



On the Tracks of Modern China: Nation-Building, Womanhood, and Resilience in Dorothea Hosie's *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung: A Tale of Modern Peking*

Dr. Debabarnine Bhattacharya

Guest Faculty,

Department of English,

Jadavpur University.

debabarninebhattacharya1998@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Published at the height of the Second World War, Dorothea Hosie's 1944 novel *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung: A Tale of Modern Peking* effectively encapsulates China's socio-political upheavals before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, drawing, as it were, on the author's missionary-diplomatic background and her 1936 experiences in Peking. In her discourse on modern China, Hosie foregrounds 'The School of Accuracy and Good Manners', a progressive girls' school, as a hybrid space where conventional Confucian orthodoxy co-exists with Western science, disciplines and modernism, a trait in keeping with the syncretism often perceivable in the country's drive towards Westernization during the 20th century. In this context, the current paper aims to examine the manner in which Hosie's engagement with the notion of "New China" becomes synonymous with her dialogue on modern Chinese womanhood, cultural continuity, resilience, Japanese militarism, hybridity and a synthesis of tradition and modernism within a highly symbolic and suggestive framework. From a post-colonial feminist stand point, Hosie's missionary-diplomatic perspective, then, may be read as, both a mediating of her Western tutelage and an affirming of her Chinese cultural heritage, while the novel itself becomes a testament to nation-building and the emergence of fresh identities amidst the echoes of war and modernity.

Keywords: China, womanhood, nation-building, modernism, 20th century.

Introduction

Published in the years after the official dissolution of China's semi-colonial era, Lady Dorothea Hosie's 1944 novel *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung: A Tale of Modern Peking*, inspired by her brief stay with her friends in Peking in 1936, skilfully evokes an atmosphere rife with political turmoil and large-scale socio-cultural changes at the height of Japan's imperialist aggressions. In keeping with Hosie's scholarly engagement with modern China as seen in her non-fictional works, *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung* offers a detailed account of women's education and agency in a country ravaged by war and displacement. Juxtaposing, as it were, elements of a travelogue, a memoir and a school report, Hosie's dialogue driven fictional discourse on modern China, thus effectively foregrounds the lived experiences of those caught in the changing tide of the times. Filtered through the eyes of the austerely Confucian teacher, Miss Way; the high-born daughter of a former Manchu official, Blossom Lo; and the spirited and progressive Crystal Lily, Hosie depicts 'The School of Accuracy and Good Manners', the setting of her narrative, as defying traditional gender norms, as a space that insists on sincerity, courtesy and intelligence as necessary virtues, while at the same time fostering an environment where the girls can learn English, drawing and various modern disciplines. Symbolic motifs, such as English pollard willows against the golden blossoms of Chinese willows, the resilient acacia tree in the courtyard, and the tranquil pool of the Qing Emperor Ch'ien-lung, further reiterate the thematic undercurrents of cultural continuity, feminine strength and the hope of renewal that remains pervasive throughout the novel. Indeed, Hosie's repeated juxtaposition of traditional Confucian ideals with modern reformist aspirations, not only becomes suggestive of a nation caught in a state of flux, but also demonstrates the ways by which conventional values can continue to co-exist in a fast-changing world where the categories of gender, class and religion remain ill-defined.

A Missionary-Diplomatic Perspective: Hosie as the Sensitive Cultural Translator of China

Having spent the formative years of her life at the United Methodist Free Churches mission, run by her parents, the prominent missionary and scholar, William Edward Soothill and his wife Lucy, the China born Hosie developed an early cultural, social and linguistic affinity not just towards the language and customs of the country, but also vis-à-vis the dispossessed realities of Chinese girls and women subject to a rigidly patriarchal societal structure. Despite moving back to England at the age of seven and later studying Medieval and Modern Languages at Newnham College, Cambridge, Hosie continued to retain fluency in the Chinese tongue owing to sustained access to her father's sinological resources. Indeed, this "transition from her Chinese upbringing to structured British schooling highlighted ongoing challenges, including a sense of alienation from peers unfamiliar with her bicultural background, which she later reflected on as fostering resilience and a lifelong interest in cross-cultural bridges" ('Dorothea Hosie', *Gorkipedia*).

