

CHINESE LITERATURE



1978 3

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Hsiao Yu-hsuan

The Girl Warehouse Keeper

"While there are no advantages for you in this job, there are three disadvantages," Liu Lan, the newcomer, was warned by the ex-warehouseman.

"So what's the first?" she inquired.

"The young men of the furnace-repairing team are rather difficult to handle, and your father's their head."

"And the second?"

"The electricians' team never give back any leftover materials or order what they require. Their leader happens to be your fiancé."

"The third?"

"Well, please excuse my frankness. You're as honest as they come and that's no good for this job."

Liu Lan smiled. "You don't mean I should learn to lie!"

"Yes. Sometimes that's more important than being honest."

He stood up and heaved a sigh. As he left he said to her with a smile, "I hope everything will be O.K."

Alone in the large two-storeyed warehouse Liu Lan's dark eyes

swept over all the racks and stands and even gazed up at the skylight. She was thrilled.

She was a bench worker in the repair team. A heap of rubbish caught her attention one day when she was passing by the river. Finding a rod she poked and turned over the heap, uncovering gloves, batteries, ropes, nails and other scrap. Indignantly she salvaged what she could and took the things in a bundle to the director.

He was very upset. "Yes. There are a lot of wasteful people in our factory," he sighed, looking keenly at Liu Lan as if to size her up.

Bewildered and self-conscious she lowered her head.

"You've done a good job, Liu Lan," she heard him say.

As she retreated, the director smiled contentedly and said half to himself and half to the supplies' section chief behind him:

"I've been on the look-out for a warehouse keeper, and here she's popped up by herself." Turning around, he asked, "What do you think of her?"

Taken aback, the supplies' section chief shook his head and said hesitantly, "She's too young and much too honest. . . ."

"A person who values state property will make a good warehouse keeper. And honesty is exactly the quality needed for a warehouse keeper. Let's think it over."

Three days later, Liu Lan was notified that she was to be transferred to the warehouse. Only then did she realize the meaning of the director's penetrating look. Her heart beat wildly at the thought of leaving her old post and at the prospect of her new one. She knew the old warehouse keeper had been no good, but it had never occurred to her that she would replace him.

The young men in her team clustered around to look at the notice.

"Why take our Liu Lan away?" they cried. "Our team will suffer."

"The personnel department certainly knows whom to choose. Don't go, Liu Lan. Wait and see what they do."

"Let's talk to the personnel department. Or go straight to the director."

"Don't talk nonsense," their foreman shouted at the young men. "Haven't you always wanted a new warehouse keeper? Yet now that one of your own team has been chosen, you aren't prepared to let her go. I think the personnel department has made a good choice." But he softened when he saw Liu Lan at her bench deep in thought. After a while he said gently, "Make your own decision, girl."

"Yes. I'll go and have a talk with the director," Liu Lan ran away.

The director quickly stood up when Liu Lan came in and asked her to take a seat.

"Do you hate to part with your tools so much, Liu Lan?" He guessed the reason for her visit at once.

"Yes," she answered truthfully.

"But the new post will suit you well too."

"Why?" Liu Lan demanded in a loud voice. "Just because I salvaged that stuff?"

The director laughed. "Not only that," he retorted.

"What if I refuse?"

"You have every right to do that."

"Then I'll stay where I am."

Immediately she regretted what she had said, but to part from her young comrades and be shut up all alone in that warehouse which was as quiet as a graveyard would be very hard for her.

Silence.

After a long time, the director said, "Well, what can I say? Having been a worker myself I know what it is to leave your bench. But what can we do? You're needed elsewhere." He paused. Gazing at Liu Lan he continued solemnly, "Comrade Liu Lan, now we need you to keep an eye on the people's property and to practise economy for the people."

Awkwardly Liu Lan avoided his eyes and bowed her head.

After a while her firm voice rang out, "All right, I'll go."

The director's wrinkled face broke into smiles. Shaking Liu Lan's hand he said kindly, "You mustn't shut yourself up in the warehouse all the time. Get a bit of sunshine too!"

The first thing she did at her new job was to write a notice and post it at the door. This was a symbol that everything was going to be put in order at the warehouse from then on.

Soon voices were heard outside. Liu Lan looked out of her window. Two young men were reading her notice.

"Well, well. A new broom sweeps clean," one joked.

"Look, it says that no one is allowed into the warehouse!" the other scoffed.

Liu Lan smiled to herself. "Comrades, what can I do for you?" she called out.

The older of the two threw an order form through the window, and said, "Open the door and let us in."

They disappeared from sight. Then came knocking on the door.

Liu Lan leaned out of her window and called, "Haven't you read the notice? No one is allowed into the warehouse. Come over here, please."

An argument ensued. The young men insisted on entering while Liu Lan stuck to her guns and said she would give them their supplies at the window. Both sides were adamant and neither would give an inch. Finally the two young men returned to the window and played their trump card, saying:

"You know, we're from the furnace-repairing team."

"I know. So what! Even though you're part of my father's team you still have to obey regulations. Now let's get your things. I guarantee you'll be satisfied."

They grudgingly agreed but argued over everything, claiming every single object was below standard. Silently, Liu Lan ran back and forth helping them to choose. Then they wanted solders for stainless steel.

"How much?" she inquired.

"As much as are ordered on the card."

It said five kilogrammes.

"Will you use all of them today?" she asked cautiously.

The young men were astounded. What a question for a warehouse keeper to ask.

"That's none of your business, Comrade Liu Lan. That's for the team leader or a department head to worry about." The older one was impatient. But he kept calm and pretended to joke.

"Yes. If you were my team leader or department head I'd go down on my knees for you." The younger one's tone was sarcastic.

"You've nothing to lose by telling me," retorted Liu Lan, imitating the older one.

This got his back up, and glaring at her he snapped, "Are you going to give us the solder or not?"

"Don't get me wrong," Liu Lan explained. "I'll give you as much as you need right now. The rest can be stored here better than in your team, can't it?"

Then in a more severe tone she went on, "Stainless steel solders are very expensive. I tell you what, will you ask my father to come here?"

"What? You mean he's got to come here in person to get the supplies. That's crazy!" The older one was furious. "Do you have that much of the stuff or not?"

"Yes, just that amount."

"Then hand it over."

"What if other workshops and teams need it?" Her brows puckered in annoyance, but she still spoke calmly and patiently. Smiling helplessly, she explained, "You misunderstand me. I want my father to come because you don't know how much you're going to use today. Please ask him, otherwise we'll never finish this discussion."

The young men left in a huff.

Liu Lan sighed. Feeling hot, she wiped her forehead with her handkerchief and took off her sweater. Then she fastened her two long plaits on top of her head, put on a blue cap, and rolled up her sleeves as if preparing for another battle.

When her father didn't come, Liu Lan was worried in case she was holding up their work. She hurried over to the furnace-repairing team, but her father was not there. Looking around the boiler room, she found him on top of a boiler.

"Dad. What do you want the stainless steel solder for?" she asked. Her father looked at his daughter in amazement. "Why, to weld the valve."

"Do you need it urgently?"

"Don't you have any in the warehouse? Don't worry. We can wait a day or two," he consoled her.

"There is some. But how much do you need?"

After a quick mental calculation he told her, "Not much. About half a kilogramme will do."

Liu Lan ran off, her frown fading, while her father gazed at her, puzzled.

Passing by the furnace-repairing team she overheard the two young men making inquiries about the whereabouts of her father. She smiled to herself and made for the warehouse.

Some time later the two young men, complacent smiles on their faces, returned with her father. Exchanging a glance with him, Liu Lan smiled confidently.

"Give them half a kilogramme of solder, please," her father said.

"But. . .!" shouted both the young men in astonishment.

Her father turned to them. "What's the matter?" he demanded. "What's bothering you two?"

Choking back her laughter, Liu Lan went to get the solder.

"You don't give a damn whether other people might need some solder too, you just want to take it all away and lock it up in your little box!" chided her father. He handed them the solder his daughter brought out and told them, "Run along now. This is more than enough."

Instead of gaining the upper hand by getting the support of their team leader, the two young men looked at each other despondently and went away defeated.

Old Liu smiled at their retreating figures. "Weren't they cunning, bringing me to back them up?" Giving his daughter a kindly look, he asked, "Have the ball-bearings for the blower arrived yet? It doesn't sound right these days, so I want to change the ball-bearings before anything goes wrong."

"Sorry, we don't have any. What specifications?"

Her father told her and asked her to get them quickly. Liu Lan put it down in her notebook.

3

Liu Lan was the sort of girl who could never sit still. She was always itching to do something. The golden sun lured her. She rose and picked up a coil of mildewed rope and spread it out on a wooden rack outside the warehouse to be dried in the sunshine.

The fresh air filled her with joy. The weeping willows beside the river wore their new green leaves. The whirring of the machines in the workshop sounded like music to her ears, enticing and intoxicating. How she longed to be standing beside her bench working with her old familiar tools.

"A penny for your thoughts, Liu Lan."

She gave a start. The colour of her oval face heightened when she saw her old foreman.

"I feel a bit lost," she told him.

"You'll get used to the change gradually," he consoled her. "Hasn't the order for 50 x 50 cm. angle steel come yet?"

"No."

"Goodness! Your predecessor has really got me into a fix. He told me a few days ago that it would definitely come today. But. . . ." Extremely worried, he frowned deeply.

"The provincial industrial department hasn't given us our allotment of steel material yet. I don't think it can arrive so soon."

"Then I must find a way out. Why did he lie to me if he wasn't expecting any? Otherwise I wouldn't have waited," he complained. Then he warned Liu Lan, "Don't you ever do the same, my girl."

She shared his anxiety knowing him so well.

"Wait a minute." She recalled that when her predecessor had gone over the work with her before he left, she had seen on a card that angle steel had been given out to somebody. "I think maybe I can help you," she told him.

She looked through the cards until she found out that her fiancé had taken away a large amount of the steel. In good spirits, she came out of the warehouse and locked it up, saying, "The electricians' team has got several hundred kilos. Come on. Let's go and see whether they've used it all up."

They went to the electricians' team.

"Oh no! What a nuisance! They've gone and ruined good material," the repair shop foreman exclaimed at the sight of a pile of angle steel by the door. Liu Lan was horrified to see that it was rusting. Just then her fiancé hurried out of the workshop. Glaring at him, Liu Lan was on the point of exploding when her fiancé, sensing trouble, smiled and shouted to his apprentices beside him:

"I told you to move this steel in this morning. Why haven't you done it? Hurry up and take it inside right now!"

"But there's no room inside for all of it." One apprentice, unwittingly, let the cat out of the bag.

Not knowing whether to laugh or shout Liu Lan said, "You should have returned this."

"But... we'll need it later on," argued her fiancé.

"Then come and get it later." She added severely, "You know this is state property."

"We're doing urgent repair work today. There's no time now but I promise to send it back tomorrow," he pleaded.

Liu Lan rolled up her sleeves further and said to her old foreman, "Is this what you need?"

He measured it. "Just the ticket."

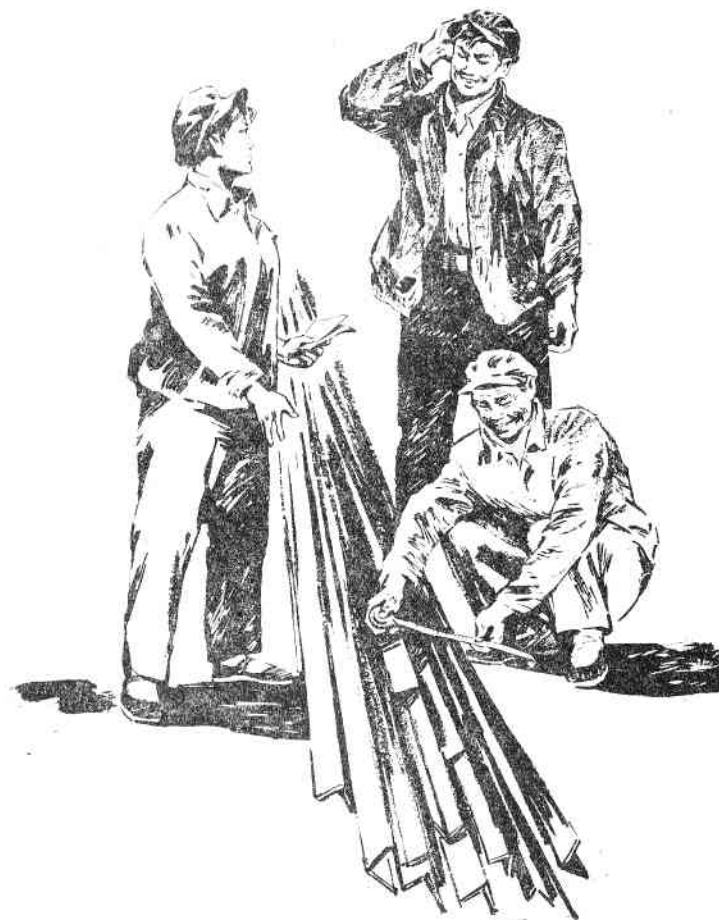
"Then let's give the electricians' team a hand to help them take it away." She turned to ask her fiancé, "Do you have a scale?"

"Thanks for your help." He was all smiles. "Don't bother to weigh the pile. Just make a rough guess."

"How generous of you!" Liu Lan laughed. "But no! Where is the scale? I'll get it."

He took her to their storeroom which was full of tools and equipment, some in large quantities too.

"What a hoarder!" Liu Lan scolded.



"Botheration!" Only then did he realize that he shouldn't have let in such a "dangerous person" to find out all his secrets. He quickly locked the cupboards and put an old straw hat over a package on the floor. Greatly amused, Liu Lan lifted the straw hat.

"What are you hiding?"

"Nothing. Just some scrap." He put the straw hat back.

"Why can't I see it?" She pouted.

Her fiancé sighed and took the hat away.

"Go on then. Have a look."

Liu Lan squatted down and unwrapped a package of ball-bearings. She quickly referred to her notebook. They were exactly the kind her father wanted.

"You've got to hand them back. The furnace-repairing team needs them." Her spirits soared.

"But those are our spare ones. We're saving them for future use."

"You don't need so many." Then her eyes fell on another pile of material.

Everything would be gone if he allowed her to stay here a minute longer, so he quickly pushed the scale outside.

"Come. Come quickly, Liu Lan," he shouted as if it was an emergency.

Without thinking she dashed out.

"What's the matter?"

The door banged behind her.

Liu Lan glared angrily.

"I wanted to get you out, that's all," her fiancé explained teasingly.

"Oh, you!" Liu Lan's feelings at the moment were hard to describe. "You're so selfish. Never think of other people."

"So what? Everybody else stores material," he retorted.

4

Grinning, Liu Lan's old foreman went back to his workshop. The sun shone down on a happy Liu Lan who sang all the way back to her warehouse.

After lunch, she spent most of the afternoon in turning over the rope, oiling the expensive tools and equipment and putting them in cupboards upstairs. She was tired and her head spun after going through all the stores. Their names, specifications and functions were mostly unfamiliar to her.

She felt better after a drink of water. As nobody had come for anything she decided to visit her old team and ask the foreman to tell her what these different things were.

12

Before she had gone far she heard knocking on the warehouse door. She hurried back. "Comrades, I'll get what you want right away."

Noisily, people handed her their cards. The two young men from the furnace-repairing team were there too.

"Don't you know your job? You shouldn't be wandering around."

"You can't go visiting in office hours."

Liu Lan lowered her eyes in embarrassment. Of course she could explain but she didn't want to. She said in a low voice:

"I accept your criticisms, comrades. Please forgive me. Now, give me your cards one by one, please."

The two young men, who had intended to make a scene in revenge for their defeat that morning, were impressed by her frankness and sincerity.

Everybody left with their supplies in half an hour. Before she could heave a sigh of relief a young apprentice from the electricians' team appeared.

"I want fifty metres of electric wire, please."

Liu Lan looked through the order cards and couldn't find their card, so she refused to give him any.

"My team leader sent me for it."

"But don't you see I can't give it to you if you haven't requisitioned it. That's the regulation," she explained patiently like a big sister.

Soon after the little apprentice had left the team leader came himself.

Her fiancé's face was streaked with sweat and grime. At sight of Liu Lan his anxious expression changed immediately to a smile. Respectfully he placed his card on the window-sill.

"May I have fifty metres of electric wire, please?"

Giving him a loving look Liu Lan said, "But you haven't put in an order for it."

"Yes. I forgot to do that. But we don't always know what we're going to need beforehand, do we?"

"You mean there's no point in making plans and filing orders?"

13

"Well!" Unable to find a good excuse he pleaded, "Help me this time, Liu Lan. I need it right now."

"You always need something right away. But once you get it you lock it up in your storeroom."

The smile left his face. "I admit I was wrong. But give it to me just this once, please."

"It's no use arguing. I can't give it to you just because you're my fiancé. According to regulations, nothing can be issued unless it's first been ordered. I can't break the rules." Liu Lan was firm.

"Can't you be more flexible?"

"If I'm flexible to your team, what about the other teams?"

