

CHINESE LITERATURE

Monthly



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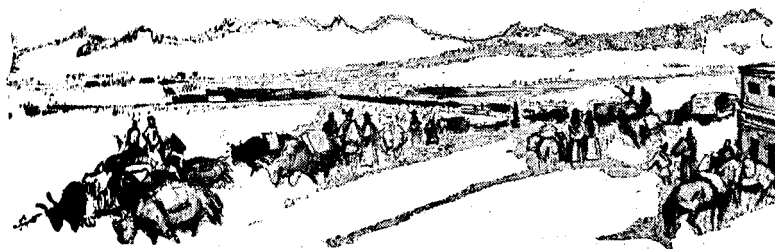
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LIU KEH

A Bridge for Galha Ford

I was in command of a border defence company at the time. We were stationed at Galha Ford, an important river-crossing.

Situated in a huge gorge, the ford was not only a passage way for travellers and merchants, it also led directly to a large section of the Himalaya Mountains. But there had never been any bridge here. Transport consisted of a few rafts of inflated cowhide, which took a rough tossing in the turbulent current.

After the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951, traffic increased enormously. Farm implements, tea, grain coming in, wool, hides, medicinal herbs, iron plate being transhipped from abroad, going out . . . all passed through Galha Ford. Of course, in addition, many government personnel, as well as supplies for our army, also crossed the river at this point.

A few cowhide rafts obviously weren't enough. This traffic bottleneck was impeding the development of the local

Liu Keh, a writer of stories, is a member of the Tibetan regional forces.

economy and the improvement of the lives of the people. And so headquarters decided that my company should build a bridge at Galha Ford — a motor vehicle bridge.

While waiting for our engineer to arrive, we set to work gathering lumber. Except for a couple of new recruits, every man in the company was an old hand at bridge building. We had erected a number of important bridges when the Sikang-Tibetan Highway was being constructed. We had a pretty good idea of what types of timbers suited what types of rivers — according to the speed of flow and width of the span required. Unless we could accumulate several thousand cubic metres of heavy timbers, no bridge would ever rise above the rapid Galha waters.

We were all very excited with the project. Early in the morning, I sent a mounted squad upstream along the river to look for a forest. Our experience in building the Sikang-Tibetan Highway told us there was almost sure to be woods in the snowy cloud-draped mountains.

But five days passed and the squad did not return. Seven days, and still no sign of them. Finally, after more than half a month, they hurried back in a swirl of dust. Squad leader Jan reported that they had followed the river a long distance without seeing a tree.

Immediately after this, I rode out on to the grassy plateau to question the shepherds, to ask whether their area had any trees. But here too I was disappointed. For endless generations the shepherds had never gone into the hills. They travelled only from one pasture land to another. Their woven yak-hair tents had no need of any wood.

What were we to do? Naturally we couldn't give up! The shepherds offered us one thread of hope. They said there were vast mountains to the west; perhaps there we could find forests. I decided to lead Jan's squad off on another search myself.

After a few days of preparation we set out, equipped with tents and a supply of grain and ammunition. We combed desolate mountains and lofty ranges for over a month without discovering any woods. But we were not discouraged. We were convinced that somewhere in these

great sprawling mountains a large stand of timber awaited us. No matter what the difficulties, we would find it.

One day, coming through a snow-filled pass, we arrived at a place called Samindamin. It was surprisingly well populated, with several small hamlets. Green crops filled the long narrow river valley. Fields of wheat and *chingko* barley rippled in the breeze; along the meandering river were thick growths of willow. Our eyes brightened at the sight of this "oasis." It was lovely! We decided to stop here and rest a week until our grain supplies caught up. Then we would continue to push on westward.

The inhabitants of Samindamin were all good honest people. When our PLA troops had passed through here two years before they had dug a long irrigation channel for the villagers; it was still in excellent condition. Needless to say the Samindamin folk remembered the PLA with affection. When we showed up, families from every hamlet rushed to invite us to their homes. They treated us like relatives, surrounding us, plying us with questions. We chatted about all manner of things.

Of course we spoke of the Galha bridge and our quest for lumber. All the grown-ups knew Galha; they agreed it certainly needed a bridge. As to lumber, they said flatly the only way to get it was to buy it abroad. To the west was only barren mountains and grassland, and beyond the grassland still more grassland. Many of them had been there.

In order to confirm these statements, I led four men on a quick swing through two hundred *li* of the area to the west. Every person we asked said exactly the same thing — there was no forest in this part of the country.

Our hopes were thoroughly dashed. If there had been a shadow of a chance for a bridge at Galha before, now there wasn't even that.

It seemed pointless to stay in Samindamin any longer. Irritable and depressed, we were anxious to get back to Galha as soon as possible. When the local people saw us preparing to leave, they pleaded with us to remain. They presented us with ceremonial *hata* scarves and many gifts,

including even a couple of sheep. Of course we couldn't accept these gifts; we kept only one *hata* from each hamlet. I had Jan let our men go individually to each of the hamlets and express our thanks for the cordial reception the people had given us.

At dusk all of the men came back on time except Ouyang Chiu, our youngest horseman. We waited, but he still didn't return. That young imp, what could be keeping him? Could anything have happened? I waited a bit longer, then the strain was just too much. Jan and I, each carrying tommy guns, separated and went out to look for him. After anxiously following the highway a considerable distance, I climbed a slope. Then I saw him—Ouyang Chiu was coming towards me through the thin mist. He was running gaily across a grassy field, looking unbearably excited, as if bursting with some momentous piece of news.

I was just about to call to him when "ping!"—a shot rang out. The boy staggered and collapsed. . . .

For a moment I was petrified with surprise. Then I whipped my tommy gun around and dashed in the direction from which the shot had come. But I found no one, and there was no second shot. I paused a moment, then hurried back to Ouyang Chiu. The young horseman was fading rapidly.

Accurate and well-concealed sniping! Obviously the marksman had received special training. A dangerous professional enemy.

Silently grieving, I took the boy in my arms. The wind began to moan dismally. Suddenly young Ouyang opened his eyes. In a weak but clear voice he whispered in the gathering dusk:

"Commander, this place has timber. . . ." He tried to say more, but his voice drifted away.

Then, Jan and the entire squad, in battle array, came rushing up to us, followed by a swarm of villagers. I told everyone what had occurred. Leaving Jan and three other men with Ouyang Chiu, I took the remaining seven members of the squad and went directly to the local chieftain.

The chieftain agitatedly assured me that such a thing had never happened in Samindamin before. He fervently promised to investigate.

Ouyang Chiu died. Besides his strange last statement, he also left us another memento—an unusual looking Tibetan bow. He had it slung across his back when he was shot. I had seen archery contests at Tibetan country festivals, but none of the bows used compared with this one. It was huge, and very old.

I wasn't sure about his bow, but I was positive that his dying words were intimately connected with the Galha bridge. Could he have learned the whereabouts of some secret forest? Was that the reason for his murder by a lurking foe?

I went to the chieftain almost every day and pressed him to get to the bottom of the matter. To prevent any more casualties, I ordered our squad not to wander about outside the village, and to keep their weapons handy at all times. After several days, frowning unhappily, the chieftain confessed that he was unable to discover who had committed the crime. He had searched everywhere without unearthing a single clue. He was powerless to do anything.

Unquestionably, the problem was complicated. We were not the only ones interested in the bridge. Our enemies must be too. One thing was certain—the man who had fired the shot was not someone who had suddenly arrived in Samindamin. Only a local resident would have known where to lie in wait so as to kill Ouyang Chiu at the time and place he did. It appeared that there was indeed a secret about a forest, a secret known only to very few, and that young Ouyang had somehow learned it.

Originally my guess was that after the murder of Ouyang Chiu the sniper would kill the other person who knew the secret and then flee. I made special preparations to apprehend him. But strangely enough, the enemy made no further moves. The other person who knew the secret did not seek us either. All was peaceful.

It seemed to me dragging the matter out any longer through the chieftain was useless. We had to take direct action. After careful consideration I decided to split our force into two. Jan would lead four men and continue west in search of a forest. At the same time, he could inquire as to whether any suspicious characters had been observed in that region lately. I would command the second group. We would go from hamlet to hamlet digging for clues.

There were many people in the hamlets. I didn't believe that there could be any question about the ordinary simple peasants. Most important to us were the drifters, the itinerant hired hands, the wandering tinkers and carpenters, and the drivers who frequently went abroad with the mule pack trains.

But after a week of investigation, the material we gathered proved that all the local men of this type were quite good people. Respectable hard workers.

I racked my brains; I couldn't sleep nights. The whole thing was so vague. We couldn't even make a start. Earlier I had thought of taking the bow and looking for its owner. Undoubtedly, young Ouyang had gone to some man's house before he was killed and had been given the bow. But I hesitated. Until we knew more about it, bringing the bow out in public might flush our bird and make him take wing before we were ready.

Now, however, I felt I had to produce the bow. I wanted nothing more than for it to stir up some waves!

The next day, with the bow across my back, I went into the hamlets. I thought finding its owner would be simple. He would easily recognize it. Even if he didn't want to, or didn't dare to, other people would tell me whose bow it was.

But contrary to my expectations, although I walked the length of every hamlet, not a soul recognized the bow. People only stared at it in surprise. They said they had never seen such a bow before.

I paraded about with the bow for several days, growing more and more confused. Not only didn't it stir up any

waves, it didn't even create a ripple. All was peaceful — unnaturally peaceful.

Jan and his men came back, thin and blackened by the sun, their lips dry and cracked, the skin on their faces peeling, their uniforms caked with white dust. Jan told me they had scouted day and night, covering the entire western region. It was just as the local people had said — grassland and then more grassland. Had there been so much as a sapling on this endless prairie the patrol would have seen it fifty *li* away, to say nothing of a forest.

I was speechless. Could Ouyang Chiu's death been an accident, his final words mere raving? No. Certainly not. But it was very strange. Why couldn't we find the secret forest? Was it in the sky? Or underground? Had it turned into a needle? The more I thought the more irritated I became. As day was ending, I leaped on my horse and galloped out along the open road. I was so irascible, I had even forgotten to remove the bow from my back.

For twenty *li*, I raced without a halt. Then a flock of sheep on the road ahead blocked my way, and I reined in. Against the glorious crimson sunset sky, the flock was like a white cloud floating on the grass. Little lambs were bleating. Distant snowy mountains rolled like billowing waves as far as the eye could see, mystic, illusory. . . .

I jumped from my horse and drew a deep breath. How pleasant it would be to sit a while on this lush green grass, so long and soft. . . . My reflections were interrupted by the clear voice of a little girl behind me:

"Hey, that bow belongs to my grandpa. It's my grandpa's. . . ."

Startled, I turned quickly around and stared at her. Then I squatted down and took her two hands in mine.

"Where does your grandpa live, little girl?"

"Grandpa lives in the hamlet. I've come out here with Uncle Kalzang to tend the sheep. Look, aren't our sheep nice?"

"Oh yes, beautiful. Are you sure this bow belongs to your grandpa?"



"Yes, yes! He guarded it very closely! What's it doing on your back?"

Taking her by the hand, I walked with her to the tent, where we found Kalzang. The little girl was called Galsa, Kalzang informed me, and she did indeed have a grandfather in the hamlet. The grandfather's name was Yarsi; he was over eighty years old. Yarsi wasn't a Samindamin man. He had come alone from somewhere outside. He never went back to his old home afterwards; Kalzang had heard that it was far away.

Yarsi was a good person. He never quarrelled with his neighbours. In his younger days, he drove a train of pack mules. When Logyaltsan, Galsa's father, grew up, he took the old man's place. In recent years, Logyaltsan had been cultivating a few crops; they hired out their dozen or so mules to someone else. But they didn't care much whether they received forty per cent of the profit or only thirty, because in his youth Yarsi had acquired a lot of money.

Yet in spite of the fact that the family had money, the old man didn't seem happy. Of course, he had always been a man of few words, but there was a perpetually harassed

gleam in his eyes. Yarsi denied that anything was wrong. If you pressed him, he would just smile mournfully.

Logyaltsan, too, had always been a taciturn fellow. While his eyes never looked harassed, after his wife died, he grew increasingly sombre.

In short, it was a joyless family. People seldom heard either father or son laugh. For that reason, little Galsa liked to get away and run about in the open. Her uncle Kalzang often took her with him when he drove the sheep to pasture.

As to the bow, Kalzang said he hadn't seen it before, but if Galsa said the weapon belonged to her grandfather, it was probably true.

The shepherd was a friendly, talkative fellow. I had only to mention a topic and he would at once elaborate at great length. He seemed to know a lot about all the hamlets, and he was a keen observer. He was the sort, if you put a pot of wine in front of him, who could ramble on for three days and three nights without a stop.

Right now, I had no time to chat. Since the bow did indeed have a master, I had to find that person immediately. The mystery had to be solved first.

After obtaining Kalzang's permission, I mounted my horse and pulled little Galsa up beside me. Together, we rode towards the hamlet. Passing our squad's camp site, I shouted for Jan. My comrades were worried. Their horses were saddled; they were just about to go looking for me. I told them briefly what I had learned, then gave Jan a wink. He understood. A tommy gun across his back and a pistol on his hip, he swung into his saddle and followed us.

Galsa directed us to her house. Surrounded by trees, it stood in a secluded quiet spot at the end of the hamlet. Night had already fallen. We couldn't see very clearly.

At Galsa's call, the door was opened. She shouted joyfully, delighted that she should be able to bring two PLA men to her home. Her father restrained her exuberance and welcomed us warmly. Old grandpa, over eighty, was

deaf, and his sight was dim. When he understood who we were, a smile fled across his expressionless face.

Holding Galsa on my lap, I related how I had met her, and gradually brought our conversation around to the bow. At first, Logyaltsan pretended he had never seen it before. Galsa chortled with laughter.

"That's grandpa's bow, father, it's grandpa's! Can't you see?"

"Nonsense, Galsa! Did you ever see grandpa with a bow like that? You know you didn't!"

Frightened by her father's threatening tone, Galsa hid behind her grandfather.

I had Jan bring the bow, and I pressed it into Yarsi's hand. Shouting into his ear, I asked him whether the bow wasn't his. He was silent for a long time. I held my breath. If the old man denied it, the situation would become hopelessly complicated. Then Yarsi began to stroke the bow caressingly, again and again. His hands trembled. Tears gushed from his eyes. Finally, he said in a low voice:

"Your honour, the bow is mine!"

Heaving a sigh of relief, I turned to Logyaltsan. He hung his head in embarrassment. After clearing his throat several times, he explained. The bow was his father's. The old man had kept it concealed for many years. One night at dusk a young PLA soldier had visited them and Yarsi had presented him with the bow. Who would have believed that soon after the youngster had left them they would hear the sound of a shot! They were very afraid that they would be implicated. That was why they didn't want to admit the bow was theirs. They knew no one else had seen it. . . . Logyaltsan spoke quite reasonably.

But why had the old man given young Ouyang the bow in the first place? Logyaltsan's halting explanation went back many years.

The story I pieced together was this: In 1904, the invasion of Tibet by the British imperialist army infuriated the Tibetan people, and they rose up in arms to defend themselves. Yarsi distinguished himself with his bow during

the battle of Gyangtse, and he cherished the weapon ever after. Now the PLA had come, bringing medicines for the sick, good seed and farm implements for the peasants; they built highways; trade was flourishing; life was improving rapidly for Yarsi's people. His beloved Tibet was for ever safe from invaders. The old man was extremely grateful. Not only was young Ouyang the first PLA man ever to visit his house, he was also a charming, lovable youngster. Impulsively, Yarsi gave him his most prized possession.

In a loud voice, I repeated Logyaltsan's tale to the old man. Was it true? I asked him. He nodded.

"It's true, your honour, but—" A sharp look from Logyaltsan stopped him from going on. He dropped his head. I didn't think it wise to press him any further at this time.

The story of the bow seemed genuine, as far as it went. But father and son obviously had quite different feelings about it. Who knew what else the old man could tell me if given the chance? Until other clues could be uncovered, he was an important link.

On the pretext that I wanted to check into what direction young Ouyang had taken after he left their home, I asked whether Jan and I might live with them a few days. Logyaltsan looked shaken. This evidently was something he had never expected. But he smiled and said we were welcome. The old man remained silent.

That night, Logyaltsan hospitably provided us with bedding and gave us the best room in the house. We chatted, and he told me of his wife who had died and something about the hamlet. But he said not a word about his father.

After Logyaltsan left me, I went out into the yard to see to our horses. Someone had already generously filled the trough with hay. Pretending to look for something, I made a circuit of inspection around the house. Then I returned to our room. As we got into bed, I reminded Jan to keep his weapons handy.

Late at night, I was awakened by someone talking in the other side of the thin wall. The voice was low, but seething with emotion. I sat up abruptly and listened. I couldn't

distinguish the words, but I recognized the speaker as Logyaltsan. Then a hoarse old voice cried pleadingly:

"By heaven, I don't know, I don't know! What do you want me to say? . . ."

It was Yarsi. He was cut short by the sound of a heavy blow, then all was still. After a long time, I again heard Logyaltsan's angry voice, even lower than before. Yarsi said nothing more.

Hearing a cough in the corridor, I quickly lay down and pretended to snore. I couldn't fall asleep again. Yarsi's words kept running through my mind. He didn't know. What didn't he know? And what was Logyaltsan trying to force out of him?

The next day, nothing unusual occurred. Father and son were both at home. It was as if the furious words of the night before had never been uttered. Yarsi was as silent as ever, Logyaltsan was as sombre as ever—although quite considerate of us.

I hoped to find a chance to speak to the old man alone, but I didn't succeed. He was unwilling to talk; what's more, I had to shout to make myself heard. I decided to let it go. But I continued to observe him closely. It seemed to me that in his dim eyes I could detect a pitiful tragedy. Kalzang was right. These people had money but they were not happy. Probably our coming had intensified their unhappiness. The place had the oppressive atmosphere of the tomb!

The only one to bring a breath of fresh air into the house was Galsa. She loved to sing and dance, and was for ever shifting the flower pots about. That evening, I drew her on to my lap and asked: Is grandpa good? Yes, good. What about father? He's good, too. And the People's Liberation Army? Very, very good! she said. She wanted to go with me immediately and join the PLA.

We both laughed. Yarsi and Logyaltsan smiled wryly.

Three days passed. We still hadn't the thread of a lead. No one in the hamlet knew whether young Ouyang had gone to visit anyone else after leaving Yarsi's house. For

that matter they didn't even know that he had been to see the old man. Of course their not knowing didn't prove that he hadn't called at some other remote silent dwelling.

Between Yarsi and Logyaltsan there seemed to be a secret conflict. Perhaps it was this conflict which made the atmosphere of the house so heavy. But what, precisely, was it?

Late that night, the conflict became violent.

I don't know what time it was, but I was abruptly awakened by dogs barking, and I heard the compound gate being opened. Through the window, I saw Logyaltsan holding a flashlight; the person he was admitting looked like a PLA man.

I was very surprised. What could have brought our comrade here at this hour of the night? Was there some emergency? I leaped out of bed and, with Jan right behind me, hurried into the courtyard.

"Who is it? What's up?" I cried, at the same time turning on my own flashlight.

I was stunned. The man revealed in the beam wasn't one of our mounted troop, he was a total stranger. The man seemed paralysed for a second, then he turned and ran, hastily mounted his horse and fled pell-mell.

"Who was that?" I asked Logyaltsan sternly.

"I don't know," replied Logyaltsan coolly. "He said he was looking for you."

"To horse!" I shouted. Jan and I were soon in hot pursuit of the racing imposter. As we were leaving the hamlet, it suddenly occurred to me that if Logyaltsan had been lying then something terrible was going to happen in his house.

Yelling to Jan to continue the chase, I swung my horse around and galloped back. When I reached the compound, the gate was shut tight. This was no time for courtesies. I quickly scaled the compound wall and dashed into the house.

But I was too late. I heard Yarsi utter a short tragic cry, then all was still. As I entered the room, in the flicker-



ing lamplight I saw Logyaltsan savagely clutching a bloody knife as he stamped insanely on his father's dead body.

"So you won't talk, you old carrion!" he was ranting. "So you won't talk!"

I trained my gun on him from the doorway.

Startled, he raised his hands. It was obvious he hadn't expected me to return so soon. Two hours later, Jan and Kalzang arrived with the false PLA man in tow. At the sight of him, Logyaltsan's face went pale. Jan told me he had chased his quarry past Kalzang's tent on the slope. If Kalzang hadn't rushed out and intercepted him, the scoundrel might have got away.

When I questioned him, he confessed readily enough realizing that his game was up. His name was Chien. He was a Han, a secret agent of the Kuomintang and American spy and sabotage organization. His local contact was Logyaltsan. Logyaltsan's greed and dissolute ways while on trips with his mule train had immediately attracted the enemy's

attention to him as a likely prospect. Sure enough, when approached with money, he promptly agreed to work against his own people.

Since then, Logyaltsan had been in the service of the American-Kuomintang spy ring, reporting through agents like Chien whatever information he could pick up. Logyaltsan of course relayed the fact that our company was seeking lumber to build a bridge at Galha. He was confident that we would fail, for he knew that the region was completely devoid of forests.

Yarsi had observed the unsavoury-looking strangers who had been calling on Logyaltsan in recent years. Although they were Hans, they obviously weren't PLA. Could they be Kuomintang spies in the service of the American imperialists? The old man had heard of such people. A patriot who had fought against foreign invaders, he was tortured by suspicion, and his relations with his son grew more strained than ever.

Then, a few days ago, young Ouyang called at the house. The old man, deaf and nearly blind, didn't go out much. Through the young PLA man he learned for the first time that we were looking for timber to build the Galha bridge. Moved by his gratitude to our army, old Yarsi not only gave Ouyang his beloved bow, he also told him, in Logyaltsan's presence, that he knew where a cache of lumber was buried.

When young Ouyang, overjoyed, hurried back to tell us, Logyaltsan took a short cut, hid himself, and shot the boy down. He then stealthily conferred with Chien, who instructed him to learn the location of the lumber from the old man as quickly as possible. If Yarsi couldn't be persuaded to talk, they would kill him to prevent him from telling the secret to the PLA. The two intended to commit the murder dressed in our army uniforms, hoping in this way to arouse the whole border area against us.

If Yarsi revealed to Logyaltsan where the lumber was hidden, they planned to kill him anyway. Then they would destroy it to make sure we didn't get it.

How did the old man know about the cache? Back in 1904, when the British invaded Tibet, their army also wanted

to build a bridge at Galha, but for military purposes. Because they could find no local forests, they imported timbers from abroad. A great stockpile was accumulated at Galha, and was guarded by several hundred English soldiers. The enraged local people determined that the bridge should not be built. One night, the Tibetans attacked. Bloody fighting ensued. Just as the battle was at its height, there was an earthquake. Tons of snow and earth came tumbling down in an avalanche, burying everything. Half a mountain top was sheared off, the river changed its course; the original Galha Ford disappeared. The present Galha was built since the disaster.

Subsequently the international situation changed and the British troops left Tibet. The bridge was never built.

Only one man escaped alive from the holocaust. That was Yarsi.

Yarsi fled from the scene like a man possessed. Several years later, poverty-stricken, he remembered the avalanche. Many English soldiers lay buried there. Not only did they have money and guns; they also had loot—gold and jewelry. Yarsi travelled a long distance to return to the place of the disaster. After a few days of careful search, he found a rusted cartridge.

Stealthily, he started to dig. At a depth of several metres, he finally unearthed corpses with rings on their fingers and rusted rifles by their side. Continuing to dig, he found the timbers, all in very good condition.

From that day on, Yarsi began to prosper. He made a number of trips to the site. Naturally, he didn't tell anyone about it. But people noticed him selling guns and jewelry, and they became suspicious. To avoid an official investigation, he took his money and property and moved to Samindamin. He built a house, married a local girl, bought a team of pack mules, and settled down.

When his son Logyaltsan was nineteen, the old man again made a trip to the avalanche site. On his return, he confided his secret to Logyaltsan. Little did he know that his son would use this secret to extort money from him. Yarsi had been bitter over the suffering of the Tibetan peo-

ple at the hands of the British invaders, and he was ashamed of the manner in which he had gained his wealth. When Logyaltsan began blackmailing him, he grew very morose.

Logyaltsan had not had any interest in the timbers until he heard that the PLA was searching for lumber. Then, after conferring with the American-Kuomintang spy organization, he began pressing the old man to tell him exactly where the avalanche had occurred. Yarsi pretended to have forgotten.

Then we arrived in Samindamin, and Yarsi blurted the secret to Ouyang Chiu. The old man saw Logyaltsan go out with his rifle immediately after the young fellow left his home. When Yarsi learned that Ouyang Chiu had been murdered, his suspicions of his son were confirmed. Logyaltsan was a spy in league with the Tibetan people's enemies! Hating his son to the marrow of his bones and sick of the whole business, but not having the courage to tell me the truth, Yarsi decided to kill himself. Logyaltsan murdered him before he could carry out his intention.

But where were the timbers? We still didn't know.

As we were searching the old man's room, the door of a small cupboard flew open and a frightened little Galsa crawled out. With trembling hands, she gave me a letter. I hugged her closely to my chest, then slowly opened the envelope.

It was a farewell note from Yarsi. He told the whole story — all the things I have just related. He begged that we take care of Galsa, and bring her up to be a good person. Yarsi also set forth the exact location of the 1904 avalanche. There we would find the timbers brought in by the British imperialist army.

One year later, hand in hand, Galsa and I walked across the big bridge at Galha. As the local people presented the ceremonial *hata* scarves at the opening ceremony, I looked off into the misty distance. For some reason tears came to my eyes.

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

Illustrations by Liu Po-shu

KAO YIN

Dajee and Her Father

It has been several months since I left Liangshan Mountains, the home of the Yi people who had lived in slavery until liberation ten years before. Every evening after work when my little daughter threw herself into my arms, put her soft little hands round my neck and nestled her warm face against mine, I let myself relax in the joys of being a father. It was at such moments that the face of a young girl from Liangshan and that of her father would come before my eyes. I want to tell you their story, a tale of love and hate. That is why I've brought out my diary and copied the following pages.

June 7 Fair

After a whole day's ride on horseback and asking my way numerous times, I at last arrived in the little village of Chiaku. At the edge of the village, I met the co-operative chairman Shama Muya, an old acquaintance of mine from the people's congress of the autonomous *chou*. He greeted me warmly, took the reins of my horse and walked into the village by my side.

Shama is a middle-aged man with an open, cheerful and rugged face. Only the deep lines on his forehead reveal of his bitter past. We sat opposite each other across the hearth as he told me about co-op affairs, a pipe between

his teeth. He mentioned the name of Maherha, a member of the co-operative managing committee, who seemed to be sulking lately. Maherha showed little interest in his work and even failed to appear at co-op meetings. Poor Shama's face darkened, as if all the black clouds in the sky had cast their dark shadows on it.

"He's dissatisfied with the co-op's farming then?" I asked.

"Never heard him complain in that respect."

"Are you people good to him?" I tried again.

"Why not?" he replied without hesitation. "We are all 'sons of the hearth'* who suffered plenty. Our hearts are bound close together."

I was puzzled. I had to get to the bottom of this. "How old is Maherha?"

"How old? . . . Ah, he doesn't even know that himself. Probably past sixty."

"Has he got a family?"

"He has a daughter in her late teens; her name's Dajee. . . ." he answered slowly passing his pipe to me.

"Do they have a hard time still?"

"How can that be? He is emancipated now. He has built himself a new house and gets enough to eat and warm clothes to wear. Only the other day he bought a new pleated skirt for Dajee."

I asked no more but sat silently smoking.

June 8 Fair

Before supper, Shama took me to visit Maherha. Thick, greyish, white smoke oozed out of a narrow door. Supper was cooking.

"Maherha!" Shama called.

"Come in," a heavy voice trailed out with the smoke.

