Chang Tai (1597–1684?)

Although Chang Tai lived well into the Ch’ing dynasty, he has traditionally been considered a Ming writer—not unjustifiably, as he remained a loyalist to the Ming dynasty all his life and dedicated much of his writing to memories of life and things before the Manchu regime took over the land.

Much of what we know today about Chang Tai is provided by his own lively autobiographical sketches, including “An Epitaph for Myself” in our selection, which offers vivid profiles of his life, aspirations, and frustrations. It suffices to say that he was born into a rich family with a tradition for official and scholarly accomplishments. His great-grandfather Chang Yüan-pien, a Hanlin Academician and later an instructor of the imperial heir apparent, was known for having personally helped to get Hsü Wei out of prison. Chang Tai, however, chose not to follow the family tradition of pursuing an official career. In his youth he led a playboy’s life, indulging in extravagance and enjoying all kinds of sensual pleasures. He was known to be a man of many talents whose range of interests and expertise included music, theater, gastronomy, tea connoisseurship, and horsemanship.

In his middle age Chang Tai lived through the downfall of the Ming court. For the next two decades, while leading a hermit’s life in his retreat in the mountains of Chekiang, he witnessed the elimination of the several Southern Ming local regimes. He wrote collections of short memoirs about the glory and sensualities of the past, the most famous of which is Dream Memories from the T’ao Hut, from which most selections here are taken. The work he took great pride in, however, was his historical record of the Ming dynasty, The Book in a Stone Case (in 220 chüan), which he claimed required twenty-seven years to complete.

In a preface to his own poetry collection, Chang Tai mentioned that when he was young he idolized Hsü Wei and, accordingly, also Hsü’s promoter Yüan Hung-tao, and tried to imitate their style in his own practice. Later he was attracted by the rising Ching-ling school and tried to write like Chung Hsing and T’an Yüan-ch’un.
Eventually, he found that he was still closer to Hsü Wei in personality and decided to “learn to express himself” as the latter had done.

More than anyone else among both his predecessors and contemporaries, Chang Tai explored the possibilities of the hsiao-p’in, a medium in which he found an individual voice and moved into new territories. Some of his prose pieces have been introduced to the English-reading public in elegant but unduly free renditions by Lin Yutang. One of his autobiographical sketches, the preface for his Dream Memoires, has received a fine English translation by Stephen Owen. More recently, a few more pieces from Dream Memories have also appeared in anthologies compiled by Richard E. Strassberg, Victor H. Mair, and Stephen Owen.

Selections from *Dream Memories from the T’ao Hut*

*A Night Performance at Golden Hill*

One day after the Mid-Autumn Festival in the second year of the Ch’ung-chên reign [1629], I passed by Chen-chiang on my way to Yen-chou. We arrived at Pei-ku [Hill] by sunset and moored our boat at the river mouth. Moonlight poured into the water as if out of a bag. The waves in the river swallowed and spat out the moonshine, and the dewy air imbibed it; it was then spurted out, whitening the sky. I was fascinated, so I had the boat moved over to Golden Hill Temple. It was already the second beat of the night watches. We walked through the Dragon King Shrine and entered the main hall. It was as still as death. Moonlight leaked through the woods, leaving sparse spots underneath that looked like vestiges of snow.

I called out to the boy servants to bring my stage properties, had the main hall brightly lit up, and performed the plays about General Han Shih-chung’s battle at Golden Hill and along the Yangtze. Gongs and drums made a deafening sound. Everyone in the temple got up to watch the performance. An old monk used the back of his hand to rub at the corneal nebula in his eyes, opened his mouth wide, and started laughing and sneezing and yawning at the same time. After a while he fixed his eyes on us, trying to figure out who we were and when and why we had come, but dared not ask any questions.
When the performance was over, it was almost dawn. We set sail and crossed the Yangtze. A monk from the mountains came down to the foot of the hill and gazed after us for a long time, as if wondering whether we were human beings, demons, or ghosts.

Plum Blossoms Bookroom

The old cottage behind Sepals Tower had collapsed. I laid a foundation about four and a half feet deep and built a large bookroom there. On its side I made an annexed alcove that looked like a screened cabinet, in which I placed a sleeping couch. I left some open space in both the front and the back of the structure. At the foot of the wall in the back I built a raised flower bed and planted three peonies, the blossoms of which, as big as the pulp of a watermelon, hung above the wall. Each year they would burst into more than three hundred flowers. In front of the terrace were two West Garrison crab apple trees. When they were in bloom, we had as much as three feet of fragrant snow. The four walls in front were slightly higher. On the opposite side I constructed a stone terrace, where I placed several Lake T’ai-hu rocks and planted some West Brook plum Prunus mume trees, the bony trunks of which had a look of austere antiquity. Beside them a few shrubs of Yunnan camellia stood, showing off their seductive beauty. By the root of the plum trees I planted some passion-flowers Passiflora, which twined round them like hairnets adorned with pearls and gemstones. Outside the windows there was a bamboo awning, topped with a canopy of thickly studded jewels. Below the steps the emerald-green grass grew more than three feet tall, set off by random plantings of begonia.

