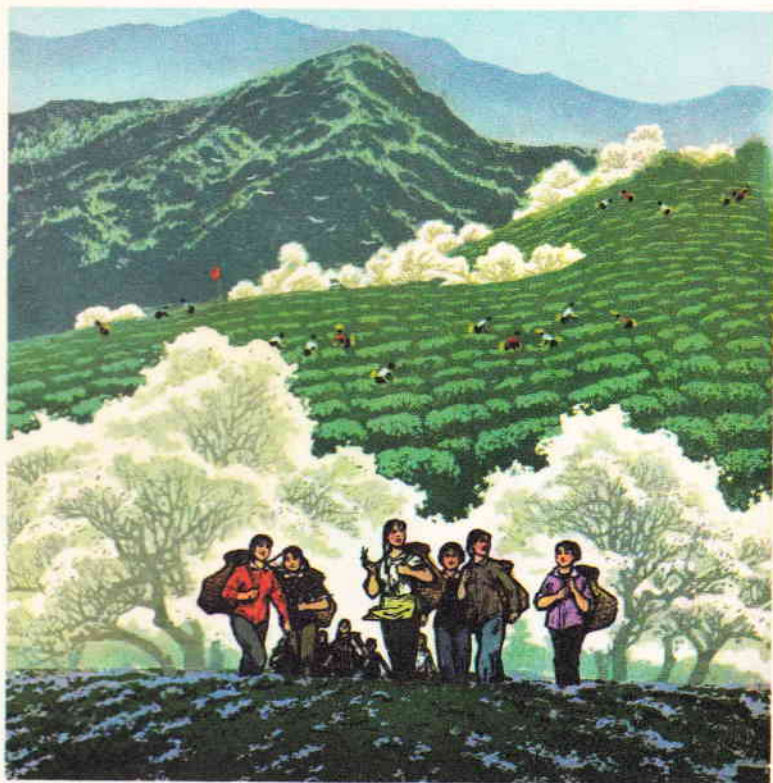


# CHINESE LITERATURE



LU HSUN'S WRITINGS

1977 12

## CONTENTS

### STORIES

- Erh-pao and the Chen Family — *Shu Ping* 3  
Two Comrades — *Miao Lin* 19  
The Leather Girth — *Wang Yuan-chien* 29

### LU HSUN'S WRITINGS

- In Memory of Wei Su-yuan 36  
Lu Hsun's Friendship with Wei Su-yuan — *Tu Yi-pai* 42

### SKETCHES

- Honey of the Grassland — *Wen Hsiao-yu* and *Wang Cbeb-cheng* 48  
A Dream of Red Mansions (Chapters 40 and 41) — *Tsao Hsueh-chin* 55

### NOTES ON ART

- PLA Art Exhibition — *Hung Lu* 93  
Ma Ko and His Music — *Li Ling* 97

### CHRONICLE 100

### PLATES

- Works from the PLA 50th Anniversary Art Exhibition 94-95

Front Cover: Spring Comes to the Tea Plantation — *Tu Ying-chiang*

## STORIES

**EDITORS' NOTE:** August 1, this year, marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. To celebrate the occasion, we have presented in our previous issue *Following His Footprints* and *Stick to the Revolutionary Standard* and in this issue *Erh-pao and the Chen Family*, *Two Comrades* and *The Leather Girth*, stories reflecting the life of the Red Army during the Long March (1934-1935). Also in this issue are some paintings selected from the PLA 50th Anniversary Art Exhibition and an article introducing it.

*Shu Ping*

### Erh-pao and the Chen Family

In 1935, at the time the cherries were ripening, the Red Army passed through Chen Family Bend.

The bend was a pretty little hamlet nestling in the green hills by the Tatu River. Rumours of the Red Army's approach had set the quiet little place astir. The rich families and local gentry, who had lorded it over the peasants, packed up their gold, silver and other valuables and fled. Although frightened too, few of the poor families went into hiding. They had so little that was worth worrying about. Moreover they couldn't leave because they had neither money for travelling nor grain for food even if they took to the road.

There lived in the bend a man in his sixties of strong character, known as Carpenter Chen. From his own experience, he knew that

Published by Foreign Languages Press  
Peking (37), China  
*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

soldiers were up to no good and that it was best to avoid them. This had been particularly true of the last few years, when the Kuo-mintang army had swept through the area burning, killing, looting and raping on more than one occasion. As for the Szechuan army stationed by the Tatu River, the men were avaricious devils who grabbed anything and everything within their reach. When they had come to the bend, every household had bolted their doors and hidden their fowls and animals.

So when Carpenter Chen heard the news of the Red Army's coming, he couldn't help feeling apprehensive. He had no intention of leaving, although the landlord's men sought him out and asked him to go. Their aim was to clear the hamlet so that when the Red Army arrived they could have no contact with the masses.

"Chen Family Bend is an important military position," they announced without giving any reasons. "We're going to raze all the houses." Determined as he was, Chen knew that he couldn't stand up to the whole bunch of those thugs. He watched helplessly as they poured kerosene all over his thatched house, preparing to set it alight. Just then he spotted in the distance a bright red flag coming towards the bend. The landlord's men becoming frightened threw down the kerosene can and ran for their lives.

Every door in the bend was tightly shut. Fear gripped the people. As the saying goes, "When an army passes through it strips bare the land." Families would be broken up, homes destroyed. It was a common enough story. In his thatched hut, Carpenter Chen went through the motions of working at his bench, but he couldn't concentrate on what he was doing. His outward composure could not control his inward alarm and anxiety.

A Red Army squad had decided to billet itself in Chen Family Bend. Comrade Chao Erh-pao, a lad of no more than eighteen years, of a large build and with a pinched, drawn face which nevertheless had kept its boyish look, was sent by his squad leader to find a place for the men. Walking down a pebbly path, and up a mound, he headed straight for Carpenter Chen's hut half hidden among a clump of trees. As he drew near a fierce-looking dog rushed at him, snarling and baring its teeth. At first Erh-pao ignored it, but when it came

closer, he motioned as if to shoot it with his gun and so the dog scampered away. Carpenter Chen meanwhile observed this from inside his hut.

Erh-pao reached Chen's doorway. The carpenter wore a pair of old, brass-rimmed spectacles, with one leg missing for which he had substituted a piece of string tied around his ear. Squinting in absorption, he appeared so intent on his work that he seemed oblivious to the dog barking and the young soldier in his doorway. A bright looking boy was at his feet helping him. Not wishing to disturb the father and son at their work, Erh-pao waited quietly in the doorway. He noticed that the carpenter's face changed colour, first pale and then red. The man shot furtive glances at the soldier out of the corner of his eye. The boy too appeared agitated and their lines were far from straight. Erh-pao grinned.

"Old uncle," he addressed the carpenter politely.

The carpenter ignored him, but the boy couldn't prevent his reaction. His busy hands paused in mid-air; his bright eyes under their long lashes fixed themselves on the speaker. His father glared at him in vain. Reluctantly he stopped working and turned towards the entrance, looking at Erh-pao over the rim of his spectacles.

"Why, in all my years I've never seen such a well behaved soldier before," thought Chen. "The moment a man becomes a soldier he turns into an evil opium-smoking monster. You can smell his stench a mile away. But this lad here has such gentle black eyes and he's smiling too. You can see right into their depths, like the clear waters of the Tatu. And though his grey uniform is threadbare and patched it looks clean and smart with its bright red star on the cap." Chen was above all impressed by Erh-pao's smiling face with its candid, honest expression. What a pity that such a fine lad had become a soldier. Without realizing it, Chen sighed. The thugs had probably tricked the boy, he mused.

Hearing his sigh, Erh-pao ventured once more, "Old uncle, we'd like to stay the night here with you. There'll only be a few of us. Will that be all right? We're Red Army soldiers. . . ."

"I'm hard of hearing," Chen's words cut short Erh-pao's explanation. "I can't hear what you're saying." With that he gestured

to his son to carry on with their work, because he was alarmed at the thought of the soldiers lodging in his home.

His son was drawn by the gentle soldier's ways. He stared at the red star on the soldier's cap. When Erh-pao turned to address his father, he couldn't resist reaching out to touch the broad sword on the soldier's back. His boldness made his father furious. Picking up the ruler, he struck his son on the head. Tears filled the boy's eyes and he was afraid to raise his head again. When his father thrust the line at him, he took it and carelessly marked the wood.

"Hey, that line's all crooked," said Erh-pao taking it out of the boy's hands. And before the carpenter could utter a word he had skilfully drawn a straight line.

Inadvertently Chen nodded in approval, but soon checked himself. He adjusted his spectacles, picked up his axe, and continued to work. Erh-pao, however, had noticed the nod and look of approval on the carpenter's face and so he watched and waited, trying to help whenever he could, copying what the boy did. Meanwhile he went on talking to Chen. "We belong to the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and so we are the army of the poor people. We never harm the masses but we attack landlords, local exploiters and reactionaries. We're now on our way to the north to fight against the Japanese invaders. Somewhere near here we are going to ford the Tatu, and so we'd like to billet here at the most for only a couple of days."

After a long pause the carpenter replied slowly, "Well, if it's only for a day or two I suppose that will be all right." He wasn't deaf really. "But I'm sorry my hut's too small for all your men."

"There're only five of us, uncle, and we won't come into your house. We just want to be able to sleep outside under your eaves." Erh-pao did his best to reassure him.

"Well. . . ." Chen hadn't the heart to refuse him. He looked into Erh-pao's honest, gentle eyes and said, "If all you want is to sleep under the eaves, then go ahead." Although he'd agreed, Erh-pao sensed his hesitation. Chen still looked frightened.

"You are very kind, uncle," replied Erh-pao in his awkward Szechuan dialect.

Then he went to summon his comrades. Their squad leader thanked the carpenter again and they started to sweep the narrow space under the eaves. After they had spread a thick layer of twigs and brushwood, they made up beds of hay.

Suddenly Erh-pao whispered to his squad leader, "Look, we can't stay here." He pulled his squad leader to a secluded spot behind the house.

"Now what's all this about?" asked the puzzled soldier.

"There are women in this family and they've only got one room. It wouldn't be right," Erh-pao explained.

"How did you find that out?"

"Well, you can see right into the room from under the eaves. I noticed a flower patterned cotton blouse hanging over the bed post and a wooden comb and small mirror on the window-sill."

The squad leader scratched his head. "Good job you're so observant. Yes, we'll have to move elsewhere, but there are so few houses here. Where on earth can we go?"

Erh-pao looked around and then pointed to some walnut trees by the edge of a cliff behind the carpenter's hut. "How about trying over there?" he asked.

The squad leader looked to where he was pointing and made out a shelter skilfully constructed from bamboo, millet stalks and matting in one of the walnut trees. Any peasant knew it was a lookout used at harvest time to protect the crops from wild animals and other marauders. Among the walnut trees was a cherry tree, on which red cherries sparkled like rubies in the sunset.

"Yes, that's the answer," the squad leader nodded. "We'll sleep in the walnut tree."

"I'll just go and check that there's enough room for all of us," Erh-pao announced as he slung his rifle over his shoulder and raced towards the tree. Born and bred in the countryside, tree-climbing was nothing to him. He rubbed his hands together before clambering up to the shelter.

Then the unexpected happened. Erh-pao astride a branch suddenly cried out and jerked backwards so abruptly that he nearly lost his balance and fell out of the tree.

In alarm, his squad leader cocked his gun and called out, "What's the matter? Is it a wild animal?"

Erh-pao steadied himself but did not reply, for he was staring in astonishment at a girl of about his own age, who was staring back at him brandishing a stick. Her eyes, which flashed angrily at him, were dark and soft like those of the carpenter's son. The truth dawned on Erh-pao, and he opened his mouth to speak. But words failed him and so instead he quickly climbed down the tree.

"There is someone in the shelter and she looks like she's the carpenter's daughter," he told his leader.

Eleven years ago Chen's wife had died of an illness leaving a son and a daughter. Their father had worked very hard to provide for them, all year round trudging with his tools up and down the Tatu River or going deep into the mountains. Yet his earnings were barely enough to feed them. There is an old saying, "Heaven cares for the motherless." Somehow or other, the carpenter had managed to raise his children into fine youngsters and they were his whole world.

On learning that the Red Army was approaching, Chen had racked his brains to think of a way to protect his young daughter and in desperation had finally told her to hide in the tree shelter. While he had been pretending to work in his hut, his mind had been preoccupied with his daughter, hoping to keep her safe from the passing soldiers. Little had he thought that she would soon be discovered.

"So that's the problem," said the squad leader frowning. "Go and ask her to come down, Erh-pao, but mind your manners and don't frighten her."

"Don't worry," he replied and went back to the tree. He called up to the girl, "Hello there, sister hiding in the shelter. Don't be afraid of us. Please come down."

At this, the carpenter rushed out of his hut shouting, "What the hell do you want?"

Realizing that the man had misunderstood their intentions, the squad leader quickly explained that they had just found out that he had a daughter and that it was no longer possible for them to billet under his eaves. Instead, they wished to sleep in the tree shelter,

The squad leader had barely finished when the girl began to nimbly climb down the tree. With a flushed face and nervously fingering the hem of her tunic, she rushed to her father.

Letting out a small sigh of relief, the carpenter turned back to his hut with his daughter. Only then did Erh-pao notice the axe blade glinting in the carpenter's belt at his back. He raised his eyebrows and shot a glance at his squad leader before climbing back up the tree.

Rising at dawn the next morning, Carpenter Chen stuck his long pipe in his mouth and slipped out of his hut, eager to survey the situation before the soldiers were awake. To his surprise he found that Erh-pao and the others had been up for some time and were busy sweeping and tidying the area. Erh-pao was attending to their breakfast, his face red from the heat of the fire. A strong morning breeze from the Tatu River wafted the pungent smell of bitter herbs in the direction of the carpenter. Pretending to be strolling about, he went towards the cauldron and took a peep. He was astonished to see only a little rice among the herbs. Whoever heard of soldiers eating that kind of food? Since ancient times men had become soldiers only to pillage and plunder. He examined his cherry tree with its ripe fruit, but found no trace of any having been taken. The bright red fruit shone in the sunlight. The carpenter said nothing but was perplexed. "Perhaps that young soldier lad was telling the truth after all. Perhaps the Red Army does really care about us poor folk," he thought to himself.

After breakfast, the squad was ordered to attack and destroy a group of Szechuan soldiers who were plundering some villages on the other side of the hills. One person was to remain and keep watch.

Erh-pao stayed behind and picked up a small stick to practise writing on the sandy ground. He wrote out in large characters "The three main rules of disciplines and eight points for attention." Underneath he started to write in smaller characters. As he finished a line, he would erase it and start another. By the time he had got to the fourth point, "Fourth, pay for anything you damage", he heard a chuckle behind him. The carpenter's boy had come up behind

him unawares and was pointing to his ear. "There's a grasshopper on your head. Grab it quickly."

Erh-pao felt the insect tickling his ear and caught it in his hand. "Here you are, little brother," he said offering it to the boy. "It's yours now."

The boy happily took it and in no time at all Erh-pao had woven him a tiny grass cage. At first the boy stood beside Erh-pao but soon he was sitting on the ground. When his sister came to call him for his meal, she found him leaning over Erh-pao joking and laughing. They were obviously great friends.

"Do you have any buckets for fetching water?" asked Erh-pao. "Would you mind if I borrowed them for a bit?"

"Of course not. Wait a moment. I'll get them for you." The boy dashed off swinging his grasshopper in its cage.

Singing to himself, Erh-pao returned with two buckets of water from the river. One was to fill their cauldron and their basins; the other he emptied into the carpenter's big brown-glazed vat, which gave a deep resonant sound when he patted it.

"What a fine solid vat you've got here, old uncle," he remarked to the carpenter.

"Yes, you're quite right. Everything else is junk. Either a leg missing here or a spout missing there," Chen replied with a wry smile, drawn into conversation with Erh-pao the first time. "This vat is the exception and it's been used by our family for four generations."

His daughter, listening to their conversation, smiled shyly.

But Erh-pao did not smile. Holding his carrying-pole, he grimly looked around the hut. His glance took in the old wooden bedstead with three legs, for although it was the home of a carpenter a piece of stone propped up the bed in place of the missing leg. Then there was a ladle without a handle, a cauldron with a crack at the rim and an earthenware teapot with a broken spout hanging by the stove. Feeling sad, he left without a word with his buckets and quietly went about fetching the rest of the water.

Soon he had brought eight buckets of water, filling the vat to the brim.

The carpenter meanwhile sat as if concentrating on his work, only glancing occasionally at Erh-pao. But his emotions were in a turmoil as he remembered an incident that had occurred a year before.

Around the time when the wheat was turning golden, his daughter had gone to the river to fetch water and on her way back had met two soldiers in the Szechuan army. The brutes were delighted to see such a pretty girl and started to make advances towards her, humming obscene songs. The girl was not frightened and throwing down her buckets she prepared to defend herself with the carrying-pole. The two men thought they wouldn't have much trouble with just one girl and so they continued to molest her. Flushed and tearful, the girl was putting up a desperate struggle, when her father came running on the scene brandishing his axe and followed by friendly neighbours. With that the two hooligans ran away.

And yet here was this kind lad filling his vat to the brim. Chen marvelled to himself, "I've seen many things in my time, but this is the first occasion I've ever come across a good soldier."

As his daughter bent down to help Erh-pao empty the last bucket, she noticed that his foot was bleeding profusely, where he had scratched it on a rock. She cried out to her father, who pulled the lad over to a tree stump and made him sit down. He went off to fetch some home-made medicine and a strip of cloth. Then he put on his one-legged spectacles in order to see better. Erh-pao wanted to attend to it himself, but Chen pushed his wet hands away.

Holding Erh-pao's feet with one hand, Chen began tending the wound with the other. But either the room was too dark or his glasses weren't strong enough, for no matter how he squinted or turned his head, he wasn't able to sprinkle the powdered medicine in the right place. Several times his daughter exclaimed, "No, not there! No, lower!"

In exasperation her father finally handed her the powder and said, "Since all you can do is fuss and point, then you do it."

The girl wasn't upset by his sharp words. Putting down the shoe she had almost finished sewing and taking the strip of cloth, she answered quickly, "Yes, all right."



Erh-pao was embarrassed by this and, waving at her with his hand, he protested, "Oh no . . . I can't let you . . . please . . ."

The carpenter glared at him from behind his spectacles. "And why shouldn't she? You're bleeding after all. That toe of yours needs attending to."

Then his son rushed over to Erh-pao and putting his arms around Erh-pao's waist he prevented him from getting up.

Without any hesitation, the girl came up to Erh-pao and brushing aside the loose hair over her forehead, she squatted down at his feet. Gently but deftly, she swabbed the toe clean before liberally sprinkling it with the powder and bandaging it neatly with the strip of cloth.

Having thanked the whole family for helping to dress his wound, Erh-pao sat down, leaning against the vat to make some straw sandals for his comrades. He borrowed a bench to use as a board and wove with great skill, for he was one of the best sandal makers in the company. Fascinated by Erh-pao's skill, the boy asked curiously, "Elder brother, you're a Red Army soldier fighting in battles so how come you can make such fine straw sandals?"

Erh-pao laughed. "All of us come from very poor families, little brother," he explained. "And we all learned to make straw sandals at home. In fact, before I joined the army, I always went around bare-footed. I wasn't even worth a pair of straw sandals."

Then Erh-pao began to tell them the story of his early life. When he reached the part where he had worked as a farmhand at the age of nine because both his parents had died, the carpenter sighed and there were tears in the girl's eyes.

Erh-pao went on to tell them of the bitter winter's day when his feet were blue and swollen with the cold. Having been told by the landlord to fetch some wood from the mountains, he had struggled to collect even half a load of wood. But the pain was more than he could bear and he had to stop. Blood dripped from his cracked soles and he could hardly stand. A kindly hunter found him crying miserably in the cold and carried him to the tiny hovel where the labourers lived. Erh-pao had lit a fire when the landlord burst in. Accusing the boy of being a lazy slacker, the landlord seized the red-



hot tongs from the fireside and hit Erh-pao on his frost-bitten feet. The boy had fainted.

Carpenter Chen's whiskers quivered in rage and the girl's tear-filled eyes glanced at Erh-pao's scarred soles.