My eyes watered as I entered the door. When I recovered slightly, I noticed a man by the hearth, his head covered by a black kerchief and a dark grey wool cape over his shoulders.

*Slaves. •

"Maherha, Comrade Li has come to see you," said Shama. I was sure he would offer me a seat with a friendly gesture, that was the least he could do under the circumstances. But he didn't even say hello. I sat down silently opposite him as he continued with bowed head to poke at the damp faggots in the hearth.

"Where's Dajee?" asked Shama.

"Still digging the fields," Maherha answered in a low, husky voice.

"What are you cooking for your daughter?" I asked, eager to join in the talk.

"Vegetable soup," he smiled wryly.

I seized the opportunity to continue, "It's smoking hard. You should pile the faggots up a little."

He made no reply, but continued to sit there coldly.

The fire got going and the smoke gradually dispersed. Shama and the old man began discussing the building of an irrigation ditch. As I listened with half a ear I observed

Maherha closely. He seemed very old. His thin, dark, sallow face, coarse as tree bark, was heavily lined. A few deep furrows cut across his prominent forehead like imprints of a heavy whip. His small brown eyes squinted in the firelight as, back bent, he stretched hands bony as dry pine twigs towards the fire. The sight of this old man brought the dark shadow of slavery to my eyes: heavy leather whip whistling over bare backs, iron fetters clanking, hard

labour, wild herbs and disease. My heart was heavy.

"Grandad Maherha, do you do the cooking for your daughter every day?" I asked.

He nodded.

"What a good father you are," I said loudly.

"Maherha is a very fond father," Shama put in. "Every time he gets his share of income from the co-op he hastens

to the county town to get beads or some pretty cotton cloth for Dajee." At the mention of his daughter, a faint smile floated to Maherha's lips, but it vanished just as quickly.

"Comrade Li," he blurted out suddenly, "are there bad men still among you Han people?" His small narrow eyes, enmeshed in a network of wrinkles, were pinned on me. I was taken aback. It was the first time such a question was addressed to me in Liangshan.

"There are some bad men still," I answered, "such as bad landlords and rich peasants who refuse to abide by the law; there are some petty thieves too. . . ."

Just then we heard a cackling and flapping of wings outside and the voice of a young girl calling to the chickens. Then one hand holding up her long skirt, a girl about seventeen entered the door.

Maherha's head turned to her at once. "Come and have your supper, Dajee," he said, his husky voice full of warmth.

The girl sat down close to him. "Ahda,* our chickens are always straying into the fields to peck at the vegetables." Her voice was sweet as spring water gurgling in the valley. Glancing at me out of bright black eyes, she cocked her head a little to ask, "Where did you come from?"

"From the other side of heaven," I answered teasingly.

"But I can see you haven't got wings," she laughed merrily.

Her hair, plaited into a thick black braid and adorned with little red beads, was coiled on top of her head over which was a small black kerchief with embroidered edgings was draped. A tight black cotton blouse hugged her young breasts. There was a strand of pretty red pearls round her neck. Her skirt, spread out on the ground, seemed a round lotus leaf floating on water. Her face was round

* Father.



and smooth; her features small and even. I was surprised that she had not the heavy contour and sharp lines of the Yi girls. Instead, her eyes were soft and two tiny dimples danced in her cheeks. Really, she did not resemble her father in the least.

Dajee began to ask me about construction in the Han areas. When I told her about factories, airplanes, trolley-buses . . . she listened wide-eyed, her eyebrows delicately arched.

To my surprise, old Maherha cut me short coldly. "Dajee, our Liangshan government will see to all that too in the future. Eat your supper now."

As he handed me a ball of cooked buckwheat, he asked me another strange question, "You said there are still bad men among the Hans. Would they be coming here to bully us and kidnap our people again?"

Before I had a chance to answer, Dajee said, "Don't talk nonsense, *Ahda*. Who dares to bully us now?"

Maherha sank into a silence from which he did not rouse even when we took our leave.

June 11 Fair

Time to plant the maize. Our Yi brethren all went to work in the fields. Black capes and coloured skirts bedecked the hillside.

Dajee and I worked together. I dug holes and she put seeds into them. A little bamboo basket on her left arm, she sowed deftly and accurately, her bare feet stepping across the soft soil.

"Dajee, why is it you Yi people will not use animal manure?" I asked.

"The Yis, they're superstitious, that's why," she replied.

The hoe in my hands shook. "Aren't you superstitious then?" I asked. "And why do you say 'they'?"

She only smiled, refusing to answer. After a while as we continued working, she said, "Comrade Li, don't you think I look like a Han?" I put down my hoe to scrutinize her face closely.

"So . . . you are a Han?" I was surprised.

She gave me a wink and smiled. "Hurry up and dig, or we'll fall behind."

When I returned from the fields my first words to Shama were, "So Dajee is a Han!"

He smiled, revealing even, white teeth. "A person with good eyesight spots a green larch the moment he raises his head," he said.

"When did she come to Liangshan?" I pursued.

"It happened more than ten years ago," he said slowly, chewing his pipe. "Ahou, the slave-owner, kidnapped her from the villages in the foothills. Dajee was not much taller than the stove then."

"Then what is Maherha to her?"

"Maherha is her *Ahda*." He went on to explain, "Old Maherha used to be one of Ahou's slaves too. The slave-owner tormented and beat the little girl so cruelly that old Maherha took to protecting her; he loved her and treated her like a daughter. Dajee began calling him *Ahda*, though in front of the master, she dared not. For fifty years, Maherha had suffered as a slave. It was not until after the democratic reform that he built himself a home and made Dajee his daughter. . . ."

Shama's tone was sad as he went over the poor old man's life. Maherha's face, rough as tree bark, and his hands, bony as dry twigs — imprints of slavery — floated to my mind. I sensed vaguely that old Maherha's brooding and his coolness towards me had something to do with his daughter, Dajee.

"Are they fond of each other, Dajee and her father?" I asked Shama.

"Oh, very, they are as inseparable as the squirrel and the pine-tree."

Suddenly I remembered the queer questions Maherha addressed to me the other day. "Then why is Maherha unhappy and sulking?" I asked, some inkling of the answer dawning on me. "Maybe some Han has been bullying him?"

"Only the forest knows the thoughts in the song-bird's head," Shama's answer was like a riddle.

June 12 Overcast

I have to find Dajee and get to the bottom of this. This morning, I saw her go to the stream for water and went after her.

"Dajee, I want to ask you something. You. . . ."

She sat down on a flat boulder. Her eyes, warm and trusting, were fixed on me as she said, "I am a Han. But I don't know where I was born or who my parents are. My earliest memory is the cruel wolf-like face of the slave-owner. . . . He beat me and burned me with branches, red hot from the hearth, all because I hadn't the strength to push a big millstone taller than my head. Look, Comrade Li. . . ."

She rolled up her sleeve and showed me the scars on her arm. My eyes faltered at the sight. I couldn't bear to look. She stared into the distance as she went on, like one talking in her sleep:

"The master made me go up the hill for dry wood in the deep snow. If I didn't get enough, he gave me no food. This went on day after day. I ate only wild herbs from the hills and munched snow. When I was worn out from hunger, it was Maherha who slipped me bits of buckwheat dough."

She was weeping; big tears trickling down her face. "Once a leopard got one of the master's sheep and he cursed me for being a useless shepherd. He tied me to a tree in the woods with leather thongs and said I deserved to be eaten by the wild beasts. Though Maherha pleaded for him to spare me, he would not relent. It was a terrifying night. The wind roared through the woods, and I closed my eyes, waiting for death. Then Maherha came stealthily, untied the thongs and carried me back. The wicked master got so angry he beat him until poor Maherha passed out. . . ."

Tears filled my eyes. I wiped them furtively with my sleeve.

"I wanted to escape, but where could I go? Where was there a home for me? I didn't know of any place without leopards and slave-owners. I cried for my father and mother, but no one came to comfort me or stroke my hair.

There was only Maherha who in the icy cold night hugged me tightly to warm me and who covered me with his ragged wool cape."

Dajee's sad past made my blood boil. I wanted to say to her, "My poor little sister, I'll take you away from Liangshan tomorrow, take you back to the Han people. I'll help you find father and mother. . . ."

Very quickly though, reason had the better of my emotions. Instead of bursting out, I said soothingly, "Don't cry any more, little Dajee. The slave-owners have been overthrown and the people of Liangshan have risen to their feet. They are now as free and happy as the Hans. It's the same now everywhere in China. . . ."

Dajee looked at me with wet eyes. "Yes, I know. It's good everywhere in China now, that's why I don't want to leave Liangshan and my *Ahda* Maherha. Comrade Li, you must investigate this matter carefully, and see whether that man is really. . . ."

Her sudden reference to some man confused me. "Dajee, what are you talking about?"

"Haven't you come to our village to help that man find out about me?"

"Which man?"

"That old man of Han nationality."



"I don't understand you, Dajee. I've come here to help look after farming in the co-op."

"My *Ahda* said you came here to find out about me and told me not to speak to you."

At my confusion, Dajee smiled with tears in her eyes. Taking a long breath, she started from the very beginning.

"Last month I went to the county town to sell vegetables. An old Han kept staring at me. When I sat under the city gate, he sat near me. Later, I rested for a while on the curb and he went and sat down opposite me. Finally he came over to ask my name. I heard him mutter to himself, 'She looks just like my daughter . . . there's a pink birthmark on her face too. . . .'"

I peered at Dajee. Sure enough, there was a small pink mark on her right cheek.

"I got a little frightened," Dajee continued. "So I walked away with my vegetable basket. The old man came after me and asked, 'Where do you live, child?' There were tears in his old eyes. I took pity on him and told him the name of our village. I could feel his eyes on my back as I walked away.

"I heard him mutter, 'I must get the county government's help . . . I'll go to the county government. . . .' Comrade Li, don't you think there was something wrong with that old man's head?"

For a few seconds I was silent, overwhelmed by the complex situation Dajee had just described. Then things became clear. I understood why Maherha was worried, why he treated me so coolly and why he asked the strange questions about bad men.

"Don't think too much of the incident," I tried to soothe Dajee. "Maybe he mistook you for someone else."

"Yes, he might have been mistaken." She breathed a light sigh.

June 19 Rain

The tragic and joyful event which I dreaded and yet half-expected finally happened.

The sky was dark. A drizzle started from early morning. An old man, a Han, came to see me. He wore a big straw hat, homespun blue cotton suit and straw sandals plastered with mud. He was thin with sharp shoulder blades showing. Wrinkles covered his forehead and ran down to the corners of his eyes. A straggly grey beard adorned his chin. Removing his wet straw hat, with quivering hands he produced a letter of introduction from the county Party committee:

This is to introduce Jen Pin-ching, a poor peasant of Han nationality who wishes to look for his daughter Niu-niu in your village. Please give him all possible assistance. If his daughter is not to be found, take care of him and send him home. If the daughter is in your village, he must show concrete proof to identify her. Don't make any final decision but refer the case back to the county Party committee for further directions.

I consulted the co-op chairman, Shama, and we decided to question the old man first.

"How do you know," I asked, "that this girl you saw is your daughter?"

The old man blinked as he stammered, "She is, she definitely is my Niu-niu. Niu-niu was kidnapped by some Yi people when she was six and taken into Liangshan Mountains. . . . She was the exact image of her mother . . . brows, eyes, face. . . ."

"Do you have proof to show that she is your daughter?" asked Shama.

"I have, but I won't tell you. I'll say it in front of the child. . . ." His tone and his determination confirmed our



impression that we had met with a very obstinate old man. We sent for Dajee.

She came into the room hesitantly, her hands behind her back. At the door she paused and stared at the old man with startled soft eyes. The old man regarded her sadly, lips trembling. Both were silent.

"I can't," Dajee suddenly burst out. "I can't go with him. What right has he to say I'm his daughter?"

Old Man Jen was stunned. He rubbed his knees nervously with rough thin hands. "I only . . . only . . . came to see," he faltered, hanging his head. "If she's not my daughter, all right . . . I . . ."

"Please give us your proof now," Shama urged.

The old man wiped his eyes with the hem of his tunic and sighed. "Her name was Niu-niu," he began slowly. "She had a round face, small mouth and two little dimples."

"What kind of proof is that!" said Shama.

The old man shot me a glance and continued, "She was called Niu-niu and looked like her mother. That year, she was not quite six, her mother took ill and I went to the market for medicine, Niu-niu was playing by herself on the meadow outside our door when suddenly two mounted Yi people came, wrapped her in a felt rug and took her away. They went towards Liangshan. . . ."

I listened, my eyes on Dajee. She stood where she was, face pale and eyes glazed.

"For more than a year, I searched everywhere in Liangshan and questioned the kind ones among the Yi people but nobody knew anything about such a little girl. A dozen years went by and I'd given up hope. I never expected to see her last month in the county town. She looks exactly like her mother and also there's a pink mark on her right cheek. . . ."

"Look here, old uncle," I protested mildly, "anybody can identify her that way. The pink mark is there for all to see."

The old man was silent for a few minutes, his eyes on Dajee. "She is the image of her mother. . . . Also there

are tooth prints left by a dog bite on her left leg . . . four tooth prints a little above the left knee."

Dajee's left hand stole to the hem of her skirt, gripped it tightly and then loosened it. With a sharp cry she sat down on her heels and buried her face in her hands. Jen was at first startled and then, as if waking from a dream, stretched both hands out to her, "Niu-niu, you are my Niu-niu. . . ."

Dajee's tear-stained eyes appeared above her hands. Soft as a summer breeze, came her muffled "Ahda!" The old man stumbled towards his daughter.

"Niu-niu," he said with a sob. "Remember the two-room thatched hut we lived in? There were three pomegranate trees at the door. Remember?"

Dajee shook her head.



"Try to remember. Not far from our door there was a pond. You used to shoo the ducklings home from the pond every evening."

Dajee leaned her head weakly against the wall and stared at the ceiling.

"Remember the bamboo fence by our gate, child, and how you used to count the number of sticks. . . ."

Dajee suddenly flung herself into Old Man Jen's arms; her shoulders quivering with suppressed sobs. Her father was also crying. . . .

My eyes were also moist, but before I had time to wipe them, an angry roar came from the door.

"Who dares come to take away my Dajee?" It was Maherha.

I stood up, my muscles tense. Dajee also flinched. Old Maherha rushed in like a whirlwind, his shirt open. Standing in the middle of the room, he fixed eyes, red with hate, on Old Man Jen.

"Get out of here," he cried fiercely. "Get out!"

I had heard about the strong temperament of the Liangshan people but I never expected such fury from old, emaciated Maherha. I was also surprised that thin, old Jen could retaliate with such heat.

"Shut up, you savage," he shouted back, his voice rumbling like thunder. "The girl is mine."

Maherha's face darkened, the wrinkles on his face tight as bow-strings, his brown eyes looking ready to burst from their sockets. "I'll kill you," he said, the words spewing out through grimly set teeth. With a sudden jerk, he pulled a rusted dagger from his belt.

Shama caught his hand in time.

"Maherha!" He admonished sternly.

Unable to free his hand, Maherha turned on me. "Didn't you tell me that the Hans will not bully us again? But this man is here to take my daughter from me! He calls me a savage. You fooled me!"

"He should not call you a savage," said Shama. "But look at your own behaviour. You want to kill him, kill a Han in the Yi area. You are bullying our Han brothers."

Maherha had no answer for that. He weakened. Turning to Dajee, he said in a soft quivering voice, "Dajee, my daughter, you cannot go with him, you are mine."

"That's right, *Ahda*," said Dajee, tears in her eyes. "I cannot leave you. But for you, I would have been dead long ago."

Maherha stretched out one hand. "Let us go home then, Dajee, come." It was more of an entreaty than a command.

Dajee left with Maherha. As she went through the door, she gave a parting glance at the other old man.

Jen gripped my arm. "Comrade Li, the county Party committee sent me to you. I must ask you for my daughter."

"This matter involves the solidarity of our two fraternal peoples. That's why you can't take your daughter away with you today. Go home. You'll hear from us soon." I tried to reassure him.

"All right," he said after a long pause. "I'll wait. But I warn you, if you don't give me back my daughter I shall complain higher up; I'll even go to Chairman Mao."

Shama and I accompanied the old man a long way out of the village. We did all we could to reassure him.

June 20 Fair

I went to the county Party committee and told the Party secretary about Dajee and her fathers in detail. The secretary's instructions were clear: Dajee must decide which father she wants to live with. Her decision must be clearly explained to the two old men. We should make use of this occasion to strengthen the solidarity between the Yis and the Hans.

June 21 Overcast

Expecting a cold reception, I went to visit Maherha again. To my surprise, the old man stood up respectfully to offer me a seat and gave me some tobacco. Dajee nodded a silent greeting. Old Maherha came to the point at once.

"You are sent by the Party committee of the Liangshan autonomous *chou*, I believe you will not take sides and think only of the Han."

"You are right."

"That old man is Dajee's real father but Dajee has no love for him. She would rather stay with me always." I glanced at Dajee.

She met my eyes and nodded. "Yes, I've made up my mind not to leave *Ahda*." This *Ahda* referred of course to Maherha.

The problem is simpler now. Since Dajee will not leave Maherha, all we need do is explain the matter to Old Man Jen and make him see reason.

June 23 Rain

The rain keeps falling maddeningly, making the hills and dale very muddy. I stayed at home today, reading alone by the hearth.

Dajee came in without a sound and sat down on her heels by my side. Her face was very pale. A lock of wet black hair was plastered to her white forehead; her big eyes were sad and sunken. There was no sign of the merry laughter that usually hovered round her lips. Her brows were tightly knit. She seemed to have matured overnight.

"Comrade Li," she said in a low voice.

"Has something happened, Dajee?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Will you help me write a letter?" she asked. When I wanted to know to whom, she said, "To my *Ahda*." My heart tightened as if caught by an invisible hand.

"All right Dajee, you dictate and I'll take it down for you." I spread a piece of paper on my book and she began.

Dear *Ahda*:

This is your Niu-niu writing to you. I'm thinking of you; I'm sure you are longing for me too. . . . Will you come and see me again?

When you come you must take the big road. Avoid the forest paths for there are leopards there. Wear a pair of sturdy sandals when you come so that the pebbles will not cut your feet, and wear a cape so you won't get wet in the rain. When you get thirsty don't drink the cold water from the stream but go to the village and ask them for a bowl of warm water. . . .

My pen shook. This was no ordinary letter; every word revealed the love of a daughter for a long-lost father. Dajee, her long black lashes cast down, sat silent now. "Is that all?" I asked.

"That's all. . . ." Her lips hardly moved. Her voice was like the chill wind soughing through the forest leaves at night.

June 25 Overcast

I met Maherha at the edge of the maize field. His eyes were not only cold but they gleamed icily like the sharp edges of a knife. Stretching out bony hands, he blocked my way.

"*Hanya*,"* he called fiercely.

I halted.

"What have you been telling Dajee?" he demanded in a menacing voice. "I know you want to take her away from me. You were sent by the Party committee of our autonomous *chou* but you are not working for us Yi people. You think only of the Hans. If you succeed in sending Dajee away, don't think I'll let you remain. I'll drive you. . . ."

"What reason have you to accuse me like that, Grandad Maherha?" I asked quietly. "If you could weigh my heart on a scale, you would find that it balances fairly between you and the other old man. My heart acts only according to the orders of our government."

* A rude name for Han.

Maherha seized my hand. "Please help me, Comrade Li," he pleaded in a hoarse voice. "Please save my Dajee. She has not eaten properly for two days. . . . She is changed and is wasting away. Her heart is sick. At night she wakes up sobbing and crying for her *Ahda*. . . . Save us and I'll be grateful always. As long as it's for her good, I'll even let her go away, I mean it. . . ."

I was too listless to do anything when I got home.

Shama sat opposite me by the hearth poking at the fire. Blue smoke coiled round us.

"I used to believe in demons and imagined that all the sufferings of humanity were manufactured by them," he said. "Now I know there are no demons. But some of the pains and agony made by that real demon, slavery, has not yet been completely wiped out in Liangshan."

June 29 Fair

Shama and I decided to call an emergency meeting of the co-op committee. Old Man Jen came again, declaring firmly that this time he would take his daughter away.

The meeting was held outdoors under the sun. It turned into more of a village than a co-op meeting because almost all the villagers turned up. Everyone was concerned about Dajee. From the way people were seated, I had an idea of their feelings. A dozen or so villagers sat scattered here and there; these were taking no sides but meant to leave everything to the co-op committee. A group of young girls sat with Dajee; a plump one held her hand protectively. Three old men sat by Maherha, each with a white stone pipe between his lips. I could hear one mutter, "Just refuse, Maherha. No one can snatch Dajee away. . . ." Only the young book-keeper Erhbu sat by Old Man Jen; he had volunteered to be Jen's interpreter.

Both Maherha and Jen looked awful. Their faces were pale and haggard. Now and then their eyes met and they exchanged glances, neither of hate nor of friendliness, but a kind of helpless despair. Maherha eyed the little cloth bundle in Jen's hands with suspicion.

Shama addressed the meeting. At first he spoke formally about unity between the different nationalities of our country, then he warmed up and talked with real feelings. . . .

". . . The Hans and the Yis were brothers in ancient times. In those days there were no quarrels or fights. The Hans gave the Yis grain in return for which they got oxen and sheep. Later, magistrates appeared among the Hans and slave-owners among the Yis. They fought and wanted to break one another's back. These magistrates and slave-owners sucked the blood of the Han peasants and the Yi slaves and made them live in tears. . . ."

Everyone was silent. An eagle flew past overhead. . . .

"The chickens do nothing to annoy the eagle but it comes to seize the chicks. When the chicks are taken away, the mother hen cackles in sorrow. Dajee was a Han; she was kidnapped and brought to Liangshan by the slave-owner. Maherha had a hard life and no home of his own. He loves Dajee though she is not his real daughter. Who is it who brewed this bitter wine?"

People's heads were lowered; a woman sighed.

Maherha looked at Dajee sadly. She sobbed. Jen wiped his eyes.

"Heaven created the world but it forgot to make happiness. It was only when Chairman Mao came that he brought us happiness. He taught us to love our fraternal peoples. . . ." Shama continued. Young Erhbu, in an irrepressible voice, suddenly shouted, "We, the Yi and Han peoples, should sit round one hearth in peace and unity!"

"Yes, like sisters and brothers. . . ." someone added.

"Like the winnow and the fan. . . ." chimed in someone else.

Shama knew the time was ripe to come to the point.

"Our Han brother, Old Man Jen, has come for his daughter. What do you think should be done?"

Silence, more silence.

Suddenly Maherha stood up and went to Dajee, took her hand and in a warm affectionate voice said, "Go, my Dajee, go with your real *Ahda*. . . ."

Dajee regarded Maherha with tears in her eyes, "Ahda!" "Go, Dajee, go," said all the Yi people.

Jen stumbled over to her daughter and stroked her hair. "My Niu-niu, bow to your Ahda and your sisters and brothers to bid them goodbye. We must go. . . ."

"Ahda, I'm going," said Dajee to Maherha. "But I'll come back to see you."

Jen unwrapped the cloth bundle he had brought and took out a new blue cotton suit. "Change into this, child. You have not worn our clothes for a dozen years."

"Please, don't make Dajee change her costume," Maherha pleaded, gripping Jen's hands. "Please don't. I made these clothes for her with loving hands and heart. She loves this pleated skirt, the beads and the head kerchief. . . ."

To Dajee, he said, "Go in these clothes and beads, my Dajee. When you see the costume in the future you'll remember how I endured the master's whip for you and how I warmed you on winter nights. When you see the beads, you'll remember the blood and tears I shed for you. . . . I'll be all alone when you are gone. . . ."

"I'll think of you every day," said Dajee, interrupting him, "and dream of you every night. . . ."

Maherha did not reply but turned to Jen. "I'm sure you'll love Dajee more than I. You must be good to her. She is fond of buckwheat flapjacks, you must remember to buy buckwheat flour for her. She loves beads, you must buy her new ones. She likes Yi songs, please don't stop her from singing them. When she does wrong, don't shout at her; there are as many scars on her young heart as on her body. . . ."

Dajee flung herself in Maherha's arms and broke into loud sobs against his hollow chest. Old Maherha kissed his daughter's hair with shrivelled lips.

Old Man Jen stood still, his eyes closed. I was afraid he would faint.

There was silence again. . . . Time seemed to have stopped.

After an endless pause, Jen dropped the blue cotton suit and rubbed his eyes.

"Child, you must remain here," he said finally, one hand on Maherha's arm and the other holding Dajee's. "Stay here with your Ahda. I see now that he loves you more than I. I am your real father, but it was he who cared for you all these years. He did more for you than I. I have tasted enough of the sorrows of losing a daughter. My heart has already been torn; I cannot bear to see Grandad Maherha's heart torn the same way. I don't want to see him shed tears over a lost child. You must stay, my daughter. . . ." Turning to Maherha, he said, "Old brother, I can die in peace, knowing that my daughter is in your hands."

Weeping, Dajee knelt down at Jen's feet and hugged his knees. "Ahda," she said between sobs, "I'm afraid

I'll have to be a bad daughter to you. I've been here a dozen years, I've become one of the Liangshan people. I love Ahda Maherha, I love the people here, I cannot part from them. Together we suffered and groaned under the whip, together we wept and laughed. . . ."

She raised her head to gaze at the rolling fields, her dark eyes shining. "Look, Ahda, isn't this a beautiful place? We have tall mountains, gurgling



brooks, green maize, thick forests, and singing birds soaring in the sky. My father, your daughter will not forget you, I'll come to visit you regularly."

Maheha rushed up to Jen. Two pairs of thin but strong arms interlocked.

My heart seemed to have raced across the ridge of Liangshan Mountains, experiencing the very mood of nature — from misty gloom to radiant sunshine, from storm and wind to a boundless blue sky. I seemed to be in a dream, but no, it was all quite real.

Everyone's eyes were on the two old men, standing erect like stone figures. Their former differences and ill will forgotten, they stood close to each other, friends for ever.

"Let us drink!" cried Shama in a boisterous voice. "Go get some wine, Erhbu."

The crowd cheered.

Translated by Tang Sheng

Illustrations by Pang Tao

By the Lantsang River →

Woodcut by Yang Yung-ching

The artist is an art editor in the Youth Publishing House.





HAO JAN

Moonlight on the Eastern Wall

For the third time Aunt Shang went to the door.

Wiping her hands smeared with flour on her blue apron she stared hard at the road east of the village which led to the market. Dusk had fallen. The moon, half visible above the clump of pine-trees on the east, shone faintly on the winding road dappling it with light and shade. Silence reigned in the village. There was not a sound, not a human being in sight. She stood at the door until her feet started aching. Then she leaned against the door-frame and sighed deeply.

There were only the three of them in her family. Her daughter Ai-chun, a member of the youth shock-brigade, had gone to plant trees on the mountain a fortnight ago; while her husband, Shang Yu-peng, a team-leader, was in charge of the spring ploughing. He was so busy these days that he seldom came home before midnight. The previous day, he was called away from his supper by the midwife who did not know what to do with the wife of Hsien-yu who was having a difficult labour. The team-leader put down his rice bowl, fixed up a stretcher to take her to the county hospital right away. But Aunt Shang was very un-

happy. Her old man had worked for a whole day and had been complaining of a backache. Now he wanted to carry someone for tens of *li*. He was getting on in years. Wasn't it too much for him?

"What are you trying to do?" she said. "This is women's business. Don't you butt in. Besides, you count as her uncle. It's not proper for you to interfere."

"You're behind the times," retorted the old man. "It's a question of life and death. Her husband's not at home. If the team-leader won't take care of her, who will?"

"The team-leader takes care of production, not of child-birth!"

"A team-leader should take care of everything. He can't look after production well unless he looks after people."

"All right," conceded Aunt Shang. "But you don't have to go yourself. You can send somebody."