Looking through the bright windows in both the front and back, under the jeweled awning, I could watch the green of the West Garrison crab apple trees take on darker and darker shades. I used to sit or lie down inside and would allow only nice, highbred friends to enter once in a while. Out of my admiration for the Obtuse Ni’s “Quiet Privacy,” I also named it Cloud Forest Retreat.

Drinking Tea at Pop Min’s

Chou Mo-lung kept singing the praise of Min Wen-shui’s tea to me. In the ninth month of 1638 I arrived at the reserved capital. Immediately after I got off the boat, I called upon Min Wen-shui at Peach Leaves Ferry.
It was toward sunset. Wen-shui was not at home. I waited, and when he returned, I found him to be a doddering old man. We had barely started a conversation when he suddenly got up and said, “I’ve forgotten my walking stick somewhere,” and left again. I asked myself, “How can I leave in vain?” So I waited for him, for quite a long while.

By the time Wen-shui came back, it was quite late. He cast a sidelong glance at me, and said, “So our guest is still around, isn’t he? And what is he staying here for?” I said, “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you for a long time. I won’t leave today until I drink my fill of your tea.”

Wen-shui was pleased, and he got up to personally take care of it in front of the stove. In a short while the tea was made, as fast as the coming of a sudden storm. He led me into another room with bright windows and clean furniture. There were more than a dozen kinds of Ching-hsi teapots and porcelain cups produced in the Hsüan-te and Ch’eng-hua kilns, all extremely exquisite. In the lamplight I took a look at the color of the tea, which did not seem to be in any way different from that in a regular cup, but its fragrance assailed my nose.

I shouted my approval and asked Wen-shui, “What kind of tea is this?” Wen-shui replied, “It’s Imperial Palace tea.” I took a sip and said, “Don’t fool me. It was made using the same method as Palace tea, but the flavor is not the same.” Trying to cover up a smile, Wen-shui said, “Does our guest know what kind of tea it is?” I took another sip and said, “Why is it so close to the Lo-chieh?” Wen-shui stuck out his tongue and said, “Fabulous!”

I asked him what kind of water it was, and he told me it was from the spring at Favor Hill. Again I said, “Don’t fool me. If it’s really from the Favor Hill spring, how could the water remain unperturbed after having made the arduous journey of more than three hundred miles?” Wen-shui said, “Now I’m going to tell you everything. To bring water from Favor Hill, you have to dredge the well first, wait for the new spring water to rise on a quiet evening, and draw it up immediately. Then you have to place pieces of mountain rocks at the bottom of the jar, and the boat carrying the water must sail and make its way here only when there is a favorable wind. In this manner, the water won’t develop any bubbles. Even regular water from the Favor Hill spring is not as good as this, let alone water elsewhere!” Once again, he stuck out his tongue and said, “Fabulous!”

In the middle of our conversation Wen-shui went out. After a short while he came back with a pot, poured out a full cup from it for me, and said, “My friend, have a sip of this.” I said, “The fragrance is intense, and the flavor succulent. Can this be the spring crop this year?” What you made
earlier was the autumn pick.” Wen-shui rocked with laughter and said, “I’m seventy years old, and my friend, I’ve never known anyone whose connoisseurship matches yours.” That was how we became friends.

**Viewing the Snow from the Mid-Lake Gazebo**

In the twelfth month of the fifth year of the Ch’ung-ch’en reign [1632], I was living by West Lake. Once it snowed heavily for three days in a row. No human voice or bird cry could be heard on the lake. One day, when the last beat of the night watch was over, I went aboard a small boat and, sitting by a stove in my fur coat, headed for the Mid-Lake Gazebo to catch a view of the snow there. Frosty trees stood out in the vast blankness. The sky, the clouds, the hills, and the water—all was white, overhead and beneath. The only reflections on the lake were one inky stroke for the long embankment, one dot for the gazebo, one mustard seed for my boat, and the two or three jots for people in the boat.

