

Liu E

(29 September 1857 – 3 August 1909)

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BOOKS: *Yu Zhi Lu san sheng Huanghe tu* [A Chart of the Course of the Yellow River through the Provinces of Henan, Zhili, and Shandong], by Liu E and others (N.p., 1890);

Zhi He qi shuo [Seven Methods for Yellow River Flood Control] (N.p., 1890–1892?);

Lidai Huanghe bianqian tukao [Maps and Studies of Changes to the Yellow River through History] (N.p.: Xiuhai shanfeng, 1893);

Tieyun cang gui [Tortoise Shells in the Collection of Tieyun], 6 volumes (N.p., 1903);

Tieyun cang tao [Pottery in the Collection of Tieyun], as Liu Tieyun, 2 volumes (N.p., 1904);

Lao Can youji [The Travels of Lao Can], 2 volumes (Shanghai: Shenzhou ribaoguan, 1907); translated by Harold E. Shadick as *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1952);

Lao Can youji erji [The Sequel to the Travels of Lao Can] (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935)—comprises chapters 21–26; translated as “A Nun of Taishan,” in *A Nun of Taishan (a Novelette) and Other Translations*, edited and translated by Lin Yutang (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), pp. 1–112; translation revised in *Widow, Nun and Courtesan: Three Novelettes from the Chinese*, edited and translated by Lin (New York: John Day, 1951), pp. 113–180;

Lao Can youji quanbian [The Complete Travels of Lao Can] (Taipei: Yiwen chubanguan, 1972)—comprises chapters 1–29 and the *waipian* fragment;

Tieyun shicun [The Extant Poetry of Tieyun], as Liu Tieyun, edited by Liu Huisun (Ji'nan: Qi Lu shushe, 1980);

Tieyun cang huo [Coins in the Collection of Tieyun], as Liu Tieyun (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986).

Editions: *Lao Can youji* [The Travels of Lao Can], annotated by Chen Xianghe and Dai Hongsen (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1957)—comprises chapters 1–26; enlarged, 1982—comprises chapters 1–29);



Liu E (from the cover for *Meipi xiangzhu Lao Can youji*, 1979; Collection of Thomas Moran)

Lao Can youji [The Travels of Lao Can] (Hong Kong: Taiping shuju, 1969)—comprises chapters 1–26;

Lidai Huanghe bianqian tukao [Maps and Studies of Changes to the Yellow River through History] (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1971);

Meipi xiangzhu Lao Can youji [The Travels of Lao Can with Full Annotation at the Top of the Page], edited by Lü Ziyang, annotated by Yu Guoji (Gaoxiong: Heban chubanshe, 1979);

Lao Can youji, annotated by Yan Weiqing (Ji'nan: Qi Lu shushe, 1981);

Lao Can youji, annotated by Yan (Taipei: Jian'an, 1997);

Lidai Huanghe bianqian tukao [Maps and Studies of Changes to the Yellow River through History] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997);

Tieyun cang tao [Pottery in the Collection of Tieyun], 2 volumes (Yangzhou: Jiangsu guangling guji keyin-she, 1998);

Tieyun cang gui [Tortoise Shells in the Collection of Tieyun], 6 volumes (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2000);

Xinshi Lao Can youji [The Newly Annotated Travels of Lao Can], annotated by Wu Shaozhi and Wu Yiling (Tainan: Xiangyi chubanshe, 2000).

Editions in English: *Tramp Doctor's Travelogue*, translated by Lin Yi-chin and Ko Te-shun (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1939);

Mr. Decadent, translated by H. Y. Yang and G. M. Tayler (Nanjing: Duli shudian, 1947); republished as *Mr. Derelict* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1948); revised as *Lao Can youji* (Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1983).

Liu E wrote only one novel, *Lao Can youji* (1907, The Travels of Lao Can; translated as *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*, 1952); but it is recognized by scholars as one of the four great novels of the late Qing Dynasty period (1844 to 1911). Shuen-fu Lin argues that Liu E's book is "the last classic Chinese novel" in that it reflects, even in its structure, the retreat of the traditional Chinese worldview in the face of modernity and the West. *Lao Can youji* also marks the beginning of modern Chinese literature: its influence on Chinese writing in the twentieth century was as great as, if not greater than, that of any other late-Qing novel. Liu E's work combines features of the traditional *zhanghui* (linked) novel with innovations such as shifts in narrative point of view; sustained descriptions of people, places, and landscape; and the exploration of the protagonist's psychology. Liu E was also a connoisseur of traditional Chinese culture and interested in science and technology. He collected antique coins and published the first collection of rubbings made from inscriptions of "oracle bones" (inscribed tortoise shells and animal bones dating to before 1000 B.C.). And he engaged in many business ventures, including planning railroads and opening a printing press. His straightforward manner and frustration with vested interests, combined with his unflinching opposition to corruption, led to his downfall: he

accrued enemies and rivals throughout his life; some of them rose to positions of power, which was fateful for Liu E.

Liu E was born into a literati family in Liuhe on the lower Yangtze River in Jiangsu province on 29 September 1857. His *yuanming* (original given name) was Mengpeng; his name as recorded in the Liu family genealogy is Zhenyuan. He is well known by both his *zi* (style name), Liu Tieyun, and his *ming* (personal name), Liu E. He came from a long line of government servants, officials, and military men; while politically prominent and well educated, the Liu clan accumulated only modest wealth. Liu E's father, Liu Chengzhong, who had earned the *jinshi* (highest-level) degree in 1852, served as an examination official, censor, and prefect. According to Fang Chao-ying's entry on Liu E in Arthur W. Hummel's *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)* (1943), Liu Chengzhong "collected many books on mathematics, on world geography, and on other studies recently introduced from the West." Liu E's mother, who was from a prominent Liuhe family, was surnamed Zhu. According to *Tieyun xiansheng nianpu changbian* (1982, A Complete Chronology of the Life of Mr. Tieyun), by Liu E's grandson Liu Huisun, Liu E's mother "was intelligent and widely read, well informed about current affairs, skilled in music and knowledgeable about medicine." Liu E had one older brother, Mengxiong, and three older sisters. His second eldest sister taught him to read when he was four *sui* (in traditional Chinese reckoning, a person is one *sui* at birth).