"I shall be worried if I don't go myself."

Since he insisted, there was nothing she could do. But to make matters worse, he wanted to take the money put aside for her daughter's wedding clothes. Aunt Shang absolutely refused to let him have it.

"Ai-chun and I earned that money. You've no right to take it!" She would not let her husband near the cupboard.

"She needs money to go to hospital. You'll get it back."

"Borrow from the commune then. Why take our money?"

"Ha, how distinctly you separate private from public money. It'll be well spent."

While Aunt Shang hunted round for a lock the old man took the money. And on top of that he was taking their quilt too.

"Why are you taking my quilt along?"

"It's chilly in the night, she might catch cold."

"I don't care if she does. I won't let a woman in labour use my things." The old man said no more but picked up the quilt. When Aunt Shang clung to it he was so angry that he pulled it away by force and strode out to cover Hsien-yu's wife and take up the stretcher. Aunt Shang

chased after him till they were out of the village and shed tears of vexation.

She didn't sleep well that night. And today she had still been unhappy while selecting cotton seeds for the commune.

Aunt Shang was one of the meanest women in the village. In the days when they farmed separately people tried to have as little to do with her as possible. If anyone borrowed a plate from her, she expected some rice to stick to it when it was returned. The pedlars knew her only too well: She always wanted to buy two cents' worth of goods with one cent. At that time, the old man was the same. The pair of them were like a rake and chest: he raked things in and she stored them away. But after the old man joined the agricultural co-operative and was elected a representative he began to change. And since the commune was set up the previous year and he was elected one of the team-leaders, the change had been complete. He no longer worried about his own family possessions. You might almost say he had given his heart to the commune. So much so that a thread belonging to the commune was a treasure to him and he would willingly have cut off a piece of his flesh for the other members. On top of that, he often contradicted his old woman and found fault with her. Aunt Shang was very sad. After all these years it seemed she still didn't know him. No, it wasn't that so much, but he had changed. She didn't want to quarrel with him. After living as husband and wife for so many years, she didn't want to hurt his feelings. But she really couldn't bear to let everyone take advantage of them. Later she gave way a little: she decided to stop taking advantage of the commune, but no one should take advantage of her either. This time, though, they had not only got away with her money and quilt but her old man had to carry the stretcher such a distance.

"He's worked as hard as anyone all day and now, instead of going to bed, for no rhyme or reason he's going to carry this stretcher. Does it pay at his age?" She began to be concerned for her husband again. "It's forty *li* to the county town. They won't be there till daybreak. Anyone with

any sense would try to get a little sleep somewhere. But he may come straight back."

When she came home that evening she made some noodles for fear her old man would miss the meal in the canteen. She kneaded the dough to just the right consistency and cut noodles as fine as thread. Then she put some water on to boil. As soon as he returned the noodles could be cooked.

She went to the door again and again. But her old man did not come back.

The moon was high in the sky, but still there was no sign of him. Angry and worried, she stared eastward at the road which led to town. There was not a soul on the road. Suddenly she heard voices from the west. She turned and saw a group of people in the distance with her old man among them. But instead of coming home he turned to the stockyard. "Why is he coming from that direction?" she wondered. She hurried in to add some fuel to the stove.

Footsteps sounded in the courtyard, and in burst her daughter Ai-chun covered with dust. Her fair complexion was streaked with sweat and grime. She made straight for the water jar and ladled herself a drink.

"Don't drink cold water. There's boiled water in the thermos flask." But it was already too late. "Did you have to rush back in such a hurry? Couldn't you start earlier?"

"I waited until the day's work was over. I've come back to fetch shoes for our people planting trees up there." Ai-chun was still out of breath.

"You've come back to fetch shoes?" Aunt Shang was put out again. "What are those long-legged men doing? Why do you have to be so meddlesome?"

"You haven't changed one bit, mum! Anyone can do it. I volunteered when I saw that when all the shoes were worn out we'd have to stop work."

"Wash your face and rest a bit." Aunt Shang put some more wood on the fire. "The noodles will be ready in a minute."

"No, I'm going back tomorrow morning." Her daughter stood up. "I must collect the shoes tonight. I shall have

to call from door to door and I don't want to wait till everyone's in bed. Where is father?"

"The old man nearly drove me mad last night!" Aunt Shang flared up again. "He's spent that money we put by for your wedding clothes. . . ."

"But why?" Ai-chun pouted. "Why did you give it to him?"

"It's not my fault, you fool. Hsien-yu's wife had to go to the maternity hospital last night. Instead of borrowing from the commune. . . ."

"So that was it!" Ai-chun laughed. "Let him take it then." And she ran out.

Aunt Shang, who had wanted to weep on her daughter's shoulder, could only sigh: "Like father like daughter. One's as bad as the other."

The moon rose over the roof, flooding the courtyard with its silver light. Aunt Shang was standing listlessly at the door when the old team-leader came home at last.

"Heaven! Why are you back so late?"

"I came back long before sunset. I was in the commune office."

"Why did you have to go to the office? Why didn't you come back to have some sleep?"

"How could I sleep when there was work to do? If folk think well enough of me to give me a responsible job like this, I must do my best — mustn't I?" The old man was in high spirits. He went into the inner room and soon came out with his bedding.

"Where are you off to now?" Aunt Shang threw down her poker and barred his way.

"The stockman's wife has come back from her mother's place today. They haven't been married long. Of course they'll want to be together. I'm going to see to the cattle for him."

Since this meant he would not have a proper night's sleep, Aunt Shang pursed her lips and said, "You interfere far too much. It's none of your business whether they are together or not."

The team-leader walked off without paying any attention. Aunt Shang sighed and followed him helplessly to the door. "I've made some noodles. Have some before you go. Ai-chun has come back and she hasn't seen you yet."

"I'll come back after I've fixed things up there," the old man called over his shoulder.

The moon was now in the middle of the sky. It must be nearly midnight. Yet neither her husband nor daughter had come back. Aunt Shang's patience was wearing out. She put out the oil lamp and went to look for them.

There was no sound in the stockyard but that of the cattle munching and chewing side by side. At one end of the cow shed were two little rooms where the stockman lived. The door was open and a safety lantern hung from the ceiling. The old man was sitting on a stool talking to his daughter who was standing beside him.

"Aren't you father and daughter ever going to eat? I'm ready for bed even if you're not."

"You go along. We still have work to do." The old man glanced at her and then said to his daughter: "Go on. What has happened?"

Ai-chun wiped her hot, flushed face. "Our biggest problem is shoes. Those we make down here are not thick enough: they wear out in one day on the mountain. Fifty of us have worn through our soles. But without shoes we can't work. Since the team-leader is too busy to come back, I was sent back to fetch more. I've been to every family, but eleven of them just haven't got new shoes on hand."

"Never mind. It's nothing to worry about. Take those you've got." Aunt Shang looked at her daughter and husband. "You did your best and it can't be helped. Go home to sleep now. You can go back to the mountain tomorrow."

"No. Everybody is waiting for the shoes. I am going back tonight," said Ai-chun.

"What? Go back like this?" The team-leader stared at his daughter severely. "What are you going to say to those people who still have to go bare-foot?"

Ai-chun dropped her head.

"Don't listen to him." Aunt Shang tugged at her daughter. "Let's go. Mother has made noodles for you."

Ai-chun shook her head mutely and stood there rooted to the ground.

"Shoes may seem a small matter, but they are very important to the people on the mountain. They can't walk on stones with bare feet. If you fail to get them shoes the commune's plan for planting trees will suffer. We must get enough shoes at all costs. You can't go back like this."

"Please think out a way for me, father." Ai-chun raised her head, smiling. "Shall we borrow some money and buy some new shoes?"

"The new shoes wouldn't be made for mountain climbing either. . . . I have a better plan. Those families with no new shoes ready may have old ones. Ask them to mend these shoes and you can take them along tomorrow. Then I'll start the womenfolk making new shoes right away. . . . What do you say?"

"That's a good idea!" Ai-chun jumped with joy. On her way out she said, "I'm going to ask every household to give their old shoes and help with the mending so that I can take more with me tomorrow."

"Fine!" The old team-leader was very happy.

"Are you crazy," interrupted Aunt Shang. "You take care of child-birth, you look after newly-wed couples, and now you want to see to this business of shoes. Aren't you ever going to sleep?"

The team-leader looked at his wife and his lips quivered, but he swallowed whatever it was he wanted to say. He stood up and walked to the door, where he turned and said: "I've got two pairs of old shoes. Bring them, will you?"

Bursting with indignation, Aunt Shang went home.

The moon sinking towards the west cast the shadow of the earthen wall on the ground so that half Aunt Shang's window was in darkness. After sulking for a while she looked out and decided it was past midnight. She began to be worried again. Putting on a jacket and taking two pairs of old shoes, she left the house.



In the shed, the cattle had stopped eating. Only the oxen were still chewing the cud. It was quiet in the two little rooms as well. In the flickering lamplight father and daughter were sitting on small stools in front of a pile of old shoes. The team-leader cut a piece of leather and nailed it on one shoe, while Ai-chun busily patched another pair. They were so intent on their work that they didn't notice Aunt Shang at the door.

After a while, the team-leader raised his head. His wrinkled face suddenly glowed. "Ai-chun," he said softly, smiling. "I've forgotten to tell you some good news."

"Yes?" his daughter answered without stopping her work.

"I've been admitted into the Party!"

"Ouch!" Ai-chun pricked her finger and quickly put it to her mouth. "Really? Why — you've got ahead of me, dad. I must catch you up!"

"I've still a whole lot of faults. You should remind me of them more often. For instance, though your mother is selfish and backward, she's a good woman. She can improve. Yet I haven't given her any help. . . ."

Aunt Shang's heart thumped when she heard this. She coughed and walked up to them. "Here are the old shoes." "Haven't you gone to bed yet?" The team-leader took the shoes and smiled at her.

Aunt Shang quickly turned to go, her heart brimming over with some strange new emotion. "No wonder my old man thinks of nothing but work and everybody's welfare," she thought. "He's in the Party!"

*Translated by Yu Fan-chin
Illustrations by Lu Chih-hsiang*

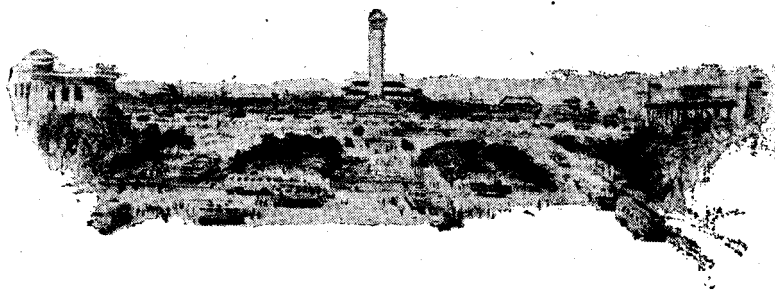
A man walking along the river bank saw someone about to throw a small boy into the water. The child was screaming with terror.

"Why do you want to throw that child into the river?" asked the passer-by.

"His father is a good swimmer," was the answer.

But it does not follow that the son of a good swimmer can swim.

The Discourses of Lu Pu-wei
(3rd century B.C.)



LIU PAI-YU

The Glow of Youth

Just before daybreak the Tienanmen Square construction site was a sea of lights and noise. A young man walked towards me wearing a safety helmet. He had ruddy cheeks, clear, bright eyes. With his jacket slung over one shoulder and his bearing erect, he strode confidently along. His step, his expression, brimmed over with zest and joy. Though the sky was still dark behind him, his face reflected the rose-red glimmer of dawn. And I could not take my eyes off him, for in that instant of time he revealed to me the infinite richness of life. It was as if a crystal-clear spring had welled up in my heart; it was like a poem or painting, but more profound than any poem, more beautiful than any painting. If I must put a name to it, I would call it "the dawn of a new age."

That same instant, a memory lurid as lightning flashed into my mind. It was a stormy summer day twenty-two years ago, sultry and stifling, when black clouds hung lower-

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ing above men's heads. Under the blazing sun that day I walked with heavy steps to Tien An Men. It was here, on this very spot, here where today we were laying underground pipes, where we were making a pavement of white stone, it was here that I halted abruptly. I saw a tank approaching from Chien Men. Wide-eyed I saw fluttering on the tank the white flag with the red sun of the Japanese aggressors. Its clanking caterpillar tread crunched remorselessly over my heart. I was in agony. I watched tank after tank pass by. I saw the deep imprints left by their treads on the tarred road surface softened by the blazing sun. These were stigmas branded on the heart of our land which I can never forget. Neither now nor in time to come. I must record this in writing to leave a record for the citizens of tomorrow.

Another memory stirs in my mind like a morning breeze. We had crossed innumerable high mountain ranges, innumerable forests and torrents, singing songs of national liberation and class victory, as day and night, in rain or shine, we plodded on and on, plodded on until this day. This was the day of the irrevocable passing of old colonial China with its whips, gunfire, rapine and massacres, the day when unvanquished China, stained with the blood of its fighters, echoing with the vows of those who loved it, should sound the bell ringing in a brave new age. On this day the first Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference opened in Peking. On this day we went to a hall which lamps made as bright as day, and here I heard the warm, deep, resonant voice of Chairman Mao Tse-tung reading out the inscription for the Heroes' Memorial. I saw his hand, which had opened the road of the Chinese revolution, dig the first spadeful of earth for the memorial. This was no mere inscription that he read, but a vow made to all the fighters of past centuries. This was no mere spadeful of earth, but the foundation of the lofty pinnacle of socialism to be built on the far-stretching soil of our land. That was one of the precious, stirring moments of history. For then, as if gathered below one standard to march into

battle, on the eve of construction we dedicated our lives once more to the revolution.

Another memory stirs me like the beat of a drum. Here, here on this very spot where the imperialist tanks once left their imprints, here surged a torrent of people, tens of thousands strong, shining forth in splendour like the sun. This was our first national day, October the First. What an ocean, a forest, a mountain, a blazing fire of people were gathered there! And all faces like golden sunflowers turned one way towards the people's leader — Chairman Mao Tse-tung — as he stood above Tien An Men. The footsteps of tens of thousands were the roll of drums, the roll of drums from remote ages of antiquity, drums sounded by the people as they advanced against the dark dynasties of feudalism, against the gunfire of the imperialists, against the last rule of tyranny. These drums rolled from the depth of the forests, from the sources of rivers; they shattered high mountains, cleft the tempest, broke through dark night. All forces, from all sides, converged on this point. Over Tien An Men the autumn sky was a deep azure blue; the paraders waved their hands and cheered; girls raised bright flowers, every face sparkled with smiles. Then Chairman Mao Tse-tung's voice mingled with the voice of tens of thousands like the peal of thunder in spring, thunder which reverberated hence throughout the length and breadth of China. And I knew that this was the verdict of inexorable history, the prelude to a new age: I must not let this moment pass forgotten. I charged my mind to treasure these memories. I remember the smiles on the ruddy faces of boys, the shining eyes of the girls. I was confident that each one of those that passed by would carry away a heart as firm as steel, as bright as gold. Youth had shaken the dust of old history from its shoulders, dawn had broken, the spirit of life had appeared in the east, a new journey had begun.

Had I eyes, then, for nothing but this small plot of land before Tien An Men? No, I knew that all that happened here had been paralleled by happenings all over the vast territory of China. Those that marched through this square

did not return to a night of slumber, an evening of repose, but moved like some mighty army towards the construction fronts. That is the kind of people we are, and this is our cause of pride; the heart of each one is tempest-tossed yet brimming over with joy; each one of us bears the scars of old wounds, each one of us knows how to make our dreams come true. From that time to the present day, from 1949 to 1959, a whole decade has passed, but never shall I forget those ruddy faces, those shining eyes. For ever since then, as I advanced on my way, I have met them everywhere.

Our people are working with might and main to build a happier life. But in the summer of 1950, the bloated Wall Street capitalists kindled the fires of aggressive war in our neighbouring country, Korea. For our own defence and to aid the Korean people in their suffering, we crossed the Yalu River already smouldering with the flames of war. This river, which flows down from Mount Changpai, is the river that divides our land from Korea. Here the imperialists brought all the horrors of war, viciously scheming to strangle the new Korean Democratic People's Republic and its neighbour, the young republic of China; but woe to the thick-headed assassins, for they found a powerful force of patriotic Koreans and Chinese confronting them. During that grim winter when howling winds sent the snow whirling down, in a dense mist I mingled with the lines of troops on their way to the front and the swift trucks carrying munitions. When we came to the river, the floating bridge had been destroyed by American planes, but on the opposite bank a lorry illumined the Yalu with its headlights while men in the rushing torrent repaired the bridge. I sat on a pile of timber some way up the bank and watched the flickering flames on the other side. Someone came and sat down beside me to ask for a light. As the cigarette glowed on the face so close to mine, I rejoiced to see those ruddy cheeks and shining eyes. Here he was again! This young soldier, who had but recently put on uniform, had been farming the fields of China not long ago. But he had already crossed the Yalu twice. In his first battle on the other side he was wounded; now, after a short rest, he was

on his way back. While the wind blew ashes from Korea into our faces, in thoughtful tones he told me of an experience. It seems that on the evening on which he left China, at this busy crossing where countless troops had converged, he saw an old woman. Her hair was white, yet she paid no attention to the wind and rain. She had a lantern in one hand, and with the other she was pouring hot water from a pot swathed in cotton. "Have a bowl of water, boys!" she urged. "Have another bowl! You'll soon have left home." He told me his company leader went down on one knee to take a bowl from the old woman's hand, then gulped it down and strode on to the floating bridge without a look behind. This young man said he had never forgotten that scene: on marches or in battle he had always felt that a pair of kindly eyes was gazing at him. . . . He had told me so much when trucks started honking and someone in his company called to him: the bridge was repaired. The young fellow stood up and disappeared into the darkness. I put out my cigarette too and walked quickly to the bridge which sparkled with frost. His words remained deeply imprinted on my mind. Often, after that, I thought of that mother standing with her lantern on the river bank and watching us no matter how fierce the wind and snow. . . .

It was a mighty conflict, and we, the Korean and the Chinese people, were the victors.

With a smile, the people of China proceeded easily and steadily on their way. Like a strong searchlight, dazzling all beholders and clearly illuminating the path ahead, the General Line for the transition to socialism was announced. Now it was the first winter of the First Five-Year Plan. It was night in a great forest sealed in gleaming snow and ice. The foresters' shack, reminiscent of the long cabin of some ship, was warmer even than a bath-house with four large petrol cans fitted up as chimneys for stoves from which blazing logs cast crimson shadows. A number of lumbermen, sitting on the bunks spread with deerskins, were eagerly discussing the General Line. One youngster beside me said: "These mountains are an important part of China's wealth. Isn't timber needed for every part of socialist cons-

truction? Can mines do without wooden props? Or railways without wooden sleepers?" Yes, a worker who rates the significance of his task so high will have inexhaustible energy. Tomorrow the mountains will surely resound to the whirl of saws and thud of axes as they fell trees.

The whole Chinese sky is illumined by the flames from our steel-smelting furnaces now that blast furnaces by the Yangtse are pouring out steel, and those of Bayin Obo in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region are not lagging behind. But during the First Five-Year Plan our primary base for iron and steel was Anshan, the mother of our whole steel industry. I was in Anshan one morning before sunrise, when tentacles of mist still wreathed the streets and the only sound to be heard was the swish of innumerable bicycles on the wet roads. From every direction people were converging on the great road leading to the entrance of the steel works. The road had become a river-bed down which a mighty torrent of workers poured. Suddenly a whistle rent the air as a train-load of workers from Haicheng and Liaoyang arrived—even the corridors of the train were packed. Then up drove a yellow bus for mothers and children—young faces lovely as flowers bathed in morning dew. Steel workers flocked into the entrance of the mill, then diverged into streams heading for different workshops. Before one open hearth furnace stood a young man with his face lit up by the flames as through his blue glass visor he intently watched the seething molten steel. Not long before this he had distinguished himself by smelting steel in record time. He told me that the day after he made his record they received a telegram of congratulations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung. The one thought of this young man of twenty-six was: "Socialism needs steel. I must better my output." In him again I saw those ruddy cheeks, those shining eyes. What a great and splendid vision of life is theirs! The light in their eyes is clearer, purer and brighter than even the azure sky.

The mighty tide of life is rushing forward. Now ten years later, looking back and reflecting, we can see what wonderful moments of time those were, every minute and every

second of our experience. It was precisely the sparks bursting from every moment to fuse into one whole that released the high tide of endeavour in the Great Leap of 1958. This was truly a tempest, a torrent, mightier than any we have known in our experience. Issuing from the hearts of six hundred million and surging out to cover thousands of miles, it has transformed our dreams into beautiful reality. In this wonderful scene of enchantment the youth has added to his stature. In ten years' time, he has grown into a man. Before us stretches out a boundless expanse lit by the flames of steel furnaces; the destructive flames of war are gone for good, but the flames of Truth are burning through the land. Hundreds of thousands of our countrymen all over China's plains and hills are braving the wind and snow to build dykes and reservoirs. Confronted by forces like these, hills bow their heads and floods submit to control. Molten iron is seething, ripe fields of wheat are waving, flags of people's communes are fluttering in the breeze. And during these tumultuous years I could neither curb my emotion nor slacken my stride. I have passed the Sungari, the Yellow River and the Yangtse, the Huai, the Chientang, the Min and the Hsinan Rivers. How many nights have I seen turned into day, how many dazzling mornings? From the depth of my being I asseverate: This has been a decade of true greatness in our history. We have travelled from night to dawn, from dawn to morning, and now the red sun has dispelled the mist and pierced the bright clouds to shine in regal splendour in the sky, giving infinite light and warmth. In the course of this long, long journey I have seen more and more ruddy faces and shining eyes; but now their expressions are more resolute, more mature, more intelligent. Just as my generation was steeled by the wind and rain of those years of war, the younger generation is being steeled in the hard school of the construction fronts.

There is a red glow in the eastern sky. Peace and warmth reign over Tienanmen Square, the work sites have gone and huge magnificent buildings have risen there. The lamps are growing dim, a bright morning has dawned, and men and women are walking with joy in their hearts to wel-

come the festival. At this instant, if you look far, what a splendid view the whole country affords! Rivers and streams break their way through silver mist, green breezes are blown from the valleys; in factories as vast as medieval castles molten steel pours down in a great scarlet cascade, tearing apart the veil between night and day to usher in the sun before its time. The Yangtse Valley is redolent of the sweetness of late rice, the paddy fields are one vast golden carpet stretching from one horizon to another. The rivers are linked chaplets of green jade, and the small white sails of their distant junks reflect the first rosy glimmer of the dawn. Dew-drops sparkle on ears of rice, while production teams raise flame-red banners as if to say: "Look! The sun is in our hands!" At this same moment those men who built big machine factories in the north are building even bigger castles of steel in the south; those who constructed the Yangtse Bridge at Wuhan are spanning the upper Yangtse with another arch like the rainbow. New mines are pouring out endless floods of coal, the northwestern oil fields are throwing up fountains of oil. I know the hearts of each and all of the labourers advancing upon these fronts. While we celebrate our tenth anniversary, we do not forget the imprints of the tanks on Tienanmen Square, we do not forget the old mother holding high her lantern on the river bank and braving the wind and snow. And because this is so, our people are drawing on endless reserves of strength, taming turbulent waves, distilling their wisdom into the fruits of victory, and scaling unconquered heights. And all this, in this instant of time, is illumined by the red glow in the east. At this moment how many ruddy faces and shining eyes are turned towards that red glow in the sky, are stirred once more to their depths by this sacred call. In truth, the red glow in their life emanates from them, from their own hearts. This glow, infinitely bright, is the glow of youth of our socialist motherland. This glow of youth will become the torch of imperishable Truth which will lead us to greater tomorrows, to loftier heights.

Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang

HAN PEI-PING

Our Party and Our Leader

Of many a high endeavour we might tell,
Of many a great achievement we might boast;
But first with true devotion let us sing
The Party and the leader we love most.

Not poets alone today are moved to sing,
This fire is burning in the hearts of all;
Great deeds past counting are strong proof of this,
And little things, though commonplace and small.

Beside the sea a cliff soars high and sheer,
A neat thatched cottage crowns the moonlit height,
And in that cottage where pine splinters burn,
Rapt, silent students bend their heads to write.

Abruptly an old man is on his feet,
He stretches out gnarled hands, his head raised now,
Once more he begs the teacher earnestly:
"First teach me, comrade, to write 'Chairman Mao!'"

Han Pei-ping is a poet and essayist who started writing in 1939.

The children flock to hear a story told,
The map upon the desk holds every eye;
Peking's main street — Changan — runs east to west,
And Chairman Mao works here in Chung Nan Hai.

A little boy pores over Chung Nan Hai,
Its winding paths and fine old trees to trace;
Sister — still smaller — pulls his hand away;
"Don't touch it! — That's a very special place!"

All's still at night, all lights are out but one
Which shines upon a workman's silver hair,
White hair, the badge of many years of toil,
The record of past penury and care.

Before him is a new invention's plan,
And swift and certain see his pencil glide;
Words of encouragement are in his ears,
The Party and the leader are by his side!

High up on Wuling Range a tent is pitched,
Through groves of pine a stream winds far below;
One day the tent's cut off from all the world
When rains pour down and torrents overflow.

For three whole days the girl there is marooned,
Yet know no fear but still can laugh and sing;
The Party and the leader by her side
Will help her overcome the Dragon King.*

* Believed to be responsible for flood and drought.

Writings of the Last Generation

WU TSU-HSIANG

Eighteen Hundred Piculs

The story below was written in 1933 and gives a good picture of the Chinese countryside in the thirties, when the grasping landlords were quarrelling among themselves while the starving peasants were driven to revolt. Wu Tsu-hsiang, the author, was born in a village in the province of Anhwei in 1908. He started writing in 1930 or thereabouts. His works include many short stories and essays and a short novel *Mountain Torrent*. He is now professor of Chinese in Peking University.

1

By the middle of the seventh month it was still as sultry as ever. The sky was covered with tattered wisps of cloud. Thunder rumbled and after more than twenty rainless days a violent storm blew up, swirling grey dust over the whole countryside. But it was too late: as far as eye could see the stunted, faded crops clung limply to the cracked soil no higher than wheat sprouts in early spring, such pallid ears as had formed were lean and wizened, and already stiff withered stalks were bobbing in the breeze.

It was the fifteenth of the seventh month. The imposing main gate of the Sung family's ancestral temple stood open, a sure sign that important business was in hand.

Po-tang, the manager of the farm belonging to the whole Sung clan, was frowning as he stood at the gate watching the torrential rain. The two gaping stone lions on either side were laughing at his depression.

In front of the temple stretched waste land and ruined buildings dating from the Taiping Revolution. As the years rolled by and rubbish and dirt accumulated, this had become an undulating meadow. Pigs and cattle browsed here, wild dogs gnawed at rags, raced wildly or rolled on the ground, children flew kites, plays were performed to the gods at festivals, and students home for the holidays made speeches here. Not a soul was in sight today, though. Prominent at some distance was a wooden platform fixed up on some pine trunks and roofed with bamboo. This was a stage for the dragon king, set up half a month previously. A shrine on this stage supported an earthenware vat, against which the rain was pelting with a muffled drumming as if the "true dragon" inside were grumbling to itself. On the ground beneath, exposed to the elements, squatted an image like a boy with a scabby head, drenched in rain and smiling wryly—a pitiful sight.* Right and left of the stage the rain-banners planted at random bore such invocations as "Timely Rain" or "A Rich Harvest," but these now hung limp and bedraggled. From the long-parched soil and the clumps of weeds rose a rank, suffocating odour. Po-tang yawned, then strode impatiently back inside.

"Shuang-hsi! Shuang-hsi!" Po-tang's voice echoed back from the four walls of the huge, empty temple.

