

tions to his fellow countrymen. His were the tactics and equivocations of a Richelieu, the secrecy of the *raison d'état* of the *ancien régime*."

Reviewed by BRENTON H. SMITH

A Neglected Literature

Twentieth-Century Chinese Stories,
edited by C. T. Hsia, *New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, 240 pp.*
\$10.00.

CONTRARY TO WHAT the title may imply, this is a highly selective anthology not meant to be all-inclusive. Only nine selections by eight authors are included. Of the eight, four belong to the generation that reached maturity nearly four decades ago while the other four are much younger, with two still in their middle thirties. Not represented are such famous names as Lu Hsun, Lao She, Mao Tun and Pa Chin, whose works have long since been available in English. As the editor, Dr. Hsia, tells us at the outset, he has not aimed at comprehensiveness; rather, he has "deliberately attempted by a new anthology to impress upon the Western reader the strength and vitality of modern Chinese fiction." Thus we also do not find in this volume the heavily political and revolutionary routine from the Chinese mainland, nor do we find the tremendously popular stories by such prolific writers as Chun Yao of Taiwan. Dr. Hsia explains that he has selected the short stories for their "intrinsic literary interest," not for their popularity; and I think he has lived up to that criterion. This volume is in a sense also a polite rebuttal to some Western anthologists of modern Chinese short stories, one of whom Dr. Hsia cites in a footnote as telling the readers that

Chinese authors have "little to offer to those in search of literary novelty and brilliance."

The editor's second criterion in selecting the stories is their "representative importance in the development of the modern Chinese short story." In this regard, the superior quality and the serious nature of the works represented are quite evident. Among the four older authors, there are Yu Ta-fu's skillful exploration of the individual psyche of a Chinese student in Japan, Shen Tsung-wen's effortless rendition of landscape with its pastoral quietness, Chang Tien-i's satirical caricature of the meanness of a group of school teachers and Wu Tsu-hsiang's realistic recording of a peasant revolt. These short stories are more than mere tales. For under the skilled pens of the authors, they tell of the clashes between the old values and the new, the anguish of the times and the struggle of the mind under artificially imposed restraints.

The works by the other four writers are no less weighty and too are products of the times, although quite different from those of the earlier era. Eileen Chang belongs to that "in-between" generation; her piece selected here, portraying a decadent upper-class family, was completed in 1943. Nieh Hua-ling, who grew up in wartime China and spent a number of productive years in Taiwan before coming to the United States in the early 1960's, describes the sense of despair and intellectual barrenness of the Taiwan middle class. The two youngest writers represented here both received their high school and college education in Taiwan. Shui Ching delves into a philosophic study between civilization and primitivism, using his teaching experience in Brunei for an imaginative story. Pai Hsien-yung writes about a Chinese girl in New York, weaving political and cultural realities into a personal tragedy.

Such is the rich content of this rather thin volume. It is a pleasure to read and the superb translations add to the pleasure of reading. One gets the feeling that there is indeed a good deal of strength and vitality

in these short stories, written by those who are free to express themselves. One only hopes for a day when it will be possible for writers on mainland China to display the same strength and vitality, as they undoubtedly are capable of doing.

But this will not be easy under the rigid system there, for Mao Tse-tung believes there must be a "correct" relationship between work in the literary and artistic fields and the revolutionary work in general. In his famous talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art in May, 1942, when China was at war with Japan, Mao said:

Our aim is to ensure that revolutionary literature and art follow the correct path of development and provide better help to other revolutionary work in facilitating the overthrow of our national enemy and the accomplishment of the task of national liberation.

This utilitarian approach to literature and art, while many would take issue with it, is understandable in the context of a total war against external aggression. But to regard enforced servitude of literature and art as mere patriotism is a naïve mistake. For the subservient role of art and literature in the total human experience goes much deeper in Mao's mind. In this respect, Mao can justly claim to be heir to orthodox Marxist-Leninist thinking about social engineering. Mao approvingly quotes Lenin concerning the role of literature and art: "As far back as 1905, Lenin pointed out emphatically that our literature and art would 'serve . . . the millions and tens of millions of working people.'" The party alone, as the vanguard of the working people, therefore, should have the sole authority to determine what is good and what is bad for the working people and to direct all forms of expression to "serve the people." Shorn of its ideological cloak, this means simply that art and literature must toe the rigid party line and be a tool for political propaganda. Art and literature would have no intrinsic value, either "bourgeois" or "proletarian," but only a utilitari-

an social value, arbitrarily and rigidly defined.

The ultimate issue involved therefore is freedom and the extent of freedom. When the validity of the general concept of freedom is denied, freedom of the mind (the expression of which is art and literature) of course cannot exist, hence the logical consequence of literature and art serving a prescribed goal, from which no deviation would be tolerated. On the other hand, if the basic concept of freedom is granted, the next question of course would be this: Is freedom of the mind unlimited? If so, then we should take such consequences as explicit sex in the movies and neurotic themes of despair in today's Western literature without an outcry.

The fact is that on the scale of human freedom, both extremes are devoid of essential humanism. The former is based on a mechanical ("scientific") view of history, the latter is based on animal instinct. Neither approach is fit for human society and in the end only proves to be self-degenerating. The ancient Chinese sages long ago found out about this and proposed the way of humanistic moderation and balance. Somewhere between being mechanical tools in the hands of a self-appointed few and being expressions of crude animal instincts which thousands of years of human civilization have tried to subdue, literature and art do have a role to play. That role can only be comprehended in the context of total *human* society, but it cannot be defined by any elitist group, political, economic or otherwise. Literature and art can be diverse, vigorous and imaginative to satisfy the equally complex human minds rather than having the uniform and depressing look of the gray tunic or appealing solely to animal instincts. The writers represented in this volume over a space of four decades amply testify to the theme of humanistic moderation. They have demonstrated that they can produce works that are neither toeing a prescribed line, nor sinking to the depths of cultural despair, but instead are rich and diverse in intrinsic value in keeping with

the Chinese tradition of essential humanism.

As vehicles to convey and impart ideas, all forms of literature and art contain messages. But the question is whether it is justified to promote one kind of message while striking down all other messages? What should be the criteria? Who have the right to set the criteria? And of course the final question is this: Is life enriched or deprived as a result of either total mind control or a reversion to intellectual primitivism? These are questions that blind enthusiasts, zealous social activists and one-track-minded ideologues will do well to ponder as human beings.

Reviewed by TA-LING LEE