

FOREWORD

An Imperfect Understanding : a Memoir of Yang Tsung-han

—by Liu Ts'un-yan 柳存仁

Many years ago, some time in the thirties, the Shanghai publishing house Kelly & Walsh brought out a book entitled *An Imperfect Understanding* by Wen Yuan-ning 溫源寧 (a professor at Peking University and editor of the well-known *Tien Hsia Monthly* 天下雜誌). It contained a series of “silhouettes” of personalities in the cultural and academic world of Peking (Pei-p’ing), including such men as Hu Shih 胡適, Chou Tso-jen 周作人 and Hsu Chi-mo 徐志摩. Subsequently some twenty of these “silhouettes” were translated into Chinese and published under the title “Some Contemporaries” 今人志 in the journal *This Human World* 人間世, edited by Lin Yutang 林語堂. Wen Yuan-ning was an old friend and colleague of Yang Tsung-han’s, and during Wen’s time as Chinese ambassador to Greece in the late forties, the two men worked together again for a while. Wen Yuan-ning died some time ago, I am sorry to say; if he were still alive, he would have been the right person to write this reminiscence of Yang Tsung-han. He would surely have been able to bring to the task a deeper and more discerning understanding.

I came to know Yang Tsung-han much later on. And at first I did not know him particularly well. He was the eldest son of the Mongol En-hua (not to be confused with the late-Ch’ing Manchu also named En-hua, elder brother of Su-shun 肅順, the statesman put to death by Tz’u-hsi 慈禧 in 1861). The Mongol En-hua was a Bannerman of the Bordered Red Banner, who took third class honours in the *chin-shih* examination of 1903, the 29th year of Kuang-hsu, *kuei-mao*. It so happened that my father’s maternal cousin Tso P’ei 左霽 (a Chinese Bannerman of the Plain Yellow Banner) took second place in the first-class honours list of the same examination. People of the previous generation liked to talk about “old family” when they met, so when Yang Tsung-han and I met for the first time he brought up this family connection. And in fact the connection did not stop there. In the Republic, En-hua was for a time Vice-Director of the Bureau of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs 蒙藏院, and he employed Tso P’ei as Principal or Deputy-Principal of the Mongolian-Tibetan School attached to the Bureau. Later Tso P’ei moved to the newly established Tsing Hua College 清華學校 to teach Chinese, and Yang Tsung-han, who himself studied at Tsing Hua from 1913 to 1921, undoubtedly received instruction from Tso, though much of his traditional education he “drank deeply at the source” of family learning.

From the beginning of the Ch’ing dynasty, under the Eight Banner system, there were Manchu, Mongol and Chinese Bannermen troops. The Chinese Bannermen were Chinese who had been captured and had surrendered to the Manchus. Their organisation was quite different from that of the regular

Chinese troops of the Green Standards---this is common knowledge. But a Chinese Bannerman was still Chinese, every bit as much so as a member of the regular Green Standards, and if a Chinese Bannerman became a scholar, then it was the culture of his own race and his own nation that he was studying. But in those times (unlike nowadays, when we regard the non-Han ethnic minorities as our equals), if a Manchu or a Mongol developed a passion for things Chinese, and became more of an expert in aspects of Chinese culture than many an ordinary Chinese, then we would say that he had been "acculturated", or "sinicised." How grand a thing we considered our own cultural tradition to be! Is there not just a whiff of the Ah Q spirit in all this? Nowadays at last certain people are beginning to recognise that there were Manchus and Mongols who actually had a more enlightened understanding of Chinese culture than some traditional Chinese scholars themselves. These Bannerman scholars (and the Han Chinese who imbibed their influence) often had a deep insight into Chinese culture, and a broad perspective, which contrasted strikingly with the narrow and slavish antiquarianism of some of their Chinese contemporaries. Many of the works contained in the *Bannerman Bibliography* (*Pach'i I-wen pien-mu* 八旗藝文編目, 1941), compiled by Yang Tsung-han's father En-hua, testify to the truth of this. So does En-hua's own decision to send his son to Tsing Hua College in the first year of the Republic, and later after eight years of study, to Harvard on a government scholarship, to study a western curriculum.

