

“Yü-kuan”: The Spiritual Testament of Hsü Ti-shan

Lewis S. Robinson

Barely five years after the 1917 literary revolution in China, Hsü Ti-shan (許地山) entered upon the literary scene as an author transcending the scope of the May Fourth scenario through his penetrating attempts to define human spirituality. Whereas most of the writers of his day were preoccupied with ideology and propaganda, Hsü alone argued for a spiritual, as opposed to a material and revolutionary, solution to the problems of life in China. Furthermore, by achieving a level of pure moral exploration, he transcended the bounds of culture and race to enter that rare category of writer whose message has universal application. Of course, Hsü was a man with considerable experience of cultures other than his own. His research led him to three continents in a five year journey around the world. As a boy growing up, he traveled with his father within the sphere of classical India (i.e., Burma). His resultant interest in Indian Buddhist literature drew him to India proper three times. On the other hand, he was a devout Christian with a divinity degree from the Yenching School of Religion. He later made the adaptation to western cultures as well, obtaining further academic degrees from Columbia University in New York and Oxford University in England. Interestingly enough, however, his writings do not reflect his sojourns in America or England, a fact which makes him somewhat unique among Chinese writers of that time who were educated in the West. Rather,

In his early works we find his pages full of descriptions of the customs and life of the Malays and other inhabitants of the tropical countries of the South, his chief aim being to create an exotic atmosphere, which he achieves with great vividness.¹

Indigenous Chinese sources also entered in to his stories, as we shall see

in our subsequent study of his long story "Yü-kuan" (玉官). Besides writing fiction, a few of the many results of his diverse range of interests include the most definitive history of Chinese Taoism to date, a study of primitive Confucianism, and a whole slew of scholarly articles concerning Sanskrit and Bengali folk literature. In short, Hsü had excellent qualifications in comparative religion and was as much an anthropologist as a writer of fiction. This extensive understanding of culture imbued his stories with a realism seldom attained by other Chinese writers when employing foreign settings, even among those writers who were to later immigrate to the West. For Hsü's part, he remained in China where he taught successively in all three of Peking's foremost universities and later at Chung Shan University in Canton. His final academic post was that of department chairman of the newly formed Chinese department at Hong Kong University, which he accepted in 1936 when Hu Shih recommended him for the post. Hsü died in 1941 at the early age of forty-nine. It is said that his heart gave out as a result of the intense energy that he poured into the Japanese Resistance Movement while continuing to make great contributions toward various literary, linguistic, and cultural movements in Hong Kong. Consequently, he left behind a myriad of unpublished writings; "Yü-kuan" was one of them.

Hsü's own peculiar synthesis of East and West appeared very early in his writings. Despite his many notable short and long stories, he is best remembered for his personal anecdote entitled "The Groundnut" (peanut), rendered "Lo Hua-sheng" (落花生) in Chinese. Remarkably enough, there are many points of interest to be gathered from this short "jotting" of a few paragraphs. For example, the title serves as the source for his pen name, "Lo Hua-sheng." "The Groundnut" is required reading for all school children in both his province of birth, Taiwan, as well as his place of death, Hong Kong. The story employs a didactic parable reminiscent of those told by Jesus or Buddha. And finally, Hsü manages to impart his personal life philosophy quite simply in these few lines:

This tiny nut does not resemble those handsome fruit trees with apples, peaches, and pomegranates displayed on their branches, whose bright reds and yellowish greens entice one's longing with a single glance. The peanut merely buries its fruit in the ground, allowing it to ripen before letting people dig it up. If you perchance to see a peanut growing stiff and numb in the ground, you can't tell right away if it contains fruit. You must wait

until you have encountered it before you can really know.²

這小小的豆，不像那好看的蘋果，桃子，石榴，把它們的果實懸在枝上，鮮紅嫩綠的顏色，引人垂涎。它只把果子埋在地下，等到成熟纔容人把它挖出來。你們偶然看見一顆花生瑟縮地長在地上，不能立刻辨出它有沒有果實，必得等你接觸到它，纔能知道。

Just like this parable, Hsü Ti-shan (or Lo Hua-sheng, "Mr. Groundnut") undertook a wide variety of endeavors during his life and, subsequently, "buried them in the ground," waiting for people to "encounter them" and discover what "fruit" might be therein. The anecdote ends with the father exhorting his children to be real, functional people and to ignore all outer appearances of glory. "The Groundnut" was written very early in Hsü's writing career and represents the embryonic stage of his enfolding life philosophy. In this present study, I will examine his posthumously published long story "Yü-kuan" to demonstrate how his personal quest toward a religious understanding not limited to any one religion was culminated in this "small masterpiece, a rare spiritual testament in an age of crude ideology and rampant materialism."³

Hsü Ti-shan had a peculiar preoccupation with the Chinese woman as the potential embodiment of his own emerging life philosophy. He created heroines quite human in circumstances and emotion, yet almost saintly after a modest fashion. Pure in spirit and resolute in character, they rely on either a profound religious faith or a deep, inner confidence to confront the hardships ever present in their lives. By far the most fascinating of Hsü's many heroines is the enigmatic Yü-kuan. Hsia suggests that Yü-kuan provides an interesting parallel with Félicité, the heroine in Flaubert's "A Simple Heart," but the comparison doesn't stop with the female protagonists. Harry Levin's introduction to Arthur McDowall's translation of this French story could just as well be applied to Hsü's writing of "Yü-kuan":

