

## A Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

The literature of a country often defines its culture, revealing its customs, fears, beauty, history, weakness, values, and societal intricacies. One legend can show how a nation sees itself while another poem examines the natural splendor of the land. Essays remind the people of their beliefs, and our novels, no matter how fantastic, are all stories about ourselves. History could make good literature, but one thing is for certain—good literature makes history. Chinese literature is no exception.

In this edition of the Youth Workshop, we explore the lives and minds of those who make good literature happen—the writers. For thousands of years, Chinese writers have penned treaties, poetry, novels, and short stories, along with words that have shaped empires, transformed the culture, and touched the lives of millions of people. Han Yu, for instance, created some of the most commonly used Chinese idioms. Lu Xun’s words inspired Communist leader Mao Zedong, while Gao Xing Jian’s earned him banishment from China—and a Nobel Prize. Contemporary author Jin Yong single-handedly molded Asian pop culture.

What made these authors’ words so powerful? Who influenced their lives and writings? How have they analyzed Chinese culture and history? These questions and more are examined and answered in the following pages. Here are the stories behind the stories—the failed scholar’s timeless tale, the exiled poet who achieved immortality—here are the true legends, those who defined our culture with a stroke of the brush.

Sincerely,  
Nancy Wang  
Editor-in-Chief  
Youth Workshop

P.S. To all those who contributed to this section: thank you for your time, your words, and boundless energy!

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# *The Poet Immortal*

*Life of Li Bai*  
By May Zhang

Spontaneous and defiant, Li Bai embodied the values of the Romantic era of poetry. His words, when translated to English, sounded like an unknown stanza of “Tintern Abbey”. They were melancholy and reflective, musical and rich in language. Yet, he was set apart from the world of Wordsworth and Coleridge for two reasons: he was Chinese and was a thousand years their predecessor.

Li Bai was born in 701 A.D. to a minor nobility family in Sichuan Province. Apprenticed to a Taoist hermit, he received both Taoist and Confucian influence in his childhood. When he turned 25, Li Bai left Sichuan in search of a high position in the royal court. However, he was deterred when his controversial ancestry prevented him from taking the royal exam. Disappointed, Li Bai chose a life of wandering.



During this time, he befriended many influential scholars and made a name for himself. By 742, he had become so well known that even the Emperor Xuan Zong wanted to meet him. The Emperor gave Bai a job at the Hanlin Academy where he provided scholarly advice for the emperor and wrote poetry. However, his rebellious and prideful nature prevented him from succeeding at the job. The post offered little power, causing Li Bai to vent his frustrations in his writing. Within two years, Bai was accused of slander and was exiled. After leaving his post, Li Bai continued his wandering until he came upon the An Lushan Rebellion. There, he saw another opportunity for power so he joined Prince Lin’s side in the battle. However, when Lin was defeated, Li Bai was exiled again. Nevertheless, Bai was pardoned before the exile journey was complete so he was freed. He ultimately spent the rest of his life traveling, writing, and enjoying his surroundings.

Li Bai died in 762. There are many legends on how exactly he expired. One legend states that he drowned when while he was drunk, he embraced the reflection of the moon in the Yangtze. However, other scholars believe he died due to mercury poisoning from the Taoist longevity elixirs he drank in his lifetime.

Li Bai’s legacy still lives on more than a millennium after his passing. He is praised as the Poet Immortal and is one of the most famous poets in Chinese history. About 1,100 of his poems remain today and are translated into many languages. His poems talk about the people he met, his wishes and remorse, and the wondrous scenery he saw in his journeys. He is best known for his poem “Thinking Under the Moon”, a rich poem full of spontaneity, imagery, and beautiful language.

Li Bai was the finest Romantic figure of his era, both for his expressive verse and Byronic life. He was unique among his contemporaries, as he had already adopted the ideals of the Romantics in seizing life and taking in one's surroundings a thousand years before the rest of the world. He was distinguished by his imaginative words and free expression of feelings. For that, Li Bai will always remain as one of the greatest poets in Chinese history.



## **POLITICS, PEOPLE, AND POETRY**

*The Life of Du Fu*

By Bob Li

Du Fu was born in Gongxian, Henan in 712 A.D when China was ruled under the Tang Dynasty. Du Fu was born in a wealthy and well-educated family; his father was an official. He started to learn to write poems when he was only seven years old. His grandfather Du Shenyan, a famous poet at the time, heavily influenced him. Du Fu became famous at the age of fifteen.

