

Tientsin Rotarian -- Norman Hinsdale Pitman
Translating and adapting Chinese folklore for Western audiences
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Norman Hinsdale Pitman, MA (*Tennessee*) (12 June 1876 – 6 March 1925) was an American educator and author recognized for his work in translating and adapting Chinese folklore for Western audiences.

Pitman ventured to the Ch'ing Empire (大清國) (China) in around 1900, where he spent most of his professional life or the second half of his life. He taught at Chihli Province College (直隸高等學堂) (1909–1912) and later served as a professor of English at Pei-Yang University (國立北洋大學) in Tientsin (*Tianjin*) (天津), the Republic of China (中華民國).

After the Rotary Club of Tientsin (天津扶輪社) was formally chartered on 10 May 1923, Pitman joined the Club as an Active Member. Regrettably, his Rotary life was quite brief because he passed away on 6 March 1925 and is buried in China.

Norman Hinsdale Pitman was born in Lamont, Michigan, United States, on 12 June 1876. He earned a Master of Arts from the University of Tennessee in 1897. Pitman had a career that took him far from his American roots. He ventured to China at the turn of the century, where he immersed himself in the local culture and traditions as he took up teaching positions in Chinese educational institutions. His experience in China greatly influenced his writing, leading him to translate and adapt a variety of Chinese tales into English.

Pitman contributed to the dissemination of Chinese folklore to English-speaking audiences in the early 20th century. Though not as widely recognized as some of his contemporaries, Pitman's work is notable for its role in bridging cultural divides and sharing aspects of Chinese culture through the art of storytelling.

Pitman's most popular compilation, 《The Chinese Fairy Book》 (1919), gathers myths, legends, fairy tales, and fables from Chinese traditions. His retelling of these stories was done with a sensitivity to the source material, while making them accessible and engaging for a Western audience. Though his name may not be as prominent in literary history as some of his peers, Pitman's work made an important cultural contribution. By bringing these tales to new readers, he not only preserved them but also fostered a greater appreciation for the richness of Chinese folklore outside of its country of origin.

Pitman's writing focused heavily on Chinese themes, ranging from children's fairy tales to romance novels. His most significant works include:

Major Book Collections

- A Chinese Wonder Book (1919): Widely considered his best-known work, this collection features 15 traditional Chinese myths and legends, including stories like "The Golden Beetle" and "The Great Bell".
- Chinese Fairy Stories (1910): An early collection that introduced classic Chinese tales such as "Fairy Old Boy and the Tiger" to English readers.
- Chinese Playmates (1911): A book focusing on stories for children set against the backdrop of Chinese culture.
- A Chinese Christmas Tree (1914): A short story collection themed around cultural celebrations in China.

Novels and Romances

- The Lady Elect: A Chinese Romance (1913): A novel that explores romantic themes within a traditional Chinese setting.
- Dragon Lure: A Romance of Peking (1925): Published posthumously, this romance is set in Peking (*Beijing*) (北京) during the era of Yuan Shih-Kai (袁世凱).

Selected Short Stories

Many of Pitman's individual stories are still frequently republished in modern anthologies of folk tales:

- "The Golden Beetle" – Explains why dogs hate cats.
- "The Nodding Tiger" – A tale of a tiger seeking redemption.
- "Princess Kwan-Yin" – A retelling of the legend of the goddess of mercy.
- "How Footbinding Started" – A cultural legend explaining the origins of the practice.