Then the squad leader returned and whispered something to Erh-pao, who jumped to his feet and untied the straw sandal he was making. He snatched up his gun.

"You're not going away, are you?" cried Chen.

"No. We'll soon be back. We're just off to sort out that swine who's been exploiting the people on the far side of the hills."

"That's all right then. As long as you're not leaving us." The carpenter had grown so attached to Erh-pao that he couldn't bear to see him go away.

Erh-pao returned in high spirits later that afternoon carrying a bundle. Seeing the carpenter's son in the distance, he called out to him, "Come and look at what I've got here, little brother."

The whole family came at the sound of his voice and stared as Erh-pao unwrapped the bundle revealing jackets, trousers, a sleeveless fur coat of the finest quality and a pipe with a jade mouthpiece.

"These are for you, uncle. You must take them," said Erh-pao going into the hut and putting them on the bed.

At first the carpenter was too stunned for words. Then he ran into the hut, grabbed the bundle and tried to thrust it back into Erh-pao's hands. "No, no. I can't take anything from you people," he refused.

But Erh-pao insisted on giving the bundle back to Chen saying, "Don't you see, these things really belong to you, uncle."

"How can they? What do you mean to me?" the carpenter asked in bewilderment.

Erh-pao sat down again by the vat and carried on weaving his straw sandal. "Of course these things belong to you. Everything was taken from us poor people. How often have we heard that without the exploitation of the poor the landlords could not get rich? All your life you've worked as a carpenter making thousands of things, yet you've never enjoyed any of your earnings, because the landlords and other exploiters took all your hard-earned money with their

taxes and other demands. So just as they stripped you of the fruits of your labour, so these things should be taken from them now."

Chen agreed with these sentiments since he'd been secretly thinking them for years though he would never have dared to utter or enact them. He nodded. "All right. I'll accept them."

Erh-pao smiled with pleasure. Chen's daughter, who had been listening like one entranced, got up and rummaged through her bamboo basket. Producing a pair of new cotton shoes that she had finished making, she presented them to Erh-pao saying, "Please take these shoes. They are for you."

Holding the black cotton shoes with their white soles in his hands, Erh-pao was very touched by their generosity. Poor people everywhere and the Red Army are just like one big family he thought. But he gently placed the shoes beside Chen and said, "No, you keep them, old uncle. I'm fine with my straw sandals."

"No. You must wear these because all we poor people are like one family. You've been an orphan since you were a child and so you've never had much of a chance to wear cotton shoes."

The carpenter spoke in a matter-of-fact way, but his words warmed Erh-pao's heart even more. Erh-pao added with feeling, "But I do have parents now. You see my home is with the Red Army and the Communist Party is more than a parent to me."

All four in the hut remained silent, the sunlight streaming in and playing on their faces. From the Tatu River a warm breeze blew outside. Then the silence was shattered by a burst of gunfire. It was faint and muffled as if coming from further up the river. Erh-pao cocked his head towards the doorway, straining to listen.

Another round of shots rang out, followed by an explosion. Erh-pao had no doubts now as he reached for his gun and leapt to his feet awkwardly, hurrying to the entrance. There was a crash as the butt of his rifle struck the rim of the water vat, breaking off a piece. Water spilled out making a puddle on the floor.

Erh-pao was very distressed and began to apologize, "Oh, I'm so sorry, uncle, I . . ."

Chen stopped him. "It's nothing. Don't worry, that was certainly no treasure you know," he tried to console him.

The firing grew more intense and unable to delay longer, Erh-pao dashed out.

On a mountain further up the Tatu River, another group from the Szechuan army, unwilling to concede defeat, was fighting it out to the end against the Red Army. The battle raged until dark, when the sound of firing slowly faded.

The weather in the hills could change in a moment. That evening the setting sun had been glowing red when very quickly dark clouds blotted out the sky and a strong wind blew in from the direction of the river carrying big raindrops.

When it was dark, Chen bolted the door and lit the oil lamp. Usually at dusk after a hard day's work, the family would sit and chat without lighting the lamp in order to save oil. But although Chen had lit the lamp nobody spoke. Deep in his own thoughts, the boy went to bed early and pulled the covers over his head. His sister sat in a corner staring dejectedly at the cotton shoes in her hands. Her father's gaze was fixed on the broken water vat but his ears strained to the sounds of the wind and rain. From time to time he muttered something incoherently.

"Really, dad!" his daughter complained. "Is that broken vat all you can think about?"

"Don't be such a silly girl. Do you think that I mind about the vat? Not in the least. It's that poor boy I'm worried about, out on a stormy night like this with his bad foot. Just listen to the wind and rain. Poor lad!"

Just then a sound was heard outside.

"Listen, dad, there's someone at the door."

The carpenter rushed to the threshold. A familiar voice called out, "Old uncle. . ."

It was Erh-pao. Chen quickly unbolted the door and flung it open, exclaiming joyfully, "It's you! You're back at last."

"Yes, uncle. Here we are," said Erh-pao entering with his squad leader.

As they were soaked to the skin, Chen turned to his daughter and said, "Hurry and boil some ginger water for them to stop them

catching a chill." Meanwhile he hunted around for some dry clothes for the men to change into.

The squad leader interrupted him, "I'm sorry, uncle, but our unit's got to leave right away." Producing two silver dollars, he offered them to Chen saying, "We only came to say goodbye and give you this money we owe you." The carpenter backed away. "Money? What money?" he asked.

Erh-pao explained apologetically, "You see, uncle, I'm very sorry I broke your vat and I hope these two silver dollars will pay for the damage."

Chen didn't know what to think. Then he gestured vigorously, "No, no! I don't want it. It was only a water vat. Didn't you say that we poor people and the Red Army are like one family? How can you talk of payment when we are all one family?"

Despite all the persuasion of Erh-pao and the squad leader, Chen refused to take any of the money. While they were still arguing about it, the girl brought them bowls of piping hot ginger water.

"Enough of all this," said the carpenter. "Come, first have your ginger water and get warm." He was relieved to have found an excuse to change the subject, and his manner was that of a kindly old uncle.

Looking at the carpenter with gratitude, Erh-pao and the squad leader obediently took the bowls and began sipping the ginger water.

The hot drink warmed their insides and beads of perspiration broke out on their noses. The colour came back to their cheeks. Chen's little boy jumped out of bed and sat near Erh-pao listening, while he and his squad leader related how their comrades had wiped out the remaining Szechuan reactionary troops. As they described the final action, the whole family laughed in delight.

While Erh-pao was talking to the carpenter, the squad leader stealthily stuffed the money into the boy's coat pocket. Then they stood up to take their leave. "Thank you for everything, old uncle. Now we must be going."

"Well. . ." Chen could not bear to see them leave, but before he could protest or detain them, they had stepped out into the wind and rain.

"Goodbye, uncle. We'll be back one day." The two soldiers had turned round to shout above the storm.

A crash of thunder followed a streak of lightning which lit up the whole sky. The carpenter and his family stood at the door waving as the two soldiers disappeared into the distance. Tears blurred their eyes.

Suddenly Chen told his daughter, "Stay here and keep an eye on things while I go and see them off." Rolling up his trouser-legs, he stepped outside. Silently his daughter handed him the pair of new cotton shoes, which he stuck into his belt. His son gave him a stick and he set out in the direction of the two soldiers.

The storm raged on. The Tatu River flowed turbulently on. . . .

*Illustrated by Chen Yu-hsien*

## Two Comrades

Thud! Hao Hung-chih accidentally stumbled over a clump of grass. Before he knew what he'd bumped his head against, he felt another blow from behind, which made him see stars and drift into unconsciousness.

Later when he came round, his face felt as if it had been stung all over by insects. Opening his eyes, he saw that he was lying face down in a patch of prickly herbs.

Gathering his wits about him, he tried to raise his head but couldn't. Something heavy was weighing down on his neck. He put up his hand to feel what it was and found it was only his rifle that had knocked him unconscious a moment ago.

"Why did you want to go and give me a blow like that, old fellow?" Sitting up, he held his rifle lovingly. "But don't worry, you'll be coming with me to northern Shensi."

A moment later, the sun began to set over the marshes, glowing fiery red in the west. As it faded to a pale grey, quietness reigned over the desolate spot; a wild eagle hovered momentarily overhead, before flying northwards.

"I'd better not stop here," Hao thought to himself. "I must catch up with the others."

As he tried to stand, he collapsed again. His clothes were soaked with perspiration and a chill gust of wind set him shivering.

A lean veteran soldier in his forties, Hao was a member of a rear-guard Red Army company, which had intercepted the enemy near a pine forest just before reaching the marshes. In the action which had lasted for two days and nights, Hao had become unconscious for some time during the second night as a result of an injury to his arm caused by a shell splintering. Regaining consciousness, he had quickly bandaged the wound and run after his company. A week had passed but he had found no one.

Before enlisting, he had worked for over twenty years for a landlord and his health had been undermined. Now his injury further impaired his poor health. And in the past few days he had eaten little.

He had had a small bag of grain before reaching the marshes but now only a handful of *chingko* barley flour remained, because in the fierce fighting he had not been able to replenish his rations.

"What I'd give for a bowl of porridge!"

He fumbled in his pockets for some matches and his remaining flour in its bag, which he had kept for emergencies only.

"Now's the time for a bowl of porridge," he decided.

This wasn't the first time he'd made this decision. Five days after reaching the marshes, he'd decided to eat his last ration of flour, but had changed his mind. Instead he had eaten some herb roots to allay his hunger, since the leaves had been eaten by the comrades ahead of him. And he had relied on his remaining strength to keep going. But now he was so exhausted that he felt he had to use up his last rations to give him some energy.

With the dusk, the vast expanse of marshland was enveloped in gloom.

Hao finally struggled to his feet, and peering into the twilight saw a shadow looming ahead. He guessed it to be a tamarisk not often found in the marshes, and with some difficulty dragged himself towards it.

He kindled a fire under it and the flames lit up his worn, haggard face. Once he had toasted his hands over the fire for warmth, he took out his "cooking pot", which was in reality a small enamel mug. Around its brim were pierced three holes strung with wire for carrying. After he had become separated from his comrades, his mug had served as his "cooking pot".

He fetched some water, picked some herbs and put them in his "pot" to cook over the fire. Soon the broth began to boil merrily.

After the herbs were well cooked, he untied the neck of his bag of flour and then hesitated. Should he use it all up now? If he did there would be none left, and there was no knowing when he would get a fresh supply. If he saved some, he would be too weak to continue and he was anxious to catch up with his comrades and proceed north to fight the Japanese invaders. After some deliberation, he divided the contents into two halves, pouring one portion into his mug. Breaking two twigs from a bush for chopsticks, he stirred his broth but found it too watery and so he was forced to add the other portion of flour. The broth thickened to an appetizing porridge.

Pleased with his efforts he called it his "herb porridge".

When his "herb porridge" was ready, he picked up a herb with his chopsticks to taste it, but spat it out immediately.

"Ouch! Trying to burn me, eh?" he smiled. "You don't realize how honoured you are to be fraternizing with *chingko* barley flour. You're very lucky to be in my porridge."

The cheerful soldier's stomach rumbled with hunger, but he felt it was more bearable than any landlord's whippings. It was worth feeling hungry, he felt, if it meant saving poor people all over the world from suffering from it. What distressed him more was being separated from his comrades so that he could not fight with them or talk to them. The fire smouldered and died, plunging everything into darkness.

Being so anxious to find his comrades, his hearing was more than usually acute, and so as he was about to eat his porridge, he thought he heard the sound of a voice calling faintly.

"Who's that? One of my comrades perhaps?" he wondered, straining his ears to listen. But there was only the sound of his own breathing and then a wolf howling in the distance. He laughed at his wishful thinking. Before night fell he hadn't seen any living creature except the lone eagle, to say nothing of his comrades.

Just as he picked up his mug again, he heard a feeble voice calling once more. This time it was more distinct and louder. "Com . . . rade . . ."

Putting down his mug, Hao followed in the direction of the voice. Screwing up his eyes and peering around he could see nothing. "Perhaps it was my imagination," he wondered, but continued to look. Then the voice called again, "Comrade . . ."

Hao searched furiously. Meanwhile a man came crawling out of some bushes. It was too dark to make out the man's features.

"Comrade . . . over here," his voice gasped. He stretched out his hand.

Hao groped his way forward, at first grasping some herbs and then a trembling, thin hand.

"Comrade, you . . ."

The limp hand drooped to the ground as Hao held it. Anxiously, Hao bent down to feel his chest. The man's clothes were sodden with water, but his body was still warm. Trying to lift him up, Hao found that he hadn't enough strength, and so taking him in his arms, Hao inched his way over the ground to the ashes of his fire.

Once they had reached the place, Hao settled his comrade by the ashes and went to gather some more twigs for the fire. Having re-kindled it, he saw from the firelight that the comrade was only a youth of about fifteen years old. His eyes were closed in his pallid face. Mud and water covered his body from crawling through the marshland.

Hao felt deep sympathy and affection for the boy. It was because he had wanted to be a revolutionary that the lad had joined the army. When he was unable to walk, he had crawled on all fours. How determined was the boy's fighting spirit!

With these thoughts, Hao helped the young comrade to get closer to the fire to get warm. Steam began to rise from his damp clothes.

The youth was still unconscious but a slight colour began to return to his cheeks.

"Perhaps he's starving," Hao thought and sighed.

He glanced at his "herb porridge" temptingly in his mug and then at the youth's face. "Ah, these young fighters," he thought. "I must get him out of these marshes for there's a lot of work waiting for him to do in the future." Propping up the boy, Hao gently fed some porridge into his mouth. Then he gave him another mouthful . . .

Soon the mug was half empty.

The warmth and nourishment revived the youth and he started to open his eyes. Finding himself lying in a strange comrade's arms, he began to weep with emotion and weakness. He made an effort to speak. "Comrade . . ."

"What's your . . . ?"

"Chang Chun," the boy interjected. "I'm a member of the propaganda team of the Tiger Regiment."

"Well, Little Chang, why are you all by yourself?" Hao asked.

"I became ill . . . I got left behind."

"Never mind about that now. We'll go on together and catch up with them," Hao spoke reassuringly.

"Comrade," Little Chang made an effort to speak. "I'm a member of the Youth League. I crawled around in these marshes for three days until my strength gave out. I'd managed to gather some herbs and when I saw the fire I tried to make it here to give them to you. See, here they are. Please take them and boil them for a meal. They should help you to keep going. When you arrive in northern Shensi, please find my team leader Yang and tell him that I was longing to rejoin my comrades and fight against the Japanese invaders, but that my strength gave out and that I couldn't make it . . ."

"Stop talking nonsense, Little Chang," Hao replied hugging him. "Has there ever been an enemy that we Red Army soldiers can't defeat? Have there ever been any difficulties that we haven't faced? So you can bet your boots that we'll soon be clear of the marshes. Come on now..." He picked up the mug to feed the rest of the porridge to Little Chang.

Chang was deeply moved by Hao's encouraging smile and selflessness. Although he was half-starved from his lack of food for several days, Chang pushed aside the mug in Hao's hand. "No, thanks. I won't have any more."

"Why not?" Hao laughed as if he was sitting chatting with his comrades in the squad. "I know there isn't very much porridge, but when we think of the revolution and the future, then this meal is very special. Have you ever thought about the future, Little Chang?" Helping Little Chang to sit up, he continued cheerfully, "Why, in the future, we'll defeat the Japanese aggressors, kick out Chiang Kai-shek and his gang, get rid of that blood-sucking crowd and liberate all of China. Then we'll build socialism and communism. These marshes here will become fertile wheat fields. Oh boy! What a great future!" As he talked, he added Little Chang's herbs to the porridge so that the mug was full again.

The flames danced over Hao's face and Little Chang felt as if he had been transported into another world.

Hao paused and then added in a more serious tone, "But a better life won't just happen all on its own. It means a hard struggle and all the efforts of thousands of us revolutionaries. So for the sake of a better world, you must eat the rest of this porridge, Little Chang. You need it to get out of the marshes and make it all the way to northern Shensi, following Chairman Mao in making revolution."

Little Chang looked at the porridge for a moment and then nodded. "All right, I'll eat half of it for the sake of a better world. But you must take the other half."

"But I... I've had more than enough already." Hao blushed to the roots of his hair never having told a deliberate lie to a comrade before, but his awkwardness escaped Little Chang's notice. As the

youth ate, Hao's lined face relaxed a little, though he was still worried because his *chingko* barley flour ration had been too little. If only he could have foreseen meeting Little Chang, he would have saved more for him.

Having eaten half the porridge, Little Chang refused to eat any more. He had noticed Hao's pinched face and that his hand shook as he fed him. And he knew the reason. He insisted that Hao take the rest of the food. Both the man and the boy felt tears in their eyes.

Leaning back to back, the two comrades dozed off by the warmth of the fire.

Around midnight Little Chang awoke, stiff and cold, to find the fire had died. A blizzard from the northwest was blowing, the air was thick with snowflakes and the ground was already white.

Hao awoke at the same time. He searched for some twigs to light a new fire, but the matches wouldn't strike in the wind. The blizzard whipped at their faces and at the tamarisk.

"It'll freeze us to death, won't it, Old Hao?" Little Chang remarked.

"Nothing to worry about. We soldiers never bother about a few difficulties." Although his answer was optimistic, Hao was in fact very worried about the boy's lack of experience.

Hao recalled that during the day he had been fetching water from a puddle close to a ridge of earth. The ridge could now possibly serve as a windbreak and shelter, and so without further delay he helped the boy towards it.

The ridge was about the height of two men, but it did not offer complete shelter from the fierce blizzard. Then fortunately Hao discovered a small recess about as high as his waist. "Here's a shelter," he shouted in delight. But it could only hold one person.

Little Chang wanted Hao to crawl in first, but without saying a word, Hao pushed Little Chang in and then squeezed in about half of his own body.

Inside the shelter, Little Chang felt immediate relief from the biting wind and freezing cold.



"Still feeling cold?" Hao inquired.

"No. I'm fine now," Little Chang replied shivering.

"That's good. . . ."

In the darkness Little Chang felt Hao shifting about until he began to feel warmer and fell asleep.

In his dream, Little Chang had returned to the marshes after many years. The wilderness had become fertile land with grain heaped on the threshing ground. There was Old Hao, cheeks aglow and smiling. Little Chang rushed over to him. Suddenly Old Hao's eyebrows and beard turned white. Little Chang woke with a start to find that it was dawn. A chink of sunlight shone through the opening of the recess, blocked by Old Hao's sleeping form.

"Wake up, Old Hao," Little Chang said. "Come on, it's already dawn and we've got to catch up with the army." Old Hao didn't move. He spoke more loudly, but still Old Hao remained silent. Little Chang shook him frantically. As he touched his back, he felt it as cold as ice. Realizing what had happened, he shook and



shouted at Old Hao, who remained like a sentinel at his post unmoving.

Pushing Old Hao aside, Little Chang squeezed his way out of the recess with difficulty. Hao's back was covered in snow where he had blocked the entrance with his body. Inside the recess there were only a few snowflakes. Thus Old Hao had protected the boy from the blizzard.

With tears in his eyes, Little Chang brushed the snow from Old Hao and then felt his chest. It was still warm and so unbuttoning his jacket, Little Chang hugged Old Hao's body to his to give it warmth.

The blizzard died out and the sunlight in the east was clear. Hao gradually recovered consciousness.

"Old Hao," cried Little Chang with tears of relief.

"Now why are you crying, Little Chang?"

"Because I'm so happy." Little Chang wiped away his tears and added, "We've made it, Old Hao. We've made it."

"Yes, Little Chang. See over there, that's the path Chairman Mao took. If we stick it out for just one more day, we'll be out of the marshes and we'll soon catch up with the others."

Little Chang helped Old Hao to his feet. Then supporting each other they followed the path taken by Chairman Mao and their comrades into the bright sunlight.

*Illustrated by Yang Li-chou  
and Wang Ying-chun*

**Wang Yuan-chien**

## **The Leather Girth**

The rain came quickly over the marshes but in the twinkling of an eye it had subsided.