Liu E lived with his parents until the age of nineteen *sui*. He read broadly under the tutelage of his father and other family members. As a youth he had a reputation for brashness and for having little patience for deception, incompetence, dogma, or superciliousness and was known for his fairness in argument and loyalty to friends. He detested the procrustean nature of the *baguwen* (eight-legged essay), the mastery of which was necessary to pass the various levels of the civil service examinations.

In 1873 Liu E married a woman surnamed Wang, who was sixteen. In 1875 Liu E and Wang *Shi* (the Chinese equivalent of "Mme Wang") were still childless; to fulfill his filial obligation to carry on the family line, Liu E formally adopted his brother's third son, Dazhang. In the spring of 1875 Liu E moved to Huai'an in Jiangsu province, where his family had property and where, according to Harold E. Shadick's introduction to *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*, he had spent his early years. In the fall of 1876 Liu E failed the provincial civil service examination. He and his wife had a daughter, Ruzhen, in the fall of the following year. Liu E took his first concubine, a woman surnamed Heng, in 1878. In 1881 his

wife gave birth to a son, Dafu; in 1883 his concubine gave birth to a daughter, Fobao.

In 1884 Liu E opened a tobacco store in Huai'an, but the venture soon failed. In early 1885 his concubine gave birth to a son, Dajin. Around this time Liu E went to Yangzhou to study with Li Longchuan, a teacher of the sect known as the Taigu xuepai (Taigu School) that combined elements of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. He studied with Li, whom he had first met in 1876, for several years and found in Taigu an inclusive philosophy that did not reject tradition but could still meet the unprecedented challenges facing modern China. Shadick writes that under Li's influence Liu E, "who had been so headstrong and undisciplined apparently experienced what might very well be called a religious conversion" and "developed a sense of social responsibility." The Taigu School figures prominently in Liu E's novel.

According to "Guanyu *Lao Can youji*" (1940, *On The Travels of Lao Can*), by Liu E's son Dashen, in 1885 Liu E tried to make money by practicing traditional Chinese medicine but failed to attract patients. In 1886 Liu undertook the imperial examinations for the second time but quit before completing them. On the way home from Nanjing, he stopped in Jinjiang and took a woman surnamed Mao as his second concubine; she gave birth to his son Dashen in 1887. That same year, in Shanghai, Liu opened one of China's first Chinese-owned lithographic printing presses. The press went out of business in 1888, and Liu E returned to Huai'an.

In 1887 the Yellow River had broken through its dikes in several places, including Zhengzhou in Henan province, and massive flooding had resulted. In 1888 Wu Dacheng, the governor of Guangdong province and a friend of Liu E's father, was put in charge of the Yellow River conservancy in Zhengzhou. Liu E went to Zhengzhou and offered his services to Wu. According to Liu Huisun, Liu E proposed to "zhu di shu shui, shu shui gong sha" (build dikes so as to manage the flow of water, and manage the flow of water so as to control sedimentation). Wu implemented the plan, and Liu E shed his long gown, donned boots, and got into the trenches with the workers. The dikes were strengthened and protected, and the persistent problem of flooding in the area was solved by the winter of 1888-1889. Wu offered Liu E an official post, but Liu E gave it to his brother and remained in Henan to contribute to a work published in 1890 as *Yu Zhi Lu san sheng Huanghe tu* (A Chart of the Course of the Yellow River through the Provinces of Henan, Zhili, and Shandong).

In 1890 Liu E's concubine Heng gave birth to a daughter, Mabao. That same year Zhang Yao, the governor of Shandong, brought Liu E to the province as an adviser on flood control. Shadick writes that Zhang Yao

appointed Liu E to "the rank of subprefect, later raised to prefect"; Fang claims that Liu E purchased the rank of "expectant sub-prefect," an accepted practice, before going to Henan. Zhang Yao died in 1891 and was replaced as governor by Furun (a Chinese transliteration of a Manchu name), whom Liu E continued to serve as an adviser on flood control until 1893. While in Shandong, Liu E wrote books on mathematics and river conservancy, including *Lidai Huanghe bianqian tukao* (1893, *Maps and Studies of Changes to the Yellow River through History*) and *Zhi He qi shuo* (1890-1892? *Seven Methods for Yellow River Flood Control*); according to some sources, the title is *Zhi He wu shuo* (Five Methods for Yellow River Flood Control). Also, some sources claim Liu E wrote one or two appendixes to the book; according to Jiang Yixue's *Liu E nianpu* (1980, *A Chronology of Liu E's Life*), Liu E wrote and published a work titled *Zhi He xushuo* (Additional Methods for Yellow River Flood Control). In the latter, according to Liu Huisun, Liu E refutes the theory, ascribed to Jia Rang of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to A.D. 220), that one should not "fight the river" and that floods were best controlled by widening the space between dikes to accommodate floods. Liu E advocated a contrasting method ascribed to Wang Jing, who lived around A.D. 100 and taught, Shadick writes, that one should "narrow and deepen the river bed so that the current would be swift and prevent the silt from forming a deposit."