After marrying the diplomat Sir Alexander Hosie in 1913, she once again moved back to China, this time living in the Peking Legation Quarters and witnessing first-hand the turbulent conditions of the early Republic, other than engaging with Chinese elites, and traveling extensively across the country, something which over the years deepened her insight into the shifting gender norms and social transformation so much a part of modern China. Following her husband's death in 1925 Hosie continued to pursue independent travels, producing amateur films and a plethora of non-fictional works that captured the everyday urban and rural life of the Chinese on the eve of the second Sino-Japanese war. Her only fictional narrative, *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung: A Tale of Modern Peking*, offers a realistic account of pre-war Beijing, functioning, not only as a literary artefact, but also as an authentic source for the study of

gender, education, and cultural transformation in wartime China. Indeed, her extensive engagement with the country has time and again been commented upon:

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Dorothea Hosie actively promoted Chinese culture and fostered Anglo-Chinese understanding through public lectures and institutional engagements. She delivered talks on Chinese customs, philosophy, and social issues at various venues, including universities and women's groups. For instance, in 1936 and 1937, during her travels in China, she spoke at institutions such as Tsinan University on the wit, wisdom, and courage of Confucius, and addressed college students in Tientsin on Christ's attitude toward women, themes she expanded in subsequent lectures across China and Britain ... In October 1937, following Japan's invasion, Hosie toured Britain lecturing on behalf of China Relief Funds to raise awareness and support for war-affected communities (*Gorkipedia*).

Hosie, thus, functions as a translator of China to her audience, utilizing, as it were, the modest, yet symbolic setting of the School of Accuracy and Good Manners, to reinforce further the actual bend of her agenda—how mutual understanding between the East and West, along with education is vital for China's future. By frequently commenting on the innate strength and resilience demonstrated by modern Chinese women like Miss Way and Crystal Lily during the fast-changing times of the pre-war era, Hosie time and again establishes Chinese traditions as being both distinctive and compatible with Western values of perseverance and moral duty. Such a stance on her part, therefore, not only appears in sharp contrast to the more confrontational outlook adopted by other women writers such as Constance Gordon Cummings or Isabella Bird Bishop, but also corroborates her role in fostering Sino-British exchange by making China more intelligible without compromising her particularity.

Needless to say, despite being a foreign imperialist intruder in semi-colonial China, Hosie's narrative never delineates Britain as an aggressive conqueror, but rather as an ally that can aid in the country's modernization without erasing its identity. Indeed, her early exposure to the socio-cultural realities of China as the daughter of a Methodist missionary fomented an initial inclination and a sense of responsibility towards the betterment of her own community. In *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung*, she is seen reflecting on her earliest shock at seeing young "Chinese girls, who then had bound feet. They had never, since they were five years old, when their mothers began to wind the bandaging- cloths about their toes, run a step: indeed, they had never walked, only hobbled, as if on cows' hooves" (Hosie 74). Such sensitivity on the part of the young narrator would not only translate into some rudimentary efforts on her part to debar foot bound girls admission in her parents' mission school, but also in her attempts to foster a liberal learning environment where exercises and drills became the norm (Hosie 75-76). In keeping with these preliminary steps, Hosie would later go on to juxtapose her missionary heritage with Sinology, as reinforced further by her advocacy for gender equality using eclectic notions (such as yin-yang, Biblical feminism) to raise awareness in works such as *Jesus and Woman* (1946), *Brave New China* (1938), etc. Within this context, *The Pool of Chien Lung*, thus doubtlessly exemplifies the ways by which personal experiences can be translated into literary works, as explicated further by her use the all-pervasive "Buddha arm" metaphor to figuratively collate her life in England with the lives of her Chinese friends and acquaintances, illustrating, as it were, an enduring commitment towards cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Nation and Womanhood: A Discourse on Modernity and Post-colonial Feminism

Hosie's discourse on feminism, women's empowerment and negotiation of a distinctly female identity in modern China is doubtlessly contained in her exploration of the intersection between tradition and modernity. In the novel, the progressive but traditionally rooted School of

