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## SYMBOLISM OF CHINESE SIGN-BOARDS\*

BY

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Probably the first thing that attracts the eye, while going through a Chinese city or town, is the picturesque vista of the perpetually recurring series of shop-signs displayed on all sides. Applying an artistic interpretation to the word, I am prepared to state that the Chinese have what amounts to a monopoly on sign-board designing. To those of us who understand them they are a mosaic rich in pleasing images. The peculiar formation of the character, and the possibility of collocating the characters either perpendicularly or horizontally renders them particularly adapted for decorative purposes.

### SHOPS HAVE PROJECTING EAVES

The shop-signs are not, as with us, displayed merely upon the shop fronts, but each establishment is provided with projecting eaves, elaborately carved and decorated, and beneath these at either corner is suspended a perpendicular sign, highly polished and inscribed on both sides with the title of the establishment and the commodities for sale, so that it may be read at a distance by people passing up or down the street. Business houses or shops in China are not known by the names of the owners as with us. When Smith, Brown or Jones, or, to select patronymics correspondingly common in China, when Plum, Stone or White commence business, they adopt a style or designation, the most felicitous in meaning, such for example as "Overflowing Abundance," and the firm is thereafter known by that title, all bills, notes, and other business documents being authenticated by its employment. The names of the proprietors never appear even in correspondence. In many cases the same designation is retained in the family for generations, and often this is carried to the length of preserving and exhibiting the old original sign-board with which the ancestors laid the foundation of the business, religiously protected from paint or repairs.

There are instances where a sign, written by some celebrated calligraphist of a few hundred years ago, has been sold for several thousands of dollars. In Peking a few years ago a sign written by a famous penman of the Ming Dynasty was actually sold for \$25,000. I shall refer to a couple later that could hardly be bought at any price, so highly are they valued. It may appear strange that any language should contain a sufficient number of felicitous terms to meet the wants of so vast a population. The difficulty, however, does not exist in practice, and although many characters appear over and over again, so cleverly are the changes rung on the class of character employed, and so well is their distribution contrived, that it would not occur to anyone strolling along a street that any sign he observed had met his eyes before.

\* Lecture given before the Things Chinese Society, Peking, on March 26, 1929.

## SYMBOLISM OF CHINESE SIGN-BOARDS

### CONSERVATISM EMPHASIZED

In China emphasis is on conservatism and safety. Children are brought up to pursue the same trade that perhaps for generations led their ancestors to some degree of success and at least comparative comfort. Son follows father, generation after generation. It is as though, learning through countless decades the difficulty of conserving life by shock attack, the Chinese have learned to dig in, family by family, consolidating each gain, and waiting for a favourable opportunity before attempting to secure more. The teacher's son seldom if ever becomes a bank president, a baker or shoemaker's son a lawyer, or a mandarin's daughter elope with the coachman. Hence, the old sign-board that has been in the family for decades is looked upon as an heirloom not lightly to be parted with. But even the shop-signs form but a small proportion of the inscriptions which attract notice whilst traversing a Chinese city. Characters of all sizes and colours teem in every direction and upon everything, until the careless traveller is apt to weary of the perpetually recurring hieroglyphic. But to the inquiring mind there is an interest in speculating what it all means, and the student of Chinese will find in the collection a convenient opportunity for studying and acquiring a considerable proportion of the few thousand characters which should suffice to give him a practical knowledge of the language. Scarcely a door, wall, pillar or window, but displays in some shape or other its scroll, tablet or device, bearing some felicitous couplet, motto or monogram, artistically inscribed.

