

CHINESE LITERATURE

1979 9



CONTENTS

LU XUN'S WRITINGS

In the Tavern	3
The Misanthrope	14
Amid Pale Bloodstains — <i>Yang Xianyi</i>	35
The Woodcut Artist Shen Roujian — <i>Xiao Feng</i>	43

STORIES

The Music of the Forests — <i>Zhang Jie</i>	48
A Bouquet for Dajiang — <i>Zhang Jie</i>	59
Hansuai, the Living Ghost — <i>Bai Hongbu</i> and <i>Yang Zhao</i>	72

INTRODUCING A CLASSICAL CHINESE PAINTING

"The Broken Balustrade" — <i>Li Song</i>	83
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INTRODUCING CLASSICAL CHINESE LITERATURE

The Classicist Movement in the Tang Dynasty — <i>Zhang Xibou</i>	87
Prose Writings of Han Yu	92
Prose Writings of Liu Zongyuan	95

NOTES ON LITERATURE AND ART

Zhang Jie, a New Woman Writer — <i>Guo Linxiang</i>	103
Miao Embroidery — <i>Ma Zbengrong</i>	105
The Beijing Opera "The Conqueror Bids Farewell to Lady Yu" — <i>Liu Naibong</i>	107

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

The London Festival Ballet Company's Visit to China — <i>Zong Shu</i>	112
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CHRONICLE

117

PLATES

Woodcuts by Shen Roujian	42-43
The Broken Balustrade	82-83
Miao Embroidery	104-105

Front Cover: Forsythia — *Guo Yizong*

No. 9, 1979

In the Tavern

During my travels from the north to the southeast I made a detour to my home and then went on to S—. This town, only thirty *li* from my native place, can be reached in less than half a day by a small boat. I had taught for a year in a school here. In the depth of winter after snow the landscape was bleak; but a combination of indolence and nostalgia made me put up briefly in the Luo Si Hotel, a new hotel since my time. The town was small. I looked for several old colleagues I thought I might find, but not one of them was there. They had long since gone their different ways. And when I passed the gate of the school that too had changed its name and appearance, making me feel quite a stranger. In less than two hours my enthusiasm had waned and I rather reproached myself for coming.

The hotel I was in let rooms but did not serve meals, which had to be ordered from outside, but these were about as unpalatable as mud. Outside the window was only a stained and spotted wall, covered with withered moss. Above was the leaden sky, a colourless dead white; moreover a flurry of snow had begun to fall. Since my lunch had been poor and I had nothing to do to while away the time, my thoughts turned quite naturally to a small tavern I had known well in the past called One Barrel House, which I reckoned

could not be far from the hotel. I immediately locked my door and set out to find it. Actually, all I wanted was to escape the boredom of my stay, not to do any serious drinking. One Barrel House was still there, its narrow mouldering front and dilapidated signboard unchanged. But from the landlord down to the waiters there was not a soul I knew — in One Barrel House too I had become a complete stranger. Still I climbed the familiar stairway in the corner to the little upper storey. The five small wooden tables up here were unchanged; only the window at the back, originally latticed, had been fitted with glass panes.

“A catty of yellow wine. To go with it? Ten pieces of fried beancurd with plenty of paprika sauce.”

As I gave this order to the waiter who had come up with me I went and sat down at the table by the back window. The fact that the place was empty enabled me to pick the best seat, one with a view of the deserted garden below. Most likely this did not belong to the tavern. I had looked out at it many times in the past, sometimes too in snowy weather. But now, to eyes accustomed to the north, the sight was sufficiently striking. Several old plum trees in full bloom were braving the snow as if oblivious of the depth of winter; while among the thick dark green foliage of a camellia beside the crumbling pavilion a dozen crimson blossoms blazed bright as flame in the snow, indignant and arrogant, as if despising the wanderer's wanderlust. At this I suddenly remembered the moistness of the heaped snow here, clinging, glistening and shining, quite unlike the dry northern snow which when a high wind blows will fly up to fill the sky like mist.

“Your wine, sir!” said the waiter carelessly, putting down my cup, chopsticks, wine-pot and dish. The wine had come. I turned to the table, set everything straight and filled my cup. I felt that the north was certainly not my home, yet when I came south I could only count as a stranger. The powdery dry snow which whirled through the air up there and the clinging soft snow here were equally alien to me. In a slightly melancholy mood I took a leisurely sip of wine. The wine tasted pure and the fried beancurd was excellently cooked, only the paprika sauce was not hot enough; but then the people of S — had never understood pungent flavours.

Probably because it was the afternoon, the place had none of the atmosphere of a tavern. By the time I had drunk three cups, the four other tables were still unoccupied. A sense of loneliness stole over me as I stared at the deserted garden, yet I did not want other customers to come up. Thus I could not help being irritated by the occasional footsteps on the stairs, and was relieved to find it was only the waiter. And so I drank another two cups of wine.