Tan Ssu-yun tied the leather belt he had washed around his waist and tightened it. Then he bent down several times to pick up some hailstones, popping them into his mouth to quench his thirst. With drops of water from the trees, he began to wash some grass roots. For a month now the troops had been in the marshes and their grain supplies had run out. All the edible grass and wild herbs had been consumed, so that now they were forced to dig up grass roots for food.

Tan was busy cleaning the roots when he was delighted to hear the sound of a horse neighing. Perhaps it was the fine black steed he was searching for. Stuffing the grass roots into his belt, he slung his gun over his shoulder and made his way out of the trees in the direction of the sound. He slackened his pace when he saw a small troop approaching. At their head was a man, who appeared to be a cadre leading a mule with a sick soldier on its back. The mule's reins were over the man's shoulder, since his arm had been amputated. A gun was over his other shoulder, and with his remaining





arm he was supporting another sick comrade. Behind him trudged the wounded and sick soldiers.

When the man saw Tan he smiled and asked, "Have you lost your unit, little comrade? Here, put your gun on the mule."

Tan shook his head.

Tan had been searching for the black horse ever since the ascent of the Snowy Mountains. One day when he was near the summit, he reached a difficult stretch, where the snow was deep and the climb steep. His trouser-legs, soaked in sweat, had frozen stiff. The air was thin. Gasping for breath, Tan felt as if he couldn't take another step. Then he felt dizzy and nearly blacked out. Losing his balance, he was on the verge of toppling over when a strong hand reached out and grabbed him. When his head cleared he found himself leaning

against a comrade's shoulder. The man was tall and strong, with broad shoulders. His forehead was wide and he wore a striking black moustache over his full lips. His breath froze on the hairs of his moustache and his eyebrows were flaked with snow. He gazed steadily at Tan. With his other arm, he was supporting a sick soldier. A black horse was led over by a very tall groom, to whom the man shouted instructions. He told Tan to hold on tightly to the leather girth strap and let the horse pull him along. Then helping the sick comrade he continued on his way.

Holding on to the girth, Tan found it easier to climb. Six or seven others were also being dragged along by the horse, impeding the animal's progress. Suddenly the leather belt snapped with a crack just as they reached the last stretch before the top.

Since then, Tan had been determined to replace the leather girth strap and when he had learned to whom the horse belonged, his desire grew stronger. "So it's *his* horse," he said to himself, picturing the man's face, bushy moustache and kind eyes. He was commanding their whole army on the march and in battle. But now his horse's girth was broken. During a period of rest in a town, Tan found an old yak hide in a lamasery, and he washed it and softened it by putting it in cold and then hot water. Having carefully rubbed off all the hair from the hide, he polished it until it shone and then made it into a long leather strap. He wore it tied around his waist, while he looked for the black horse.

Tan sighed as he gazed at the mulc. It wasn't the one he sought. But he removed the grass roots from his belt and fed them to the animal before carrying on.

He made his way over the grass, past ditches filled with muddy water. At sunset, after scrambling up several mounds, he saw puffs of smoke swirling up in the distance. Some comrades had pitched camp for the night. Tan tightened his leather belt and broke into a run. He soon reached a very dangerous section of the marshes being mainly deep mud, pools of water and only a few tufts of grass. He slowed down and carefully picked his way over the marshland when he suddenly heard someone shouting for help. About ten metres away a comrade was sinking into the muddy water. More than half of him had been swallowed up as Tan ran quickly over to him. The soldier raised his gun from which some grass roots dangled and with a desperate effort threw it to Tan. He sank further, so that only his head showed above water. Tan frantically wondered what to do. It would be useless to try going nearer and haul the man out, as Tan himself would be pulled into the marsh. A picture of the man with the black moustache and the kind eyes flashed into Tan's mind. He immediately untied his leather belt and threw one end to the sinking comrade. "Here! Grab this," he shouted. With the man holding on to one end, Tan slowly pulled him out of the marsh.

Tan hugged the man with relief and then wiped the mud away from his face. He paused to get his breath and strength back. Then

tying the man to his back with the leather strap, he began to crawl towards the swirling smoke.

He edged his way forward inch by inch. . . .

At last he was safe and out of the marsh. Tan could see the camp-fire and hear the soldiers chatting as they sat around it. Suddenly everything started to swim before his eyes, and he saw stars. He felt a mouthful of blood come into his throat and he lost consciousness.

When he came round, Tan was lying beside the fire and in his hand was his leather strap. The comrade he had rescued had recovered a little and was helping attend to something by the fire. Seeing that Tan had regained consciousness, the man quickly took a broken brass ladle from the fire and limped over to Tan. He picked up something from the ladle and blew on it several times before holding it out for Tan to bite.

Tan chewed a bit off. It was meat! It tasted delicious. He ate some more and then asked, "What sort of meat is this?" The comrade shook his head, "I haven't a clue. It could be yak meat. It's just been distributed to us. We've all got a ration about the size of a fist."

With the nourishing food in his stomach, Tan began to feel his strength returning. He sat up to clean his gun and then stood up and walked slowly among the fires looking for some water with which to wash his leather strap. Passing one fire, his eye caught a familiar face. He recognized the tall groom, who was cleaning some grass roots by the fire and wiping tears from his eyes with his sleeve.

Tan ran up to the man saying, "At last I've found you. Please take this," and he gave him the leather strap.

In bewilderment the man raised his swollen red eyes and asked, "What's this for?"

"Why, for the black horse, of course," replied Tan.

The groom held the leather strap in his hands and examined it. Through fresh tears he managed to say, "There's no black horse any more."

"No! What happened to it?" Tan asked in consternation.

"Don't you know that you just ate some horse meat?" Tears poured down the man's face as he showed Tan the grass roots. "See these," he said. "The comrade with the moustache\* won't let me tell anyone, but I'm telling you. He hasn't eaten anything for two days and yet he won't touch even a mouthful of the horse meat. He says he prefers to eat grass roots."

Just at that moment, a voice boomed, "Now, what tall stories have you been telling the little soldier?"

Tan started and saw the large, broad-shouldered man with the wide forehead. There was no longer any ice on his moustache and he was smiling warmly. Tan began to jump to his feet, but was stopped by the man. "Don't listen to any of his nonsense," he said. "Some monkeys stole our horse, but that can't be helped." Then he laughed and added, "Those little devils wanted to be like our soldiers and the Tibetan people and ride on horses."

Tan looked at the man's smiling face with its bushy black moustache and wondered for a moment whether or not the man was speaking the truth. He knew that the man was trying to comfort them by joking. The man had a heart of gold. As a commander of the troops, he needed his horse and so Tan felt very upset.

"Not having the horse won't make all that much difference. We can fight for the revolution just the same." The man took the leather strap from the groom and stroked the shining leather. "For us what counts most is people. Shared hardships make us closer comrades and we'll be all the stronger for it. An army like ours is forged into iron and steel!"

Tan and the groom brushed away their tears and listened to his words.

The man with the moustache continued, "In the future we'll have horses again." Then he poked the fire with one end of the leather strap. "Young soldiers like you will join the cavalry one day..." He stopped abruptly and looked at the end of the leather strap, which

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\*This refers to Comrade Ho Lung. During the Long March, he was commander-in-chief of the Second Front Army and was called affectionately by his men "the man with the moustache".

with a crackling sound had burnt to a crisp. A large blob of grease dropped into the flames, hissing. The smell of the burning fat filled their nostrils.

Holding up the burnt leather, the man examined it and then cut off a piece and put it in his mouth. Suddenly he slapped his thigh with his hand and exclaimed, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"You mean we can eat it?" asked Tan.

"We certainly can after it's been burnt and boiled. Fancy that!" Then he flipped Tan's nose with the end of the strap and continued, "When we've added a few spices, this'll make your mouth water." Pushing back his army cap, he started to chuckle. "We can eat everything made of leather. Our capes, belts, the soles of our shoes, the horses' reins..." Counting all the items on his fingers, he grew even more delighted. "We'll use all of them to fill our bellies. Let them serve the revolution too!" With the leather strap in his hand, he turned and walked away. After a few steps he stopped and called back to Tan, "Comrade, you helped me and the revolution with this leather strap. One day we'll have horses, just you wait and see." He laughed with pleasure and the sound carried over the marshes into the distance.

Sleeping soundly by the fire that night, Tan dreamt of a long leather strap, stretching further than the eye could see. Then the strap turned into the reins of a fine horse. Tan mounted the horse and saw the man with the moustache galloping ahead. Tan spurred his horse forward trying to catch up.

From that night, the seventeen-year-old Tan often had this recurring dream. It was one he liked to have because it was more vivid, more beautiful and more pleasant than much of his daily life.

*Illustrated by Tung Chen-sheng*

### In Memory of Wei Su-yuan

I have some memories, but fragmentary in the extreme. They remind me of the fish-scales scraped off by a knife, some of which stick to the fish while others fall into the water. When the water is stirred, a few scales may swirl up, glimmering, but they are streaked with blood, and even to me they seem likely to spoil the enjoyment of connoisseurs.

Now a few friends want to commemorate Wei Su-yuan and have asked me to say a few words too. Yes, this is my duty. So I shall have to stir up the water around me to see what may float up.

One day, it must have been more than ten years ago when I was a lecturer in Peking University, in the staff room I met a young man with fearfully long hair and a long beard — Li Chi-yeh. I believe it was Li Chi-yeh who introduced me to Wei Su-yuan, but I can no longer remember the circumstances. All I recollect is that he was already sitting in a small hotel room planning publications.

That small room was the office of the Wei Ming Press.

In those days I was editing two pocket editions: The Wu Ho Library which consisted of original writings only, and the Wei Ming Library which consisted of translations only. Both were printed by the Peihsin Book Shop. Then, just as now, neither the publishers nor the readers liked translations; hence the second library was not doing so well. As it happened, Wei Su-yuan and his friends were eager to introduce foreign literature to China, and when they negotiated with Li Hsiao-feng to make the Wei Ming Library independent of the book shop to be run by a few of them, Li readily agreed. So this library broke away from Peihsin Book Shop. We supplied the manuscripts ourselves, then funds for the printing were collected and the work got under way. As this library was called Wei Ming,\* our press took the same name. It did not mean that we had no name, however, but simply that the name was not yet fixed, just as in the case of a boy who has not reached manhood.

The members of the Wei Ming Press had no high ambitions but shared the desire to do some honest work, bit by bit and step by step. And the key man was Su-yuan.

So he took to sitting in the small ramshackle room which was the office of the Wei Ming Press. Of course, this was due in part to his poor health, which prevented him from attending college and naturally made him the one to hold the fort.

My earliest recollection of him is in this shabby fort, a short, thin, shrewd and serious-looking lad, with a few rows of dog-eared foreign books under the window, proving his devotion to literature despite his poverty. But at the same time he made a bad impression on me, and I felt it would be very difficult to make friends with him because he seldom smiled. This was a characteristic of all members of this press, but in Su-yuan it was so marked that it struck you at once. Later I found out that I had misjudged him; it was not difficult to make friends with him. His reluctance to smile probably arose out of the difference in our age and was a sign of special respect for me — what a pity that I could not grow young again to prove that I was

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\*Literally "not named".

able to bridge the gap between us! I fancy Li Chi-yeh and the others realized the truth.

But by the time I realized my mistake, I had discovered his fatal weakness: he took life too seriously. Calm as he looked, he was very passionate. Can taking life seriously prove fatal? It could then, at least, and now. When a man is serious he easily grows passionate, and if this trend goes unchecked it may cost him his life, though if he remains quiet he will break his heart.

Here is a small example — all we have are small examples.

At that time I had already fled to Amoy to escape persecution by Premier Tuan Chi-jui and his stooges, but the bullies were still riding roughshod over Peking. Lin Su-yuan, one of Tuan's clique and president of the Women's Normal University, used troops to seize the college, and after a display of military might accused several teachers who had stayed there of being "Communists". This epithet has always helped certain people to "do their job" and the method is an old one, nothing to occasion surprise. Yet Su-yuan seems to have grown heated. After this, for some time in his letters to me, he was too disgusted to use his own name\* and changed it to Sou-yuan. At the same time there were clashes inside the press. Kao Chang-hung wrote from Shanghai accusing Su-yuan of suppressing an article by Hsiang Pei-liang and urging me to interfere. I said nothing. Then Kao started printing abuse in the *Tempest*, first abusing Su-yuan, then me. I thought it extremely funny that, when Su-yuan suppressed Hsiang's article in Peking, Kao should express indignation in Shanghai and want me in Amoy to take sides. Someone always starts trouble inside an organization, even though it is just a small literary one, when there is pressure from without: this is nothing unusual either. Yet Su-yuan took it very seriously, not only writing me a full explanation, but also writing to clear himself in some magazine. But who else had any say in the court presided over by those "geniuses"? I could not help sighing to think of Su-yuan, only a

\*Because the characters Su-yuan in his name were the same as those in the name of Lin Su-yuan, whom he detested.

man of letters and ill into the bargain, who yet strove so hard to cope with troubles from both within and without. How long could he stick it out? Of course, these were only minor troubles, yet grave enough for one so serious and passionate.

Before long, the Wei Ming Press was closed down and several of its members were arrested. Su-yuan was not one of these — perhaps because he had already coughed blood and was in hospital. Later on those arrested were released, however, and the Wei Ming Press could open again. This game of sudden closing down, sudden opening, sudden arrests and sudden releases, is one which even now still baffles me.

The next year when I went to Canton — that was in the early autumn of 1927 — I continued to receive a few letters from him, letters written in bed in a sanatorium in the West Hills because the doctors would not let him get up. He expressed himself more precisely and his ideas were clearer and wider in scope, but this made me worry more about his illness. One day I received a book out of the blue, a cloth-bound edition of his translation of Gogol's *The Greatcoat*. When I saw what it was, I shivered: he was obviously sending me a memento — did he already sense that his end was near?

I could hardly bear to read this book, yet read it I must.

And this made me remember how one day, when a good friend of his who was also coughing blood did this in his presence, Su-yuan, in panic, charged him in a loving, anxious voice: "Don't do that!" And then I remembered Ibsen's Brand who ordered the dead to rise again but, not having divine power, ended up by being buried under an avalanche. . . .

I seemed to see Su-yuan and Brand in the air, but I had nothing to say.

Towards the end of May 1929, most fortunately I was able to go to the sanatorium in the West Hills and have a chat with Su-yuan. His skin was bronzed by sun-bathing and he was in good spirits. His friends and I were pleased. But there was some sadness in my pleasure too, for suddenly I remembered that his fiancée had become

engaged to another man with his consent. Suddenly I doubted whether he would even be able to carry out his modest wish to introduce more foreign literature to China. Then I wondered if he was lying there waiting to be cured or waiting to die. Then I asked myself why he had sent me that well-bound copy of his translation. . . .

On the wall hung a large portrait of Dostoyevsky. I respect and admire this author, but I hate the callousness of his writing. He prepares spiritual tortures and drags poor wretches in one by one for us to watch their agony. Now his gloomy eyes were fixed on Su-yuan and his couch, as if to tell me: Here is another poor wretch for me to write about.

Of course, these were merely minor misfortunes, but for Su-yuan they were fairly serious.

At half past five on the morning of August 1, 1932, Su-yuan died in the Tungjen Hospital in Peking, and all his plans and hopes came to nothing. I am sorry that to avoid trouble I had burned his letters. My only memento of him is his translation, which is always by my side.

Two years have passed since his death, during which time nothing has been said about him in the literary world. This is not strange, for he was no genius or hero. In life he lived quietly, in death he naturally vanished quietly too. But for us he is a young man worth remembering, for he quietly supported the Wei Ming Press.

Now the Wei Ming Press has virtually disappeared, after what was also only a short existence. But while Su-yuan was running it they introduced works by Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Andreyev, van Eeden, Ehrenburg's *The Tobacco Pouch* and Lavrenev's *The Forty-first*, besides publishing new writings including Tsung-wu's *Chunshan*, Tai Ching-nung's *Sons of the Earth* and *Builders of the Pagoda*, and my *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*. These were works relatively worth reading in those days. Meanwhile history has not spared those petty-minded cynics: though not many years have passed they have all disappeared, while the translations of the Wei Ming Press have not yet withered in our garden of literature.

True, but Su-yuan was no genius or hero, much less the pinnacle of some high monument or the finest flower of some famous garden. Still, he was a stone under the monument, a clod of earth in the garden, and China first needs many more of his kind. He is beneath the notice of connoisseurs, but builders and gardeners would certainly not spurn him.

A writer's misfortune is not so much being attacked or ignored in his lifetime: what is really tragic is if, once he is dead, his words and actions forgotten, fools pretend to be his friends and say this and that to make a name or money for themselves, using a corpse as their ladder to profit and fame. Now I have written a few thousand words to commemorate Su-yuan whom I knew well, and I trust I am without any selfish motive. This is all I have to say.

I do not know whether I shall have another occasion to commemorate him. Should this be the only time, then, Su-yuan, farewell!

Night of July 16, 1934

## Lu Hsun's Friendship with Wei Su-yuan

Lu Hsun did his utmost to encourage young writers and artists, saying on one occasion, "I have always paid attention to training new young fighters, and I have formed quite a few literary groups." Lu Hsun's friendship with Wei Su-yuan is an example of his deep concern for the young, who he hoped would make contributions to China's revolutionary literature and art, willing to serve as a plank of wood or a stone in the building up of our new culture.

Wei Su-yuan, from Huochiu in Anhwei, was born in 1902 and died at the age of thirty. Lu Hsun described him as a "thin, shrewd and serious-looking lad" who suffered from poor health. He had little money but was very keen to introduce foreign literature to China.

In 1925, when Lu Hsun was fighting with his pen against the northern warlords and their stooges in Peking, some young people who loved good literature were encouraged and helped by him to start the Wei Ming Press, to support the revolutionary movement by introducing progressive foreign literature and promoting China's new literature and art. Wei Su-yuan was one of its chief organizers.

Other members of this group included Li Chi-yeh, Tai Ching-ning, Tsao Ching-hua and Lu Hsun, who was the actual leader.

Lu Hsun first met Wei Su-yuan in May 1925 and they were in close touch, as we can see from Lu Hsun's diary, until Lu Hsun left Peking in August the following year. Even after Lu Hsun went to Amoy, Canton and Shanghai, they continued to correspond with each other as close friends.

However, Lu Hsun's warm concern for Wei Su-yuan is evident chiefly from the help he gave him in his translation work. After the October Revolution, Wei Su-yuan had gone to the Soviet Union for a short period and learned Russian. At the time when Lu Hsun met him, he was engaged in translating progressive works by Russian writers. In 1926, Lu Hsun carefully checked his translation of Gogol's *The Greatcoat*, writing to Wei on July 13, "I have read *The Greatcoat* and put question-marks beside a few passages in the manuscript which I query." This shows Lu Hsun's conscientious support for this work. In other letters to Wei, Lu Hsun discussed and painstakingly corrected the translation of the titles of certain novels, and made sure that they were attributed to the right author. Lu Hsun disliked slipshod writing. He warned Wei, "Whether in creative writing or translation, only those who do solid work can stand the test of time."

Lu Hsun once compared the translation of Marxist theoretical works into Chinese with Prometheus stealing fire for men; for such works were urgently needed to guide China's revolutionary movement in literature and art and to help writers and artists remould their thinking. Lu Hsun himself translated various books introducing Marxism, and when he found that Wei knew Russian he urged him to translate more Marxist works from Russian. In 1928, while debating with members of the Creation Society and the Sun Society about revolutionary literature, Lu Hsun read all the Marxist theoretical works he could find to strengthen his argument. On July 22 that year he wrote enthusiastically to Wei, "I have read a few books using historical materialism in literary criticism, and I find the arguments straightforward and clear. They help to elucidate many difficult problems which used to puzzle me." Lu Hsun's advice and encouragement

put fresh heart into Wei, so that even when he was ill he went on translating Marxist works on literature and art.