When I reached the gazebo, there already sat two people on a rug facing each other, and a little boy was warming up a pot of wine on the stove, which had just started boiling. They were overjoyed to see me, saying, “How could there be a guy like him on the lake?” They pulled me over to join them for a drink. I had no choice but to drain three large goblets before I bade them farewell. I asked their names and found them to be natives of Chin-ling on a visit. When I got off the boat, the boatman murmured to himself, “Don’t say that our young gentleman is crazy; there are people even crazier than he!”

**Yao Chien-shu’s Paintings**

Yao Chien-shu’s paintings will be timeless, and so will be the man. In 1638 Chien-shu was a guest of honor at the Weis’ residence. At that time I made my home at Peach Leaves Ferry and exchanged friendly visits with only a couple of people, such as Min Wen-shui and Tseng Po-ch’en. Chien-shu, who had never met me before, came over to see me, and the two of us immediately became the best of friends. He sojourned at my place and took care of the daily household supplies without letting me know anything about it. Whenever we had some free time, he would take me to the riverside tavern, and we would not come home until we were intoxicated. He insisted on introducing me to every single one of all the nobles, venerable elders, fellow literati, Buddhist monks, luminaries, and renowned
courtesans that he knew. He had stayed at my place for ten days when an old servant came over to see him; only then did I realize that he kept a concubine at home.

Chien-shu was deep and introverted and did not like to exhibit his smartness. He was by nature a lonely person and found it very difficult to get along with others. But for reasons hard to fathom, he made great efforts to befriend me. Once we visited someone at Grace Temple, who showed us about a hundred sheets of album leaves, all works by masters of the Sung and the Yüan dynasties. Chien-shu's flashing eyes seemed to be piercing through these sheets. He sank into deep thoughts, propping himself up with his hands on the table, and looked ghastly pale. After coming home, he did two paintings modeled after Su Han-ch’en4 for me.

A little boy is about to take a bath in a tub. He has one foot in the water and holds up the other one as if trying to get out. A palace maid squats on her heels by the tub. She holds the boy under his armpit with one hand and uses her other hand to wipe the boy's runny nose. On the other side sits another palace maid. A little boy who has just come out of the bathtub lies prone over her knees, and she is buttoning up his embroidered shirt for him.

In another painting a lady of the palace is in splendid attire, as if for some occasion. She is followed by a girl with her hair dressed up in a pair of buns. A maid stands by with a tray in her hands; on the tray are two small dishes. She looks toward the viewer. Another maid also holds onto the tray and is putting the teaspoons in order; she is all attention to her job.

Later I checked the paintings with the originals and found that he had not missed a single stroke.

Moon at Censer Peak

The summit of Censer Peak1 stood beyond layers of mountains and winding ridges that soared and spired in entanglement. The Cliff of a Thousand Chang2 stood in front, jagged and interlocked. Between the two rocks there was a gap a little less than twelve feet wide. We leaned out and looked down, and were so scared that our feet refused to move on any farther. When Wang Wen-ch’eng was a young man, he once jumped over it and was admired for his courage.3 My uncle Erh-yün wrapped himself up in a blanket and let himself down by a rope. I was held on both sides by the arm by two woodcutters, and was pulled up from the bottom of the ravine. It was crazy indeed!
In the fourth month of 1627 I engaged myself in reading at the Celestial Tile Convent. One afternoon I went up the summit with a couple of friends to watch the sunset. A friend said, “Don’t leave now. Let’s wait for the moon to come out. Fine moments like this are hard to repeat. Even if we run into a tiger, it would be our destiny. Besides, tigers have their own Tao—they go down the mountain at night to look for pigs and dogs for food. I suppose they cannot be coming up the mountain to watch the moon rise, can they?” He surely made his point, so the four of us squatted on the Golden Tablet Rock. It was the night of the full moon that month. After the sun had gone down, the moon rose, and all the plants in the mountains looked ghostly in the moonlight, which was eerie. The mountain path was clear under the white moon, so we held on to one another and descended, using our walking sticks. We had hardly moved a few steps before we heard someone howling halfway down the mountain. It turned out to be my servant and seven or eight Buddhist monks from the mountains. They were afraid that we might have encountered a tiger and lost our way, so, holding torches and clubs in hand and carrying sheathed daggers in their boots, they came up along the mountain path and shouted to us. We responded to their call; they hurried up and helped us to get down.

The next day someone who lived on the mountainside said, “Late last night more than a hundred bandits, carrying tens of torches, went across Lord Chang’s Ridge. Does anyone know where they came from?” We didn’t say anything, but couldn’t help laughing up our sleeves.