In the introduction to his translation of Liu E's novel Shadick, drawing on information provided to him by Liu Dashen that was later published as "Guanyu *Lao Can youji*," writes that Yuan Shikai (who became president of the Republic of China in 1912 and then made himself emperor) and the Manchu officials Gangyi and Yuxian were working in Shandong and that all of them regarded Liu E with enmity. Shadick, following Liu Dashen, contends that Yuan Shikai "turned against Liu because the latter could not or would not persuade Governor Zhang to give him a position of responsibility." According to the biography of Yuan Shikai in Howard L. Boorman and Richard C. Howard's *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (1967-1979), however, Yuan Shikai was in Korea as China's top-ranking representative there during Liu E's years in Shandong. Shadick, following Liu Dashen, claims that Gangyi and Yuxian disagreed with Liu E on flood control and were displeased when the governor sided with Liu E. In *The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning* (1969), however, C. T. Hsia contends that Gangyi did not serve in Shandong when Liu E was there. All scholars, including Hsia, agree that the two main villains in *Lao Can youji*, the officials Gang Bi and Yu Xian, are based on Gangyi and Yuxian.

Liu E's wife died at thirty-six in August 1893. In the same month his concubine Mao Shi gave birth to a daughter, Longbao. Liu E's mother died in September, and he returned to Huai'an for the mourning period. In 1895 Shandong governor Furun recommended that Liu E be brought to the capital to work for the Zongli yamen (Foreign Office); Liu E was offered the position and accepted it. In the summer and fall of 1896 Liu E went to Hubei on an assignment for Zhang Zhidong, governor-general of Hubei and Hunan, to implement Zhang's plan to build a railway from Beijing to Hankou. The industrialist Sheng Xuanhuai, an associate of Zhang's, disagreed with Liu E on details of the plan, and Liu E quit and returned to Beijing. Liu E next proposed a railway between Tianjin and Jinjiang, the city in Jiangsu on the Yangtze River where Liu E's paternal grandfather had settled. (Shadick says that Jinjiang was Liu E's "native place," but other sources name Dantu, a town near Jinjiang, and still others claim that Dantu and Jinjiang are two names for the same town.) Jinjiang officials who were in Beijing opposed the railway, and it was not built.

In 1896 Liu E took his third concubine, a seventeen-year-old surnamed Wang. Mao Shi gave birth to his son Dajing in 1897. That same year Liu E made three trips to Shanxi province as the Chinese manager for an English company that planned to open mines there (coal mines, according to Shadick; iron mines or coal and iron mines, according to other sources). According to Liu Huisun, the enterprise was Liu E's idea. The contract stipulated that after thirty years, the mines and the railroads built to service them would revert to Chinese control. Liu E either quit or was fired when he argued with his English partners over contractual details that he found not to be in China's interests. According to Luke S. K. Kwong, in 1898 officials from Shanxi asked the emperor to criticize the governor of Shanxi "for granting privileges to foreigners in exchange for a loan for railway construction." Kwong says that "Liu E, a go-between in the negotiations, was identified as a culprit," and the government in Beijing demanded that the governor explain his actions, claimed Liu E was of "exceedingly ill repute," and banned him from participation in projects in Shanxi. In 1899 Liu E began participating in the planning and construction of a railway in Henan; it was a segment of a line he had planned from Shanxi to Jiangsu to bring the products of the mines in Shanxi to the east coast.

Liu E's daughter Mabao died in 1899. In late spring of the next year his concubine Wang Shi gave birth to his last son (his sixth, counting the adopted Dazhang), Dalun. Shortly afterward, Liu married Zheng Anxiang as his *jishi* (new wife of a widower).



Cover for a 1907 edition, the earliest that can be confirmed, of Liu E's novel *Lao Can youji* (translated as *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*, 1952) (from Yu Runqi, ed., *Tang Tao cang shu*, 2004; Brucoli Clark Layman Archives)

Either before or after this marriage, he took a fourth concubine, Guo Shi.

According to Liu Huisun, in 1900 the powerful Manchu official Gangyi filed a petition with the government asking that Liu E be disciplined because of the Shanxi railroad and mining venture. In "*The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning*" Hsia claims that Gangyi "accused Liu E of treason"; Hsia, however, suggests that this event happened in 1897. Hsia questions Shadick's claim in the introduction to *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* that Gangyi was settling a personal score with Liu E; he argues that as an "antiforeign conservative" Gangyi would naturally have been troubled by Liu E's involvement with an English company intending to build railroads and mines in the Chinese interior—especially at the time of the antiforeign Boxer Rebellion, which Gangyi supported. Liu E was in Shanghai, where he was involved in a failed plan to build a five-story department store, and escaped trouble.

In August 1900 twenty thousand troops from eight foreign nations entered Beijing to complete the

suppression of the Boxer Rebellion. Sometime shortly thereafter, Liu E returned to the city and engaged in relief work for the populace. According to Liu Huisun, when the supply of relief rice ran out in April or May 1901, a businessman from Ningbo named Zhang put Liu E in touch with the Russian troops who had taken control of the imperial granary and wanted to get rid of the rice in the storehouses so that they could use the buildings. Liu E bought the rice and resumed the distribution of food aid. According to Liu Dashen, Liu E had friends in the British, Italian, and Japanese embassies and in the Chinese government and was asked to participate on the periphery of the discussions of details of the Boxer Protocol, the document that ended the rebellion and imposed severe penalties on the Chinese.

In 1901 Liu E resumed efforts to promote railway construction and mining in Henan, started a mint in Baoding, purchased government offices for himself and four of his sons, and discussed starting a company to install running water in Beijing. His concubine Guo Shi died that year. Liu E's 1902 business ventures included a plan to start a company to refine salt in the northeast for export to Korea. He also continued to work on mining and railway schemes and bought land in Pukou in Jiangsu, intending to develop the area as a commercial port. The land became valuable with the completion of a railway line from Tianjin to Pukou.

By this time Liu E was quite well off. His primary domicile was in Huai'an, but he also owned homes in Beijing, Shanghai, and in Henan and Shandong provinces. He had become an important collector of antiques and in 1902 bought a large collection of oracle bones that had belonged to Wang Yirong, the chancellor of the Imperial Academy, who had committed suicide after foreign troops entered Beijing in 1900. Liu E had known Wang, and he bought the bones from Wang's son.