The Wei Ming Press published the works of new Chinese writers as well as translations of foreign literature. It also published such periodicals as *Wei Ming* and *Mang Yuan*. The latter was started by Lu Hsun to enable young people to voice their views and fearlessly criticize Chinese society and culture. He himself published many important essays in this periodical. When Lu Hsun went to Amoy in 1926, *Mang Yuan* was left in Wei's charge. But Lu Hsun continued to take an interest in the Wei Ming Press and all its publications. He wrote urging Wei to keep *Mang Yuan* militant and not publish empty talk about "flowers", "love", "death" and "blood". He encouraged the editors to be bold and fearless. On November 7, 1926 he wrote to Wei, "I think you people in Peking should decide about the books and the magazine yourselves. . . . There is no need in every case to wait for my decision." These words showed his trust in these young editors as well as his hope that, through practice, they would increase their ability.

Lu Hsun thoroughly disapproved of lauding young writers and artists to the skies or giving them undeserved praise which made them lower their standards. Though he had great hopes of young people like Wei and believed they would make contributions to literature, he made strict demands on them and gave them political guidance, frankly pointing out their shortcomings to help them make progress and remould themselves.

Lu Hsun appreciated Wei's hard work and his conscientiousness; however, in letters to him he often stressed the need to pay more attention to political struggles and the social reality. Lu Hsun decided to leave Amoy University because it was too detached from reality, "like a mountain retreat", and so "stagnant" that he got few fresh ideas there. When he wrote about this to Wei, he was actually advising him, from his own experience, not to shut himself up in his small office. The first letter Lu Hsun wrote Wei from Canton gave his view that in this centre of the revolution the society was still basically the old one, for this area controlled by militarists and big business was a mixture of "red and white". In this way he urged Wei to

think more deeply about the prospects of the revolution. After going from Canton to Shanghai, Lu Hsun wrote several times to Wei about the mistakes of the Creation Society and the Sun Society which were influenced by the "Left" opportunist line then prevalent in the Party, and castigated their writers. These examples show that Lu Hsun wanted Wei to differentiate between the correct and the wrong lines.

Lu Hsun also pointed out repeatedly that members of the Wei Ming Press should have high political ideals. He charged them with being too cautious and pulling their punches, and hoped they would grow bolder. Wei had clear likes and dislikes, but Lu Hsun, while approving this, felt that he was too gloomy and pessimistic. He urged him to show more pep and revolutionary optimism, to overcome his timidity and petty-bourgeois narrow-mindedness and to stop worrying over trifles.

Wei was very poor at that time, but he always worked hard; as a result he contracted tuberculosis, yet he still kept up his translation work. Lu Hsun was concerned for his health and often wrote from Amoy telling him to take care of himself. In 1929 when Lu Hsun learned that Wei was in a sanatorium but still working, he wrote to Wei stressing that the most important thing was to regain his health — at most he should only translate some short articles. A month or so later, Lu Hsun went from Shanghai to Peking to see his mother. On May 30, he accompanied Li Chi-yeh and Tai Ching-nung to the West Hills to see Wei in the sanatorium. Wei was very moved when he knew that Lu Hsun was coming. He had his room spick and span in readiness and asked the cook to prepare an extra good meal. Lu Hsun enjoyed his long talk with him that day. In January the next year when Wei's illness grew worse, although in financial straits himself Lu Hsun sent him a hundred yuan he had saved from his expenses in Peking.

During the ten years from 1927 to 1936 when Lu Hsun was in Shanghai, the political situation was critical and fierce class struggles were waged. In this difficult period Lu Hsun felt constant concern for his young friend in the north; and Wei, although ill, also worried about the safety of the mentor so dear to him. On January 17, 1931,



when Kuomintang agents arrested five young Left-Wing writers including Jou Shih and Yin Fu, it was rumoured that Lu Hsun had been arrested too. Wei immediately wrote to Lu Hsun's wife Hsu Kuang-ping to ask if this was true. Lu Hsun wrote on February 2 to reassure him, saying, "Your letter to my wife reached me yesterday via my brother. So that rumour even spread to the north and caused you anxiety. I'm most touched by your concern." He went on to say, "Ever since coming to Shanghai, I have been a constant target for attack. . . . It is very difficult to be a Chinese, and I have too many enemies (all crafty devils); but to the last day of my life I shall devote all my energy to writing. We shall see which turns to dust first, the new literature or that stinking stuff put out under the auspices of the oppressors." Lu Hsun ended this letter with the encouraging words, "Mind you take good care of yourself too and get better soon. Come what may, the future will ultimately be ours." Here we see his optimism, his firm faith in the revolution. Unfortunately, Wei's illness could not be cured, and after little more than a year he died.

After Wei's death, Lu Hsun kept his translation of Gogol's *The Greatcoat* as a memento of him. It was found among Lu Hsun's books after Liberation, and on it was an inscription in Li Chi-yeh's handwriting that this was a gift to Lu Hsun from Wei on July 12, 1929. On April 30, 1932, Lu Hsun added these words: "This was specially bound and given me when Su-yuan was seriously ill. Perhaps he knew he was soon to die. Alas! More than two years after his death, I happened to open my case and found this book, so I am adding this inscription." In his essay *In Memory of Wei Su-yuan* he wrote again, "My only memento of him is his translation, which is always by my side."

In April 1934, Lu Hsun wrote this epitaph for Wei's grave: "A great talent with high ideals, his life was cut short. The garden of letters has lost a flower. The discriminating will always mourn his death." These few lines reveal Lu Hsun's deep feeling for this young translator. They are also an indictment of the infamous social system which caused Wei's untimely death.

On July 16, 1934, nearly two years after Wei's death, Lu Hsun wrote *In Memory of Wei Su-yuan*. Simply but with strong feeling, he recall-

ed various dealings they had had with each other. He laid stress on Wei's willingness to do spadework in preparation for a revolution in Chinese writing, and pointed out that the translations and original works published by the Wei Ming Press had "not yet withered in our garden of literature". He emphasized, "Su-yuan was no genius or hero, much less the pinnacle of some high monument or the finest flower of some famous garden. Still, he was a stone under the monument, a clod of earth in the garden, and China first needs many more of his kind. He is beneath the notice of connoisseurs, but builders and gardeners would certainly not spurn him."

Lu Hsun has left us for more than forty years. His friendship with Wei Su-yuan still moves us today. In those grim years Lu Hsun kept in close touch with an obscure and impoverished young writer, helping him with his work and ideological training, making strict demands on him and constantly giving him warm encouragement. He did this in the spirit expressed in his famous line of verse:

*Head-bowed, like a willing ox I serve the children.*

## SKETCHES

*Wen Hsiao-yu and  
Wang Cheh-cheng*

### Honey of the Grassland

It was just an ordinary honey-producing establishment, with chunks of honeycomb neatly arranged on shelves around the walls. A girl in a white overall was turning the handle of a honey extractor, separating the honey from the combs. Since we were guests from various parts of the country, she hospitably invited us to taste their honey. It was thick and white like milk, and we were not familiar with it. We all dipped into a wooden bowl inlaid with silver to taste some of the honey. It had an extraordinary flavour and a faint aroma of grass and fragrant flowers. Our verdict was unanimous; the grassland honey was amazing.

And it truly was a wonder, because it had not been produced from the fertile fields south of the Yangtse, but right here in the heart of a desert in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Travelling by bus the previous day, we had passed through mile after mile of sand-dunes. But here an enormous change had taken place, transforming the barren desert into a grassland which could produce delicious honey.



The girl told us that the honey was produced mainly from the flowers of astragalus grass. Tasty and highly nutritious, it had gained the reputation of being a delicacy more prized than litchi or milk vetch honey. The apiary was providing honey for the local people and for medical use, as well as exporting a considerable quantity abroad.

In order to develop the industry, increase its income and support the state's programme of socialist construction, the commune had planted a lot of astragalus grass in its enclosed settlement. This not only solved the problem of providing winter fodder for their livestock, but also provided flowers for the bees to gather honey. The girl concluded her introduction by telling us, "Our Mongolian people can now keep livestock and bees on this land, which we could never have dreamed of doing in the past."

This made us recall an incident that had happened many years before.

It was the spring shortly after Liberation. Headquarters had sent us a local Mongolian fighter to be the guide of our cavalry detachment, which was detailed to suppress all the bandits in the area. There was a drought, and a sand-storm enveloped the wilderness. The landscape of sand-dunes altered and shifted so much that without our Mongolian comrade we should have lost our way in the treacherous conditions. During a rest period, we sheltered behind a sand-dune chatting about the coming battle and our future plans. Some

comrades wanted to be tractor drivers, others to attend university, but when we asked our Mongolian comrade what he'd like to do, he hesitated and then answered with a smile, "Well, I'd like to keep bees."

"What a terrific idea! When we've finished with these bandits, you come back with me to my home town," our machine-gunner, a southerner, invited him enthusiastically.

"That's very kind of you," he replied, "but I want to keep them here at my home."

We were astonished by his answer, for where amongst all the sand could you find a single blade of grass let alone one flower?

"You think bees can make honey from sand?" the machine-gunner teased him. "What a fine idealist you are, old fellow," he laughed.

But our Mongolian comrade answered seriously. "Before I joined the army I was a young lama and when I ran away the Eighth Route Army came to my rescue. Since I had been badly tortured, they sent me to a field hospital, where for the first time in my life I tasted honey. From that day I often thought to myself that it would be marvellous if I could keep bees for my suffering people to eat honey too. Then after I joined the army and learned about the revolution, I began to see that what we were fighting for was a life as sweet as honey for our people everywhere. Would you agree, comrades?"

Although his thoughts had been expressed in a simple and naive way, all of us, including the machine-gunner, felt that there was something deep in what he said.

Later that day, at dusk, we engaged in a fierce battle with the bandits. All the men fought bravely, especially the Mongolian comrade who led the charge at the enemy and struck down at least eight of the bandits. He, however, was severely wounded and was rushed to hospital.

Now over twenty years later, that Mongolian comrade's dream had come true. The local people had spared nothing to transform the desert. Honey could not be produced without flowers and so the first step was to plant trees and grass, dig wells and irrigation canals in order to make the desert fertile. The people's commune which had been set up here had planted the first group of wormwoods, which had just begun to flourish when they were trampled by wild animals.

Then some people suggested that they should build earthen enclosures to protect the trees. But others felt discouraged.

The girl opened the lid of the extractor and removed the honeycombs which she put on a shelf.

She began to tell us, "Just at that time, Chairman Mao issued the call to learn from Tachai. When the Party secretary of our brigade returned from a visit there, he went around all the houses telling everyone about the hard work of the people of Tachai and of their struggles against nature. This encouraged us to struggle and build our own grassland towns. Our Party secretary had been wounded in the lungs when he was in the army and he was always short of breath. In bad weather or when doing heavy work, he would gasp for breath. One day while climbing up a sand-ridge carrying lumps of earth for building the walls, his legs gave way under the heavy load on his back and he fainted. He was found lying at the foot of the ridge, wearing as always his faded and patched old army uniform. Beside him were three huge clods of earth, weighing about a hundred pounds, wrapped in his Mongolian robe. When he came round, he insisted against all advice on carrying the earth to the worksite himself."

Then the girl accompanied us to the fields. The desert had become a luxuriant grassland dotted with rows of poplar, elm, tamarisk and bramble bushes, which formed wind-breaks, protecting the vast expanse of grassland from the encroaching sand. In the distance we could see indistinctly more shelter belts. The industrious Mongolian commune members had "nibbled" away at the desert piece by piece, by dividing it into plots and then enclosing them one by one. The girl told us that there were many fields like this in every commune and brigade, which had become pastureland following the example of Tachai.

Crossing a small bridge, we came to a pasture encircled by wind-breaks. It was chequered with canals and footpaths criss-crossing. The astragalus grass, chest-high, had white, yellow and purple flowers as far as the eye could see. Swarms of bees were buzzing about collecting honey. Not far away was a reservoir which also served as the commune's fish farm with a total of twenty thousand fish fry having been transported here from the south the previous year.

"You've done a marvellous job!" we all exclaimed. "We fought hard to liberate this land and anyone can see what a tough struggle you've had to cultivate it."

"Yes, we did have a tough time, but that wasn't all." After a moment the girl explained, "You see, the 'gang of four' did all they could to obstruct us in developing our green towns. At one point they used the slogan of 'taking grain as the key link' in an attempt to sabotage our socialist animal husbandry. On another occasion, they got some of their followers to attack us for having only concentrated on production and for having ignored revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. They stirred up trouble, slandering our Party secretary and undermining the development of our pastureland."

"So what happened to your Party secretary?"

"He saw through their tricks and under his leadership we studied



carefully Marxist-Leninist theory and Chairman Mao's works. From these writings we saw very clearly that to develop production is fundamental to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Through study we became immune to their distortions." At this she stopped and began to scan the sky. Looking up too, we saw overhead swarms of bees heading for their hives.

"It's going to rain," she turned to us. "Let's hurry back!"

We gazed at the blue sky, not a cloud in sight.

With a smile, the girl explained, "The bees can forecast the weather just like a barometer. They're flying home in a hurry, so that means rain's on its way. You go back quickly and I'll just close these beehives first, then I'll follow you."

It was exactly as she said. Suddenly dark clouds filled the sky and heavy rain pelted down just as we reached shelter. By the time the girl came in, the rain was sheeting down.

Wringing out her wet hair, she cheerfully told us that she had managed to close all the hives before the rain started, otherwise the bees would have been frightened away. Then she told us quite frankly that when she had been given this job at first, she hadn't liked it, because she felt she should be doing something more interesting. She'd come thousands of miles to settle in the border region and she had wanted to throw all her energies into the struggle. If she'd liked



looking after bees, she could have stayed at home in the south. But in time she had grown to love her job, after the Party secretary had told her his story.

We guessed from this that her Party secretary was none other than our Mongolian comrade who had fought with our cavalry troop and who had dreamed of keeping bees in the desert. All of us were eager to see him again.

"You'll see him in a couple of minutes," the girl assured us, "because he comes here every day to inspect the bees, come rain come shine no matter how busy he is. And as he knows you're here, he'll certainly be along."

Soon after this, a man came dashing in from the rain, shouting at the girl, "Quick! Go and bring a hive. I've found the queen that escaped yesterday."

"Where is it?"

"In the date grove of No. 3 Shelter Belt."

As the girl started to rush out, he caught her by the wrist and, removing his raincoat, put it around her shoulders. We recognized his smiling face when he turned towards us. Yes, he was our old Mongolian comrade who had wanted to be a bee-keeper so that the Mongolian people could live happy lives.

We all shook hands warmly.

"Your dream came true. Your Mongolian people are living lives as sweet as honey."

"Yes, it's a good thing to have developed this apiary here," he said with meaning. "You know our first queen bee was brought here by that girl's father when he came to visit his daughter from his army unit. Guess who he was. Our machine-gunner comrade who teased me about bees gathering honey from the sand." He burst out laughing.

The rain passed and the sky turned blue once more. Bathed in the sunlight, the trees, flowers and grass looked greener and lusher than before. The buzzing of the bees was heard in the air.

"Come on, comrades," our host picked up the bowl of honey and offered it to us. "Help yourselves to our grassland honey."

*Illustrated by Chao Shib-ying*

## A Dream of Red Mansions

**EDITORS' NOTE:** The well-known Chinese novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* (*Hung Lou Meng* also translated as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) was written in the eighteenth century. The book comprises 120 chapters, the first eighty by Tsao Hsueh-chin (?-1763), the last forty by Kao Ngo. In our last issue, we republished Chairman Mao's *Letter Concerning the Study of "The Dream of the Red Chamber"* written in 1954 and Chapters 27 and 28 of this novel. In this issue we are publishing Chapters 40 and 41, which describe the visit of an old peasant woman to the Chia mansion and the parasitic life of luxury of the noble ladies there.

### CHAPTER 40

#### The Lady Dowager Feasts Again in Grand View Garden Yuan-yang Presides over a Drinking Game

Pao-yu hurried over at this summons and found Hu-po by the screen.

"Come quickly," she urged him. "The old lady's waiting for you."

He went to the Lady Dowager's apartments, where she was discussing with Lady Wang and the girls how to repay Hsiang-yun's hospitality.

"I've a suggestion," said Pao-yu. "As we're not inviting outsiders, there's no need for too many dishes; let's just have a few we like. There's no need for tables either; each of us can have a teapoy with a couple of dishes we fancy, as well as a ten-compartment box of titbits and a wine-pot apiece. Wouldn't that be more original?"

The Lady Dowager approved. She sent instructions to the kitchen to prepare their favourite dainties the next day and put them in separate boxes, and to serve breakfast in the garden too. By the time this was settled the lamps were lit, and they retired for the night.

The next morning, as luck would have it, the weather was fine. Li Wan rose at daybreak to supervise the matrons and maids as they swept up fallen leaves, dusted tables and chairs, and prepared the tea-services and wine-vessels. While she was doing this, Feng-erh arrived with Granny Liu and Pan-erh.

"How busy you are, madam!" remarked Granny Liu.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to leave yesterday," replied Li Wan with a smile. "Yet you were in such a hurry to get away."

"The old lady made me stay to enjoy myself for a day," chuckled Granny Liu.

Feng-erh produced a bunch of keys and announced, "Madam Lien says there may not be enough teapoys out: We'd better unlock

the attic in the tower and fetch some down to use for a day. She wanted to see to it herself, but she's talking with Lady Wang. So do you mind opening the attic, madam, and having the things brought out?"

Li Wan made Su-yun take the keys, and sent one of the matrons to fetch a few page boys from the inner gate. Standing with raised head at the foot of Grand View Pavilion, she ordered them to go up and open the tower of Variegated Splendour and carry down the teapoys one by one. Pages, matrons and maids set to work then to bring down more than twenty, while Li Wan warned:

"Careful! Steady on! You're not being chased by ghosts. Mind you don't bump them."

Then she turned to ask Granny Liu, "Would you care to go up too and have a look?"

The old woman needed no pressing but promptly pulled Pan-erh up the stairs with her. She found the attic chock-a-block with screens, tables, chairs, ornamental lanterns large and small, and other similar objects. Although ignorant of the function of most of them, she was dazzled by their gay colours and fine workmanship.

"Gracious Buddha!" she exclaimed.

When she withdrew the door was locked and everyone came down.

Then it occurred to Li Wan that the old lady might feel disposed to go boating. So on her instructions they unlocked the door once more and brought down oars, punt-poles and awnings. Pages were also sent to the boatwomen to order two barges from the boathouse.

In the middle of this bustle, along came the Lady Dowager with a whole company of people.

"How bright and early you are, madam!" cried Li Wan hurrying to meet her. "I didn't think you'd have finished your toilet yet. I'd just picked some chrysanthemums to send you."

Pi-yueh held out a large emerald plate in the form of a lotus leaf, on which were chrysanthemums of different kinds. The Lady Dowager selected a red one and pinned it in her hair. Then, turning, she caught sight of Granny Liu.

"Come here and take a few flowers to wear!" she called with a smile.

While the words were still on her lips, Hsi-feng pulled Granny Liu forward.

#### THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Pao-yu	<i>Lady Wang's son</i>	Li Wan	<i>Pao-yu's sister-in-law</i>
Tai-yu	<i>His cousin, the Lady Dowager's granddaughter</i>	Hsi-feng	<i>Wife of Pao-yu's cousin Chia Lien</i>
Pao-chai	<i>Lady Wang's niece</i>	Hsiang-yun	<i>The Lady Dowager's great-niece</i>
Lady Wang	<i>Pao-yu's mother</i>	Yuan-yang	<i>The Lady Dowager's chief maid</i>
Aunt Hsueh	<i>Pao-chai's mother</i>	Granny Liu	<i>A peasant woman</i>
The Lady Dowager	<i>Pao-yu's grandmother</i>		

"Let me make you beautiful, granny!" she cried.

Seizing all the flowers on the plate, she stuck them this way and that in the old woman's hair, reducing everyone present to helpless laughter.

"I don't know what meritorious deed my head's done to deserve this good fortune," cackled Granny Liu. "What a dash I'm cutting today!"

"Why don't you pull them out and throw them in her face?" gasped the others. "She's got you up to look a real old vampire."

"I'm old now, but when I was young I was flighty too and fond of flowers," chuckled Granny Liu. "So it's right I should be an old fibbertigibbet today."

While laughing and chatting they had come to Seeping Fragrance Pavilion. Maids spread a large brocade cushion they had brought on the railing of the balcony. The Lady Dowager, seating herself there with her back against a pillar, made Granny Liu sit beside her.

"Well, what do you think of this garden?" she inquired.