### CLASSICAL QUOTATIONS POPULAR

The scrolls mostly contain apophthegms, or classical or poetical quotations, or they are inscribed with some impromptu sentiment, the autographed contribution of a distinguished person or friend. The rocks adjoining temples in romantic spots to which the Chinese are very partial as localities for their shrines are frequently covered with fantastic inscriptions in huge characters, deeply graven, so as to defy time and weather. Some of these are so ancient and so highly prized that lengthy journeys are continually undertaken by antiquaries and others for the express purpose of taking rubbings, which are afterward handsomely mounted as scrolls, and hung as we use pictures. Another interesting subject for character decorating is a Chinese lantern. To give the symbolism on lanterns alone would fill a good sized volume. In former days a Chinese and his lanterns were inseparable. Let him start out on any journey that was likely to last till sunset, and his lantern would be the first article he laid his hands on to carry with him. Even on the brightest moonlight night he considered it his duty to provide himself with artificial light, and it is, or was, a curious sight at a large fire at night to see the huge crowds which filled the streets, each man with his lantern held aloft, although the very heavens were ablaze with light. The wearing apparel of the Chinese again is constantly to be seen decorated with the written character. It was, and still is in some places, observable principally upon the large cuffs attached to sleeves of the

women, and upon their little shoes, upon children's caps and clothing, and upon tobacco-pouches, snuff-bottles, fan-cases, and the girdle ends of men.

#### CHARACTER UNIVERSALLY EMPLOYED

The sketches on the fans used by both sexes are nearly always accompanied by inscriptions, and very often a specimen of calligraphy constitutes the sole ornament on an article, the highly prized autograph of some relative, friend or distinguished individual. Numerous examples of the universal employment of the character in the decoration of articles of daily use is to be seen on cups, saucers, plates, chopsticks, vases, cabinets, incense-burners, and a thousand other things. Indeed, an entire book might be filled with illustrations of the various decorative purposes to which the character is put, and a vast store of additional facts as to history, poetry, and legendary, lore and customs of the Chinese might thus be elicited. Enough, however, has been advanced to show how highly the Chinese prize their seemingly eccentric and impracticable symbols, and that it is used by them to an extent unprecedented in the practice of any other nation, ancient or modern. With these few preliminary remarks on the general use of the written character we will proceed with our sign-boards.

#### TWO STYLES TO DEAL WITH

Before going into details, however, it is perhaps necessary to state that we have two or more sign-boards to deal with. The first is the *tzü-hao* (字號), the style or designation of the firm. The second is the *chao-pai* (招牌), or beckoning tablet, on which are indicated the commodities for sale. The *tzü-hao* seldom, if ever, gives us a clue to what the firm deals in; the *chao-pai* generally, but with a few exceptions, as will be shown hereafter, states it fairly clearly. In addition to these we have at some places, especially Peking, a *huang-tzū* (幌子), which we, for want of a better term, call a sign or symbol representing the article for sale. By *huang-tzū*, however, the Chinese imply a shadow to attract attention, just as the shadow of a man or tree cast across a street will attract attention to the man or tree itself. The character is said to have been invented by an emperor who used to work all night and sleep during the day, so he had a curtain hung up on the sunny side of the bed to screen off the sunlight. Indeed, the character for *huang* is made up of a curtain and sunlight. Hence it has also come to mean the "shadow for the substance." And is not the coil of imitation cash displayed outside money changer's the shadow for the substance that is within? But to revert to our *tzü-hao*: these first came into use during the Liao dynasty, (1125-1168 A.D.), and means the two halves of a tally, hence to agree with, to be in harmony. The character *chao*, in *chao-pai* is taken from a saying attributed to the Emperor Shun, who ascended the throne in 2317 B.C., *chao-jen-i* (招仁義), inviting men of good deeds to assist in ruling the empire. Strange to say, that *chao-pai*, although adopted from a classical saying, was first used by innkeepers who took in night lodgers, and, stranger still for a classical quotation, were later adopted by

courtesans. Many firms combine the *tzü-hao* and *chao-pai* on the same sign-board, as for example *Heng-hsing-pu-hao* (恒興布號). The two first characters are the *tzü-hao*, meaning "Permanent Prosperity," and the two last from the *chao-pai* "Dealers in Cloth."