Getting angry he shouted, "Are you going to give it to me or not?"

"And what if I don't?" she replied calmly.

"Then I'll come in to get it myself."

"Don't you dare." Liu Lan jumped up.

Knowing when to stop, her fiancé fell silent, pacing up and down frantically till he hit on a plan.

"Open the door, please. I want to call up the supplies' section chief."

On her guard Liu Lan held the receiver out of the window.

"Go on then. Tell on me."

The voice of the supplies' section chief came through the receiver. Her fiancé told him his problem. But the supplies' section chief also insisted that he should have put in an order beforehand, as if he and Liu Lan had agreed about this in advance. Furious, her fiancé shouted into the receiver, "Have it your way then. But you'll be held responsible if the repair can't be finished today and we fall behind this month's quota." Slamming the receiver down he stalked off in a huff with his apprentice.

"Well!" exclaimed Liu Lan. Since the electric wire was needed so urgently she quickly went to get it, but after searching high and low in the warehouse she still couldn't find any. A breeze drifted in from the window. Liu Lan sweated with anxiety.

Her fiancé never spared himself in his work, and fully aware of that, Liu Lan wanted to help him quickly. But where could she

get that 50 metres of electric wire? It occurred to her that her father might have some, for he was known to pick up every single nail or bit of rusty wire he came across. And everything the furnace-repairing team got from the warehouse was handed over to her father who gave it out like a housekeeper doling out the daily allowance — no one got more or less than he needed. Perhaps he'll have some electric wire, Liu Lan thought. She put her sweater on and was about to leave when he appeared.

"Dad. I was just coming to see you."

"You've been quarrelling." Her father was worried after hearing that his daughter and her fiancé were at loggerheads.

"Me? Why should I want to fight with him?" Liu Lan pouted.

"What was the matter then?"

She explained briefly. "Do you have the electric wire, father?"

"What specifications?"

She told him. He thought for a moment.

"Come. I'll see what I can do for you."

Hopefully, Liu Lan followed him to his team.

"Did we use all the electric wire we got last month?" her father asked the older of the young men.

With a glance at Liu Lan, he quickly replied, "Yes."

"Open the box and let me have a look."

Under her father's severe gaze the young man unwillingly opened the box, exposing a coil of electric wire. Her father gave it to her.

"But we'll need it next week." The young man grabbed at the wire.

"The electricians' team needs it now. Let them have it," said Liu Lan. "I'll get you some more next week."

Only when he saw her father's stern look did the young man let go of the wire. Happily, Liu Lan swung it onto her shoulder and hurried away. She turned back after a moment and asked:

"You wanted ball-bearings badly, dad?"

"Have you got any?" He was delighted.

"Follow me."

She took her father to the electricians' team and stopped at the door. Then she gave the wire to her father and told him with a twinkle, "Wait here, dad, and don't come in till I signal you."

Wondering what she was up to, her father remained outside.

The electricians' team was holding a meeting about how to get some electric wire. The director himself was there.

Her fiancé was holding his head in his hands wondering what to do.

Liu Lan entered and announced, "I've got the electric wire."

Everyone was jubilant. Her fiancé jumped up and asked, "Where is it? Let me fetch it."

"On one condition. You must hand over your store of ball-bearings."

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

Her fiancé was very pleased. It had never occurred to him that the ball-bearings could get him out of this difficulty. He immediately fetched the package from his storeroom. Placing it before Liu Lan, he put one hand on it and asked:

"Now where's the electric wire?"

Keeping a straight face, Liu Lan beckoned to the door and her father came in. Her fiancé snatched the wire from his future father-in-law and dashed towards the machine room.

"Your ball-bearings, dad." Liu Lan pointed to the package on the desk.

A happy smile appeared on his face.

Liu Lan laughed merrily, her big dark eyes sparkling.

"You must have it out with him after work," the director teased her.

Blushing, Liu Lan said, "Let's get rid of all these small storerooms, director."

"You're right. If we want to stop hoarding and waste we should get rid of these small storerooms and keep supplies where they belong."

5

As Liu Lan collected the rope she had laid out to sun, the siren sounded for the end of the shift.

She locked up the warehouse. Three people were waiting for her outside. The director had come to see how the day's work had turned out; her father to take her home; and her fiancé to apologize.

Liu Lan told the director she needed more wooden racks so that the supplies would not rust on the ground, and she needed extra hands for a few days to put the warehouse in order. The director nodded and promised to see to these things the next day. Since her fiancé was there her father left with the director. Softly her fiancé apologized.

The couple disappeared into the distance. Evening clouds gathered over the factory buildings, tall chimneys and the boulevards where the workers strolled after work. It was a beautiful dusk!

Illustrated by Yin Kuo-kuang



Double Happiness

Spring was short that year, so that preparations for the spring ploughing had to be made in a hurry. Old carpenter Ma Teh was so weighed down by work, he hadn't the time even to smoke his pipe. The brigade's two young carpenters had had to go to a nearby water conservancy project, so that he was left to repair all the farm tools by himself. With so much to do, unless he hurried, he would hold up his brigade's ploughing.

Ma Teh was nearly seventy, of medium height, with bushy eyebrows and a flowing grey beard. Though his thin face was wrinkled, he was strong and healthy. Renowned throughout the area for his skill, he had taught more than a dozen apprentices, all of whom became first-rate craftsmen. Of these, Liu Chin-sheng, his first apprentice, was made head of the commune's machinery plant. Ma Teh could have retired long ago and the brigade leaders had spoken to him more than once about it, but he would not listen. Despite failing eyesight, when he put on his glasses, he could still do a better job than most. Ma Teh had hated the "gang of four" and was

overjoyed when this anti-Party clique was smashed. Now he worked with even more zeal and was determined to train another apprentice. He wanted to pass on all his skill and experience to make his contribution to modernizing agriculture.

As luck would have it, Tien Family Village, a neighbouring brigade, sent him Tien Erh-hsi, a tall young man aged about twenty-five years old, to be his apprentice. He seemed quite a smart fellow. As Ma Teh always selected his apprentices with care, he decided to try out Erh-hsi for a period of time. Usually if he found a young man all right, he would hand him his own axe as a sign of his acceptance. Since this was his last apprentice, he was going to demand high standards.

Erh-hsi had done well in the first few days, finishing whatever task he was given and sometimes anticipating what needed to be done without waiting to be asked. Clever and quick-witted, he learned fast. Though still new to the work, he was quite a help to old Ma Teh. After a mass meeting had been called by the brigade to discuss production plans, all the members were asked to think of ways to hasten the spring ploughing and sowing. Erh-hsi became absent-minded and a change came over his work. Ma Teh thought his initial enthusiasm had worn off and was annoyed with him, but because he was a newcomer from a neighbouring brigade, he did not like to give him a lecture. He just carried on with his own work. Erh-hsi had gone from bad to worse the past two days. He spent most of his time peering into books, sketching something on paper, or simply messing about. When he did do some work, his heart wasn't in it.

Old Ma Teh was very stubborn and did not like to repeat himself, so that if young people did not pay attention to what he said, he simply stopped asking them to do anything. They could do what they pleased. He just went on with his own work.

Erh-hsi had been working on his own, making a wooden wheel, when he asked the old man, "I want to make a seeding device and fix it to the plough, so that the ploughing and seeding can be done at the same time. It'll not only save manpower, but the sowing will

be more even than by hand. Do you think it can be done?" He repeated it again, but Ma Teh gave him no answer.

That afternoon when old Ma Teh went home for lunch, his wife sat with him as he ate. She wanted to talk to him about something important, and if she did not seize the chance while he was at his meal, he would be gone as soon as he had finished.

"Last time Hsiu-hsia came back from the commune's farm machinery training class, she told me she's got a boy friend." She watched for his reaction.

Old Ma Teh did not even look up from his food. "Well, she's going on twenty-five. It's about time."

"Is that all you can say?" His wife was annoyed with him. "She's our only daughter. Of course she can find her own boy friend by herself, but we should at least make sure he's the right choice and advise her."

"Go ahead and help her then. I'm busy." Old Ma Teh put down his rice bowl, wiped his beard with one hand and got up from the platform bed.

He was leaving, so she hurriedly continued: "Hsiu-hsia says he's twenty-five this year. He's called Tien from Tien Family Village. Last year when he and Hsiu-hsia were both working at the reservoir he was cited as a model worker. According to what she's told me, he's not bad."

"Good." Ma Teh put on his fur cap. His wife took out a photo from a drawer and handed it to him. "Here, have a look," she told him. "He's quite smart looking."

Ma Teh put on his glasses. Then he frowned. "Is that him?" he exclaimed.

"We'll have to find out about his character. I wonder if he is tall or short; or strong and sturdy?" she rattled on.

"He's fairly tall and quite sturdy, but he can't be our son-in-law!"

"What! You know him?"

"He's been working right beside me for nearly ten days now. No need to inquire about him!" Ma Teh threw the picture on the table, put on his sheepskin coat and went out.

His wife knew that her husband had a new apprentice, but she'd never expected him to be her daughter's boy friend. Why was he so against the fellow? She decided to go and find out for herself. After some thought, she took the battered wooden box in which she kept her combs and set off for the brigade headquarters where carpentry work was done.

As she pushed open the door, she saw her husband was alone, busy chopping a wooden plough-tail. He looked up and casting her a sidelong glance bellowed, "I suppose you've nothing better to do."

"Nothing better to do?" his wife countered. "I've come to get my box repaired." On second thoughts, she decided she might as well be frank with him. "You can see him all day long if you want, so why can't I come take a look? You're like a mule."

"Mule or not, he's got to work!" Ma Teh retorted indignantly. "I asked him to cut out these plough-tails, but he didn't even touch them. Instead he's gone off again. We've got so much work to do and yet all he does is fiddle with this damned little wheel!" He picked up the little wheel, waving it at his wife's face and tossed it on to a scrap heap.

Just then the door was thrust open and in burst Erh-hsi. Taking off his fur hat he threw it on a wood pile. "I've just been to see Hochaitzu Brigade's tractor team, and it's been a great help. Do you think. . . ." He paused, realizing that the old man was neither listening nor taking any notice of him, but working noisily at his plough-tail. He stopped and with an embarrassed smile threw off his white sheepskin coat, picked up an axe and started chopping too.

Ma Teh's wife knew that he must be the new apprentice. She examined him from head to toe. When Erh-hsi turned round she stepped back a little but kept her eyes glued on him, her box in her arms. At first, the boy didn't pay any attention, but soon he became aware of her and stopped chopping to ask with a smile, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Oh, yes," she hastily handed him her wooden box. "Can you repair this for me?"

"Can't you see we are very busy at the moment?" Old Ma Teh shouted at his wife. "Take the box home and chop it up for firewood!"

"Burn it?" she cried. "No. I want to put my needles and thread in it."



"The box does look very old," Erh-hsi joined in, smiling as he glanced at the box. "Why don't you give it to me, and I'll make you a new one."

"What do you want it for?"

"I'm looking for a small box to fix it to that wheel. . . ." He suddenly realized that the wheel had disappeared. Working on the wheel, he had had to miss his lunch. He looked anxiously round the room until he finally discovered it on the heap of shavings and scraps. "Who threw it there?" he cried, running over to pick it up. "It might have been burned with the scraps." Putting the wheel on the ground, he took up the battered box and measured it against the wheel. "It's just what I need," he told the old woman. "I'll use the wood to make a model of a seeder and then I'll make you a new box. I promise you." With a crack, he broke the box into pieces, while the old lady gaped in amazement. Though the box was old, she had had it for more than forty years. Old Ma Teh had made it for her when they got married. But since her daughter's boy friend wanted it, she could hardly refuse to let him have it. "If you need it," she told him, "you can have it. But mind you don't waste it."

Though she'd lost her box, she felt pleased that the lad was tall and strong. And she admired his gift of the gab, his boldness and directness. My daughter knows what she's doing, she thought. But what about his family? "Are you from Tien Family Village?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"How many are there in your family?"

"Come here and help me with this wood!" Old Ma Teh called to the young man in an angry tone. He was furious with his wife.

Erh-hsi ran over and helped Ma Teh move two planks. Seeing the old man's expression, he asked: "Do you think we can make this into a double-shared plough?"

"You'd better get rid of all your fancy ideas," Old Ma Teh snapped. "You don't even know how to make a single-shared one yet. Come on, give me a hand with this wood."

Erh-hsi smiled and said no more. Seeing her husband so brusque with him, his wife complained, "No need to be so bad-tempered! Can't you talk to him nicely? Why pull such a long face? . . ." Before she had finished, there was a crash. Erh-hsi, as he had turned round, had knocked Ma Teh's pipe off the bench and the crimson agate mouthpiece smashed into two.

"*Aiya*, you're so careless." Ma Teh picked up the broken mouthpiece, his chin quivering. It was a present from his first apprentice Liu Chin-sheng twenty years ago when he had finished his apprenticeship, and now his last apprentice had broken it. He cursed silently: "A careless young fool like you isn't good enough to be my son-in-law. I won't even accept you as my apprentice!" He cast a glance at Erh-hsi who looked very upset, and then glared at his wife. "You still here making trouble? Get out!" Angrily he thought, "I won't take him as my apprentice. Tomorrow, when I go to the commune to fetch timber, I'll send a message to his brigade leader to take him back." The broken pipe in his hands had decided him.

3

Old Ma Teh didn't leave the brigade office until dusk. Erh-hsi tidied up the room before he turned to his model again. He sawed up the box to make a square funnel and tried to fit it on the little wooden wheel. But, after a few times, he still couldn't do it. He thumbed through a manual of modern agricultural machines and tried again, but there was always something wrong. He threw the parts down in disgust and sighed: "If only the old man would help me. But he just ignores me. Thinks I'm fiddling around for fun. But the sowing will begin soon, so I've got to get this done now. I'll go and ask my brother and see if he can help me."

As Erh-hsi was locking the door, he remembered that Ma Teh had told him they had to fetch some timber from the commune the next day. It would save them time if he brought the wood back early the next morning on his way back from his brother's. . . . He went to the brigade stable, harnessed the donkey cart and drove off.

By the time he arrived at the commune it was nearly midnight. His twin brother, Ta-hsi, was attending the farm machinery training class. He was taken aback when he saw Erh-hsi, his nose and cheeks crimson with cold and covered in frost.

"What brings you here so late at night?" He gazed into Erh-hsi's eyes questioningly.

"I need your advice." Putting the small wooden wheel and funnel and his diagrams on the table, Erh-hsi took off his coat and sat down beside his brother. "I want to make a seeding device to attach to the plough so that we can sow maize and inter-plant beans. I've been puzzling over it for days, but something keeps going wrong. I thought you could perhaps help me." He spread out the diagrams.

"It's quite a good idea!" Ta-hsi craned his neck and began to study the drawings.

"Why aren't you in bed, Tien Ta-hsi? You can't digest that in one gulp, you know. You'll be worn out, burning the midnight oil." The two young men looked up to greet a robust unshaved man in grimy overalls who'd just come in.

"Working late again, Liu?" Ta-hsi asked, smiling to his director.

"Two pumps were sent here before dark and I've been repairing them. They're needed for irrigation and there's no time to lose." He glanced at Erh-hsi and asked, "Who is. . .?"

"My brother, Erh-hsi," answered Ta-hsi.

"Yes? You look alike, same build too. . . ." Liu scrutinized them.

"We're twins." Erh-hsi told him with a smile.

"Ah, that's it! Both of you look full of beans. When one of you has a girl friend, careful she doesn't mistake one for the other." Liu burst out laughing. He asked Erh-hsi, "What are you doing in the brigade?"

"Learning carpentry from Old Ma," was the answer.

"Old Ma? That makes us fellow apprentices to the same master." Warmly he patted the young man on the shoulder. He was none other than Ma Teh's first apprentice — Liu Chin-sheng! When he noticed the diagrams on the table he asked with a smile, "What are you two hatching?"

"I want to make a seeding device but I can't get it right. Old Ma was so busy making ploughs, he ignored me when I asked him for help. So here I am!"

"*Aiya!* Trying to do the job of our farm machinery plant and you haven't even finished your apprenticeship yet! You've plenty of guts!" Liu chuckled. "It seems our old master is still rather hot-tempered. Well, I'll try and give you a hand." He pulled over the diagram sheets.

"Erh-hsi has another idea," Ta-hsi said.

"What?" Liu looked at him.

"I haven't got it all worked out myself," Erh-hsi explained. "I just wonder if we can't improve the plough by adding another share, to sow two furrows at the same time. . . ."

"Marvellous idea! Let's try." Liu nodded approvingly and then pointed at the diagrams. "Come on, let's look at these first."

Their heads bent over the drawings, they were silhouetted against the paper windowpane. Outside in the cold night, the chugging of pumps was audible in the distance; the commune members were irrigating the fields.

By the first cock-crow they had finished with the last diagram and under Liu's guidance a small model of the double-shared plough with an automatic seeder had been produced. It sat on the table, looking like a beautiful toy.