"Gracious Buddha!" ejaculated Granny Liu. "We country folk come to town before New Year to buy pictures to stick up; and when we're at a loose end we often say, 'If only we could take a stroll in these pictures!' We always reckoned the places shown were too good to be true, but coming to this garden today I can see it's ten times better than any painting. I wish someone would paint me a picture of it to show the folk at home. Then I'd die content."

The Lady Dowager pointed to Hsi-chun. "See this young granddaughter of mine?" she asked. "She can paint. Shall I get her to do a painting for you tomorrow?"

This offer so delighted Granny Liu that she hurried over to take Hsi-chun's hand.

"Why, miss! So young and pretty, yet so clever too — you must be a goddess come down to the earth."

After a short rest the Lady Dowager started showing Granny Liu round, going first to Bamboo Lodge. Inside its gate, a narrow pebbled path flanked with bamboos met their gaze. The ground on either side of it was carpeted with dark moss. Granny Liu left the path for the others, walking on the verge herself.

"Come up here, granny," urged Hu-po taking her arm. "That moss is slippery."

"That's all right, I'm used to it," said the old woman. "Just go ahead, young ladies. Take care not to get your embroidered slippers dirty."

Intent on talking, she slipped and fell with a thud, at which the whole company clapped their hands and laughed.

"You wretches!" scolded the Lady Dowager. "Help her up. Don't just stand there laughing."

"That was to punish me for boasting," chuckled Granny Liu as she scrambled to her feet.

"Did you strain your back?" asked the Lady Dowager. "Let one of the maids pummel it."

"I'm not so finicky. Hardly a day goes by without my falling. How could I get someone to pummel my back each time?"

Tzu-chuan had the bamboo portière raised ready for them. The Lady Dowager and others went in and took seats, after which Tai-yu with her own hands brought her grandmother a covered bowl of tea on a small tray.

"No tea for us," said Lady Wang. "Don't trouble to pour any more."

Then Tai-yu told a maid to fetch her favourite chair from the window for Lady Wang. Granny Liu, meanwhile, was struck by the brushes and inkstones on the desk by the window and the bookcase piled with books.

"This must be the young master's study," she said.

The Lady Dowager smiled and pointed at Tai-yu.

"This is my grand-daughter's room."

Granny Liu looked intently at Tai-yu.

"This isn't like a young lady's chamber," she remarked. "But it's far better than the best study."

"Where is Pao-yu?" asked the Lady Dowager.

"Boating on the lake," the maids told her.

"Who ordered boats?"

"I did," replied Li Wan hastily. "As we were fetching things

from the attic just now, it occurred to me you might feel inclined for a turn on the lake, madam."

Before the old lady could answer, Aunt Hsueh was announced. And even as they rose to their feet she came in. When they had resumed their seats she remarked:

"You must be in good spirits, madam, to have come here so early."

"Only a minute ago I was saying all late-comers must be fined." The Lady Dowager chuckled. "I'd no idea the offender would be you."

They chatted for a while. Then the Lady Dowager noticed that the gauze on the window had faded.

"This gauze is pretty when new," she remarked to Lady Wang, "but it soon loses its vivid emerald colour. Anyway, as there are no peach or apricot trees in this courtyard and the bamboos are green themselves, green gauze is out of place here. We used to have window gauze in four or five colours, I remember. Tomorrow we shall have to change this for her."

"When I opened the storeroom yesterday," put in Hsi-feng, "I saw several rolls of pink cicada-wing gauze in one of the chests. There are several different designs — sprays of blossom, floating clouds and bats, butterflies and flowers — the colours so vivid and the gauze so soft, I've never seen anything like it. I took out two rolls, thinking they'd make good coverlets."

"Bah!" the Lady Dowager snorted. "Everybody says there's nothing you haven't seen or done, but you don't even know what this gauze is. You must stop bragging in future."

"However knowledgeable she may be, she can't compare with you, madam," said Aunt Hsueh. "Do enlighten her and let us hear as well."

"Yes, good Ancestress, do enlighten me," begged Hsi-feng smiling.

Then the Lady Dowager told them all, "That gauze is older than any of you. No wonder she mistook it for cicada-wing gauze. As a matter of fact, the two are so alike that those not in the know always mix them up. Its proper name is soft-mist silk."

"What a charming name," cried Hsi-feng. "I've seen hundreds of kinds of silk, but never heard of this one."

"How long have you lived?" retorted the old lady. "How many rarities have you seen? What have you to brag about? This soft-mist silk comes in four colours only: light blue, russet, pine-green and pink. Used for bed curtains or window gauze, from a distance it looks like smoke or mist — that's how it got its name. The pink's also called rosy-cloud gauze. Even the imperial gauze used in the palace today isn't so soft and fine."

"I'm not surprised Hsi-feng hadn't seen it before," interposed Aunt Hsueh. "I'd never even heard of it either."

By now a roll had been fetched on Hsi-feng's instructions.

"That's it!" exclaimed the Lady Dowager. "We used it first just for windows, then found it was good for quilts and bedcurtains too. You must get some more out tomorrow and screen the windows here with some of the pink."

Hsi-feng promised to attend to this while the whole party admired the material. As for Granny Liu, her eyes were nearly popping out of her head.

"Gracious Buddha!" she gasped. "We couldn't afford to make clothes of this. It seems a shame to use it for windows."

"Clothes of this don't look well," said the Lady Dowager.

Hsi-feng promptly showed them the lapel of the red gauze tunic she was wearing, saying, "Look at this tunic of mine."

"Very nice too," said the Lady Dowager and Aunt Hsueh. "This is made nowadays for the palace. Still, it can't compare with the other."

"You mean to say this shoddy stuff is made for the imperial use?" exclaimed Hsi-feng. "Why, it's not even up to the gauze made for officials."

"We must see if there's any more of the blue," said the Lady Dowager. "If there is, give a couple of rolls to Granny Liu, and I'd like to have a bedcurtain made with it. What's left can be matched with some lining and made into lined sleeveless jackets for the maids. Don't leave it there to be spoiled by the damp."

Hsi-feng agreed, and had the stuff put away. Then the Lady Dowager rose to her feet.



"Let's stroll on," she suggested. "Why should we stay cooped up here?"

Invoking Buddha again, Granny Liu remarked: "Everyone says, 'The great live in great houses.' When I saw your room yesterday, madam, it was a grand sight with all those big cases, big wardrobes, big tables and big bed. The wardrobes alone are bigger and higher than one of our whole rooms. No wonder you keep that ladder in the back yard. I couldn't think at first what it was for, as you don't sun things on the roof. Then I saw it must be for opening the tops of wardrobes to take things out or put them in, for without a ladder how could you get up? But this small room is even better furnished than that big one, with all these fine things — whatever they're called — in it. The more I see of it, the less I want to leave."

"I'll show you better places than this," promised Hsi-feng.

Upon leaving Bamboo Lodge they saw a punting party out on the lake.

"Since they've got the boats ready, we may as well go aboard," suggested the Lady Dowager.

They were on their way to Purple Caltrop Isle and Smartweed Bank when they met several matrons carrying multi-coloured lacquered hampers inlaid with gilt designs. Hsi-feng at once asked Lady Wang where they should breakfast.

"Wherever the old lady chooses," was the reply.

The Lady Dowager, hearing this, called over her shoulder to Hsi-feng, "Your third cousin's place is pleasant. Take some people there to get it ready while we go by boat."

Then Hsi-feng turned back with Li Wan, Tan-chun, Yuan-yang and Hu-po, accompanied by the attendants with the food. Having taken a short cut to the Studio of Autumn Freshness, they arranged the tables in Morning Emerald Hall.

Yuan-yang remarked with a chuckle, "We often say that when the gentlemen feast outside they've someone who can raise a laugh to entertain them. Today we've a female entertainer too."

Li Wan was too good-natured to catch on, but Hsi-feng knew that Granny Liu was meant.

"Yes, she should be good for some laughs today," she agreed.

Then the two of them began to lay their plans.

"You're up to no good," protested Li Wan, smiling. "As bad as children. Mind the old lady doesn't scold you!"

"You won't be involved. Just leave the old lady to me," Yuan-yang giggled.

As they were talking the rest of the party arrived. They sat where they pleased and were first served tea by the maids. Then Hsi-feng placed before each the ebony chopsticks inlaid with silver which she had brought wrapped in a cambric napkin.

"Bring that small cedar table over here," directed the Lady Dowager. "I want our kinswoman to sit next to me."

As her order was carried out Hsi-feng cast Yuan-yang a meaning glance, and the maid led Granny Liu aside to give her some whispered instructions.

"This is the custom of our house," she concluded. "If you disregard it people will laugh at you."

When all was ready they took seats at the tables. All but Aunt Hsueh who, having breakfasted already, did not eat anything but sat on one side sipping tea. The old lady had Pao-yu, Hsiang-yun, Tai-yu and Pao-chai at her table; Lady Wang had Ying-chun, Tan-chun and Hsi-chun; while Granny Liu sat at the table next to the Lady Dowager's.

Usually Yuan-yang left the younger maids to wait on the old lady during meals, holding ready her rinse bowl, whisk and handkerchief. Today, however, she held the whisk herself and the other maids kept out of the way, realizing that she meant to bait Granny Liu.

Yuan-yang, standing there, now whispered to the old woman, "Don't forget!"

"Don't worry, miss," was the answer.

Having taken her seat Granny Liu picked up the chopsticks, but found them too awkward to manage. For Hsi-feng and Yuan-yang had decided to give her an old-fashioned pair of square-edged ivory chopsticks inlaid with gold.

"Why, these prongs are heavier than our iron shovels," the old woman complained. "How can I handle them?"



As everyone laughed, a matron brought in a box and stood holding it while a maid removed the cover, revealing two bowls. Li Wan put one on the Lady Dowager's table and Hsi-feng set the other, containing pigeon's eggs, before Granny Liu. The Lady Dowager urged her to make a start.

Granny Liu stood up then and declaimed at the top of her voice:

Old woman Liu, I vow,  
Eats more than any cow,  
And down she settles now  
To swill just like a sow.

Then she dried up abruptly, puffing out her cheeks and staring down at her bowl.

The others had been staggered at first but now everyone, high and low, started roaring with laughter. Hsiang-yun shook so uncontrollably that she sputtered out the rice she had in her mouth, while Tai-yu nearly choked and collapsed over the table gasping, "Mercy!" Pao-yu fell convulsively into his grandmother's arms and she chuckled as she hugged him to her crying, "My precious!" Lady Wang wagged one finger at Hsi-feng but was laughing too much to speak. Aunt Hsueh, too, exploded in such mirth that she sprayed tea all over Tan-chun's skirt, making her upset her bowl over Ying-chun, while Hsi-chun left her seat and begged her nurse to rub her stomach for her.

As for the maids, some doubled up in hysterics, others sneaked outside to squat down in a fit of giggles, yet others controlled themselves sufficiently to fetch clean clothes for their young mistresses.

Hsi-feng and Yuan-yang, the only ones with straight faces, urged Granny Liu to eat. But when she picked up the chopsticks she still found them unwieldy.

"Even your hens here are refined," she remarked, "laying such tiny, dainty eggs as these. Well, let me fuck one of them."

This caused a fresh outburst of laughter. The Lady Dowager laughed so much that tears streamed from her eyes and Hu-po had to pat her on the back.

"That wretch Hsi-feng's up to her tricks again," she gasped. "Don't believe a word she says."

Granny Liu was still admiring the dainty eggs and saying she wanted to "fuck" one, when Hsi-feng told her merrily:

"They cost one tael of silver each. Better try one while they're hot."

The old woman reached out with her chopsticks but failed to secure an egg. After chasing them round the bowl for a time she finally succeeded in catching one; but as she craned forward to eat it, the egg slipped and fell to the floor. She hastily put down her chopsticks and stooped to retrieve it. However, a maid had already picked it up.

"A tael of silver!" Granny Liu sighed. "And gone without a sound."

The others had long since stopped eating to watch her antics.

"This isn't a formal banquet. Who gave her those chopsticks?" demanded the Lady Dowager. "This is all the doing of that minx Hsi-feng. Get her another pair."

It was, indeed, not the maids but Hsi-feng and Yuan-yang who had brought the ivory chopsticks. Now these were removed, an ebony pair inlaid with silver taking their place.

"After the gold comes the silver," observed Granny Liu. "They're not as handy, though, as the ones we use."

"If there's poison in the dish," Hsi-feng explained, "the silver will show it."

"Poison! If this food is poison, ours is pure arsenic. But I'm going to finish the lot, even if it kills me."

The Lady Dowager found her so amusing as she munched away with relish that she passed her some of her own dishes, at the same time instructing an old nurse to help Pan-erh to everything that was going.

When presently the meal ended, the Lady Dowager and some of the others adjourned to Tan-chun's bedroom for a chat while the tables were cleared and another laid for Li Wan and Hsi-feng.

Granny Liu watching this said, "Leaving everything else aside, what I like best is the way things are done in your household. No wonder they say, 'Good manners come from great households.'"

"You mustn't take offence," responded Hsi-feng quickly. "We were only having fun just now."

Yuan-yang promptly stepped forward too.

"Don't be cross, granny," she begged with a smile. "Please accept my apologies."

"What a thing to say, miss!" Granny Liu laughed. "We were trying to amuse the old lady, why should I be cross? When you tipped me off, I knew it was all in fun. If I'd been annoyed I would have kept my mouth shut."

Yuan-yang then scolded the maids for not serving granny with tea. "That sister-in-law there brought me some just now," put in Granny Liu hastily. "No more, thank you. You ought to have your own breakfast now, miss."

"Come and eat with us," said Hsi-feng to Yuan-yang, making her sit down at their table. "That'll save another commotion later on."

So Yuan-yang sat down with them and the matrons brought an extra bowl and chopsticks. The three of them finished so soon that Granny Liu commented with a smile:

"It's a marvel to me what small appetites you have. No wonder a gust of wind can blow you over."

"What's happened to all the left-overs?" asked Yuan-yang.

"Nothing's been done with them yet," replied the matrons. "They're still waiting here to be shared out."

"There's more than enough for the people here," said Yuan-yang. "Choose two dishes for Ping-erh and send them round to Madam Lien's quarters."

"She's eaten already," put in Hsi-feng. "There's no need."

"If she doesn't eat them your cat can have them," said Yuan-yang.

A matron promptly chose two dishes and took them off in a hamper.

"Where's Su-yun?" Yuan-yang asked next.

"They'll all eat here together," said Li Wan. "Why single her out?"

"That's all right then," replied Yuan-yang.

"Hsi-jen's not here," Hsi-feng reminded her. "You might send her a couple of dishes."

Yuan-yang saw that this was done, then asked the matrons whether the boxes of titbits to go with the wine were ready yet or not. On being told that this would probably still take some time, she sent them off to expedite matters.

Hsi-feng and the others now joined the rest of the party who were chatting in Tan-chun's room. This was really three rooms in one, as Tan-chun liked plenty of space. On the big rosewood marble-topped desk in the centre were piles of albums by noted calligraphers, several dozen good inkstones and an array of jars and other containers holding a regular forest of brushes. On one side a *Ju*-ware vase the size of a peck measure was filled with chrysanthemums white as crystal balls. In the middle of the west wall hung a large painting by Mi Fei, *Mist and Rain*, flanked by a couplet in Yen Chen-ching's calligraphy:

Indolent fellow among mist and clouds,  
Rustic life amidst rocks and springs.

On another table was a large tripod. To its left, on a red sandalwood stand, a big dish of *kuan*-ware porcelain was heaped with several dozen handsome golden Buddha's-hands. To its right, suspended on a lacquer frame, was a white jade musical stone with a small hammer next to it. Pan-erh, over the worst of his shyness now, was reaching out for the hammer to strike the jade when one of the maids quickly stopped him. Then he wanted a Buddha's-hand to eat. Tan-chun gave him one explaining that it was to play with, not to eat.

At the east end of the room stood a large bed, its leek-green gauze curtain embroidered on both sides with flowers and insects. Pan-erh ran over to have a look.

"Here's a cricket!" he exclaimed. "Here's a locust!"

Granny Liu promptly gave him a slap.

"Little wretch!" she scolded. "Pawing everything with your dirty hands. If you're allowed in to look, don't raise such a rumpus."

At this Pan-erh set up a howl and the others had to intercede to soothe him. Meanwhile the Lady Dowager had been looking through the window gauze at the back yard.

"That *wu-tung* tree under the eaves looks well," she remarked. "It's not sturdy enough though."

Just then a gust of wind carried them the strains of distant music.

"Who's having a wedding?" she asked. "We must be quite near the street here."

"Not near enough to hear sounds from the street," replied Lady Wang. "It's those child-actresses of ours rehearsing their music."

"If they're rehearsing, let's get them to do it here. It'll be a little outing for them and we'll have fun too."

Hsi-feng promptly sent for the actresses and gave orders for tables to be brought and a red carpet spread.

"No, let's use that lake pavilion by Lotus Fragrance Anchorage," proposed the Lady Dowager. "Music sounds better on the water. And we can drink in the Tower of Variegated Splendour which is roomy and within easy hearing distance."

All approved this idea.

Then with a smile to Aunt Hsueh the old lady said, "Let's go. These girls don't really welcome visitors for fear their rooms may be dirtied. We mustn't impose on them. So let's go boating and then have a few drinks."

As everyone rose to leave Tan-chun protested, "What a thing to say! We only wish you'd come more often."

"Yes, my third grand-daughter's good that way," said the old lady. "It's Tai-yu and Pao-yu who are so pernickety. On our way back, when we're tipsy, we must go there just to annoy them."

They trooped out, laughing, and soon reached Watercress Isle where some boatwomen from Soochow had punted two pyrus-wood boats. Into one of these they helped the Lady Dowager, Lady Wang, Aunt Hsueh, Granny Liu, Yuan-yang and Yu-chuan. Li Wan followed them and so did Hsi-feng, who took her stand in the prow meaning to punt.

"It's not as easy as it looks!" warned the Lady Dowager from the cabin. "We're not on the river, it's true, but it's fairly deep here. So don't try, and come inside at once."

"It's quite safe," cried Hsi-feng. "Don't worry, Old Ancestress."

She pushed off with a shove for the middle of the lake, but when the small overloaded boat started rocking she thrust the pole into the hands of a boatwoman and hastily squatted down.

Ying-chun and the other girls followed in the second boat with Pao-yu, while the rest of the attendants walked along the bank.

"How disgusting those withered lotus leaves look," remarked Pao-yu. "Why not get people to pull them out?"

"What time has there been for that?" countered Pao-chai with a smile. "We've been out here enjoying ourselves every day recently."

Tai-yu put in, "I don't like Li Shang-yin's\* verses except for that single line: 'Leave the withered lotus to hear the patter of rain.' But now you two don't want to leave them."

"That's a good line," agreed Pao-yu. "All right, we won't have them pulled out."

They had now reached Reed Creek by Flowery Harbour. In the shade here chill penetrated their very bones, while their awareness of autumn was heightened by the withered grass and caltrops on both sides. The Lady Dowager fixed her eyes on the airy lodge on the bank.

"Isn't that where Pao-chai lives?" she asked.

They told her it was.

At once she ordered the boats to go alongside and, climbing the stone steps to Alpinia Park, they were greeted by a strange fragrance. The advance of autumn had deepened the green of the rare plants and creepers there, from each of which hung charming clusters of berries like coral beads. The room which they now entered was spotless as a snow cave, with hardly an ornament in the whole place. The desk was bare except for a rough crackleware vase with some chrysanthemums in it, two sets of books and a tea-service. The blue gauze bed-curtains and bedding were also of the simplest.

"What a goose this child is!" cried the Lady Dowager. "Why not ask your aunt for some knick-knacks? It didn't occur to me, I just didn't think. Of course you left all your own things at home."

Having told Yuan-yang to be sure to fetch some curios, she called Hsi-feng to task.

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\*Tang Dynasty poet.

"Why didn't you send over some pretty things for your cousin? How very stingy!"

"She wouldn't have them," explained Lady Wang and Hsi-feng. "She returned all the ones we sent."

"She doesn't care for such things at home either," put in Aunt Hsueh.

