Guo Moruo stood out as monumental and started a new tradition in Chinese literature.

Lao She, Ba Jin and Shen Congwen came slightly later to the scene, i.e. , when the new literature had taken deep root in the cultural life of the people. Like their immediate predecessors they excelled in prose, in the forms of stories and novels, although occasionally they also wrote familiar essays and sometimes plays, Lao She for instance. Their common trait was also realism à la 19th century European masters. But each had his specific characteristics. Lao She was a quiet but keen observer of Chinese social life. The collapse of the last Manchu Dynasty, the civil wars among the warlords in the twenties and miseries of the people throughout the country he succeeded in describing masterfully, with irony, and sometimes in tears. But when the people became united and independent heading for reconstruction of their life in the People's Republican days, he poured out his love for the rebirth of the nation without reserve.

Ba Jin, as far as his temperament goes, could be poet, because he has great passion for life, for justice and progress. But he prefers to express himself in fiction and essays. He harbours great affection for the down-trodden and the humiliated, and deep hatred for the oppressors and the social system which serves their interest. His inspiration derives from the maltreated and the suffering who yet dare to fight against their conditions for a better future, and to them goes his admiration and love. His trilogy *Family*, *Spring* and *Autumn* illustrate his propensity as well as his art of story telling.

Shen Congwen, Ba Jin's contemporary, similarly renowned as a master of prose, but more restrained in his handling of emotion. He excelled in creating a language at once lively and refined which, combined with his profound attachment to the life of the people, brought a freshness and an elegance veiled in modesty to his narrative. *The Border Town* is a typical example. The scene is unadorned, but imbued with an ingenuous affection and poetry of the life of the simple and artless people. It gives great delight to both the plain or sophisticated reader. Shen was a professional raconteur,

with a great artistry in style.

The works of these writers, diverse as they are in ways of presentation, have nevertheless one feature in common: their faithful reflection of life, thought, sentiment and aspirations of the Chinese people in a turbulent age. All sorts of characters, the insignificant as well as the illustrious, strike their poses on the stage of history to form a panoramic picture of the country in the present century. They have lived and will live indefinitely in the annals of Chinese literature as witnesses of a great literary era, the era of realism.

Chun-chan Yeh

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Camel Xiangzi

Translated from the Chinese by

SHI XIAOQING

Preface to *Camel Xiangzi*

Camel Xiangzi was written the same year that the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression broke out and was published in installments in *Yuzhoufeng* magazine. Before publication was completed, the war started. Later it was published in book form in Guangzhou, and it might also have been published in Guilin. But I did not see either of them because Guangzhou and Guilin fell into enemy hands one after the other, and the book was perhaps destroyed by the enemy. The "first edition" of the book I read was the one published in Sichuan on home-made paper.

It was said that during the War of Resistance *Camel Xiangzi* was translated into Japanese, but I did not see it. After the war was over, however, another version of the Japanese edition was published, and the translation was done with my approval.

In 1945 *Camel Xiangzi* was published in English in the United States. The quality of the translation was not bad, but the last paragraph was left out and the tragic ending was changed to a happy one, in order to appeal to American readers. In this version Xiangzi and Xiao Fuzi do not die at the end; instead, Xiangzi rescues Xiao Fuzi from the white house and everyone is happy. The translator had not asked for my consent beforehand, and by the time I arrived in the United States, the book had already become a best seller; it was too late to change it back to its original.

Thereafter, all subsequent translations were based on the English version. As there is no international copyright agreement between China and the United States, the translator holds the copyright, and I cannot interfere. *Camel Xiangzi* has now been translated into German, French, Italian, Czech, Swiss and Spanish. The Spanish version is an abridged one.

A Chinese film corporation in Hollywood wanted to adapt the book into a film but failed. Maybe their hopes will never be realized.