#### "TZÜ-HAO'S" PECULIAR PHASE

A peculiar phase of the *tzü-hao* is that nearly every place in China has its own fancy regarding the characters used in *tzü-hao*. As a matter of fact, nearly every place in China has its own peculiar individuality, its own industries, its own dialect. The seeker for information finds it at every step. And this information is so varied that it becomes highly interesting. At Canton, for example, the character *fu* (happiness) and *chang* (expansion of business) are in common use. Many places, again, use the first character of a name, whether town, district or province. *Ning* for Ningpo, *Hu* or *Shên* for Shanghai, *I* for Ichang, and so on. A temple, a street on a bridge, also lend their names to a business. For instance, there is a street called *T'ai-ho-fang* at Huchou in Chêkiang, so several firms have adopted the style *T'ai Ho*, and which on inquiry I was informed was taken from the name of a bridge. Not being satisfied with this vague explanation, I asked the magistrate, who on looking up the Huchou Annals, found that the name was originally taken from a temple which had stood on that street several hundred years ago. The bridge, which was gone too, has taken its name from the temple, and so the street. In years to come probably—like Peking Hutungs—the name of the street will disappear too. The pity of it all! China seems to be on the way to lose all of her ancient connections. It is safe to say that the present generation of Pekingese—if the constant changing of Hutungs continues—will lose all of the historical associations connected with them. Wine-shops, tea-houses, restaurants, affect such *tzü-hao* as for example, *Chao-hsien-lou* (根賢樓) "Resorts where men of virtues foregather," When we know of all the revolutions and rebellions which took their rise mostly in such places, perhaps the less said the better. Curio shops affect such styles as *Po-ku-chai* (博古齋) "Studio where the relics of ancient times may be studied extensively." Out of a list containing thousands of *tzü-hao* thus collected, I find that they generally denote prosperity, profit, perseverance, harmony, virtue and so on. Less than one per cent. denote any profit or benefit for the customer. Usually, where the character *ho* (和), meaning harmony, appears on a *tzü-hao* it indicates a partnership; for of course, if a business is to pay, the partners must be in harmony. I have often thought that if some Chinese government would only use a few *ho* in their titles, the business of government might work with less friction and last longer. Druggist's *tzü-hao* are characterized with *t'ang* (堂) as terminals, and characters signifying preservation of life, and nourishment are common; such as *hui-ch'un* (回春), meaning that everything returns to life in the spring time, and that those who partake of their drugs will have a new lease of life. Hence, they use such characters as *pao* (保), *shou* (壽), *chi* (濟) and *ch'un* (春), all denoting the preservation of life, nourishment and so on.

Coffin shops generally use characters on their *tzü-hao* conveying a sense contrary to death, such as *ch'ang* (長) length of years, *sheng* (生) life, *shou* (壽) old age, and *fu* (福) happiness beyond the grave—a beautiful sentiment indeed!