"This will never do." The old lady shook her head. "She may have simple tastes, but this wouldn't look well if relatives were to call. Besides, it'll bring bad luck for girls, this austerity. Why, in that case we old women ought to live in stables! You've all heard those descriptions in ballads and operas of the elegance of young ladies' boudoirs. Maybe these girls of ours can't compare with those young ladies, but they shouldn't go to the other extreme either. When we've knick-knacks ready at hand why not display them? Of course, if your tastes are simple you can have less.

"I used to have a flair for decorating rooms, but now that I'm old I haven't the energy. These girls should learn how to fix up their rooms too. The only trouble is if you've a vulgar taste, for then you'll make even handsome things look frightful; but I wouldn't call our girls vulgar. Now let me fit out this room for you, and I promise it'll be in quiet yet excellent taste. I've a couple of nice things which I've managed to keep by not allowing Pao-yu to set eyes on them — if he had, they'd have disappeared."

She called Yuan-yang over and ordered, "Fetch that miniature rock garden, that little gauze screen and the dark steatite tripod. Those three things will do nicely for the desk. And fetch those white silk bed-curtains with the ink painting and calligraphy in place of these."

"Very good, madam," said Yuan-yang. "But those things are in some cases in the east attic. They may take a little finding. Suppose I get them tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow or the day after, it doesn't matter. Don't forget, that's all."

After sitting a little longer they went on to the Tower of Variegated Splendour, where Wen-kuan and the other young actresses paid their respects and asked which tunes they should play.

"Just choose a few you want to rehearse," replied the Lady Dowager. Thereupon the actresses withdrew to Lotus Fragrance Anchorage. By now Hsi-feng and her helpers had everything in perfect order. There were two couches on the north side, left and right, spread with brocade cushions and velvet coverlets. In front of each couch stood two carved lacquer teapoy of different shapes with pyrus-blossom, plum-blossom, lotus and sunflower designs, some square, some round, one of which held an incense-burner, a vase and a box of various sweetmeats. The other was empty, ready for their favourite dishes. These two couches with four teapoy were for the Lady Dowager and Aunt Hsueh. Then there were a chair and two teapoy for Lady Wang, while the others had one chair and teapoy apiece. Granny Liu's seat was on the east; below it was that of Lady Wang.

On the west sat Hsiang-yun, Pao-chai, Tai-yu, Ying-chun, Tan-chun and Hsi-chun in that order with, last of all, Pao-yu. Li Wan and Hsi-feng had seats outside the inner screen, within the third row of balustrades. The designs on the comfit-boxes matched those of the teapoy. Everyone also had a tarnished silver wine-pot with engraved designs and a variegated cloisonne-cup.

As soon as the party was seated the Lady Dowager proposed, "Let's begin with a few cups of wine. It would be fun to play a drinking game."

"I know you're good at drinking games, madam," chuckled Aunt Hsueh. "But how can we play them? If you just want to get us drunk, let's simply drink a few cups more apiece."

"How modest you are today!" retorted the Lady Dowager. "Do you find me too old for this company?"

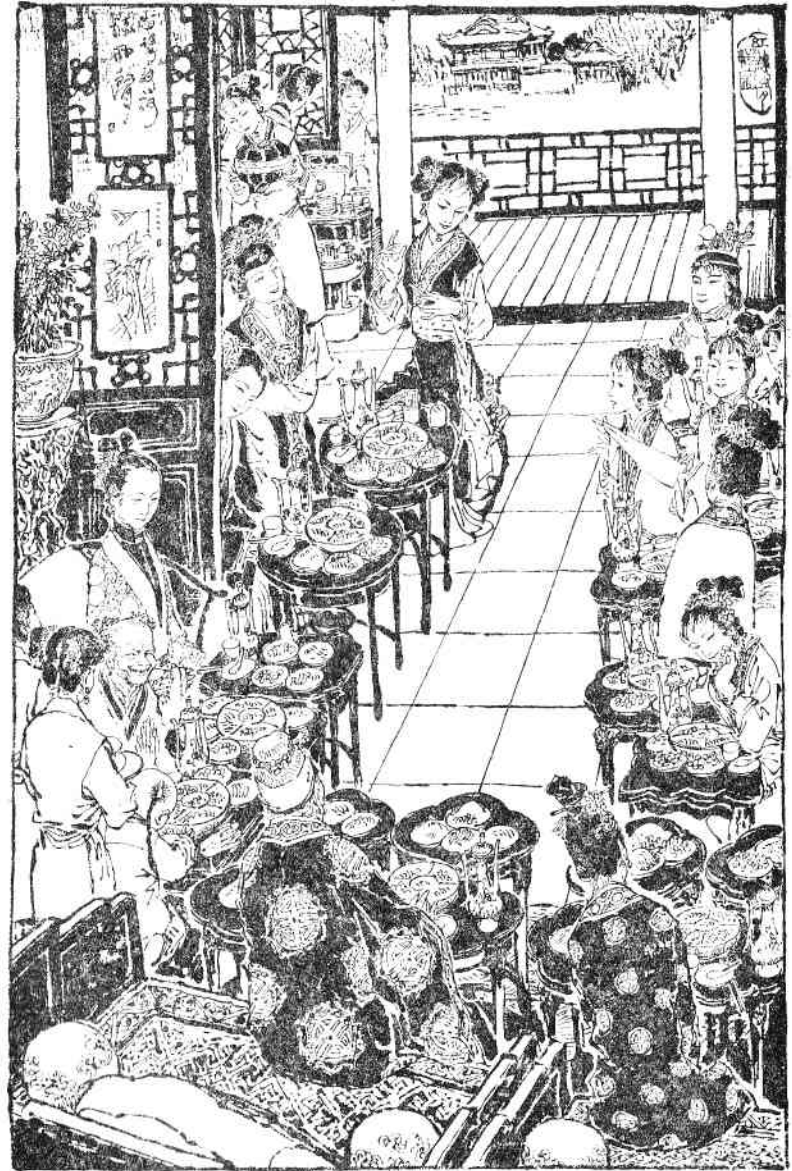
"I'm not being modest. I'm afraid of getting laughed at for giving the wrong answer."

"Even if we can't answer," interposed Lady Wang, "it only means drinking an extra cup. And anyone feeling tipsy can go and lie down. No one will laugh at us."

"Very well then," Aunt Hsueh agreed. "But you must start off with a cup, madam."

"Of course."

The Lady Dowager drained her cup.



Hsi-feng stepped forward to propose, "If we're to have a game, let Yuan-yang take charge."

The whole party agreed, knowing that it was always Yuan-yang who made the rules for the old lady's drinking games. So Hsi-feng made her join them.

"If you're joining in, there's no reason why you should stand," said Lady Wang. She ordered a young maid to fetch a chair and put it by Hsi-feng's or Li Wan's table.

After making a show of declining, Yuan-yang took the seat with thanks and drank a cup, after which she announced:

"Drinking rules are as strict as martial law. Now that I'm in charge I'll be no respecter of persons — anybody who disobeys me must pay a forfeit."

The others smiled and Lady Wang said, "Of course. Hurry up and tell us the rules."

But before Yuan-yang could speak Granny Liu left her seat, waving one hand in protest.

"Don't make fun of me like this. I'm leaving," she declared.

"That won't do," chuckled the others.

Yuan-yang ordered some maids to drag Granny Liu back to her table. They did so, giggling, while she pleaded to be let off.

"Anybody who speaks out of turn again will be made to drink a whole pot of wine," warned Yuan-yang.

At this the old woman held her peace.

"I shall use three dominoes," announced Yuan-yang. "We'll start with the old lady and go round in turn, ending with Granny Liu. For example, I'll take a set of three dominoes and read out what's on each of the three in turn, ending with the name of the set. You must say either a line of classical poetry, a proverb or an adage after each; and they must rhyme. A cup of wine is the forfeit for any mistake."

Laughingly they all approved and begged her to start.

"Here's a set," said Yuan-yang. "On the left is the 'sky'."

"The sky is blue on high," responded the Lady Dowager.

"Bravo!" applauded the others.

"In the centre's a 'five and six,'" Yuan-yang continued.

"Six bridges with the scent of plum admix."

"The last piece is 'six and one.'"

"From fleecy clouds rises a round red sun."

"Together they make a 'ghost distraught'."

"By his leg the ghost-catcher he's caught."

While the whole party laughed and cheered, the Lady Dowager tossed off a cup of wine.

Then Yuan-yang resumed, "Here's another set. The one on the left is a 'double five'."

Aunt Hsueh responded: "Plum-blossom dances when soft winds arrive."

"A 'double five' again here on the right."

"In the tenth month plum-blossom scents the height."

"In the middle 'two and five' make seven."

"The Weaving Maid and Cowherd\* meet in Heaven."

"The whole: O'er the Five Peaks the young god wends his way."

"Immortal joys are barred to mortal clay."

All applauded Aunt Hsueh's performance and she drank a cup.

"Here's another set," said Yuan-yang. "On the left 'two aces' combine."

Hsiang-yun capped this: "The sun and moon on earth and heaven shine."

Yuan-yang continued, "On the right 'double aces' are found."

"The idle flowers fall, noiseless, to the ground."

"In the middle, a 'four and a one'."

"Red apricot leans on clouds beside the sun."

"Together: The cherries ripen nine times in all."

"Birds in the palace orchard make them fall."

Her turn finished, Hsiang-yun drained her cup.

"Next one," said Yuan-yang. "On the left is a 'double three'."

Pao-chai responded, "Pairs of swallows chirp merrily."

"Another 'double three' upon the right."

"The wind-trailed weeds seem belts of malachite."

\*Names of constellations in Chinese astronomy. According to Chinese folklore, the Weaving Maid and the Cowherd were lovers.

"In the middle, 'three and six' make nine."

"Three hills across the azure sky incline."

"Together: A lonely boat moored by a chain."

"The wind and waves bring sorrow in their train."

In conclusion Pao-chai drank her wine.

Yuan-yang resumed, "The sign of 'heaven' on the left."

Tai-yu answered, "A fair season, a season bereft."\*

Pao-chai turned to dart her a glance, but for fear of a penalty Tai-yu ignored her.

Yuan-yang continued, "In the middle a 'screen' finely wrought."

"No maid a message to the gauze window has brought."\*\*

"That leaves only eight, by 'two and six' shown."

"Together they pay homage at the jade throne."

"Combined: A basket in which to gather posies."

"On her fairy wand she carries peonies."

Having finished her turn Tai-yu took a sip of wine.

Yuan-yang went on, "On the left, 'four and five' make nine."

Ying-chun responded, "The peach-blossom is heavy with rain."

"Fine her! Fine her!" cried the others. "That doesn't rhyme. Besides, why peach-blossom?"

Ying-chun smiled and took a sip. The fact is that Hsi-feng and Yuan-yang were so eager to hear Granny Liu make a fool of herself that they had urged the others to give wrong answers, so that all were fined. When it came to Lady Wang's turn, Yuan-yang answered for her. Then it was Granny Liu's turn.

"We country folk sometimes get together and play this when we've nothing better to do," said the old woman. "Mind you, our answers aren't so fine-sounding as yours. Still, I suppose I must try."

"It's easy," they assured her. "Just go ahead, it doesn't matter."

Smiling, Yuan-yang announced, "On the left, 'four and four' make a man."

Granny Liu thought this over, then suggested, "A farmer?"

\*A line from the Ming drama *The Peony Pavilion*.

\*\*A line from the Yuan drama *The Western Chamber*.

The company roared with laughter.

"Good," the Lady Dowager encouraged her. "That's the style."

"We country people can only talk about the things we know," said Granny Liu, laughing herself. "You mustn't make fun of me."

Yuan-yang continued, "'Three and four,' green and red, in the centre."

"A big fire burns the hairy caterpillar."

The others chortled, "That's right. Go on in your own way."

Yuan-yang said, "On the right a really fine 'double ace.'"

"A turnip and head of garlic in one place."

Giggles broke out again.

Yuan-yang went on, "They make up 'flowers' in all."

Gesturing with both hands Granny Liu responded, "And a huge pumpkin forms when the flowers fall."

The others were shaking with laughter when they heard a commotion outside. What had happened will be told in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 41

### Pao-yu Sips Tea in Green Lattice Nunnery Granny Liu Succumbs to Wine in Happy Red Court

Granny Liu's gestures and response, "A huge pumpkin forms when the flowers fall", caused a fresh gale of mirth. After tossing off the cup of wine, in the hope of raising another laugh she observed:

"To tell the truth, I'm clumsy. And now that I'm tipsy, unless I'm very careful, I may smash this porcelain cup. If you'd given me a wooden one it wouldn't matter even if I dropped it."

Once more everybody laughed.

"If you really prefer wooden cups I'll fetch some," offered Hsi-feng. "But first I must warn you that the wooden cups aren't like porcelain ones; they come in a set, and you must drink from every cup in the set."

The old woman thought: I was only trying to raise a laugh, but it seems they really do have them. When I've dined with the village



gentry I've seen plenty of gold and silver cups, never any made of wood. I know! These must be wooden bowls that the children use. She just wants to fool me into drinking more. Never mind, this wine's no stronger than mead anyway, so I needn't be afraid of drinking a bit extra.

So she said, "Fetch them, and we'll see."

Hsi-feng told Feng-erh: "Bring that set of ten cups carved out of bamboo root on the bookshelf in the inner room."

The maid assented, but as she was about to go on this errand Yuan-yang put in with a smile:

"I know that set, it's too small. Besides, you just said wood and it won't look right if now you produce bamboo. Better fetch from our place that large set of ten cups made out of box-wood roots. Let her drink from those."

Hsi-feng thought this a better idea, so Yuan-yang sent someone to fetch them. These cups when brought filled Granny Liu with amazement and admiration. Amazement because all ten fitted into each other, the largest being the size of a small basin and even the smallest as big as the cup in her hand. Admiration at the fine landscapes, trees and figures carved on them, as well as the seals and inscriptions.

"Just give me that small one," she said hastily. "I can't use so many."

"No, you can't just have one," chuckled Hsi-feng. "None of our family has ever ventured to use this set, not having a big enough capacity for it. As you asked for it, granny, and we went to all the trouble of fetching it, you must drink from each cup in turn."

"I daren't!" exclaimed Granny Liu in consternation. "Dear madam, do let me off."

The Lady Dowager, Aunt Hsueh and Lady Wang, knowing that she was too old to stand this, made haste to intervene.

"She mustn't drink too much," they said. "It'll do if she just empties the biggest cup."

"Amida Buddha!" cried the old woman. "Let me use the small one, and put that big one aside. I'll take it home to drink up little by little."

Everyone burst out laughing. All Yuan-yang could do was to have one large cup filled, and Granny Liu raised this in both hands to her lips.

"Go easy," warned both the Lady Dowager and Aunt Hsueh. "Mind you don't choke."

Aunt Hsueh urged Hsi-feng to give her some food with the wine.

"What would you like, granny?" Hsi-feng asked. "Just name it and I'll feed you some."

"How can I tell what these dishes are?" said Granny Liu. "They all look good to me."

"Give her some fried egg-plant," proposed the Lady Dowager with a smile.

Hsi-feng did so, picking up the food with her chopsticks and putting it into Granny Liu's mouth.

"You must eat egg-plant every day," she remarked. "Taste this of ours and see how you like it."

"Don't try to fool me," cackled Granny Liu. "If egg-plant tasted like this, we'd stop growing other crops — just stick to egg-plant."

"It really is egg-plant," they assured her. "We're not fooling you."

"Really egg-plant, is it?" marvelled the old woman. "All this time I'd no idea. Give me some more, madam, to chew more carefully."

Hsi-feng accordingly fed her another mouthful.

After savouring it slowly Granny Liu said, "It does taste a little like egg-plant, but still it's quite different. Tell me how you prepared this, so that I can cook some for myself."

"It's quite simple," replied Hsi-feng, twinkling. "Pick some early egg-plant and peel it, keeping only the best part, which must be cut into small pieces and fried with chicken fat. Then get some chicken breast, fresh mushrooms, bamboo shoots, dried mushrooms, spiced dried bean-curd and various kinds of preserved fruit. Dice these too and boil them with the egg-plant in chicken soup, then add sesame oil and pickles and store it in a tightly-sealed porcelain jar. That's all."

Granny Liu shook her head and stuck out her tongue in amazement.

"Gracious Buddha! No wonder it tastes so good, cooked with a dozen chickens."

While talking she had slowly finished the wine and now she started examining the cup.

"You haven't drunk enough yet," said Hsi-feng. "Have another cupful."

"Not on your life! It would kill me. It's just that I admire pretty things like this. What workmanship!"

"Now that you've finished drinking from it," put in Yuan-yang, "tell us what wood it's made of."

"I'm not surprised you don't know, miss." Granny Liu smiled. "Living behind golden gates and embroidered screens, what should you know about wood? But we hobnob with wood all day long, sleep on wooden pillows, rest on wooden stools and even eat the bark of trees in time of famine. Seeing it and hearing and talking about it all the time, I can naturally tell good wood from bad and true from false. Well now, let me see what this is." She was scrutinizing the cup carefully as she spoke. "Such a family as yours would certainly have nothing cheap, nor would you use any wood that's easily come by. Judging by the weight of this, it can't be fir, it must be pine wood."

The whole party had exploded in fits of mirth when a serving-woman came in to tell the old lady:

"The young actresses have all gone to Lotus Fragrance Anchorage and are waiting for Your Ladyship's instructions. Should they start their performance now or wait a while?"

"Yes, we'd forgotten them," chuckled the Lady Dowager. "Tell them to start."

Soon after the serving-woman left on this errand they heard the lilting strains of flutes and pipes. The breeze was light, the air clear, and this music coming through the trees and across the water refreshed and gladdened their hearts. Pao-yu could not resist filling his cup with wine, which he tossed straight off. He had just poured himself another cup when he saw his mother, who also wanted a drink, send for freshly-heated wine. He promptly took his cup over and held it to her lips. She took two sips.

When presently the heated wine arrived, Pao-yu returned to his place while Lady Wang rose from her seat, holding the wine-pot. At this all the rest, including Aunt Hsueh, stood up. At once the Lady Dowager told Li Wan and Hsi-feng to take the pot.

"Make your aunt sit down," she said. "Let's not be so formal."

Lady Wang relinquished the pot then to Hsi-feng and resumed her seat.

"How pleasant it is today," remarked the Lady Dowager cheerfully. "Let's all have a couple of drinks." Having urged Aunt Hsueh to drink she said to Hsiang-yun and Pao-chai, "You two must drink a cup too. And even though your cousin Tai-yu can't take much, we won't let her off either."

With that she drained her own cup so that Hsiang-yun, Pao-chai and Tai-yu had to follow suit.

Now the music, on top of the wine, set Granny Liu waving her arms and beating time with her feet for sheer delight. Pao-yu slipped across to whisper in Tai-yu's ear:

"Look at Granny Liu!"

"When the sage king of old played music, all the hundred beasts started dancing," quipped Tai-yu. "Today we've just this one cow."

The others tittered.

Presently the music stopped and Aunt Hsueh rising from her seat suggested, "We've all had enough to drink, haven't we? Let's go for a stroll before sitting down again."

As this suited the Lady Dowager, they all got up and she led the way outside. In the hope of some fresh diversion, she took Granny Liu to a grove at the foot of a hill and led her to and fro, telling her the names of the different trees, flowers and rocks.

After digesting all this information the old woman remarked, "Fancy, in town it's not only the people who have class, the birds are high-class too. Why, when they come to this place of yours, they grow so clever they can even talk."

Balled by this the others asked, "What birds have grown so clever they can talk?"

"I know that green bird with the red beak on the golden perch in the corridor," she said. "He's a parrot. But how come that black

crow in the cage has grown a phoenix-like crest and learned to talk too?"

This provoked a fresh burst of laughter.

Soon some maids came to ask if they would take some refreshments.

"After all that wine, we're not hungry," replied the Lady Dowager. "Still, bring the things here and those who want to can help themselves."

The maids fetched two teapots and also two small hampers. These when opened were seen to contain two different confections each. In one were cakes made of ground lotus-root flavoured with fragrant osmanthus, and pine-kernel and goose-fat rolls. In the other were tiny fried dumplings no more than one inch long.

"What's the stuffing in these?" asked the Lady Dowager.

Some servants told her, "Crab-meat."