When Hsieh Ling-yün was opening up a road through the mountains to Lin-hai with several hundred of his attendants, Governor Wang Hsiu, who took them for bandits from the mountains, was scared and remained ill at ease until he found out that it was Ling-yün.4 We were lucky that night not to have been tied up and sent to the governor as mountain bandits!

*Liu Ching-t’ing the Storyteller*

Pockmarked Liu¹ of Nanking had a dark complexion, and his face was covered with scars and swellings. “Idle and languorous by nature, he regarded his physical appearance as no more than clay and wood.”² A great storyteller, he would tell one episode each day for the price of one tael of silver. A letter of reservation and a deposit had to be sent to him ten days in advance, and he was engaged all the time. At that time there were two popular entertainers in Nanking—none other than Wang Yüeh-sheng³ and Pockmarked Liu.

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I once listened to him tell the story “Wu Sung Knocks Out the Tiger at Ching-yang Ridge.” His account was quite different from that in the novel. His delineation included minute details in every possible way, and yet was well tailored and never long-winded or muddled, having weeded out all superfluities. His regular voice was already like the sound from a huge bronze bell. When he came to a critical juncture, he would shout and yell in a voice loud enough to shake the house. “Wu Sung came to the tavern to order a drink. Finding nobody at his service, he gave a raging roar that sent all the empty pitchers and jugs in the shop rumbling in echo . . .” —this is just an example of how he could draw out minute details to add color to points of repose.

Before he started, he always expected his hosts to hold their breath, sit still, and listen to him with full attention. When he was about to wag his tongue, if he ever caught sight of a servant whispering, or anyone in the audience stretching himself, yawning, or looking sleepy, he would remain silent, and no one could force him to start. Toward midnight he would dust the table clean, clip the lamp wick anew, quietly drink some tea from a white porcelain cup, and talk with ease. The tempo, volume, cadence, and modulation of his voice always fit the story, no more and no less. If all the storytellers in the world had assembled in the audience and listened to him attentively, they would have been so ashamed of themselves that they might have died from biting their tongues.

Pockmarked Liu was extremely ugly. But he was brilliant at conversation, had very expressive eyes, and wore tasteful clothing of quiet colors, so he almost matched Wang Yüeh-sheng in grace. That was why both of them commanded the highest price in the market.

West Lake on the Fifteenth Night of the Seventh Month

On the fifteenth night of the seventh month, there was nothing worth seeing at West Lake except the people milling around. If you looked at people who came out on that night, you could classify them into five types.

First, there were those who came in a storied galley, bringing with them musicians playing flutes and drums. They were fully dressed up, and they ordered sumptuous meals. At a brightly lit place they enjoyed themselves in a tumult of light and sound. They were supposed to be “viewing the moon,” but actually they could not see it. We could look at them.

There were also those who came in a boat or sat in a storied mansion. They were accompanied either by celebrated beauties or gentlewomen, and
sometimes they also brought with them handsome boys. Laughs and sobs burst out in turn. They sat in a circle on the balcony and glanced right and left. Although they were right there under the moon, they really did not bother to give it a look. We could look at them.

There were those who came in a boat, with musicians waiting upon their pleasure, in the company of famous courtesans and Buddhist monks who had time to spare. They sipped their wine slowly and sang in a low voice, accompanied by the soft music of pipes and strings. Human voice and the sound of musical instruments set each other off. They were indeed beneath the moon, and they did view the moon, but they also wanted people to see them viewing the moon. We could look at them.

There were those who came neither in a boat nor in a carriage. They were casually dressed. After having eaten and drunk their fill, they met in groups of three to five and joined the crowd, making a lot of noise shouting and yelling at the Celebration Temple or on the Broken Bridge. They pretended to be drunk and sang tuneless songs. They looked at the moon, at those who were looking at the moon, and also at those who were not looking at the moon, but actually did not look at anything in particular. We could look at them.

There were those who came in a small boat with gauzy curtains. They sat by a clean table and a clay stove, and had water boiled in the pot to make tea; then they passed it to one another in white porcelain teacups. They came with good friends and beautiful women, and invited the moon to be their company. They either hid themselves in the shade of the trees or stayed away from the clamor on the Inner Lake. They came to view the moon, but people couldn’t see how they conducted themselves while viewing the moon. Nor did they ever look at the moon with full intent. We could look at them.