Overcome by an almost Proustian nostalgia, he sank—as he told his correspondents—into "a bath of recollections." The farm, the inn, the town-people, the relatives, and the servant were part of his own recovered past.⁴

In the same way, "Yü-kuan," with its "rich panorama of Chinese history,"⁵ is reminiscent of many episodes out of Hsü's own "recovered past," retold with a Flaubertian "propensity for intricate plots."⁶ For example, we are told in the opening paragraph of the story that the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 has claimed the life of Yü-kuan's husband. Her resultant widowhood constitutes a major theme throughout the remaining fifty pages. Reviewing Hsü's early life, we know that the outcome of this same war precipitated his family's move from Taiwan to Fukien, where the bulk of the action in "Yü-kuan" takes place. And just as Yü-kuan learns the ways of a "bible woman" though barely an adult herself, Hsü Ti-shan

... seems also to have acquainted himself during his youth with the ways of Christian missionaries, both native and foreign, who traveled over South China to preach the gospel.⁷

In other ways, Hsü's life is parallel to that of Yü-kuan's son, Chien-te, whose age in the story closely approximates Hsü's age at that time. They both married at roughly the same time and went on to earn church support for their respective college careers. Furthermore, they both lost a wife through illness after the birth of a single child, later went to America practically the same year, and even remarried after their respective homecomings. The parallels are too numerous to be mere coincidence. They suggest, perhaps, that Hsü may have been aware of his approaching death and decided to summarize the meaning of his life in a longer work of fiction. In any case, Hsü obviously possessed a first-hand knowledge of these historical events right up through the rise of communism. The extremely effective way in which Hsü intricately interweaves these events into the lives of his characters generates a keen historical, as well as dramatic, interest on the part of the reader.

From a literary standpoint, "Yü-Kuan" is a kind of synthesis encompassing the width and breadth of Hsü's fictional writings. As Hsia puts it:

Without "Yü-kuan" it could be said that Lo Hua-sheng's quest for a perfect fable to embody his vision of the good life had ended in failure: Shang-chieh. Ch'un-t'ao, Tung Yeh, and others like them, with all their charity and virtue, are allegorical characters rather than dramatic. Since, in the history of fiction, there have been very few saintly characters who are at the same time alive and interesting, Lo Hua-sheng's failure would still have deserved commendation for his single-minded determination to attempt

the supremely arduous task. But in "Yü-kuan" he did achieve a small masterpiece.⁸

Going a step further, I fully believe that Hsü's intriguing psychological treatment of Yü-kuan culminating in her final "spiritual awakening" (or, more aptly, self-confrontation) is a reflection of the evolution of the author's own "inner life," from the time he adopted Christianity as a youth to the time of his death. Therefore, "Yü-kuan" is ultimately a personal "testament of the human spirit," a theme which did indeed captivate Hsü throughout his career. Again, just as "an intense bond of personal sympathy drew Flaubert to *Félicité*,"⁹ Hsü endowed his heroine with his own soul in a rare display of self-illuminating honesty. And like Flaubert, "his work is rich in positive values, which appear most concretely when he touches his native soil."¹⁰

Another parallel between Yü-kuan and *Félicité* is that they are the most "real" of the heroines of the respective authors. To quote Levin's terminology, they are both "women of goodwill," originating from "peasant stock," and "incarnated" with a "religious veneration."¹¹ As Hsia points out, the difference between them lies in their final responses to a veritable onslaught of personal crises. In Yü-kuan's case,

... instead of shriveling inside herself, the goodness of the Chinese woman extends outward into the practical world of love and work.¹²

Also, unlike Hsü's earlier heroines, Yü-kuan does not acquire her moral superiority in any unbelievable or superhuman manner. In order to fully illustrate this point, I propose to carefully describe how her inner transformation takes place. In doing so, I will draw from my own Christian experience, as well as a basic understanding of Jungian principles of psychology. My goal is to demonstrate both the realistic frailty of Yü-kuan's utter humanity and the essential feasibility of her remarkable inner growth by the end of the story. I may be accused of an overly subjective analysis, that is, reading too much into the events as originally portrayed by Hsü. Nonetheless, the exercise remains beneficial in and of itself, for it presents a concrete verification of Hsia's ultimate praise of Yü-kuan":

... in it Lo Hua-sheng has upheld what Allen Tate has admirably defined as the responsibility of the man of letters in the modern world: "He must recreate for his age the image of man, and he must propagate standards

by which other men may test that image, and distinguish the false from the true." "Yü-kuan," therefore, belongs with those works of literature which are "the recurrent discovery of the human communion as experience, in a definite place and at a definite time."¹³

Thus, through my admittedly "subjective" analysis, I will "test the image" and "distinguish the false from the true." In short, I will partake of the "human communion" which Hsü has so richly provided for this particular reader of his novelette. First of all, however, it behooves me to provide a brief synopsis of this complex plot in order to facilitate further discussion. For this purpose, I have taken the liberty of extensively quoting Hsia's very adequate outline of the story:

Yü-kuan is a young woman of South Fukien whose husband has died in action in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. She lives entirely for her infant son and hopes that someday he will become an official and erect an arch in honor of her virtuous widowhood. After repeated molestations from her brother-in-law, who is something of a blackguard, she obtains work as a domestic in the home of a foreign missionary and becomes gradually interested in missionary work. She soon becomes a Bible woman herself, following the example of her best friend, Hsing-kuan. To all appearances Yü-kuan is a zealous Christian worker, though she retains her Confucian scruples as to the propriety of neglecting ancestor worship and other traditional rituals, to which she has been accustomed. Characteristically, she carries a copy of the Book of Changes along with the Bible whenever she travels.

