

## Asian 204

### Unit 02: Sea of Regret

#### **Sea of Regret: Basic Information**

*Sea of Regret* (*Henhai* 恨海), first published October 1906

Author: Wu Woyao 吳沃堯, courtesy name Jianren 趸人 (1867-1910)

#### Cast of Characters:

Chen Qi, courtesy name Gelin, a scholar-official from  
Guangdong

Miss Lu, Chen Gelin's wife

Chen Xiang, courtesy name Bohe, Chen's elder son

Chen Rui, courtesy name Zhongai, Chen's younger son

Wang Dao, courtesy name Letian, a scholar-official from Suzhou,  
cousin to Chen Gelin

Miss Jiang, Wang Letian's wife

Juanjuan, Wang's daughter, betrothed to Chen Zhongai

Zhang Gao, courtesy name Heting, a merchant from Guangdong

Miss Bai, Zhang Heting's wife

Dihua, Zhang's daughter, betrothed to Chen Bohe

Li Fu, a Chen family servant

#### **Historical Background**

1. Foreign Encroachment on China
  - a. Europe and America
  - b. Japan
    - i. Meiji Restoration, 1868: Western-influenced reforms
    - ii. Sino-Japanese War, 1894-1895
    - iii. Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1895
2. Chinese Reactions to Foreign Threat
  - a. Humiliation and outrage
  - b. Fear of being "carved up like a melon"
  - c. China: center of the civilized world, or "sick man of Asia"?

- d. Fear and distrust of West
  - e. Calls for modernization
3. Reform and Backlash
- a. "Self-strengthening Movement" during Tongzhi reign (1862-1874)
  - b. The Hundred Days of Reform, 1898
    - i. The Guangxu Emperor (r. 1875-1908)
    - ii. The Dowager Empress Cixi (1834-1908)
  - c. Conservative backlash and defeat of the reform party
4. Grassroots Anti-foreign Sentiment in Shandong
- a. The German presence
    - i. Railroads, industry, economic disruption
    - ii. Aggressive missionary activity
  - b. Local customs and traditions
    - i. Martial arts
    - ii. Local religious sects
    - iii. Invulnerability rituals
    - iv. The Boxers United in Righteousness
5. The Boxers United in Righteousness
- a. Aggression against Chinese Christians
  - b. Spread across northern China in 1900
  - c. Anti-foreign activity
    - i. "Support the Qing, Destroy the Foreigners"
  - d. Qing government response
    - i. Early attempts to suppress the Boxers
    - ii. Backing for Boxers from conservative factions at court
6. The Siege of the Foreign Legations
- a. Siege of foreign communities in Tianjin and Beijing, Summer 1900
  - b. Expeditionary force of the Eight Allied Powers
  - c. Relief of Tianjin and Beijing

- d. Flight of Qing court to western China (Xi'an)
  - e. The Boxer Protocols, 1901
7. Different readings of the Boxers
- a. The West: barbarism and superstition
  - b. The Chinese elite: "bandits"
  - c. Communist historiography: peasant rebellion and anti-imperialism

### **The Civil Service Bureaucracy and Education in Traditional China**

1. The government of imperial China
  - a. The emperor and the court
  - b. The civil service bureaucracy
  - c. Entrance to the bureaucracy through civil service examinations
  - d. The basis of education: the Confucian Classics
  - e. Education and status
2. The Examination System: Ideals and Reality
  - a. The ideal
    - i. Meritocracy
    - ii. Fulfillment through service to state and people
  - b. Problems
    - i. Limited access to education
    - ii. Glut of qualified candidates
    - iii. Corruption
    - iv. Doubts about relevance of classical education
3. Women and Education in Traditional China
  - a. Women excluded from government service and public life
  - b. (Limited) education a refinement for women of the elite class
  - c. "For a woman, ignorance is a virtue."

## **Wu Jianren (1867–1910)**

Surname: Wu

Given name: Woyao (Wu Woyao)

Courtesy name: Jianren (Wu Jianren)

1. Background and Career
  - a. Family from Guangdong
  - b. Forebears' success in civil service and trade
  - c. Classical education
  - d. Family financial difficulties
  - e. Journalistic career in Shanghai
2. Changing Horizons for the Educated Elite
3. The Advent of the Commercial Mass Media in China
  - a. Advances in printing technology
  - b. New formats: the newspaper and the periodical magazine
  - c. Rising literacy
  - d. Urban concentrations of population
4. Facets of Chinese Publishing at the Turn of the Century
  - a. Commercial
  - b. Political
  - c. Entertainment oriented
5. Traditional Chinese Views of Fiction
  - a. Outside the boundaries of serious literature
  - b. Moralistic criticism
  - c. Widespread popularity
  - d. Occasional & eccentric defenders
6. Liang Qichao and the Call for a New Fiction
  - a. Liang Qichao (1873–1929)
    - i. Leading figure in reform movement
    - ii. Flees to Japan after failure of Hundred Days of Reform (1898)
    - iii. Activist publishing

- b. "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People," 1902
  - i. Fiction a powerful tool for shaping the hearts of the nation
  - ii. Fiction key to reform and modernization in the West
  - iii. Traditional Chinese fiction backwards and corrupting
  - iv. Call for a new fiction of criticism and enlightenment
- 7. Wu Jianren's Fiction
  - a. The influence of Liang Qichao
  - b. The commercial imperative
  - c. Fondness for traditional Chinese fiction
- 8. Conventions of Traditional Chinese Fiction
  - a. Formal conventions of Chinese fiction
    - i. "Cliffhanger" chapter transitions
    - ii. The "storyteller" narrator
      - 1. Manipulating the arrangement of events
      - 2. Directly addressing the audience
      - 3. Offering moral commentary
  - b. Thematic conventions of Chinese fiction
    - i. "Scholar and beauty" romances
      - 1. Handsome scholar and talented beauty
      - 2. Matched pairs of lovers
      - 3. Overcoming obstacles to win the mate of one's dreams
- 9. *Sea of Regret*
  - a. "Scholar and beauty" lovers in the chaos of changing times
  - b. A "worm's-eye" view of history