At the age of 19, Du Fu left his family and started a journey throughout China. As he was traveling, he wrote many poems describing the beautiful sceneries he saw. When Du Fu stopped at Luoyan, he met Li Bai, also a renowned poet. They became good friends due to their interests in poetry, but they were separated in the fall of the year and they never saw each other again. Du Fu wrote more than 20 poems, most of them delightful and cheerful. As he traveled along, his money soon ran out, so he stopped at Chang'an. He wanted to get a position in the government, so he wrote poems and sent them to the government officials hoping that they would acknowledge his talents. After ten arduous years, one of the government officials read Du Fu's poem and was amazed by his gifts in poetry. The official submitted the poem to the prime minister for critique, but no answers came. Finally, after five more agonizing years, Du Fu was appointed to a small position in the government by an army official.



As an official, he slowly realized the corruptions in the government. He felt sorry for the common citizens for not having enough food while the officials squandered money on valuable pearls. His poems soon added some sour notes. He began to write poems about the sufferings of the poor and corruptions of the government. In the year 756, the An Lushan Rebellion broke out, and he became a refugee. Life as a refugee brought him closer to the people, and he wrote many poems about the experiences he had with them.

He regained his position after the rebellion was over. However, he became even more disappointed with the government. Finally, he decided to give up politics and wrote more poems, some of them his greatest. In his last two years of life, he spent most of his time on boats, drifting from one city to another. In the winter of 770, he died on the boat to Yue Yang when he was 59 years old.

# Founder of Neo-Confucianism

*Life of Han Yu*

By David J. Chang

Han Yu was born in the year 768 AD in Henan, China. He was a poet and prose writer as well as the founder of Neo-Confucianism. He became an orphan when he was three years old and was brought up and educated by his older sister-in-law. Later, Han Yu went to the capital city Changan in 786 AD. There he took the government examinations and, after three unsuccessful efforts, was able to finally pass on his fourth attempt. Han Yu gained his first central government position in 802 AD, but was soon exiled. From 807 AD to 819 AD, he held a series of posts in the government, first in Luoyang and then in Changan.

Starting at about thirty years old, Han Yu began to form the literary circle advocating orthodoxy in cultural matters. In poetry, Han Yu sought to follow the principle: the form of the work should match the content. Thus, a simple subject would be treated in a simple style. In prose, he was a strong proponent of the Classical Prose Movement, which advocated a clear and concise writing style. His own works were written in a simple prose style unlike the elaborate manner popular at the time. Han Yu was also a master of linguistics. Many words he invented have become idioms and are used widely in China today. One well-known story described a person sitting at the bottom of the well and looking up at the sky. He remarked that the sky was very small and limited. In reality, his vision was restricted by the well and simply could not see the entire heaven! A very popular idiom called "Zuo Jing Guan Tian" evolved which described people who are shortsighted.



Perhaps the most famous essay written by Han Yu was the "Study of the Way". It showed us a blueprint of an ideal Confucian society: the king, the officials, and the people, each had his own rights and obligations, with corresponding punishments. The "Way" in the "Study of the Way" was based on Confucian doctrines. There were two perspectives of the "Way": the guiding principles and their implementation. In the essay, Han Yu explained the Confucian definition of "Ren"—Humanness, "Yi"—Appropriate Action, "Dao"—Guiding Principle, "De"—Morality. However, Han Yu's idea was still confined to the scope of traditional Confucianism: to serve the feudal government. Although it emphasized the importance of the people and the order of the society, it did not give people political rights. It was not a democratic idea.

Although the "Study of the Way" demonstrated the way to manage a country, Han Yu also used it as an example in his reform of writing. This revision brought about liberation in prose writing. The sentence in writing was now given complete freedom to seek its own length and structural pattern as logic and content might dictate, instead of

restrictively conforming to the rigid rules. This reform also enabled the development of a new writing style in the following two hundred years. These new styles encompassed topics of love and romance, heroic adventures, mysteries and fictionalized history. These were exemplified by the famed and the celebrated: *Dream of the Red Mansion*, *The Tale of Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, and *The Three Kingdoms* respectively.

During his career as a government official, Han Yu was a strong supporter of strong central government control over the separatist provinces. This period of service came to an end when he protested against Buddhist influence on the state and sought to restore Confucianism to its former status. He was dismissed and exiled again to Chaozhou and died in 824 AD in Changan.