"Well, that's done. Now let's get some sleep. We'll make a pair of them for trial after daybreak. Erh-hsi, you and Old Ma can make the wooden parts while we'll do the metal work. If it succeeds we'll make more of them. So let's snatch some sleep. I still have to modify this diagram a little." Liu picked up one of the sheets and switched off the light before he went out.

Erh-hsi switched the light on again. "You get some sleep," he told his brother. "I'm going to the commune office to load the cart with the timber I've to take back. I want to get back quickly to ask our brigade leader to find me some boards for the sowing box."

He threw his coat over his shoulders and picked up his cap. Ta-hsi stopped him, saying, "Why the hurry? Have some sleep first.

Liu's taken away one of the diagrams and you can't start work without the measurements on that sheet." He paused and then went on, "As for the boards you need, where would the brigade leader get them just like that? Look, how about if I drive home and get that wood I put aside for making a pair of chests. Try that first. I'll be back before they start work at the commune office and then you can load them with the timber."

Ta-hsi put on his cap and started off, but Erh-hsi caught up with him and wrapped his coat round his shoulders. "Fine, but mind you come back soon. I can't sleep, so I'll go now to the commune office and collect the timber."

4

Old Ma Teh got up at the crack of dawn. He wanted to go to the commune and bring the timber back early so as not to waste time during the day. Picking up his pipe with the broken mouthpiece and his tobacco pouch he went out. When he came to the brigade office he saw that the door was locked. Puzzled, he fished out the key and unlocked the door. Peeping into the small inner room, he found that Erh-hsi's quilt remained untouched. The young rascal must have gone home. Good riddance! It would save him the trouble of firing him. But when he went to the stable for the cart, the stockman told him that Erh-hsi had taken it to the commune for timber the previous night.

"He fetch the timber? What the hell does he know about selecting the right kind! He's just a damn nuisance." Old Ma cursed inwardly, worried that Erh-hsi would bring back some useless timber. He went out of the stable and headed straight for the road leading to the commune.

Though nearing seventy the old man strode briskly, so that by the time it was daylight, he had reached the commune. He had just turned into a lane when Ta-hsi drove past him with a cartload of boards. Despite his poor eyesight, he recognized the donkey and cart as well as the coat. What luck catching up with him here,

thought the old man. Clearing his throat, he shouted: "Hey! Wait a minute!"

Ta-hsi looked back over his shoulder and saw an old man, eyebrows and beard covered with frost. Bewildered, he reined in the donkey. Ma Teh came towards him with an expression of disapproval. Patting the boards on the cart he asked: "Where are you taking these?"

"Palipu Village."

"What for?"

"I got them to make chests."

Ma Teh's temper flared up at this. So he'd got it all figured out. Busy making chests even though his girl friend hadn't yet agreed to be his fiancée. "Is that why you ran off home last night?" he asked.

Ta-hsi looked the old man up and down, wondering what on earth he was babbling about. Seeing the sun rising he thought that he should hurry back to his brother. With an apologetic smile, he said, "If you don't mind, let's chat about it some other time. I've got to hurry to the commune office for some timber."

He gave the donkey a pat on its flanks, and it went off at a trot.

Old Ma Teh was furious. Brandishing his pipe he shouted, "Hey! Wait for me!" But the animal went even faster. "All right, then I'll follow you." He ran after the cart.

Erh-hsi was not there when Ta-hsi drove the cart into the commune's timber-yard. He must have picked out the timber and gone to sleep, Ta-hsi thought and tethered the donkey to a birch tree. He was about to go and look for his brother, when he turned round and saw Old Ma in hot pursuit shouting, "You can't run away from me!"

What the hell was he up to? Ta-hsi was completely bewildered. "What on earth do you want, old man?"

"Old man?" Doesn't even call me Old Ma! He rushed over and grabbing the halter yelled, "What do I want? The cart! Look, the poor beast's exhausted. Are you planning on some donkey meat or what? Everything's going so well this year and everyone's working hard day and night. Except you, you're only concerned with your own affairs. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

When Ta-hsi realized that the old man wanted the cart, he was a little annoyed at being lectured. "Why get so worked up, old man? Calm down. If it's the cart you want, that's all right by me, but you'll have to wait. I can't give it to you just like that. After all I don't even know you..."

"What? Go on, I dare you to say that again!" Ma Teh cut him short, too furious to listen. "All right! So you don't know me. But I certainly know you. You pretend you don't know my name and I have no wish to acknowledge you as my apprentice. Just go on back to your Tien Family Village and I'll go back to my Palipu Village." He untied the rope and began to throw the boards on to the ground. "So you wanted the carpenters in Palipu to make chests for you, eh? You're crazy! We work only for socialism..."

Only then did it dawn on Ta-hsi that this hot-tempered old man was none other than Erh-hsi's master and his own future father-in-law. He didn't know what to do. Wringing his hands, he stammered: "So you're... er, please try not to get angry... er, listen to me..."

"No!" Another board came banging down.

Just at that moment Liu Chin-sheng and Erh-hsi arrived on the scene. Ta-hsi rushed over, "Quick! Old Ma has mistaken me for Erh-hsi."

They went up to the angry old man and called, "Master!"

"I'm not your master!" When Ma Teh swung round he was flabbergasted. Standing before him was Liu Chin-sheng, his first apprentice, all smiles. On either side of him were two young men as like as two peas. Erh-hsi introduced his twin brother.

Knowing of the relationship between Ta-hsi and Hsiu-hsia, Liu said with a smile, "Old Ma, you mustn't mix up these two brothers, you know! Come over here and let's smoke while you rest your feet a bit." He took the old man over to a seat behind a pile of wood. Erh-hsi went over to them too. Producing from his pocket a pipe engraved with flower patterns and with a plastic mouthpiece, he offered it to the old man. "Don't use that pipe I broke. I've bought you a new one."



Ma Teh glanced at the pipe and said, "I'm not used to that kind!"

Liu laughed and told Erh-hsi, "You'd better get a move on loading the timber."

As they put the boards back in the cart, Ta-hsi told his brother, "The old man mistook me for you and gave me an awful scolding."

"I've also been mistaken for you these past two days," Erh-hsi said. "Yesterday Aunt Ma came specially to look me over."

"Erh-hsi," Ta-hsi changed the subject. "Old Ma seems to have a very bad impression of you."

"He was very good to me first, but then got upset when I started to design the seeder. He thought I was wasting time," Erh-hsi ex-

plained. "He's got a heart of gold despite his bad temper. He gives all he's got working for the brigade...."

When they had loaded the boards, they added the timber Erh-hsi had gathered. Liu and Ma Teh were still talking.

"We'd better hurry and get back," Erh-hsi called.

"All right! Let's go." Ma Teh knocked out his pipe and stood up. He took the diagram sheets from Liu, folded them and put them in his pocket. "About Hsiu-hsia and that lad, if you think it's a good thing, then it's settled," Old Ma said as they walked towards the cart. "Erh-hsi did tell me about his idea, but I didn't like his fooling around. I thought he'd make a mess of it. Do you really think it will work?" He always respected the opinion of his first apprentice.

"I think so," Liu replied promptly. "Send Erh-hsi to me if anything goes wrong."

5

The compound of the brigade office was crowded with people; they were as eager to see the new device as people waiting for a new bride. They stood in a circle around Ma Teh, Liu and the twins who were putting together the two ploughs with the automatic seeding device. The brigade leader shouted to the people crowding round, "Stand back and make room, please!" Then he scolded children squeezing in and out of the legs of the adults, "Off you go and play somewhere else." But the people took no notice of him and just remained where they were, talking to each other.

When Ma Teh had helped Ta-hsi put one of the ploughs together, he went over to Erh-hsi who was fixing the plough-tail. "Here, let me do it."

"No, let me do it. You sit down there and have a smoke." Erh-hsi looked up at Ma Teh and taking out the flowered pipe with the plastic mouthpiece offered it to the old man.

"All right, I will." He took the pipe and then gave his own axe with its shining blade to his apprentice. "Here, take this."

The brigade leader noticed this and went over to him. "It seems that Erh-hsi has won your approval at last."

Ma Teh filled his pipe and between puffs said: "Yes, he's O.K."

His wife, who had just elbowed her way over, heard this and chimed in: "I always said he was a match for our daughter but it's taken you all this time to agree!"

"What are you going on about?" Old Ma dragged his wife out of the crowd. In a low voice he said, "Erh-hsi's my apprentice but that one over there is your future son-in-law."

"What? Isn't he the same person? Let me go and have a look."

"It's not necessary. They are as like as two peas. Off you go home and kill two hens for dinner."

"If I waited for you to tell me what to do, nothing would ever get done. I've already cooked them." The old woman pushed her

way through the crowd to have a good look at her future son-in-law.

At noon the two double-shared ploughs with automatic seeders were taken to the field. The brigade leader himself brought two strong oxen to pull them. Ta-hsi and Erh-hsi drove a plough each, holding red-tasselled whips in their hands.

"Stand back, stand back!" The brigade leader waved to the crowd. "Now, let's see how they work!"

As the whips cracked crisply in the air the ploughs moved behind the animals. Four straight furrows appeared as the maize and soybeans were evenly sown.

Illustrated by Hsu Hsi

The Young Man and His "Apprentice"

Deep in the orchard lay a still pond. Its water, pumped and piped up from a river that skirted the edge of a little wood, irrigated all the orchard's thirty *mu* of land. Thick with algae, its surface shimmered with a dark green colour, giving the hut beside it a green tinge too.

Two orchard keepers lodged in the hut, a young man and an elder one in his fifties. The latter was bearded and had a drowsy look as if suffering from a lack of sleep. Fond of smoking, he took to sitting on a slab in front of the hut, puffing on his water pipe.

His daughter, who had settled down in the village after finishing senior middle school, sent him three meals a day in an earthen pot. Clever and considerate, she often helped by washing his clothes in the pond while the old man ate. She also washed his young assistant's jacket. Sometimes she criticized her father for being lazy and selfish, unlike his hard-working partner who only thought of doing his best for the people. The old man called him "Little Fool", but his daughter often went to see the youth at work in the orchard.

With the advent of spring, clumps of wild date trees awakened by warm breeze began to put out new leaves. It was a wonderful sight to see nature awakening.

Beside a tree the young man, half kneeling, his sleeves rolled well up, was cutting open a bud with great care, a piece of aspen bark clenched in his teeth. He looked like a surgeon performing an operation!

The old man was indifferent to all this but he liked his young assistant because he had been such a hard worker ever since his arrival the previous autumn. However, he thought he was somewhat naive. Once when the fruit trees were infected with insects, the young man became too worried to eat, and worked hard spraying them with insecticide. Come time to water the trees he worked day and night refusing to sleep though his eyes were bloodshot. Another thing the old man did not like was his rather rigid attitude towards certain things. For instance, he would not allow anybody to take home the dead branches or twigs after pruning. Instead, he gathered and sent them to the brigade's stockmen for firewood. And he had a thing about grafting. It was very easy to buy a few saplings and plant them in the orchard. But the young man went to all the trouble of grafting the fruit trees himself, insisting they could save some money for the brigade by using what was at hand. He argued, moreover, that in this way he could master another skill. He even went a long way to get some shoots. Though working all day in the orchard, he would browse over his books till late at night.

"I say, little fool," the old man once said to him, "do you really think that that other strain of honey-date will graft well on our wild date tree?"

"No harm in trying," the young man replied smilingly.

"A real little fool, that's what you are." Suddenly in the sunshine he noticed the soft down on the youth's upper lip. He was twenty-five now, the old man realized. "It's about time he had a wife," he said to himself. He thought that if he introduced him to a girl and everything went well, the bride might make him a few pairs of shoes, the customary gift for the matchmaker.

One day the old man at last talked him into going to Hsifang Village to meet a girl.

When they arrived, the old man went first to fetch the girl while the young man waited under a big willow tree at the entrance to the village. The old man was stopped in the street by the brigade leader of Hsifang who asked him to help prune their new orchard since no one around knew how to do it. Chuckling and counting on his fingers the old man said, "You know, someone once offered me five yuan a day for that. I didn't feel like doing it. But since we are neighbours, I'll lend you a hand."

The old man was asking for a lot of money, the brigade leader thought.

"Well . . . suppose you just tell us how to do it, all right?"

The old man's face darkened. "Sorry," he said, "I'm actually extremely busy." He took his leave, sniggering.

The young man, having waited for quite a long time, strolled towards the village and reached a canal, beside which was an orchard. He wondered what strains the fruit trees were and thought he could learn a thing or two, since orchards were his job. He entered it without thinking what he was doing.

The trees were growing wild. "Why don't they prune them?" he thought to himself. "They badly need it." He found a man, who happened to be the brigade leader, and volunteered to help. Immediately several youngsters were rounded up to be his "apprentices". While working, he patiently explained what he was doing. Unwanted twigs and branches fell to the ground as the trees became trim and neat.

All of a sudden a voice bawled at him, "What a fool! You've messed everything up!"

"It'll be all right once I've cut away this twig." Before he could finish he sensed that something was wrong. He turned round and saw the old man's angry face.

"She waited for you for two hours! What the hell do you think you're doing!"

Only then did the young man remember why he had come to the

village. But it was too late. The sun was already setting behind the trees.

When the apricots were turning orange, the old man tried once more to introduce his assistant to another girl. When the girl arrived he asked his daughter to fetch the young man and bring him to the hut. She went and found him.

"Pick some good apricots," the old man urged, giving him a bag. "She's waiting for you in the hut. You'd better hurry up." The young man smiled in embarrassment.

"Would you mind helping me a bit?" he asked the old man's daughter. "Please go to the northern end and see if there are any sparrows pecking at the ripe apricots. And then go to the southern end, and keep an eye out for those naughty kids who try to pinch fruit. The fruit belongs to the brigade and not a single one should be damaged."

The old man overheard this. After introducing the young people, he went out to his daughter, grumbling again about his assistant's foolishness. But the girl retorted, perched high up on a tree, "But what's wrong with what he said? He's not smart the way you are. You never give a damn about the collective's property."

The old man, silenced by her sharp words, just scratched his head. After half an hour, he went back to the hut.

To his surprise, the boy was seeing the other girl off! They had almost reached the edge of the wood. He wanted to say a few kind words to them but refrained for fear of intruding. He found it strange that the girl did not have the bag of apricots with her. Then he saw the young man go towards some apricot trees. After a moment, he returned with a few apricots in his hands, saying to the girl, "I almost forgot to ask you to taste our apricots. These are so ripe, the sparrows pecked them down. Have a taste."

What an ass! Seeing all this the old man was furious. The girl whirled round and left without a word. The old man rushed over and let fly, "How can you be so stingy?"

"But the apricots belong to the brigade, don't they?"

"You've gone and put another girl off!"

"So much the better!" the young man said tersely. "I'm not interested in girls who want to take advantage of the collective."

The old man was speechless, staring at the empty bag hanging on a peach tree in front of the hut.

He's a hopeless case, the old man thought and made up his mind not to help again.

"What sort of girls were they?" his daughter chided. "All like you, selfish and short-sighted."



The young man worked happily in the orchard, though he still had no girl friend. However, his experiment was a success. The grafted date trees began to put out new buds.

The old man's daughter came to see them every day. Finally she said shyly to the youth, "Will you take me on as your apprentice?"

He agreed. From then on, he taught her how to select the best buds, how to cut a cleft on a branch and how to use aspen bark for wrapping. When the sun was sinking and dusk was settling over the trees, he would urge her to go home. But each time it was he who went first.

The girl was glad that he was so serious about teaching her. One day she picked a bunch of wild chrysanthemums and brought it to the hut, saying to her father, "You can have these to scent the air."

But she put them by the young man's bedside. The little room was filled with their faint fragrance.

At noon one day the sun was blazing down and the heat was oppressive, but in the orchard it was cool and quiet. In a shady spot by the pond the two young people were sitting together eagerly discussing their plans.

"If we succeed with these wild date trees, we'll go to the other side of the river next year. There's a whole bank of them there. After that we could try those on the west bank. How nice it would be for our country if all those wild trees could bear sweet dates."

The young man's eyes shone with delight at the prospect. The girl gazed at his reflection in the water, listening to his words.

"When I first came," he continued, "I didn't think much of the job. It was only when the fruit had been picked, packed and carried away truck-load after truck-load that I felt I'd done my bit for the country and began to love my work. The more I think about it the more I realize its importance."

"So why does my father think you're a fool?"

"Perhaps I am. But you know, your father's a bit too smart, all he cares about is himself."

"Yes. I suppose that's why the brigade Party branch sent you to work here."

"And so I must work hard and not let them down. And I should try to change your father's attitude too." The young man gazed at the fruit trees and said, "Anyway, I've made up my mind to work here all my life."

"I'll be working here all my life too," the girl blurted out.

The young man's heart beat faster. But immediately he began to doubt her. "That's not true," he said. "You're a girl, and girls are like birds, flitting here and there."

"But this bird will never leave the orchard!"

His heart leapt.

The girl picked up a stone and, throwing it into the pond, ran off.

Understanding her meaning, the young man smiled. The girl was lost to sight for a moment. Then he caught sight of her amid the yellow-blossomed date trees.

