

My Recollections
Jin Yong, Chinese Author
By SGI President Ikeda

Chinese writer Jin Yong has lived a turbulent life. His might be the story of one of his heroes, always dedicated to helping the weak and resisting oppression.

In every Chinese community around the globe, the novels of Jin Yong are read and cherished. Everyone, from street vendors to university professors, from teenagers to senior citizens, hungrily devours his rich sagas. He can claim hundreds of millions of readers — too many, in fact, to count. His works reflect the essence of the Chinese spirit.

Jin Yong's novels portray sweeping dramas of people who are ready to fight for a just cause, driven by the conviction that not to do so is cowardice. Justice to them is more important than life itself. They fight evil and injustice, placing their lives on the line for their principles, heroes who live among the people.

And they take many forms: a warrior who becomes a wanted man because he dares to rebuke arrogant, corrupt officials; an intrepid soldier who goes behind enemy lines to save a comrade; an honest man who rises in avenging fury to clear his name when it has been sullied by conspirators; a young man who is badly burned in an attempt to save the husband of the woman he loves; a resistance leader torn between his cause and love; a sensitive young man who is gradually tempered and forged by life's trials, maturing into a great hero.

The protagonists in Jin Yong's novels are men of solid principle and women of strong resolve struggling together as comrades toward a common ideal. All of his characters are vibrantly alive, each completely unique.

He describes his creations: "I want to depict people who endure the most difficult circumstances with an invincible spirit and wage a valiant struggle to triumph over all obstacles. The reason I choose this kind of character is because this is the true nature of the Chinese people." Needless to say, this is also a description of the way Jin Yong has led his life.

Jin Yong, whose real name is Louis Cha, was born in China's Zhejiang Province in 1924. His ancestors, too, were people of principle. Jin Yong has profound respect for his grandfather, Cha Wenqing, who was a provincial governor toward the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Resentment against Western powers' incursions into China and the suffering this was causing the people in the province ran high.

A group of protesters set fire to a Christian church in a place called Danyang in Jiangsu Province. To them, the church and its clergy were nothing but agents of the foreign powers. The leader of the uprising was about to be executed, but Governor Cha helped the man escape. Then he resigned his post, taking full responsibility. He was prepared to give his very life to save the Chinese people. This inner strength of the Cha family has shaped Jin Yong's life as well.

Though his grades were always at the top of his class, Jin Yong was expelled from school twice. The first time was when he was 17. He wrote a satiric piece about an abusive head teacher in the school newspaper, which was pasted up on the school walls. The other students cheered, but he was expelled.

The second time he was expelled, Jin Yong was 20. Wanting to become a diplomat, he entered the Central School of Government, where again he was at the head of his class. But he soon became angered at the violent way in which students belonging to the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) harassed other students. He appealed to the university authorities for justice, but instead he was expelled for stirring up trouble.

Title: My Recollections: Jin Yong

Subject: World Tribune 10/17/97 n.3161 p.14 WT971017p14

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: author Chinese People Recollections Tribune World Writers Yong

Later, he moved to Hong Kong, where he founded a newspaper, *Ming Pao*. There, too, he continued to find himself in the line of fire. In one of our conversations, he said: “Because I have always stuck to my beliefs, I have been subject to death threats and forced to bear the pressure of living in constant danger. But what is right is right and what is evil is evil. I have never given in to pressure that goes against truth and justice. I always tell myself, ‘Even if you’re afraid, you must never beat a cowardly retreat when danger approaches, lest you be ridiculed by the heroes in your own novels!’”

As Jin Yong says, one determined person has the strength of a hundred. Even on the day his eldest son died, he laid aside his pain and grief to write an editorial for his paper just like any other day. He did what he had to do.

In 1962, as a result of the failure of China’s Great Leap Forward initiative (1958–60), a flood of refugees poured into Hong Kong from the mainland. In his newspaper, Jin Yong called for assistance and took part in activities to help the refugees.

When, in 1963, a Chinese government official announced, “We don’t need trousers, but we do need nuclear weapons,” Jin Yong countered in an editorial: “The Chinese people need trousers, not nuclear weapons!”