Tsing Hua College has a very special place in the history of Chinese education. The Americans returned a portion of the "Boxer" indemnity imposed on the Ch'ing government in the treaty of 1901, in the hope that the Chinese could use the money to develop a new-style education system—and this is how Tsing Hua came into being. Before it was founded in 1912, the money was used to support Chinese students already in the United States (such as Yuen Ren Chao 趙元任, Hu Shih 胡適 and the meteorologist Chu K'o-chen 竺可楨, all of whom had gone abroad in 1910). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs meanwhile planned the establishment of a

Figure 7

Part of Professor Liu Ts'un-yan's
Foreword in his original Chinese

宗翰先生和歐府有關係，大約不過是抗戰時中國政府在香港設有 China Information
大學的文學院長之任（校長是徐鴻鵠），就南洋和滿洲等，金蟾古蹟……以至晚年
新教徒 Professor，許多年後做了香港的大主教 Bishop 替人司事。香港淪陷了，他改
職使館作事，其後又帶去 Hamburg，在漢堡大學和 Professor Wolfgang Frankl 同事，
他到香港，在港大 F. S. Drake 主持的《東方文化》學報的編輯方面，擔任過一個
東教士，對中國的物理人情 ~~極其熟悉~~（^{研究}）
Drake 常到花榮教（Nestorian Church）的歷史，
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school to prepare students for study abroad. Tsing Hua did not come under the Ministry of Education, but under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was only after the success of the Northern Expedition and the consequent reorganisation of the old Peking administration in 1928 that Tsing Hua became a University, and at the same time the system of automatic overseas study after graduation was abolished. In this way Tsing Hua underwent a gradual transformation. The original "preparatory" college examined candidates in every province, and the age of admission was fourteen or fifteen. The students selected spent four years in the Junior High School section, then a further four years in the Senior High School: altogether this comprised the six years of a complete High School curriculum and the first two years of university. So students who were fourteen or fifteen on admission were in their twenties by the time they went abroad; when they left China they were supported by government scholarships and carried official passports—they even had a special allowance to get themselves Western-style suits made up in Shanghai. By the time they arrived at university in the United States they were already at third year level. Yang Tsung-han entered Harvard in 1921 and graduated with an A.B. in Political Science. This was the only degree he was ever awarded. And yet on his return to Peking, the courses he taught for many years at Peking University were courses on Western literature—Shakespeare and Milton. I am not sure if he ever taught Political Science in his entire life. This versatility was not unusual for men of his generation. Once in the nineteen-eighties, when Yang Tsung-han was already well over eighty years old, I remember John Minford telling me that the old gentleman had corrected him—not for his Chinese, but for his Latin!

Mongol surnames have their own system, which is quite different from that of the Chinese. In the Republican period many Manchus and Mongols took Chinese surnames, or changed their names altogether. Chen-chün, for example, author of *Hearsay in the Capital* 天咫偶聞, became T'ang Yen 唐宴; Chin-liang 金梁 took the surname Chin 金 (which no doubt had something to do with the fact that the Manchus had once called themselves the

Latter Chin Dynasty); there is no need to bore you with more examples. En-hua, who held several positions in the Republic, never changed his name. But his son took the surname Yang, and gave as his place of origin Tan-t'u 丹徒, Chen-chiang 鎮江. And yet he never had any qualms about saying that he was a Mongol. He may have given Chen-chiang because he was born there, when his father was Military Lieutenant-Governor. En-hua had an extensive collection of valuable old Chinese books, especially rare works by Bannermen.

ration Committee, 那时他恰巧离开四川
 人 徐斌斌 (Francis Hsu, 近代史学家)
 久清先生转述进入内地, 后来在重庆
 借 都 洋烟以度日, 我通不通。五十年代初,
 国时候的工作。Drake 先生早年曾在山
 。B. C. 勋位侯爵之前, 宗翰先生亦曾
 其子也。

¹⁰ F. S. Drake (1892–1974) succeeded J. K. Rideout as Professor of Chinese at Hong Kong University, a position he held from 1954 to 1964. He was born into a Baptist missionary family in Tsou-p'ing, Shantung, and in addition to his work for the church gave some lectures at Ch'i-lu University in Tsinan.

With the huge interest in the study of the novel *The Story of the Stone*, a lot of writings by Bannerman authors connected with the novel and its author Ts'ao Hsueh-ch'in were reprinted in the '50s—works like Yu-jui's 裕瑞 *Tsao-ch'uang hsien-pi* 棗窗閑筆, and Tun-min's 敦敏 *Mao-chai shih-ch'ao* 懋齋詩鈔. The originals of these came from En-hua's collection.