## FANTASTIC TZU-HAO FOUND

But let us take a stroll in imagination through one of the principal streets of a Chinese city. We shall find that some of the *tzü-hao* are as fantastic if not more so, than the characters themselves. Here is a dyer whose sign reads that his "Blacks and blues rival celestial colouring." There is a tallow-chandler whose sign reads that he "makes dips fit for presentation as tribute." If we step in and inquire who it is that receives tribute now that the Emperor is no more, we are informed that the tribute is for the gods in the temples and so on. Further along, is an optician who gives out that he makes crystal glasses for old and young. His *tzü-hao* reads "*Lao-huan-t'ung*" (老還童), youth restored. Here we come to another chandler, who, to beat his rival further up the street, gives out that his "wares are double dipped and small wicked." Here is a druggist whose sign-board informs us that his sticking plasters will cure the most serious cases of indigestion. There are several kinds of sticking plasters, such as will cure, or rather are said to cure, boils, sores, aches, pains, rheumatism, diarrhoea, and other ailments. The one I have just mentioned for cases of indigestion is very famous all over China. It is made in Peking and called *Erh-lung-kao* (二龍膏) "Double Dragon laster." The principal ingredients are *hsien-ts'ai*, a sort of coarse wild grass, and a turtle pounded into a pulp while still alive. I first came to hear of this plaster some thirty-five years ago, when my teacher told me that he had been wearing one on his stomach for the past forty-five years, that is, since he had been one year old, to keep down a *ch'ang-ch'ung*, or "long insect", which had been troubling him ever since he was born. I had forgotten all about this until a few years ago, when one of my writers one day brought his little daughter of eight to me and said that she was troubled with a "long insect," begging that I do something for her. Investigation showed that she had had a *Erh-lung-kao* sticking plaster on her stomach ever since she was six months old. I sent her to the hospital where a tape worm more than a hundred feet long was taken from her. The writer, just as did my teacher, believed that the sticking plaster compounded out of a live turtle, although dead, had sufficient vitality left to suppress the convulsive struggles of the "long insect."

## HE HAD TRANSPARENT STOMACH

The *Erh-lung-kao* trade mark is a picture of Shen Nung, the god of agriculture, who is also the god of herbs, and who is supposed to have had a transparent stomach which enabled him to study the effect of food during the course of digestion. Here are the signs, of a physician, who judging from their number and colouring, must be a renowned and popular leech. We will call him Dr. Stone, this being the equivalent of his Chinese surname, *Shih*. On one of his signs we read "Stone *Quartus*, great

grand-son of Stone *Primus*, of Peking, whose *specialité* is to treat fractures, contusions and wounds, to set bones and return dislocations. Another sign repeats the leech's name, and announces that he treats internal as well as external complaints, cures affections of the throat, administers acupuncture and the moxa, and so on. Over the door are suspended complimentary tablets presented to the worthy doctor by grateful patients. On one slab is inscribed "Bent arm, three principles," in allusion to the skill in feeling the pulse that is touched with three fingers by Chinese doctors. Ability to feel the pulse in China is considered the true criterion of medical skill and proficiency. On another slab we read the sentence "Supreme faculty handed down by family descent." Reference is here made to the fact that the leech's father and grandfather had been medical men of renown. In the opinion of the Chinese, occupation and fame derived from inheritance afford the most reliable evidence of professional skill where physicians are concerned. Hence a pretender has only to display in front of a tented table by the wayside, "Dr. so and so by family descent," and he will never lack a patient. When I was stationed in Kueilin, the then capital of Kuangsi, in 1914, a quack attached himself to an idol in a temple—probably with the collusion of the monks—and gave out that the dust of the idol if made into a plaster and applied to sores and boils never failed as a remedy. This story was so thoroughly believed that within a few days the mud idol actually disappeared for plasters.

## SOME CURIOUS SIGN-BOARDS SEEN

But it is time to proceed with the elucidation of some curious sign-boards I have noticed in my travels.

*Liu-pi-chü* (六必居). Probably some of you will grasp the meaning at once. It means the Six Essentials. But what are the "Six Essentials?" Well, they are tea, salt, oil, vinegar, sauce and wine. I mention this sign particularly because it was written by Yen Sung, the Chief of the Six Wicked Ministers of the Ming Dynasty. But with all his wickedness, he was the most famous penman of later times. The original sign, however, is kept inside the premises, for fear of theft; a copy of the original is displayed in front of the shop. The shop is at the Liang Shih Tien, outside of the Ch'ien-mên.

*Liu-ch'ên-chü* (陸陳聚). As you will note at once this is a grain dealer's sign. The first character has a double meaning, that is Six and Dry Land. He sells the Six Principal Grains which are grown on land such as sessamum seeds, corn, wheat, buckwheat, beans and ears of grain generally. The sign thus reads: "A collection of the Six Ripe Stores of Grain"

*Liu-yeh-t'ang* (六也堂). This sign too, is very simple—when you know it. *Liu-yeh* is a book on composition. But as this is a barber's sign, what connection is there with a book on composition? It simply means that those who patronize the establishment will be "polished" up!