The calm surface of the pond was disturbed, forming ripples. . . .

Illustrated by Chao Shib-ying



Red Lotus (traditional Chinese painting) by *Huang Yung-yu*



A Helping Hand

After much pressing, Teh-sheng, well-known for the fine walls he built, had agreed to help build a courtyard wall for Old Seventh. He took up his tools, put a bottle of wine in his pocket and started off. A big flapjack in one hand, he munched as he walked.

By the time he arrived, Old Seventh had gone to town to buy spirits and meat, and no one was at home. Only Fu-kuei the mason was there laying the foundation of the wall in front of the gate. He had already completed half of it, ready for Teh-sheng to build the wall, and then he would plaster it and top it off with tiles.

Teh-sheng and Fu-kuei were good partners. The former, swarthy and short, with big feet and tousled hair, looked a rough fellow. But when he built walls he would fill in all the holes, even if they were no bigger than a walnut, then ram the earth down hard. No one could accuse him of slacking on the job. Fu-kuei on the other hand was tall and lanky, soft-spoken and fair-complexioned. He looked bright and able to get on with people, just like the trowel in his hand which could smooth any rough patch of wall. For over ten years, he had rather dreaded teaming up with Teh-sheng, but of

course their work kept bringing them together. After all, how could a mason and a wall builder be kept apart?

Now, Fu-kuei went on laying the foundation. Pointing at the stones beside him, he said:

"Hey, man, pass me a few stones!"

The stones had been collected by Old Seventh the previous night. His pipe in his mouth, Teh-sheng started handing them over. As he did so, his brows knitted. He pulled the pipe out of his mouth and knocked it on a cart. Swallowing back the words on the tip of his tongue, he spat in disgust and thrust some stones aside. Fu-kuei meanwhile was hard at work. A skilled hand, he laid stones of different shapes in place, filled up the crannies with mortar, then smoothed the surface, from time to time calling to Teh-sheng:

"Pass me a rectangular one."

"A square one, please."

This time, though, when he reached out no stone was forthcoming. He looked up to see Teh-sheng squatting there, smoking his pipe.

"Is this the time to knock off for a smoke?" he demanded.

A rap of the pipe accompanied the retort: "There are no more stones."

Fu-kuei pointed at the pile of stones beside him. "Are you leaving those there to breed more?"

Teh-sheng bounded over to sit on the stones. "These? You can't use them!"

"Why not?"

"These stones belong to the production brigade. Old Seventh stole them from the embankments of our fields."

"Ha!" said Fu-kuei. "Are you so smart you can see a rabbit breathing on the other side of the mountain? Can you make these stones tell you which of them come from the embankments of fields and which from the river-bed?"

Teh-sheng stared at him, banging his pipe hard on a stone.

"Use your eyes, man. Look here!"

All the stones were black on one side, white on the other. Moss grew on one side, clay stuck to the other.

"I see..." Fu-kuei blinked in astonishment. "No wonder people say you can trace the footprints of ants!"

Silence fell. To break it, Fu-kuei urged Teh-sheng to rest and tossed him a rush hassock. Not used to sitting, Teh-sheng found a stump to squat on.

"Look, Old Seventh's standing treat today." Fu-kuei picked up a bottle from the ground. "Let's have a sip to warm up."

Teh-sheng took his own bottle from his pocket. In it was some persimmon wine he had brewed himself which he liked to keep handy as a stimulant. Now he opened the bottle, threw back his head and drank. Instantly his face turned red.

"I'm used to my home-brewed wine," he said.

"How pig-headed you are! We're here to build him a wall, we're not cadging drinks." Fu-kuei tipped the bottle and took another swig of the foaming liquid.

Teh-sheng gave a snort and cast him a scornful glance. A moment later, he said drily: "If it were for drinks, I wouldn't come even if he sent a sedan-chair carried by eight bearers to fetch me."

"Of course, we don't come for wine." Seeing Teh-sheng's dour look, Fu-kuei mopped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Well, men with skills always have calls upon their time. Neighbours should lend each other a helping hand."

Does Old Seventh need help? wondered Teh-sheng as he looked at Old Seventh's living quarters: a tile-roofed and brick-walled house with four rooms, in front of which stood a pigsty, a sheep-fold, a latrine and a woodshed. The rest of the yard was planted with garlic. Outside it lay his private plot, bare since the harvesting of last year's potatoes.

"Why does Old Seventh want to build this wall now?" inquired Teh-sheng.

"He's raised so many chickens and ducks, he says, he needs a wall to keep them from spoiling the crops in his private plot."

"Hmm." Teh-sheng thought to himself: This plot used to be part of one of the brigade's fields. Old Seventh asked to have it switched with his private plot, and when the brigade refused he drove his chickens here to ruin the crops. Finally the brigade agreed to

switch with him. Now, he means to take good care of his own crops.

"Old Seventh's a grabber!" he growled. "He grabs whatever he can from the collective."

"You're right," Fu-kuei agreed. "But never mind. As craftsmen, our job is just to build this wall. Even if we don't get paid for it, we'll be given a good meal."

"You mean we should be crafty men, not craftsmen!" Teh-sheng said scornfully.

Fu-kuei, sipping from his bottle, flushed.

Teh-sheng stood up, set the wooden boards in place, packed earth between them and began to tamp it. Fu-kuei had just lit his pipe, but after a few puffs he put it down. He fetched some stones from the pile at the corner of the house and resumed laying the foundation. "You're always in a hurry," he complained. "Don't even wait till I finish smoking a pipe."

Teh-sheng took off his cotton-padded jacket and rolled up his sleeves, then started tamping the earth with a ram weighing twenty catties. His sinewy shoulders bulged with each blow he struck. Looking at him, Fu-kuei envied his strength and admired the way he was going all out. Just as he was about to compliment him on this, Teh-sheng suddenly stopped, threw his ram on the ground and jumped down. Hands behind his back, he began to pace out Old Seventh's courtyard and then the private plot. This done, he squatted down to make a calculation with a broken tile on the ground. Then, jumping up abruptly, he raced to the wall he had rammed and shoved it with his shoulder. The wall toppled.

"Root up the foundation!" he turned to shout to Fu-kuei.

"Why? Are you mad?"

"No. It's you who's got muddle-headed," retorted Teh-sheng. "Where did you lay the foundation? You've taken in one-third of this private plot."

"It's Old Seventh who marked the place. After all, this is *his* plot."

"His?" Teh-sheng flushed with anger. "Private plots belong to the brigade. He has the right to till it, but he doesn't own it. If a wall is built, all the land inside will count as his."



Not venturing to dispute this, Fu-kuei sheepishly walked over and made him sit down, saying: "All right, but why snap at me?"

"I know now why he insisted on switching his private plot."

"You've seen through him. But I'd like to tell you something."

"What is it?"

"I feel I ought to tell you, but I'm afraid you'll flare up."

"Out with it, man."

"Promise me you won't lose your temper?"

"What is it, for goodness' sake?"

"To be frank, I was here when Old Seventh marked the place. He told me that he was enclosing part of this plot so that he can keep it for twenty or thirty years. Because the brigade can't take the land in a commune member's courtyard. This way, he'll be able to grow whatever he likes here. . . . He also asked me not to let on about this."

Teh-sheng flew into a rage. "That won't do," he said decisively. "This is the capitalist way! It's against the collective's interests."

Fu-kuei craned round to make sure there was no one near them, then said: "I was afraid you'd flare up — and you have!"

"How can I help it? If everyone was like you, there would be no socialism." Teh-sheng sprang up to kick down the pole on which Fu-kuei had fastened the thread marking the foundation, and trampled on it. But the pole was not broken. He jumped on it several times; still the pole remained intact. In a fury, he picked up a big stone and smashed the pole into three pieces. Then, with his big feet, he kicked the foundation apart. This drove Fu-kuei frantic. He cried: "You've done me out of a drink!"

"Done you out of a drink?" Teh-sheng bellowed. "I've done the brigade a good turn!"

Unable to rebut him, Fu-kuei walked over and said coaxingly: "My dear fellow, I know Old Seventh's in the wrong, but he's gone to buy wine and meat for us. How can we disappoint him? We came to help him out."

"Help him out? We must first help him get his thinking straight! As commune members, how can we stand doing nothing when someone's undermining the commune?" Teh-sheng tossed a mattock to Fu-kuei.

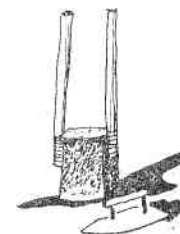
Very soon they had dug a new base for the wall. Fu-kuei relaid the foundation, while Teh-sheng set to work ramming earth again. He worked with a will, tamping with all his might. And as his spirits rose, he pulled out his bottle to take a few more swigs.

Fu-kuei, still in the dumps, muttered, "What am I going to say when Old Seventh gets back? He's bound to bawl me out."

"Don't worry, man!" Teh-sheng brought down his ram. "We'll tell the team leader about it presently and suggest he calls a meeting this evening to talk the matter over. Let the commune members judge who is wrong. If it's Old Seventh, he must make a self-criticism; if it's you, you must criticize yourself."

Fu-kuei felt as stunned by this as if the ram had slammed down on his heart.

Illustrated by Chao Shib-ying



Comedy at the Fish Market

Spring, the season to net huge grey crabs and plump prawns. As dusk closed in on Humenyu Harbour, half the sky was crimson with sunset clouds, the sea was an expanse of golden waves, and a forest of masts lined the shore now crowded with people. Amidst the cheerful hubbub of laughter, songs and chanties, crates and crates of crabs and prawns made their way into the Humenyu Branch of the Marine Products Company — known locally as the fish market.

It was April, one day before the Clear and Bright Festival which fell on the 5th. In the goods yard outside the fish market the day's catch was being sorted. Trucks, carts and boats loaded with fresh, cured and dried sea products took off one by one as night closed in.

Amid the hubbub a telephone rang shrilly. Shen Chiang, the accountant, looked up from the figures he was scribbling and grabbed it.

"Hello, this is the fish market. Who's calling? Hsi Hsiao-chun is it? Hold the line please."

Shen winked mysteriously at Wei, the young cashier by his side,

and covered the receiver with one hand. "Guess who's on long-distance? Fiancée of our Sea-skimmer wants him."

"How can you possibly find him?"

Shen winked again. "I can't — I'll stand in for him!" He pointed at his own nose and made a face. Clearing his throat slightly, he assumed a serious expression and spoke into the telephone in a husky imitation of Yu Fei, manager of the fish market.

"Hello, Yu Fei speaking. Who's that?"

"Hey, Sea-skimmer, why aren't you at sea today?" a crisp, pleasant voice teased.

"If you really want to know, a moment ago I was out on the sea, and if you'd called a moment later I'd have been gone again."

"I struck luck then."

"Well, it's more than luck. Fate's web is spun: we're destined to be one!"

"Say, who're you anyway, talking such nonsense?" came the suspicious demand.

Shen stuck out his tongue, then keeping a straight face went on, "You've no need to be suspicious. Of course I'm Yu Fei. How I long to fly to your side to let you see me for yourself!"

Silence. She seemed to be analysing this.

"I say, Hsiao-chun, what's up? Speak up, will you?"

"Nothing very important. I'm coming down your way tomorrow for some goods. I'll be there by ten. Can you postpone your sea-skimming and wait for me?"

"Of course I can. Certainly!"

"I can't stay very long. Have to get back as soon as the goods are loaded."

"No problem at all. I assure you I'll have his wings tied."

"What's that you're saying?"

"I said . . . I'll be seeing you."

Shen Chiang dropped the telephone and wiped his brows, then made another face. "Playing that role sure isn't easy. I nearly got caught out." He turned quickly back to busy himself with his figures, oblivious to the roar of laughter and admiring comments that greeted his performance.

The news of Hsiao-chun's coming visit galvanized Huang Yu-hsiang, the tally clerk.

As he watched the scales, he sang out the figures: "First class big 'uns (the local name for crabs) one hundred and twenty-seven! Small 'uns and horse-tail fish twenty-one."

Though his hands were busy, his mind was on something else. He'd got a letter from his wife in Tientsin a few days ago announcing that she was coming to see him during the spring vacation. She was a school teacher. Huang realized there would very likely be a ding-dong battle between them. The next day was Clear and Bright when the spring vacation would start and she would be here. It was a day he looked forward to with mixed feelings.

Huang had asked to be transferred to the harbour branch a year ago, for he thought the work here needed strengthening. The night before his departure, his wife Hsiu-chin had begged him not to go. She talked as if they might never meet again.

"Can't you give up going?"

"Haven't I told you a dozen times, our revolutionary work needs me there?"

Hsiu-chin had nothing to say to that; she just sat weeping.

"Aw, stop crying. Why don't you come with me?"

Hsiu-chin drew back as if stung by a scorpion. How could she leave Tientsin to go to a fishing-port at the back of beyond? The mere idea made her shudder. "Why, I wouldn't leave Tientsin for the world," she said petulantly. "I wouldn't even think of leaving the street we live in."

She had shouted, pleaded and wept by turn all night, until the clock struck six and the city lights went off.

When they reached the little garden in front of the railway station, Hsiu-chin held their one-year-old baby out to him. "You won't be seeing baby for two or three months. Aren't you going to give her a kiss?"

The young father took the baby and rubbed his face against her soft,

rosy cheeks. He tickled her under the chin until two little dimples appeared.

Even baby's laughter failed to comfort her mother. She drew out a handkerchief to wipe her eyes and sighed. When Huang's train was announced she reminded him again, "As soon as you get there, be sure to send me a wire. Write me every three days. There are thirty envelopes in your bag and thirty commemorative stamps for them. Don't forget."

"I won't."

When Huang first arrived, he had found time in the evenings to write to his wife. Not wanting people to see to whom he was writing, he always left the beginning blank, not filling in "My Very Dearest Chin" until the letter was finished.

He purposely avoided all mention of the hardships in the fishing harbour, writing of everything with enthusiasm as if life here was better even than in Tientsin. He described to her how smoothly his work was progressing but said he missed her dreadfully — if only he had wings so that he could fly back to her!

Even clever Hsiu-chin couldn't tell from his first three letters how her husband was getting on. But she didn't believe that he was living in clover or finding his work all smooth sailing.

"Do tell me how things really are with you there," she pleaded.

But she never received such a letter.

Over at Humenyu, Huang Yu-hsiang had noticed that all his colleagues were eager to go out on the freighters which provisioned the fishermen and brought back their catch. If they could do this, why couldn't he? He therefore requested permission to go to sea to get some experience and learn the ropes. The manager Yu Fei readily agreed.

It was a beautiful spring morning when Huang set sail on a freighter.

"So this is your first trip out. Scared?"

"Not at all, Manager Yu."

"Haven't I told you to call me Old Yu?"

"All right, Comrade Old Yu, I'll do that."

"Come and sit here, mate, where you can see into the distance. That helps you not to feel seasick."

Huang eyed him gratefully. Yu's hair was closely cropped but there was a thick stubble of beard on his chin. He was tall, dark and sturdy. His big calloused hands and overalls spattered with fish-scales bespoke a hard-working fisherman.

"Manager . . . ah . . . Old Yu, you don't sound like a local man."

"I'm not. I came from the Taihang Mountains."

"And where's your family now?"

"My parents died at the hands of the landlords. The Eighth Route Army rescued me and at fifteen I joined the army. I'm still a bachelor."

Some of the crew had moved over to sit with them. One of these piped up now, "As soon as she says yes, Sea-skimmer, you must marry her."

"It's not so simple."

"Why not? She came three times to see you, but instead of waiting for her you flew off to sea. You make me sick."

"That's why she won't have me."

The young man was disgusted. "Then you deserve to be a bachelor for life."

"Well, if that's why no one will have me, I'll live and die a bachelor with no regrets."

Huang savoured the meaning of these words and felt his own outlook expanding. Eyeing Sea-skimmer's broad chest he thought: Here's a man who's truly big-hearted!

When the ship began to toss and roll, Huang started to feel queasy.

"Feeling sick, mate?" Yu Fei asked.

Huang forced a smile. "No, it's nothing."

"Don't try to fool me. You should see the colour of your face. Come into the captain's cabin and lie down."

"No need. I'm fine here." He had to break off, retching.

Someone passed him a cup of water. Huang rinsed his mouth.

"Feeling better?"

"Yes, I feel much better after throwing up."

Yu brought out a quilt and spread it on the deck. He made Huang lie down, his head on a pillow, while he sat beside him to tell him about the sea, the fish and the work of the fish market. His descriptions were so vivid that Huang listened like a child spellbound by an exciting story. Though he still felt qualms from time to time, he was glad to be aboard.

Soon they reached the fishing ground. A number of fishing-boats converged on them, all loaded with full crates of crabs. Huang, struggling to his feet, had his first glimpse of crabs clawing and twisting their pincers in the crates.

"Did you bring me that aspirin, Sea-skimmer?" someone shouted.

"Hey, what about my jacket? Have you brought it?"

"Any salt and soy sauce?"

"Pipe down!" cried Yu Fei from the deck. "I've got everything you want." Then, calling the names of different individuals and their boat number, he handed out parcels and packages one by one.