The book was originally published by Culture and Life Press. Today it is published by the Chenguang Publishing Company, and I am very grateful to Culture and Life Press for agreeing to transfer the rights.

Lao She

Beijing, April 1950

Preface

LAO SHE came from a very poor family. His father, a member of the Imperial Manchu guards, was killed by imperialist troops of the Eight Allied Armies in 1900 when Lao She was just a year old. From then on, his mother and elder sister made a living washing and mending soldier's clothes. Later, his mother became a charwoman in a primary school. The whole family was illiterate. Lao She studied in schools which did not charge for tuition, finally graduating from normal school, and so was the only one in his family who could read and write. While he was studying, he would often come home at lunchtime to find the cooking-pot empty. He would ask, "Is there anything to eat?" and when told there was not would go pluckily back to school to listen to the afternoon lessons on an empty stomach.

Lao She's neighbours were all poor people. He understood them and knew all about them. They worked at different jobs: some pulled rickshaws, others were coolies, scrap-collectors, artists, servants or peddlers.... Lao She himself was never a rickshaw puller, but he had friends who were and whom he had grown up with. In Chapter Sixteen of *Camel Xiangzi*, he describes at great length the tenement courtyard where Xiangzi and Tigress lived. He describes how the old people lay hungry on the cold brick-beds, how the women waited till old and young had gone to bed before washing, making and mending clothes for other people by the light of a small kerosene lamp, how the young girls had no trousers and stayed indoors, their natural prison, wrapped in torn pieces of cloth, helping their mothers. All these people were modelled on ones Lao She had known in his childhood. In a short essay, he mentioned how he never felt happy at the prospect of the New Year festivities because they reminded him of the many times in his childhood when, having nothing to eat, he had gone early to bed to the sound of other people's fire-crackers.

Lao She never went to university. His knowledge was acquired by diligent study after graduating from normal school. Very early he took on the heavy task of providing for the entire family. One of his close friends remembers seeing him thinly clad in the dead of winter, working hard in a draughty

room. Lao She told him with a bitter smile that he had pawned his fur gown to get some extra money for his old mother. Undoubtedly, these experiences were the rich, substantial material upon which he drew for his *Camel Xiangzi*. But Lao She was not satisfied with this alone. While writing the book, he spent a great deal of time collecting other material, and also asked many friends to jot down regularly or from time to time what they knew of the customs and ways of Beijing. He collected all this carefully, regardless of whether it was useful or not.

In 1936, Lao She's last paragraph of *Camel Xiangzi* read like this, "Xiangzi, honorable, enterprising, dreamy, selfish, unconforming, strong, great Xiangzi had been a mourner at countless funerals, without knowing where or when he would end up burying himself, degenerate, self-centred, unfortunate victim that he was of that individualistic morbid society." At that time, Lao She made Xiangzi's life end in tragedy. It was just as the lovable old man, Little Horse's grandfather said, "To try to make a go of it all by oneself is the hardest thing on earth. When a single grasshopper is caught and tied up by a child, it can do nothing. But wait until they swarm, then no one can stop them!" The only way out would have been for hundreds and thousands of Xiangzis to unite and struggle together, and this is precisely the social lesson of Xiangzi's tragedy.

After Liberation, Lao She very much wished to write a sequel to *Camel Xiangzi*. I remember he used to invite his old friends, the rickshaw men, the Xiangzis, to a meal with him, for he maintained close ties with his old neighbours. All these people were now liberated and very happy, and full of wonder at the great changes in their life. At their request, Lao She readily agreed to write a sequel which would describe Xiangzi's rebirth, his revolt, his happiness. This new *Camel Xiangzi* would have a happy ending. Unfortunately, due to the persecution of Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, Lao She died too early and this wish can never be fulfilled. But *Camel Xiangzi* lives on to spur everyone, today just as yesterday, to strive for a brighter future. Surely this is the happiest ending of all!

Hu Jieqing (Lao She's widow)

February 2nd, 1979