*Kou-hung-chi* (溝洪記). This is another simple sign: it means an "Overflowing Gutter." But as this is a mutton seller, what has mutton to do with overflowing gutters? The answer is simplicity itself. There is a large gutter running from the Hsi-chi-men to the Hsiang-fang-ch'iao on the street where the butcher's business is, which gutter overflows during the heavy rains: the meaning, therefore, of course, is that the firm wishes wealth to flow into their business as water flows into the gutter—in great abundance. The first character also stands for one hundred thousand millions, but it is doubtful whether the butcher knows that connotation.

*Chang I Yuan* (張一元). This is another easy one. It is a small tea shop sign, and means "One Dollar Chang." The inference is that Mr. Chang bought a lottery ticket for one dollar, won the first prize, so he opened this shop with part of his winnings and adopted this name for further luck.

*Shuang-k'wei-yung* (雙魁永). You will note at once that this means "Double Honours Forever!" But unless you are told, you would hardly believe that it is a tailor's sign, but so it is. He makes official-styled clothes, and, naturally, those who patronize him will be rewarded with high honours in official life.

*Liu-yeh* (六也). Here is simplicity itself in a nutshell. Hardly worth the telling. It is the *tzü-hao* of a tea shop, and signifies the six senses of desires. That is that smell, form, sound, taste, touch and perception (in a Buddhist sense) are all partly released or suppressed according to the customers' desires—when partaking of their tea. Recently I came across a treatise written by one Kuan Fang-pu of the T'ang Dynasty praising the flavour of tea as follows: "It tempers the spirits, and harmonises the mind, dispels lassitude, and relieves fatigue, awakens thought and prevents drowsiness, lightens and refreshes the body, and clears the perceptive faculties."

*Ch'i-chih* (七之). Having guessed the last one so readily this one should present no difficulties at all. You will see at once that it is also a tea shop sign, and signifies the Seven Passions. That is joy, anger, fear, sorrow, love, hatred and desire, which are all kept under control by drinking this firm's tea. It is a tea house worth patronizing, especially during times of distress or when in love.

*Jan-hsin* (染心). This sign is so easy that I am almost ashamed to bring it to your notice. Literally, it signifies "dyed heart or mind." And being a washerman's sign, it is quite clear that the idea conveyed even to the dullest intellect is that "the original colours will not come out in the washing."

At Nanking the character 鑫 frequently appears on shop signs. It is read *Hsin*. Such characters are often selected by persons who feel that they are in need of a certain element in their eight cyclic characters. The origin of the character is interesting. A man had five sons to whom he gave the name *Hsin* (as above), *Sen* (森), *Miao* (淼), *Yen* (焱), and *Yao* (堯). It will be observed that their names are composed of the Five Elements, metal, wood, water, fire and earth, triplicated.

The Chinese believe that each of the Five Elements either produce or destroy each other, such as that metal destroys wood or metal produces water and so on, so they make sure to have an antidote in their horoscope.

*Hao-nien-t'ang* (鶴年堂). "House of the Crane Year." This, as you will observe at once, is a druggist sign. The crane is a symbol of longevity, hence those who partake of their drugs will obtain a new lease of life. This sign, like that of the *Liu-pi-chu* already noticed, was written by Yen Sung, and the original, like that of the *Liu-pi-chu*, is kept out of sight at the back of the premises for fear of its being stolen: a replica of the original hangs up in front of the shop. There are said to be only two shops with inscriptions written by Yen Sung, and they are exceedingly valuable on account of their exquisite penmanship. While on the subject of Yen Sung it is worth remarking that he wrote a *Pien* or honorary tablet for the old Examination Hall at Peking. The *Pien* bore the inscription *Chih-kung-t'ang* (致公堂) "Hall of Supreme Equity." There it remained until the Emperor Ch'ien-lung, who was an expert penman himself, replaced it by a *Pien* by his own hand, on the plea that as Yen Sung was a traitor, it should no longer be displayed at the Examination Hall. But on seeing that even his own beautiful calligraphy did not match Yen's, he ordered his own *Pien* removed and replaced by Yen's original. In 1900, during the Boxer outbreak, the Examination Hall was destroyed by fire and Yen Sung's *Pien* perished in the conflagration.