The old lady frowned. "Who wants anything so greasy?"

The other confection, small coloured pastries fried with cream, did not appeal to her either. Aunt Hsueh took a cake when she was pressed. The Lady Dowager chose a roll but after one bite handed it to a maid.

Granny Liu was struck by the daintiness and variety of the small pastries. Selecting one shaped like a peony she said:

"The cleverest girls in our village couldn't make scissor-cuts as good as this. I'm longing to try one, but it seems a shame to eat them. It would be nice to take some back as patterns for the folk at home."

Everyone laughed.

"When you go," promised the Lady Dowager, "I'll give you a jarful to take back with you. First try some while they're hot."

The others simply picked out one or two titbits which took their fancy, but Granny Liu had never tasted anything of the sort before. It hardly seemed possible that these small dainty objects could be very filling, and so she and Pan-erh sampled some of each until presently half were gone. Hsi-feng had the remainder put on two plates and sent in a hamper to the actresses.

Now Ta-chieh's nurse brought her along and they played with her for a while. The child was amusing herself with a pomelo when she noticed Pan-erh's Buddha's-hand and wanted it. Although the maids promised to fetch her one too, she was unwilling to wait and burst into tears. At once they gave the pomelo to Pan-erh and induced him to part with his Buddha's-hand. He had played with it long enough by then and now had both hands full with the cakes he was eating; besides, this fragrant round pomelo seemed more amusing; so, kicking it about like a ball, he cheerfully relinquished the Buddha's-hand.

As soon as they had finished this collation the Lady Dowager took Granny Liu to Green Lattice Nunnery. Miao-yu promptly ushered them into the courtyard, luxuriant with trees and flowers.

"It's those who live the ascetic life, after all, who have time to improve their grounds," observed the Lady Dowager. "These look better-kept than other places."

As she spoke, they were walking towards the hall for meditation on the east side, and Miao-yu invited them to go in.

"We've just been having wine and meat," said the old lady. "As you've an image of Buddha inside, it would be sacrilege. We'll just sit in the outside room for a while and have a cup of your good tea."

Miao-yu at once went to make tea.

Pao-yu watched the proceedings carefully. He saw Miao-yu bring out in her own hands a carved lacquer tea-tray in the shape of crab-apple blossom, inlaid with a golden design of the "cloud dragon offering longevity". On this was a covered gilded polychrome bowl made in the Cheng Hua period,\* which she offered to the Lady Dowager.

"I don't drink Liuan tea," said the old lady.

"I know," replied Miao-yu smiling. "This is Patriarch's Eyebrows."

"What water have you used?"

"Rain-water saved from last year."

The Lady Dowager drank half the bowl and passed the rest with a twinkle to Granny Liu, urging her to taste the tea. The old woman drank it straight off.

\*1465-1487.

"Quite good, but a bit on the weak side," was her verdict, which made everyone laugh. "It should have been left to draw a little longer."

All the others had melon-green covered bowls with golden designs of new imperial kiln porcelain.

Having served tea, Miao-yu plucked at the lapels of Pao-chai's and Tai-yu's clothes and they went out with her, followed surreptitiously by Pao-yu. She invited the two girls into a side room, where Pao-chai sat on a couch and Tai-yu on Miao-yu's hassock, while the nun herself fanned the stove and when the water boiled brewed some fresh tea. Pao-yu slipped in then and accused them teasingly:

"So you're having a treat here in secret!"

The three girls laughed.

"What are you doing here? There's nothing here for you."

Miao-yu was just looking for cups when an old nun came in bringing the used bowls.

"Don't put away that Cheng Hua bowl," cried Miao-yu hastily. "Leave it outside."

Pao-yu knew that because Granny Liu had used it, she thought it too dirty to keep. Then he saw Miao-yu produce two cups, one with a handle and the name in uncial characters: Calabash Cup. In smaller characters it bore the inscriptions "Treasured by Wang Kai of the Tsin Dynasty" and "In the fourth month of the fifth year of the Yuan-feng period\* of the Sung Dynasty, Su Shih of Meishan saw this cup in the Imperial Secretariat". Miao-yu filled this cup and handed it to Pao-chai. The other, shaped like a small alms-bowl, bore the name in the curly seal script: Rhinoceros Cup. Having filled this for Tai-yu, she offered Pao-yu the green jade beaker that she normally drank from herself.

"I thought that according to Buddhist law all men should be treated alike," said Pao-yu with a grin. "Why give me this vulgar object when they get such priceless antiques?"

"Vulgar object!" retorted Miao-yu. "I doubt if your family could produce anything half as good, and that's not boasting either."

\*1082.



"As people say, 'other countries, other ways'. Here with a person like you, gold, pearls, jade and jewels must all count as vulgar."

Very gratified by this remark, Miao-yu produced a huge goblet carved out of a whole bamboo root which was covered with knots and whorls.

"Here's the only other one I have," she said. "Can you manage such a large one?"

"Of course I can!" declared Pao-yu delightedly.

"Even if you can, I've not so much tea to waste on you. Have you never heard the saying: 'First cup to taste, second to quench a fool's thirst, third to water an ox or donkey'? What would you be if you swallowed such an amount?"

As the three others laughed, Miao-yu picked up the pot and poured the equivalent of one small cup into the goblet. Pao-yu tasted it carefully and could not praise its bland purity enough.

"You've your cousins to thank for this treat," observed Miao-yu primly. "If you'd come alone, I wouldn't have offered you tea."

"I'm well aware of that." Pao-yu chuckled. "So I'll thank them instead of you."

"So you should," said the nun.

"Is this made with last year's rain-water too?" asked Tai-yu.

Miao-yu smiled disdainfully.

"Can you really be so vulgar as not even to tell the difference? This is snow I gathered from plum-blossom five years ago while staying in Curly Fragrance Temple on Mount Hsuanmu. I managed to fill that whole dark blue porcelain pot, but it seemed too precious to use so I've kept it buried in the earth all these years, not opening it till this summer. Today is only the second time I've used it. Surely you can taste the difference? How could last year's rain-water be as light and pure as this?"

Tai-yu, knowing her eccentricity, did not like to say too much or stay too long. After finishing her tea she signalled to Pao-chai and the two girls left, followed by Pao-yu.

As he was leaving he said with a smile to Miao-yu, "That bowl may have been contaminated, but surely it's a pity to throw it away? I think you'd do better to give it to that poor woman, who'd make

enough by selling it to keep her for some time. Don't you agree?"

After a little reflection Miao-yu nodded.

"All right," she said. "It's a good thing I'd never drunk out of it, or I'd have smashed it. But I can't give it to her myself. If you want to give it to her, I've no objection. Go ahead and take it."

"Of course," he chuckled. "How could you speak to the likes of her? You'd be contaminating yourself. Just let me have it."

Miao-yu sent for the bowl and had it handed to him.

As he took it he said, "After we've gone, shall I send a few pages with some buckets of water from the stream to wash your floors?"

"That's a good idea." She smiled. "Only make them leave the buckets by the wall outside the gate. They mustn't come in."

"Of course not."

He withdrew, the bowl in his sleeve, and entrusted it to one of his grandmother's small maids with the instruction, "Give this to Granny Liu to take home tomorrow."

By this time the Lady Dowager was ready to leave, and Miao-yu did not press her hard to stay but saw them out and closed the gate behind them.

The Lady Dowager, feeling rather tired, told Lady Wang and the girls to go and drink with Aunt Hsueh while she herself had a rest in Paddy-sweet Cottage. Hsi-feng ordered a small bamboo sedan-chair to be brought. The old lady seated herself in this and was carried off by two serving-women, accompanied by Hsi-feng, Li Wan and all her own maids and older serving-women.

Meanwhile Aunt Hsueh had taken her leave too. Lady Wang, having dismissed the actresses and given what was left in the hampers to the maids, was free to lie down on the couch vacated by her mother-in-law. She told a small maid to lower the portière and massage her legs.

"When the old lady wakes, come and let me know," she ordered the servant. With that she settled down for a nap, and the rest of the party dispersed.

Pao-yu, Hsiang-yun and the other girls watched the maids put the boxes of titbits on the rocks. Then, some sitting on the rocks

or grass, some leaning against trees or strolling by the lake, they made very merry.

Yuan-yang arrived presently to take Granny Liu for a stroll, and the rest of them tagged along to watch the fun. When they reached the arch erected for the imperial consort's visit home, Granny Liu exclaimed:

"My word, what a big temple!"

She plumped down to kowtow, making everyone double up with laughter.

"What's so funny?" she asked. "I know the words on this arch. We have plenty of temples like this where I live, all with arches like this one here. The characters on it are the name of the temple."

"What temple is this?" they demanded.

Granny Liu looked up and pointed at the inscription.

"Splendid Hall of the Jade Emperor, isn't it?"

They laughed and clapped and would have gone on teasing her, but Granny Liu's stomach suddenly started to rumble. Hastily asking one of the younger maids for some paper, she set about loosening her clothes.

"No, no! Not here!" they cried, nearly in hysterics.

An old nurse was told to take her to the northeastern corner. Having shown her the way, the old servant took the chance to amble off to have a rest.

Now the yellow wine which Granny Liu had been drinking did not agree with her; and to quench her thirst after eating all that rich food she had drunk so much tea that her stomach was upset. She remained squatting for some time in the privy. When she emerged the wine had gone to her head, and squatting so long had left the old creature too dizzy to remember the way she had come.

She looked round. Trees, rocks, towers and pavilions stretched on every side, but having no idea how to reach these different places she could only hobble slowly down a cobbled path until she came to a building. After searching for a long time for the gate, she saw a bamboo fence. So they have bean-trellises here too, she thought. Skirting the hedge, she reached a moon-gate and stepped through it. Before her was a pool seven or eight feet across, its banks paved

with flag-stones, a clear green brook flowing through it, and lying across it a long slab of white stone. She crossed over this stone to a cobbled path which, after a couple of bends, brought her to a door. The first thing she saw as she entered it was a girl, smiling in welcome.

"The young ladies ditched me," said Granny Liu hastily. "I had to knock about till I found this place."

When the girl did not answer, the old woman stepped forward to take her hand and — bang! — bumped her head painfully on a wooden partition. Looking carefully at it, she found it was a painting. Strange! How could they make the figure stick out like a real person? Touching it, however, she found it was flat all over. With a nod and a couple of sighs of admiration she moved on to a small door over which hung a soft green flowered portière. She lifted this, stepped through and looked around.

The four walls here were panelled with cunningly carved shelves on which were displayed lyres, swords, vases and incense burners. They were hung moreover with embroidered curtains and gauze glittering with gold and pearls. Even the green glazed floor-tiles had floral designs. More dazzled than ever she turned to leave — but where was the door? To her left was a bookcase, to her right a screen. She had just discovered a door behind the screen and stepped forward to open it when, to her amazement, her son-in-law's mother came in.

"Fancy seeing you here!" exclaimed Granny Liu. "I suppose you found I hadn't been home these last few days and tracked me down here. Which of the girls brought you in?"

The other old woman simply smiled and did not answer.

"How little you've seen of the world," chuckled Granny Liu. "The flowers in this garden are so fine, you just had to go picking some to stick all over your own head — for shame!"

Again the other made no reply.

Suddenly Granny Liu recalled having heard that rich folk had in their houses some kind of full-length mirror. It dawned on her that this was her own reflection. She felt it with her hand and looked more carefully. Sure enough, it was a mirror set in four carved red sandalwood partitions.



"This has barred my way. How am I to get out?" she muttered.

Then the pressure of her fingers produced a click. For this mirror had western-style hinges enabling it to open or shut, and she had accidentally pressed the spring which made it swing back, revealing a doorway.

In pleased surprise Granny Liu stepped into the next room, where her eye was caught by some exquisite bed-curtains. Being still more than half drunk and tired from her walk, she plumped down on the bed to have a little rest. But her limbs no longer obeyed her. She swayed to and fro, unable to keep her eyes open, then curled up and fell fast asleep.

Meanwhile the others outside waited in vain for her till Pan-erh started crying for his grandmother.

"Let's hope she hasn't fallen into the cesspool of the latrine," they said jokingly. "Someone should go and see."

Two old women were sent but came back to report that there was no sign of her. So they searched in all directions but still could not find her.

She must have lost her way because she's drunk, thought Hsi-jen, and may have followed that path to our back yard. If she passed the hedge and went in by the back door, even if she knocked about blindly the girls there must have seen her. If she didn't go that way but headed southwest, let's hope she's found her way out. If not, she may still be wandering around there. I'll go and have a look.

Thinking in this way, she went back to Happy Red Court and called for the younger maids who had been left to keep an eye on the place. But they had seized this chance to run off and play. Going in past the latticed screen she heard thunderous snores and, hurrying into the bedroom, found the whole place reeking of wine and farts. On the bed, sprawled out on her back, lay Granny Liu. Hsi-jen was shocked. She ran over and shook her hard until Granny Liu woke with a start. At sight of Hsi-jen she hastily scrambled up.

"It was wrong of me, miss," she cried. "But I haven't dirtied the bed." She was brushing it with both hands as she spoke.

Hsi-jen signed to her to keep quiet, not wanting to disturb others for fear Pao-yu should come to hear of this. Hurriedly she thrust

several handfuls of incense into the large tripod and replaced the cover, then straightened things a little in the room. It was lucky at least that the old woman hadn't been sick.

"It's all right," she whispered quickly. "I'll see to this. Just say you were so tipsy that you fell asleep on one of the rocks outside. Now come along with me."

Granny Liu assented readily and followed Hsi-jen out to the young maids' room where she was told to sit down. Two bowls of tea sobered her up enough to ask:

"Which of the young ladies' rooms was that? So elegant and beautiful! I thought I was in heaven."

"That?" Hsi-jen smiled. "That's Master Pao's bedroom."

Granny Liu was too shocked to utter another word. Hsi-jen took her out the front way to find the rest of the party.

"Granny Liu fell asleep on the grass" was all she told them. "Now I've brought her back."

Then the others thought no more of the matter, and there it rested. To know what the sequel was, read the next chapter.

*Illustrated by Tai Tun-pang*

## NOTES ON ART

*Hung Lu*

### PLA Art Exhibition

An art exhibition opened on August 1 this year in Peking to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. More than five hundred art works by professional and amateur artists were displayed. Here we introduce a few representative examples.

One oil painting *The Yellow River* depicts a soldier, rifle in hand, gazing into the distance from the top of a mountain. Below him, the Great Wall winds over the mountains, the Yellow River flows turbulently past, and the radiant sun is rising above the horizon. The red sun symbolizes Chairman Mao, great leader of the Chinese people; the Great Wall, a formidable bulwark against invaders from the north in the past, represents the People's Liberation Army; the Yellow River stands for our motherland. These images, skilfully and naturally blended, bring out the main theme very graphically.

Another oil *Crossing the Yangtse to Liberate Nanking* presents a memorable scene in the War of Liberation (1945-1949). Artillery salvoes, billowing waves and advancing troops are portrayed with vivid colours and forceful strokes, together with the villagers flocking to help



our brave soldiers. The War of Liberation is also the theme of the painting in the traditional style *News of Victories from the Battlefield*. This does not depict a battle scene, however, but the women in the rear who are washing clothes and preparing food for the soldiers. With delicate brushwork and felicitous colouring, the artist shows how the masses support our revolutionary war.

*Victory Lies Ahead*, another oil, shows Chairman Mao and his close comrades-in-arms Chou En-lai and Chu Teh in 1948 at Hsi-pai-po in Hopei, where Chairman Mao made the final plan for the overthrow of the Chiang Kai-shek regime. The depiction of these three leaders looking forward with full confidence to the final victory of the War of Liberation leaves us with an indelible impression of their tremendous moral stature.

A large proportion of the works exhibited paid tribute to veteran revolutionaries. There we saw Chairman Mao during the Long March making straw sandals for a young Red Army man who was fast asleep. We saw Chou En-lai weaving yarn with other comrades in Yen-an in 1942, when the Kuomintang imposed an economic blockade and Chairman Mao called for a drive to boost production. Another painting showed Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh carrying loads of grain with his shoulder-pole up the Ching-kang Mountains. Yet others presented Tung Pi-wu helping to educate the younger generation; Ho Lung during the guerrilla fighting in the Hunghu region; and Chen Yi at the front directing the Huai-Hai Campaign in 1948. Many other fine revolutionaries who gave their lives for our country's liberation were also depicted.

Other paintings in this exhibition portrayed Chairman Hua Kuo-feng, Vice-chairman Yeh Chien-ying, Vice-chairman Teng Hsiao-ping and other leading comrades during the war years and in the period of socialist construction. They showed how they carried out Chairman Mao's instructions, leading our people to overcome difficulties and conquer our enemies; and how these proletarian revolutionaries are continuing to advance along the course charted by Chairman Mao at the head of the different nationalities of China.

This exhibition also included landscapes, sculptures, cartoons, New-Year pictures and posters by young spare-time artists and veteran



Militia Girl (sculpture) by Tang To-hsi



Crossing the Yangtse to Liberate Nanking (oil painting) by Chang Tzu-shen



The Yellow River (oil painting) by Chen Yi-fei



Victory Lies Ahead (oil painting) by Chi Chieh and Fei Chen



News of Victories from the Battlefront (traditional Chinese painting) by Chen Chuan-sheng



The Road Mounts Skyward (traditional Chinese painting) by Wei Tzu-hsi



*In the Mountains* (woodcut)

by Feng Chung-tieh

professional artists. The traditional-style ink painting *The Road Mounts Skyward*, by the well-known artist Wei Tzu-hsi, depicted the scene described in Chairman Mao's poem *Reascending Ching Kangshan*, expressing our people's love for Chairman Mao and the old revolutionary base. The verdant peaks, the mountain road winding up to the clouds, and the gleaming red memorial at the summit combined to form a picture of beauty and grandeur.

Our people and our army, steeled in long years of revolutionary

wars, know that we must take up arms to defend our country and never forget that wolves are still at the door. The oil *Discussing World Affairs* uses large contrasting colour washes to depict national minority militiamen making a serious study of the situation with some PLA soldiers. They retain a high sense of vigilance against the social-imperialists close at hand. This unusual painting by the Mongolian artist Tomus aroused great interest. The sculpture *Militia Girl* presents a militia woman on the south China coast. A rifle over her shoulder, her hands on a sledge, she looks fearless and alert as she guards against an enemy raid from the sea.

The PLA's fiftieth anniversary was not merely an army festival, but a festival for all the Chinese people. And so the artists who contributed to this exhibition came not only from army units but other walks of life as well. Together they succeeded in presenting a panorama of the Chinese people's history of armed struggle.

## Ma Ko and His Music

This year, on the first anniversary of Ma Ko's death, a recital of the works of this outstanding composer was held in Peking. It included music he wrote during the War of Resistance Against Japan, the War of Liberation, and the period of socialist revolution and socialist construction after the founding of our People's Republic.

Ma Ko (1918-1976) first took up music as a hobby. In 1937, when the Japanese imperialists invaded our country, he gave up studying chemistry at Honan University and joined the resistance movement, writing songs for it and using music as his weapon. In 1939 he went to Yen-an, where he was encouraged and helped by the well-known composer Hsien Hsing-hai (1905-1945).

An important feature characterizing Ma Ko's music is that he linked his composition closely to the revolutionary struggles of different periods, using songs to reflect speedily the people's revolutionary demands and encourage their militant will.

During the war of resistance, when Chairman Mao called upon the army and people to open up more fronts in enemy-occupied territory and set up guerrilla bases, Ma Ko produced his choral music *The Luliang Mountains*. This impassioned song to the partisans there became widely known in various revolutionary bases in the enemy's rear.

In 1942, Chairman Mao in his celebrated *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art* pointed out that literature and art must serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, calling on literary and art workers to learn from and integrate themselves with the masses. This glorious historic document made clear the correct path for all revolutionary writers and artists. And Ma Ko, responding to Chairman Mao's call, set about collecting folk-songs and learning the language of the labouring people. He took an active part in the new *yangko* movement in Yen-an. The *yangko*, originally a popular folk dance performed at the lunar New Year, was now amplified by the addition of singing and acting. Ma Ko used this improved traditional art form to produce the *yangko* drama *Husband and Wife Help Each Other to Read*, describing the current drive to wipe out illiteracy in Yen-an.