"Have you brought us a visitor?" one fisherman asked, pointing to Huang.

"This is Comrade Huang of our fish market, newly transferred from Tientsin. Make his acquaintance, folk, you'll be doing business with him."

The fisherfolk sized Huang up with friendly eyes, then brought out fresh fish, boiled crabs and prawns. "Welcome to our new Sea-skimmer!" they cried. "Have some of these. This is our idea of a party."

Huang was touched by their simple goodwill. Leaning against the railing, he didn't know what to say. Back in Tientsin he had heard that fishermen were a tough lot, hard to handle. Now he saw that these sea-farers had all the impetuosity of the sea and were really likable people.

Suddenly he saw Yu take a flying leap on to one of the fishing-boats. Huang's heart missed a beat, but when he looked down there was Yu standing firmly on the boat with his hand on a rope.

"Well, how's the catch?"

"Come and check it in," nodded the captain.

"You don't want it weighed?"



"Your hands are better than scales. And you know just how much labour we put in."

Huang had no idea what they were talking about. Yu lifted a crate with both hands and hefted it. "A little over eighty catties, isn't it? All right, try it on the scales now."

A few deck-hands weighed the crate, which tipped the scales at eighty.

This staggered Huang, who had worked at retailing in Tientsin for nearly five years but had never seen anyone come so close. A thought flitted through his mind. "If he can do it, why can't I? I must master this skill of his within two years...."

"Listen, Yu Fei, don't waste any more time. As you once told us: Time means fish. Hurry now and take stock of the catch."

By now Huang had climbed down the ladder too. He stood there awkwardly, not knowing how to pitch in and help. "You take down the figures, Huang," Yu told him. Then they began to check the number of crates, singing out the figure for each. Before long they had taken stock of five boatloads.

On the way back, Huang told Yu, "I must say you've trained yourself to be a dab at this work."

"Hardly," retorted Yu Fei. "We've still a long way to go. You see, our ship's sailing towards communism. In that regard, I've only just got aboard."

Huang was like a caged bird whom Yu Fei had released by taking him out to sea. Gradually his wings grew stronger. He soon got over the worst of his seasickness and was able to put out to sea even in a gale. One fishing season followed another, and he went out with the freighter until winter grounded the fishing-boats. Before that, all Hsiu-chin had received from him was a wire and his three letters written in the first month. Now at last he wrote to her again, telling her that he was learning to skim over the sea, to be someone like Yu Fei.

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He was now a competent worker in his own right. In this past year he had crossed swords more than once with his wife in their correspondence. She accused him of forgetting her and the baby; he called her backward, unable to think of anything but their home. Now that she was coming on a visit, he was both pleased and anxious. But he was also prepared for battle.

3

The first thing people told Yu Fei when he returned that evening was the great news that Hsiao-chun was coming the next morning. Yu had been in Humenyu three years and Hsiao-chun's work had brought her to the harbour several times. Though he was out with the boats

every time she came and they'd never got together, most of the others at the fish market got to know the straightforward girl driver.

When Shen came in Yu Fei was winding his alarm clock.

"Listen, Sea-skimmer, you're not to go out to sea tomorrow."

"Why not?"

"Comrade Hsi Hsiao-chun is coming for some goods. She can't stay long, and I've promised her you'll wait for her."

"So." Yu Fei nodded, then in a half teasing tone said, "Since you promised her, *you* can wait for her. What's it got to do with me?"

"All right, Yu Fei, you can joke about it now, but seriously, are you going to wait for her or not?"

"Ho, is that an ultimatum?"

"No, but this is important."

"Haven't you heard the weather forecast, mate? There's going to be rain, I don't think she can get here. Out at sea, they're overstocked with fresh catch which we must collect; and a lot of boats need fresh water, ice or more grain. Tomorrow, we've got to sail on time." He glanced at the alarm clock. Shen noticed that it was set for four-thirty.

"If she does get here, ask her to wait for me. I'll be back by ten."

"No. Once you're out at sea, skimming this way and that, who can guarantee that you'll get back by ten?"

"What does it matter if I don't? I'm not going to pop off tomorrow; I'll have chances to see her in future."

"That won't do, I shan't let you go. I've notified Huang Yu-hsiang to take the freighter." Without waiting for an answer, Shen snatched the alarm clock out of Yu's hands and went off.

Yu rubbed his bristly chin, shaking his head mildly with a sheepish grin. Then he went out and roamed the street overlooking the harbour. Overhead, the half circle of lights was a pleasing sight; in the shops, restaurants, bath-house and barber's that flanked the street there was warmth and bustle. A crashing of gongs and cymbals interspersed with applause came to his ears when he drew near the theatre. A Peking opera troupe had arrived recently from Peking. He glanced at the bills on the wall. The next morning's performance

was *Red Crag*, adapted from the popular novel. He walked to the window of the box-office.

With two theatre tickets in his big hands, he strolled quietly homeward. The spring breeze carried a strong tang of the sea. He half closed his eyes to savour the taste. It wasn't often that he had a leisurely stroll for his had been an active, hard-working life. He was the kind of person who rushed from one job to another, always finishing his work on time and with credit; who rattled off like a machine-gun, bursting into roars of laughter that surged like the incoming tide. He never went to bed before midnight, but as soon as his head touched the pillow he fell asleep. That was why he attached such importance to his alarm clock, and why he carried it with him wherever he went.

As Yu Fei walked along he chuckled at the thought of good-hearted Shen Chiang snatching his alarm clock.

"That fellow knows my weak point. Yes, he's got me there. This is something I've got to correct. After all, clocks are men's servants; how can I be a slave to my clock?"

"Yu Fei!"

He turned to find Shen Chiang coming out of a confectionery, in his hand a bag bulging with parcels and boxes. Shen quickened his steps to catch up with him.

"What have you been buying?"

"Some things for your visitor. Someone so special needs entertaining properly."

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Very pleased with his confiscation of Yu Fei's alarm clock, Shen told Wei, the young cashier: "I've finally found a way to keep our Sea-skimmer at home."

Wei was sceptical. "It may not work."

"Would you like to bet on it?" Shen slammed his palm down on the table.

"A bar of chocolate?"

"Done!"

When Shen woke up it was early morning. He went out to glance at the sky which was leaden. The wind blowing in was so damp, it seemed rain was sure to come. He tiptoed to the window of Yu

Fei's room and peered in through a crack. He was fast asleep with the bed-clothes drawn over his head. Shen felt triumphant. As an extra precaution, he took a padlock and clamped it over Yu's door.

"Now, I've got you," he gloated. "Wei's got to buy me that bar of chocolate now."

4

Along the deserted highway, a truck raced. When a few raindrops spattered the windscreen, the driver felt an added sense of urgency and stepped on the accelerator. The arrow of the speedometer hovered at sixty kilometres.

Hsiao-chun and Yu Fei had lived across the street to each other when they were children. With only two years' difference in their age they had played, worked and suffered together. When she saw him off to join the Eighth Route Army, she swore to wait for him all her life though she was only thirteen at the time. In the ensuing years, Yu Fei had come back to see her more than once, the last time being three years ago when he was freshly demobbed from the army and assigned to work at Humenyu. By then she was already a qualified driver with headquarters at Shihchiachuang. They planned to be married right away. But the young man brought up in the mountains met his toughest challenge when he went out to sea. He could neither swim nor sail a boat. Every time he got on board, he was so sick that they had to haul him home when the boat returned. All his colleagues at the fish market and the fisherfolk urged him sympathetically to transfer to some other work.

Yu Fei wouldn't hear of it. "A Communist never backs out," he announced. "I'm going to train myself to skim the sea." He started from scratch. First he spent days on the beach learning to swim; then he practised rowing a sampan in shallow water. He swore that until he had mastered his job there would be no wedding for him. Hsiao-chun had the guts to back him to the hilt. "I don't mind how many difficulties you tackle. Just go ahead. I'll wait for you," she promised.

And how had he tackled this first difficulty? When she wrote to ask him, his reply was brief: "... Haven't got much to my credit yet, but I'm going full steam ahead. Miss you terribly." Soon the fame of this Sea-skimmer who was so good at his work began to spread. When it reached Hsiao-chun's ears she was very pleased and was more eager than ever to see him.

As she sped along, someone stepped out from under a tree by the road to thumb a lift. A man in his late fifties climbed into the cab. He had the swarthy face and bronzed bare chest of a veteran fisherman. His eyes had a penetrating look. There were deep lines around his firm mouth.

"Where are you heading, uncle?" asked the driver.

"I'm from Humenyu. Went to the machinery plant in town to get some spare parts for our outboard motor. If it weren't for the rain I wouldn't have troubled you for a ride back."

"It's no trouble. How far are you from the marine-products company?"

"Very close. Practically next door."

"Do you know Yu Fei then?"

"I should say I do! He's terrific."

A hardly discernible smile flickered over the girl's face. "What's so terrific about him?"

"When I say he's terrific, I mean it. Why, he's a better seaman now than even old hands like us. Last year, we got caught in a typhoon. I was slowly making for harbour when a blast of wind, broadside on, snapped our rudder and hurtled me into the sea. The waves crashed down like mountains; the force of the typhoon must have exceeded tens of thousands of horsepower. The rudderless boat churned in the sea, then capsized. I'm not one to boast, comrade, but I'm pretty good in the water even among the fisherfolk. That day I swam as hard as I could but the waves beat down on me until I was dizzy and exhausted, unable to catch my breath. My last thought before blacking out was: This time I'm done for.

"They told me afterwards that Yu Fei brought his boat over when he saw us capsize. Though they drew near they couldn't reach me from the boat. A lifebelt was tossed out but I was too far gone by



then to grab it. Yu Fei peeled off his oilskin, slung two lifebelts over his shoulders and jumped overboard. That took everyone's breath away, for to jump into a stormy sea is suicidal — all fishermen know that. But Yu Fei came out alive and saved my life too. The others from our boat were also rescued. I was told that Yu Fei's fiancée was due to visit him that day. On the way back to harbour he asked the others not to tell her about his escapade for fear of frightening her. However, when he got back she had come and gone again. They say she's like him, completely wrapped up in her work. . . ."

By now, the rain was pouring down. They were still twenty kilometres or so from Humenyu. Hsiao-chun, her heart warmed by the tale about her loved one, pressed her foot hard on the accelerator, until she noticed with a start that the speedometer was registering 80.

A few minutes later a woman carrying a baby beckoned to them at a crossroad.

"Please comrade," she called, "can you give me a lift to Humenyu?"

Hsiao-chun braked the truck. The old fisherman offered to go and sit behind and let the woman and her baby ride in the cab.

"That's good of you," said Hsiao-chun. "Put on my raincoat first."

The truck went on in the misty rain. The new passenger was no other than Huang Yu-hsiang's wife Hsiu-chin. She had arrived at the railway station to find the morning bus for Humenyu gone and the afternoon bus not due for several hours. People advised her to hitch a ride at the crossroads and that was how she got a lift on Hsiao-chun's truck.

Before long the two were acquainted and Hsiu-chin was telling her new friend about her husband. Speaking with a strong Tientsin accent she complained, "Men are all heartless. When he left, his words were sweet as honey but once gone he didn't even write home. I wrote letter after letter asking for news, and what did I get? A small scrap of paper telling me he's trying to emulate a certain Sea-skimmer." She was so carried away by her indignation that her eyes reddened and tears sparkled on her lashes.

Hsiao-chun didn't like the sound of this, so she advised her, "There is no limit to our cause of socialist construction, sister. We women should let our men fly high and go far. We shouldn't try to pull them backwards."

"Pull him backwards? I'm not! This time I'm going to have a serious talk with him. If we agree then well and good, if not we'll go our separate ways."

"Suppose he's doing very well at his work?"

"Him? A man who's deserted his wife and baby? I can't believe it."

"You can't accuse him of deserting you when all he did was fail to answer a few letters."

Hsiu-chin opened her mouth to argue but no words came. She looked up tearfully to stare at the woman driver, suddenly embarrassed at what she had been saying. With a wry smile, she wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and lapsed into silence.

As the rain trickled down the windscreen, the truck sped on, honking its horn. As far as the question of speed was concerned, the two women were in complete accord, both of them eager to get to their destination.

When they finally reached the fish market it was just seven. The rain continued to pour but Hsiu-chin and her baby had both dozed off. Not wanting to disturb them, Hsiao-chun slipped quietly down, while the old fisherman thanked her and went off. Hsiao-chun covered the truck with a tarpaulin and headed for the fish market. When she came to the door, a whoop of delight from Shen Chiang greeted her. "You've arrived at last."

Peering into her face, he said with an air of mystery, "This time Sister Hsi, are you going to give me a treat?"

"Why should I give you a treat?" She wiped the rain from her face.

"If it weren't for me, your man would have flown off again."

"This is our strategist," young Wei chimed in. "It's all because he adopted the tactics of taking away the alarm clock that we managed to lock Manager Yu in his room."

"Well, how about it? A treat?"

"Of course."

"That's good. Here's the key. Go ahead."

Instead of taking the key, she giggled.

"It's true, sister, he's still sleeping," Wei assured her. "We were afraid he might go off, so Shen locked the door this morning. Here, let me open it for you."

Hsiao-chun pushed past the door curtain with a feeling of excitement. There, under a green blanket was Yu Fei, his head under the bedclothes. She hadn't seen him for so long; how she had missed him! And judging by all those reports she'd heard, everyone thought

highly of him. She longed to go over and say, "Here I am!" and then watch his eyes light up. She reached out to nudge him. But then she remembered how hard he always worked and how tired he must be. She couldn't leave anyway until the rain let up, so why not let him sleep a little longer? Her hands paused in mid-air. She slipped into a chair and bent her head to look at the citations and pictures under the glass on his desk.

Shen and Wei listened with bated breath outside. When they couldn't hear a word, Wei wondered out loud, "Why isn't there a peep out of them? You go and have a look."

When the two of them came in, they saw her sitting quietly by the bed.

"Look, who's here!" they shouted, pulling back the blanket. But to their surprise there was no one there — nothing but a pillow and some quilts.

Hsiao-chun, taken aback too, gaped at the flabbergasted Shen Chiang.

It was he who spotted the slip of paper under the bag of goodies he'd bought the night before. He snatched it up.

Hsiao-chun,

Sorry that once again I can't wait for you. The weather forecast says it'll rain tomorrow. If you manage to get here and are held up by the rain, please go to the theatre, I'll join you there when I get back at ten. A ticket and some sweets and cakes are in the bag. If you really can't wait for me, then run along. I'll be coming down after the fishing season.

Yu Fei

5

Huang had sounded the water several times, but it was still too shallow for the freighter to put out to sea. He was feeling a bit desperate because if while he was waiting Yu Fei arrived, all his efforts to keep him home and go to sea in his stead would have been in vain. He did so want Yu Fei to meet his fiancée. Of course he realized that

the tide would not be high enough for them to set sail before 4:50. It was now barely four.

He sat on deck waiting impatiently for time to pass, but it seemed to be standing still. Overhead, dark clouds were racing. Soon they had covered the morning star.

At last, the necessary depth of two and a half metres was reached. Huang promptly issued the order to get going.

Two white sails were hoisted and the motor started, the racket was loud enough to rouse the whole harbour.

"Hey, mates, weigh anchor!" As he gave the order, Huang glanced uneasily along the hazy shore lest a running figure should try to catch up with them at the last moment. Within a couple of minutes the boat would be gone.

"Set sail!" Huang finally ordered. Amid shouts of "Easy!" "Avast!" and "Easy!" the boat turned out of the harbour.

"Full speed ahead!"

Leaving a trail of white foam, the boat was the first to set sail that morning. Huang felt an immense satisfaction. "This time I'd like to see how you're going to skim over the sea!"

"Hey, what's that you're saying, mate?"

Looking around with a start, Huang found Sea-skimmer standing before him. For a moment he was stunned. Then he cried, "We must turn back. Yu Fei's on board. We must put him ashore."

But Yu Fei came out triumphant for, instead of turning back, the boat shot straight towards the fishing ground. Yu Fei hadn't slept in his own bed at all. The night before, unknown to everyone else he had crept into the hold and slept there until the sound of the motor roused him.

Their boat with its green light sailed towards No. 36 fishing ground. When it was broad daylight, a green flag replaced the green light. Then it began to rain.

The catch at No. 36 was middling and a lot of fishing-boats had gone elsewhere. The freighter made a round but only half filled its holds with crabs.

Yu Fei got in touch with the marine-products headquarters and



learned that the catch was best at No.41 where the fishing-boats were eagerly awaiting a freighter. Would Yu Fei like to go there?

Huang had removed his coat which had got wet under his leaking raincoat. Now, he was in the cabin emptying his pockets to dry the miscellaneous slips of paper in them. "You go back with one of the boats returning to harbour, Yu," he told Yu Fei. "Let me take our boat to No. 41 to fill up. This time, please do as I ask you."