*Hua-han-ch'ung* (花漢沖). You will see at once that, as this is a perfumery shop sign, it must mean that their perfumery is so powerful that it pervades the Milky Way!

*Ying-ko-Chang* (鸚鵡張). At the first glance, you will agree with me that this must be Parrot Chang. That is, that a man named Chang either sells parrots or that parrot is his personal name. Well, we are all wrong. This shop sells preserved and salted vegetables, and is owned by a man surnamed Chang. The *tzü-hao* takes its name from a parrot which is confined in a cage in front of the shop.

*Hu-ch'iao-shen-jung-t'ien* (壺橋蓍茸店). This combination is rather complicated. As you will readily see the first two characters refer to the "Tea-pot Islands," and, by implication the "Tea-pot Islands" refer to the Isles of the Blest, which are supposed to be of tea-pot shape. This, of course, is the *tzü-hao*. The last three characters are the *chao-pai*, indicating that the firm deals in ginseng and the soft core of the young antlers of deer. When we have got thus far, the rest is easy, since we now know that the commodities they sell are produced at the Isles of the Blest.

*Pen-shan-hsien* (奔善鱣). This is a very simple one to begin with, because we have cows, sheep and fish triplicated. Naturally, you will say the *tzü-hao* means they deal with those in abundance: you will be quite right—at least, partly so. The real meaning of the combination is that "all rush to get a taste of their succulent viands! *pen* 奔 of course, stands for 奔 to hasten, 善 stands for 善 the rank smell of mutton, and 鱣 stands for 鱣 fresh.

*Pu-ying-hsüeh-tien* (步瀛靴店). Here we have a *tzü-hao* and *chao-p'ai* combined, and it is easy to see that the firm deals in native boots. Having got thus far we see at a glance that *pu-ying* refers to the Abode of the Genii, or rather that the wearer of the boots will *pu* (stroll) amongst the fairies who inhabit Ying (the Isles of the Blest). The Ying-t'ai Pavillion at Peking situated in the Pe-hai is where the late Empress-Dowager confined the unfortunate Emperor Kuang Hsü in 1898. The Ying-t'ai is surrounded by water, thus symbolizing the Isles of the Blest. The idea behind all this, of course, is that those who purchase their boots will obtain official advancement and consequent happiness as do the fairies that inhabit the Abode of the Genii.

*K'o-k'o-chü* (可可居). This sign does not mean cocoa or Coco-kola for sale, but that their meals (for it is an eating house) are served to suit the taste. In other words, *k'o-i-k'o-k'ou*." Suitable to the mouth or taste.

*Ch'ing-mei-chü* (青梅居). This, as can easily be seen, means the "House of Green Plums." But if we think to buy "Green Plums" here we shall be mistaken, for they sell no fruit whatever. It is a small eating house whose speciality is *kan-san-chien* (乾三件), fried tripe, heart and liver. The inference, of course, is that as green plums whet the appetite, if we are reminded of them, naturally we walk right in and partake of their appetising victuals.

*I-ch'uan-hao* (義川號). This is about the only *tzü-hao* I have come across that takes the public into consideration. It is a grain dealer's sign, and means that "Our desire for the common good flows on like a stream—in abundance."