In 1942, a year of great hardship during the war of resistance, Chairman Mao called upon the army and civilians in the border area to boost production, in order to frustrate the economic blockade imposed by the Kuomintang reactionaries. Ma Ko's famous song *Nanniwan*, based on a folk tune, acclaimed the splendid achievements of this movement. This song has been popular in China ever since.

After this, Ma Ko, collaborating with others, helped compose the music for *The White-Haired Girl*. This well-known opera describes the cruel exploitation and oppression suffered by the peasants in old China at the hands of the landlord class, and the awakening and revolt of the peasants. By adapting popular folk tunes, the composers successfully depicted the Chinese people's fight against feudalism at that time. This work blazed a new trail for Chinese opera, endowing it with a distinctively national style with a strong mass appeal.

Following the victories of the War of Liberation, when the people's revolution swept the whole country, workers in the liberated areas flocked to support the front and countless young people joined the revolutionary ranks. Ma Ko composed songs such as *Our Workers Have Strength* and *We Are Democratic Youth* which with their stirring rhythm and popular style reflect the gallant spirit and optimism of that period. He also composed an orchestral suite of songs about northern Shensi based on folk melodies, making use of Chinese

fiddles and percussion instruments to depict the life in the revolutionary base in a fresh and original way.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, when our country embarked on socialist revolution and socialist construction, Ma Ko kept abreast of the times and endeavoured to serve his country by employing various forms: songs, opera, film music and others. He composed a whole series of fine songs, among them *Song of the Steel Workers* and *Song of Petroleum Workers*. He worked on indefatigably to the end. In the spring of 1976, when ill with terminal cancer, he composed his last suite of songs *The Road to Tachai*. Based on folk-songs from that area, it praised the Tachai people's self-reliance and struggle to transform their land by their own efforts. The clear, evocative music, typical of the north China countryside, effectively conveys the heroic spirit of the Tachai people.

Indeed, a major feature of Ma Ko's compositions is his artless, fluent style with its rich Chinese flavour and affinity to real life. He was adept at adapting good folk music and evolving new modes of expression. His works have a consistent style, although each song has its own individual characteristics.

Ma Ko throughout his long career adhered firmly to Chairman Mao's directives: let a hundred flowers blossom; weed through the old to bring forth the new; make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China. He was in favour of a variety of styles and of letting a hundred schools contend to solve problems in music and art. To help develop China's new music, he experimented by writing in new styles, and by using musical instruments and styles of singing popular with the peasants.

Ma Ko said in connection with the music of *The White-Haired Girl*, "Musicians must go deep among the masses to experience their life, enter into their thoughts and feelings, and learn how they express themselves. We must assimilate all the best features of folk forms based on real life, and learn from the experience of the past as well as of other countries, so as to create a Chinese opera which truly represents our people's spirit." His most significant achievement was integrating revolutionary content with a Chinese style in music which is popular with the masses.

## CHRONICLE

### First Anniversary of Chairman Mao's Death Commemorated

On September 9, which marked the first anniversary of the death of Chairman Mao (1893-1976), a photography exhibition *Life of Our Great Leader and Teacher Chairman Mao* and an art exhibition *Chairman Mao Lives in Our Hearts Forever* were opened in Peking.

The photography exhibition presented two hundred photographs in colour, a vivid record of Chairman Mao's activities in different periods of the Chinese revolution.

The art exhibition displayed fifty-nine oil paintings, most of them painted only recently, showing the artists' respect and love for Chairman Mao.

Stage performances commemorating the anniversary and a colour documentary film *Where Chairman Mao Lived* were also put on in Peking.

### Hunan Modern Drama Troupe in Peking

In August, the Modern Drama Troupe of Hunan Province staged two plays in Peking, *The Red Army Song* and *The Song of the Aqueduct*, both of them recent productions.

*The Red Army Song* centres around the promulgation of the Three

Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention\* by Chairman Mao Tsetung in Shatien Village, Kueitung County, Hunan Province in 1928. It shows that the Red Army, adhering to Chairman Mao's line, resolutely used the Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention as a weapon to educate the fighters and unite with the masses. As a result, the Red Army defeated the enemy's reactionary propaganda and won victory after victory.

*The Song of the Aqueduct* deals with the building of the Shaoshan irrigation system by 100,000 peasant workers led by Hua Kuo-feng, who has always shown great concern for the people's welfare. It also reflects the revolutionary spirit of the pace-setters in the construction work — their whole-hearted determination to serve the people. •

### New Books About Inner Mongolia

A number of new books published in Peking and Inner Mongolia reflect the glorious achievements of the socialist revolution and construction in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and eulogize the great victories achieved by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line and the Party's national policy.

*The Grasslands*, a collection of stories, and *Album of Selected Paintings from Inner Mongolia* have already been published. Forthcoming are the novel *Naminyibung*, a book of short stories *Camel Riders*, the collections of poems *Morning Glow on the Grassland*, *Galaxy* and *Dedica-*

\*The Three Main Rules of Discipline:

1. Obey orders in all your actions.
2. Don't take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses.
3. Turn in everything captured.

The Eight Points for Attention:

1. Speak politely.
2. Pay fairly for what you buy.
3. Return everything you borrow.
4. Pay for anything you damage.
5. Don't hit or swear at people.
6. Don't damage crops.
7. Don't take liberties with women.
8. Don't ill-treat captives.



tion of Love, and an album of photographs of the Ulanmuchi Song-and-Dance Troupe. These books are rich in national minority features and give us a good picture of life on the grasslands.

### A New Magazine for Children

Recently a new magazine for children, *Children's Literature*, has been published by the Chinese Children's Press to further hasten the growth of our socialist children's literature.

The first issue contains short stories, essays, poems, comic dialogues, fairy-tales and fables. The essay *Hearts Beating in Unison* commemorates Chairman Mao's great contributions and expresses the determination of young and old alike to hold high Chairman Mao's great banner and carry the proletarian cause through to the end. *Stories About Chairman Hua* tells how Chairman Hua taught young messengers to read and write, showed his concern for three orphans, and led peasant workers to build the Shaoshan irrigation system. *Following the Footprints of Two Great Revolutionaries* contains two short stories about the Red Army on the Long March, with inspiring reminiscences of Chou En-lai and Chu Teh.

### Yugoslav Films and Posters Exhibition in China

In August and September this year, two Yugoslav colour feature films, *Walter Defends Sarajevo* and *The Bridge*, were shown in China. Both described how the Yugoslav people fought the German fascists during the Second World War, reflecting their revolutionary spirit and heroic defence of the independence of their motherland.

The Yugoslav Posters Exhibition was held in Peking at the same time. Ninety posters produced since 1968 were displayed. These were works of art reflecting Yugoslav society as well as the political situation.

Both the films and the posters exhibition were warmly received by the Chinese people.

## INDEX

*Chinese Literature 1977 Nos. 1-12*

	Issue No.
<b>Directive Concerning the Film "The Pioneers" — Mao Tsetung</b>	1
<b>Letter Concerning the Study of "The Dream of the Red Chamber" — Mao Tsetung</b>	11
<b>IN MEMORY OF CHAIRMAN MAO</b>	2
A Memorable Voyage — <i>Hsin Chun-wen</i>	
Chairman Mao Inspects Nanniwan — <i>Tung Ting-heng</i>	
Chairman Mao Shines Like a Red Sun over the Earth — <i>Li Shu-yi</i>	
<b>IN MEMORY OF PREMIER CHOU</b>	3
Our Beloved Premier Chou at Meiyuan New Village	
Our Beloved Premier Chou's Three Visits to Tachai	
Mourning Premier Chou — <i>Kuo Mo-jo</i>	
Proud Eagle — <i>Saifudin</i>	
On the Anniversary of Premier Chou's Death — <i>Chao Pu-chu</i>	
The Lamp in Premier Chou's Office — <i>Shih Hsiang</i>	
In Those Days of Deep Sorrow — <i>Yu Ying</i> and <i>Hua Tan</i>	
<b>STORIES</b>	
Old Bull-Head — <i>Teng Ta-chun</i>	2
The Battle in Wanshan Valley — <i>Wei Shu-hai</i>	3
High in the Yimeng Mountains — <i>Nieh Li-ko</i> and <i>Liang Nien</i>	4
Sister Autumn — <i>Chao Pao-chi</i>	
The Cave Hospital — <i>Yueh Wen</i>	7
A Guerrilla Contingent — <i>An Yu</i>	
Sunflower — <i>Hsu Kuang-yao</i>	9
The Scattered Beans — <i>Hung Hsia</i>	10
Following His Footprints — <i>Wang Yuan-chien</i>	11
Stick to the Revolutionary Standard — <i>Wang Yuan-chien</i>	
The Eighth Routers' Hut — <i>Wei Chin-yung</i>	
A Would-Be Little Red Soldier — <i>Tien Ting</i>	
Erh-pao and the Chen Family — <i>Shu Ping</i>	12
Two Comrades — <i>Miao Lin</i>	
The Leather Girth — <i>Wang Yuan-chien</i>	

POEMS

Smash the "Gang of Four" — <i>Kuo Mo-jo</i>	1
A Grand Festival for All Revolutionaries — <i>Kuang Wei-jan</i>	
Chairman Hua in His Green Army Uniform — <i>Yu Kuang-lieb</i>	
Chairman Hua Leads Us Forward Triumphantly — <i>Shih Hsiang</i>	
To Peking from the Chuang Mountains — <i>Hsiao Yang-wu</i>	2
When the Good News Comes to Our Hui Mountains — <i>Ma Jui-lin</i>	
We of the Bamboo Forests Will Always Follow the Party — <i>Sun Lun</i>	
When Chairman Hua Came to Our School — <i>Chang Kuei-lan</i>	
Lake Hsiangyang — <i>Tsang Keb-chia</i>	4
The New Canal — <i>Wang Hsun</i>	
The Moon — <i>Pieh Min-sheng</i>	
Our Pack-Horse Bells — <i>Yang Chun</i>	
Autumn in Tuanpowa — <i>Kuo Hsiao-chuan</i>	5-6
Autumn Song — <i>Kuo Hsiao-chuan</i>	
Seven Poems — <i>Chen Yi</i>	7
Chu Teh's Poems	8
"Gazing from Afar" and Other Poems — <i>Yeh Chien-ying</i>	
Poem — to the tune of <i>Man Chiang Hung</i> — <i>Mao Tun</i>	9
Happy News Brought by the Rainbow — <i>Radgae Basang</i>	
When the Fifth Volume Came to Our Grassland — <i>Gasang Cedan</i>	
Spring Comes Early to Our Village — <i>Mudi</i> and <i>Wang Jan</i>	
Poems in Praise of Taching	
Chairman Mao Brings Spring Sunshine to Our Hearts	10
The Liberated Serfs Love Chairman Hua	
The Old Company Commander and the New Battalion Commander — <i>Wang Yao-tung</i>	
Ten Poems — <i>Tung Pi-wu</i>	11

LU HSUN'S WRITINGS

The International Settlement in March	1
Reply to a Letter from the Trotskyites	3
Reply to Hsu Mao-yung and on the Question of the United Front Against Japanese Aggression	
The True Story of Ah Q	5-6
Literature of a Revolutionary Period	9
In Memory of Wei Su-yuan	12
The Pioneers (a film scenario)	1 and 2

DRAMA

Maple Bay	8
A New Dawn — <i>Sun Wei-shih</i>	10

SKETCHES

Heroes Split Mount Chailing — <i>Sung Shu-wen</i> and <i>Sung Kuei-sheng</i>	4
Callused Hands — <i>Tsung Ting-chao</i>	
A Pine Twig from Tachai — <i>Chang Kang-keang</i>	
Heartfelt Longing — <i>Hua Shih</i>	7
My Visits to Riverside Pavilion — <i>Ho Wei</i>	
Reminiscences Concerning Millet — <i>Tsao Ching-hua</i>	
Chairman Hua's Concern for the People — <i>Chu Ching</i>	
"Uncle Hua" — <i>Liu Hsiu-ying</i>	
A Snowy Night Deep in the Mountains — <i>Sung Sheng-fa</i>	
Ode to the Locomotive — <i>Chen Chi-kuang</i>	9
Spring Rain — <i>Liu Cheng-tai</i>	
The Story of a Ballad-Singer — <i>Teh Yung</i>	
Before Returning to China — <i>Li Kun</i>	
Honey of the Grassland — <i>Wen Hsiao-yu</i> and <i>Wang Cheb-cheng</i>	12

REPORTAGE

Devoted Hearts Wing Their Way to Peking — <i>Ku Kung</i>	10
--	----

CLASSICS

A Dream of Red Mansions (chapters 27, 28, 40 and 41) — <i>Tsao Hsueh-chin</i>	11 and 12
The Hatters (a comic dialogue) — <i>Chang Pao-hua</i> and <i>Chang Kuei-tien</i>	9
Three Fables	9

ARTICLES

A Brilliant Historic Document — <i>Jen Ping</i>	1
The Never-Setting Red Sun — <i>Wen Chung</i>	2
Lu Hsun's Struggle Against Hidden Enemies in the Revolutionary Camp — <i>Chung Shu-chih</i>	3
Some Outstanding Peasant Paintings — <i>Hung Lu</i>	
Grand Panoramas of History — <i>Chung Shu</i>	4
The Liberation of Six Popular Films — <i>Hsin Jung</i>	
Our People Sing of Chairman Hua — <i>Ma Chang-yi</i>	
Learn from Lu Hsun's Tenacity in Fighting and Forging Ahead — <i>Chou Chien-jen</i>	5-6
How Our Revolutionary Operas and Ballets Were Produced — <i>Wan Kung</i>	
His Songs Will Live On — <i>Yang Kuang-man</i>	
National Art Exhibition — <i>Chi Cheng</i>	
The "Wagon Opera Troupe" — <i>Chung Shu</i>	

On Chen Yi's Poems — <i>Cheng Chih-wei</i>	7
The Oil Painting "Chairman Mao with the Anyuan Miners" — <i>Chi Cheng</i>	
"The People's Singer Li Yu-yuan" — <i>Wang Wei-cheng</i>	
Rereading "Gazing from Afar" Steels Our Determination — <i>Mao An-ching</i> and <i>Shao Hua</i>	8
About the Play "Maple Bay" — <i>Chi Ko</i>	
On Reading Comrade Chu Teh's Poems — <i>Hsieh Mien</i>	
Reading Lu Hsun's "Literature of a Revolutionary Period" — <i>Sim Yu-shih</i>	
An Unforgettable Night in Yen-an — <i>Huang Kang</i>	
My Recollection of the Production and First Performances of "The White-Haired Girl" — <i>Chang Keng</i>	
Two Anthologies of Poems by Taching Workers — <i>Wu Chao-chiang</i>	
In Praise of the Taching Spirit — <i>Yang Tung-mei</i>	10
A Grand Display of Revolutionary Art — <i>Li Shu-sheng</i> and <i>Shao Tachen</i>	
Woodcuts in China's Old Liberated Areas — <i>Hua Hsia</i>	
Restudying Chairman Mao's "Letter Concerning the Study of <i>The Dream of the Red Chamber</i> " — <i>Li Hsi-fan</i>	11
Reading Tung Pi-wu's Poems — <i>Niu Li-chih</i>	
Some Outstanding Sculptures — <i>Fu Tien-chou</i>	
The Film "Oh, My Motherland!" — <i>Su Yuan</i>	
Lu Hsun's Friendship with Wei Su-yuan — <i>Tu Yi-pai</i>	12
PLA Art Exhibition — <i>Hung Lu</i>	
Ma Ko and His Music — <i>Li Ling</i>	
REVOLUTIONARY RELICS	
A Blanket in the Military Museum — <i>Lin Chih-chang</i>	4
LITERARY CRITICISM	
An Out-and-Out Old-Time Capitulationist — <i>Jen Ping</i>	1
A Grave Struggle Around the Film "The Pioneers" — <i>Tu Shu-ying</i> , <i>Chu Ping</i> and <i>Yang Chih-chieh</i>	
Chiang Ching, the Political Pickpocket	2
An Exposure of Chiang Ching	
The Struggle Around the Film About Premier Chou En-lai	3
Chiang Ching's Treachery in the Criticism of "Water Margin" — <i>Chung Ya-erb</i>	5-6
The "Gang of Four's" Revisionist Line in Literature and Art — <i>Hua Wen-ying</i>	7
The Truth Behind the "Gang of Four's" Criticism of the Confucians and Glorification of the Legalists — <i>Shih Kao</i>	

The "Gang of Four's" Reactionary Approach to Our Cultural Heritage — <i>Liu Ming-chiu</i>	8
CULTURAL EXCHANGE	7, 9 and 11
CHRONICLE	1-12
PLATES	
From "The Pioneers"	1
Chairman Mao with Chairman Hua (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Liu Wen-hsi</i>	2
The Red Sun Shines Over Tiger-Head Hill (woodcut) — <i>Wang Chun</i>	
Working Hard to Transform the Land (gouache) — <i>Liu Teh-yun</i>	
Leading Water Uphill (oil painting) — <i>Chang Shih-pei</i>	
Old and Young Study Together (woodcut) — <i>Wu Kao-wei</i> and <i>Kuo Yen-tse</i>	
Comrade Chou En-lai, Great Proletarian Revolutionary (sculpture) — <i>Tung Tzu-yi</i> and <i>Yang Shu-ching</i>	3
We'll Always Think of Premier Chou (woodcut) — <i>Yang Hsien-jang</i>	
Peasant Paintings	
Our Great Leader and His Close Comrades-in-Arms (sculpture) — <i>Chou Chih-hai</i> , <i>Chen Kuei-lun</i> , <i>Yu Sung</i> , <i>Pan Hsi-jou</i> , <i>Fu Tien-chou</i> and <i>Cheng Yun-hsien</i>	4
Chairman Mao Reascending Chingkangshan (woodcut) — <i>Ma Chen-sheng</i> and <i>Chu Li-tsun</i>	
Art and Crafts	
Lu Hsun with Young Writers and Artists (woodcut) — <i>Chao Jui-chun</i> and <i>Wu Yung-liang</i>	5-6
National Art Exhibition	
Chairman Mao with the Anyuan Miners (oil painting) — <i>Hou Yi-min</i>	7
Chairman Hua's Concern Warms Ten Thousand Households (charcoal) — <i>Kuo Huai-jen</i>	
Chen Yi Battling on the Lohsiao Mountains (oil painting) — <i>Chiu Jui-min</i> , <i>Sung Jen</i> and <i>Hsiao Feng</i>	
The People's Singer Li Yu-yuan (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Han Kuo-chen</i>	
Spring in the Yen-an Date Orchard (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Fang Chi-chung</i>	
Loushan Pass (oil painting) — <i>Shen Yao-yi</i>	8
We Sing of Chairman Hua (woodblock print) — <i>Chiang Tieb-feng</i>	
Mountain Flowers in Full Bloom (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Ho Chun-yang</i> and <i>Sun Chi-feng</i>	
A Little Eighth Route Army Soldier (lithograph) — <i>Sun Tzu-hsi</i>	

This Auntie Is Fine (woodcut) — <i>Huang Hui-yi and Mo Ko-chieh</i>	8
Chairman Mao (sculpture) — <i>Sun Hsin-chou</i>	9
Chairman Mao in His Study (woodcut) — <i>Chang Chiang</i>	
Aiwan Pavilion (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Li Ko-jan</i>	
Wang Chin-hsi, Hero of Taching Oilfield (woodcut) — <i>Chao Tsung-Isao</i>	
Our Mountains Transformed (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Teng Yao-ping</i>	
Works from the Art Exhibition Commemorating the 35th Anniversary of the Publication of Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art"	10
A Scene on the Lichiang River (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Pai Hsueh-shih</i>	11
South of the Yangtse (traditional Chinese painting) — <i>Chien Sung-yen</i>	
Comrade Tung Pi-wu (oil painting)	
Sculptures	
Works from the PLA 50th Anniversary Art Exhibition	12



The Old Peasant Revolutionary (woodcut) by Cheng Tso-liang



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2929 - 24TH ST. • SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94110  
415-282-2994

San Francisco • New York • Chicago

# 中国文学

英文月刊1977年第12期

本刊代号2—916