On many of her field trips she meets with a peddler named Ch'en Lien, with whom she gradually falls in love. Now that her son is growing up and well on his way to completing his free education at the local missionary school, she feels the need of a new life and wants very much to marry the peddler. But she gives up the idea when she learns that he is really the husband of Hsing-kuan and that he has just returned to the neighborhood without his wife's knowledge. It appears that, many years ago, Ch'en Lien left home to avoid arrest after he had assaulted a Christian convert for wantonly smashing his idols.

Yü-kuan's son in time marries Hsing-kuan's daughter. Yü-kuan feels very lonely, and quite jealous of their intimacy. Soon, afterward her son goes to America to study for a religious career and his wife dies in giving birth to a son. Yü-kuan takes care of her grandson and continues with her missionary work. She suffers many humiliations during the Communist occupation of South Fukien. But she doesn't come to serious harm and is even in a position to help her fellow victims of Communist terror, largely because her brother-in-law, now a Communist officer, affords some protection.

Her troubles are far from over, however. Soon after the evacuation of the Communists, her grandson suffers a serious fall and becomes a permanent

cripple; and Ch'en Lien is again leaving for the South Seas. In her misery, Yü-kuan is excited to learn that her son is finally returning to China after a protracted stay in America of eight or nine years. In the meantime the latter has repudiated his missionary upbringing; he goes directly to Nanking to accept a government post and marry a rich and spoiled girl whom he has courted in America. (This girl is actually Hsing-kuan's other daughter, kidnapped in infancy by Yü-kuan's rascally brother-in-law and eventually adopted by a wealthy family in Shanghai.)

Yü-kuan goes to Nanking to live with her son. Much to her dismay, she finds her new life almost intolerable. A total stranger to their Westernized bourgeois ways, she cannot get along at all with her son and daughter-in-law. Her new unhappiness prompts her to review her past life¹⁴

At this point, Yü-kuan pursues a course of honest introspection which results in her "enlightenment" in a psychological sense. It is precisely this process of psychological growth that I will examine as I review the events of the foregoing synopsis. First, however, let us finish Hsia's summary in order to see exactly where this process of growth leaves our heroine:

In spite of her advanced age, Yü-kuan returns to Fukien and works tirelessly for the next two or three years in the villages. To commemorate her fortieth year in missionary service, the villagers, many of whom received succor from her during the period of Communist terror, now wish to present her a concrete testimonial of their love and esteem. Yü-kuan, who had dreamed of a widow's arch in her younger days, is completely uninterested. Finally, the villagers win her permission to build a concrete bridge. Upon its completion they give a party in her honor and even her son and daughter-in-law come back for the occasion. Yü-kuan is deeply moved. A few days later she embarks for Borneo to bring back Ch'en Lien for her lifelong friend, Hsing-kuan.¹⁵

Thus, the story ends with Yü-kuan successfully transcending her narrow self-interests which had imposed such severe psychological and spiritual restrictions upon her self-growth throughout the course of her life. The only question remains, how does she get to this point? The answer necessarily entails a detailed analysis of the events of her life as the author masterfully portrays them. Basically, it all begins after Yü-kuan learns of her husband's death, at which time she resolutely determines to live a life of chaste widowhood devoted only to her son's future success. On the surface, these appear to be virtuous ideals worthy of our utmost respect. Hsü, however, allows us to probe his heroine's subconscious mind in order

to discover her real motive: the inner desire to be honored permanently through the construction of a portal commemorating her virtue. As a woman in traditional China, Yü-kuan can realize her subliminal wish for immortality only by a long and worthy widowhood. Ironically, her initial desire for such commemoration is actually fulfilled in the end through yet another channel long after she has matured out of this fantasy. Jung created the term "individuation process" to describe the way that a person becomes his/her own unique, undivided, whole self. "Yü-kuan" is the story of a woman who is caught in this process and comes out on top.

A practical woman, Yü-kuan is constantly aware that her son must someday be an official if her dream is to come true. If becoming a Christian will help her cause, then she will become an outward paragon of philanthropic endeavor, though her real motives are miles away with her son's development and education. For example, the church pays for his education and even helps him go to the United States for training on the condition that he enter the ministry upon his return to China. But when he marries a rich girl who can buy him a government position and subsequently rejects his original "calling" to the pulpit, Yü-kuan is absolutely overjoyed. Naturally, she keeps her selfish satisfaction a carefully guarded secret when handling the matter with the foreign mission board.

Up until this point, Yü-kuan has never admitted to herself the true extent of her near hypocrisy. Though not truly believing the central dogmas of Christianity, she rationalizes such behavior as winning souls for Christ by telling herself that in the final analysis all religions exist to encourage people to reform themselves. She has not yet realized that she was in need of her own inner reformation, that is, a reconciliation between her outer appearance and her inner reality.