Yu Fei glanced casually at the various objects that had made their home in Huang's pockets: small change, meal tickets, a few stamps, toilet paper and other odds and ends. But what caught his attention was a piece of stationery with this line on it: "I've decided to come and visit you on the Clear and Bright Festival. . . ." Before he could read on, Huang had snatched the letter away, though not before Yu realized that it was a letter from Huang's wife, Hsiu-chin.

"Why, you've been withholding information, Huang," he said, then ran out of the cabin with the signal flags.

The outcome was that they carried Huang bodily to a boat returning to harbour.

"When you get back," Yu told him, "please take a message for me. Go to Hsiao-chun in the theatre. Here's a ticket. Tell her I just can't get back for the time being, but once the season is over I'll go to visit her. All right, good luck!"

A gentle breeze ballooned the sails and the returning boat scudded along. Huang stood in the rain, his eyes moist.

When the boat reached the wharf he jumped off and made straight for the theatre, smoothing out the crumpled pink ticket. But as he approached his seat his eyes widened to stare at the woman in the next seat.

"Why, it's you Hsiu-chin!" Sitting down hurriedly, he asked softly, "When did you get here?"

"We got here at seven."

"How did you come from the station?"

"In Hsi Hsiao-chun's truck."

"What a coincidence!"

"Weren't you out at sea?"

"Yu Fei caught a glimpse of the letter you wrote me and had people put me into a boat that was returning to harbour..."

"How could you let anyone read that letter?"

Huang saw she was not angry nor was there any note of suspicion in her voice. He felt reassured. Keeping his own voice low, he asked, "Didn't you say you were coming to settle scores with me?"

"Don't mention that again. This time Sister Hsi and Yu Fei have taught me a good lesson. Why, just look at the two of them... they're really tops... As soon as Sister Hsi alighted, she burrowed into the engine-room of a boat to help with repairs. When the engine was going again, she was afraid it might break down out at sea, so she went along too just in case. When I see their example I have nothing to say. It was she who gave me the theatre ticket. Told me to enjoy myself while she went and let you know I was here. 'Don't be impatient,' she said. 'He'll be with you by the time the opera ends.' Remarkable person, she is."

Huang could no longer stay and enjoy the opera. He stood up. "You enjoy yourself, dear. I must go to help them unload that boat. With the rain..."

"I'll come with you."

Outside the theatre it was still raining. Huang had the baby in his arms; she was much heavier than a year ago. He kissed her plump cheeks; the baby smiled sleepily.

Behind him, Hsiu-chin said, "Couldn't we ask them to transfer me here too?"

"Who? You?" Huang was incredulous. "You don't mean it!"

"Who's kidding?"

"Didn't you say you wouldn't even leave our street to say nothing of leaving the city?"

"But ain't I here already?"

Huang was surprised and overjoyed at the change in Hsiu-chin. "That would be just swell."

"Do you know there's going to be a female Sea-skimmer now?"

"You mean... you..."

"Not me! I'm much too backward," Hsiu-chin corrected him.

"But Hsiao-chun has decided to get herself transferred here to operate a motor-boat."

"That'll be really wonderful. Who said so?"

"Back at the fish market, Accountant Shen's so pleased he's treating everybody to chocolate bars. Sister Hsi has brought her transfer papers and her belongings too. She's coming to work out here as soon as she gets today's load of goods back."

Illustrated by Chen Yu-hsien



Chin Tzu-kuang

The Making and Staging of the Opera "Driven to Revolt"

The revolutionary Peking opera *Driven to Revolt* was first staged in Yenan in 1943, when it received enthusiastic acclaim. Chairman Mao praised it saying that it "marks an epoch-making beginning in the revolutionization of the old opera", "and thus a new life is opening up for the old opera".

What is this opera about?

Its plot comes from some episodes in the fourteenth-century Chinese novel *Shui Hu (Water Margin)* supplemented with certain historical facts. The story, in brief, is as follows:

Early in the eleventh century, during the reign of Emperor Hui-tsung towards the end of the Northern Sung Dynasty, there are famines for years on end and many people, cruelly oppressed and exploited by the feudal ruling class, are forced to leave home in search of a livelihood. The family of a peasant called Li Tieh flees with other refugees to the East Capital; but they are bullied and beaten by govern-

The writer of this article, Chin Tzu-kuang, was one of the original script-writers of the Peking opera *Driven to Revolt* which Chairman Mao praised thirty-four years ago. He also played the part of Lin Chung in the opera. The whole opera comprises twelve scenes, of which two are published in this issue.

ment runners, only managing to escape to Tsangchow when Tsao Cheng, a pupil of the arms instructor Lin Chung, and the tavern-keeper Li Hsiao-erh come to their rescue. Because of this, Li Hsiao-erh is arrested. When Lin Chung has him released he also goes to Tsangchow.

At that time Kao Chiu, the emperor's favourite, is the powerful high marshal commanding all the imperial forces. To consolidate his position, he tries to get rid of all officers whom he dislikes. Lin Chung, the arms instructor of the Imperial Garrison who has a keen sense of justice, incurs his enmity.

One day Lin Chung, on his way to burn incense at Tienchi Temple, meets and makes friends with a gallant monk Lu Chih-shen. Lin Chung's beautiful wife Chen-niang has preceded him to the temple. Kao Chiu's son is making amorous advances to her when, luckily, Lu Chih-shen arrives with Lin Chung and they see her safely home. As Kao Chiu already hates Lin Chung and his son wants to abduct Chen-niang, they connive to send their steward Lu Chien to trick Lin Chung into going to White Tiger Hall, where secret military documents are kept; then Lin Chung is accused of drawing his sword to assassinate the high marshal. He is tattooed as a felon and banished to Tsangchow. Before his departure, he bids a sorrowful farewell to his family and neighbours. When he reaches Wild Boar Forest, the two constables escorting him are bribed by Kao Chiu to tie him to a tree and murder him. However, he is saved by Lu Chih-shen, who has secretly followed them.

Earlier on, Lin Chung's pupil Tsao Cheng beat up Kao Chiu's son and the government ordered his arrest, but Lin Chung helped him to escape from the East Capital. Then, revolting against the government's oppression, Tsao Cheng led some insurgents to take to the Liangshan Mountains. On their way, they now pass Wild Boar Forest and happen to meet Lin Chung. Tsao Cheng urges him to go to Liangshan and raise a revolt, but Lin Chung retains illusions about the emperor and insists on going to Tsangchow as the government has ordered.

Upon reaching Tsangchow, Lin Chung is put in charge of the army fodder in the local depot. In Li Hsiao-erh's tavern he comes across

Li Tieh, who has killed a government runner and therefore cannot remain there. The tavern-keeper advises both Lin Chung and Li Tieh to join the peasant insurgents at the Liangshan stronghold. Lin Chung hesitates over this advice, but still decides against going. Then the tavern-keeper hears that Kao Chiu has sent Lu Chien to Tsangchow to murder Lin Chung, and he goes at night to pass on this information. At this juncture Lu Chien has the fodder depot burned down, in the hope of killing Lin Chung. Failing to do so, he tells Lin Chung that his wife has committed suicide after being abducted by the Kao family. In fury Lin Chung kills him and finally decides to join the rebels. He and his comrades defeat some pursuing government troops, then march off to the Liangshan stronghold.

The making and staging of this opera was as follows:

In May 1942, Chairman Mao in his famous *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art* pointed out the significant role literature and art should play in popularizing culture. I was then a student in the Central Party School at Yen-an, and I took part in amateur art activities organized by the school club. I saw how eagerly the people welcomed the adapted *yangko* dances, folk-songs, local operas and other types of folk art when new contents were instilled into the old forms, so as to popularize them. Many of us at the school were Peking opera fans. After talking it over together we decided that although the old Peking opera was a product of feudal culture, it could also be adapted to modern conditions. As stated in the *Yen-an Talks*: **“Nor do we refuse to utilize the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands these old forms, remoulded and infused with new content, also become something revolutionary in the service of the people.”** So after further discussions, we set about our first attempt to revolutionize the old Peking opera.

Why did we choose the story of how Lin Chung was driven to revolt? This was due to the situation at that time. In 1943, the War of Resistance Against Japan had reached a stalemate. The Japanese were trying to mop up the resistance bases in the rear, while the Kuomintang regime was attacking the Communists and only making a show of resisting the invaders. The Kuomintang occupied areas were bankrupt, with galloping inflation, pressganging of

soldiers and forced levies of grain. The people were reduced to destitution by this cruel exploitation. Seeing no other way out, many students and patriots ran the blockade set up by the Kuomintang and made their way to Yen-an, the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. So when we wrote of Lin Chung driven to revolt, we were using an ancient story to illustrate the contemporary situation.

We discovered from earlier records that writers in the past had usually emphasized Lin Chung's personal adventures and not the true situation at the end of the Northern Sung Dynasty characterized by tremendous peasant revolts. We felt that to portray the hero well we must also depict the historical background, for only by linking Lin Chung's defiance of tyranny with the struggle of the masses could we fully reflect the spirit of the age. So when writing this script we created a number of staunch characters representing the labouring people, who matured in struggle, to show the stormy class struggle between the masses and the reactionary ruling class. Under the impact of peasant revolts, the ruling class itself began to split up. Lin Chung originally had illusions about the feudal dynasty. After being persecuted by the reactionaries and educated and helped by the common people, he underwent a mental conflict. Should he accept unjust treatment and remain a loyal subject, or should he rise in revolt?

In the scene on the night of the snowstorm in the Mountain God Temple, his mental conflict reaches its climax. When the fodder depot is burned and his enemies come to destroy him, he finally makes up his mind to revolt. Then he kills the government officers and goes to join the insurgents in the Liangshan Mountain base to fight against the feudal dynasty.

The first version of this opera was finished in September 1943. In December it was staged, and I was chosen to play the part of Lin Chung.

In between our performances we revised the original script a good many times and introduced a number of innovations in the orchestral music, singing passages and performing techniques, as well as in the scenery, lighting effects, costumes and decor. Our aim was

to carry out Chairman Mao's instructions and achieve the best possible integration of revolutionary ideological content and the Peking opera art form.

In making this revolutionary Peking opera we received encouragement and help from Premier Chou En-lai, Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh and other leading comrades. To cap this, during the New Year Festival in 1944, Chairman Mao came twice to watch our performance and also read through our script. After watching this opera for the second time on January 9th, he was very pleased, and that same night he wrote a letter to two of the comrades responsible for the production. In his letter Chairman Mao wrote:

"Having seen your performance, I wish to express my thanks to you for the excellent work you have done. Please convey my thanks to the comrades of the cast! History is made by the people, yet the old opera (and all the old literature and art, which are divorced from the people) presents the people as though they were dirt, and the stage is dominated by lords and ladies and their pampered sons and daughters. Now you have reversed this reversal of history and restored historical truth, and thus a new life is opening up for the old opera. This is why this merits congratulations." He went on to say: **"The initiative you have taken marks an epoch-making beginning in the revolutionization of the old opera. I am very happy at the thought of this. I hope you will write more plays and give more performances, and so help make this practice a common one which will prevail throughout the country."**

This letter of Chairman Mao's marked the beginning of the revolution in Peking opera, pointing out the right direction to take. It was delivered to us the next morning at our school. This kindly letter so full of enthusiasm filled all our hearts with warmth, and moved many of us to shed tears of joy. All those of us taking part in the production made a serious study of these most significant instructions, which increased our confidence in our ability to reform the old Peking opera. We vowed to use the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint to reform and further develop this old art which had been created and grown to maturity in feudal society. We resolved to give the

traditional opera a new lease of life, so that it could better suit the needs of the labouring masses and the interests of the new society, and better serve the workers, peasants and soldiers.

The appearance of this revolutionary Peking opera infused new blood into this old art and gave it fresh vitality. It was bound to lead to more and better new Peking operas and to stimulate reforms in other traditional opera forms, thus hastening the development of all revolutionary art. The subsequent flourishing of literature and art in the liberated areas, and the flourishing of our socialist stage art after the birth of New China both testify to this.

Chairman Mao's instructions on the revolutionizing of Peking opera had great political and historical significance. However, after the establishment of the Chinese People's Republic, Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in literature and art was time and again obstructed or sabotaged by the counter-revolutionary revisionist line of Liu Shao-chi, Lin Piao and, above all, the "gang of four". They banned not only *Driven to Revolt* but many other traditional stage items too. They claimed that the revolution in Peking opera dated from a talk given by Chiang Ching in 1964. This renegade even distorted history by claiming that she was "the standard-bearer of the revolution in Peking opera". She wanted people to forget that the revolution in Peking opera began in Yenan more than thirty years ago, in response to Chairman Mao's call and with his encouragement.

After the smashing of the "gang of four", this revolutionary Peking opera *Driven to Revolt* was once more staged in Peking and other cities to celebrate the twenty-eighth anniversary of our People's Republic. Some theatrical companies in different provinces, municipalities and counties also produced local operas based on our Yenan script, keeping its original theme, the main episodes of the story and certain artistic features, but also greatly improving on the artistic quality of the performance. So these new performances have met with an enthusiastic reception all over the country. The restaging of this revolutionary Peking opera during the mass movement to expose and debunk the revisionist line of the "gang of four" is a powerful criticism of the gang's attempt to negate past history and exercise a despotic control over art.

Driven to Revolt

(Two scenes)

Characters

Lin Chung	<i>an arms instructor in the Imperial Guards</i>
Li Tieh	<i>a peasant insurgent</i>
Hsiao-erh	<i>a tavern-keeper</i>
Chen-niang	<i>Lin Chung's wife</i>
Yueh-hua	<i>Hsiao-erh's wife</i>
Chin-erh	<i>Chen-niang's maid</i>
Uncle Chang	<i>Lin Chung's father-in-law</i>
Lu Chien	<i>trusted steward of Marshal Kao Chiu</i>
Fu An	<i>Kao Chiu's attendant</i>
Tung Chao	<i>a constable</i>
Hsueh Pa	<i>a constable</i>

SCENE SEVEN

A Painful Parting

Time: Shortly after Lin Chung's arrest.

Place: Near a pavilion on the outskirts of the East Capital.
(*Chorus offstage.*)

*Wild west wind, heavy frost,
Maple leaves stained with blood,
Cold willows by the pavilion.
Lowering clouds obscure the morning sun,
The grief of parting overspreads the plain.
Calamity strikes our hero
Torn from his loved ones;
Bitter the tears they shed.*

(*During this singing people enter and walk round. Lin Chung is escorted on stage by Tung Chao and Hsueh Pa.*)

Lin (*sings*): *My high hopes have vanished like a dream;
Tattooed as a felon,
I am banished to Tsangchow —
Falsely accused!*

Crowd: Arms Instructor Lin!

Tung and Hsueh: Move along! Move along!

Crowd: Instructor Lin, you've been wronged!

Tung: Hey, hey! What are you doing here?

Old Man: We've some silver here for you two officers. We hope you will take good care of Instructor Lin on the road. (*Offers the silver.*)

Tung: Well. . . All right. . . (*Takes the silver with a glance at Hsueh Pa.*)

Hsueh: Don't talk too long.

Lin: What have I done to deserve a big send-off like this?

A Lad: Instructor Lin, we're all indignant about your frame-up. We hope you'll soon be cleared and come back to us. Please drink a cup of wine.

Lin: Many thanks! (*He drinks.*) Friends! (*Sings.*)

*My heart is sad as I speak,
You are doing me too much honour.
Don't dream that the world is at peace,
Far and wide are man-eating wolves.
Don't trust their talk of humanity and justice,
They are beasts in human form!*

Uncle Chang (*offstage*): Son-in-law! (*Rushes in towards Lin Chung.*)

Son-in-law!

Lin: Father-in-law!

Tung: Get away! We've orders from above not to let his relatives see him.

Uncle Chang: Do us a favour, officers! (*Passes him some silver.*)

Hsueh: Hurry up then. Don't waste time.

(*They drive the crowd away.*)

Uncle Chang: Son-in-law, you've . . . you've been framed. We are all furious. Take good care of yourself on the road. I shall see to everything at home, don't worry.

Lin: I'm very grateful, father-in-law, for your kindness. I'm not likely ever to return. I don't want to spoil your daughter's whole life, so I've written out a bill of divorce. . . .

(*He produces this, but Uncle Chang will not accept it.*)

Uncle Chang: You mustn't think of such a thing, son-in-law!

(*Chen-niang calls offstage: "Husband, husband!"*)

(*Lin Chung hastily hides the document.*)

(*Chen-niang rushes in, followed by Chin-erb carrying a bundle. She darts towards Lin Chung, who supports her.*)

Lin: Wife!

Chen-niang: Husband! (*Sings.*)

At sight of you I can't hold back my tears,

My husband . . . ah, my lord. . . .

He is torn and bleeding, his face tattooed with gold. (Sobbing)

How my heart bleeds!

So loyal an instructor of the Imperial Guards,

Why should he be falsely accused,

Banished from the capital?

Lin (*sings*): *The wicked lords at court*

Have brought calamity on the common people;

They made this dastardly plot

To ruin an innocent man.

Chen-niang (*sings*): *I hate those cruel monsters!*

Alas that gallant men cannot serve their country.

May Heaven see that justice is done,

And let us often write letters

To set our parents' hearts at rest.