When the local people in Hangchow made their trip around the lake, they usually came out around ten o’clock in the morning and returned before six in the evening. They stayed away from the moon as if from a personal enemy. On that night, however, they all came out of the city in groups, merely for the purpose of having something to brag about. They paid heavy tips to the gatekeepers. Their sedan-chair carriers held torches in hand and stood in a row on the bank. As soon as they got into their boats, they instructed the boatmen to hurry for the Broken Bridge to join in the big party there. Therefore, before the second beat of the night watches, the boiling hullabaloo of human voices and music there was like that during an earthquake or in a nightmare, loud enough to make everyone deaf and
mute. Boats big and small were all moored along the bank. There was nothing there to watch except the boats and the punt-poles hitting one another, and people rubbing shoulders and looking into the faces of one another. After a while their frenzy was exhausted. Government officials left after their banquets were over, yamen runners shouted to clear the way, and sedan-chair carriers yelled and scared people in the boats by saying that the city gates were closing. Lanterns and torches moved like a trail of stars, and people hurried away surrounded by their retainers. Those on the shore also hurried to go back in groups before the city gates closed. The crowd got sparser and thinner, and in a short while they were all gone.

Only then would people like us move our boats to the shore. The stone steps of the Broken Bridge had just cooled down. We placed mats on them and sat down, and invited our friends to drink to their hearts’ content. Now the moon was like a newly polished mirror. The hills and the lake seemed to have just washed their faces and put on new makeup. Those who had been sipping their wine slowly and singing in a low voice came out. Those who had been hiding themselves in the shade of the trees also emerged. We greeted them and pulled them over to sit among us. Poetic friends and famous courtesans arrived on the scene. Wine cups and chopsticks were brought out. Human voices and musical instruments blended in unison. Only when the moon was fading fast and the east was gradually turning white would our guests take their leave. We set our boats adrift to find ourselves among miles of lotus flowers and to sleep soundly. There, with the fragrance assailing our nostrils, we would have sweet, sweet dreams.

Wang Yüeh-sheng

In Nanking the courtesans on Crooked Lane considered it beneath themselves to associate with those in the Vermilion Market, but Wang Yüeh-sheng, from the Vermilion Market, was definitely not to be found on Crooked Lane during the three decades of its history.¹

Her complexion was like that of a newly blossomed autumn orchid. She was sensuous, gentle, and delicate. Her tiny ivory feet were like pink water chestnuts just out of the pond. With a reserved and noble carriage, she seldom spoke or smiled. No matter how fellow courtesans and visitors tried in many cunning ways to mock or make merry with her, they were unable to extract a beam from her. She was good at regular-script calligraphy and did paintings of orchid, bamboo, and narcissus. She also had a flair for folk
songs of the Wu region, but it was not easy to get to hear her sing. Nobles and patriarchs of the southern regions always tried their best to engage her, but could hardly make her stay till the end of a banquet. Those wealthy merchants and powerful mandarins who managed to get a seat at her table for half of the evening had to send in a reservation, wrapped in a silk kerchief, a day in advance. It had to be ten taels of silver, or at least five taels; no one dared to make any lower offer. For an act of love with her, one had to send the engagement gifts one or two months in advance; otherwise, one should simply forget it for the whole year.

A fancier of tea, she was a friend of Pop Min’s. Even on days of a big storm or a grand banquet, she would call upon Pop at his home and would not leave until she had sipped several pots of tea there. If she met someone whom she found attractive, she would also have a rendezvous with him at Pop’s.

One day a rich merchant who lived next to Pop’s had a gathering of more than a dozen courtesans from Crooked Lane. They were chatting and giggling as they sat in a circle and went on a drinking spree. Yüeh-sheng stood out on the balcony and reclined on the parapet. Shy and modest as she was, her beauty dazzled the other courtesans—so much so that they moved into another room to avoid looking at her.

Yüeh-sheng was aloof and remote like a solitary plum tree or a cold moon. Icy and proud by nature, she did not like to socialize with philistines. Sometimes, if she had to sit face-to-face with such a person, she would stand up and walk away as if she had not noticed him at all.

Once she was engaged by a young nobleman. Although they lived together for half a month, he failed to make her speak a word to him. One day she moved her lips haltingly. Surprised by joy, the retainers ran over to report to the young nobleman, “Yüeh-sheng is about to speak.” He got very excited, as if it were an auspicious sign, and immediately ran over to have a look at her. She blushed, but did not say anything. At the young nobleman’s repeated request, she just murmured, “[Let me] go home.”