In 1903 Liu E again took up his plan of refining salt in the northeast for export to Korea. That same year he moved his whole family to Shanghai and began to write *Lao Can youji*. This complex novel is reputed to have been unplanned and to have been composed in his spare time. According to both Liu Dashen and Liu Houze's "Liu E yu Laocan youji" (Liu E and *The Travels of Lao Can*), included in a 1985 volume edited by Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, a friend of Liu E's named Lian Mengqing was wanted by the Qing government on charges of conspiring to reveal information about the government's support for the Boxer Rebellion and had fled the capital for Shanghai, where he made his living as a writer. Liu E knew that Lian was too proud to take gifts of money, so he used his spare time to write something that Lian could publish. He allowed Lian to submit the manuscript and collect the

royalties. Hsia repeats the story in "*The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning*" but expresses doubt about it in a footnote, pointing out that according to Liu Dashen's own account, the fee paid to authors by *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* (Fiction Illustrated), the Shanghai journal that initially serialized the novel, was negligible. Hsia suggests that Liu E could have found easier ways to provide larger sums of money to his friend.

The novel was published in *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* from September (some sources say March) 1903 through January 1904. The author was named as "Hongdu Bailian-sheng" (The Scholar of One Hundred Temperings from Hongdu); the public was not aware that Liu E wrote the work until Hu Shi established his authorship in 1925. After *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* expurgated the last part of chapter 10, all of chapter 11, and the first part of chapter 12 without consulting him, Liu E broke off his relationship with the journal and had the novel republished, starting from the first chapter, in the Tianjin newspaper *Riri xinwen bao* (The Daily News), which was under the editorial direction of his friend Fang Yaoyu. Liu E resumed writing with chapter 14, and the serialization in *Riri xinwen bao* continued through chapter 20. The first twenty chapters are customarily referred to as the *chujī* or *chupian* (text proper). Hsia's "*The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning*," Timothy C. Wong's "Notes on the Textual History of the *Lao Ts'an Yu-chi*" (1983), and Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping's *Liu E xiao zhuan* (1987, A Concise Biography of Liu E) discuss the publishing history of the text proper. All three sources mention A Ying's claim in his "*Lao Can youji banben kao*" (1936, A Study of the Editions of *The Travels of Lao Can*) that he owned a one-volume edition of the first ten chapters published by *Riri xinwenbao* in 1904; all three mention the claim by Liu Houze, Liu E's grandson, that sometime after 1904—probably in 1906—*Riri xinwenbao* published all twenty chapters in two volumes. According to Liu, Zhu, and Liu, the first volume of Liu Houze's copy of the book—the only surviving copy—was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. A two-volume edition of the text proper was published in Shanghai by the *Riri xinwenguan* (Office of the Daily News) in 1907, and copies of this book survive.

The second set of authentic chapters, referred to variously as the *erji*, *er pian*, or *xuji* (sequel), of which nine are extant, was probably written in 1907 after one of Liu E's business failures afforded him time to write. These chapters were rediscovered in the offices of *Riri xinwen bao* in 1929, and four of them were published in Lin Yutang's periodical *Renjian shi* (The World Age) in 1934. These chapters and two more were published the following year as *Lao Can youji erji* (1935, The Sequel to

the Travels of Lao Can) and translated by Lin Yutang in 1936 as "A Nun of Taishan." The remaining three chapters of the sequel were suppressed by the Liu family because of their phantasmagorical quality and were first published in 1972. A *waipian* (fragment) of approximately a chapter in length was discovered in the Liu home in 1929 and is likely to have been written by Liu E. Other chapters have been rumored to exist, but none has surfaced.

The earliest English translation of part of *Lao Can youji* is Lin Yutang's rendition of the sequel in *A Nun of Taishan (A Novelette) and Other Translations*, published by the Commercial Press in Shanghai in 1936. In 1939 the Commercial Press brought out an abridged translation of chapters 1 through 20 by Lin Yi-chin and Ko Te-shun under the title *Tramp Doctor's Travelogue*. A translation by H. Y. Yang (Yang Xianyi) and G. M. Tayler (later known as Gladys Yang) was published in Nanjing in a bilingual edition as *Mr. Decadent* in 1947 by the Duli shudian (Independent Bookstore) and as *Mr. Derelict* in London in 1948 by George Allen and Unwin. *Tramp, Decadent, and Derelict* are efforts to convey the meaning of the name Lao Can, which is sometimes glossed as "Old Decrepit." In "The Name 'Lao Ts'an' in Liu E's Fiction" (1989) Wong cites scholars such as Qian Zhongshu in arguing that *Decrepit* and its variants do not convey the meaning of the Chinese; he offers "Old Remnant" as the accurate translation. The hero's real name is Tie Ying; his *hao* (literary name or sobriquet) is Bucan, in which *can* (remnants) is an allusion to a care-free Tang Dynasty Buddhist priest; Lao Can is the affectionate nickname by which his friends know him. In a footnote to chapter 1 of his translation of the novel Shadick glosses the name "Bucan" as "he who mends broken things or leftovers" and says that it "probably refers to the profession of medicine," since Lao Can is a healer. The Yang-Tayler 1947 translation, which deletes chapters 9 through 11, 16, 18, 19, and part of chapter 20, was republished in 1983, with minor changes in wording and punctuation, by the Chinese Literature Press in Beijing as *Lao Can youji*. The first, and still only complete, translation of the "text proper" is Shadick's *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* of 1952; it is exemplary, annotated, and the standard one.