The way is long, take good care of your health;

The roads are rough, be on your guard.

This great injustice must in the end be righted;

In three years or five you will surely be back again.

Lin (*sings*): *I am deeply moved by your love;*

Each word you speak pierces my heart.

I am now banished as a felon to Tsangchow;

After ten years together we must part.

My fate is hard to predict;

We must sever relations, put an end to our love;

Once I am gone you cannot expect me back.

Dear wife, once I leave for Tsangchow there's no knowing what will happen. I don't want to involve you. . . . (Sobbing, he gives her the bill of divorce.)

Chen-niang (*taking it*): Divorce? . . . No!

(*Chen-niang faints. Lin Chung goes on his knees to hold her in his arms.*)

Chen-niang (*coming to*): Dear husband! (*Sings.*)

For ten years our hearts have been one;

We've felt the same warmth and cold, so close to each other,

Don't say a tender plant can't withstand high wind;

Have you never seen winter-plum brave snow and frost?

Lin (*sings*): *I fear Kao Chiu with his might may overpower you.*

Chen-niang (*sings*): *I'll cut my throat first, spattering him with blood, And then, in spirit, follow you to Tsangchow.*

Lin and **Chen-niang** (*sing*): *Seas may run dry, rocks turn to dust, But our hearts will always be one.*

(*Chen-niang tears up the bill of divorce.*)

(*An old guardsman calls offstage: "Arms Instructor Lin!" He hurries in followed by the crowd.*)

Old Guardsman: Instructor Lin! All our brothers in the Imperial



Guards are fuming over your frame-up. But our barracks discipline is so strict, we couldn't come out. When I was sent out to buy vegetables, the others told me to say goodbye to you for all of us. I hope, by the time you reach Tsangchow, the wrong done you will have been set right and you can join us again. (*Wipes his tears.*) Instructor Lin, we can't afford anything good. I've just brought you a few buns to eat on the road — to show the way we feel!

Lin: Old brother! (*Sings.*)

*So you've come to the pavilion,
Making my tears fall like rain. (Wipes his tears.)
Time presses and we can't talk heart to heart;
I just want you to pass on this message;
Don't be awed by that powerful scoundrel,
He is bound to topple like a mountain of ice.
Uniting together we are strong as iron
And need fear no powers of evil.*

I'm deeply moved by the friendship you've all shown me. My



heart's flown back to our imperial barracks. When you go back, please tell our brothers this: After I reach Tsangchow, so long as I'm alive, I shan't fail your expectations of me.

Old Guardsman (*sobs*): I shall certainly tell them, Instructor Lin. Take good care of yourself on the way.

Tung: That's enough!

(Chin-erh hands the bundle of clothes to the constables.)

Lin (*sadly*): Wife! Father-in-law! Chin-erh! Old brother! . . .
(Steps back, bowing in farewell.)

Chen-niang: Husband! (*Tries to rush to Lin Chung, but the constables push her back. She approaches him on her knees.*)

Chen-niang (*weeping*): Dear husband! . . . (*She faints.*)

(Chorus of women offstage):

*On a sudden they are torn apart,
Weeping and heart-broken.*

(Men's chorus):

*The Yellow River sweeps on
Endless as the blood shed by heroes.*

(Men and women sing together):

*Parted by wind and rain and mountain passes,
They may never look on each other's face again!*

Tung: Get moving! Get moving!

(Tung Chao and Hsueh Pa lead Lin Chung away. The crowd press forward in distress and anger, but are thrust back. Some shake their fists, some wave to Lin Chung, some wipe the tears from their eyes. They watch until he disappears. Then the inner curtain falls slowly.)

SCENE ELEVEN

A Snowstorm at the Mountain God Temple

Time: Night.

Place: The Mountain God Temple.

(In the distance are undulating hills, nearby some sturdy pines. The wind is raging and heavy snow is falling.)

(The inner curtain rises to show Lin Chung. He is wearing a felt hat and carrying a sword. From his spear dangles a gourd filled with wine.)

Lin: What a heavy fall of snow! (*Sings.*)

Caught off guard, I am swamped by disaster:

At White Tiger Hall I fell into a trap

And in Wild Boar Forest nearly lost my life,

As I plodded along the perilous road to Tsangchow,

Ending up as a keeper of fodder.

My home left behind me is far, far away;

The north wind is whirling snow,

I am sad and lonely.

But my anger soars to the skies

With my hatred for the despot who bounded me.

When will the day come

When with blood I can wreak vengeance!

Just now in the tavern I drank with some friends. Coming back to the fodder depot, I found my thatched hut had collapsed in the snow — if I'd stayed there I'd have been done for. Now I have no roof over my head. I see there is a mountain god temple in front. I may as well spend the night there. (*Walks round the stage.*)

(*The third curtain rises, disclosing the Mountain God Temple.*)

(*Lin Chung enters the gate, closes it and looks around.*)

Lin: I can see some firewood there. I'll start a fire to get warm. (*Lights the fire, then starts drinking by the altar.*) To think of all

the trouble I've landed in, banished to Tsangchow! If not for all the help I've been given, I'd have been dead by now. When I think of those tyrants who have ruined me and are trampling over the people, I nearly burst with anger. You scoundrel, Kao Chiu!

(*The first watch sounds.*)

Lin (*sings*): *I hear the first watch sounded on the drum-tower;*

Blazing anger burns in my heart;

I burst with hatred for Kao Chiu,

'The dirty dog! (Draws his sword half out of the sheath.)

I shall find no rest till I've killed that brute,

Only then shall I vent my anger. (Drinks.)

(*The second watch sounds.*)

Now I hear the second watch sounded on the drum-tower,

And recall what my brothers told me:

Rebel and go to the mountains,

To the mountains!

Only so can I break my chains,

Yes, break my chains!

(*He drinks more, grown slightly tipsy.*)

I see there are some words written on that curtain. Let me see if I can make them out by firelight. Ah... "Peasants rise up to fight. Flags are raised on fishing-boats." Flags on fishing-boats!

(*The third watch sounds. He sings.*)

Now the drum-tower sounds the third watch;

Anger surges in my breast like a raging tide.

Peasants rise up to fight,

Flags are raised on fishing-boats.

When the people are ground down, they must rebel,

Rise in revolt!

Let us smash our chains, leave this prison!

To turn this world upside-down

We must take up arms and fight.

Let all of us unite to clean up this shambles,

*Rebel against the emperor, drive
away despots,
Kill the corrupt officials, wipe out
injustice,
Make seas boil, mountains topple —
Turn the whole world upside-down!*

*(He draws his sword and slashes
out, then growing tired dozes off by
the table. Hsiao-erb and Yueh-hua
hurry in, armed with swords.)*

Hsiao-erb: When we went to the
fodder depot just now to look
for the instructor, we found his
thatched hut had collapsed in
the snow, and there was no sign
of him. Where would he go
in such a snowstorm?

Yueh-hua: How about the Moun-
tain God Temple? He may be
sheltering there.

Hsiao-erb: Let's call to him. *(Cries.)*
Instructor Lin! Instructor Lin!

*(They open the gate and enter the
temple.)*

Lin: Who's there?

Hsiao-erb: It's us.

Lin: What brings you here, Brother Hsiao-erb and sister-in-law?

Hsiao-erb: It's like this, instructor. After you left, two strangers
came to our tavern and whispered something to the local officer
in charge. Very fishy they looked. Talking like men from
the East Capital, they muttered something about Marshal Kao
and the fodder depot. Could that old scoundrel Kao Chiu
have sent them to kill you?

Lin: What do they look like?



Hsiao-erb: The one in the lead looked like a steward.

Yueh-hua: The other one looked like a constable.

Lin: The first must be Lu Chien. If he's here he must mean to
kill me. I'll go and have it out with him!

*(A fire flares up in the distance. Shouts are heard. Enter Lu Chien,
Fu An and the local officer in charge of the army depot, followed by
some thugs.)*

Fu: What a big fire!

Officer: Lin Chung will certainly be burned to death.

Lu: Hmm. Even if he escapes, we can have him executed for
burning this big army fodder depot.

Fu: When the fire's put out, we'll pick up some of his bones to take back with us, so as to collect our reward.

Lu: What a heavy fall of snow. Let's go and rest a while in the temple.

(Lin Chung, Hsiao-erb and Yueh-hua burst out of the gate to confront Lu Chien.)

Lu: You . . . are . . .

Lin: The Lin Chung you've been trying in vain to kill.

(Lu Chien signals to his thugs.)

(Lin Chung, Hsiao-erb and Yueh-hua start fighting with them. Hsiao-erb chases Fu An, Yueh-hua the officer. Lin Chung is left resisting Lu Chien and his thugs. Finally he kills all the thugs and kicks Lu Chien to the ground.)

(Hsiao-erb, Yueh-hua and Li Tieh come in with other peasants, a hunter and a blacksmith. They carry weapons or farm tools.)

Lu (*grovelling for mercy*): Spare my life, brother!

Hsiao-erb: Why did you track him down to Tsangchow, eh?

Lu: We . . .

Li: Speak up, or we'll kill you!

Lu: It's because Marshal Kao's not through with Lin Chung yet. He's afraid that if Instructor Lin lives he may cause trouble in future. So he ordered us to come and finish him off.

Lin: So!

Lu: After you left, the marshal's son abducted your wife . . .

Lin: Ah!

Lu: Then . . . your wife was driven to take her own life. The rest of her family were done to death too.

Lin: Say that again!

Lu: All your family are dead.

Lin: You fiend! (*Sings.*)

Hearing this heart-rending news,

Gazing south I wish I were dead!

I shall tear you limb from limb and drink your blood!

(Sword raised, he approaches Lu Chien.)

Lu (*kowtowing rapidly*): Spare me, Instructor Lin! It was all the doing of Kao Chiu and his son. Nothing to do with me!

Crowd: You were hand in glove with them — can you deny it?

Lin (*sings*): *You are a savage wolf, a poisonous viper!* (*Kicks Lu Chien over.*)

Lu: Brother Lin, for pity's sake! We were fellow-students and colleagues for several years. Let me off for old times' sake!

Lin (*laughs coldly. Sings*): *You beast in human form, you smooth-tongued fiend!* (*Plants one foot on Lu Chien.*)

How can I let you off? (*Sings.*) *I am out to destroy all traitors!*

(Lin Chung kills Lu Chien. Drums and bugles are heard. A peasant runs in.)

Peasant: Brother Li Tieh, the garrison commander is bringing up troops. We must get away!

Lin: There's no other way out for us. We'd better all turn rebel.

All: Right! Rise in revolt!

Lin: Come with me, friends, to fight the enemy.

(All cheer.)

(They march off, headed by Lin Chung. The inner curtain falls.)

Selection from the "Book of Songs"

In the South There Is a High Tree

In the south there is a high tree;
It gives no shelter.
Beyond the Han roams a maid;
I cannot reach her.
Ah, the Han it is so wide
I cannot swim it,
And the Yangtse is so long
I cannot pass it!

From the tangled undergrowth
I shall cut the thistles.
When the maid comes to marry me,
I shall feed her horses.
Ah, the Han it is so wide
I cannot swim it,

And the Yangtse is so long
I cannot pass it!

From the tangled undergrowth
I shall cut the wormwood.
When the maid comes to marry me,
I shall feed her ponies.
Ah, the Han it is so wide
I cannot swim it,
And the Yangtse is so long
I cannot pass it!

The Paths Are Drenched with Dew

The paths are drenched with dew,
Yet we must leave before dawn.
Why should I fear to walk through heavy dew?

Who says that the sparrow has no beak?
How else could it pierce my roof?
Who says that my daughter is unwed?
Why should you send me to jail?
But though you send me to jail,
You cannot add her to your family.

Who says that the rat has no teeth?
How else could it pierce my wall?
Who says that my daughter is unwed?
Why should you take me to court?
But though you take me to court,
I shall still refuse your demand.



Dazzling the New Tower

Dazzling the new tower
By the brimming river,
In place of the good match sought,
A loathsome toad.

Lofty the new tower
By the smooth-flowing river,
In place of the good match sought,
A stinking toad.

A net set for fish
Caught a paddock,
In place of the good match sought,
An ugly hunchback.

This song satirizes Duke Hsuan of Wei, who took his son's bride as his own wife, and to welcome her built a tower by the Yellow River.

The Rat Has a Skin

The rat has a skin,
Yet a man may lack decency.
A man without decency,
What is he doing, that he does not die?

The rat has teeth,
Yet a man may have no restraint.
A man with no restraint,
What is he waiting for, that he does not die?

The rat has limbs,
Yet a man may have no manners.
A man with no manners
Had best quickly die.

Po Is So Brave

Po is so brave,
A hero in our state!
Grasping his lance
He fights in the king's vanguard.

Since Po went to the east
My hair has been unkempt as wind-blown thistle.
It is not that I have no hair-oil,
But for whom should I want to beautify myself?

Let it rain, let it rain!
But instead the sun shines bright.
I keep longing for Po,
Heedless of my aching head.

Where can I find the herb of forgetfulness
To plant behind the house?
I keep longing for Po,
Though it makes me sick at heart.

The Millet Is Dense and Tall

The millet is dense and tall,
The sorghum is in sprout.
I walk on slowly,
My heart shaken within me.
Those who know me say that my heart is sad;
Those who do not know me ask for what I am searching.
Oh, grey heaven stretching endlessly away,
Who has done this to me?

The millet is dense and tall,
The sorghum is in spike.
I walk on slowly,
My heart stupefied.
Those who know me say that my heart is sad;
Those who do not know me ask for what I am searching.
Oh, grey heaven stretching endlessly away,
Who has done this to me?

The millet is dense and tall,
The sorghum is in grain.
I walk on slowly,
My heart like to choke.
Those who know me say that my heart is sad;
Those who do not know me ask for what I am searching.
Oh, grey heaven stretching endlessly away,
Who has done this to me?

When the Chen and the Wei

When the Chen and the Wei
Brim their banks,
Lads and lasses
Gather orchids.
Says she, "Have you looked around?"
Says he, "I have."
"Why not have another look?"
Beyond the Wei
It's very open and pleasant."
Together then
They sport and play,
And each gives the other a peony.

When the Chen and the Wei
Flow clear,

This song describes the spring outing in the third month, a time for courtship, when young people gathered by rivers. The peony symbolized true love.

Lads and lasses
Flock to their banks.
Says she, "Have you looked around?"
Says he, "I have."
"Why not have another look?"
Beyond the Wei
It's very open and pleasant."
Together then
They sport and play,
And each gives the other a peony.

Chop, Chop, We Cut Elms

Chop, chop, we cut elms
And pile the wood on the bank,
By the waters clear and rippling.
They neither sow nor reap;
How then have they three hundred sheaves of corn?
They neither hunt nor chase;
How then do we see badgers hanging in their courtyards?
Ah, those lords,
They do not need to work for their food!

Chop, chop, we cut wood for wheel-spokes
And pile it on the shore,
By the waters clear and flowing.
They neither sow nor reap;
How then have they three hundred stacks of corn?
They neither hunt nor chase;
How then do we see bulls hanging in their courtyards?

Ah, those lords,
They do not need to work to eat!

Chop, chop, we cut hardwood for wheels
And pile it at the river's brink,
By the waters clear and dimpling.
They neither sow nor reap;
How then have they three hundred ricks of corn?
They neither hunt nor chase;
How then do we see quails hanging in their courtyards?
Ah, those lords,
They do not have to work to live!

Field-Mouse

Field-mouse, field-mouse,
Keep away from our millet!
Three years we have served you,
But what do you care about us?
Now we shall leave you
For a happier realm,
A happy realm
Where we shall have a place.

Field-mouse, field-mouse,
Keep away from our wheat!
Three years we have served you,
But what have you done for us?
Now we shall leave you
For a happier land,
A happy land
Where we shall get our due.

Field-mouse, field-mouse,
Keep away from our rice-shoots!
Three years we have served you,
But have you rewarded us?
Now we shall leave you
For those happy plains,
Those happy plains
Where weeping is never heard.

The Golden Oriole Sings

The golden oriole sings
As it lights on the thorn-bush,
Who has gone with Duke Mu to the grave?
Yen-hsi of the Tzuchu clan,
This Yen-hsi
Was a match for a hundred men,
When we approach the tomb
We shake with dread.
Grey Heaven
Slays all our best men!
Could we but ransom him,
There are a hundred who would give their lives.

The golden oriole sings
As it lights on the mulberry.

This song laments three men of the Tzuchu clan who were buried alive with Duke Mu of Chin after his death in 622 B.C.



Who has gone with Duke Mu to the grave?
Chung-hang of the Tzuchu clan.
This Chung-hang
Could stand up to a hundred men.
When we approach the tomb
We shake with dread.
Grey Heaven
Slays all our best men!
Could we but ransom him,
There are a hundred who would give their lives.

The golden oriole sings
As it lights on the brambles.
Who has gone with Duke Mu to the grave?
Chien-hu of the Tzuchu clan.
This Chien-hu
Could withstand a hundred men.
When we approach the tomb
We shake with dread.
Grey Heaven
Slays all our best men!
Could we but ransom him,
There are a hundred who would give their lives.