Accuracy and Good Manners, one of the first government-approved girls' schools in the country, thus not only embodies a radical departure from the mission-led education in the treaty ports, but also strikes a balance between Western modernism and a preservation of China's cultural heritage. Miss Way, the custodian of the school, described as a "middle-aged woman scholar", personifies the very notion of the evolution of female agency, one who skilfully utilizes cross-cultural exchange to carve out spheres of domestic and intellectual independence (Hosie 82). Her institution, embodying, as it were, a synthesis of Confucian orthodoxy and modern academic rigour, functions beyond the purview of a mere educational facility and transforms into a space where young girls are able to achieve social and scholastic autonomy outside the conventional domestic spaces. The school, as the unnamed narrator writes taught "simple English, drawing, arithmetic, geography and the ... foundations of the classics" (Hosie 63).

Commenting on this large-scale shift in terms of autonomy and empowerment among modern Chinese women, Jonathan Spence observes—

... many independent young women were, with the encouragement of their own parents or brothers, unbinding their feet and struggling to obtain an adequate or even advanced education. They found moral and social support in sisterhoods that promised lodging and economic help if they remained unmarried, in groups of men who pledged to marry young women with the still unfashionable "large feet," and in schools that actively encouraged their pursuit of learning. These women now had new role models in the guise of famous Western figures like Joan of Arc, Mme. Roland, Florence Nightingale, and Catharine Beecher, whose biographies were translated, printed, and reprinted in magazines. There were also stark new images such as that of the young Russian radical Sophia Perofskaya, whose successful assassination of Tsar Alexander II, even though

it led to her arrest and execution, made her a model for female intransigence and courage in the face of autocratic misrule (240-41).

Modern Chinese womanhood of the 20th century, thus found new models to idolize, a fact further reinstating this steady movement towards a fast reforming socio-cultural milieu. A further manifestation of this distinctly female agency in Hosie's novel is perceivable also in characters such as Crystal Lily, whose outdoor activities and callisthenic exercises, such as Chinese shadow boxing become symptomatic of the "New China." Her effortless ability to "whirl about and swoop, like a swallow on the river-bank in summer", therefore functions in sharp opposition to the earlier generation's social and physical imprisonment due to foot-binding (Hosie 51). As the narrator herself observes—

It seems, therefore, all the more remarkable that the Chinese woman of to-day, whose ancestors' lives for generations moved in these narrow limits, should be able to serve New China with so much distinction. Yet, of course, those women of the past possessed just as much brain and intelligence: they merely lacked opportunities of using them. They whetted their wits on each other within' their homes, instead of on outside agents and re-agents (Hosie 27).

This physical and by extension social liberation may be effectively connected to the wider socio-political stage where educated women were progressively moving past domestic confines into public domains of nation building. As General Chi, father to the school's founder Miss Chi, had once noted—"If boys neglect-right behavior and the virtues, girls shall learn them" (Hosie 109).

Hosie's narrative, thus explicitly corroborates the growing belief in gender and academic equality, a stand which undoubtedly fosters a tension between this newfound autonomy and

traditional marriage expectations. Hosie's observation that —“The new husbands of to-day also expect some literacy in their wives: the modern marriages demand some sort of equality in education”, then, on several levels remain in opposition to the harsh realities of several women who continued to endure the constraints of traditional domesticity (30). The experiences of the young Precious Jade Wang of the Wang household (the narrator's host) may be seen as an exemplar of this conventional respectability which often functioned in incongruence to the progressivism, tolerance and agency perceivable in the eclectic school just across the street—“Miss Way, as an educationalist confirmed and tested, was horrified at discovering that Miss Precious Jade Wang, under her very nose, just across the street, had for practically the whole of her long life of fourteen years been immersed in domestic affairs, almost to the exclusion of any schooling whatever” (Hosie 30). In keeping with the novel's practice of balancing perspectives is Miss Way's own unmarried status and her belief that “Heaven can use women's bodies and brains in other ways besides marriage”, a viewpoint which tellingly offer a counter-narrative to the idea that a woman's value is solely tied to marriage and childbearing (Hosie 67).