* This amiable deity, West Wind Scabies, was believed to be in charge of the rainfall here. If no rain fell, the villagers used to sacrifice for three days. If the drought continued, they marched in procession at night to Dragon Pool and caught an eel or shrimp to represent the "true dragon," putting this in an earthen vat and returning with gonging and drumming to install it on the dragon king stage. This was designed to trick West Wind Scabies and intimidate his subordinates. If rain was still withheld, less polite tactics were employed: men went to West Wind Temple on the South Hill, took the deity from his seat and brought him down to the valley to let the blazing sun scorch his scabby head.

Shuang-hsi, the care-taker, called back gruffly as he stumped in through a side door. He was in his fifties, with eyelids which drooped drowsily.

"Yes, sir?"

"Did you notify every family? Show me the list."

"Yes—I made the round of every one on the list."

From the pocket of his jacket Shuang-hsi produced a folded red paper which he handed respectfully to Po-tang. This paper bore a lengthy list of names, most of them followed by a scribbled "Coming" or a signature. Having studied this with a thoughtful frown, Po-tang asked:

"How many aren't coming?"

"Master Chu-tang isn't at home, it was Master Shih-tang who signed for him. All the other old gentlemen and young gentlemen who signed promised to come."

"H'm." Po-tang pocketed the list and asked: "What are you doing in there?"

"Making tea."

"Have you swept out the East Hall?"

"The East Hall is leaking. I thought—I didn't suppose you'd be using it."

"Leaking? Why didn't you say so earlier? Why didn't you get it mended? The longer you live the less use you are, confound it!" Po-tang shook his shining bald head indignantly.

"It's rain slanting in between the gaps in the tiles. I . . . I . . ." Shuang-hsi's face was impassive, but to himself he was thinking: "That roof started leaking during the rainy season in the fifth month and I told you it needed mending, but you said there was no money to spare. No money to mend the ancestral temple, indeed!" But he kept these reflections to himself.

Po-tang abruptly stopped shaking his head as another idea struck him. In quite a different tone he ordered: "In that case, move some chairs and tables into the central hall."

"Yes, sir. Right away, sir." Shuang-hsi backed out.

Po-tang went out to the steps at the door and looked out over the large rectangular court. The rain was less heavy

now, but the sky was still sombre. In the yard on one side of some ornamental rocks from Lake Taihu stood a cedar several feet higher than the temple eaves, on the other side grew three spindly shrubs with red berries. The hiss and spatter of the rain on the leaves only brought out the place's isolation and stillness. In vain Po-tang tried to banish his forebodings. He had sat up late yesterday preparing for today's meeting, and had woken several times in the night to go over his opening speech — if he had to make one. Once more it rose unbidden to his mind.

"I had decided to call this meeting even before you proposed it. Throughout the years of my stewardship I have steered a straight course, as you gentlemen know. I have proved myself worthy of the trust reposed in me. My wish has been not to disgrace our ancestors. During the drought between the two harvests last year the land rent, at a fifty per cent discount, brought in eighteen hundred piculs only. We are all in the same boat, gentlemen, as you know. Then the price of rice dropped to two dollars fifty, two dollars twenty, and not wanting to sell dirt cheap I stored the grain in our granary where you can see it for yourselves. Pei Kun Girls' School has had to be closed. Girls only study for amusement anyway. The teacher's fee in Pei Ying Boys' School was reduced to fifteen cents an hour. All of us are eager to serve the community. Next term the school will be unable to open. Our house in town is empty as no tenants can be found. Uncle Yueh-chai, an ardent supporter of education and a public-spirited man, lent us twelve hundred dollars. The Defence Corps has been disbanded for five years now. After four weeks of drought our entire crop has failed. Though we applied for tax exemption on the ground of famine the county government would not sanction it, no, they would not sanction it. I have done nothing but what is plain and above board, as you can check for yourselves. . . . If we raise the rent, our tenants may leave in a body as refugees, and that would never do. . . . For the last five years, as you gentlemen know, I have worn myself out in the service of our estate. I'd have called today's meeting myself if you hadn't

proposed it. Let me set these problems before you for discussion. First, our eighteen hundred piculs of grain must on no account be touched. No, there is a legitimate use for them. We shall have to pay the additional tax of sixty-six cents a *mou* and the special levy of forty cents imposed by the Reclamation Bureau. Well, . . . Uncle Yueh-chai has lost so heavily on his mill in Sanhsi this year that we shall have to reimburse his loan to the primary school. We mustn't let him down after his kindness. Secondly, I hope you will devise some means to keep the tenants and hired hands in order. . . . If they leave the land that will be no laughing matter! Thirdly, gentlemen . . . the fact is we are unable to pay our taxes. We might draft a petition to the county government asking to increase the land tax. We can surely add just twenty catties per *mou*. Fourthly, there's the *pao chia* system, the militia, the census, the suppression of Reds. . . . There's no money for all these things. Fifthly, Pei Ying School will have to be closed for a year. Too few boys in our village have really shown themselves good scholars, far too few. But our boys can study at home. As a matter of fact there is not much profit in study. . . . I've done all in my power. Those eighteen hundred piculs must be put to the right use. . . ."

2

"Coming down in buckets, isn't it?"

With a start, Po-tang looked round. Laughing and talking loudly, two men came in, put down their umbrellas, scraped the mud off their shoes and wiped away the beads of moisture on their clothes. Short Tzu-shou in his fifties, in an old silk gown, owned a cloth shop and was head of the merchants' guild. Lanky Sung-ling in his twenties, with sleek hair cut short and a long gown of tussore silk with a high stiff collar, had graduated from a technical school in Shanghai but was living as a gentleman of leisure at home.

"Glad to see you! Glad to see you!" Forcing a cheerful smile, Po-tang invited them into the West Hall.

"Confound this rain! What weather, eh, Po-tang?" Tzu-shou shook the water off his oiled umbrella. "If only it had come ten days earlier!"

"Don't talk about it, brother," replied Po-tang gloomily. He turned to Sung-ling. "I never thought you'd come all this way in the rain."

Sung-ling chuckled but said nothing, merely smoothing his high collar and craning his neck.

"Only urgent business would bring him here," said Tzu-shou. "He asked me —"

"Come in and sit down."

They went into the West Hall which had an old wooden settee and two benches, and Shuang-hsi relieved the two new-comers of their umbrellas. Cigarettes and sweets were laid out. Sinking down on the settee Tzu-shou reached out for a cigarette. As he tapped it and held it up for inspection he said:

"I've lost my energy with my money. Whenever I see a couch I want to lie down. What are these cigarettes you've bought, Po-tang?"

"Shuang-hsi bought them. The name is Chesterfield. The price is fair, thirteen cents a packet."

"No wonder you age so fast, you're so busy scheming all the time how to save money. I'm used to English tobacco. These new brands —"

"I know. With a pipe of opium, you'd be happy."

"The idea! Think where we are. That wouldn't be seemly. Well, let's get down to business. Sung-ling wouldn't have come today if it wasn't urgent. He's been to your house several times, brother, but you were always out on your own affairs —"

"I haven't been home for two weeks. I spent one week on our farm and three days in town. That's why this meeting couldn't be held before. But what else could I do? I know about Sung-ling —"

"Just let me have my say. His capital is tied up, but he's chosen a day next month for the interment: the only

thing lacking is money. He can't leave his father's bones above ground for ever, can he, Po-tang? The most unfilial son must bury his parents. I know we've been short for the last year or two —"

"Short, do you call it? Last year when Pei Ying School had no money to open, we had to borrow twelve hundred from Uncle Yueh-chai at twenty per cent interest a year."

"I know. Just let me have my say. That hill with bamboos that Sung-ling has — this is frank talk between just the three of us — is more than he can handle, and that tenant of his there is a useless clod. Every year all the bamboo shoots and bamboos are stolen by the riff-raff around. They know the owner is a helpless scholar. He's spent countless money at the county government and invited the local big-wigs to countless meals. Those warnings to trespassers are utterly useless — they couldn't frighten a fly. You know, brother, that hill belongs to the same range as our ancestors' burial ground. Now he's hard pressed for money and willing to let it go for a mere two thousand. Apart from the bamboos, there are over fifty *mou* of arable land, which alone is worth more than two thousand! He doesn't want this fine bargain to go to strangers, he's set his heart on selling it to our clan. Leaves fall by the parent tree, he's a true son of Sung. You've got to help him out, Po-tang. I know the eighteen hundred piculs we had last year haven't been sold yet. Of course, you're quite right when you say we're short. The payment can be made in rice. I know you'll agree, Po-tang. It's to bury Sung-ling's father. That's right and proper. By helping him, you're laying up treasure in heaven."

"This is not the first I've heard of this. But the estate isn't my personal property. If it were, you may be sure I'd lend him two thousand dollars gladly, hill or no hill."

"Don't ride the high horse, Po-tang! Just give Sung-ling an honest answer: will you or won't you? Speak up!"

* It was customary in those days for a dead man's coffin to be bricked up and left in the open till a suitable time for burial.

"Tzu-shou, you've done business in town. You can't force my hand with talk like that. I'll turn out my pockets for you if you like. Because I didn't want to sell that eighteen hundred piculs of clan grain like dirt, I clung on to it—some devil must have bewitched me—meaning to let the interest go for a year because I was sure the price would rise this year. How was I to know it would drop and this year there would be an appalling drought—we shan't harvest a single grain! This wasn't just my stupidity, we've all done the same. Now all we've got is eighteen hundred piculs. At the market price of a dollar eighty cents, that comes to less than 3,500 silver dollars. Paying back Uncle Yueh-chai's loan with the interest will take fifteen hundred. Work it out for yourself, brother. Where are our expenses for the rest of this year and the first half of next to come from? The county government won't exempt us from taxes in spite of the famine: where are we to get the extra sixty-six cents tax on each *mou*? Or the levy for the Reclamation Bureau? Or money for the militia? Is Pei Ying School to remain closed for good? All that aside, brother, do you know how many others beside Sung-ling have designs on this rice?"

Flushing angrily, Tzu-shou leaped to his feet.

"Nothing of the sort!" he shouted. "Why drag all those things in? Sung-ling's offering to sell his bamboo grove to the clan in order to bury his father. He asked me to act for him. How dare you accuse me of having designs on the rice? This is no joke, Po-tang! You're dragging my name in the mud!"

"Sit down. Sit down. Keep cool. If I spoke hastily, it's all in the family. . . . Sung-ling—"

Sung-ling, sitting on their left, was staring blankly at the inscription on the pillar opposite. There were so many cracks in the pillar that the once upright characters were a crazy patchwork. A lizard was darting from one word to the next, slipping in and out of the cracks. Sung-ling traced each word on his knee:

"Man's highest duty is study."

He traced the inscription a second time. Though Po-tang and Tzu-shou were beside him, he heard snatches only of their conversation. His mind was on the mah-jong party at his cousin's house the previous evening. He had teased the maid Yen till she coloured up and giggled. . . . It had exceeded his wildest expectations!

"Nine women out of ten are willing if a man has the right approach. . . ." Complacently he recalled every episode, tracing idly on his knee till his name was spoken.

"Yes, Uncle Po-tang." He blinked and twitched his head.

"I don't want to read you a lecture, nephew. But though you've been home barely two years since you graduated, fifty *mou* of your land have passed through my hands; that's not counting the house you sold in Sanho and your shares in Heng Yu Tobacco Company. How is it your father's bones are still above the ground? Our forbears worked hard to make their way in the world. You are young, your mother is still alive, and you already have a wife and two children. You've had a first-rate education. You must think of the future. . . . Times are going from bad to worse. Money melts away."

"This year . . . I . . . I . . ." Patches of crimson burned in Sung-ling's pale cheeks. He squirmed and stood up.

3

The tramp of leather shoes was heard outside, followed by the sound of hobnails and cheerful voices in the main hall.

"So that's where you are!"

The speaker was Pu-ching, manager of Ichang Beancurd Shop, a stooped greybeard in his fifties with shaggy hair. Hard on his heels came Ching-chia, whose wrinkled chin was hairless though he was over sixty. Behind his back he was called the Drone, for all he had ever done in his life was sit by the stove, bask in the sun, stroll with a fan by the river, take the children out to play or visit the shops. The third was Tzu-yu, a foul-mouthed, boisterous notary

in his forties, with a wispy beard and a fat pear-shaped face. The fourth was Shu-hung, twenty-seven-year old graduate of some university in Peking, who had a dark scar under his left eye and taught in a middle school in the provincial capital. The fifth was Ching-yuan, a leathery-faced stammerer in his thirties who had been idle at home for the last three years since he lost his job as a shop assistant. Some fresh scratches on his face were no doubt the handiwork of his excellent wife. These five men represented their different branches of the Sung family.

Leaving Tzu-shou and Sung-ling, Po-tang hastened to greet the new arrivals.

"It was good of you to come. I'm sorry you're wet."

Shouting to Shuang-hsi for tea and cigarettes, he looked up at the sky. The rain had nearly stopped, a few dark clouds were scudding overhead.

"That's no way to talk, Po-tang." Pu-ching the beancurd maker stooped to lean his umbrella against a wall, then held up his bamboo pipe to peer into it, deliberately knocking out the ashes against one hobnailed clog. "I came only because it was raining. Heaven preserve us from this autumn drought!"

Tzu-yu the pettifogger grinned all over his face and pointed his grass to goad fighting crickets at Po-tang, saying:

"I tell you, Po-tang, Old Man Heaven's a mischief-maker. He's as big a scamp as any human being!"

"Nothing of the sort, Tzu-yu!" The beancurd maker sat down on the chair Po-tang had vacated, and taking tea from Shuang-hsi said to him: "Bring me some pipe tobacco, I don't hold with these foreign-style cigarettes. Nothing of the sort, Tzu-yu! The harvest has gone anyway, but in this autumn drought even men's lives are in danger. This shower of rain came in the nick of time. Believe me, Heaven has eyes."

"If Heaven has eyes, they must be in the back of its head!"

"Steady on. Since the capital was set up in Nanking, our Heaven here has had eyes. Have you read in the paper

what's going on in Shensi and those parts? That couldn't have happened near Nanking. How do I know that Providence is kind? This morning I saw Wei-sheng again. Thin and pale he is, but that's not strange. For the last dozen days he hasn't had time to smoke one pipe at home. I tell you, this autumn drought makes good business for doctors, pharmacies and undertakers."

"Your beancurd business isn't doing so badly either, brother." Tzu-yu made a face and chuckled, stroking his wispy beard with his grass.

"Don't interrupt!" Pu-ching went on solemnly: "How many in our village have come down with the autumn plague in the last few days? A fearful disease it is too: you shiver and burn by turns till the whites of your eyes grow yellow. It's not malaria, not typhoid: it's autumn fever! Our Chun-kou ate two slices of spiced beancurd the first day and was singing away with his sister, right as rain. But by midnight he was burning with fever. The next day he didn't know me. When I asked Wei-sheng to see him, he said there was no need: it's the same disease! He sees fifty or sixty patients a day. He made up a prescription and told me to give the boy that. But he says the illness can't be cured completely till Buddha sends us rain—and he was right. You say Heaven has no eyes? Where would we be if not for this rain today? No, no, Providence is kind."

The Drone's hairless jaw twitched and with his eyes on the yard he nodded to himself, impressed by Pu-ching's reasoning.

Tzu-yu grinned slyly round. When the others remained silent and Pu-ching went on smoking, wagging one foot complacently, he decided to stir them up.

"According to you, brother," he said, "this rain kills the autumn plague and helps the sick to recover. Well, that makes Heaven more of a bastard than ever!"

"Stuff and nonsense," Pu-ching retorted.

"Let me finish, brother. You know only the half of it. You're as slow in the uptake as that pipe of yours. If

a man's life is saved, you say Heaven has eyes. But suppose his whole crop fails and he can't afford to buy rice be it ever so cheap? Compared with that, dying of plague is as good as becoming immortal. Those the rain has cured today will be left hovering between life and death. A cat playing with a mouse likes to torment it. How can you talk about a kindly Providence? I say Heaven is a low-down, dirty bastard!"

"Stuff and nonsense!"

Shu-hung, who had listened in silence, now burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" Tzu-yu grinned sheepishly. "You've had an education, Shu-hung. Isn't what I said true?"

"I'm sorry, brother." Shu-hung smoothed his hair and smiled wryly. "Don't drag me into this. I can't claim to understand these theories of yours."

Tzu-shou, the head of the merchants' guild, was still lying on the settee blowing smoke rings as he reflected. Now he sat up abruptly to ask:

"When are you going to the provincial town, Shu-hung? What came of your lawsuit?"

"Term started some time ago. But I'm tied down by this case. I mean to set off in a day or so."

"Has it been cleared up?"

"Cleared up? I doubt if it ever will be."

"What suit is that?" asked Po-tang.

"Don't you know? — Ah, you're too busy to know," said the notary.

"It's a question of the 2,200 dollars we invested in Wan Yuan Oil Shop. . . ."

"You mean Yin Chu-chiang's shop? Isn't money there safe? Yin Chu-chiang may be dead but his thousands of *mou* of land can't fly away."

"I'm not saying the security isn't good. But I need money now! It was my father who invested that 2,200 dollars. He and old Mr. Yin were good friends, brother, don't you remember?"

"I do," said Po-tang. "Old Yin had shops with gold signboards north and south of the Yangtse. Everybody admired his ability."

"Moneybag Yin was one of the foremost gentlemen in these parts." Pu-ching rubbed the stem of his pipe against his glistening nose.

"The year that I graduated, we were still getting eighteen per cent annual interest. Then the old man suddenly died. I heard that his money-lending business went bankrupt, and when creditors pressed him he took his life by swallowing gold. But that's as may be. I hurried back to get in touch with his son, as both of the elder generation were dead. But he begged me with tears to let the interest go, promising to repay the principal within three years. That gave me a bad jolt; but since our fathers had been friends, if I couldn't help them at least I shouldn't make things harder. So I talked it over with my mother, and we agreed to waive the interest if he paid back our principal within a year. That was the year before last. He neither paid that year nor last year either. Even on his own showing, in two years he should have paid back the greater part. But not a cent have I seen yet. You know what he wants? To give me land instead!"

"A poisonous scheme!" Pu-ching shook his head.

"You can't eat rat poison with your eyes open." Po-tang made a show of concern.

"So it seems to me in times like these we can't consider old friendship. He's made a poor return for my kindness. At least my father and Mr. Yin are dead. You all know young Yin — just the sight of him irritates me. He isn't short-sighted, yet he must wear glasses. He dresses in ridiculous Western-style suits of purple and green brocade. He flaunts four rings on one hand. He lies all day on an opium couch listening to gramophone records, and gets prostitutes from other districts to come to his house. Why should I treat a man like that decently? I lent him hard cash, he can't pay me back in land! My father's funeral cost me nearly seven hundred; my young brother costs me four to five hundred a year at college; when my other

brother was divorced that cost nearly four hundred, and now he's married again —"

"Has Po-hao remarried? His own choice?" asked Tzu-shou.

"In Peking," Shu-hung went on: "He's married again. . . . Now we've more mouths to feed. And being away from home we can't keep an eye on things. I tell you our family is going to the dogs! But never mind that. You must all know how small our property is. Barely a hundred *mou* of land, and last year we had to pay a hundred extra in taxes without anything to show for it. This year is even worse. As for our investments, bah! Ho Mao Wine Shop closed down in 1927 when the northern warlords' army reached the county, and I not only lost five hundred dollars but had to pay over a hundred more. In Tung Sheng Cloth Shop last year when third brother invested in silkworms, a cool five thousand went! All I salvaged from that was a few bolts of foreign cloth that no one would buy. I've some money invested in Fukang, but since the owner's under arrest in the *yamen*, who's going to pay me? I've money in Heng Feng Tobacco Shop, but third uncle's barely keeping the place going. He's my elder, and if he pays no interest and won't return the principal there's nothing I can do. I have over ten mouths to feed at home, ten people to be clad. I don't like going to court, but I've no alternative."

"What was the decision in the county court?" Tzu-shou sounded sympathetic.

"It's still hanging fire. If he were bankrupt that would be another story. But with land he can't count as a bankrupt. I'm selling land myself, why should I take his?"

"In times like these, land's a millstone round your neck. Nobody wants it." The notary laughed.

"Who'll look after your interests when you've gone?" asked Tzu-shou.

"I've empowered Brother Tzu-yu to act for me."

"Mind you do your best for Shu-hung, Tzu-yu. If you get this money, I'll invest it for you in business. Twenty per cent annual interest, twenty per cent."

Tzu-yu bellowed with laughter.

"Hear him counting his chicks before they're hatched!"

"Don't count on that, Brother Tzu-shou. I need money to clear my debts and for my journey. If I had capital to invest, I wouldn't have gone to law. You're the manager of a big concern and head of the merchants' guild. Won't you make me a loan? I'll pay you twenty-five per cent annual interest."

At Shu-hung's request the whole room was filled with laughter.

After a moment Shu-hung went over to Po-tang.

"I've something to say to you, brother."

Po-tang, slightly taken aback, allowed himself to be led to the West Hall.

4

It was nearly half past ten. The rain was a mere drizzle. A long shaft of sunlight abruptly fell through the window of the West Hall, as blazing hot as ever. The wet earth in the courtyard started steaming.

The men's faces lengthened.

"Brother Pu-ching!" The notary smiled. "Do you still say Heaven has eyes and Providence is kind? A cat playing with a mouse! How are men to live?"

"Spoken like a true pettifogger, Tzu-yu. Stuff and nonsense! Is Heaven never to let the sun come out?"

"Enough of that," the head of the merchants' guild put in impatiently. "I've been thinking, Tzu-yu, there's been too much hanky-panky during Po-tang's stewardship. He means to keep these eighteen hundred piculs in his own hands."

"You're wrong there." Pu-ching filled his pipe again. "Po-tang is an honest gentleman, shrew and steady. He knows how to make one coin do the work of two. Our estate can't do without him. That's for certain."

"Shrew! Steady! A smiling tiger! — Calm down, Brother Pu-ching, I wasn't talking to you."

Pu-ching stolidly struck a light and lit his pipe, wagging one foot contentedly. The head of the merchants' guild went on:

"Last year we got less than sixty per cent of our rent: eighteen hundred piculs. When he went to the village to collect it, he took his own farm hands but charged their food to the estate. He took those two sons of his too. Our tenants toil and drudge the whole year round. In time of drought both landlords and tenants should put up with a loss; but not Po-tang! Every day he asked for chickens or the first beans of the season, and what they couldn't eat he made the tenants cart home. I doubt if he's finished eating that loot yet. He lined his own pockets by such tricks. That was last year. The year before that, when the harvest was good, there was even more hokey-pokey."

"That's not strange, Tzu-shou," Pu-ching put in again. His eyes were closed and he was rocking gently. "That's not strange. That was the tenants' duty, no more than his due. Those are crocodile tears you're shedding for the tenants. You're only sorry you couldn't do the same yourself. . . ."

"What sort of way is that to talk, Pu-ching? A man nearing sixty like you should keep a better watch on his tongue. Have you learned nothing in half a century?"

"Don't lose your temper." Pu-ching went on rocking calmly.

"Listen to me, Tzu-yu. Never mind the perks but take those eighteen hundred piculs. The market price then was still nearly three dollars, but for selfish reasons he wanted a monopoly of that rice to line his own purse; so he wouldn't sell it. But to make certain of it, he made the farm hands and their animals carry it here. Each extra transaction meant extra perks for him. And that's not all either. He left the rice till this year, when not a grain is being harvested yet the price of rice has dropped to one dollar seventy. Who's responsible for that loss? And that's not all. Two years ago we had a splendid harvest and prices were good — he can't possibly have spent all that money yet. But after buying several hundred *mou* of our kinsmen's land he

says there's nothing left. There must be something. He's using it to buy in tea and dates or to lend to the poor and our tenants at twenty per cent monthly interest. He was the one to close down the girls' school. And when the boys' school opened again he borrowed from Uncle Yueh-chai. Everyone knows the interest is eighteen per cent, but he's scored it up as twenty."

"I believe you. I believe you," said the notary. "But all tigers eat men, the brutes. That's why I'm in favour of splitting up the estate, first the grain and then the land in an equal division. We'll communize it." He guffawed.

While the others stared in amazement at his grinning face, Pu-ching rose to his feet and rapped his pipe on the ground.

"That idea's not new, Tzu-yu," he said. "But how can you air it publicly in the ancestral temple? You are no true son of the house of Sung! I'm worse off than you, but I wouldn't dare dream of such a thing. You have no heart or conscience, no family loyalty."

Tzu-yu was still grinning, his head resting on the back of his chair. At this he sat up and said:

"We're in the presence of the family gods here, old man. Will you swear on oath that you don't want to share out the estate? If you lie you're a bastard!"

"No heart or conscience! No family loyalty!"

The head of the merchants' guild, who had laughed heartily, now said cheerfully to Tzu-yu:

"Yes, everyone wants those eighteen hundred piculs of rice, and Po-tang is trying to swallow it himself. Besides, in a bad year like this, when we landowners have nothing coming in, do our tenants have rice dropping down from heaven? They're thinking of leaving the land to flee from famine; but they can't grow wings to fly away, and in any case where would they go? A dog pushed hard enough will jump over the wall. Are they going to behave like Buddhas when they're starving? That smiling tiger, blinded by his own greed, hasn't thought of that. No, Tzu-yu! I'm going to propose that we share out that eighteen hundred piculs. When we're starving, we can't let Po-

tang trick us out of our money. We mustn't wait for our tenants to rob us either — wouldn't you say there's a good likelihood of that?"

"Certainly not. But self interest blinds a man, and Po-tang won't consider it. If we don't press him to start, this meeting may never be held at all today." Tzu-yu stroked his beard as he spoke.

Ching-yuan the erstwhile shop assistant had been watching in silence, sitting on the farthest chair. Now he cleared his throat, rubbed the scratches on his face, and stood up to say solemnly:

"I-I-I. . . . Today is the middle of the s-s-seventh month—our tenants are gathering for a sacrifice. . . . We must b-b-be on our guard."

Spittle sprayed from his mouth as he spoke.

"Steady on. Steady on," said Tzu-yu. "There won't be any trouble just yet. We're only joking."

The veins on Ching-yuan's temples stood out. He sat down.

"That's hard to say. We must be prepared for the worst. But let's not talk of that," continued Tzu-shou. "Po-tang's in league with Uncle Yueh-chai to keep control of this rice. Do you know what happened just now? Sung-ling needs money to bury his respected father, a duty which should be close to the heart of our clan. He asked me to offer his bamboo hill to the estate. But Po-tang refused to help him and rode the high horse, even accusing me of ulterior motives! Sung-ling —"

Sung-ling was smoking in silence, absorbed in a dream. Hearing his name he flushed, straightened his collar and craned his neck with an embarrassed smile.

"He's a spineless creature. You can teach him a tune but he won't sing. Po-tang, that smiling tiger, presumed on his position as elder to talk to him sternly; but Sung-ling here hadn't a word to say for himself."

"Well, what's the use of my saying anything?" Sung-ling was discomfited.

Tzu-yu gave a hoot of laughter. "True enough! You might as well wear out your tongue on a stone wall. There's

no end to Po-tang's greed. He means to put us off while he uses this rice to feather his own nest, the bastard!"

"That's it," agreed Tzu-shou. "The smiling tiger had the nerve to say there are others who have designs on these eighteen hundred piculs. Do you know who he means?"

"I know Shu-hung wants to sell thirty *mou* or borrow fifty piculs of rice. He needs money for his journey and for his family. Po-tang had to agree; he can repay it with his first month's salary. Old Hsin-chiao is asking for a 'superannuity allowance,' but that won't do. Are we to get nothing from our patrimony unless we live to be seventy? Shu-tang's offering three *mou* as security for a small loan. Then there's him —" Tzu-yu pointed his grass at Ching-yuan.

"I-I-I. . . ." The veins started out again on Ching-yuan's temples. "I c-c-can't help it. My f-f-family's got no f-f-food."