Lao Can youji features lyrical passages, idyllic renderings of the natural landscape, political and philosophical repartee, digressions, and apocalyptic imagery. It is a "linked" or episodic work, not an integrated one in the fashion of a modern novel. It is, however, unified in its overall tone, stylistic continuity, and sustained attention to the picaresque adventures of the protagonist, Lao Can. The travels of the peripatetic Lao Can are also a spiritual and moral quest. Treating the work as a "series of ascending lyrical tableaux," Leo Ou-fan

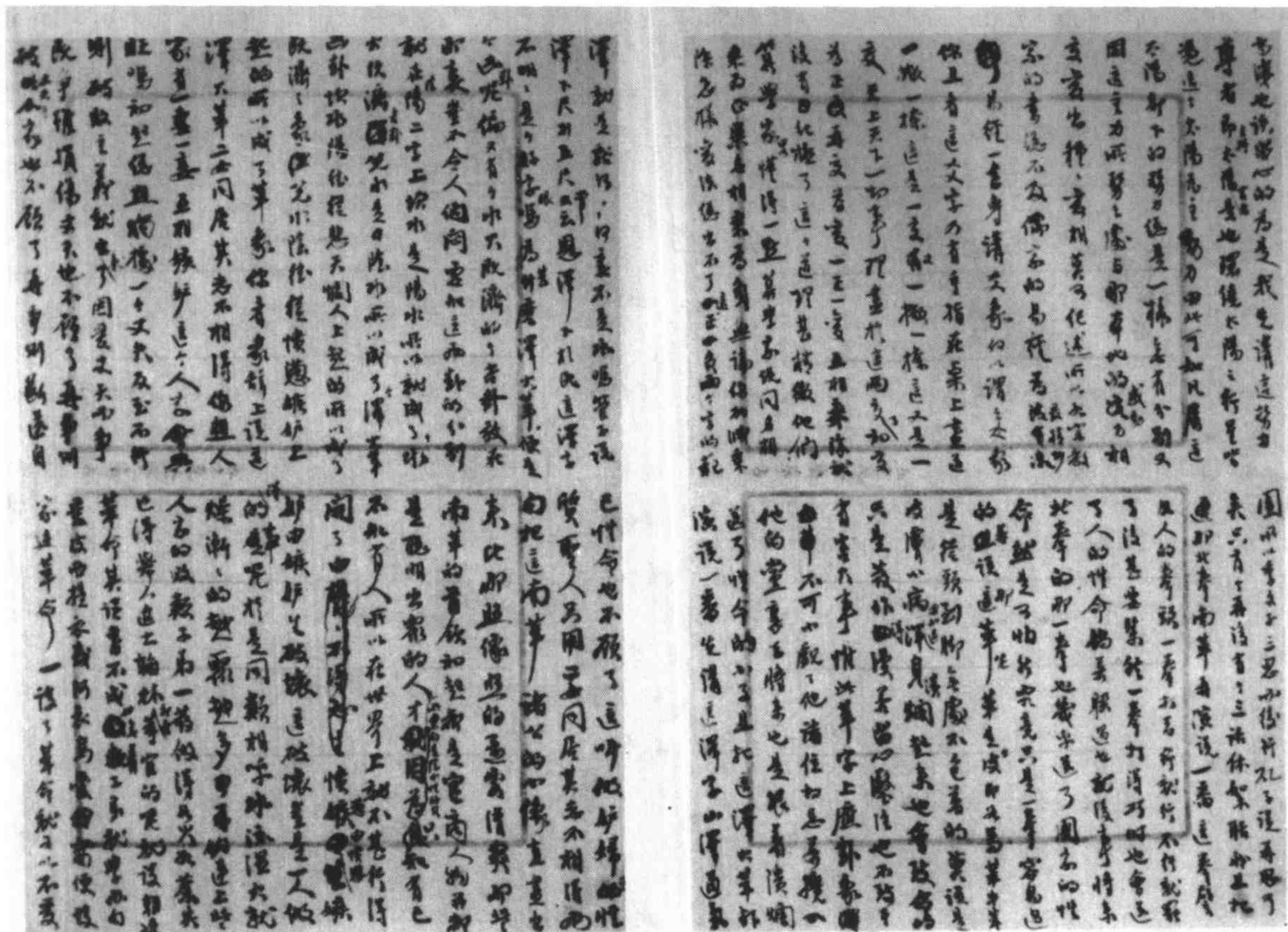
Lee in "The Solitary Traveler: Images of the Self in Modern Chinese Literature" (1985) identifies the concern of the novel as an exploration of nature, politics, and spirituality. By using several styles of expression that were in favor in China in the early twentieth century, Liu E also explores the culture of the emergent modern Chinese nation-state and the values and modes of thought that underpin it. Donald Holoch calls the novel "one author's excursion into the various genres of his day" and argues that the "characters and events function as illustrations of moral positions and of typical actions."

In the manner of traditional Chinese fiction, *Lao Can youji* begins with a preface. The preface is a meditation on "strong" and "weak" *kuqi* (weeping): weak weeping is the crying of spoiled children, while strong weeping is the profound expression of emotion found in great literature. "The quality of a man," the narrator says, "is measured by his much or little weeping, for weeping is the expression of a spiritual nature." Shuen-fu Lin suggests that the theme of the prologue—a man's worth is demonstrated by his affective response to injustice and crisis—is exemplified by the various stories of social realism told in the novel.

The preface is followed by the allegorical prologue of chapter 1. It begins with a reference to the "Penglai Pavilion," named after a legendary abode of immortals, and presents the national allegory of the novel. From a spot near the Penglai Pavilion on Penglai Hill on the Shandong coast Lao Can and his friends spy a boat in peril. The sailors are fighting with the passengers and, Lao Can notices, have no compass and cannot find their way to safe waters. The compass, invented by the Chinese, was used by Western mariners to navigate the globe and colonize territories. The allegory suggests that China should use any methods necessary to right its ship of state. Lao Can's vision of a ship in distress turns out to be a dream. This chapter and the others in the book end in the traditional manner, with variations on the phrase "to learn what happened, hear the next chapter tell."