Yang Tsung-han's only connection with politics was during the anti-Japanese war, when he was involved in the China Information Committee set up in Hong Kong by the Chinese government. He had just left Szechwan University, where he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts (the President at the time was Jen Hung-chün 任鴻雋, H. C. Zen), and travelled south where he worked with people like Wen Yuan-ning, Ch'üan Tseng-ku 全增嘏 (T. K. Ch'uan) and younger scholars such as Hsu Ch'eng-pin 徐誠斌 (Francis Hsu, at that time still a protestant, but years later to become Hong Kong's first Chinese Roman Catholic bishop).

After the fall of Hong Kong, he travelled with Wen Yuan-ning into the interior, and later worked under him in the Chinese embassy in Athens. Subsequently I understand he worked for a time with Professor Wolfgang Franke at Hamburg University, but I do not unfortunately know the details.

In the early '50s he went to Hong Kong and worked for a while on the editorial board of the *Journal of Oriental Studies* under F. S. Drake 林仰山.¹⁰ Drake had earlier taught in Shantung, and was very familiar with China, the land and its people. Until the '60s, when Drake received an OBE and returned to England, Yang Tsung-han would go to Drake's home for dinner every Christmas Eve. Drake had done some research into the Nestorian Church (he and his wife were, needless to say, Christians).

In Hong Kong there is a government-run tertiary college, really a sort of night school, called the Evening School of Higher Chinese Studies. In the '50s there were a large number of refugees from the Mainland whose children needed further education, and the Hong Kong government set up this evening school to cater for them, with the intention of eventually merging it with Hong Kong University. In the '50s the Hong Kong government had not yet decided to set up a second university (the present Chinese University of Hong Kong). The evening school had already had two Principals (they were actually called Superintendents), but the position was vacant and the government appointed Yang Tsung-han. I was doing some teaching there myself, and from June 1955, when Yang took over as Principal, until August 1958 when he resigned, I had the opportunity to work with him and we became friends "across the chasm of the years" 忘年交 (I was ten or so years his junior).

Strictly speaking this was when my real friendship with Yang Tsung-han began. From 1955 until August 1962, when I left Hong Kong and came to Australia, we saw each other frequently and had many long conversations together. This enabled me to come to some sort of understanding, however imperfect, of his personality and his aspirations. Differences of environment, different ways of life and positions in life, can combine with differences in

personality and temperament to make a true and complete understanding of another person an extremely hard task. So even an “imperfect understanding,” however partial it may be, if it is sincerely arrived at, has its place and value. As I see it, Yang Tsung-han was a Chinese scholar formed by Chinese culture, and in this respect he was indistinguishable from other ethnically Han Chinese. There was one distinguishing feature, and that was the fact that he was not a Confucian scholar—or at least certainly not in the Neo-Confucian sense, more in the “expansive” mode of the Han-T'ang Confucians. And to this should be added a touch of the severity and intensity of a Legalist. This was his character. There was something very noble about him. He never held a prominent public position, he never did anything “important,” he was never the leader of any grand movement—far from it. In his old age, when he was eighty or so, he was a solitary figure, and lived in greatly straightened circumstances. But it is still my opinion that he was one of the truly outstanding men to come out of China in the past eighty years.

In conversation on matters intellectual or scholarly, his views were legion, his flow of ideas unstoppable. He was no mealy-mouthed pedant quoting empty chapter and verse from the classics—no “Rotten Armchair Talk” 席上腐談 from him, to steal a title from the works of the Yuan dynasty Taoist Yu Yen 俞琰. There was substance in his every word, every sentence had something solid to back it up. I was born too late, alas! By the time he was in the fifth form of Tsing Hua College (1917) I was just a babe in arms. A lot of his anecdotes were beyond me—conversations with him were sometimes like intensive study sessions for me!