In the Seventh Month

In the seventh month Antares sinks in the west;
In the ninth, cloth is handed out for making clothes,
In the eleventh month the wind blows keen;
In the twelfth, the weather turns cold;
But without a coat, with nothing warm to wear,
How can we get through the year?
In the first month, mend the ploughs;
In the second, go out to work
With wives and young ones,
Taking food to the southern fields
To please the overseer.

In the seventh month Antares sinks in the west;
In the ninth, cloth is handed out for making clothes;
As the spring grows warm
And the oriole sings,
Girls taking deep baskets

Go along small paths
To pluck tender mulberry leaves;
As the spring days lengthen
They gather artemisia by the armful;
But their hearts are not at ease
Lest they be carried off by the lord's son.

In the seventh month Antares sinks in the west;
In the eighth, we gather rushes;
In the third, we prune the mulberry,
Taking chopper and bill
To lop off the long branches
And bind up the tender leaves.
In the seventh month the shrike cries;
In the eighth, we twist thread,
Black and yellow;
We use a bright red dye
To dye garments for the lord's son.

In the fourth month the milkwort is in spike;
In the fifth, the cicada cries;
In the eighth, the harvest is gathered;
In the tenth, down come the leaves;
In the eleventh, we make offerings before the chase,
Then hunt wild-cats and foxes
For furs for our lord.
In the twelfth month the hunters meet
And drill for war;
The smaller boars we keep,
The larger ones we offer to our lord.

In the fifth month the locust moves its legs;
In the sixth, the grasshopper shakes its wings;
In the seventh, the cricket is in the fields;
In the eighth, it moves under the caves,
In the ninth, to the door,
And in the tenth under the bed.
We clear the corners to smoke out rats,
Paste up north windows and plaster the door with mud.
Come, wife and children,
The turn of the year is at hand,
Let us move inside.

In the sixth month we eat wild plums and cherries;
In the seventh, we boil mallows and beans;
In the eighth, we beat down dates;
In the tenth, we boil rice
To brew wine for the spring,
A cordial for the old.
In the seventh month we eat melons,
In the eighth cut the gourds;
In the ninth take the seeding hemp,
Pick lettuce and cut the ailanthus for firewood
To give our husbandmen food.

In the ninth month we repair the threshing-floor;
In the tenth, we bring in the harvest,
Millet and sorghum, early and late,
Paddy and hemp, beans and wheat.
There is no rest for farm-hands:

Once harvesting is done
We are sent to work in the lord's house;
By day we gather reeds for thatch,
After dusk twist rope,
Then hurry to mend the roofs,
For it is time to sow the many grains.

In the twelfth month we chisel and hew the ice;
In the first, store it away inside cold sheds;
In the second, it is brought out
For the sacrifice with lambs and garlic;
In the ninth month there is cold frost;
In the tenth, we sweep and clear the threshing-floor;
With twin pitchers we start the feast,
Killing a young lamb,
Then go up to the hall
And raise the beaker of buffalo horn —
“May our lord live for ever and ever!”

Silks, Oh So Bright

Silks, oh so bright,
Make up this shell-embroidery.
Those slanderers
Have really gone too far!

Their mouths, agape,
Make up the Southern Fan.*
Those slanderers —
Who are their counsellors?

Whispering gossip,
They plot to slander men.
Be careful what you say!
The day will come when nobody believes you.

With ready tongues
They plot to make up lies.

*The Southern Fan was another name for the Winnowing Fan, a constellation in the sky.

Though some are taken in,
One day they will turn against you.

The proud are gloating,
Toilers' hearts are sad.
Ah, Heaven, grey Heaven,
Take note of those proud men,
Have pity on the toilers.

Those slanderers —
Who are their counsellors?
Let us seize those rumour-mongers
And throw them to wolves and tigers!
If no wolves or tigers will eat them,
Let us send them to the Far North;
If the Far North will not accept them,
Let us give them to Old Man Heaven.

The road to Willow Garden
Is by Mou Hill;
There lives the eunuch Meng Tzu
Who made this song.
May all gentlemen, whosoever they be,
Listen to it with attention!

In the Beginning Who Gave Birth to Our People?

In the beginning who gave birth to our people?
It was Chiang Yuan,
How did she give birth to our people?
By earnest sacrifice and prayer
That she might no longer be childless.
She trod on God's big toe print,
Standing alone at rest there;
She conceived, lived quietly,
Then gave birth and nursed the child,
And he was Hou Chi.*

When she had fulfilled her months,
Her first-born came like a lamb,
With no bursting or rending,
With no hurt or harm,
To manifest power divine.

*The name Hou Chi in the legend means Prince Millet.

But she feared that God was displeased
And had not blessed her sacrifice and prayer,
That the child had been born in vain!

So she abandoned it in a narrow lane,
But oxen and sheep protected and nurtured it;
Then she abandoned it in a great forest,
But it chanced that woodcutters came to this forest;
Then she abandoned it on the cold ice,
But birds covered it with their wings;
When the birds flew off,
Hou Chi began to wail,
So long he wailed and loud,
His voice was heard on the road.

Then the child began to crawl,
Rose to his feet and learned
To seek food with his mouth.
He planted beans,
The beans grew sturdy and tall;
His millet flourished,
His hemp and wheat grew thick,
His young gourds teemed.

Indeed, Hou Chi knew the way
To make crops grow well.
He cleared away the rank weeds,
He sowed good yellow grain,
It grew straight and sturdy,
It was heavy and tall;
It sprouted and eared;
It grew firm and good,

Thick and full.
Then he made his home in Tai.

Thus it was that the lucky grain came down,
The black millet, the double-kernelled,
The red millet and the white.
Far and wide the black millet and the double-kernelled
Field after field he reaped;
Far and wide the red millet and the white
He carried in his arms, bore on his back,
And brought home for the sacrifice.

What are they, our sacrifices?
We hull the grain and ladle it from the mortar,
Sift it, soften it by treading,
Swill and scour it,
Then steam it thoroughly.
Next, taking careful thought,
We pluck artemisia, make offering of fat,
Skin a ram,
Then roast and broil it,
To bring a good harvest in the coming year.

We heap the offerings on wooden stands,
On wooden stands, in earthenware vessels;
When the fragrance rises up,
God on high is well pleased:
What smell is this, so good and strong?
Hou Chi founded this sacrifice
To propitiate the gods,
And it has come down to this day.

Hsu Kung-shih

The "Book of Songs" — China's Earliest Anthology of Poetry

China's long history of poetry begins with the *Book of Songs*. Exactly how and when these songs came to be collected and edited is still somewhat controversial; but we know that they were produced between the 11th and the 6th century B.C. in the lower reaches of the Yellow River and north of the Yangtse. They came from regions near the capitals of Western Chou (11th century-770 B.C.) and Eastern Chou (770-249 B.C.) — present-day Sian in Shensi and Loyang in Honan. All these early songs were set to music. Musicians of the Chou Dynasty and its vassal states collected and edited folk music, which was handed down from generation to generation. That is how these songs, composed over a period of five centuries and in different parts of the country, came to form one collection, first known as the *Three Hundred Songs*. After the 5th century B.C. the original musical scores were gradually lost and only the verses remained. They were divided into three categories:

Feng, folk-songs from the various vassal states;

Ya, songs sung at court and at official functions, subdivided into the *Ta Ya* or *Greater Ya* and the *Hsiao Ya* or *Lesser Ya*;

Sung, songs used in sacrifices in ancestral temples.

The three hundred odd songs in this collection are unique documents for the study of ancient Chinese history. Most of those in the *Ya* and *Sung* were written by the slave-owning nobility, yet many of them are well worth studying. In the *Ta Ya* for instance, we find myths and legends dealing with the origin and early history of the Chou people. An example is *In the Beginning Who Gave Birth to Our People?* which describes the miraculous birth of Hou Chi, the legendary founder of agriculture who also taught the Chou people to propitiate the gods so that they prospered. The *Ta Ya* and *Hsiao Ya* also contain political satires written mostly by scholars or low-ranking officials, which reflect the decline of the slave system in the later period of the Western Chou Dynasty and the contradictions within the ruling class. Songs in the *Hsiao Ya* and *Sung* describing the slave-owners' sacrifices and prayers for good harvests shed light on farming methods and the scale of agriculture at that time.

Viewed as poetry, however, the finest songs are the folk-songs in the *Feng* and *Hsiao Ya*. These are very rich in content, dealing with labour, courtship and marriage, as well as warfare and class contradictions.

The most primitive songs were connected with labour, and this anthology has many fine songs of this kind. Here, for instance, we find girls singing as they go home in twos and threes after plucking mulberry leaves.

In the ten-*mu* field
The mulberry-pickers are resting.
"If you're going, I'll go back with you."

Beyond the ten-*mu* field
The mulberry-pickers are leaving.
"If you're going, I'll stroll with you."

Sericulture originated in China, and this song shows that nearly three thousand years ago mulberries were already widely grown to breed silkworms.

Some songs depict brave hunters. Others deal with sowing, reaping, woodcutting, fishing or keeping fowl and cattle, as well as the other common tasks of that time.

Songs about love and marriage, numbering over a hundred, express poignant feeling.

Oh, the one plucking hyacinth-bean,
The single day I have not seen him,
Seems like three months!

These lines have come to symbolize longing for an absent friend or loved one.

That was a time of transition from slave society to feudalism, and these songs bear the imprint of their age and class. It is clear that women had an inferior position: they were often forced into unhappy marriages, badly treated or forsaken by their husbands. That the ruling class oppressed women can be seen from *The Paths Are Drenched with Dew*, which tells how a nobleman forced a girl to marry his son and had her father locked up when he objected. And *In the Seventh Month*, after depicting girls gathering mulberry leaves and artemisia, adds significantly:

But their hearts are not at ease
Lest they be carried off by the lord's son.

Quite a number of folk-songs from the various states also expose class oppression and exploitation and voice the people's resistance. Many of these were composed by labour conscripts and soldiers, or their wives longing for their return. Conscripts had to march long distances through the mud, braving wind and snow, and toiling like beasts of burden. *The Millet Is Dense and Tall* expresses their utter weariness and despair.

Once such men left home, they had little chance of returning; and their families seeing them off dreaded the prospect that they might die outside. Their wives were bowed down by grief.

Since Po went to the east
My hair has been unkempt as wind-blown thistle...
I keep longing for Po
Though it makes me sick at heart.

In *the Seventh Month* vividly lists the serfs' tasks in different seasons: farm work, hunting and building, sericulture and weaving. All the fruits of their labour were taken by their masters, while they themselves went short of food, clothes and adequate shelter. Yet in spite of their hard year's work, during the New Year Festival they had to toast their lords and wish them a long life.

These folk-songs voice strong popular discontent. In *Chop, Chop, We Cut Elms* some woodcutters demanded:

They neither sow nor reap;
How then have they three hundred sheaves of corn?
They neither hunt nor chase;
How then do we see badgers hanging in their courtyards?

They denounced the masters:

Ah, these lords,
They do not need to work to eat!

Field-Mouse contemptuously equates the ruling class with the field-mouse which steals crops, expressing hatred for such parasites, and voicing the toilers' longing to leave them and go to a happy realm where they could be their own masters.

The people of that age also condemned the iniquities of the slave-owners. For example, when Duke Mu of the State of Chin died, his family had three brave men buried alive with him, and this barbarous custom was denounced in *The Golden Oriole Sings*. Again, when Duke Hsuan of the State of Wei abducted his son's bride, the local people derided him in *Daxgling the New Tower*.

In brief, the realistic songs in this collection give us a comprehensive and truthful picture of that society, exposing its main contradictions. Artistically, in Chinese, they have distinctive features including end rhymes, internal rhymes and alliteration. The verses are mostly short, with four or more words to each line: but there are irregular stanzas too and a great metrical diversity. Wide use is made of colloquialisms, similes and metaphors to convey ideas and feelings forcefully, while the vivid evocative imagery heightens the atmosphere and gives the poems flavour and freshness.

The high quality of most of these songs is due to the fact that they were based on the real life of the people, both regarding form and content. Certain of those in the *Ta Ya* and *Sung* are relatively inferior, because not being so closely linked with the life of the people they are more insipid.

The *Book of Songs* occupies an important place in the history of Chinese literature and has exercised a tremendous influence on later poetry. It was one of the Five Classics approved by the Confucians, who read moral or allegorical meanings into simple love songs. Subsequently, it became required reading for candidates for the state examinations; thus allusions to the *Book of Songs* were understood by all educated Chinese, and this increased its widespread influence. Later, great poets such as Li Po (A.D. 701-762) and Tu Fu (A.D. 712-770) as well as countless others drew inspiration from the *Book of Songs*. And we today, centuries later, still treasure it as our finest collection of traditional songs.

Shu Hua

“Watering Horses” by Chao Meng-fu

Watering Horses is a handscroll on silk, 28.1 cm. high and 155.5 cm. long. It depicts horses being taken to water. There are fourteen unsaddled steeds and nine grooms, some of whom are holding their reins, some on horseback, others washing their horses in a stream. On the left bank in the painting is a horse tethered to a tree. Its groom, his tunic draped over his shoulders, is putting on his shoes after wading out of the water to have a rest. Opposite him, a groom in red is leading his horse into the water while another reins up the bank. In the centre of the painting six horses are bathing. One of them is standing in the stream, its head high, while one groom unfastens its reins, and another carries it. The horse appears comfortable and at ease. Another man beside them is ladling water over his horse with a gourd. By the right bank some carefree horses are lying, standing, drinking, neighing or gazing around. The postures of both men and horses are equally lifelike. The landscape, though not too extensive, provides an appropriate setting. The winding stream fringed by *wutung* and weeping willows seems quiet and peaceful. The objects are delineated with precise, delicate lines and the



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先此以告
上揚于天子
下揚于士大夫
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horses with their light or dark colour washes are strikingly substantial. The rocks, weeds on the slopes and the leaves tinged with turquoise-green add animation to the painting.

Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322) was a well-known court painter and calligrapher in the Yuan Dynasty. He painted a wide range of subjects: human figures, landscapes, flowers, birds, bamboos, rocks, and especially horses. He started drawing horses while still a child and practised whenever he could get hold of some paper. It is said that his wife, passing by his window one day while he was recuperating from an illness, was startled to see him rolling on the ground exactly like a horse. This anecdote shows how assiduously he studied his subject-matter, and how hard he worked to improve his skill. *Watering Horses* is only one of his many paintings in this genre.

Chao Meng-fu made a conscientious study of traditional Chinese painting, but while adopting many of its techniques he evolved his own individual style. The presentation of *Watering Horses*, for instance, is modelled on methods handed down from the seventh century; but his style is characterized by mellowness and delicacy compared with the vigorous and trenchant strokes of earlier masters.

Chronicle

Selection of Tung Pi-wu's Poems Published

A selection of Tung Pi-wu's poems has been brought out by the People's Literature Publishing House.

Tung Pi-wu was one of the founders of the Communist Party of China and a great revolutionary son of the Chinese people. The new collection contains about 300 works selected from among more than 1,000 poems he wrote. They warmly praise the Chinese people's revolutionary struggle, and mirror the poet's lofty revolutionary spirit.

With its title inscribed by Vice-Chairman Yeh Chien-ying, the book has two portraits of Tung Pi-wu and two facsimiles of his manuscripts printed in the front.

D.P.R.K. Painting Exhibition Opens in Peking

An exhibition of Korean paintings from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea opened in Peking last winter. It was sponsored by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

The 62 works shown at the exhibition included modern and ancient paintings and murals. The works mirrored the successes scored by the Korean people in revolutionary struggles and socialist construction under the leadership of President Kim Il Sung, depicted the

beautiful landscapes of Korea, and expressed the ardent love of the Korean people for their fatherland. Some of the works had the theme of the militant friendship between the people of China and Korea.

Pakistan Folk Crafts Exhibition in Peking

An exhibition of Pakistan folk crafts opened in Peking not long ago.

Among the more than 200 exhibits are garments, jewelry, carvings, lacquerware and wooden and leather goods. They reflect the creativeness and high artistic level of the Pakistan people.

Crafts of Ming and Ching Dynasties on View in Kaifeng

An exhibition of Ming (1368-1644) and Ching (1644-1911) Dynasty crafts, sponsored jointly by the Peking Palace Museum and the Kaifeng Municipal Museum of Honan, opened recently in Kaifeng.

The over 300 exhibits from the former collection of the Ching palace include porcelain, lacquerware, bamboo, wood and ivory carvings, enamelware, embroidery, stationery and jade ornaments. The Ching porcelain *Flower Rings of the Four Seasons* is of exquisite workmanship; the porcelain is snow-white and as thin as eggshell. Another outstanding exhibit is a large ivory carving of a dragon-boat with a three-storeyed tower and 43 finely carved figures in different postures.



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

A Girl Shepherd (woodcut)

by Ko Sha



中国文学

英文月刊1978年第3期

本刊代号2—916

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CONTACT

CB *China Books
& Periodicals, Inc.*

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415-282-2994

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