A strong feminist discourse is also perceivable in the narrator's commentary on the universal nature of female oppression—

In the same way, some modern Chinese girls have never seen a - bound foot, and ask their grandmothers how on earth the operation 'was performed. The modern And both, East and West, cry with conviction: “How hideous you must have looked!” The unbinding of the Chinese woman's foot, like that of the European woman's waist, _only came, historically speaking, in the nick of time. - No Western woman, tight-gripped in whalebone and coustil, could have toiled and laboured for her country through two wars, as she has done in this -generation. And no Chinese woman with crippled feet could

have ‘footed the long trails, sometimes one thousand, sometimes fifteen hundred miles, on mountain paths and over interminable sun-racked plains, to escape Japanese domination and lust (Hosie 51).

Nonetheless, Hosie’s musings on China’s modernity and womanhood, may be seen as being an extension of a long-established missionary-diplomatic tradition of interpreting Chinese culture for a Western readership. Whilst, *The Pool of Ch’ien Lung*, undeniably delineates China through a sympathetic, but somewhat authoritarian lens, the novel also tellingly critiques the Western “gun with gun” approach endorsing instead a deep-seated intercultural understanding, humility and awareness—“Typical of China, it must be opened from within. We foreigners smashed the doors open when we first sailed up the Pearl River and answered gun with gun” (Hosie 15). Furthermore, on a more symbolic level, Hosie’s usage of the “Buddha arm” metaphor vis-à-vis her desire to lengthen her vision from England back to China, also becomes explicative of the complexities of the “Old China Hand” (term used to refer to the treaty port foreign community that hegemonized the China discourse), one in which she advocates for China’s modernization while at the same time reiterating notions of Western tutelage. A distinctly post-colonial feminist perspective therefore becomes apparent in Hosie’s reflections on education, modernism and a renegotiation of gender roles.

The Specter of “Dwarf-Men”: Education and Japanese Militarism of the 20th Century

Yet another motif that remains all pervasive in Hosie’s discourse on modern China is her thoughtful engagement with the threat posed by large-scale Japanese aggression during the 1930s. The novel, functioning as a poignant reflection on the ills of wartime upheaval, also acts as a testament to the disturbances fomented by the presence of predatory Japanese soldiers and the forced migration of Chinese youths and students, which effectively transformed academics from a steady social institution into an act of nomadic resistance in pre-war China.

Indeed, Hosie delineates the Japanese presence not as a purely military conquest, but rather as an abrasive force that threatens to disrupt the very fabric of Chinese socio-cultural life. Repeatedly referred to as “predatory crows” or “bandy-legged little men in khaki”, the presence of the Japanese soldiers therefore became synonymous with a persistent, exhausting vigil, necessitating a plethora of defence manoeuvres on the part of the native populace (Hosie 10). For instance, the old gardener, Chang, must hide his “lovely secrets”, the dwarfed plum trees in a deep pit underground to prevent them from being looted by the “grasping Japs” (Hosie 11). The apprehension induced by the “monkey-people” is so ubiquitous that simple acts of hygiene, grooming or appearance are also weaponized—Old Mother Chang consciously besmirches her face with dirt and dishevels her hair to avoid rousing the “lustful desire” of the Japanese soldiers (Hosie 10). Telling, in W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood’s 1939 travelogue *Journey to a War*, they appropriately describe “China as a giant martyr, stuck full of swords and pestered by a tiny Jap aeroplane which buzzes round his head like a wasp” (132).

Education, under this despotic shadow, is also redefined as a form of moral and physical preservation, requiring, as it were, relentless watchfulness and alacrity. Indeed, the School of Accuracy and Good Manners, the symbolic backdrop of Hosie’s discourse, exists in a state of suspension and disquietude, with its figureheads, Miss Way and Blossom Lo, being “wearied with endurance” (Hosie 107). Similarly, acts of physical displacement, especially those concerning the youth and intelligentsia of the country, became an unwritten norm, with many choosing “to travel the long way to Free China” to join the resistance under the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek (Hosie 9).

Transforming thus, into a nomadic endeavour, education under coercive Japanese imperialism also functioned as a sanctuary and crutch for the future, as elucidated further by the emphasis on modern disciplines and physical training (Crystal Lily’s boxing classes). The

“New China” of Hosie’s imagination is therefore one born of this struggle, with the School of Accuracy and Good Manners functioning as a *mise-en-scène* for a culture that continues to resist extinction.