In chapter 2 Lao Can visits a famous lake in Ji'nan and listens to the singing of Hei Niu (the Dark Maid) and Bai Niu (the Fair Maid). Qian Zhongshu (Ch'ien Chungshu) argues that this passage represents an attempt by the author to apply the principles of traditional poetry to modern Chinese prose. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová and Tao Tao Liu Sanders include these parts of chapter 2 as examples of passages in *Lao Can youji* that allow readers to envisage the events and places described "with a clarity seldom experienced in any literature."

In chapters 3 through 7 Lao Can hears about Yu Xian, a draconian magistrate who emerges as the chief



Pages from the manuscript for the end of chapter 11 of *Lao Can youji* (from Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji Lao Can youji ziliao*, 1985; Charles E. Shain Library, Connecticut College)

villain of the first half of the work. He is proud of his incorruptibility and overly confident in his powers of judgment; his hubris has led him to torture an innocent father and son to death, driving the son's wife to suicide. The abuse of power by sanctimonious officials convinced of their infallibility deters Lao Can from serving in the government. In this respect he is like a Daoist sage who has talent but also the wisdom to know that his small contribution to the state will be ineffectual. Also in line with the Daoist tradition, Lao Can can heal illness and does so several times in the novel. Lao Can writes a letter to Provincial Governor Zhuang (who is based on Zhang Yao, for whom Liu E worked) informing on Yu Xian and recommending the *xia* (knight-errant) Liu Renfu to bring order to the county. Shen Ziping, the cousin of a friend of the governor, is sent to find Liu Renfu.

Shen's quest takes him to Taohua shan (Peach Blossom Mountain). By Chinese literary convention, the name "Peach Blossom" suggests a utopia; this notion is reinforced by the natural imagery of this section of the novel and the enlightened attitudes of the people Shen meets: a young woman called Yu Gu (Miss Jade) and an older man who calls himself Huang

Longzi (Yellow Dragon). Liu E often uses the voices of women to convey crucial information; here Yu Gu explains to Shen that Huang Longzi's poems articulate a synthesis of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism (an allusion to Taigu). She laments that the true understanding of Confucianism has been lost and tells Shen that one should not shun emotions and feelings, as puritanical Neo-Confucians do. Yu Gu says that Neo-Confucianism (the Song Dynasty reworking of Confucian philosophy into a new orthodoxy) has made "the Confucianism of Confucius and Mencius more and more narrow until it was quite destroyed."

In chapter 11 Huang Longzi predicts China's future, which he says holds "bei quan nan ge" (Boxers in the north, revolution in the south). He says that a "political force in the north" will create a great clash and much upheaval, which will invite the wrath of a massive Western incursion in the year *Gengzi* (1900 by the Western calendar). The Boxer Rebellion and its suppression by a military alliance of eight imperialist nations had, of course, already occurred by the time the novel was written. Huang Longzi's second prediction is that the "political force in the south" will incite revolution in 1910. Liu E may have had in mind anti-Qing

revolutionary groups that took their inspiration from two southern revolutionaries, Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan) and Zou Rong. Huang Longzi says that the movements in the north and south will bring disaster to China but will open up a new era. He predicts that "the introduction of new culture from Europe will revivify our ancient culture . . . and very rapidly we shall achieve a universal culture. But these things are still far off, not less than thirty or fifty years." In an apocalyptic vision rare in Chinese literature he goes on to postulate a supreme force known as "zun zhe" (the August One) or "shi li zun zhe" (Force Supreme).

Shen's sojourn to Peach Blossom Mountain has been the subject of much discussion by scholars. Some suggest that chapters 8 through 11 are a digression that betrays the disjunct quality of the narrative. In "*The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning*" Hsia offers the most ambitious account of this portion of the work, arguing that it is indicative of a split in the author: Lao Can represents the practical, active side of his nature, while Huang and Yu Gu represent his philosophical side.

In chapters 12 through 16 Lao Can is unable to cross the Yellow River because unusually cold weather has left the ferryboats frozen in ice. As he contemplates the natural surroundings, the stark sky brings to his mind a poem from the *Shijing* (circa 600 B.C., The Classic of Poetry) that describes the Big Dipper. The poem, a veiled criticism of the gentry class, causes Lao Can to reflect on idle and corrupt officials; and in this reverie, which Hsia and others have called stream of consciousness, he is overcome by emotion and by thoughts of the passage of time and the urgency of China's crisis: "When he reached this point in his thinking, unconsciously the tears began to trickle down his face." Lao Can realizes that he is crying only when he feels ice—his frozen tears—sliding down his cheeks. Many scholars have remarked on the elegant prose of this passage.

Waiting to cross the river, Lao Can lodges at an inn. There he encounters an old acquaintance, Huang Renrui. The worldly Huang Renrui is a counterpoint to the philosophical Huang Longzi; their identical surnames are an example of the preoccupation of the novel with the synthesis of opposites. Huang Renrui invites Lao Can to his room to share his dinner and a cup of wine. Two courtesans Huang Renrui has retained for the night, Cuihua and Cuihuan, arrive and recount how the teenage Cuihuan, who came from a wealthy household, ended up poor and with no recourse but to become a prostitute when she lost her family two years previously in an ill-conceived flood-abatement scheme authorized by Governor Zhuang. Zhuang, who is not a villain but tolerates wrongdoing that it would be impolitic to address, sanctioned a scholar-official's plan to

flood land along the Yellow River inhabited mainly by peasants in order to avert a flood downstream. Several hundred thousand people, including Cuihuan's family, were drowned. The account of Cuihuan's travails justifies Lu Xun's description in *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* (1935; translated as *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, 1959) of *Lao Can youji* as a *qianze xiaoshuo* (novel of exposure).

When Lao Can learns that Cuihuan is to be sold to a man with a reputation for cruelty, he is filled with pity, anger, and grief, and a "slight moistness" comes to his eyes. He and Huang Renrui agree that the best way to save Cuihuan is for Lao Can to take her as his concubine. Lao Can is uncomfortable with the plan, however, and in chapter 17 he is surprised and "rather disgruntled" when Huang Renrui arranges a ceremony to formalize Cuihuan's sale to him as concubine.