When the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) began, Jin Yong was one of the first to see it for what it was — a power struggle — and to report the truth. In his editorials, he predicted the ouster of Lin Biao, the comeback of Deng Xiaoping, and the fate of Mao’s widow, Jiang Qing. When asked how he was able to write such insightful editorials, Jin Yong replied that he upholds the principle of independence and refuses to be swayed by any temptation or pressure. This is a mark of true integrity.

In the Chinese classic of Mencius, we find the passage “To be above the power of riches and honours to make dissipated, [to be above the power] of poverty and mean condition to make swerve from principle, and [to be above the power] of power and force to make bend: — these characteristics constitute the great man.”¹

The will of a great individual cannot be swayed by external power.

One of Jin Yong’s characters says, “The courageous are clear in their loyalties.”² In other words, they are loyal to their benefactors and relentless in bringing to justice anyone who would dare harm those to whom they are indebted. This is an impassioned person of action, a person whom the good will befriend and with whom the corrupt will hesitate to meddle. What a contrast to the Japanese, who soon forget their debts of gratitude or injustices that need to be set straight!

But valor is different from recklessness. A true hero doesn’t need to resort to heroics. Jin Yong is a warm and magnanimous person. He is cheerful, unpretentious and open. He wears his great learning and accomplishment lightly, and his conversation is as refreshing and invigorating as a clear mountain stream.

Referring to the fact that the Japanese government has failed to apologize for its invasion of China during World War II, Jin Yong has said: “Though the Japanese have many fine characteristics, they are not international. It is like a person who is intelligent and has superior abilities but is not good at getting along with others. Such a person is very likely to be misunderstood and thought of in a negative light....

“My family was pretty well off, but we were entirely ruined by the Japanese army. My mother died during the Japanese occupation for want of medicine and proper nursing care, and my younger brother died during that time, too.”

In the *Analects* of Confucius, he says, “The mean man is sure to gloss his faults.”³ As a result, people don’t trust such a person, fearing that he will commit the same error a second and a third time. Asia, indeed the entire world, thinks of Japan as a nation of petty people. Why is that so? Is it perhaps because Japan does not demonstrate a sense of justice?

Title: My Recollections: Jin Yong

Subject: World Tribune 10/17/97 n.3161 p.14 WT971017p14

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: author Chinese People Recollections Tribune World Writers Yong

The *Huai-nan Zi*,⁴ one of the most important works of the early Han dynasty, says, “Justice is the foundation of the human being.” To know what is right and wrong is what makes us human. In China, this is called civilization.

Throughout its long history, Chinese society has been, for the most part, open and accepting of different peoples. Jin Yong points out that during the Tang dynasty (618–907), at least 23 non-Han Chinese held the post of prime minister. Pedigree is not important; what the Chinese have always valued is whether a person is civilized. In their eyes, all who share a belief in justice and righteousness are comrades and equals. This is one of China’s fundamental differences from Japanese society, which has traditionally been organized around kinship ties. In Japan, as long as one has “foreign” blood, one remains forever an outsider.

To link people together through culture, through civilization, is humanism. And this is what lays the groundwork for respect of universal values.

The British historian Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee urged us to learn from China. He told us that in this coming age of globalization, there are profound insights to be gained by studying the great multiethnic civilization that has flourished there since the beginning of recorded history. And China’s neighbor Japan has a special need to do so.

Will Japan survive the 21st century? I don’t think it’s going too far to say that Japan’s future will be decided by whether it can learn the universalism that China has. And Jin Yong is said to be one of the best articulators of that Chinese spirit.

Again, what is that spirit? To fight against oppression, to stick to one’s principles, and to keep one’s promises even at the cost of one’s life. That spirit links Jin Yong and myself and binds us together as true comrades.

Soon after our first meeting, Jin Yong said to me, in a decisive, confident voice:

“There is a Chinese saying: ‘One who never undergoes persecution is an inferior person.’ It means that a person who is not disliked or envied by others is not of any great caliber.”

WT

1. James Legge, “The Works of Mencius,” *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991), vol. 2, p. 265.
2. Jin Yong, *Shu jian en chou lu* (Book, Sword, Gratitude and Revenge).
3. James Legge, *Confucian Analects*, vol. 1, p. 342.
4. A collection of essays written or compiled by scholars at the court of Liu An (d. 122 B.C.E.), the first Han emperor.