An Allegorical Discourse: Symbolism as a Commentary on Modern Womanhood

An undercurrent of exceedingly suggestive environmental symbolism in *The Pool of Ch’ien Lung* enhances further Hosie’s literary musings on the psychological and social landscape of early 20th-century China. In this context, the symbolism contained in the images of the pool, the lotus, the acacia tree, and the willows, not only furnishes the narrative with an ethnographic local colour, but also functions as a commentary on Chinese womanhood, female agency, resilience and a spiritually centred modernism.

The titular symbol of the novel, the Qing Emperor, Ch’ien Lung’s Pool, functions as a metaphor of China’s spiritual heart and the pressing need for transformation and self-renewal. Suggestively shaped like a “half-moon” and concealed behind a colonnade, the pool in the novel becomes emblematic of a space of refuge, a sanctuary, as it were, of peace and clarity in an age of wholesale chaos and social upheaval. The inscription—“Cleanse your Hearts”—carved out on the pavilion overlooking the water, acts as a further moral imperative of character, encouraging the visitor to wash away the “dolours” of life, and suggesting how the road towards modernism requires a return to a purified spiritual essence (Hosie 152). The “fat carp” flouncing in the pool acts as an extended metaphor for the latent energy confined within the bulwarks of tradition and past authority, symbolising China’s potential to thrive even amidst the restrictions of convention.

Likewise, the symbolic significance of the willow and lotus lies in the dialectic between grace of tradition and the resilience required of a fast modernising era. The “first faint gold” of

the willows on the banks of the river becomes suggestive of the arrival of spring and hope (Hosie 8). Interestingly, Hosie is seen establishing a contrast between the “utilitarian” pollarded English willows and the graceful, “slender fingers” of their Chinese counterparts, with the latter representing a natural, unforced beauty with the capacity to withstand the “iron-hard soil” of winter (Hosie 7).

In a similar vein, the lotus invoked using the proverb—“Out of the mud cometh Beauty”—becomes the final symbol of the country’s latent potential to rise beyond the “miry ponds” of chaos, one in which the “dreary brown plains” of the past are replaced by the “golden-green” of the future (Hosie 7).

Perhaps the most explicit commentary on modern Chinese womanhood is found in the symbolism of the acacia tree outside the narrator’s window—“That acacia-tree became something of a symbol of young Chinese womanhood to me. Once it was cared for, and nurtured, kept in a courtyard. Now, ever lovely and sensitive, but with energetic boughs, it had grown, had raised its head and shoulders above the roofs, was looking wide abroad” (Hosie 21-22). In a sweeping symbolic gesture, the acacia tree with its feet “confined to a courtyard”, a fact suggestive of the domestic constraints of the past, raises its head “in the open” rising “above the small ways of men” (Hosie 21). Sensitive yet energetic, the tree in the narrator’s imagination becomes one with Crystal Lily, a person who is able to strike the delicate balance between traditional refinement and a progressive modernism. By aligning such characters with such symbolic notions of transformation and progress, Hosie positions Chinese womanhood of the 20th century as an organic, inevitable growth, a “mighty step forward” that is able to maintain the foundations of the Chinese classics while embracing the freedom of a new era (Hosie 76).

The Confucian-Christian Synthesis: A Dialogue on Tradition vs. Modernity

Yet another motif dominating Hosie's narrative is the ideological battleground between past traditions and modernity. Commenting from the vantage point of wartime England in 1943, Hosie reconstructs her experiences in Peking to illustrate the manner in which British intellectuals of the interwar period visualized "modern China" as a hybrid entity, one struggling to retain its "spiritual heart" whilst adopting the mechanisms of progress. Commenting on the duality inherent in the progressive Chinese, especially the "returned Chinese students" of the times, Jerome Ch'en notes—

Their love of China and Chinese values was just as intense as their hate. They were quite incapable of resolving the conflict between Eastern and Western values and yet they were emotionally committed to both China and the country in which they had studied. Most Western-trained students in humanities and the social sciences unashamedly displayed their two sets of mutually contradictory loyalties; they defended Chinese values against Western criticism and defended Western values against Chinese criticism. In so doing they were culture mongers rather than original thinkers trying to arrive at a coherent synthesis of these two great traditions (159).