He could recall clearly and effortlessly people and events in Peking in the two decades or so before 1937, the Marco Polo Bridge incident and the arrival of the Japanese. He was able to talk about these things in great detail and with scrupulous accuracy. On one occasion we were talking about Shen Meisou 沈寐叟 (Shen ‘the Old Dozer’, Sheng Tseng-chih 沈曾植, *tsu Tzu-p’ei* 子培, 1851–1922), the great scholar, Manchu loyalist and restorationist of the late Ch’ing and early Republic. Yang told me that in his later years, when Shen lived in Shanghai, he would sometimes fall asleep on his visitors—hence he gave himself the sobriquet ‘the Old Dozer’. “Shen Tseng-chih’s learning was vast,” Yang told me. “He was at home in every field of traditional Chinese learning. Whatever the topic, he would be able to help you find your way through it.” It was true. And Yang Tsung-han himself was to some extent a person of similar abilities. In 1956–57, when I was writing my thesis on the mid-sixteenth-century novel *Feng-shen yen-i* 封神演義 (The Investiture of

Figure 8

Calligraphy for the title-page of *En-hua’s Pa-ch’i i-wen pien-mu*, by the Mongol Ch’ung-i 崇彝, of the Balute clan, grandson of the Grand Secretary Po-chün 柏俊 (d. 1859) [below]; calligraphy for the book’s outside cover, by Pao-hsi [left]

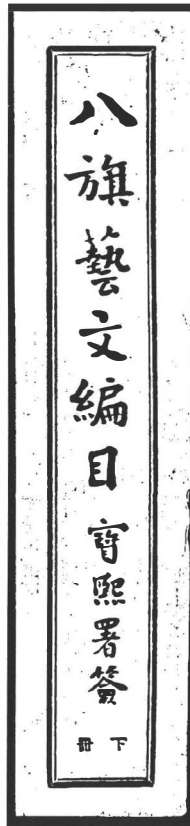
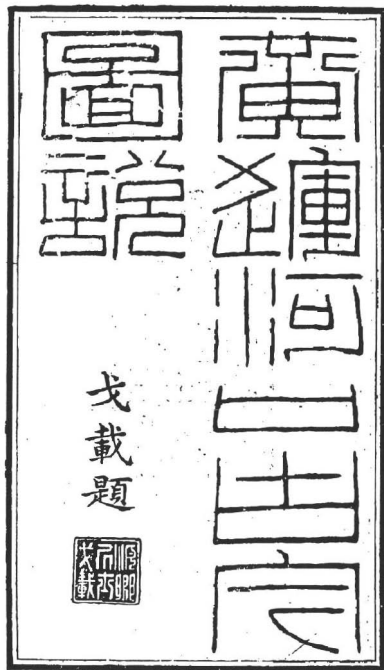


Figure 9

Calligraphy by Ko Tsai 戈戟 for one of Lin-ch'ing's other books, Hua-yun ho-k'ou ku-chin t'u-shuo (1836)



the Gods), Yang Tsung-han remarked to me one day, quite out of the blue, that there was an interesting entry for the 17th of the first month, 1893, in the diary of Wang K'ai-yun 王闖運 (1832–1916), *Hsiang-ch'i-lou jib-chi* 湘綺樓日記: "The titles used for the gods in *Feng-shen yen-i* show certain gross discrepancies. The book needs careful collating. The discrepancies can be established from textual evidence. The book uses the expression *lang-bsien* 狼筵, meaning a bamboo pike, which can only have occurred after the Chia-ching reign (1522–67)." This reference of Yang's indicates real learning, it is the sort of knowledge not to be derived from idle chat or hearsay. The "bamboo pike" was a weapon invented by Ch'i Chi-kuang 戚繼光 (1528–87) during the Chia-ching period to deal with the Japanese pirates (*wo-k'ou* 倭寇). It was made of a long bamboo staff with a sharp metal spike on the end of it and along its length a series of protruding bamboo branches. It was used by foot-soldiers. Yang Tsung-han studied Western political science and constitutional history, he was a scholar of Milton and Shakespeare, and there he was producing this reference from one of the more obscure byways of traditional Chinese learning. Imagine what else there must have been stored away in that brain of his!

In August 1958 he resigned from his position as Principal of the Evening School for Higher Chinese Studies. It was a sudden decision. I once asked him about it and he said:

"When I took on this job, it was a decision reached jointly by the Hong Kong government Department of Education and Hong Kong University. The idea was to merge the school with the university. Now the two parties have failed to reach an agreement. Hong Kong University does not seem predisposed to take on the Evening School. Consequently my being there no longer has any meaning."