*Kou-pu-li-fan-kwan* (狗不理飯館). As you will observe this is a hotel that "even the dog's won't notice!" This curious sign originated with a gang of loafers who started a small restaurant and did not exhibit a shingle of any kind! So the neighbours gave them this name out of derision. Later on the business prospered and they actually hung out a sign with these characters on it, hoping that it would bring them further luck, which apparently it did, for they subsequently began a business under the same name at Harbin, and later at Ch'ang-ch'un. At Tientsin I noticed a shop selling meat-dumplings under the same title.

*Fu-fu-k'o-tzü-chü* (夫婦刻字局). The signification of this sign you will, of course, grasp at once, *i.e.* that both husband and wife engrave characters. But you will be mistaken—as I was. It simply means that the characters are out in relief and incised. *Fu* (夫) corresponds to *yang-wen* (陽文), cut in relief, and *fu* (婦) to *yin-wen* (陰文), incised, which of course refers to the male and female principles of nature.

As the most of us are interested in Chinese curios, I shall give one or two of the most interesting signs for curio shops.

*Ch'ing-yün-chai* (慶雲齋). This means "Studio of Auspicious Clouds," and no doubt you will wonder what they have to do with curios. Well, it simply means that "Lucky stars and auspicious clouds are so attractive that everybody would like to see them first: that which is neither fog nor smoke is called "Auspicious Clouds." This is an

excerpt from an ancient poem. The combination in the sign means that their works of art are as scarce and attractive as auspicious clouds.

*Yün-yü-chai* (韞玉齋). Studio which contains a rich collection of jade. This is an excerpt from a poem by Lu Shih-heng of the Tsin Dynasty. "If the stones contain gems, the hills will sparkle: if water contains pearls, the rivers will be beautiful."

Now let us take a jeweller's sign.

*Wu-ts'un-lou* (梧村樓). Quite naturally you will say "This means the 'House or Tower of the Wu Village.'" But as the firm deals in bridal ornaments what has *that* to do with the "Wu Village?" The answer—to those who know—is quite simple. It refers to the female phoenix. Taken from an ancient saying that "if you have not the Wu-t'ung tree (Sturculia), the phoenix (fig. a bride) will not come." Just as for example *Feng-i* (鳳一), used by some jeweller's indicates that they sell bridal ornaments. A bride's crown is called *feng-kuan*. As the phoenix is the emblem of matrimonial alliances, firms that deal in bridal ornaments either use the characters for the Wu-T'ung tree on which the phoenix is supposed to light or the character for phoenix itself.

#### MOST EXTRAORDINARY SIGN.

I shall now conclude by describing one of the most puzzling and extraordinary shop-signs I have ever come across. Some forty or more years ago, when I first began collecting shop-sign indications at Tientsin, I noticed a small engraver's shop whose sign read *ch'iao-chieh* (巧姐) "clever sister." Naturally, I thought that some one's sister was an expert engraver, and that I would like to see her. But I was doomed to disappointment. There was no woman in the shop, and the engraver, an old man of about seventy-five insisted that *he* was the engraver, and there was no one else beside himself.

But when I inquired about the inscription, I ran against a snag, as one usually does, when getting too inquisitive about "Things Chinese." The old man either could not or would not enlighten me in any way, except to say that the shop-sign had been in his family for decades; and, although I asked all the Chinese with whom I came in contact none of them could give me any explanation, unless that it contained some hidden meaning known to the craft only. On my return to Tientsin some ten years later, almost the first thing I did was to look up the old engraver and endeavour to fathom the secret of his sign. I was, however, to be disappointed, for the shop was closed, or at least another business was being conducted therein, and the sign of course was gone too. No one could tell me what had become of the engraver, until one day, to my great delight, an old woman hearing me making inquiries about the mystic sign volunteered the information that the old engraver had been arrested by some eunuchs and taken away to Peking for making characters containing the Emperor's name, and hence *tabu*. She further said that one of the characters on the sign was the name of the Heir Apparent, and that the Emperor K'ang-hsi deposed him. This was all I could discover at the time.