From a psychological standpoint, we know that this dichotomy of inner versus outer is destructive to the individual psyche the more that one identifies with the outer "mask" (known as "persona" in Jungian terminology) and suppresses one's real desires deeper into the unconscious realm. The Freudian rule of thumb in psychology that whatever is suppressed in the subconscious will eventually rear its ugly head in one form or another is quite applicable in Yü-kuan's case. For example, when she feels real passion for a particular man one night, she can only sublimate such feelings and try to sleep in spite of them. The result is that she spends the night in fear that a great shadow is engulfing her. Interestingly

enough, "shadow" is the term with which Jung described our repressed sides. The passage in the text is well worth our examination. The setting is a country church where the night watchman, Ch'en Lien, has agreed to put her up for the night:

Yü-kuan hadn't had such an evening chat with a man since her husband died. Forgetting herself a bit, she talked with Ch'en Lien well into the night, until he finally showed Yü-kuan her sleeping quarters in the back

Yü-kuan closed her eyes and imagined Ch'en Lien's form under the light, retrospectively enjoying their chat. She felt a passionate impulse going through her entire body. Tossing to and fro, she was unable to sleep. She opened her eyes and listened to the many night sounds, growing more and more apprehensive as she listened. The more she grew afraid, the more certain she was that a devil was pressing down upon her She didn't dare blow out the oil lamp for fear of the dark. Once she closed her eyes, however, she didn't dare open them again, for she sensed the presence of a great shadow engulfing her. She was too petrified to move or even swat the biting mosquitoes. A cold sweat covered her body

At last, she got up and took her Bible out of her satchel and laid it on her bed, constantly reciting the Nicean Creed and the Lord's Prayer. This calmed her down a little, but throughout the night, she felt almost suffocated by the devil's oppressiveness

When dawn finally broke in the east, she sat up and stared vacantly before her, tightly clutching her Bible. She thought to herself that Chinese devils probably didn't fear the foreign scriptures and prayers; otherwise, why didn't she obtain any respite during last night's ordeal

When she got up and went out, Ch'en Lien was already making breakfast. He asked her how she slept, to which Yü-kuan could only reply that the mosquitos were a bit on the numerous side. She glanced at a small book next to his pillow and asked about it. Ch'en Lien said it was the Book of Changes, for he too feared devils. Suddenly, Yü-kuan realized that the thing which Chinese devils feared was a Chinese sacred book!

The night's experience produced in Yü-kuan the deep conviction that devils in the world were for real After breakfast, she began to feel feverish Ch'en Lien nursed her the entire morning, but rather than go down, her temperature rose with yet another type of fever in her heart

After returning home, she laid in bed several days before her fever finally broke. Even then, she didn't feel quite like herself, but she didn't dare tell a soul.¹⁶

玉官自從與丈夫離別以後就沒同男人有過夜談。她有一點忘掉自己，彼此直談到中夜，陳廉才領她到後院屋裏去睡……

玉官回味方才底談話，閉眼想像燈光下陳廉底模糊的樣子，心裏總像有股熱氣向着全身衝動，躺在床上翻來覆去，直睡不着。她睜着眼聽外面

許多的聲音，越聽越覺得可怕。她越害怕越覺得有鬼迫近身邊……小油燈，她不敢吹滅它，怕滅了更不安心，她一閉着眼就不敢再睜開，因為她覺得有個大黑影已經站在她眼前。連蚊子咬，她也不敢拍，躺著不敢動，冷汗出了一身……

至終還是下了床，把桌上放着底書包打開，取出聖經放在床上，口裏不敬地念乃西信經和主禱文，這教她底心平安了好些。一夜之間，她覺得被鬼壓得幾乎喘不了氣……

東方漸白，她坐起來，抱著聖書出神。她想中國鬼大概不怕洋聖經和洋禱文，不然，昨夜又何故不得一時安寧？……

她下床到門口，見陳廉已經起來替她燒水做早餐。陳廉問她昨夜可睡得好。玉官不敢說什麼，只說蚊子多點而已。她看見陳廉底枕邊也放着一本小冊子，便問他那是什麼書。陳廉說是易經，因為他也怕鬼。她恍然大悟中國鬼所怕底到底是中國聖書

一夜底經過，使玉官確信世間是有鬼底……喫過早飯以後，身上覺得有點燒……陳廉伺候了一早晨，不但熱度不退，反加上另一樣底熱在心裏……

走了一天多才回到家裏。她躺在床上發了幾天燒，自己不自在，却沒敢告訴人。

As we can see from this insightful psychological study, rather than confront these "devils" surrounding her and thus dispel the shadow once and for all, she seeks to further avoid such a confrontation with her "dark" side by methodically praying throughout the night. Consequently, she loses a night's much needed rest and falls very ill. Psychosomatic illness is, of course, a common result of consistent psychological repression. In any case, let us examine precisely how Yü-kuan assumes a Christian "persona," yet ultimately finds her salvation (i.e., psychological wholeness) through an honest confrontation with her suppressed side. As we shall see, this new level of consciousness allows her to remove her "mask" once and for all, successfully integrate her "shadow," and subsequently move on to the higher morality of true Christian faith.

Ironically, Yü-kuan can thank her rascally brother-in-law for indirectly

introducing her to Christianity, because it was to avoid him that she sought refuge in the home of a neighbor, Hsing-kuan. An active member of the Christian community, Hsing-kuan wields a certain kind of influence due to her association with the foreign missionaries. Consequently, the rogue is hesitant to bother Yü-kuan in her presence. Ever since Yü-kuan's husband was reported dead, this fellow began pestering Yü-kuan on practically a daily basis, urging her to marry again and bring in some money with which to transport his brother's corpse back home for a proper burial. He was so consistently at Yü-kuan's home that the neighborhood gossip became centered around a possible affair between the two. For a woman resolute about one day having an arch erected in honor of her virtuous widowhood, such gossip represented quite an initial setback. Therefore, she locked up her house and sneaked off with her small son to the home of Hsing-kuan.