Crab Parties

Clams and freshwater crabs belong to the category of food in which the five flavors\(^1\) are complete without the use of any salt or vinegar. By the tenth month, when rice and millet mature, the freshwater crab gets plump. Its bulging carapace is the size of a plate, its purple claws as big as fists, and the meat from its small legs as glossy and fatty as an arthropodal insect.
Beneath its carapace the roe or milt\(^2\) that congeals into a lump like amber or white jade is more delicious than the eight treasures.\(^3\)

In the tenth month my friends, my brothers, and I always held crab-eating parties. We would have such a party in the afternoon and cook crabs to eat, six for each of us. Lest they should get smelly after cooling down, we cooked them in different batches. They were accompanied by cured fat duck and cheese, amberlike liquor-saturated clams, and bok choy cooked in duck juice that looked like white jade tablets. For fruit we ate tangerines, air-dried chestnuts, and air-dried water chestnuts. For drink we had Jade-Pot Ice.\(^4\) For a vegetable dish we had bamboo shoots from Ping-k’ang. The rice we cooked was the newly harvested Yü-hang White. We rinsed our mouths with Snow Orchid tea.\(^5\) Looking back, it really seems like a banquet of ambrosia from the celestial kitchen, at which we ate and drank our fill. I feel ashamed just to think about it.

\textit{Lang-hsüan, Land of Enchantment}

Predestination has much to do with the dreams of T’ao Hut. Once I dreamt that I was in a stone grotto hidden among masses of crags. Flowing in front was a rapid and winding stream, where water cascaded down like snow. Ancient pine trees and oddly shaped rocks stood interspersed with prized flowers. I dreamt that I sat down inside. A boy served me tea and fruit. The bookshelves were filled with books. I opened a few at random to take a cursory look, and they were mostly printed in a kind of inscription script\(^1\) that resembled tadpoles, the footprints of birds, or thunderbolts. Yet in my dream I was able to read the script and seemed to understand everything in spite of its abstruseness.

On days when I have had nothing particular to do, I have often dreamt at night about the place. And after waking up, in an attempt to recall my dream, I have always wished to own a place with such a fine view. It would be a rock-ribbed small hill in the suburbs, with plenty of green bamboos growing on it, as if lying in ambush in the garden. There I would build an open hall facing east and west, with one study in the front and one in the back. In the back I would like to get a pebbled plot where I would plant a few pine trees from Yellow Mountain and place some rocks of strange shape to make a small canyon. In front of the hall I would plant two so-lo trees,\(^2\) to take full advantage of their cool shade. On the left side I would have an annexed vacant den, where I might sit watching the foot of the hill with its jagged, toothlike crag looking as if someone had tested the
sharpness of his sword on them; and I would hang a horizontal board there inscribed “One Hill.” On the right side I would have three open verandas squatting on the edge of, and looking out upon, a big pond that would be clear and cool in autumn, where I might read in the dark shade of the weeping willows; and I would hang a horizontal board there inscribed “One Dale.”

Northward along the hill, cottages and small houses next to one another would stretch in a zigzag line. There would be old trees, stratified cliffs, small streams, and secluded groves of bamboo, every joint of which would look ever so graceful. At the end of the mountain path there would be an elegant-looking cave, where I would build a burial place for myself, in preparation for the exuviation of T’ao Hut. A tombstone would then be erected with the inscription, “Alas! The Grave of the T’ao Hut, Chang Chang-kung.” On the left of the grave there would be an open lot, about one-sixth of an acre in area, where I would build a thatched shrine to lay offerings to Buddha and also to a portrait of T’ao Hut. Monks would be invited to live there to take care of the worship services. The big pond would be about one and a half acres in area, accessible to someone with a boat along a rivulet with three or four turns. On the high mounds standing on both banks of the rivulet one might plant fruit trees such as tangerine, plum, pear, or date palm, with chrysanthemums all around. On the summit of the hill one might build a gazebo. At the western foot of the hill there would be more than three acres of fertile farmland where one might plant sorghum and rice. The front gate would face a big river, with a small tower on its wing, on top of which one might command a view of Censer Peak, Ching-t’ing, and the other mountains. A gate would be constructed beneath the tower, with a horizontal board inscribed “Lang-hsüan, Land of Enchantment.” Along the northern bank of the river there would be an ancient-looking stone bridge, with shrubs growing on it. There one might sit to enjoy the cool breeze or the moonlight.

An Epitaph for Myself

Chang Tai was a native of Shu [Szechwan], and T’ao Hut was his cognomen. In his youth he was a silk-stocking dandy incurably addicted to luxurious living. He was fond of fine houses, pretty maids, handsome boys, gorgeous clothes, choice food, spirited horses, bright lanterns, fireworks, the Pear Garden, music, fine antiques, flowers, and birds. In addition he indulged himself in tea and fruit, and was infatuated with books and poetry.
For half of his life he had been busy with all these, but then everything turned into dream and illusion.