"That wife of his is a devil," said Tzu-yu. "Ching-yuan is too soft with her; he needs to get tough."

"What, have they been fighting again?" asked Tzu-shou.

"Look at the marks on his face!"

"I-I-I —" Ching-yuan rubbed the scratches.

"It's not to be wondered at," commented Tzu-yu. "He's been at home without a job for three years, and their few *mou* won't feed them for more than a month or so. That woman of his is as fertile as a sow: he gets her with child every year. How are they to feed all their litter? They've nothing to live on but what little she makes by sewing and washing. There are no good wives nowadays. If they have to put up with hard times they expect to rule the roost."

"Uncle Tzu-shou!" Ching-yuan stood up, flushing, and walked up to him respectfully. "C-c-can I trouble you . . . to f-f-find me . . . a job in some sh-sh-shop?"

"Your aunt's been after me many times for that. Have you been out recently?"

"I-I-I. . . ."

"How many shops are still open? How many customers are there today?"

"D-d-do us a good t-t-turn!"

"Confound it, nephew! You've come to the wrong door! My position as head of the merchants' guild is nothing but an empty title. Every day I'm begging others to do me a good turn."

Tzu-yu roared with laughter again. "True enough! To ask him for help is like asking an old man to suckle a child!"

5

Pu-ching had been lolling back with closed eyes, wagging one foot as he listened to the others. Since he had no chance to join in their conversation he filled another pipe and left his seat. Hard though he was of hearing, from the main hall he caught a buzz of voices and laughter which drew him towards it. There he found at least thirty members of the Sung clan in groups of five and six. As he neared the great marble pillar in the lower part of the hall, a man stood up and waved to him from a group near the chimes.

"Come over here, Brother Pu-ching!"

Pu-ching saw on approaching that it was Wei-sheng, a doctor in his forties, wearing a yellow jacket over a black gown. He had thick, curling lips, his eyes were bloodshot and he blinked incessantly. He was a noted geomancer as well as a physician.

"When did you arrive?" Pu-ching greeted him cheerfully. "So you've time today to come to the ancestral temple?"

"I'll tell you how it is, brother. I don't let private affairs interfere with public business. Even if ten sedan-chairs were at my gate, my patients would have to wait if I was summoned to the ancestral temple. 'The superior man keeps to what is fundamental. The true Way can only grow from a firm foundation.' I don't forget my roots. Did you get here early?" His bloodshot eyes were blinking rapidly.

"I came during that downpour. You were right, Wei-sheng. This rain today is worth several of your prescriptions. My Chun-kou ate half a bowl of rice this morning."

"This was a shower of timely rain, timely rain. It hasn't overcome the heat, though; the sun is too fierce. This is an 'autumn tiger.' When the ancients said: 'Rivers and oceans wash, the autumn sun dries,' they meant the autumn tiger. In fact, before the rain stopped the Sun God was overhead again. When the *yin* and the *yang* contend together, mortals fall an easy prey to evil effluvia. Then a man must keep his Betony Pills* beside him."

"Uncle Wei-sheng, to my mind Betony Pills are far less effective than *ren dan*."

It was Yun-chuan who had interrupted, a sharp-faced youth who had abandoned his studies after two years of middle school. Dressed in a short-sleeved foreign-style shirt, he kept fingering the pimples on his face.

"*Ren dan*? That's bogus. . . ."

Shu-hung and Po-tang were talking to Shih-tang, a haggard one-eyed, petty politician and opium addict who had served as a secretary in the army, and fifty-year-old Shu-tang, an honest, unfortunate teacher. At this point they laughed.

"Not Chinese *ren dan*, Japanese."

"That's even worse. The Japanese are a nation of wolves: even their drugs are too fierce. Mark my words, nephew: in curing an illness, just as in ruling a country, the kingly way is best. Nowadays in your enthusiasm for the new learning you forget these old principles."

Yun-chuan glanced at Shu-hung, the university graduate. But he and Po-tang were deep in their own affairs. Yun-chuan asked provocatively:

"What about Shih Teh-chih's Universal Physic? Or Tiger Balm and Eight Hexagram Pills? Are none of them as Betony Pills?"

"My dear nephew, if you know what's in them, those drugs are worthless. Universal Physic, Ten Drops, and Tiger Balm fetch a high price simply because of their smart packaging. But what are they made of? Merely

* A remedy for sunstroke made from *Lophanthus rugosus*.

peppermint, licorice, camphor and the like, mixed with a little alcohol. Yet what alcohol in the world can drive out noxious humours? Alcohol, indeed! It's a noxious thing itself."

"That's not entirely true." Shih-tang, the one-eyed politician, rapped the table. "There's brandy in the Universal Physic. That's a fine stimulant. For any slight disorder of the heart, spleen, stomach or digestive tract, a small glass of it works wonders. I once stayed in Tientsin in June with one of my sworn brothers. One evening a few of us went to the theatre to hear Peking opera; but before the main item I came over dizzy and broke into a cold sweat. I thought I was heading for hospital, but no! My sworn brother ran out to a restaurant and brought me a small cup of no more wine than this—" he indicated what was left of his tea. "I was no drinker in those days, but I made myself swallow a little and felt better at once. After one cup—it was a small glass of a kind we don't have in the country—my chest felt easier. When I asked what it was, he told me 'brandy.' Shih Teh-chih must have learned that from that sworn brother of mine. Oh yes, the foreigners can teach us a thing or two, there's no denying that. But Japanese *ren dan* isn't all it claims to be."

"It has morphine in it!" Pu-ching nodded.

"That's not so." Yun-chuan sniggered: "Go and ask them at Kuang Chi Tang Pharmacy which they sell most of in summer—*ren dan* or Betony Pills? Yesterday when I went to buy medicine for my aunt, out of thirteen customers five were buying *ren dan*. They wouldn't take the Chinese brand, they must have Japanese! I learned that in summer the shop sells between seven and eight thousand packages! Yet in all the ports along the Yangtse there's a boycott on Japanese goods! Don't tell me all those people want to eat morphine!"

"The boycott of Japanese goods is a farce." Shih-tang shook his head.

"There's very little business in town, all the shops are closing. Only the pharmacies are doing well." Pu-ching sighed and looked grave.

"Your shop will never close anyway, uncle!" said Yun-chuan.

"Because I deal in a household necessity—but the profit is next to nothing."

"Never mind that," said Shih-tang. "To my mind, if there's a boycott we shouldn't make any distinction between Japan, America, England and France. If buying Japanese goods drains money from the country, the same is surely true of goods from the West. Is it just buying Japanese goods that has made China poor? And it's no use simply leaving it to the students to make speeches and search the shops. When people are as poor as they are now, of course they buy what's cheapest. Besides, foreign goods are naturally better than Chinese. The government ought to do something about it."

"What can it do?" asked Yun-chuan.

"The government should—but you wouldn't understand. I'm talking of customs. If there were a heavy duty on foreign imports, our local products would naturally pick up. Shu-hung knows what I mean."

"What's that?" asked Shu-hung.

"I said to control foreign goods and give our own a boost, we should impose heavy customs."

"Sorry, brother, I don't know what you're talking about."

Yun-chuan chuckled. "A university graduate, and you don't understand that? Did you study social science?"

"Yes, but not this. Don't quiz me. I hate being quizzed."

Yun-chuan gave a shout of laughter.

"Brother," said Shu-hung with a smile, "you just uttered heavenly wisdom! It's the foreigners in China who've increased the taxes on Chinese goods! Do you know that even in the Yangtse ports they have foreign custom-houses! There are foreign flags flying in all the larger ports!"

"Don't mention them!" One-eyed Shih-tang wrinkled his nose. "Yun-chuan, when you students hold open-air meetings why do you always talk such nonsense? This summer, for instance, you were making speeches every evening at this gate, wild, lawless speeches."

"We were only talking about overcoming superstition and boycotting foreign goods. We didn't say anything lawless or wild. Uncle Chu-tang in your branch of the family is the one for that," retorted Yun-chuan.

"Don't follow his example! He's an anarchist!"

"Shih-tang!" Po-tang spoke sternly. "You must control that brother of yours better. He's your responsibility. After all the money the family spent on his education, when he graduated from the local normal school he should have done something for the village. But when the primary school invited him to teach, he refused: he wanted to work in a factory in Shanghai! Rather than be a perfectly respectable teacher, he chose to be a filthy worker! He must be naturally depraved. He's a disgrace to our family. He didn't even know his place as a worker, for a warrant went out for him. He rushed home to hide but couldn't keep quiet here either, spending all his time with our farm hands stirring up trouble! It was 'Russia' this, 'Russia' that all the time with him. What does he really believe? Outsiders say he's joined the Communist Party. If that's true it's no laughing matter! If there's trouble in future, you'll be the one involved."

"Don't mention him to me!" Shih-tang screwed up his nose and threw up his hands. "I wish there were no such person. Since he's left home he's nothing to do with me. Don't drag me into it! If he'd been my son I'd have tied him up and taken him to the *yamen* to avoid his being locked up in a foreign prison like Yao-tsu. His name was on that list you sent out today, Brother Po-tang. You shouldn't have included him."

"Why not?" said Po-tang. "I asked one from each family, and in any case he never comes to this temple. What's happened to Yao-tsu, Shu-hung? Is he alive or dead?"

"As a suspect he should be all right — but it's hard to say."

"Ah, the pair of them —" Pu-ching sighed. But before he could continue, Shuang-hsi led in two waiters from Willow Spring Tea-house with steaming bamboo hampers. "The food is here! Let's eat."

After eating, Shu-hung wiped his mouth on a towel handed him by Shuang-hsi and murmured with a smile:

"The food's eaten, when will the meeting start?"

"Very soon now!" Po-tang smacked his lips over his tea. "Not all branches of the family are here yet."

"There are eight main divisions." The head of the merchants' guild spoke with his mouth full. "Over eighty branches and several hundred families. The rest of us come to keep up appearances, but sit silent as bodhisattvas in the meeting. Not till Uncle Yueh-chai comes can the business be settled. To save trouble in future, instead of summoning a meeting of the clan why not just ask old Yueh-chai to settle everything?"

"You shouldn't say that, Tzu-shou." Pu-ching was wrapping five sponges in a handkerchief to take home to his boy. "Uncle Yueh-chai is one of the family elders, a man of principle. If he did settle everything it wouldn't be strange; all the others would agree."

"It's no use our arguing, brother," said Tzu-shou. "So kindly don't interrupt!"

The others laughed.

Tzu-yu the notary took his bowl of tea over to Shu-hung and said:

"Our clan meetings aren't like your student meetings: it's no use losing patience. We simply talk and eat and go away. Whether the meeting's held or not makes no difference."

"That won't do today. We've talked and eaten but we can't go! Today it's a question of eighteen hundred piculs of rice and hundreds of lives!"

"Here come two more — no, three!" cried Yun-chuan.

The first of the new arrivals was in his late twenties and wore a white cotton jacket and leather belt. This was Yi-sheng, a member of the Three Rivers Gang. The second was the hard-working head of Mei Wen Chai Academy, old Min-chai, consumed with anxiety over the fate of his son. The last was Han-chih, principal of Pei Yin School, who

had graduated from Kiangnan Normal College in 1914. He wore an old silk gown and had a mottled face.

"You're just in time! There are still some cakes left!" Po-tang greeted them.

The member of the Three Rivers Gang sat down at a table with pale elegant Sung-ling. Seizing a cake with his chopsticks, he announced:

"I was born lucky where food's concerned. I've just been eating with friends in Willow Spring."

"You utter scoundrel!" Tzu-yu walked over to him with a grin. "On the eighth you promised to catch some crickets for me — but I've seen neither hair nor hide of you since."

"Uncle! Uncle!" Yi-sheng cowered as if to ward off a blow. "Don't be angry with me! I've been on a visit to Sanhsi where they've had operas. Like a puppy in a cesspool, I lapped it up. I'm worn out after hurrying back over eighty *li* last night. I've been asking about crickets for you. The carpenter's son caught a fine specimen in Po Yin Garden. I've seen it: it's not bad at all. Hsiao-chun next door caught another good one, but unfortunately one of its legs has come off."

"Stop trying to fool me! I don't give a damn what you've been doing. If you don't bring me some within three days, I'll break your dirty legs — you utter scoundrel!"

"All right, uncle. All right. We're still a long way from White Dew.* More I don't dare promise, but I guarantee you twenty by then. If I break my word, you can whip me for unfilial conduct."

"That's more like it."

"I've one comment to make, but please don't take offence. You're a beggar in a brothel, uncle — poor but happy."

"Utter scoundrel!" Tzu-yu slapped his head.

"Oh, uncle!" Yi-sheng dodged, blinking and chuckling. "Whom are you going to match your crickets against? The village ring closed down two years ago, and this year not

* A division in the old Chinese calendar, about the beginning of September.

even Sanhsi has one. I advise you to lie quietly at home by your lamp instead of playing with insects!"

"Shut your foul mouth, you utter scoundrel!"

"Ah, uncle, the well-fed can't sympathize with the starving. I —"

Yi-sheng broke off as Shu-hung came over to tell Sung-ling and Tzu-yu with a smile:

"Of all our villagers you're the two most cheerful. You take life easy, keeping crickets and birds, behaving as if you hadn't a care in the world."

"Shu-hung, Sung-ling here has a strange vice, did you know? It's not really strange, only strange in him. He's crazy about slave girls!"

Red in the face and squirming inside his high collar, Sung-ling protested:

"Don't slander me, I . . ."

"Slander, is it? Tell the truth, Sung-ling. You're a university graduate, but instead of modern girl students you like slave girls. I shouldn't say like, the fellow's crazy about them. It's not for nothing he's called a 'feudal remnant.'"

Shu-hung laughed and quipped:

"No wonder you stay at home, Sung-ling, and refuse to go back to Shanghai."

"Rubbish!" Sung-ling stiffened and stood up, crimson, to escape.

"Don't go! Don't go!" Tzu-yu bellowed with laughter. "He's an out and out womanizer! He doesn't care what they look like or how old they are."

Sung-ling managed to slip away.

"Ha, ha, the bastard!"

"Shu-hung, I've something to ask you!" a gruff voice called.

Shu-hung turned to see Min-chai, the head of the private academy, sitting with old Hsin-chiao at a table on one side.

"What is it, uncle?"

"Just tell me this. . . . Is Yao-tsu really a Communist? You must know."

Yao-tsu, Min-chai's only son, had been in Shu-hung's form in middle school. He and Shih-tang's younger brother were the two revolutionaries of the Sung family. While studying in a college in Shanghai he had recently been arrested, and they did not know what had become of him.

"I have no idea," said Shu-hung. "According to Chu-tang, he's only a suspect. He's a good student. Don't worry about him, uncle. He'll be released before long."

"That's not the point. If he's really a Communist, being cut into small pieces would be too good for him. I'd be pleased and our ancestors would be rid of a pest. Even if the court didn't kill him, I wouldn't put up with him." Min-chai fanned himself with a fan made of eagle feathers, while tears welled up in his old, dim eyes. His voice, so stern at first, shook.

"It can't be serious, uncle. Set your mind at rest. I've written to several friends asking them to make inquiries. I'll let you know as soon as I hear anything."

"Ah, nephew, in our village yours is the only household that amounts to anything now. The rest of us aren't worthy sons of the Sung family."

Old Hsin-chiao, who had asked the estate for a "superannuary allowance," combed his beard with the small comb that hung from his lapel, and quoted:

"'An ancient clan well-known south of the Yangtse and famed in the Western regions.' Ah, Shu-hung, your generation has no conception of what the Sung family was like in our days. All you can see are the tablets, the official titles, the academic honours. . . . In those days not one blessing was lacking, whether 'Five generations under one roof' or 'Living till a hundred in married happiness.' Yet in fifty years we have been reduced to this!"

"Yes, uncle," responded Shu-hung helplessly.

"In the old days each son we sent out into the world cut a respectable figure, handsome and courteous. In the ancestral temple in those days there were three small sacrifices a month, two great sacrifices a year. The clan members filed in and ranged themselves each in his place, some sitting, some standing. There was the right precedence for high and

low, the right order for old and young. If the elders kept silent, no young fellow dared open his mouth. But look at things now: it's like a cattle market! Mark my words, Min-chai, this family needs to be disciplined. . . ."

Min-chai was too deep in thought even to hear him. After a pause he said to Shu-hung:

"In the first month this year, I shouldn't have let Yao-tsu go. His face was dark, I knew ill luck was in store. Yao-tsu's future is black, Shu-hung. For three nights running I've dreamed that he knelt before my bed with blood streaming down his face!" The tears which he had held back flowed down his cheeks.

"That's not possible, uncle." Despite his own forebodings, Shu-hung forced himself to smile. "You dream at night because you worry all day. Dreams are always the opposite of reality. Set your mind at rest."

"How can my mind be at rest? . . ."

7

Meanwhile still seated near the chimes were Pu-ching the beancurd maker, Wei-sheng the doctor and geomancer, Po-tang the manager of the estate, Shih-tang the petty politician, and Yun-chuan the former middle-school student. They had been joined by another couple: Shao-hsien the pock-marked head of the fourth district, a man in his fifties with gold fillings in his teeth; and Han-chih the head of Pei Ying School.

They were discussing the organization of a militia. Han-chih told the district head:

"As I see it, Brother Shao-hsien, you'll find it hard to get a defence corps going. First of all, there's the question of men. Judging by the regulations for suppressing Communists in Honan, Anhwei and Hupeh, each household has to supply one militiaman regardless of family or social status, and no substitutes are allowed. But that wouldn't work here. Take Sung-ling, for instance. Can you imagine him shouldering a rifle and serving in the militia? Or take

the men who are idle at home with no jobs, the shop assistants, tailors, petty tradesmen. . . . Most of them belong to the Three Rivers Gang. None of them knows where his next meal is coming from, and since they have no property themselves why should they defend other people's? Remember when the bandits broke into the city two years ago? Did they really fight their way in? Of course not. Every child knows that it was the local riff-raff that opened the city gates and welcomed them in. Those young unemployed fellows are just longing for riots to start. Besides, the only good militiamen in our village have jobs outside like Shu-hung, though they're a minority. Very few of those living here are reliable. And farm hands, of course, are completely out of the question. They've nothing to eat and their noses are kept to the grindstone all the year long — what time do they have to drill, stand sentry or defend the place for you? But apart from farm hands, unemployed and riff-raff, who else is in the militia? The second problem is rifles. The thirty-odd rifles which were all our village had were borrowed by the County Defence Brigade; so when the city fell the bandits got them. Where are you going to get money to buy new rifles? There's no fund for the militia, it's a voluntary organization for self defence; but who's to pay for uniforms? For hot water and incidental expenses?"

"I know. I know." The district head spoke shortly. "But I have my orders. I've got to carry them out. No matter how hard it is, this has got to be done. On the tenth I went into town and had a good look at the methods used in the second and third districts. I mean to do the same. We'll issue no rifles for the time being: in any case they won't be needed yet a while. But we will organize militiamen. I don't anticipate any trouble there."

"Thank your lucky stars they haven't any rifles," quipped Yun-chuan.

"Hold your tongue, my lad, and keep out of this!" snapped the district head.

"I was saying no more than's true," Yun-chuan flushed and spoke grumpily.

"The cost will be met by the estate, of course. Fortunately it doesn't amount to much."

"That won't do," protested the headmaster. "The estate hasn't reaped one single grain this year, all we have is eighteen hundred piculs Po-tang kept from last year. That rice has got to be used to run my school. Don't tell me a village of several hundred households with several hundred boys named Sung can't even run a school! To my mind, the girls' school should also be re-opened. Last year we had mixed classes at Pei Ying, and that's very bad. Respectable families won't send their daughters to a boys' school, and those girls from low-class families. . . . In a word, times are so hard that only a handful of people have enough to eat. Even if bandits come, there's nothing to steal. A militia is quite redundant, we don't need defending. The important thing is the education of the younger generation."

"Bosh!" cried the district head bluntly. "During famine even a paralytic old woman may turn bandit. Bandits don't come from outside, they're here among you! A militia will at least give you more confidence. If we don't have one and the worst should happen, who'll be responsible? You don't care, I suppose, if I'm shot for negligence?"

"Shao-hsien is right." Pu-ching had been silent for some time but now he spoke up. "Bandits have got to be rooted out. Look what the paper says about those Communists in Kiangsi and North Anhwei. . . ."

Annoyed with this digression, the district head glared at Pu-ching before going on:

"As for education, you've teachers, haven't you? Hasn't old Min-chai got a first-rate private academy? Doesn't Shu-tang teach? And if you want schools, there are plenty in the county town."

"The school in town is subsidized by a levy on silk and tea. These last two years no cocoons could be sold — even Sung-ling's big mulberry orchard has been cut down to make a vegetable garden. How many households raise silkworms nowadays? But no more of that. Do you know that last year the County Education Bureau had a deficit of over

twenty thousand, and the teachers still haven't received their salaries for the fourth and fifth months? Do you know that when they pressed for payment the bureau had to give each of them a pass-book for the shops? Next term I shouldn't be surprised if students from the county town didn't start coming to our village school!"

"Never mind! Never mind!"

"Never mind? Do you want all the children of the Sung family to become young hooligans or cowherds? You'll hardly have the face to propose that, Brother Shao-hsien."

One-eyed Shih-tang stood up and stretched with a snort. Looking at Po-tang, he said:

"But if you think carefully, education is just one more way of cheating people. It costs over ten thousand dollars to go through university, but what happens when you graduate? You can't get a job as magistrate: the best you can hope for is a teaching post. Men like Sung-ling have to live at home doing nothing. And what do you learn for all that expense! When I was in Peking I saw how students live: a football match today, a race tomorrow. The winners throw their caps into the air, shouting with laughter. Or else they fight or go to the theatre. Or make speeches out of doors. Or walk hand in hand with girls to parks or cinemas! I can see no need for schools: a private tutor is enough. I never went to a modern school, but when I was a secretary school graduates had to come to me for advice."

Po-tang cast a harassed glance at the headmaster, but since Han-chih merely pulled a long face and said nothing, he kept silent too.

The district head chuckled. "That's the way to talk!"

Po-tang listlessly changed the subject. "Uncle Yueh-chai's loan passed through my hands and I must see that it's paid back. This year he lost over four thousand on his mill in Sanhsi, and he needs this money to start things going again. He's raised the question many times. I got him into this mess, I must get him out. Do as you like about the school and militia. I'm going to repay that loan."

"Old Yueh-chai lost money on his mill because of his own greed," said the district head. "Last autumn when

the price of rice dropped to two dollars eighty, he was sure it would drop no further and drew all his money out from his money-lending shops to buy in two thousand piculs. Then his money shops crashed. In the end both horse and rider toppled down!"

"Otherwise he couldn't have lost over four thousand. His case was just like ours with these eighteen hundred piculs. He couldn't believe the price would stay at two dollars: he was sure if he kept the rice it would go up. This spring it was easy to sell. The dealers came and pestered me every day, but I made up my mind not to part with a single grain. I thought that was in the best interests of us all and would please our ancestors. But this year, in spite of the famine, the price has dropped to one dollar eighty. And if you look for a dealer, he gives you a wide berth."

"That's what's known as cornering the market in grain. You were trying to do the same thing yourself!" For the first time the petty politician laughed.

"That's not fair, Shih-tang," said Pu-ching. "Po-tang has our interests at heart, that's his great virtue. If he hadn't kept that bit of grain, what would we Sung have to eat now that the crops have failed? That was a wicked suggestion Tzu-shou made just now that we should divide the eighteen hundred piculs up between the different families. But what we can do is buy the 'common rice,' paying the same price as in previous years of famine when we bought it at a fifty per cent discount. Our ancestors left this estate for us, and our ancestors' rice tastes sweet to their descendants. That's my proposal. Isn't it right and fitting?"

"Most of the estate is land that used to belong to one or other of us. We can only blame our own incompetence in not being able to make ends meet without selling land. But if this goes on till all our land has become common property, how are we going to manage? Tzu-shou's proposal makes sense. Why should we buy the 'common grain'? Many of us here are in favour of a division. I think that's our most reasonable course."

"Shih-tang, you're talking like Tzu-shou and Tzu-yu — such things should never be said! Remember that we're

in the ancestral temple and all the ancestors are listening to us. You have no right to propose such an impious thing."

With a sigh of dismay, Po-tang clasped his bald, shining head.

8

Hsin-chiao and Min-chai lamented the good old times till Shu-hung lost patience and slipped away to join Po-tang to urge him once again to start the meeting. Po-tang explained unhappily:

"We're just waiting for Uncle Yueh-chai."

"The normal procedure is to start when you have a quorum. Over fifty out of eighty-odd have turned up: that's quite enough. Why do we have to wait for Uncle Yueh-chai?"

"This is our ancestral temple, brother, not your college. We're all at sixes and sevens. These eighteen hundred piculs are like a gold coin in a beggar's hands — some want to use it for this, others for that; but there's not enough to go round. Holding the meeting couldn't solve the problem. If Uncle Yueh-chai isn't here I can't be responsible. It's not today only. We've always looked to him for advice. With these additional taxes and levies so heavy and rent only two hundred odd catties per *mou*, even in a good year we make no more than thirty or forty per cent. I'm still in favour of putting up the rent."

"Our tenants are on the verge of fleeing from famine: how can you talk about putting up the rent?"

"They won't really do it. They talk wildly because the law can't reach them here; but where could they go? This is one of the richest regions in the country. There may be a famine this year, but not every year."

"It's out of the question to put up the rent. You're high and dry yourself, so you don't know how icy the water is, brother. Though I'm not at home most of the time, I've some idea of the situation. Each has his own difficulties. The year that my father died I found family affairs too much for me. Since I calculated that we'd get less than

seven per cent on our hundred or so *mou*, and it didn't seem worth wearing myself out all autumn for such a small amount, I thought selling land and banking the money would be safer and less troublesome. When I found that no one wants land any more, I thought of raising the rent. But I soon discovered: . . ."

"You're a bookworm, brother, and don't know how crafty the tenants are. They told you a pack of lies."

"Not a bit of it. I checked up carefully. Old Tai, the farm labourer who lives in my gatehouse, is an honest fellow who doesn't work for me either. His wife used to be a servant in our house. There's no reason why they should lie to me. Listen: the best land produces no more than six hundred catties a year, and the landlord takes half in rent, leaving only two hundred and fifty or thereabouts. Thirteen or fourteen workdays are needed on each *mou* for ploughing, sowing, weeding, watering and so on. You can reckon each workday at thirty-three cents. What's left is barely enough for fertilizer and seeds, the hire of an ox and water-wheel, and the labourers' food. Work it out for yourself: after a year's hard work what do they get? Not enough to keep a family."

"Of course. What's strange about that? With nothing but their bare hands, they can't expect to make big money."

"He argues like an intellectual," put in Shih-tang, screwing up his one good eye. "My brother Chu-tang is much worse with his talk of the 'proletariat' and 'down with landlords!'"

"I don't understand that talk. I'm just giving you the facts. Naturally no one makes big money by farming; but a man must have enough to eat. What is old Tai eating now? The whole family climbs the hills each day to pick pine kernels and wild mushrooms. The other day they ate toadstools by mistake so that now their lips are swollen, their tongues are numb! The children are writhing on the bed! The old are weeping and the young are wailing! It's a ghastly business!"

"This is a famine, brother. How many of our Sung family have rice?"

"And suppose there weren't a famine? The price of rice has dropped like this, and the government's borrowed shiploads of American wheat and cotton — fifty million dollars' worth! Poor quality stuff that they couldn't sell. . . ."

"In the last twenty years there have been so many famines." Shih-tang put in with a sigh. "I've been home nearly ten years but seen only two good harvests. I simply don't understand why."

"Why, eh, Shih-tang?" Pu-ching rubbed his pipe against his nose, wagging one foot. "I'll tell you why: Heaven — is — punishing — man — for — his — sins." He turned to the geomancer. "Am I right, Wei-sheng?"