It is quite appropriate that her concern over her virtuous widowhood is the original impetus for her entering a Christian home and politely listening to the Christian message. Indeed, it is ultimately for these same selfish reasons that she becomes the housekeeper for a missionary and agrees to receive Christian Training. In short, the money is good and her son can receive a free education at the church school. In reality, Yü-kuan finds the central dogmas of Christianity to be absurd, though she is a simple woman and cannot refute them either. In this regard, she is much like another simple housekeeper, Félicité: "Of doctrines she understood nothing—did not even try to understand."¹⁷ But whereas Félicité had simple, childlike faith, Yü-kuan has simple, childlike incomprehension. In other words, she had her own answers to the paradoxical problems inherent in Christian doctrine.

Another interesting comparison between these two heroines is that whereas Yü-kuan lives for her son and has him always in her thoughts, especially when he goes off to America, Félicité has a much cherished nephew who embarks for America half a century earlier:

As Félicité passed by the Calvary she had a wish to commend to God what she cherished most, and she stood there praying a long time with her face bathed in tears and her eyes toward the clouds

Félicité's thoughts from that moment ran entirely on her nephew. On sunny days she was harassed by the idea of thirst; when there was a storm she was afraid of the lightening on his account. As she listened to the

wind . . . she pictured him lashed by that same tempest . . . or else . . . eaten by savages, captured in a wood by monkeys, or dying on a desert shore. And never did she mention her anxieties.¹⁸

Yü-kuan does mention her anxieties to her Christian friend, Hsing kuan, who seems to sense the way in which Yü-kuan "serves two masters" and is the only person to realize it when Yü-kuan chooses to serve only God years later. But in the meantime, Yü-kuan becomes a conscientious and hard working evangelist, who even learns to excel in Christian apologetics despite secretly doubting the validity of most of her arguments. This is partly because she is "stubbornly Chinese," as Hsia puts it:

To all appearances Yü-kuan is a zealous Christian worker, though she retains her Confucian scruples as to the propriety of neglecting ancestor worship and other traditional rituals. Characteristically, she carries a copy of the Book of Changes along with the Bible whenever she travels.¹⁹

The fact is, however, Yü-kuan remains "stubbornly Chinese" even after her inner transition, symbolized by the fact that her copy of the Book of Changes is still by her side in the final paragraph of the story. Although she is unable to read it with any understanding, she obviously feels a real attachment to it. Hsü's insightful message here is that being a true Christian does not require a denunciation of one's own cultural heritage and an adaptation to western culture. Indeed, Yü-kuan hasn't a western bone in her body. For example, her attitude toward the western missionaries at best evolves from suspicion to polite tolerance. Furthermore, when she goes to live with her son and his wife upon their return from America, she is absolutely appalled by their western life-style and values. Finally, it is precisely this quality of being "stubbornly Chinese" that enables Yü-kuan to resist the Western trappings while eventually arriving at the essence of Christ's message which, of course, transcends any particular culture. In short, her transition is from a woman concerned only with outwardly being a Christian worthy of name and reputation to being a Christian inwardly honest before herself and God. Needless to say, the peace accompanying a consistent outer and inner life greatly enriches her own life and takes the pressure off people around her.

Let us take a look at some of the minor characters and incidents related to them that influence Yü-kuan over the course of her life.

Foremost among them is her best friend, Hsing-kuan. A true example of Christian longsuffering, she provides a marked contrast to Yü-kuan's selfish complaining, which persists right up until her awakening. Of course, Hsing-kuan's religious patience has its roots in much trial and tribulation. For example, her conversion to Christianity results in the loss of her husband, who turns out to be none other than Ch'en Lien, the night watchman. Apparently, he was once quite anti-religious and assaulted Hsing-kuan's nephew for being responsible for her conversion and the subsequent smashing of his idols. To avoid arrest, he fled to the south seas, leaving Hsing-kuan alone with two daughters. By the time Yü-kuan starts up a relationship with him, he has returned to the Fukien countryside and stays cautiously away from his wife. Yü-kuan continues seeing him while "circuit riding" and only gradually begins to suspect Ch'en Lien's true identity. In the meantime, her own personal regard for her ancestral tablets and other Confucian scruples dramatically changes Ch'en Lien's attitude toward this "foreign" religion.

Returning to the time of Ch'en Lien's initial departure from the neighborhood, Hsing-kuan quickly gains a reputation for being a husband-ruining, religious fanatic. When Yü-kuan first enters her home, however, she finds only a kind and sympathetic woman whose most "devious" deed is to teach the illiterate Yü-kuan how to read a romanized, vernacular version of the Bible. Before long, however, Yü-kuan's rascally brother-in-law catches up with her and is so incensed by Hsing-kuan's "meddlesome" influence on her that he proceeds to kidnap the older of Hsing-kuan's two infant daughters. Incidentally, he succeeds in selling her to a rich Shanghai family and she grows up to become the spoiled girl who meets Chien-te (Yü-kuan's son) in America and later marries him. Hsing-kuan actually sees her grown daughter years later at a celebration commemorating Yü-kuan's fortieth year in missionary service (at least, that is the label which the mission society puts on the village's observance of her birthday). When Yü-kuan sees that they obviously do not recognize each other, she decides to keep their true relationship a secret. Knowing her daughter-in-law's snobbish attitudes, Yü-kuan fears that such a disclosure would cause more hurt than healing.