Lao Can, Huang Renrui, and the two women talk from chapter 12 through chapter 16. The telling of Cuihuan's story is interrupted by and intermingled with banter between Lao Can and Huang, Huang's periodic opium smoking, and a fire that breaks out in Lao Can's room. Liu E introduces the final episode of the novel by having Huang Renrui mention at the end of chapter 12 "a most amazing law case," on which he does not begin to elaborate until chapter 15. Praising Liu E's craftsmanship, Hsia says in "*The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning*" that "this continuous scene records undoubtedly the longest night in traditional Chinese literature and, in terms of fictional art, the most triumphant."

The final episode of the first twenty chapters is a *gongan* (criminal case) story that returns to the theme of the rigidly incorruptible magistrate whose belief in his grasp of the truth leads to the suffering of innocents. Several members of the Jia family and their attendants have been murdered, and the Jias' daughter-in-law, Jia Wei, and her father, the elderly Mr. Wei, have been arrested for the crime. Magistrate Gang Bi orders Jia Wei and Mr. Wei tortured until they confess. This tale of *qi yuan* (strange injustice), as the heading of chapter 18 puts it, plays out in chapters 15 through 20.

Having secured a letter from the governor, Lao Can marches into Gang Bi's court and forces him to suspend sentencing of Jia Wei and Mr. Wei. In chapter 18, Prefect Bai, a benevolent and astute high-ranking politician, arrives and acquits the accused. In the next chapter Lao Can treats Jia Wei's injuries from her torture and carries out his own inquiries. Mr. Wei tells Lao Can that Wu Er Langzi (Wastrel Wu) held a grudge against Mr. Wei for refusing him Jia Wei's hand in marriage. On Lao Can's instructions Xu Liang, a *yamen chairen* (assistant at the local government headquarters), tracks Wu down and tricks him into revealing his guilt: he used a poison called *qian ri zui* (Thousand Days'

Sleep) on the Jias. Lao Can discovers an antidote that revives all thirteen of the characters who had been presumed dead.

The quest for the truth in chapters 15 through 20 increases the suspense by mixing several modes of perception and transmission: hearing (the tale Huang tells Lao Can about the law case), writing (the letter that Lao Can writes to Governor Zhuang), seeing (the imagery of the story itself), retelling (the story Mr. Wei tells Lao Can that confirms Wei's innocence and reveals the true malefactor), and whispering (the plan that Lao Can tells Xu Liang to enact). Stuart H. Sargent suggests that Gang Bi's refusal to give speculation their due and his insistence on an unrealistic standard for truth lead to his draconian behavior. Sargent further argues that Gang Bi's behavior is implicitly contested and rejected by the fictitiousness of the novel itself; in other words, the explicit and implicit celebration in the novel of imagination, sentiment, and fiction refutes Gang Bi's approach to the world. In a *meipi* (marginal or "eyebrow" annotation) to the 1979 edition of *Lao Can youji*, Yu Guoji argues that Prefect Bai's reasoning by inference and close questioning of witnesses are unusual in traditional Chinese crime fiction, in which prosecutors usually arrive at the truth abruptly through flashes of insight.

Hsia writes in "*The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning*" that in modeling Yu Xian and Gang Bi on the real Manchu officials Yuxian and Gangyi, Liu E intended a critique of more than self-righteous zealotry. Yuxian and Gangyi supported the antiforeign activities of the Boxers in 1899–1900, and Yuxian supervised the murder of Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries. Liu E, Hsia writes, made Yuxian and Gangyi his targets in his novel to denounce their "crime of inciting and supporting a fanatic movement of grave national consequence."

Chapters 21 through 26 are reminiscent of the storytelling modes employed in the traditional *huaben* genre (short or medium-length stories in vernacular Chinese from the late imperial period). Though these chapters are referred to as "the sequel," there is no indication that they are not simply a continuation of Liu E's serial novel. In these chapters the narrative voice is fully assumed by women, and the issue of sexuality, which is referred to obliquely in the "text proper," is brought to the fore.

Lao Can and Cuihuan happen upon Lao Can's old friend De Huisheng, who appeared in his dream of the ship of state in the first chapter, and De's wife, and the two couples make an excursion to Tai shan (Mt. Tai). There they meet the Buddhist nuns Qingyun, Yiyun, and Jingyun, who is in hiding from the son of a corrupt magistrate who wishes to subject her to his will. The nuns reside in a temple that is an hour's hike up the mountain. Their convent is, as Lin Yutang writes in

the prefatory note to his translation, "irregular": by a tradition dating back to the Ming Dynasty, Yiyun explains, the younger nuns dress attractively and entertain guests. "Sometimes a few young men like to flirt with us, which we don't mind," she says. Jingyun's reputation is such that Lao Can has heard of her. (In late-Qing China, courtesans were celebrities known for their beauty and their talent for poetry and music.) Mrs. De asks Yiyun if "all of you remain virgins until the end of your days." Yiyun answers, "ye bu jinran" (not exactly). Some of the nuns occasionally spend a night with a guest, she says, but not often: "After all, this is a temple and not a brothel." At the age of thirty the nuns cut off their hair and enter religious life.

Yiyun accompanies the party on the climb to the peak of Mt. Tai. On the way she relates the story of her life and her first love, Ren Sanye (Third Master Ren). Yiyun's account of her infatuation gives Mrs. De vicarious pleasure and alludes to the female romantic imagination as it is presented in traditional Chinese literature, which is filled with sons, scholars, and fantasies of political careers and fancy clothing, as well as conflicts with mothers-in-law. Yiyun explains how she was courted by Ren, fell in love with him, dreamed of having sons who would become scholars—one successful at the traditional examinations, the other a distinguished student abroad—and how it all came to naught because of the restrictions on autonomous love in late imperial China.