In the novel, this primary conflict is epitomized in the interactions between Miss Way, a representative of the austere Confucian orthodoxy, and the narrator, who on the other hand becomes symbolic of Christian pragmatism and progress. Through their spirited dialogues, mutual respect, shared social goals and a combined effort to reconstruct Chinese womanhood, Hosie creates a synthesis where the two schools of thought find a common ground. Sharing, as it were, an ethical foundation where they endorse integrity over dogma despite approaching the truth via different scriptures, both Miss Way and the narrator find commonality in the humanitarian impulses of both faiths. For instance, while Miss Way chooses to adhere wholly

to her Buddhist heritage, she is able to recognize that “the law of compassion, which both [Buddhism and Christianity] preach is good” (Hosie 41). In a similar vein, despite the severe upbringing of both parties, they echo each other’s distrust of “long-winded” philosophical and religious commentators—“My father used to say that ‘one proof of our faith was that it had survived its interpreters and the pulpit,’ I told her. She grunted her approval of this piece of caustic commentary, and growled that the - same might be said for long-winded Confucianist commentators” (Hosie 89). The Holy Bible, a frequent topic of their myriad debates, likewise offers a scope to reflect further on the same universal truths to be found in the Chinese socio-cultural milieu.

Furthermore, tradition and utility find an apropos intersection in Miss Way’s austere Confucianism and conventional propriety (Li), and Western disciplines like English, arithmetic and geography which furnish the young girls to tackle a fast-modernizing world. Conversely, the narrator’s self-perception as a trustee of the school rather than a proselytizer enables her to champion Miss Way’s vision of female agency, something which aligns with her own notion of “Biblical feminism.” Over time, this affinity also allows her to recognize how, on several levels, Miss Way’s abstemiousness and sobriety may be thwarting real psychological progress, something which eventually culminates in her attempts to equate the “Buddha’s arm” of compassion and the Christian duty of hospitality as two parts of the same spiritual effort to empower China.

In this context, it is perhaps only fitting that the maturity of this symbolic friendship is reached with an equally symbolic union, one in which traditional Chinese rituals and vows eternally cement a bond that is able to transcend culture. The friendship oath modelled on the “Peach Garden Ceremony” of Chinese history, thus functions as an act of profound grace, dignity and humility that appears to symbolically indicate a fellowship between the East and West. As the narrator herself notes—“A few months ago I had burst upon them almost

heedlessly, with my Western ways and ideas, and had not dreamed to awaken such depths of feeling (Hosie 161).

Peking as a Case Study of Hybridity: Architecture, Transport and Imperialist Nostalgia

In keeping with the syncretism of the times, is Hosie's delineation of the Peking of the 1930s. Functioning, as it were, as a classic case study of hybridism and large-scale change, Peking of the early 20th century became an apropos instance of that which characterized modern China in British imagination. Thus, the narrator's quarters at the Wang household, sports all the insignias of traditional Chinese artistry and architecture—a pavilion, a picturesque moon gate, wooded lattices, classical scroll paintings—things, which are suggestively paired with a large second hand wooden desk and modern glass window panes. A similar case of syncretism is perceivable also in the “wide bay in the road” where “horse-carriages and carts” seamlessly merge with “motors and rickshaws” (Hosie 15). Remarking on the overt nature of Western presence in the treaty ports, that often co-existed with a traditional Chinese socio-cultural milieu, Bickers notes—

Settlers built large residential, commercial and industrial suburbs in the Chinese cities open to them, constructed racecourses, jetties, roads, harbours, parks ... established public utilities, municipal administrations, faux hill stations on the Indian model, styles of architecture ... newspapers, bodies of literature, publishers, schools, churches, Masonic lodges, hospitals, prisons and all the other social institutions and infrastructure that might be expected (15).

Likewise, imperial grandeur and nostalgia are also seen coexisting with tides of reformist currents and practices. Indeed, the novel is interspersed with various references to the “Manchu houses of the nobility”, the antiquity and splendour of the bygone Qing monarchy (Hosie 14).