As we readily see here, the impact of many events which take place in the first part of the story is finally realized much later on in the story. For example, Hsing-kuan's remaining daughter (the younger of the two)

grows up to become Chien-te's first wife. Only later do we discover that he remarries her older sister (the younger one dies shortly before he meets the older sister in America). Again, it is well into Yü-kuan's relationship with Ch'en Lien that we discover his true relationship with Hsing-kuan. This is what Hsia refers to when he says that Hsü "unashamedly lards his story with coincidences and mistaken identities of a kind which would always look out of place in a piece of realistic fiction."²⁰ Yet in my mind, "Yü-kuan" is a piece of realistic fiction, even though the multitudinous coincidences combined with a fable-like, happy ending may suggest otherwise. For example, in each case of mistaken identity, only Yü-kuan is aware of the actual relationships, and in each case she deals with the knowledge in a mature manner. As for the ending, Hsü does seem to rush the reconciliation between Yü-kuan and Chien-te's second wife. Aside from that, however, the happy ending is the logical consequence of the preceding action.

Like most of us, Yü-kuan can handle herself nobly in the face of crisis, but often slips into a lower standard of behavior in everyday life. The best example of this lies in her propensity for playing the typically oppressive Chinese mother-in-law. In the case of Chien-te's first wife, Yü-kuan makes life miserable for everybody involved, including Hsing-kuan, who must act as mediator between her daughter and her best friend. As Hsia observes: "Yü-kuan feels very lonely, and quite jealous of their intimacy."²¹ Apparently, her fallible humanity makes itself felt whenever she feels threatening tugs on her son's "umbilical cord." This explains the deep depression she feels later when she runs up against Chien-te's "liberated" second wife who totally usurps Yü-kuan's place in her son's life.

Yü-kuan also becomes incensed with her first daughter-in-law for allowing Chien-te to get involved with some irresponsible gang of insurgents without telling her. When he is subsequently arrested, Yü-kuan needs all the foreign pull the missionaries can provide to secure his freedom. She becomes harsher than ever as a result of this episode, and Hsing-kuan must constantly remind her that Chien-te is married to her daughter and not Yü-kuan!

Yü-kuan's rigidity in demanding such unrealistic piety out of her daughter-in-law is another indication that Yü-kuan only superficially adheres to Christianity's tenets without really undergoing any inner change

herself. In fact, it is when Chien-te's second wife indefatigably stands up to Yü-kuan that her "persona" is finally brought before her conscious mind, a point I will elaborate on later. As for the first wife, however, she dies very young in giving birth to a son. What remains in question is, does the mother-in-law's mental harassment play a role in her poor physical condition? Regardless of the answer, Hsing-kuan holds no hostility toward Yü-kuan despite the fact that she could possibly be held responsible for the loss of both daughters. Hsing-kuan can only seek solace in her faith and in caring for her grandson while Yü-kuan is out on the circuit. Consistent with their luck, this grandson later suffers a serious fall and becomes a permanent cripple.

Another interesting point is that while Yü-kuan is quite distraught over her daughter-in-law's death, she does not display overt guilt in connection with her former severity. As with all of her behavior at that time, she always has some rationalization for her actions. Hsü's point here, however, is a vital one: no matter how excellent one's outward moral behavior may be, inner contradictions will inevitably be projected upon others, usually wreaking havoc to those closest to us. In other words, Yü-kuan could easily find fault in her daughter-in-law because she would not admit to any fault within herself. Such projection is a highly dangerous act common among outwardly rigid Christians. Fortunately, Yü-kuan transcends such Pharisaic behavior before it's too late.

The process arriving at this transcendence, however, is an extremely difficult one involving much mental and physical suffering. The mask, or persona, is worn as long as the wearer maintains a certain complacency about the situation. As soon as circumstances become uncomfortable and the validity of the mask is tested and its function rendered obsolete, then the door is wide open for self-confrontation. This type of situation is always arrived at via personal crisis. In Yü-kuan's case, it occurs when she is taken prisoner by communist insurgents. She finds herself suddenly thrust into a position where her real self might be exposed to the group of terrified women prisoners awaiting the "inspired" leadership of the Yü-kuan they see in everyday life. At first, Yü-kuan's self-preservation instinct is stronger than her desire to stay true to her Christian witness. Thus, she keeps her "faith" a secret from their captors. In other words, she foresakes Christ's exhortation to "strive to enter by the narrow door" (Luke 13:24), "for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to

life" (Mathew 7:14).