## Lady of Literature

*Life of Li Qingzhao*

By Xuan Yue

China has always been known for its poetry. Li Qingzhao of Song Dynasty is considered to be China's greatest female poet. Born in 1084, Li Qingzhao was introduced to literature and poetry at an early age by her parents. Her father, Li Kefei, was a prose writer, a professor, an administrator in the Imperial Academy, and a member of the prominent literary circle led by Su Dong Bo. Her mother was also a poet. She started writing poetry very early in her life, and completed her first poem at the age of 17. Later, she joined her father's friend in poetry competitions.

At age 18, Li Qingzhao married 21-year-old Chao Mingcheng. They shared many similar interests, such as art and literature. In 1127, the Manchurians invaded China. Due to the chaos, Li Qingzhao and her husband fled their home in Ch'ing Chou (modern day Shantung Province) to avoid being captured. In 1129, when she was 46, her husband died of illness. After her husband's death, Qingzhao often moved and did not settle down until 1132. She passed away around 1151 at the age of 68.



Li Qingzhao's work is divided into three phases: the time during her happily married life, the time of desolation after her husband's death, and the time of increasing loneliness as she grew older. Her most famous works include "Double Nine" and "Wuling Spring". Both mourn the loss of time and are written with superb language. The overwhelming emotions felt by the reader upon reading her poems prove that Li Qingzhao's fame was no mere fluke.

# He Was... the Obscure Dreamer

*Life of Wu Cheng En*

By Emily-Ann Chao

A Chinese novelist-poet was born in the year of 1500 or 1506. No one is definitely sure of the year, let alone the date of birth. He was born in Huaian, a neighboring state to Shanghai in the Jiangsu province during the Ming dynasty. Born into an ancestry of humbleness, his father was a low ranked officer who later became the founder of a small family business.

In his childhood years, collecting fantasy books was his hobby. Fairies, wizards, magical beings and animals captivated this young boy's interest and soon ignited the imagination later to create the most famous folktale ever written in Chinese literature. This peculiar young boy blossomed into adolescence with flying colors in academics. He studied very hard and held a great skill of photographic memory. This outstanding young man soon began to study in Nanjing Taixue, the most prestigious and highest institute of learning in China during the Ming dynasty. There he stayed for more than 10 years discovering and applying the art of writing and poetry.

Fame found him at a young age from his first developments of literature. However, in his early 20's, his fame quickly faded away and the people mocked him because of his poor social status. Proud and unhurt, this lively man married a girl of the name Ye from his hometown. Even though a wild and adventurous spirit prospered within him, he was a faithful husband. The marriage was successful and happy, flourishing with love.

After marrying, the groom realized that he needed to stop living off his family's land. He tried time and again to pass the government's civil service examination but failed gravely. This test gave men the right to obtain work, but since he did not pass, he could not provide for his bride on his own. His father died in disappointment as his bright, notorious son could not achieve the simple task of manly duty.

Humbled and humiliated (since all of his friends succeeded with ease), the now middle-aged writer put forth all his effort and skill toward a novel called *Xiyouji*, otherwise known as *The Journey to the West*. Only after his death in 1582 was the author recognized and noted for great literary accomplishment.



This timeless tale of adventure and quest is known throughout the world by generations of people. The author of *Journey to the West* lived a life of poverty and little fortune, of knowledge and understanding. The name of the folktale is famous, but its creator is generally unknown. A lower class man who deserves all the credit; he was...

Wu Cheng En.

# The Radical Writer

*Life of Lu Xun*

By Frank Zhang

Zhou Shuren (otherwise known by his pseudonym as Lu Xun) was China's foremost modern writer and intellectual; he composed many short stories, poems, essays and literary criticisms. Besides being an author, Lu Xun is also acknowledged as the leader of the May Fourth Movement (a revolution in 1919 that sought to modernize Chinese social and intellectual life). He is also revered as a pioneer in Communist thought by Mao Zedong and Mao's followers.

Lu Xun was born in Shaoxing, a city of the Zhejiang province in eastern China, into an impoverished but educated family in 1881. He received a traditional education with family tutors before attending a school in Nanjing. In 1902, he attended Sendai Medical School in Japan, but in 1906, he abandoned his medical studies and pursued instead a career in literature. He studied on his own until 1909, when he returned to China and became a teacher in his hometown Shaoxing.