In chapter 5 of the sequel (chapter 25 of the novel) the group spends the night on the mountain. In conversation with Mrs. De, Yiyun explains the outlines of her spiritual progress and quotes from the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, works in which she finds the distillation of the teaching that has enlightened her and freed her from "mortal desires." The next day the group goes down the mountain and returns to the temple, where Jingyun greets them. They talk about Buddhism, and Lao Can is impressed by Yiyun's intimate understanding of the subtleties of the philosophy. Yiyun's comments expound the Buddhist doctrine of "nonduality" and, as Lin Yutang writes in a footnote, suggest "that there is no absolute truth, and that if one sincerely desires a truth, 'wants' it," then this is the truth of salvation.

Chapters 27 through 29 center on Lao Can's dream visit to Yama, the King of Hell, who exacts reparation throughout eternity for the conduct of people such as Yu Xian and Gang Bi. In his "Crime or Punishment? On the Forensic Discourse of Modern Chinese Literature" (2000) Wang Dewei suggests that while Lao Can's foray into hell is a "belated" form of "poetic justice" because it shows that those who escaped punishment in the living world are punished in the afterlife, readers finish the book thinking "that justice on earthly

China is only an expensive fantasy." According to Wang, even in the world "beyond life" Liu E does not offer the reader an alternative to draconian magistrates.

During and after the writing of *Lao Can youji*, Liu E distinguished himself as a prolific and respected arbiter on subjects such as oracle bones, inscriptions on ancient pottery, music, poetry, and seals. His *Tieyun cang gui* (1903, Tortoise Shells in the Collection of Tieyun) and *Tieyun cang tao* (1904, Pottery in the Collection of Tieyun) catalogue antiques in his collection. The former is an important early contribution to the study of *jiaguwen*, the oldest Chinese script. A bibliography in *Liu E ji Lao Can youji ziliao* (1985, Research Materials on Liu E and *The Travels of Lao Can*), edited by Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, lists similar works written or compiled by Liu E: fourteen are lost; twenty-three are extant; and three of the extant titles survive only in part. The bibliography gives no information as to which have been published and which have not. *Tieyun cang huo* (Coins in the Collection of Tieyun), published in 1986 from Liu E's manuscript, is a survey of his collection of antique coins. Like any member of the traditional literati, Liu E wrote poetry; it is collected in *Tieyun shicun* (1980, The Extant Poems of Tieyun), annotated by his grandson Liu Huisun.

From 1905 to 1907 Liu E undertook new business ventures, including textile mills and a steel refinery and, in Beijing, a waterworks (resuming an effort he had first made in 1901), a streetcar line, and an electric-light company; none came to full fruition. He made at least two trips to Japan and in 1906 took a Japanese woman as his fifth and last concubine; Liu E brought her to China in the winter of 1906–1907, but she returned permanently to Japan not long afterward.

Most sources chronicle the same series of events that led to Liu E's death, although the accounts differ on details. In 1907 Chen Liu, a member of the Pukou gentry whom Liu E had not allowed to participate in his 1902 land deal, charged that Liu E had bought the land for foreigners. All sources refute Chen Liu's claim and record that Liu bought the land with a group of friends and relatives with the intent of developing it as a commercial port. According to Shadick's introduction to his translation of *Lao Can youji* and according to Liu Huisun, in 1907 Yuan Shikai and a man named Shi Xu, both of whom were in the Junjichu (Grand Council of State) in Beijing, charged Liu E "with being a traitor to the country and buying land at Pukow for certain foreign interests." According to Liu Huisun, Shi Xu held a grudge because of a perceived slight from Liu E's father. According to Shadick, Liu E had alienated Yuan in Shandong in 1890, but there is reason to doubt that this claim is true. It is certain that the government ordered Liu E's arrest in 1907. According to Shadick,



Cover for the bilingual edition (1947) of *Lao Can youji*, with translation by H. Y. Yang (Yang Xianyi) and G. M. Tayler (Wason Collection on East Asia-China, Kroch Asia Library, Cornell University)

Liu E's brother-in-law, Ding Baoquan, the governor of Shanxi, intervened, and Liu E was not detained. In June 1908 Yuan Shikai revived Chen Liu's allegation, added to it a charge that Liu E had misappropriated imperial grain in 1901, and ordered Liu's arrest. The official ordered to carry out the arrest warrant, Duanfang, knew Liu E and tried to warn him, but to no avail. (Fang Chao-ying writes that Duanfang had an old score to settle with Liu E and benefited from Liu's arrest by confiscating many of his antiques, but Liu Huisun dismisses this version of events). Liu E was exiled to Xinjiang province in the far northwest, where he died of a stroke on 3 August 1909. His body was retrieved and prepared for interment by the governor of Gansu province and was met at stops along the trip home to Huai'an by each of his sons in succession. He was buried in Huai'an, Jiangsu province.

The half century of Liu E's life fits between the Opium Wars of the mid eighteenth century and the revo-

lution that toppled the Qing Dynasty. During this time the challenges of domestic rebellion and foreign imperialism compelled China to alter its political and cultural structures. Liu E's life and work exemplify this transformation. Hsia writes in "*The Travels of Lao Ts'an: An Exploration of Its Art and Meaning*" that Liu E cannot be understood apart from the political turmoil of the late Qing dynasty, and Shuen-fu Lin argues that the challenge to moral values brought on by the Western incursion into China created a "split" in Liu E's value system and in his novel. Lin writes that in its form *Lao Can youji* combines "narrative devices from the native tradition with experimental innovations from the West," and in its meaning it highlights the tension between Liu E's "unswerving commitment to the heritage of China's humanistic culture and his sensitive (and in many ways farsighted) response to Western civilization." Liu E's lone novel has remained a favorite of readers and critics since it was published as a book in 1925.

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