"It's fate. It's fate."

"Of course it's fate."

"Brother Po-tang," Shu-hung smiled. "Since I can't sell my small property, I was thinking of suggesting to my tenants that we dig a few ponds. They can supply the labour, I'll supply the land. I think you should have ponds dug on the estate too."

"It can't be done."

"Why not? Let me explain. I've thought it out carefully. In hilly country like this there is no danger of flood, all we fear is drought. During that terrible flood two years ago we had a bumper harvest. In the old days when our ancestors were in charge, the dykes were repaired every year, the embankments were strong, the river bed was deepened and canals were made. Even if no rain fell they didn't lack water. In the last few decades folk have been too poor to repair the canals. The embankments are caving in, the river bed has been silted up as high as the banks. If there's no rain for three days, there's no water to pump into the fields. Now we really 'depend on Heaven for our food.' You say this year is exceptional, but there may be a famine next year too. There may be years of famine caused by drought. So I mean to convert several *mou* of land and get my tenants to dig small reservoirs for me. Each one will irrigate ten *mou* of land."

"You're a bookworm, brother. Stick to your book learning, but leave farming alone. You don't know what you're talking about."

"I don't know what I'm talking about?"

"Listen! When it comes to farming, you'd better take my advice. Those fancy schemes of yours won't work. The soil hereabouts doesn't reach down more than three or four feet anywhere. Underneath that is rock. Not even an immortal could dig down for you. And would your tenants be willing to dig for nothing? You've just said yourself how hard they work all the year round!"

Shu-hung was silenced. He scratched his head and sighed.

"There are no end of jokes about bookworms like you. Let me tell you one. The son of rich Fang Yung-ching in Sanhsi graduated from an agricultural college in Nanking and insisted on farming their land himself to try out scientific methods. He spent over ten thousand dollars going to America and buying a tractor. Came the day to try it out and he invited a great crowd to watch. Everybody thought it would be quite a spectacle. And so it was. He used petrol as fuel, but the thing wouldn't move. Some bolt had broken. That spoiled his whole show. He fetched a mechanic from Shanghai to repair it, but the man said he'd have to go to America to get another bolt. Just think of it! Bolts are always breaking on those machines, but if he went to America each time to get a new one, how much would every grain of rice he grew cost? Fang Yung-ching spent half his fortune to buy that infernal machine, thinking his son knew what he was about. If a graduate in agriculture was like that, what chance have you —"

"Served him right!" Shih-tang roared with laughter. "Each place has its own way of doing things. China's a country of hoes and wooden ploughs. How can we use foreign methods here?"

Distant gonging and drumming sounded, interspersed with shrill cries, as if heralding a general's appearance on

the stage. It was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon. But the Sungs were chatting and laughing, sipping tea or smoking cigarettes, as if there had never been any talk of a meeting, as if all disputes and problems could be solved by this idle chatter.

Tzu-shou on the settee in the West Hall had been reflecting in silence. Now he marched sternly into the main hall, shouting:

"Brother Po-tang, you're putting off the meeting on purpose!"

Po-tang smiled wryly and said:

"What do you mean, brother? Why should I do such a thing? We're waiting for Uncle Yueh-chai —"

"If Sung Yueh-chai dies, does that mean we must die too? They want to trick us, friends! Down with these white ants who are lording it over our clan and swallowing up our estate! . . ."

While the others stared in amazement, with a chilly smile Po-tang stepped forward.

"Don't lose your temper, brother!" he cried. "Keep a watch on your tongue!"

"I shall say what I like. You smiling tiger, you! You're in league with Sung Yueh-chai to eat up our estate! If we hadn't pressed you, you'd never have called this meeting. Now you're trying to wriggle out of it on the pretext of waiting for him. Then the two of you can pocket eighteen hundred piculs!"

"What's this?" the others demanded.

"Don't you understand? This smiling tiger is choking the life out of us. He's keeping his claws on those eighteen hundred piculs."

"Not I! You all elected me as your manager."

"Manager, indeed! You manage to line your own purse, but you haven't repaired the East Hall since it started leaking. You and Sung Yueh-chai are up to dirty tricks — you'll ruin the lot of us! You want to swallow our eighteen hundred piculs."

"Hold your tongue, brother! Because you've lost money in business and your creditors are pressing you, you want our

common rice to save yourself! You brought Sung-ling here as your dummy, and when your scheme failed you flew into a rage. A dog pressed hard enough will jump over a wall — you should be ashamed of yourself. Think of all the legitimate uses for that rice. How can we let you have it all? The time has come for frank talk — forget your crazy dream!"

Like a mad dog Tzu-shou leaped at the steward with his cynical smile. Others held him off, crying:

"This is the ancestral temple: steady on! It's all in the family: let's talk things over. We'll send someone for Uncle Yueh-chai. And we needn't wait for him. Let's start the meeting."

Bang, bang! Boom, boom, boom! Bang, bang, bang, bang! Boom, boom, boom!

The din of gongs and drums and children's cries had reached the common outside. They peered through the gate to see what was happening. Ching-yuan, the jobless shop assistant with the scratched face who had been sent to fetch Uncle Yueh-chai, rushed back in horror, his eyes nearly starting from his head. The veins on his temples stood out darkly as he cried:

"They're c-c-coming to st-st-steal our rice! The t-t-tenants and farm hands are c-coming! They've got b-b-baskets. They've c-come to rob us!"

Consternation reigned. Each face contracted into two great eyes and a gaping mouth. A noisy crowd of scantily clad peasants was rushing through the weeds outside towards the temple. The gonging and drumming had swelled to a wild tumult. Small urchins were shrieking, jumping and whistling like demons.

"Shuang-hsi! Shuang-hsi!" shouted Po-tang. "Close the gate!"

Like a sleeper rudely awakened, Shuang-hsi stumbled in from a side door to scurry panic-stricken this way and that, like an ant on a hot pan.

"Close the gate, man! Has a devil run off with your wits?"

But the gate was too massive and heavy. While Shuang-hsi was still bending one shoulder to it, the crowd burst

through the doorway. These peasants with screaming, leaping children in their midst came furnished with buckets, baskets, crates and sacks. . . . Gaunt scarecrows with scrawny black arms, they blocked the gate. Some had made themselves devils' masks of ashes and lime, others with crates and baskets on their heads were reeling and leaping from side to side like the demons in a Buddhist hell. The shouting, gonging, drumming and whistling were deafening.

A swarthy, heavily bearded man stepped forward and, having gestured to the others behind him, strode into the ancestral temple shouting:

"We've come to borrow grain! We want Sung Po-tang!"

Like hens confronted by a wild cat, the Sung's scattered in all directions, some even scuttling through the crowd at the gate. Po-tang's lips were trembling; he seized the district head.

"You take charge for me! You take charge!"

The peasants surged in like a spring tide, bearing down on the storehouse at the back. Baskets, buckets, crates whirled through the hall. The volume of shouting and gonging increased tenfold till even the great stone pillars were vibrating. Some dark figures, empty-handed but for gongs and drums, rushed up to Po-tang and Shao-hsien.

"You — you brigands! Do you want to die?"

The broad-faced peasant who had led the way charged forward clapping his hands and crying:

"Grab them! Sung Po-tang! Sung Po-tang! Don't be afraid, you fellows! A man can only die once!"

The empty-handed peasants closed in to seize the steward and district head, who screamed at the top of their voices and struggled wildly. To the accompaniment of gonging and shouting, they were half pushed, half carried out of the gate.

The waste land outside was thronged with ragged men, women and children: members of the Sung family as well as tenants and farm hands. Some had swathed their heads in cloth and were ghastly pale — these were the invalids. Some held banian fans up to keep off the slanting rays

of the setting sun as they stared into the temple. Some ran whooping inside to fill their baskets with rice, darting here and there madly. The air was rank with the stifling exhalations of decaying vegetation and slime.

The steward and the district head were pushed like two pigs for the slaughter, to the dragon king's stage. The earthen vat had been knocked down, and West Wind Scabies squatting on the ground had been kicked over in the mud and rubble. His face with the wry smile was smashed into fragments. Some young fellow picked up old sandals or whatever they could lay their hands on to throw at the steward, while a skinny boy found a dead eel — the true dragon! — beside the scattered remains of West Wind Scabies and hurled this at Po-tang's bald head.

Peasants shuttled in and out of the temple door, loading rice into baskets, on to their backs or on animals, roaring work-chants as they went. Those with empty containers flew by whistling, like the wind. Pu-ching the beancurd maker and Ching-yuan the stammerer had run home for baskets and come back to join the crowd. Sung-ling had slipped out of the gate and trotted stiffly off like a goose chased by a dog.

Shuang-hsi crouched by the steps, wracked with sobs. "Our ancestors! . . ." The two big stone lions merely laughed at him, laughing and laughing as if they would never stop.

Translated by Gladys Yang

Notes on Literature and Art

OUYANG YU-CHIEN

The Modern Chinese Theatre and the Dramatic Tradition

1

If we start with the dramas of the Southern Sung dynasty (1127-1279) the traditional Chinese theatre has a history of nearly nine hundred years, while even the existing plays of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) are nearly seven hundred years old. But the Chinese stage has a much earlier origin, if we reckon that it had already begun to develop in the Han dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D. 220).

The modern Chinese theatre is little more than half a century old. The traditional dramas had been a form of opera, though they also laid emphasis in some scenes on dialogue. Modern plays were not introduced into China till 1907, after which scenery and curtains began to be used on the stage, there was a division into acts, and multi-act and even one-act plays appeared.

Modern Chinese operas have an even shorter history. Some experiments were made during the late twenties and early forties of this century, and Li Ching-hui's operas for

Ouyang Yu-chien is a famous actor and playwright who started his dramatic career in 1919 and was one of the pioneers of the modern Chinese stage. His plays include *The Shrew* and *After Coming Home*, both on anti-feudal themes. He is now director of the Central Drama College.

children were at one time fairly popular; but not till after the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature in 1942 did modern operas begin to make an appeal to the masses and reflect contemporary life. So I think we should take 1942 as the date of the beginning of modern Chinese opera. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China there has been a great development in this field and many themes have been used, most of them dealing with new revolutionary stories, in full-length operas.

2

Modern plays first appeared in China on the eve of the 1911 Revolution, which converted the country into a republic. Young intellectuals of that period, faced by the growing corruption of the Ching dynasty, the invasion of their country by foreign powers and the danger of its partition, attempted to arouse the people to save China by means of political movements; but while some wrote on politics others preached patriotism through fiction and poetry. In June 1907, some Chinese students in Japan made use of the European form of drama to reflect the rising tide of nationalist feeling. The first play they produced was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, based on the popular novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. The theme was the revolt against race prejudice, and the religious ideas of the original were omitted, the play ending with the victory of the Negroes after killing the slave-traders and pursuing troops — a permissible change in order to stir the audience. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had five acts, but in order to hold the spectators' interest a number of interludes were added, not strictly in accordance with the rules of the modern stage. This play was put on in Shanghai in the autumn of 1907. After that, starting in Shanghai, many modern repertory companies were formed and modern plays became popular in China, their popularity increasing in the decade following the 1911 Revolution. They were known as "Modern Dramas" or "Plays of Enlightenment," the term *hua-chu* (a "talking play") now in

use being adopted in 1927 on the suggestion of the dramatist Tien Han.

In the years just before and after the 1911 Revolution, modern plays were performed mainly as political propaganda; so were those freely adapted from foreign authors, which also dealt with such social problems as arranged marriages, usury or racial prejudice. At that time few scripts existed. Some writer would draw up a skeleton plot for a number of different scenes, and after he had explained this to the actors they would dramatize it on the stage. Though there was general agreement about the substance of the dialogue, a great deal was left to the individual actor. Again, since Chinese audiences at the time were not accustomed to intervals between acts, each time the curtain went down an interlude was performed outside the curtain to fill up the gap. These were called "outside-the-curtain scenes." The actors, playwright, producer and stage hands did not come together till shortly before the production, and very few of them had even read a Western play let alone watched one. Hence although they adopted from Japan the Western division of acts and scenery, the construction of the play and the acting technique were of necessity based on old Chinese conventions — a story with a complex plot was told from beginning to end. In an attempt to reflect modern life these plays were somewhat naturalistic, yet the acting and dialogue contained a strong element of artistic exaggeration, while rhythm was deliberately emphasized in order to create a dramatic effect. These features were borrowed from the traditional theatre. Indeed, the earliest modern Chinese plays were closely linked from the start with the old stage tradition.

During this period no well-known playwright appeared and very few plays of lasting value. Though not a little useful experience was gained, this was not summarized or improved upon at the time. Moreover the actors were a mixed lot, and the slackening of the political movement combined with the pernicious influence of the commercial theatre to strangle this form of art. It was followed, however, by the modern drama of the May the Fourth period.

After the May the Fourth Movement in 1919, to oppose the commercialization and vulgarization of the modern stage, a call went up for an "amateur theatre," and some non-professional repertory companies appeared, organized by young progressives. In the face of considerable difficulties and material hardships, these young people worked tirelessly to produce new plays. Since the lack of scripts had resulted in crude productions, they insisted on the use of written texts and began to make a serious study of the technique of stagecraft. They introduced plays by Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, Strindberg, Romain Rolland, Chekhov and Oscar Wilde, while at the same time talented Chinese playwrights appeared, men like Kuo Mo-jo, Tien Han, Hung Shen, Ting Hsi-lin, Tsao Yu, Hsia Yen, Yu Ling and Chen Pai-cheng. After the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, the modern theatre came directly or indirectly under the leadership of the Party and gained new strength, winning significant victories in the revolutionary struggles against imperialism, feudalism and reaction. The May the Fourth Movement, by opposing imperialism, feudalism and superstition and preaching the emancipation of the individual, did much to arouse men from lethargy and slumber. Because in the field of art the movement urged the destruction of old forms, the new playwrights in the early years of the May the Fourth period emphasized the study of European drama. Not till after 1925, when the Nan Kuo Drama Society had been formed, did the modern theatre link itself once more with the traditional art of the Chinese stage. After the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature more attention was paid to tradition, but it was only after liberation that a serious study of the ancient stage began. Today all those in the Chinese theatre understand the importance of taking over the best in our heritage, and constant experiments are being made in this connection. For example, when the Peking People's Art Theatre produced Kuo Mo-jo's *The Tiger Tally*, in which the Lord of Hsinling stole the king's tally to rescue a neighbouring state in the third century B.C., tension was heightened by the use of gongs and drums as in Peking opera, and certain traditional

gestures and movements were used. Since this was a historical play, these adaptations seemed natural and effective. In elocution, too, this play borrowed certain techniques from the classical opera. *The Red Storm*, produced by the Youth Art Theatre, presents the famous railway workers' strike of February 7, 1923. Here again a quite successful use was made of certain of the gestures, methods of speech and rhythmic patterns of the classical stage, which helped to convey the most heartfelt emotions of the characters. Other companies are also studying the problem of learning from tradition, and many experiments are being made.

3

As we have seen, the modern Chinese opera began to develop after 1942 in the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Area, the main base of the revolution. Most modern plays at that time were of foreign origin or dealt with life in the cities and having no connection with northern Shensi, they were not accepted by the people there. The classical theatre, on the other hand, was hardly equipped to handle topical themes. So the popular *yangko* drama, which had developed from a form of folk dancing into a simple drama, was chosen as the basis for new operas. This form later spread to other areas. New operas like *Brother and Sister Reclaim Waste Land*, *The White-Haired Girl* and *Liu Hu-lan* were taken to the heart of the peasants. These "new *yangko* operas" were later called "modern operas."

Whereas the original *yangko* dances simply showed a boy courting a girl, the new *yangko* operas presented the heroism of the toiling people and the nobility of labour. Thus *Brother and Sister Reclaim Waste Land* uses light, lilting tunes to show the peasants' optimism and joy in their work. *The White-Haired Girl*, based on a popular folk legend, despite its romantic colour gives a truthful and deeply moving picture of the landlords' cruel exploitation of the peasants and the latter's awakening. *Liu Hu-lan* reflects the people's courageous revolt against savage reaction and served

to arouse the masses in the war of liberation. The important role of these new operas is easily seen.

The new operas include both singing and dialogue. The songs are in the vernacular, and although composed by musicians they are based on folk tunes so that ordinary people understand and enjoy them. The actors use certain symbolic gestures taken from the classical theatre, going in and out of imaginary doors, for instance, for there is usually nothing but plain background scenery without windows and doors. The construction resembles that of modern plays, having the same division into scenes and the same method of introducing characters. Springing out of the traditional Chinese drama, the new operas have much affinity to the old. In mass scenes, however, there is chorus singing adapted from Western operas.

The ten years since the founding of our republic have seen a considerable development in the new opera. In the first place, it now has a larger orchestra with a greater variety of musical instruments; the accompaniment has improved and so have the chorus, the stagecraft, costumes, stage properties, lighting and other effects. In the second place, there is a greater variety of themes, which now include modern and historical subjects as well as folk legends and myths. In the third place, the technique of the singers and dancers has improved. And recently a call has gone out for a wider and more careful study of tradition.

4

Since we are interpreting Chinese people on the Chinese stage, we cannot cut ourselves off from the traditions of the Chinese theatre, but must take these over and further develop them. But what should we learn from tradition? How should we learn? Here are my personal observations on these questions.

Our forbears had a strong sense of orthodoxy. When *kunchu* opera was popular, it was used as the criterion to judge other plays; when later Peking opera came into

fashion, it was taken as the standard of excellence. After liberation our Party issued this directive: "Let a hundred flowers blossom, weed through the old to let the new emerge." And after a number of dramatic festivals in which various operas were performed, we began to discover the wealth we possess in the great variety of local operas in different parts of China and began to take a wider view. This has given us a keener realization of the richness of our heritage and the genius with which the old actors and playwrights, most of them anonymous, developed the Chinese stage. We should evaluate the *kunchu* and Peking opera highly, but we can no longer consider them as representing orthodoxy or as being the only good forms of traditional drama.

The basic tunes of Peking opera are *erh-huang* and *hsi-pi*, as in Hupeh opera. Peking opera evolved gradually after the Hupeh opera came to Peking, absorbed certain good features of *kunchu* opera and the North China clapper tunes, and began to use the Peking pronunciation. Certain innovations were also made in the tunes, dancing, acrobatics and use of percussion instruments. Peking opera is noted for the excellence of its movements and gestures, its spectacular costumes and masks, which show just the right touch of artistic exaggeration. For the last hundred years, brilliant actors have improved this art till it is polished and concise. These are the merits of Peking opera. But because this classical theatre grew up in the feudal capital to suit the taste of the imperial house and nobility, there was a tendency to over-emphasize technique and form at the expense of content and characterization — little attempt is made to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the characters or to reflect the life of the people. In this respect the local operas are superior. When we see Szechuan opera, for instance, we find its deeper realism and psychological insight more moving. The same applies to other local operas. Again, although many local operas are good works of literature, no adequate study has yet been made of them. In the past few years Peking opera has improved by borrowing some fine features of local operas, and the local operas have much to learn, too, from Peking and *kunchu* opera.

There is no space here for a comparison of all the different schools of Chinese opera. But viewing the traditional theatre as a whole, among the thousands of plays that have come down to us we can see many excellent ones: a rich variety of tragedy, comedy and short, earthy folk plays filled with genuine poetry. Here we find reflected the Chinese people's views on politics, society, the family, the woman problem and love. From these we see certain aspects of history, morality and social struggles in different periods, and characters ranging from emperors to the lowest in the land. Moreover it is significant that there is always deep sympathy for the under-dog.

The themes embrace folk legends and the life of all classes of people.

Not all the historical plays in local opera conform to official history; in fact, most of them are based on legends or romances. Sometimes, for a definite artistic purpose, entirely new characters are created out of historical figures, as in the case of Tsao Tsao and Kuan Yu, well-known generals of the Three Kingdoms period, or Pao Chen, a Sung dynasty prefect noted for his justice. These historical plays honour patriots and the brave men who sacrificed themselves for others in a just cause. Very few of them battled for religious beliefs, but rather for political and social ideals. But these heroes and heroines who risked their lives for some noble cause were often ordinary men and women. For on the Chinese stage all those who fight against evil are honoured, regardless of their social status. Some historical plays have a tragic ending, some a happy ending, some close with a moral lesson. For example, *The Battle of the Red Cliff*, dealing with the period of the Three Kingdoms, has a happy ending; but *Orphan of the Chao Family*, which describes how some just men give their lives to rescue an orphan, *Fengpo Pavilion*, about the death of the patriotic general Yo Fei, and *The Martyr of Chaishih*, whose hero is the patriot Wen Tien-hsiang, are famous tragedies. Still, to satisfy the audience all these tragedies

end with retribution, like the final scene of revenge in the *Orphan of the Chao Family*, for this expresses the wishes of the people.

There are not many purely mythical plays in China. The best known are those with romantic flights of fancy like *Monkey Plays Havoc in Heaven* or *Nocha Plays Havoc in the Sea*. Many folk legends contain gods and ghosts, however, and men may live side by side with supernatural beings. Gods descend from heaven to assume human guise, or mortals ascend to heaven to become immortals; for the gods were originally men, now removed to a higher plane, who remain interested in human affairs and like to help the good and punish the evil. Though this smacks of superstition, in these folk legends the labouring people and the oppressed generally use spirits to express their own hopes and ideals. For instance, since peasants were often too poor to marry and were cruelly treated by the landlords, they made a legend about a goddess who came down to be the wife of a humble peasant and lived happily with him out of reach of the landlord's oppression. This is the theme of *The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid*. Or there is the story of the filial son, Tung Yung, who sells himself into slavery in order to be able to bury his father. The seventh daughter of the Heavenly Emperor takes pity on him, comes to earth to be his wife, and by weaving a hundred lengths of silk in three days redeems him from the grasping landlord. In these plays beautiful goddesses love hired hands, poor scholars or small tradesmen. For example, a shop assistant like Hsu Hsien in *The White Snake* ranked very low in the old society, yet he was the fairy's choice. Similar examples could be multiplied indefinitely. Such enchanting tales were woven, no doubt, by those who could not attain their heart's desire, and performed on the stage they moved the audience to tears. Whether supernatural elements exist or not in these plays based on folk legends, the spirit is the same: sympathy for the poor and oppressed, and hatred for rich tyrants or those who repay kindness with ingratitude. Here we see the people's determined opposition to the ruling class, the feudal marriage system and unfair laws. There is

a very clear class stand in such plays as *Her Ghost Seeks Revenge*, which describes a singsong girl who kills herself because she is forsaken by her lover; *The Forsaken Wife*, in which a woman abandoned by her husband is avenged by a just official. *Love Under the Willows*, with its two young lovers who die for love; *Snow in Midsummer*, the heroine of which is unjustly sentenced to death; or *The Fisherman's Revenge*, which deals with a fisherman goaded into revolt by the local officials. A play rather similar to *Her Ghost Seeks Revenge* is *The Beggar Chief's Daughter*. In this the daughter of a low-class family saves a young scholar from perishing in the snow, and they are married; but after the scholar passes the official examination he starts looking down on his wife and tries to drown her. In both cases the daughter of a humble family is kind and good, while the scholar-official is cruel and wicked. There are many plays on similar themes in China. In feudal society when so many thousands were wronged or unjustly killed, the theatre's sympathy for their fate and condemnation of social abuses prove its affinity to the common people.

The traditional theatre, especially Peking opera, contains some remarkable representations of women generals. For example, Mu Kuei-ying while still a girl rules over a mountain as a brigand chief and is completely fearless. Disregarding feudal conventions, she chooses her own husband, and those who try to browbeat her are badly worsted: she even knocks her future father-in-law — the redoubtable Sixth General of the Yang Family — off his horse. For many years she fights to defend the country, counting no hardship too great, and after living in retirement for twenty years, she resolutely assumes command once more when China is invaded again. Such a character was so uncommon in feudal society that it may strike us as entirely imaginary, yet this heroine appears completely convincing. Both in content as well as in form *The Mu Family Fortress* and *Mu Kuei-ying Takes Command* are spirited and beautiful plays which lead the audience into a realm of enchantment. But such heroines are not entirely fictitious, for Chinese history tells us of women who served as generals: Hua Mu-

lan, Liang Hung-yu, Chin Liang-yu and others. On the stage these women are cleverer and braver than men in corresponding positions, and they usually command their husbands. This dramatic and romantic conception was a bold ideal to put forward in a patriarchal society.

There are very few religious plays in the traditional Chinese theatre, though many operas contain elements of superstition and the supernatural. The chief themes of the old Chinese stage are the struggle between good and evil, between patriotism and capitulation, the people's fight against social injustice, the class struggle, men's dreams of a better life and their sympathy for the oppressed. Of course since the stage was a product of feudal society, it inevitably contains certain dregs of feudalism; but viewed as a whole it evinces a love of right and a hatred of wrong, a clear distinction between good and evil. I shall now give a brief summary of the historical development of the traditional stage, then say something about the acting, so that we may have a general picture of the traditional theatre in China.

6

Plays were staged before there were any written scripts, and since the earliest scripts were merely records of what was performed on the stage they were not well written. Only later did playwrights appear. The playwrights of the Yuan dynasty were men of low social position who lived with actors; but because they lived among the people their works are simple yet full of true feeling, and the language is natural and unadorned. Many masterpieces appeared during this period. Not till the Ming dynasty did scholars with a high social status and even some noble officials start writing plays for their own amusement. In the Ching dynasty a number of noted scholars wrote in the traditional forms of the Yuan dynasty *tsa-chu* and the Ming dynasty *chuan-chi*; but most of the writers of local operas generally known as *luan-tan*, such as Yiyang opera, Shensi opera, Anhwei opera and Hupeh opera, were anonymous. These anonymous

local operas have enjoyed great popularity, however, and exercised a considerable influence.

The Chinese theatre sprang up and developed among the people. Though performances were sometimes given at court, this was never a courtly art. During the Tang dynasty there were performances of singing and dancing in the courtesans' quarters. The *tsa-chu*, which originated in the Sung dynasty and formed one item in the entertainments given during feasts in the palace, were at first no more than humorous sketches, not full-fledged drama. By the Yuan dynasty *tsa-chu* reached maturity, but this development did not take place in the palace. Like the Southern Drama which grew up in South China in the thirteenth century, *tsa-chu* had a folk origin. There were never special companies of palace players, and very few wealthy nobles kept small companies. During the Ching dynasty an extremely small number of well-known actors only was reserved for performances in the palace. So the actors depended entirely on public performances, usually in theatres or temples, though during certain festivals or fairs they would travel from village to village. Certain companies spent their whole time on tour, travelling all over the country, often suffering hunger and cold. But it was in the towns and villages that plays were created. Although in the old society the theatre could not but be influenced by feudal morality and conventions, and pandered to a certain extent to the tastes of the gentry, the main audience consisted nevertheless of small townfolk, artisans and peasants. And unless their plays were welcomed by spectators like these, the actors could not make a living.

Kunchu opera, though known as the "cultured drama," still drew its material from the people; although it developed in the cities and was improved and polished by men of letters. Indeed, in the end it was so refined that it lacked simplicity and vigour, and with its effeminate tunes and ornate language came to be difficult to follow and failed in dramatic effect. In the early part of its career, some of these refinements made it very popular; but later it was increasingly modified to suit the taste of the literati till it became cut

off from the people and declined. Its place was taken by *luan-tan*, the local operas which grew up among the people, used more popular language and had a less rigid structure.

The Ming dynasty *chuan-chi* grew out of the earlier Southern Drama. Breaking the *tsa-chu* convention that the chief actor alone should sing, they gave singing parts to all the characters, introducing duets and choruses in addition to solo singing. The playwrights, allowed greater freedom, produced works richer in content; but the main plot was usually weaker than in the Yuan theatre and *chuan-chi* tend to be inordinately long, with irrelevant interludes which destroy the unity of the whole and prevent the main theme from standing out clearly. One *chuan-chi* often has over forty scenes and taken more than one day to perform, though the central theme occupies but one fraction of the whole. This is a serious defect. Whereas the idle rich could enjoy such plays at leisure or choose favourite scenes for performance, an ordinary audience soon lost patience. This was one reason for the decline of *kunchu* opera.