Ironically, she is confronted by one of her own converts who exhorts her to "foresake not her God in times of crisis." Thereupon, this "babe in Christ" demonstrates a stronger faith than the "veteran believer" Yü-kuan. She proceeds to produce a Bible which she smuggled into her clothing prior to her capture. She hands it to Yü-kuan, encouraging her to select a few verses with which to instill courage into the group of women. With this request, Yü-kuan obtains her first real insight into the true nature of her Christian faith. She feels a genuine sense of duty and silently reads the Scriptures until she summons the courage to make a stand. This time, however, she acts not from the standpoint of outer appearances, but from the higher perspective of spiritual consciousness. Her subsequent actions attest to this fact. For example, Yü-kuan not only succeeds in calming the women when faced by an unruly intrusion of their quarters by a lustful group of soldiers, she actually stands up alone before the ill-intentioned men and delivers a rousing sermon on moral ethics. She convinces them that rape is harmful for all parties involved, including the aggressor, citing both Biblical and classical Chinese teachings. For the first time, she senses God actually speaking through her. In short, she puts her faith on the line and to her own surprise ends up with a personal ministry among the women and many of the soldiers. Still a realist, however, Yü-kuan realizes that they might not be so fortunate the next night. Therefore, she leads the women in a daring escape to a nearby church where they secure refuge under the "foreign banner." Interestingly enough, they still volunteer to patch the soldiers' clothing while Yü-kuan carries on a ministry to "patch" a few souls along the way, indicative of Christ's command to love even one's enemies. Yü-kuan gets her first real taste of disinterested goodness with no strings attached.

As long as the Communist uprising persists, Yü-kuan finds herself in difficult straits; as long as she finds herself in difficult straits, her faith persists. At one point, she is publically paraded as an "imperialist running dog" on account of her faith. When she responds to this disgrace by rising above her circumstances with a spirited "hallelujah!", she is knocked to the ground by her punisher. This doesn't bother her, for such beatings have recently become a common part of her life. Obviously, her service is no longer perfunctory or mechanical. Rather, she has begun

to integrate what she had formerly only given "lip service." Interestingly enough, however, she still finds private peace of mind by imagining her son's future success. Indeed, her aforementioned cry of "hallelujah!" was arrived at through just such contemplation. It might be more accurate, therefore, to say that her real decision to be a Christian grows out of her public persecution, while her inner dichotomy remains unresolved. This becomes obvious after the Communist evacuation when she quickly regresses back to her obsession with her son's success. Her wartime experiences leave their mark in her unconscious nonetheless, for she seems to have something solid to fall back upon when she later discovers the essential emptiness of the "spoils" accompanying her son's acquisition of position and wealth.

Incidentally, this portrayal of the early stages of the Communist revolution is anything but complimentary. I mention this just in passing to point out the absurdity of the claim by Mainland critics that Hsü was moving toward "Communist awakening" by the time of his death. It is true he was critical of the Nationalist regime in such stories as "The Iron Fish with Gills," but this does not necessarily imply leftist leanings. Indeed, the awakening depicted in "Yü-kuan" is of a deeply spiritual nature most repugnant to the Communist critics. Such a theme represents Hsü's so-called "escape into the world of religion" which *Chinese Literature* maintained was one of Hsü's *early* malpractices.²² It is no wonder that the Mainland compilation of Hsü's works conveniently leaves out his greatest effort "Yü-kuan."

Back to the story, we find Yü-kuan actually leaving her missionary endeavors to join her son in the affluence of his Nanking home. As mentioned previously, she becomes very disgruntled with her demanding and highly unfilial daughter-in-law. She is further bothered by their western, bourgeois way of life. The final blow comes when Chien-te loses interest in utilizing his position to persuade authorities to erect an honorary portal on her behalf. He figures that Yü-kuan was never really interested in him as a person, but only in his future success. After all, what kind of mother would stick her child in some church school and rarely visit him? In Chien-te's mind, his father is the one worthy of recognition for dying a martyr. This reduces Yü-kuan to total regression into self-pity; she even comes to the conclusion that God must be sleeping, for why else would He allow the children to be so unruly! It is interesting to note

that she later becomes an excellent grandmother to Chien-te's child, thus making amends for her treatment of her son.

Both psychology and religion attest to the fact that any kind of rebirth is usually preceded by a final relapse, deeper than ever, into the old modes of behavior. Thus, it is not unrealistic for Yü-kuan to sink into the depths of selfishness before undergoing final release from her self-centered moroseness. The transition is a quick one, as spiritual rebirths usually are, yet it is a believable end result of the many inner changes that I have outlined up to this point. In short, she finally realizes the truth of Christ's admonition that "he who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). In other words, she lives to see her vision for Chien-te realized and to experience the emptiness that accompanied the fulfillment of this purely selfish preoccupation. Hsia quotes the relevant passage:

Her new unhappiness prompts her to review her past life:

She sat at home musing. She recalled that all her actions since widowhood, though preparing for her son's success, were at bottom selfish. Like a peddler in chinaware who uses at home only mended bowls, she had not benefited by religious teachings during the decades of her missionary life. The moment she realized this, she stood up suddenly, as if she had found an invaluable lesson from her life. She felt that the words with which her brother-in-law had taunted her when she had been a recent widow were after all right. She felt that her persistence in widowhood had been almost a form of hypocrisy, and that her present suffering was the natural consequence of her past actions. She wanted now to return to her villages to really engage in missionary work. But first she had to offer penitence. She had at least to render one good deed for some other person; in her mind she made a resolution.²³

玉官只坐在屋裏出神。她回想自守寡以來，所有的行爲雖是爲兒子底成功，歸根，還是自私。她幾十年底傳教生活一向都如『竇器底用破碗』一般，自己沒享受過教訓底利益。在這時候，她忽然覺悟到這一點，立刻站起來，像在她生活裏找出一件無價寶一般。她覺得在初寡時，她小叔子對她說底話是對的。她覺得從前的守節是爲虛榮，從前的傳教是近於虛僞，目前的痛苦是以前種種底自然結果。她要回鄉真正做她底傳教生活，不過她先要懺悔。她最少要爲人做一件好事。在她心裏打定了一個主意。