Whilst one can argue that such nostalgia on the part of the narrator may, in fact, be rooted in her own family's sinologistic tradition, which cherished the scholastic and aesthetic achievements of China's imperial past, it may also be seen as an extension of her British upbringing which influenced her perception of China as an antiquated nation gradually moving towards a modernist discourse while still retaining the moral clarity of the past. The symbolic significance of the Emperor Ch'ien-lung's pool as cleansing the spiritual heart of the nation can hardly be ignored in this context.

The "New China": Patronage, Endowments and Political Instability

Another strand of conflict in Hosie's narrative, is the one found in the intersection of politics and pedagogy as delineated primarily via the history of the School of Accuracy and Good Manners, founded, on the patronage of the patriarch General Chi, a high ranking Manchu official. Having bequeathed both his family mansion and three rural estates to his only daughter, Miss Chi for the purpose of promoting young girls' education, the Chi family became something of a societal outcast on account of having spurned a well-established Chinese custom of favoring male relatives. Such a progressive act of patronage, together with the political disturbances engendered by the 1911 Revolution, radically destabilized the school's finances, with the Qing officials losing much of their status and wealth, something which not only led to mounting debts, but also a "pettifogging lawsuit" over land rights that sapped the school's vitality for over 30 years (Hosie 122). Such vicissitudes on the socio-political stage and a transition from imperial endowments to republican-era litigation, therefore, effectively underscores the ways by which academic institutions were often caught in the crossfire of traditional patronage systems and an erratic, often predatory bureaucracy of a modernizing but unstable state.

In Hosie's novel, the extensive lawsuit episode becomes a pertinent instance of this tension between a bygone imperial tradition and the abrasive emergence of a modern nation. The lawsuit itself, rooted in a collision between legal and social philosophies, also becomes a means of exposing the corruption inherent in the judicial system of a nation in a state of flux. For instance, after eight years of devitalizing courtroom visits, the judge offers to pass judgment in favour of the current custodian (Miss Way) for one-third of the contested amount. The episode also reiterates the tensions inherent in the Confucian austerity of Miss Way, who refuses to let go of the lawsuit to continue honouring the memory of Miss Chi, and the pragmatism of the narrator, who argues that the "New China" requires a much needed shift towards living students rather than on the sanctity of ancestral graveyards—

Give up the lawsuit ... I know it is not the thirty dollars rent a year which keeps you defending your suit. I know it seems cowardly to withdraw after you have spent, so much money and life on it. But is it worth expending more of these? You have faithfully served your Teacher, Miss Chi, and her memory, and kept her wishes, for nearly thirty years. She would be the first to agree to your withdrawing, to your using your energy to better purpose than sitting hours here in this dingy place, growing ever more miserable. Nobody could have served their Teacher better than you have done (Hosie 121-122).

Interestingly, as noted earlier, the episode also underscores the specific challenges of independent, educated, but unmarried women like Miss Way who must pay a steep price to maintain the professional and institutional autonomy during periods of crisis. The lawsuit, as the narrator, time and again notes zaps the "precious vitality" of Miss Way and Blossom Lo, and yet caught in the mire of political upheavals and impending wars, both women but carry on—"I could not bear to think of this woman, who had given her all for the betterment of her

country, — her days, her woman's nervous strength, her joy in life, being thus harassed by a pettifogging lawsuit, her precious vitality sapped by these tedious, exhausting waits of many hours, fortnight by fortnight for the better part of eight interminable years" (Hosie 122). Nonetheless, their ultimate victory, suggestively arriving just before the outbreak of full-scale war with Japan in 1937, then becomes symbolic of not just a legal win, but also a spiritual vindication of modern China, with Miss Way's decision to not demand the rightful sum from her impoverished opponent acting as a further reinforcement of the capacity of educated women to lead the nation with humility, courage and righteousness. The passage from traditional antiquity to modernism in Hosie's novel, then, is not a clean break, but rather a painful litigation of it.