An audience of ordinary people wants a good, compact story, clearly told, with vivid characters and well-defined views. If the plot is too loose, spectators will find it dull; if the story is too involved, they cannot follow it. There must be strong contrasts, conflicts and drama. The language must be easy to understand, the enunciation loud and clear yet varied, capable of giving pleasure and moving men. Above all, the drama must be concise, laying stress on what is important. These are the traditions of the Chinese theatre, clearly seen in local operas.

The Chinese stage has been described as romantic. It is true that there is strong romantic colouring in the expression of the people's hopes and aspirations. The theatre is closely linked with real life too, however, and has always been popular precisely because men see in it a reflection of their own lives and the essence of life.

Luan-tan, and indeed all local opera, originated as short plays. Folk artists who had not the means to organize a large company banded together in small groups to perform

plays needing very few characters. Thus some travelling companies in Anhwei and Hupeh consisted of no more than seven members. The difficulty of performing with such a small number gave rise to the saying: "Seven is short, eight is plenty, nine is perfect." These small troupes could only perform scenes with two or three characters, and were unable to produce whole plays until they had made enough money to take on new actors. They performed scenes of every description: some came from Yuan dynasty drama, some were adapted from Ming *chuan-chi*, or from folk legends, romances and *chante-fables*, some were short plays on contemporary life. As the troupes grew, retaining their earlier conventions and characteristics, they built up their own repertoire and in most cases staged more historical plays. But not even the largest companies were cut off from ordinary townfolk and villagers, for throughout the ages the actors' social status was low, they endured many hardships and had a wide experience of life. They knew the likes and fears of common folk, they worked hard to perfect their acting by learning from the people and entered into their feelings.

Some of the older local operas like Shensi opera or *erh-huang* opera existed when *kunchu* opera and Yiyang opera were popular, and later grew into full-fledged art forms themselves. These local plays had fewer rules governing their structure than the Yuan drama and were more concise than the *chuan-chi*. At first they linked separate scenes to form one long drama which often appeared unnatural. For example, the story of *Lady Precious Stream* was in eight separate parts, each a short drama in itself; but together they fail to form an integrated whole. Some operas were good as a series of separate scenes, but since the whole lacked unity, certain scenes only were performed. It took a fairly long time before the emergence of complete plays which could be staged in three or four hours like *The Four Scholars* or *The Forsaken Wife*. As regards construction, the introduction of characters or the proportion of singing and speech, these local operas carried forward the tradition of the Yuan *tsa-chu* and the Ming *chuan-chi*, with certain

modifications. Their characteristics, acquired after long experience and in response to popular demand, were a neat plot, clearly depicted characters, strong contrasts, a swift tempo, simple language and clear enunciation.

7

In the old days, the audience could watch the stage from three sides and there was neither scenery nor curtain; hence plays were produced to conform to these conditions. The traditional Chinese theatre is a specific and effective combination of song, dance, movement and speech. (It has been contended quite rightly that the Chinese drama also contains elements of recitation and miming, but for the sake of convenience I include these in movement and speech.) The correct proportion of these four elements depends on the theme and nature of the play. The playwright must be a master of stagecraft to afford the actors opportunities to display their talents and distinctive techniques, and a good actor must be highly versatile.

Since it is beyond the scope of this article to make a comprehensive survey of Chinese stagecraft, I shall simply mention a few salient features.

The drama must be easy to understand and to most spectators the story is paramount. It may be noted in passing that most Chinese peasants derive all their knowledge of history from the theatre, for operas are packed with historical incidents. Since the theatre is for the masses, the plot must be made clear. A long drama, of course, must present a complete story, while even a single scene taken from a play must have a beginning and an end. Many traditional operas are so well-known that a single scene from them can be understood by the majority of theatre-goers; but since not everyone knows the whole story, each scene must introduce what has gone before. No doubt this is the reason why certain scenes on the stage look like one-act plays. Again, since clarity is considered essential, the story is usually told from the beginning, instead of starting

in the middle and going back. To make the crucial points of the story clear, even small details are sometimes repeated many times to leave a strong impression.

But is not this method of narrative flat and tedious? Not necessarily, for we stress what is important and pass over what is of less consequence. The unities of time and space are not observed on the Chinese stage. For example, a man may write a lengthy letter by dashing off a few words. Or a banquet may be represented by a few cups and music and the participants raising their cups to drink. Other details can be omitted, because the audience is interested not in the feast itself but in its purpose and effect. If a man is traveling from one place to another, no matter how great the distance, the actor has only to leave the stage and return to show that he has arrived at his destination. (These are considered as two separate scenes.) Or he may simply walk round the stage without leaving it; for the audience wants to know what happens after his arrival, not what he does during the journey. Only if the incidents on the road are of significance, need there be a special description of them. Going upstairs or down, out of a door or in, boarding a boat or disembarking, all can be clearly conveyed by certain gestures and the minimum of words. The passing of time can be indicated simply too. For example, if a man has gone out fishing at dawn, he has only to look up at the sky and remark that the sun is setting and he should go back, for the audience to know how much time has passed. Similarly, the sound of the watch-drums tells us the hour of the night or heralds the advent of dawn in an economical and effective manner. In short, lengthy explanations are not needed if the audience can understand without them and some things are better left to the imagination. There is no need for mountains, rivers, storeyed buildings, gates, boats or horses on the stage; the actors' gestures and the spectators' imagination create a more magnificent effect than would a display of the objects themselves on a limited stage. Songs and speech should be concise and evocative. So the audience depends not only upon visual and aural impressions but draws upon its imagination. In this way the

theatre is less circumscribed and men reach a better appreciation of beauty.

Chinese stage conventions are not intended to be applied mechanically but with discrimination. These conventions are like letters of an alphabet, which combine to express a specific meaning, depending on the character's personality, thoughts and feelings. It is a great mistake to think that the Chinese traditional drama pays attention to form alone, ignoring all that concerns the heart and mind. It is equally mistaken to deny that the conventional gestures are taken directly from life. The characters in the Chinese theatre are always clearly portrayed, the good and the evil are sharply differentiated: for Chinese audiences do not like complex, inexplicable characters. We have no plays comparable to certain modern European works which probe into an individual's abnormal psychology; but this does not mean that we pay no attention to the inner man. One feature of the Chinese theatre is the simple yet telling method of characterization and the way in which a man's mind is revealed through his behaviour and speech. The test of an actor is whether or not he can achieve this. Different schools of drama have different modes of expression, while in the same school the emphasis may differ: some operas pay more attention to singing, other to dancing, dialogue or acting; although all four elements are inseparable.

The conventional gestures of the Chinese stage are beautiful dancing movements; but since drama interprets life, unless the actors' gestures come from real life the audience will not sanction them. On the stage the movements of real life are concentrated and transformed into beautiful dance movements which achieve artistic verisimilitude; but beauty of line is not sought for its own sake. This is another distinctive feature of Chinese drama. We are all familiar with the movements in Chinese opera indicating that a warrior is fitting on his head-dress and armour, tethering his horse or galloping; and there are simpler gestures denoting boarding or disembarking from a boat, going upstairs or down, which can be grasped without any explanation. Then there are sleeve movements, made by manipulating

the white silk cuffs, open at the seams, which are attached to the actor's long broad sleeves.

The increased variety of sleeve movements in recent years has led some to believe that these are pure dancing movements with no basis in actual life. But in the old days when long sleeves were worn, these movements were commonly used by both men and women. When characters shake their sleeves to show displeasure, link their sleeves to suggest love or friendship, flick off dust or wipe away tears with their sleeves, or spread them to express consternation, all these gestures are taken from life — they are simply exaggerated and made more graceful. But however beautiful and intricate these movements, they must conform to the character's social position and state of mind. For all dance movements in the Chinese theatre are designed to reveal character and to depict real life, being derived themselves from life.

8

On the whole much that is admirable can be found in the traditional Chinese theatre, although some plays have backward features and include certain vulgar elements. To distinguish between bad and good, we must make a thorough study of the theatre. A superficial approach will teach us nothing, and failing to recognize what is good we may preserve what is backward. What we need is to absorb the best traditions and develop them further to enrich our new Chinese stage. But without a genuine understanding we cannot adopt a really critical attitude. Without intensive study we cannot understand this traditional art, let alone adopt and develop the best in it.

Modern plays, modern operas and traditional operas have their distinctive forms, characteristics and laws. Although they can influence each other, one form cannot take the place of another, and in learning from tradition we must beware of indiscriminate transplanting. Peking opera and Shaohsing opera are both traditional, but if we discard the percussion instruments in Peking opera to use Shaohsing

opera music instead, the result is insipid and incongruous. In certain modern plays it may be possible to use gongs and drums to increase the tempo, but these remain modern plays. And similarly though some Peking operas have more dialogue than singing, that does not make them modern plays. New operas may combine song, dance and speech, but they are quite different from the local operas. These techniques cannot be used mechanically regardless of the special characteristics of different forms of drama. In learning from the traditional theatre, we must first recognize its good points and distinctive features before adapting these to improve our new drama. Even unsuccessful attempts are useful.

All plays express a definite point of view, but if we try to embody lengthy moral lessons for some specific educational purpose, the result cannot be good theatre. There are very few old plays in which sermons are preached: instead ideas are expressed through the characters' feelings and actions. This is akin to traditional Chinese ink painting where an object is drawn in a few simple, vivid lines, without much explanatory detail. However lofty or profound the message of a play, if it is not easy to understand it must fail. It cannot be popular in the best sense of the word. In the Chinese theatre right and wrong are clearly contrasted, and the action is straightforward without being flat. This is one of our best traditions.

To emphasize what is important in order to bring out the main theme, while passing over less significant incidents, is another good feature of the traditional stage, especially of the local operas. Conciseness is essential, and after that an appropriate use of exaggeration and repetition. For a play is not like a novel in which one can turn back to earlier pages: the audience demands some skilful repetition.

Some people attribute the clear sense of rhythm in Chinese opera mainly to the percussion instruments, but this is not the whole reason. True, the percussion instruments play an important part, but the music is arranged to fit the action. To reflect the heightening and lessening of suspense as well as other changes, the percussion instru-

ments must be subordinated to the plot. The actors' movements, speech and singing, closely interrelated, give concise and forceful expression to the characters' sentiments, thus creating a clear rhythmic pattern which the percussion instruments have to match. On the whole, the rhythmic pattern of an opera is produced by the stress on the main theme, by vivid contrasts, artistic exaggeration and economy of expression. It is not easy to combine brevity and clarity — one often has to be sacrificed to the other — but the best Chinese operas achieve this.

There is a set of basic techniques in the traditional theatre and a comprehensive system of training, first and foremost in movement, singing and elocution. In addition, certain plays are used as teaching material. An actor has to learn how to use his hands and eyes, how to make gestures and walk, and his every action is closely bound up with singing and speech. It seems to me that we should also introduce a system of basic training for our modern plays and operas in the light of their special characteristics and the traditional basis. This means that we must master the old traditions and learn all that is valuable in them to let the new emerge from the old. According to actors, all movements must be natural. All gestures must be graceful, whatever the position and pose. This calls for perfect correlation. To achieve an impressive delivery, the actor must have clear enunciation and be able to give its full musical value to spoken Chinese.

9

Through the arduous strife of the past half century our modern drama has accumulated considerable experience and attained a fairly high artistic level. But so long as times were unsettled we could not summarize our experience or introduce comprehensive methods of training directors and actors. Since liberation we have established dramatic colleges and all our theatrical companies now have training classes based on our own conditions and what we have learned from Soviet experience. Aided by Soviet experts

we have made a systematic study of the Stanislavsky system and applied its method of training to deepen our understanding of our traditional stagecraft. As regards movement, elocution and acting, we are trying to absorb the best features of the old Chinese theatre, but we have not yet evolved a systematic course of training, though we are working on this now.

Modern opera is in a similar position. In the sense that it too has singing, speech, acting and dancing, the new opera resembles the old; but these are nevertheless two distinct art forms which cannot be intermingled. Although it is even more necessary for the exponents of the new opera to study from the traditional theatre than it is for those in modern drama, they cannot take over traditional techniques completely. Some of our modern opera singers are trained to sing as in traditional opera, others in the Western style, and these two schools have long been at loggerheads. But now our new operas are divided into two parts: the first produces mainly Western operas like *Madame Butterfly* or *La Traviata*, the second uses modern, historical or legendary Chinese themes. These two schools work side by side in harmony. The singers, directors and writers of both styles are aware of the need to learn from the past. Recently some sopranos and tenors in the Conservatory of Music have learned to sing Hopei clapper tunes remarkably well, proving that one singer can without difficulty master two different methods of singing. When it comes to training in deportment and movement, the Chinese traditional discipline is well adapted to enable actors to move with graceful precision and to promote general muscular development. Hence actors in the new opera and the new drama are now studying it. They are learning the traditional dances too, which are proving most useful for exponents of the

Donkeys by Huang Chou→
Huang Chou, a young artist, is a cultural worker in the People's Liberation Army.



new opera. In addition, they are studying the Western ballet. Since we want to reflect the life of the Chinese people on the stage, we must make a serious study of Chinese history and social customs. And to understand the Chinese people thoroughly we must have a profound appreciation of the beauty of the Chinese language and be able to use it competently. Playwrights, actors and producers must all make greater efforts in this direction. Only so can we carry forward our fine traditions.

The Party policy in art and literature is "Let a hundred flowers blossom." We must have different forms and different styles; we must use different methods of stagecraft. We are for a rich variety in art, provided that it assists socialist construction and does not run counter to the principles of socialism; that it promotes unity among different nationalities and different nations in the spirit of patriotism and internationalism; that it helps to foster communist moral qualities. Granted these prerequisites, there should be unlimited freedom. Our programmes include new Chinese plays, historical plays, plays based on folk legends and myths, all manner of comedies and tragedies, all kinds of local operas, and foreign plays ancient and modern. Little by little we mean to introduce the best operas and plays of the world.

We believe that traditions must live on and be carried forward for ever. But traditions must be developed, for otherwise they will stand still or break down. The Chinese theatre has its distinctive characteristics, its long and splendid tradition. Prizing it highly, we mean to do our utmost to make it more glorious yet.

TIEN HAN

The Composer Nieh Erh



The composer Nieh Erh

One day in the spring of 1931, in the Bright Moon Variety Company directed by Li Ching-huei, I met a young man called Nieh Tzu-yi who was keenly interested in music.

Their premises were crowded and noisy, but we found a quiet room and had a good talk. Nieh, then only twenty-one, came from distant Yunnan in Southwest China and had an unusual background. His mother was a hard-working widow and since his childhood he had been fond of music. Upon

graduating from secondary school he left home to roam the country. He served as a soldier in Hunan and Kwangsi, and

Tien Han is a well-known playwright; he is also chairman of the Chinese Dramatists' Association and a pioneer in the modern Chinese theatre. His recent plays include the historical plays *Kuan Han-ching* and *Princess Wen-cheng*. Nieh Erh (1912-1935) was the composer of the "March of the Volunteers," the words of which were written by Tien Han. This march composed in 1934 and first used in a film, became exceedingly popular throughout China, serving as

studied for a short time in Kwangtung at the Institute of Drama under the direction of the well-known dramatist Ouyang Yu-chien. Two years previously he had come with a Yunnan merchant to Shanghai and been taken on as a violinist by the popular Bright Moon Variety Company. So he returned once more to his old love — music.

Like many students from poor families, he thirsted for revolution. A progressive friend introduced him to the Shanghai Anti-Imperialist League and he took part in mass work in the western district of Shanghai. He wanted to get in touch with the Chinese Communist Party, to study revolutionary theory, to learn more about Chinese politics and the international situation. He loved music and was eager to master its techniques, to improve his violin playing and to compose music. He wanted to know how he could use his music in the service of the revolution.

During our conversation, he told me that he enjoyed being with the Bright Moon Variety Company because the young people in it were full of spirit, but he was not satisfied with Li Ching-huei's leadership. It seemed to him that certain of Li's unhealthy, frivolous tendencies were doing harm and weakening their attack on feudal influences.

After this we saw a good deal of each other. I introduced him to the Friends of the Soviet Union and he joined their music group. This was not a large group but a fairly solid one, with musicians like Lu Chi, Chang Shu, Jen Kuang and An Ngo in it. They had some political study and took part in various political activities to defend the Soviet Union and the Red bases in China, to defend world peace and human rights. They also put up a splendid fight against the yellow music of that day and the bourgeois school of art for art's sake. By theoretical debates and by the example of their own compositions they refuted the enemy.

Jen Kuang, who had just returned from France, was the chief of the symphonic music section of the Pathé Gramophone Company. Because he had a good piano in his lodgings, this music group often held its meetings and discussed the mem-

the clarion call of the age and the voice of the people. Since the founding of the Chinese People's Republic this song has been used as the national anthem.

bers' compositions there. In order to improve on their works they often argued until they were red in the face, but after reaching an agreement they never harboured resentment. So it came about that in a musical contest at the end of the year, their progressive, militant songs defeated the popular decadent tunes, winning high praise. These new songs like "Graduation Song" (the theme song for the film *Students in Trouble* produced in 1934) and "Song of the Road" (the theme song for the film *The Road*) quickly gained popularity and Nieh's name became known to many. When he produced "Storm of the Yangtse" and "March of the Volunteers" he was acknowledged to be the foremost song-writer in China and the founder of a new school of music.

It was in the autumn of 1932 after he joined the Lienhua Film Studio in Shanghai that he changed his name to Nieh Erh. I first co-operated with him over "The Miners' Song" in the film *Glorious Motherhood*.

Dig!

We are toilers producing wealth.
We toil with sweat and blood
While they take their ease,
We work on empty bellies
While they glut themselves.

All our hearts
Must unite together to make a wall;
All our hands
Must grow stronger than steel;
That we may enjoy the happiness
Which is the fruit of our toil.

This song about the Dutch capitalists' exploitation of the miners in Indonesia exposed the class conflict of that time and expressed the bitterness of the oppressed and their determination to revolt. I remember that Nieh Erh took the part of a miner, darkening his face and body, to lead the singing of this song.

Another occasion on which Nieh Erh showed himself a gifted singer was when *Storm of the Yangtse* was produced in 1934. In this, the first modern opera in China, he played the part of the stevedore Lao Wang. When the imperialists opened fire on the Chinese workers and killed his grandchild Hsiao Shuan,

carrying the small corpse in his arms he sang to all the other labourers:

Fellow countrymen, let us unite to fight for
the dawn!
We are not afraid of death. (Speaking) Don't
try to frighten us with death!
We will not be slaves; we must be the masters
of China!
Let us unite to form a Great Wall of iron
And drive away these brigands;
Let us form a wall of iron, and march down
freedom's road!

His powerful rendering of this song stirred up its hearers' hatred for imperialism.

In those days in progressive circles there was close co-operation between composers, writers and performers. During a period of relative freedom we writers could make suggestions to the composers, and after rehearsals I often recommended changes. Later, during the White Terror when we worked entirely underground and direct contact was difficult, we still contrived to get into touch through others to solve problems. My words for the songs in *The Return of Spring*, produced in 1934, were all passed on to Nieh Erh, and he dealt with them very satisfactorily. One of these songs, "Farewell to the South Seas," was in a more classical style and I was afraid the composer might have difficulties; but he set these words to a powerful and moving melody and this gave me great encouragement.

Nieh Erh in the opera
Storm of the Yangtse



Nieh Erh and I worked together on quite a few songs, most of them the theme songs for films or plays. His only song not used in a performance was "Fighting for the Yangtse," written for a film describing how peasants in the Yangtse Valley fought the drought. Nieh Erh withdrew his score probably because he was dissatisfied with that film company. Then Jen Kuang was asked to compose a new song for the film, but it was not as rich in feeling as Nieh Erh's. Though the film did not contain his song, however, the latter circulated and became very popular.

I was unable to see the first performance of *Storm of the Yangtse*, for at that time I was arrested. Soon after I was put in prison the Kuomintang reactionaries decided to arrest Nieh Erh too. By this time he was a member of the Communist Party. To save this gifted and loyal fighter and to give him an opportunity to develop his talents, he was sent to Japan. In Japan, Nieh Erh combined serious study with the political tasks assigned to him, just as in China. In 1934 I wrote a scenario called *Wartime Youngsters*, about young intellectuals leaving their ivory tower and going resolutely to the battlefield. The theme song of this film, "The March of the Volunteers," was sent by him from Tokyo. This song rapidly won the hearts of people all over China, arousing a keener resistance to Japanese aggression.

On July 17, 1935, Nieh Erh was drowned off Kugenuma in Kanagawa, Japan. This unexpected loss was a tremendous blow to all who had expected great things of him. When I heard this news just after leaving prison in Nanking, I was utterly aghast. I felt a twofold sorrow, in as much as the Party had lost a brilliant son and I a loyal friend. I wrote a poem to send to the memorial meeting held in Shanghai:

Five months I spent in prison,
Many tears I shed for lost friends;
I was waiting for your voice to shake earth and
sky,
Never thinking that our parting was for ever.
Now great danger threatens our country
And near the border cities fall one by one.
Your heroic spirit should return with the wrathful
waves
To voice again the anger of our people.

When Kuo Mo-jo learned that Nieh Erh had been drowned, he wrote a dirge comparing his untimely death to that of Shelley. But Shelley did not suffer as many misfortunes as our gifted musician. Nieh Erh was forced to escape from China and perished abroad at the age of twenty-four. Chang Shu, who influenced Nieh Erh considerably in his political thinking as well as his art, was twice arrested in Shanghai, suffered privations, and was killed in Kweilin during an air raid by Japanese planes. Jen Kuang, who worked with Nieh Erh in the music group of the Friends of the Soviet Union, went to the lower Yangtse Valley during the Japanese war and joined the New Fourth Route Army under Party leadership. He fell in 1941 while resisting a sudden attack of the Kuomintang reactionaries.

In 1944 I went to Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan, and Nieh Erh's elder brother introduced me to his mother who lived in a house by the lake. I plucked some wild flowers there to lay on his tomb. The beautiful hills there, lapped by a far-stretching lake, make an appropriate resting-place for a revolutionary artist.

It is difficult to assess in a few words Nieh Erh's achievements as a musician, but I shall make the attempt. In the first place, the earliest music he heard was that made by the labouring people of his district. The music of local operas in Yunnan and elsewhere also influenced him; and though later he made a careful study of Western music he always paid great attention to our own. This enabled him to understand and bring out the music of the Chinese language and gave all his compositions a strong Chinese flavour.

The second thing to note is that his vigorous and stirring melodies surpass all those of his contemporaries. This is especially evident in the songs in *Storm of the Yangtse* and "March of the Volunteers," as well as in those songs dealing with labour like "Road-Building Pioneers" and "Fighting for the Yangtse." Other composers using similar themes lacked his feeling and strength. Nieh Erh's music makes you feel his emotion and be moved by it. He did his best work between 1932 and 1935, when the guns of the Japanese aggressors had aroused nationalist feelings among the Chinese people, but the Kuomintang reactionaries were launching attack after attack against the Red bases in Kiangsi and the revolutionaries. Nieh Erh's

greatness lies in the fact that through his music he expressed great hatred for the enemy and uttered a clear call to battle. His patriotism was closely bound up with his love for the common people. His "Song of the Stevedores" presents the working class in music. His songs about labour are strong, deep in feeling and militant, with no pessimism or weakness. Indeed, his achievement stems not simply from superior technique but also from his political understanding. He was no ordinary musician but a fervent revolutionary.

Not all his compositions are heroic, however. He wrote some charmingly light and merry tunes, like "The News-boy's Song," "Graduation Song," "Mei Niang," "The Girl Singer" and other love songs and folk songs. After all, he was a warm-hearted, optimistic young man in his early twenties. And these songs with their healthy feeling were welcomed by young intellectuals of that time. Through his music Nieh Erh led young petty-bourgeois intellectuals towards the revolution and not away from it to decadence; for he had absorbed some of the best qualities of earlier musicians, rejecting what was unhealthy. Hence his achievement.

We have an old Chinese saying: "To prove his worth a man need not live to a great age. If he is worthless even living to a hundred is useless." This applies to the life of Nieh Erh. He lived for a brief twenty-four years, only during the last three of which did he produce much; but he has left most outstanding and significant works. His music brims over with passionate political convictions. At that time the Chinese people were contending with imperialist aggression and the oppression and exploitation of the Kuomintang reactionaries. Nieh Erh's music voiced the bitterness and rage of the Chinese people. Above all, his work gave a correct and forceful reply to the question then confronting the people of China: "Shall we resist aggression or surrender?" This was the main reason for the wide and immediate popularity of his songs.

Nieh Erh solved the problem of the correct connection between art and politics. He dedicated all his gifts to the revolutionary struggle. But he did not underestimate the importance of virtuosity. With the help of other musicians among the Friends of the Soviet Union, he steadily improved his technique. Although he owed a great deal to Western music, he made a tireless study of the Chinese tradition. While he served in the army and while he was in Shanghai, he kept close to

the labouring people and learned much from their life. His works breathe a remarkable spirit of sanity and breadth and reveal great skill in handling the Chinese language correctly and forcefully. He was skilled not only in handling modern Chinese, but in setting classical Chinese verses to music in a lively, intelligible and effective way.

A number of bourgeois musicians of his time launched a vicious attack on his war songs, accusing them of many technical faults. Of course there were flaws in his work; there were bound to be. He was a young composer from a poor family and had never had a long formal training in music. Nieh Erh did not condone these faults of his either, if faults they really were. More than that, he made the strictest demands on himself. He was never satisfied with what he had done. He wanted to write better music for the Party. The production of *Storm of the Yangtse*, while it gave him more confidence in his ability to compose modern Chinese operas, also made him worry more about his own professional shortcomings. He felt desperately the need for further study. That was why he was willing to leave the arduous struggle in Shanghai and go for a time to Japan, but no one could foresee the accident which would cut short his precious life.

Like most young people, Nieh Erh had an hot temper. In protest against the commercialized management of the Pathé Gramophone Company, he resigned from his post as assistant chief of the musical section. His uncompromising attitude was of positive value in that society of lax moral standards. His contemporaries had the greatest admiration for his integrity and willingness to sacrifice security for the sake of his principles.

It is twenty-four years now since Nieh Erh died. Under the leadership of the Party, China has changed from a weak, semi-feudal and semi-colonial country into the People's Republic of China, strong and united as never before in history. The road opened up by Nieh Erh and his comrades-in-arms is being carried forward by many musicians better equipped both theoretically and technically. Already they have brilliant achievements to their credit, and will undoubtedly compose works which would have delighted Nieh Erh and the other pioneers.

Past and Present



Hsiao Chang-hua
in a clown role

I am eighty-two this year and have lived under five "dynasties": the Ching dynasty, the Northern warlords, the early republic, the puppet regime under the Japanese imperialists and Chiang Kai-shek's clique. Sometimes I feel like an old tree that has weathered many storms: my leaves had fallen and my branches had withered, but ten years ago Chairman Mao and the Communist Party came and brought a second springtime to my life.

Ten years is not a long time, but I have seen tremendous changes in our country since liberation, and we are going ahead faster every day. My life has changed too. The last ten years have been totally different from the seventy-two that went before.

Hsiao Chang-hua is the oldest Peking opera artist now living and is celebrated for his clown roles.

In 1897, the twenty-third year of Emperor Kuang Hsu's reign, at the age of twenty I remember completing my training and joining the Hsiao Hung Kuei Troupe. In those days the imperial court often summoned companies to perform in the palace; sometimes we were summoned to the Summer Palace, sometimes to the Winter Palace. The Hsiao Hung Kuei Troupe received two such summons every year, and each time I went with the company.