His analysis was close to the truth of the case. Soon afterwards he also resigned from his concurrent position lecturing on Western literature at Chung Chi College 崇基學院 (now one of the constituent colleges of the Chinese University of Hong Kong). Colleagues at Chung Chi had criticised him for being too stringent in his marking, claiming that his standards were too high for an "independent college" such as theirs. In December of that year the Hong Kong government made him an Assistant Education Officer, and assigned him as a lecturer to the Northcote Teachers Training College. This was a very dependable job, but two months later he resigned again. He considered the training offered by Northcote College inadequate, and was totally unwilling to go along with what he saw as their slipshod approach. During the subsequent thirty-odd years I do not believe he ever had a definite job, although he may have taken on some literary piece-work. His fellow student from Tsing Hua days, the Wu-hsi man T'ang Ping-yuan 唐炳源 (better known as T'ang Hsing-hai 唐星海), later the owner of one of Hong Kong's largest textile factories, over the years until his death provided his high-minded old friend with occasional financial assistance. But Yang would not accept money from anyone else. Whenever I went to Hong Kong from

Australia I would always call on him at home. In the '80s he moved from Kowloon out to the New Territories, to a single-room apartment (with its own W.C.) in Yuen Long 元朗. But from there he could at least look northwards to China, and he continued to observe the world—I am sure I am not the only person to remember his well-informed and often idiosyncratic observations on world affairs. The well-known novelist Chin Yung 金庸 (Cha Liang-yung 查良鏞), until recently chief shareholder in Ming Pao Newspapers, hearing of Yang's plight, immediately proposed to make him an annual allowance (for "ice" and "charcoal", as the Chinese traditionally say). Yang let it be known that he did not wish to accept such a gift. But at the same time he remembered that one of Chin Yung's elder brothers Cha Liang-chao 查良釗 (a prominent figure in the Chinese legal world) had been at Tsing Hua, where he had been three years Yang's senior.

It must have been in the winter of 1991 that Yang Tsung-han went to live in a nursing-home in Aberdeen. In December of that year I passed through Hong Kong and called on him. He was still in good spirits, though he was beginning to show certain symptoms of persecution mania. He suspected that the sisters of the nursing-home were using "kindly" means to send the residents "back to their maker," and would plead with his friends to find some way of "setting him free." I talked with him at some length, trying to allay his fears, and left in a somewhat subdued silence. In June of the following year, once again I was passing through Hong Kong. A friend had already informed me that Yang had been sent by the nursing-home to the psychiatric ward of Queen Mary's (the Hong Kong University teaching hospital). It was raining slightly the day I went there to visit him. When finally I found him, he seemed in good spirits again, and there were no signs of his illusions of persecution. But as I was leaving he took hold of my hand and held it tightly, and asked me in a quiet voice: "How much does it cost here, per day?" I had no idea, and could not think how to answer him. In the end I just smiled. I am afraid my silence must have been a disappointment to him.

That was the last time I saw him. He had a younger brother. He once told me this brother, who died some time in the '70s, was my age. Yang Tsung-han was married, but had no children. His wife lives in Peking. She came to Hong Kong to see him once, and must have tried to persuade him to go back. For a while he seemed to have made up his mind to do so, but friends in Hong Kong advised him to stay, and he never went. I have on my desk in front of me a complete set (twenty-four thread-bound volumes) of the *Chin History* 晉書 in the *po-na* 百衲 edition of the *Twenty Four Histories*, a present from Yang Tsung-han. It is a lithographic reprint of the Sung edition that was once in the collection of Chi Chen-i 季振宜 (born 1630) and Chiang Kuang-yu 蔣光燾, which had thirty *chüan* (the *Tsai-chi* section) missing. When it was reproduced, this portion was made up from another Sung edition. My own family's set of the first series of the *Szu-pu ts'ung-k'an* also contained this edition. My family books are dispersed, and now each time I turn the pages of Yang Tsung-han's gift, my mind fills with recollections of the past, with shadows of old friends and of old books that I once knew.

Figure 10

An illustration from Lin-ch'ing's *Hokung ch'i-chü t'u-shuo* [Illustrations and explanations of the techniques of water conservancy and engineering], 1836. As Joseph Needham comments (*Science and civilisation in China*, vol.4, pt 3, p.596, fig.1009b), "this is the best traditional Chinese drawing of a standard transport junk, showing the system of battens, the multiple sheets with their eupbroes, the balyards and the trapping lifts A transport of this kind could do coastal as well as river work." Elsewhere (*ibid.*, vol.4, pt 2, p.348) Needham refers to this work as "the great Ch'ing compendium of water-conservation technology."