When he was fifty years old, his country lay shattered, his family was broken up, and he took refuge in the mountains. Nothing was left in his possession except a rickety bed, a battered desk, a damaged bronze cooking vessel, a lute out of tune, several slipcases of incomplete books, and a cracked inkslab. He began to wear plain clothes and eat simple food, and still he often failed to have regular meals. Looking back, those days of two decades ago seemed to have belonged to a previous incarnation.

Upon self-reflection, he found seven things that he could not understand. In the past, though a mere civilian, he was able to rival dukes and marquises in his lifestyle; later, despite his noble pedigree, he lived no better than a beggar. The highborn and the lowbred were thus reversed. This was the first thing he could not understand. His inheritance was just below average, yet he tried to keep up with the [Master of] Golden Valley. There were many shortcuts to success in the world, and yet he just missed his chance from “waiting by the stump” at his retreat of Yü-ling. The indigent and the wealthy were thus turned topsy-turvy. This was the second thing he could not understand. Once, as a man of letters, he set foot on the battlefield; then, being an army commander, he made his intrusion into the court of arts. The literary and the military were thus confused. This was the third thing he could not understand. Among superiors, he would not be obsequious even while attending upon the Jade Emperor, but among inferiors, he would show no arrogance in the company of paupers at the almshouse. The exalted and the base were thus messed up. This was the fourth thing he could not understand. He could be so meek as to “let his face dry off by itself when spat upon,” and yet he could be so audacious as to ride into the enemy’s camp all alone. The lenient and the valiant were thus turned around. This was the fifth thing he could not understand. He was willing to fall behind others in pursuit of fame and gain, but when there was a stage performance or a game going on, he would rush to the front before everyone else. Matters of low and high priority were thus mistaken for each other. This was the sixth thing he could not understand.

When he played chess and checkers, he did not care if he won or lost, but when he was sipping tea or tasting water, he was able to draw distinctions among various flavors. The sagacious and the foolish were thus mixed up. This was the seventh thing he could not understand.

These were the seven things incomprehensible to him. If he could not
understand them himself, how could he ever expect others to? Therefore it would be perfectly all right to call him either a wealthy or a poor man, either a wise or a stupid man, either an audacious or a meek man, either a zealous or an idle man. He studied calligraphy, and he failed. He studied swordsmanship, and he failed. He studied morals and ethics, and he failed. He studied literature, and he failed. He studied Taoism, Buddhism, farming, and gardening and he failed in all. He could only let himself be called a wastrel, a good-for-nothing, a misfit, a dull-witted pedant, a sleepyhead, or a damned old fogey.

At first he adopted the style-name Tsung-tzu; then people addressed him as Master of Stone, so he assumed the style-name Shih-kung. He was fond of writing books. Among the books he completed, the following were published: The Book in a Stone Case, A Genealogy of the Chang Family, A Biography of Heroes and Martyrs, A Collection of Literary Writings from Lang-hsüan, An Explication of The Book of Changes, Grand Applications of The Book of Changes, Passageway of History, Random Notes on The Four Books, Dream Memories, Tinkling Bells, Interpretation of Li Ho’s Poetry, Talks on the Ancients from Pleasure Garden, Ten Collections from the Servant-boy’s Bag, Searching for West Lake in Dreams, and Prose of Ice and Snow in One Volume.

He was born at the crack of dawn on the twenty-fifth day of the eighth lunar month in 1597, during the Wan-li reign. He was the eldest son of Master Ta-t’i, counselor-delegate of the state of Lu, and his mother, T’ao, was a Lady of Suitability. In his childhood he suffered from phlegmy diseases. For an entire decade he was brought up in the household of his maternal grandmother, Grand Lady Ma. His maternal grandfather was Lord of Cloud Valley, an official in Kwangtung and Kwangsi Provinces. He had a collection of raw bezoar pills, which filled up several wicker baskets. From my birth until I was sixteen, I took those pills, and I recovered my health only after I finished all of them. When I was six my grandfather Master Yü-jo took me to Wu-lin [Hangchow], where we ran into Master Mei-kung, who was there as a guest of the Ch’ien-t’ang magistracy, on the back of an antlered deer. He said to my grandfather, “I’ve been told that your grandson is good at matching antithetical couplets. Let me try it out on him.” Pointing at the screen painting Li Po Riding a Whale, he said, “T’ai-po, riding a whale, fished for the night moon along the Stone Pit River [Ts’ai-shih Chiang].” I responded, “Mei-kung, straddling a deer, struck at the autumn wind within Coin Pond County [Ch’ien-t’ang Hsien].” Mei-kung bounded to his feet and burst into laughter, saying, “How can anyone
be so smart! A young friend of mine, indeed!” He wanted to encourage me
to make some immortal accomplishments. How could he have anticipated
that one day I would end up a total failure!