Once we were summoned to the Winter Palace soon after the lunar New Year. We had to set out before dawn and go on foot, no matter how biting the wind or how heavy the snow, for in those days actors were considered too low-class to ride in carriages—it was not like today when we are fetched and taken home by car. When we reached the palace wall, we walked in small groups of four or five through Tien An Men, and then through courtyard after courtyard, gate after gate. We followed silently after our guide, not daring to utter a word, for this was the Forbidden City. If anyone was careless enough to make a noise, the eunuchs would come over to swear at him: "Remember where you are! If you disturb the emperor, what punishment will you deserve?" How very strange! We were still miles away from the emperor. How could we disturb him by making a little noise?

That day, I remember, I wore a padded cotton cap which let no wind through and was snug and warm. At one gate a eunuch stopped me and demanded: "What is that on your head?" I told him: "A padded cotton cap." He reached out and pulled it off, growling: "Call that a cap? It's a tea-cosy! You can't wear that." There was nothing for it but to obey. So we could not even wear the sort of caps we wanted! Those palace officials did not care if we perished of cold so long as they could throw their weight about.

When we reached Huai Jen Hall where we were to perform, we had to sit outside under the eaves, waiting in utter silence without stirring. Anyone who broke this rule was soundly rated if not beaten. One of our company, a man playing the part of a rough fellow, could not find anywhere to sit and I can still hear the slap he got on the face. In those days we actors were hardly considered human.

At nine o'clock we had breakfast: two pancakes and two packets of meat apiece; and we had to kowtow to thank the

empress dowager before we were allowed to start. Even the food we earned by our exertions was counted as a gift from our gracious rulers! The performance started at noon. As soon as the empress dowager arrived, everyone had to drop what he was doing. Stewards and chamberlains led us out by two entrances on to the stage, and advancing to the middle of the platform we lined up in a row and kowtowed to Her Imperial Majesty. Some of us were in costume, some had just made up their faces but not yet dressed, some had their masks half painted, some were in shirts. . . . We were a very motley crew and must have looked ludicrous as we knocked our heads on the ground, for the empress dowager burst out laughing. Yes, she was amused, but we all felt like fools. The performance lasted till six o'clock in the evening when we had to kowtow once more to "thank" the empress dowager. So one performance meant at least three lots of kowtowing, because she was the imperial sovereign and we were simply "riff-raff."

You might imagine that the back-stage in the palace would be fairly roomy. In fact it was smaller than in the average theatre. We dressed in the corridor and in mid winter it was bitterly cold — when we ground a stick of the old-style ink in water it was soon frozen solid. Our head-dresses were covered with ice, and icicles formed whenever we shook our heads. There was only cold water to wash in, and we had to like it or lump it. True, there was a kettle at the back, but we never had hot water in it. We just put up with the discomfort, only hoping that we wouldn't be summoned too often. On the stage we took great care not to make any mistakes, for fear of some terrible penalty. We all breathed a great sigh of relief when this command performance was over, feeling as if we had been through purgatory as a punishment for our sins.

Sixty-two years later, in April 1959, I visited the Winter Palace again. This time it was spring, the sun was warm, the breeze was soft and all the flowers were in bloom. And I drove up this time in a car with Mei Lan-fang. We drove along Changan Street, now many times the width it was, passed Fuyu Avenue with its luxuriant trees on either side, and entered the Winter Palace, stopping right in front of Huai Jen Hall.

I went there this time not to perform in an opera but to attend the Second All-China People's Congress as a people's delegate.

I sat in the same hall as our beloved Chairman Mao, all the leading members of the government and over eleven hundred delegates from the entire country. We heard and discussed reports by Premier Chou En-lai and the vice-premiers, and passed resolutions on affairs of state. I could hardly master my emotion when I first took my seat. I felt so happy, so honoured, so grateful to our Party, our state and our people. Never in my life had I dreamed of such a day.

Now I am really a free and responsible citizen.

April 27 was an unforgettable day for me. After an early lunch I put on my best clothes, filled my new pen with ink and waited to be fetched.

That was the day for the election of leading members of the government. I picked up the ballot-paper, put on my glasses and looked at it carefully. It wasn't just a sheet of ordinary paper: it would express the hearts of six hundred and fifty million. Holding my pen firmly I wrote down those beloved names. My new pen was just what I wanted and the characters I made were clear and bright. I slipped the ballot into a red ballot-box bearing the national emblem. I was exercising my privilege as one of the masters of the state. Sixty-two years before, when I had dressed in opera costume and waited, shivering, in the corridor outside this same hall for my cue, I had no conception that such a day would come. When I went home in the evening my arms were aching: I must have clapped too much that afternoon.

I remember these two visits to the Winter Palace: once as the lowest of the low, waiting on the sovereign's pleasure with fear and trembling; the second time as a responsible citizen respected by all, taking part in affairs of state, confident and at ease. What a tremendous change!

In feudal China an actor's life was a hard one and an actor's training was like a term in gaol. But after you had been through the ordeal of seven years' training you had to find a troupe to take you on, and joining a troupe was harder than climbing up to heaven. I remember the case of Yeh Chunshan who founded the well-known Fu Lien Cheng Training School. When he graduated from the Hsiao Jung Chun Training School, no company would have him. He ran here, there and everywhere searching for a post. One day he came across a friend outside Ching Lo Yuan Theatre. This man was

his uncle's pupil, then working in the Ssu Hsi Company, and Yeh begged him hopefully: "Brother, just spare me a minute. . . . Can you get me taken on here?" The other threw him a cold glance and answered scornfully: "You? You're not up to our standard." He turned on his heel and left. Tears of disappointment sprang into Yeh's eyes. All his hopes were dashed to the ground.

Even after you had run around following up every chance and getting others to help till you finally succeeded in joining a company, it was still impossible to make a living, for you had to work without pay for six months. A new actor had to feed himself or perform on an empty stomach. For six months he didn't get a cent, no matter in what straits his family was. He just had to tighten his belt so that his name might appear on his company's list. When actors playing the clown's role like myself could go on as a carriage driver or messenger we were already thankful. It was very hard to get a real part.

After six months did we start receiving our salary? No, all we got was fifty per cent of the tips after each performance. An actor getting one string of cash—slightly less than fifty cents—a day, was already getting somewhere. To make two strings of cash a day you had to work hard for three years. This meant that actors who were not known had to perform and work at a trade at the same time, for they could not make a living by acting alone. I was a small tradesman myself and toiled in wind and rain for enough to eat.



Peking opera students practising their parts

In 1900, the twenty-sixth year of Kuang Hsu, I joined the Tung Ching Company. My daily pay was one string of cash, but I dared not ask for more. On February 24 we gave a performance in a rich man's house by the East Arch in Peking. After playing my own part I played the waiter in *The Drunken Monk*. But as I was about to go home the manager stopped me and told me to take the part of Wang Lung in *Lady Chao-chun Goes to the Huns*. "That's a big part," I protested. "I daren't attempt it. Can't you give it to someone else?" The manager was angry and that same day he struck my name off his list and dismissed me from the company.

Four generations of my family have joined the theatre. The youngest do not know how lucky they are to be living today. My two grandsons Jun-chen and Jun-teh both started their training after liberation, under the care of the Party and the state. The elder graduated from the dramatic academy last year, the younger this year. Now Jun-chen is in the fourth company of the State Peking Opera Theatre, while Jun-teh is in the Experimental Peking Opera Company organized by the academy. They started work as soon as they graduated. The state brought them up, gave them their operatic training and supplied them with work. Many graduates in the past looked in vain for a job, but not those of today. And there is no more bullying or discriminating against them either: they can devote themselves entirely to their work, studying politics and getting a general education at the same time, without having to worry about their livelihood. The Party has made them respected citizens, has given them a fine education: how can they fail to make good in their profession?

Whenever they come home and tell me eagerly about their study, rehearsals and performances, I feel happier than I can say. Because my future, at their age, was uncertain and I wore myself out each day for a miserable pittance. In that cruel society we had no security, so that many talents were wasted and art withered away. Now the Party and the state are looking after them, have given them their education and a job, and they get every help and encouragement from society. I say again: What a tremendous change!

After these reminiscences about the changes in our status as actors, let me say something about our quarters. Today in

Peking when you mention Tao Jan Ting, everyone knows that it is a beauty spot; but that has only been so since liberation. Before that it was called the Southern Marsh and was a stretch of wild country full of weeds and stagnant pools. In summer it stank and everywhere there were neglected graves.

Not far west of Tao Jan Ting was the common graveyard of theatre folk. From the end of the Ching dynasty onwards, many players came with their companies from Anhwei, Hupeh and Kiangsu to settle down in Peking; and although well-known actors could remain independent, the less successful lived in a hostel with a communal kitchen. When they grew old they had to fend for themselves. If they had no relatives to help, and no famous pupils, there was no one to give them a funeral when they died. Some of their kind-hearted fellows had to plead with other actors: "So-and-so has died. He was on his own and has no relatives. Will you help bury him?" Then out of pity the others would write down on a slip of paper the sum they would subscribe, and the dead man would be buried in this common graveyard, which was also financed by the actors themselves. Later even some well-known actors were buried here.

Because this was a lonely spot, actors came here every morning to practise singing or acrobatic exercises, till this became a sort of common meeting place. I once thought of building a few rooms north of the temple there and setting up a small gymnasium where retired players could teach young acrobats. But with no backing my scheme came to nothing.

Then liberation came. And now this place has been transformed just like other tracts of waste land in Peking: Dragon Beard Ditch, Goldfish Pond, Dragon Pool. . . . The Party and the government spared no pains to clean up these localities thoroughly so that the old, filthy, weed-infested places are fresh and blooming today.

What is more wonderful is that now we have here two schools for future exponents of Peking opera—the National Academy of Peking Opera and the Peking Opera Academy. Here you find experienced teachers, spacious and handsome buildings, and a theatre for the students' performances. In these ten years six classes of students have already graduated from these two academies. They have an eight-year course, and nearly two hundred young artists have been trained, including actors, musicians and producers. These young people

are now working in all parts of the country and making a name for themselves.

And I say: Without Chairman Mao, without the Communist Party, none of this could have happened.

The sight of these splendid buildings reminds me that not only are people given a new life, but Peking itself has been given a new life too. What was once a graveyard for destitute players is now a garden for the nurture of young actors. In the past I wanted to have a small gymnasium here, but not even that humble wish could be realized. Now two magnificent academies have been set up here. What a tremendous change!

Once in Liaotung a swineherd's sow farrowed a piglet with a white head, and thinking it a prodigy he decided to present it to the court. When he reached Hotung, however, he found that all the pigs there had white heads; so he went sheepishly home.

The Later Han History
(Compiled in the 5th century)



HSIEH PING-HSIN

Cultural Palace of the Nationalities

In front of Tien An Men in Peking a wide avenue runs from east to west, flanked by several splendid big buildings behind a magnificent array of street lamps. On the west of this avenue passers-by are struck by a thirteen-storeyed structure whose blue glazed tiles contrasting with white walls are a beautiful sight under Peking's azure sky and remind one of some white stork stretching its wings before soaring into the air. This is the new cultural palace of China's nationalities. The central building, larger and taller than the rest, houses spacious exhibition rooms and living quarters; one wing is a great hall, the other consists of a ballroom and gymnasium and others. The first floor of the central building is a library with space enough to hold 600,000 books for the different nationalities. Since its opening in September this cultural palace has held an exhibition of ten years of work among the nationalities.

Hsieh Ping-hsin is a noted woman essayist.

ties, which is a survey of the political, economic and cultural developments of the various minorities since liberation.

You ascend granite steps to a great gate of pale green decorated with golden Uighur designs and inscribed in gold with the words "Unity" and "Progress." Passing through the marble entrance you come to an impressive hall with reliefs more than six metres high depicting the fifty-two Chinese nationalities: Miao youth playing reed-pipes, dancing Uighur girls, Mongolian shepherdesses. . . . In addition to the Hans, there are thirty-five million minority people scattered over China. During past centuries feudal exploitation and oppression had kept these minorities in a state of backwardness and poverty; only since the founding of the Chinese People's Republic has there been a radical change.

Inside is the main exhibition hall. Carved in white marble at its entrance is a gilt inscription written by Chairman Mao Tse-tung: "All Nationalities of the Chinese People's Republic Unite!" These sacred words are not only carved in stone but engraved upon the hearts of all our nationalities. This is the source of the strength and happiness of China's great multinational family.

As you enter this exhibition hall, you are confronted by a mural painting seven metres wide. Using the traditional method of Chinese painting, the artists have depicted singers and dancers of fifty-two nationalities in a lively style reminiscent of the famous Tunhuang frescoes.

The various exhibits, photographs and charts in this room show the changes among different nationalities during the past ten years. What attracted us most was a large photograph of Chairman Mao Tse-tung shaking hands with an old Sinkiang peasant, seventy-four-year-old Kurban Tulum from the Kunlun Mountains. In this photograph he is wearing a cap and a belt, and his wrinkled face is beaming as he grips Chairman Mao's hand. Kurban Tulum toiled hard for a landlord for dozens of years but had no home of his own, went cold and hungry, and was treated with contempt. After liberation he began to enjoy a life of plenty surpassing all his dreams; and realizing that he owed this to the Communist Party and Chairman Mao, day and night he longed to go to Peking to search for the source of all his happiness. And in the end he not only made his way to Peking, but shook hands with Chairman Mao! For times have changed, and a formerly poor and down-trodden

peasant can now talk with the leader of the state and tell him about conditions in his locality. This story illustrates the new position of the minority people since they became joint masters in our big Chinese family.

On the left side of the main building are regional halls with exhibitions of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and the Northeast. In the Inner Mongolian Hall I saw from an old newspaper that the first autonomous region in China was set up here in May 1947. In the glass case underneath I saw a perfectly ordinary sabre. Who its owner was I cannot tell, but I know that during the years of the people's revolutionary struggle thousands of brave horsemen on the grassland raised their sabres in the cause of liberty and equality, stubbornly resisting their reactionary rulers and the Japanese imperialists. These sabres captured a great many modern weapons such as machine-guns and pistols, for victory must always go to the just. In these twelve years, Inner Mongolia has passed through whole historical epochs at an unbelievable speed. On this sea of grass teeming with cattle described so often by our ancient poets, a recent photograph shows a large iron and steel combine, while in another photograph I saw a wide-eyed Mongolian girl handling a sizable lathe.

The Northeast Hall makes those regions live for us. Here we see the Olunchun hunters; then there is the Hoche fisherfolk, numerically the smallest minority in China and known in the old days as the Fish-skin Tartars, because in their poverty they wore clothes made of fish-skin. In fact one set of these tattered brown garments is displayed, but a photograph shows its former owner in a cotton suit sitting with his family listening to the wireless. At the time of liberation, no more than 404 Hoches were left, who roamed about in the vicinity of the Ussuri, Sungari and Amur Rivers. Now their numbers have gone up to 606. All the children of school age are going to school. Their old fishing tackle has been taken over by museums and today they sail small launches catching fish up and down the rivers.

The Szechuan Hall on the second floor has four screens with Chinese paintings at the entrance depicting the minorities' life and their products. Writers of the past always described Szechuan as a wealthy province, but ten years ago all the nine national minorities of Szechuan had either a slave society or a form of serfdom. The wretched lot of the slaves defies

description. One of the exhibits was a strange wooden chest. I did not know its use till the guide told me that this was a cage for Yi slaves at Liangshan. The slave's neck was fastened with an iron chain and after a day's hard toil he was cast into the wooden chest, the lid of which was weighted with a heavy rock. The young man explaining the exhibits had been a slave himself. At the age of twelve he was kidnapped in one of the many racial clashes and taken by the Yis to the mountains. He was a slave for eight years, but ten years ago he was released from the cage. Then, with the help and guidance of the Party, he became a government functionary, and worked hard in that area for the emancipation of slaves. Raising his pointer to one photograph he said: "In the Greater Liangshan Mountain more than 690,000 slaves have been emancipated. Now an autonomous *chou* has been set up." As I looked at the delightful scene of old folk sitting together to watch the boys and girls dance, I marvelled to think that some of them had once been slaves.

In the Yunnan Hall upstairs a brilliant peacock welcomes visitors and carries them in fancy to a warm and sunny clime. Of all China's provinces, Yunnan has the most national minorities, no less than twenty-one. These include the Kawa people whose social system is still a form of primitive society. We are shown their life at the time of liberation, and a wood block on which they used to put men's severed heads to offer as sacrifice. In those days when the Kawas fell ill they would get a shaman priest to kill a cock in order to placate the evil spirits. Now, no longer superstitious, they are using modern agricultural implements over large tracts of land. Other changes in their mode of life are the introduction of electricity and modern medicine. The Tais and the Hanis of Yunnan used to live under feudal chiefs. Here is a model of a chieftain's castle, and we can see him lording it over the people while his serfs live in separate groups and do all manner of labour for him: weaving, carrying his sedan-chair, fetching water, feeding horses, dancing and singing for his entertainment, looking after his ancestors' graves, minding his children. . . . Now the serfs who toiled for these chieftains for generations have become their own masters.

The Yunnan Hall also displays strange-looking leaves, notched message-sticks and knotted cords, the most primitive means of communicating with others or making records. At the time

of liberation about thirty Chinese minorities had no written language, and some used the leaves of plants to convey their ideas. For example, the Chingpo people used a green leaf of a certain shape to convey the idea "I shall always wait for you," and a pink leaf to signify "We shall never part." Such simple means were naturally inadequate to express more complex feelings and ideas. After liberation the government set up seven teams for the study of minority languages. These teams with more than seven hundred members from more than twenty different nationalities toured sixteen provinces and studied the languages of more than forty minorities. In the past ten years the government has helped ten minorities to make their new languages and three minorities to carry out language reforms. Since then the minorities have had periodicals and text-books printed in their own languages, and are able to write letters to each other and to express their ideas in writing. Among the exhibits of this kind, my attention was caught by a charming letter written to Chairman Mao by a Miao girl: "I love our Miao language just as I love my needle. I hope that in our socialist construction it will embroider flowers for our national culture, and, like my needle, will remain bright for ever."

On the other side upstairs is the Sinkiang Hall. Sinkiang is noted for its dances and songs, and the Uighurs and Kazakhs who live here are all good singers and dancers. Here are displayed the musical instruments of about a dozen minorities, long *tumbras* and *dutars*, the round *kowuz* and percussion instruments like the *karun*. . . . When Sinkiang girls put on their traditional silk dresses to dance, it is a sight well worth watching. I saw a most enchanting stage photograph of an Uighur girl with a shawl half covering her face so that her big black eyes alone could be seen. Her graceful pose reminded me of a bud about to unfurl.

Finally we went to the Tibetan Hall in the west wing where all the horrors of a backward, reactionary, cruel serf system can be seen. Upon entering the room I felt as if I were standing between two different worlds. On one side were exhibits illustrating the landowners' life: the most modern comforts, soft spring beds, gold-embroidered robes, piles of gold and silver ingots, every variety of tea service, Western cigarettes and Western confectionery. Not far away was a display of the serfs' life: the most primitive wooden ploughs and wooden

looms, the most backward farming methods, a cage for offenders made of twelve strips of wood, heavy iron shackles, the chopped-off hands of serfs, a three-year-old girl brutally murdered and made into an image of Buddha. . . . Within the small compass of this room we were able to grasp the different modes of life on the Tibetan plateau existing before. It was this great gulf between the rich and the poor that made the working people of Tibet long so eagerly for democratic reforms.

Leaving the cultural palace of China's nationalities and gazing back at the tall silvery building with its blue roof, I felt very conscious that the things of the past are vanishing while new things like this white building show the splendour of the evolution of history. A minority folk song came unbidden to my mind:

In days gone by we did not know each other,
Now we are close as brothers.
Ah, brother,
Let us go on living in peace,
Passing our days in friendship,
And together building our new happiness,
Together building happiness.

Chronicle

Conference of the Presidium of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles

On August 29, the presidium of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles held an enlarged conference attended by more than one hundred leading writers, dramatists, film workers, musicians, artists, folk artists and dancers. There was an enthusiastic discussion on the Bulletin and Resolution of the Eighth Party Congress, and it was pointed out that these significant documents give inspiration and encouragement to the people with their correct analysis of our present political and economic position, and their targets for a further leap forward on the basis of the great victories already won. Chou Yang, vice-chairman of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and a noted literary critic, was the first to speak. He said that as revolutionaries, as revolutionary writers and artists, we should in our works fully reflect and arouse the people's enthusiasm for socialist construction; and to this end we must raise our ideological and artistic level. If we merely raise our ideological level without improving our technique, we shall not produce works with a powerful appeal. In order to achieve better results in the fields of literature and art, we must pay equal attention to work by the masses as well as by professionals. We must further carry out the directive "Let a hundred flowers blossom, a hundred schools contend," so that literature and art may flourish in China and we may have an infinite variety of works with a socialist content, with different forms and styles, on different themes. The well-known playwright Tien Han, vice-chairman of the Association of Chinese Dramatists, commented on the great vitality and vigour of the new plays written since spring last year, and the number of good works produced; and he appealed not only for more plays but plays of a higher artistic standard. Shao Chuan-lin, vice-chairman of the Chinese Writers' Union, called for a further popularization of literature and art combined with an improvement in quality. He stated that the

raising of the ideological and artistic levels are inseparable, but the ideological level must take first place. Ideology is the soul, artistic technique the weapon; and good weapons bring out the full strength of the revolutionary content. These speakers were followed by prominent folk artists, film workers, artists, musicians and dancers, who expressed their determination to make further swift advances in their different fields. Finally Kuo Mo-jo made this proposal: First, all writers and artists should make a serious study of the Bulletin and Resolution of the Eighth Party Congress and discuss these documents, relating them to their own thoughts, feelings and standpoint in order to deepen their political understanding and become true people's artists or writers. Secondly, writers and artists should emulate the determination and enthusiasm of the workers and peasants, competing with them to produce more and better works.

Ancient Uighur Music Restored

The most important musical composition of the Uighur people in Sinkiang, the *Mukam*, has recently been edited and is shortly to be published. The *Mukam* is a collection of ancient music in twelve books, including recitative, ballads, dances, arias, etc. With over one hundred and seventy melodies and seventy-two symphonic poems this forms a very valuable collection of ancient Uighur music. To play the whole takes more than twenty hours.

The *Mukam* has been called the Uighurs' "Mother of Music." In the past the feudal rulers and the Kuomintang reactionaries despised and discriminated against the cultural heritage of the minority peoples until musicians who could play the entire *Mukam* grew increasingly rare. By the time of the liberation of Sinkiang only two old Uighurs were able to play a more or less complete version. In 1951 the Sinkiang Autonomous Region assembled a group of writers and musicians to restore the *Mukam* by collecting the missing tunes and editing them. Now, after eight years of hard work, the entire musical score and the words of the songs are complete, and the ancient Uighur lyrics have been translated into modern Uighur and standard Chinese. Now once more we can hear these beautiful

compositions in their entirety, and are provided with rich material for a study of the music of one of our national minorities.

Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution

The Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution has been completed in Peking. This museum, situated on the main highway outside Fuhsing Gate, stands in grounds more than 60,000 square metres in extent. The two wings have three storeys while the central part of the building has seven. There are more than twenty exhibition halls in all, with an area of more than 29,000 square metres. Nearly a hundred thousand visitors can be admitted daily. The three exhibition halls on the east deal with the Second Civil War (1927-1936) and include exhibits from the time of the Nanchang Uprising to the Long March. The halls on the west cover the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the history of the guerrilla fighters. The second storey houses exhibits of the War of Liberation and the defence of socialist construction, having models to depict various stages of the War of Liberation such as the crossing of the Yangtse. The third storey deals with the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, and brings out clearly the solidarity between the Chinese and Korean peoples. Another hall displays ancient and modern weapons.

Large Find of Sassanian Coins

The most western county of the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region is Ouch. This is a mountainous district north of the Pamir range. This May during the building of a highway, 947 Sassanian silver coins weighing 3,800 grammes, and thirteen ancient gold bars weighing 1,330 grammes were unearthed here. These Persian coins date from the middle of the sixth to the seventh century, and were probably buried in the later half of the seventh century. That was an age of flourishing trade and a two-way traffic in ideas and techniques between China and the kingdoms of Central Asia; and the merchants who exported so much Chinese silk usually took the overland route. Chinese archaeologists are of the opinion that these old coins were buried by some merchants

who had sold their silk and were attacked by bandits. This discovery sheds interesting light on the relations between China and the kingdoms to the west in those remote days.

Paintings by Eight Yangchow Artists

During the reign of Chien Lung (1736-1795) in the Ching dynasty, eight outstanding artists in Yangchow who had the courage to break conventions and paint in an original and individual style were known as the Eight Eccentrics of Yangchow. They were Chin Nung, Lo Ping, Wang Shih-shen, Huang Shen, Kao Hsiang, Chen Hsi, Li Shan and Li Fang-yin. Recently the Peking Cultural Relics Publishing House published an album of twelve paintings to represent this school. These include Chin Nung's *Plum Tree*, Kao Hsiang's *Pomegranate*, Chen Hsi's *Orchids*, Huang Shen's *Ducks*, Wang Shih-shen's *Plum Blossom*, Lo Ping's *Autumn Orchid and Rock*, Li Shan's *Butterfly and Flower by the Wall*, and Li Fang-yin's *Hundred Flowers*. This album also has an introduction giving a simple account of these artists' achievements and of their different styles.

Recitals by Luxembourg Pianist

Professor Son Kin Wong of the Luxembourg Institute of Music and her husband, Felase H. J. Marque, conductor of the Luxembourg Radio Station Orchestra, visited China in August at the invitation of the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. Professor Wong gave several recitals in Shanghai and Peking. Her programmes included works by Scarlatti, Chopin, Schumann, Debussy, Liszt and Prokofief.

New Museums in Shaohsing

Shaohsing, an ancient city in Chekiang Province, is the birth-place of the famous writer Lu Hsun and the home of many other eminent historical figures. Recently three more exhibition rooms have been added to the Lu Hsun Mu-

seum: "Lu Hsun and His Old Home," "Books Lu Hsun Read in His Youth," "Lu Hsun's Contacts with Local Places and People." Many valuable exhibits are now on display there for the first time. In the south end of the city stands the house of the famous woman revolutionary at the end of the Ching dynasty, Chiu Chin, who held secret meetings here with other revolutionaries. Now relics concerning her are being collected and the Chiu Chin Museum will soon be opening. The famous Ming dynasty artist Hsu Wei (1521-1593) made his home in the Green Vine Studio in Shaohsing, and here are paintings and writings by him as well as by another noted artist, Chen Hung-shou, who lived at the same time. The old vine here was planted by Hsu Wei. Now this house, too, has been opened as a historical museum. There is also an exhibition room in Shen Garden to introduce Lu Yu's life (1125-1209), where the Sung dynasty poet stayed. The many other ancient relics in Shaohsing include the Temple of Great Yu the legendary pacifier of floods, and the Orchid Pavilion associated with Wang Hsi-chih the brilliant Hsin dynasty (265-420) calligrapher. These places have recently been repaired and re-decorated.

Lungchuan Celadon Revived

The world famous celadon of Lungchuan, Chekiang, is being produced again today. During the Southern Sung dynasty (1127-1279) two brothers in Lungchuan invented this type of fine porcelain, and before long celadon was known throughout China and abroad. There were then several varieties including "Plum Green," "Sky After Rain," and "Fish Spawn," but some centuries later the manufacture of celadon stopped. After liberation the local pottery tried to reproduce some varieties of ancient porcelain; recently a research institute was set up by the provincial government, and now, with the help of the Provincial Bureau of Light Industry and the Chekiang College of Art, new celadon ware is being designed and made. This new celadon has been named "National Anniversary Celadon," and eight thousand pieces have been produced to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Chinese People's Republic this year.

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