Many years later a Manchu friend of mine informed me that what the old woman said was partly true, that K'ang-hsi's eldest son had been deposed twice for his mad escapades and dalliance with the women of the palace, and that he was none other than Pao Yu the hero of the famous novel *Hung-lou-meng*, or Dream of the Red Tower. Now it is on record that T'ung Kuo-wei, K'ang-hsi's father-in-law got himself into trouble with K'ang-hsi for having suggested the substitution of a younger son, Yung-cheng, for the Heir Apparent, Yin Jeng (胤禔), who was suffering from mania. T'ung Kuo-wei is the *chiu-chiu* or uncle mentioned in the *Hung-lou-meng* as conspiring with two others to sell Ch'iao-chieh, (which, you will remember, were the characters on the old engraver's sign) to a Mongol Prince, and which no doubt refers to the conspiracy to depose Yin Jeng, that is, Pao Yu whose identity is concealed under the name of *ch'iao-chieh*. But why the engraver used the characters in his sign, and why he was arrested, and what eventually became of him is still a mystery, and will probably remain so for all time. As the characters on the sign were written in the cursive script, a Chinese friend suggested that I may have mistaken *ch'iao* 巧 for *Jeng* 禔, since in the running hand they look very much alike would make the sign read "clever Jeng" instead of "clever sister." But as either would seem to indicate that the Heir Apparent was meant, I see no reason why one should not have been used instead of the other. But Pao Yu is not the only character whose identity is concealed in the pages of the *Hung-lou-meng*. Most of the females mentioned are not females at all, but the Presidents of the Six Boards (Liu Pu): that is Hans (pure Chinese) who accepted appointments under the Manchus, and were therefore stigmatized female slaves! The malignant, mercenary Feng Chieh, for example, was none other than the President of the Board of Revenue.

CHAO CHUN CH'U SAI  
OR CHAO CHUN'S LAMENT

TRANSLATED BY  
PEARL HARMONI

Each year as I lived in Wei Yang Palace  
Spring days were late, late.  
Autumn nights were long.  
The Prince's favour deep, deep.  
An ill fate my destiny  
By his command I now go north;  
And bitter is my sorrow.  
Ai Hai Hai Hai Yao.

I ride with my P'i P'a held in my lap.  
Gold rises sand, sand,  
Dimming the Great Wall.  
The sky becomes now dark;  
And the stars are closely veiled.  
The Mongol pipes sound strange and sad;  
And altered is their cadence.  
Ai Hai Hai Hai Yao.

The tears from my two eyes stream down and meet.  
Who sees my grief, grief?  
Leaving the Han's gate.  
The Emperor I leave, leave.  
To the Phoenix Court farewell.  
With pain I view the hills of Yen.  
For bitter is my sorrow.  
Ai Hai Hai Hai Yao.

THE CONTENTS OF A BRASS BUDDHA

Four or five years ago there came into my possession a small gold-brass figure of a Tibetan Buddha from the Po Ta La at Jehol.

It was fashioned in the early days of Chien Lung's reign by a lama priest on the borders of Mongolia.

One day I was showing it to a friend, when he suggested pulling out the stuffing to see what was inside; and the following is what we found.

At the bottom powdered flower petals (Lotus?). Then two rolls of prayers written in Tibetan, one inside the other, and bound with red silk. Above that three red balls and another double prayer—these in the belly. In the breast were scraps of green and red silk and thread. In the top of the head a small single roll of prayer.

A Chinese of my acquaintance tells me the petals represent the words of Buddha that fall like gentle rain upon the earth and spring to life as flowers. The red balls are the three souls, the conscious soul, the sentient soul and the living soul. The scraps of silk thread and embroidery are the heart, veins and sinews. The prayers are the sacred utterances of the sainted priest who had become Buddha and to whom this image was consecrated.

The balls are made of the dust and residue from the burnt bones and dried body of the dead saint.

J. C. H.