Since the year 1644 I have lived as in a daze. I am neither able to enjoy
life nor to seek death. With white hair fluttering all over my head, I am still
among the living and breathing. I am afraid that I will one day disappear
like the morning dew or rot away like grass and trees. It therefore occurred
to me that among the ancients, Wang Chi, T’ao Yüan-ming, and Hsü Wei
all wrote epitaphs for themselves, so I also “knitted my brows in imita-
tion” and wrote one. Once I started composing, I felt that neither myself
nor my writing was good enough. Twice I put my writing brush aside and
gave up. However, the piece might be worthy of being preserved, as it enu-
merates my errors and my idiosyncrasies.

I have already acquired an open grave for myself up Mount Chicken-
head, at Hsiang-wang Hamlet. My friend Li Yen-chai made an inscription
for it, which reads, “Alas! Here’s the coffin pit for Chang Chang-kung,
author and scholar of the Ming dynasty.” Liang Hung was a noble man;
and the graveyard is close to that of Yao Li. That is why I chose this loca-
tion. Next year I will be seventy-five years old. As for the dates of my death
and my burial, I have no idea yet, so I have not put it down here. Here runs
the epilogue:

A poverty-stricken Shih Ch’ung
   contended with his Golden Valley.
A blind Pien Ho
   presented his jade from Ching.
An old Lien P’o
   fought his battle at Cho-lu.
A sham of the man from the Dragon Gate
   played his game as a historian.
A gluttonous Eastern Slope
   starved like Solitary Bamboo.
A Grand Master of the Five Black Rams—
   would he ever be willing to sell himself?
It’s all in vain to emulate T’ao Ch’ien
   and equally futile to model after Mei Fu.
Go look for loners outside this world:
   only they would ever know my heart.
Preface to *Searching for West Lake in Dreams*

There was something wrong with the timing of my birth. I have long been separated from West Lake—for some twenty-eight years—but everyday West Lake has emerged in my dreams, and the West Lake in my dreams has never been separated from me, not even for a single day.

In the years 1654 and 1657 I twice visited West Lake. All those lakeside villages—such as the Mansion beyond Mansions of the Shang family at the Surging Gold Gate, the Occasional Lodge of the Ch‘i family, the villas of the Ch‘ien and the Yü families, and my own family’s Residential Garden—had been reduced to rubble. What had existed in my dreams, then, turned out to be what was missing at West Lake. When I arrived at the Broken Bridge and looked around, I found that all of the supple willows and lush peach trees, and the towers and pavilions where singing and dancing had once been staged, seemed to have been inundated in a flood; fewer than one out of a hundred of these had survived.

I hurried away from the sight. I had made the trip because of West Lake, but considering what I saw there, it would have been better had I simply kept West Lake only in my dreams, which would have been left intact.

It occurred to me that my dreams were quite different from that of Li the Court Attendant. The way he dreamed about Mount T‘ien-mu was like dreaming about a goddess or a celebrated beauty he had never seen, so his dream was pure illusion. The way I dream about West Lake is like dreaming about home and garden and family—all in my own possession in the past, so my dreams are all reality.

I have lived as a tenant at someone else’s house now for twenty-three years, but in my dreams I am still in my old residence. Today the little boy-servant who used to serve me is already white-haired, but in my dreams he remains a boy with his hair tied in a knot. I have not yet got rid of my old habits, nor am I free from my manners of yore. From now on, I shall just live in the quiet solitude of my Butterfly Hut, stay asleep or awake on my Startling Couch, and do nothing but preserve my old dreams, so that the landscape of West Lake may remain untainted. When my children ask me about it, I might on occasion tell them a thing or two, though it would always sound like talking about dreams in a dream—some rigmarole, if not a nightmare.

Therefore I have written seventy-two entries of *Searching in Dreams*, to be passed on to future generations as reflections on West Lake. I am like a mountaineer who has returned from a sea voyage. When he starts praising
the delicious seafood for its taste, his fellow mountaineers race with one another to come over to lick his eyes. Alas! Once the Golden Mincemeat and Jade Columns slide down beyond one’s tongue, they simply vanish. How could one’s gluttonous craving be satisfied by a mere licking of the eyes?

The above was written by the Old Man of Ancient Sword [County] and Butterfly Hut, Chang Tai, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month in 1671.