As we can see here, Yü-kuan finally identifies her persona, desires to take off her mask and make amends. First, she returns to her missionary endeavors feeling a new sense of excitement in her service to God. Though the church is not aware of her inner change, Yü-kuan knows that she is now giving service just for the sake of serving, without the slightest ulterior motive. Whereas before she would stockpile her money for her son's use, now she puts every cent into a mission school which has been put in her charge. When someone praises her actions, she replies that she's merely offering penitence. She becomes a genuine philanthropist now, giving of herself freely. Still human, however, she occasionally manages to steal away to the spot where she and Ch'en Lien used to chat together merrily. Though she takes delight in such recollections, Yü-kuan is resolved to one day travel to Borneo and bring back Ch'en Lien—not for herself, but for her lifelong friend Hsing-kuan. This is the one good deed to which she pledged herself.

As mentioned earlier, the villagers whom she has served for so many years gather together to celebrate her birthday and commemorate her fortieth year in missionary service. Despite her total lack of interest and avid insistence that a widow's arch is an extravagant expense, they finally get her permission to build a much needed bridge in her honor. This final realization of her lifelong goal in a manner which had never before crossed her mind reflects the Biblical paradox of losing one's life in order to gain it. As the psalmist says: "Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Obviously, Yü-kuan had successfully changed the focus of her desires.

For Yü-kuan to become fully "individuated," she had to distinguish the true from the false in her life. An important line from the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢) can best describe the nature of Yü-kuan's unregenerated Christian "faith": "When the false is taken to be true, then the true is also false" (假作真時真亦假). Unfortunately, this dichotomy is a common problem among fundamentalist believers, including those who took the gospel to China. In Hsü's own lifetime Christian involvement, he must have met many such believers within the church, both foreign and native, and had the keen insight to see the discrepancies inherent in such a psychological "split." Yü-kuan sums it up nicely in her analogy of the peddler in chinaware using only mended bowls at home. Perhaps this comparison was inspired by Christ's rebuke to the Pharisees to "first

cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean" (Matthew 23:27-28). This reprimand is followed by Christ's most succinct portrayal of the inner/outer, persona/self dichotomy at its worst:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead man's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23:27-28)

Perhaps Hsü sought to bring this problem to the attention of Chinese believers through the person of Yü-kuan. The story includes other examples of Chinese Christians who entered the church for the wrong reasons, including a Catholic man who converted in the prospect of having a financial debt rescinded. As Hsia rightly points out, "Yü-kuan is not exactly a Christian apology."²⁵ Indeed, at times it seriously challenges the outward structure of the Christian church, which is quite evident when Yü-kuan fails to find any rebuttal to Communist accusations concerning economic ties with foreign investments, insistence on Western ways of doing things, etc. This notwithstanding, Yü-kuan still maintains a "gut feeling" that the Christian message is basically a good one, through she hasn't the worldly wisdom to distinguish between the essence of Christ's teachings and the dealings of an adulterated institution. The mind which conceived of Yü-kuan's character, however, understood the distinction and brilliantly brought it to light through the naiveté of his heroine. Even though Hsü was a strongly religious man, he was neither typical nor fundamental in any activity, including his Christian beliefs. It was precisely his creative nonconformity that enabled Hsü to write a story of "Yü-kuan"'s psychological and spiritual penetration, "... beyond the intellectual capacity of most contemporary Chinese writers."²⁶

Finally, in "Yü-kuan," Hsü Ti-shan has found a home for his spiritual quest. His philosophy of life has reached its fruition. If Hsü could have lived into the present, he undoubtedly would have been an invaluable asset to China. He probably would have remained in Hong Kong and thus avoided the highly restrictive writing environment of the Mainland. Hsü simply could not have made such compromises. One thing for certain, however, is that he would have continued probing the meaning of man's

existence, questioning the ever-present iniquities, attaining higher spiritual goals while living in the real world . . . in short, writing "literature for life."²⁷

Notes

1. Joseph Schyns, et al., *1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays* (Peiping: Catholic University Press, 1948), p. 48.
2. Hsü, Ti-shan, *Hsü Ti-shan Hsüan-chi* (The Selected Works of Hsü Ti-shan) (Peiping: K'ai Ming Publishing House, 1951), pp. 90-91. (my translation)
3. Hsia, C. T., *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 88.
4. Levin, Harry, Introduction to *Three Tales by Gustave Flaubert*, trans. Arthur McDowall (Norfolk: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1924), p. 4.
5. Hsia, *History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, p. 92.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
8. Hsia, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.
9. Levin, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
12. Hsia, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
13. Hsia, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
14. Hsia, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-90.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
16. Hsü, Ti-shan, *Wei-ch'ao chui-chien* (危巢墜簡, Letters From an Endangered Home). ["Yü-kuan" was included in this collection] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1947), pp. 187-188.
17. Flaubert, Gustave. "A Simple Heart," *Three Tales*, trans. Arthur McDowall (Norfolk: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1924), p. 33.
18. Flaubert, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.
19. Hsia, *op. cit.*, p. 88. (The phrase "Stubbornly Chinese" is found on page 91.)
20. Hsia, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
22. *Chinese Literature*, no. 9 (September 1964), pp. 84-85.
23. Hsia, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
24. Plaks, Andrew H. *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 223.
25. Hsia, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
27. Credo of the Literary Association (文學研究會), of which Hsü was a founding member in November, 1920.