In 1918, Lu Xun gained literary renown when his short story "Kuangren Riji" ("Diary of a Madman") was published in the *New Youth*, the journal that initiated the May Fourth or New Culture Movement. "Diary of a Madman" was hailed as China's first modern story since it was written in contemporary vernacular and critiqued China's traditional culture. In the 1920s, while he was teaching at universities in Beijing and other cities, Lu Xun wrote two more collections of short stories. Lu Xun also wrote 16 volumes of essays, prose poetry, historical tales, poetry in the classical style, scholarly research, and he also translated numerous works. His main works include *Call to Arms*, *Wandering*, *Wild Grass*, *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dawn*, and *Old Tales Retold*.



Lu Xun believed that only through literature could the Chinese society be reformed. His "Diary of a Madman" strongly criticized the traditional Chinese culture. Near the end of his life, he settled in Shanghai, turned to Communism, and founded the League of Left-Hand Writers. However, he never joined the Chinese Communist Party, due to personal conflicts and ideological differences. Throughout his life, Lu Xun was torn by his inner pessimism and his public stance for building a new Chinese nation and culture. His struggles can be seen in his writings, where he experimented with a variety of genres. The Chinese Communist Party hailed Lu Xun as a great revolutionary writer because of his dislike of the Nationalist Government. His writings proved to be of great inspiration to Mao Zedong. Lu Xun died of tuberculosis on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1936 in Shanghai.

# HISTORY OF A HERO

*Life of Jin Yong*

By Nancy Wang

Very few authors can define a genre, captivate the imagination of an entire generation, shape the popular culture of a continent, and still top the bestsellers' lists three decades after his last published book. Yet Jin Yong has managed all of the above, an incredible feat as admirable as those the heroes in his books accomplish.

Jin Yong was born Louis Liang Yong Cha on February 6, 1924 in Zhejiang, China. After finishing high school, he studied foreign language at Chungking Central University and then international law at Dongwu University. After graduation with the best score in English, Jin was hired as a translator for the Shanghai newspaper, *Ta Kung Bao*. He moved to Hong Kong after being appointed to the papers' office there. In Hong Kong, he began writing screenplays and movie criticisms, but it was not until 1955 that he wrote his first *wuxia* novel (also known as swordsmen novel).



His first novel, *The Book and the Sword* (“Shujian Enchoulua”), was published as a series in Hong Kong’s *Xin Wan Bao*. Upon the immediate popularity of the series, Jin founded his own newspaper, *Ming Pao Daily*, to secure printing rights to his stories. He eventually expanded to *Ming Pao Weekly*, *Ming Pao Monthly*, and *Ming Pao Evening News*. He also founded his own publishing company. Over the next 17 years, Jin wrote over a dozen more novels. His most popular and acclaimed works include *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils* (*Tianlong Babu*), *Smiling Proud Wanderer* (*Xiao’ao Jianghu*), and the Condor Heroes trilogy (*Shendiao Yingxiongzhuan*, *Shendiao Xialue*, *Yitian Tulongji*). His last and often considered best novel, *The Deer and the Cauldron* (*Ludingji*), was written in 1972 when he vowed not to write another book. Despite the clamoring of his fans, he has not broken the vow to this day.

Since then, Jin Yong has remained an active participant in public life. From 1985 to 1989, he was an executive member of the Basic Law Drafting Committee and Consultative Committee of the Hong Kong, helping pave the way for the region after its return to China. He has been appointed honorary professor at Hong Kong University, Zhejiang University, and Beijing University. He goes around the country, attending conferences and lectures about his work.

Jin Yong’s novels are part of a literary revival of the *wuxia* genre in the last half-century. Among the thousands of novels written, however, his stands as most distinct and most well read. One factor of his popularity is the immense appeal of his books to all ages and all social class. The chivalrous adventures, tales of love, honor, courage, and brotherhood, have enchanted the popular masses from schoolboys to the elderly. They

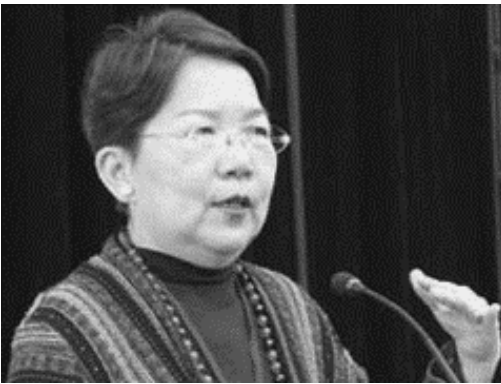
have been adapted into scores of movies and TV series all over Asia. However, his stories rise above pulp fiction when one examines their immense historical and literary depth. Jin's prose is refined and cultured, filled with erudite references, witty word plays, and subtle metaphors. One example of his literary brilliance lies in the mere titles of his works: arranged in the right order, the first character in each title forms a classic couplet. With both critical and popular acclaim, Jin Yong's place in Chinese literary history is firmly set.