"I Want to Save China": A Narrative of Resilience and Hope

In its final analysis, *The Pool of Ch'ien Lung* may be seen as functioning as a testament to the Chinese nation's endurance and the seething hope for renewal it carried with it during the start of the 20th century. Published at the height of the Second World War, Hosie's *The School of Accuracy and Good Manners*, together with its motley crew of progressive inhabitants, thus doubtlessly acts as a microcosm of a country that refuses to be broken. The repeated thematic emphasis on "saving" China, together with the novel's focus on a gradually flourishing nation-state, then collectively engender a hopeful narrative of nation building, whilst at the same time endorsing the narrator's own role as a sympathetic, but external observer of the "New China."

The recurring motto—"I want to serve China. I want to save China", therefore function as the novel's teleological anchor, pushing a message that carries a deeply eloquent, and moral commitment that transcend the bounds of social strata, class and gender (Hosie 29). For the figureheads of the School, Miss Way and Blossom Lo, "saving China" becomes synonymous with a radical need to both preserve, as well as modernize the intellect, to foment, as it were, a

pedagogical mission worthy of national defence. Such an approach, undoubtedly, served the dual purpose of radicalizing the earlier vision of China as a regressive orthodoxy in Western imagination, while at the same time validating the country's own proactive agency to "cleanse the heart" and return to a state of spiritual clarity, as symbolically reinforced by the Qing Emperor Ch'ien-lung's pool. As Peter Zarrow observes—

Chinese nationalism was shaped by a sense of humiliation in the face of repeated foreign intrusions and invasions. Leaders and people were also acting to restore historic greatness. They understood China as a land of ancient glory. To survive and prosper, however, it needed new institutions. Above all it needed new citizens, to be shaped into a cohesive whole by common institutions like schools, the law, military service, and state propaganda (*Preface xvii*).

This motif of endurance in Hosie's discourse on modern China, then, is not a stagnant force, but rather something that holds the capacity to bring about a transformation that mirrors the natural world. The "willow" that "breaks in gold", becomes a metaphor of this resilience, suggesting how the country's hope lies in its ability to assimilate into the modern world without compromising its cultural essence. The youth, presented as the architects of this renewed future, are delineated as bearing the onus to bridge the gap between the cloistered past and the infinite potentiality of the future. The narrator herself adequately sums up such a standpoint, whilst commenting on how modernism, for the Chinese, acted as a two-fold prong—

One of the reasons for the over-long school hours was the feeling which pressed upon China that she had so very much to learn and catch up with in the way of modern science, languages, world history, geography and mathematics: all subjects unknown and unneeded in the past. Besides these fresh studies, Chinese children naturally had to learn to write and read their own Chinese ideographs, and these, however simplified

and reduced in number, require long and constant efforts of memory, much time and intense concentration. The Chinese written language is a great and glorious heritage. It has probably done more to keep China a unified and homogeneous nation during the centuries than any other factor (Hosie 28).

Conclusion

Hosie's narrative thus functions as a multi-faceted discourse on Chinese nationhood, woman empowerment, imperialist aggression, tradition, modernity, politics and pedagogy, presented, as it were, within a highly symbolic and suggestive framework. Her role as sympathetic guardian and observer, her missionary upbringing, together with her status as a long-term expatriate of the China coast, therefore positions her as a cultural bridge, a metaphor she examines through the "Buddha arm" image that reaches across the world to touch the lives of her Chinese friends—"My dears, my sisters ... here I am back again with I promised to come as soon as I could, you know, but this war ... All the same, I have never altogether left you. A part of my being has been constantly returning. And as I can't come in person, I have come in memory" (Hosie 12). Furthermore, her perception of the "New China" is not only marked by a thorough sense of optimism, but also an overt absence of Western cultural superiority that often marred the discourses of other China hands.

Needless to say, Hosie views modern China as a peer and an equal, and while she acknowledges her Western tutelage, she increasingly views herself as an heir to both the country's traditions and its resilience. It is perhaps only fitting, that the whole of her narrative endorses a similar sense of hope where she foresees how—"Out of the mud cometh Beauty ... when, with the eye of faith, they foresee the rose-red and glowing white of the lotus-flowers which will rear their heads out of the miry ponds when summer comes" (Hosie 7).

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