## *Redefining Romance*

*Life of Qiong Yao*

By Jane Liu



There are many adored and awe-inspiring Chinese authors today, and one of the most famous and well-loved authors is Qiong Yao, a highly accomplished romance novelist. Her countless novels have touched and riveted the hearts of millions of Chinese citizens, young and old alike. Qiong Yao, meaning fine jade, is the poetic pen name for the talented writer Chen Zhe. She was born on April 20, 1938, the eldest of four siblings, including her twin brother. Qiong attended Taiwan University, one of Taiwan's most prestigious colleges, but, unfortunately, did not graduate. She currently resides in Taiwan and is still continuing her writing career.

Along with her many fictional stories, she has written an autobiography, *My Story*. The exact number of novels Qiong has written throughout the full extent of her career is unknown, but one thing is certain: over forty of her captivating novels have been adapted to TV mini series, films, and plays. Of these forty, a few of the most well known TV series and movies are "Qing Shen Shen Yu Meng Meng," "Cloud of Romance," "A Trip Back to the Old Courtyard," and "Huan Zhu Ge Ge" ("My Fair Princess"). Many of her novels follow a common trend of setting in ancient dynasties or the early 1900s.

Numerous actors and actresses have Qiong Yao to thank for their fame. Not only did she write the original novels and scripts, Qiong also chose many of the actors and actresses for the shows, which led them to become rising celebrities. All in all, she has been an inspiration to thousands of readers and sentimentalists. Many of her fans can relate to a quote she once said in the 1980s: "My tears are gushing as I read; I can do nothing but concede, that youth itself is just a book, one that is swallowed down with greed." It is certain that Qiong Yao's heart-warming novels, bursting with adventures, compassion, and heroics, will live on from generation to generation.

# The Price of the Prize

*Life of Gao Xing Jian*

By Steven Sun

Some great stories do not tell us what we want to hear, but instead throw before us that which we would rather avoid. There are some lessons that are hard to swallow, and yet are necessary to learn. Gao Xing Jian, a political refugee of China, tells such stories in his books, plays, paintings, and essays. Gao Xing Jian was born in Ganzhou, China on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1940. Born shortly after the Japanese invasion of China, Gao grew up exposed to the upheaval of Communist control and the Cultural Revolution. He became a writer of short stories, plays, and essays, but was often suppressed by the Communist government. In 1979, he left China and was free to publish works in France and Italy. During the next decade, he wrote various successful plays, including *Signal Alarm* in 1982 and *Bus Stop* in 1983. *Bus Stop* is especially notable, as it was harshly criticized by the Communist government as “intellectual pollution” to Communist thought.



In 1989 the infamous massacre at Tiananmen Square caused Gao Xing Jian to sever all ties with the Chinese Communist Party and relocate permanently to France as a political refugee. Shortly afterwards, the Chinese government declared him an exile and banned all his books and other works. As Gao stayed in Europe, he completed what may have been his two greatest works: *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*. Penned in Chinese, these two books were the inner struggles of a man who grew up amidst the turmoil and fear of a frightening regime. They detail the philosophical and pragmatic longing for meaning, only to find nothing. Within the two books are the sense of hopelessness in mortality, and the uncertainty of the future. With these books, Gao was met with much response, both good and bad. On the one hand, he received the Nobel Prize for literature in the year 2000 for his book *Soul Mountain*; on the other, he was denounced and ruthlessly criticized by the Chinese government. Some people affiliated with the Chinese government have even accused the Nobel organization of abandoning all honor and using its power for purely political reasons. Despite the accusations, Gao Xing Jian's masterpiece in literature still stands as a contemporary reminder that the anti-utopia is not just looming in the future, but has already come.

Gao Xing Jian is still writing today, and is currently a French citizen.