“This time it must be a customer,” I thought, at the sound of footsteps much slower than those of the waiter. When I judged that he must be at the top of the stairs, I raised my head rather apprehensively to look at this extraneous company and stood up with a start. It had never occurred to me that I might run into a friend here — if such he would still let me call him. The newcomer was an old classmate who had been my colleague when I was a teacher, and although he had changed a great deal I knew him at a glance. Only he had become very slow in his movements, quite unlike the spry dynamic Lu Weifu of the old days.

“Well, Weifu, is it you? Fancy meeting you here!”

“Well, well, is it you? Just fancy!”

I invited him to join me, but he seemed to hesitate before doing so. This struck me as strange, then I felt rather hurt and annoyed. A closer look revealed that Lu had still the same unkempt hair and beard, but his pale lantern-jawed face was thin and wasted. He appeared very quiet if not dispirited, and his eyes beneath their thick black brows had lost their alertness; but while looking slowly around, at sight of the deserted garden they suddenly flashed with the same piercing light I had seen so often at school.

“Well,” I said cheerfully but very awkwardly, “it must be ten years since last we saw each other. I heard long ago that you were at Jinan, but I was so wretchedly lazy I never wrote.”

“It was the same with me. I've been at Taiyuan for more than two years now with my mother. When I came back to fetch her I learned that you had already left, left for good and all.”

“What are you doing at Taiyuan?” I asked.

“Teaching in the family of a fellow-provincial.”

“And before that?”

“Before that?” He took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it and

put it to his lips, then watching the smoke he puffed out said reflectively, "Just futile work, amounting to nothing at all."

He in turn asked what I had been doing all these years. I gave him a rough idea, at the same time calling the waiter to bring a cup and chopsticks in order that Lu could share my wine while we had another two catties heated. We also ordered dishes. In the past we had never stood on ceremony, but now we began deferring to each other so that finally we fixed on four dishes suggested by the waiter: peas spiced with aniseed, jellied pork, fried beancurd and salted mackerel.

"As soon as I came back I knew I was a fool." Holding his cigarette in one hand and the winecup in the other, he spoke with a bitter smile. "When I was young, I saw the way bees or flies stuck to one spot. If something frightened them they would buzz off, but after flying in a small circle they would come back to stop in the same place; and I thought this really ridiculous as well as pathetic. Little did I think I'd be flying back myself too after only describing a small circle. And I didn't think you'd come back either. Couldn't you have flown a little further?"

"That's difficult to say. Probably I too have simply described a small circle." I also spoke with a rather bitter smile. "But why did you fly back?"

"For something quite futile." In one gulp he emptied his cup, then took several pulls at his cigarette and his eyes widened a little. "Futile — but you may as well hear about it."

The waiter brought up the freshly heated wine and dishes and set them on the table. The smoke and the fragrance of fried beancurd seemed to make the upstairs room more cheerful, while outside the snow fell still more thickly.

"Perhaps you knew," he went on, "that I had a little brother who died when he was three and was buried in the country here. I can't even remember clearly what he looked like, but I've heard my mother say he was a very lovable child and very fond of me. Even now it brings tears to her eyes to speak of him. This spring an elder cousin wrote to tell us that the ground beside his grave was gradually being swamped, and he was afraid before long it would slip into the river: we should go at once and do something

about it. This upset my mother so much that she couldn't sleep for several nights — she can read letters herself, you know. But what could I do? I had no money, no time: there was nothing that could be done.

"Now at last, because I'm on holiday over New Year, I've been able to come south to move his grave." He tossed off another cup of wine and looking out of the window exclaimed, "Could you find anything like this up north? Blossom in thick snow, and the soil beneath the snow not frozen. So the day before yesterday I bought a small coffin in town — because I reckoned that the one under the ground must have rotted long ago — took cotton and bedding, hired four workmen, and went into the country to move his grave. I suddenly felt most elated, eager to dig up the grave, eager to see the bones of the little brother who had been so fond of me: this was a new experience for me. When we reached the grave, sure enough, the river was encroaching on it and the water was less than two feet away. The poor grave not having had any earth added to it for two years was subsiding. Standing there in the snow, I pointed to it firmly and ordered the workmen, 'Dig it up.'

"I really am a commonplace fellow. I felt that my voice at this juncture was rather unnatural, and that this order was the greatest I had given in all my life. But the workmen didn't find it strange in the least, and set to work to dig. When they reached the enclosure I had a look, and sure enough the coffin had rotted almost completely away: there was nothing left but a heap of splinters and chips of wood. My heart beat faster as I set these aside myself, very carefully, wanting to see my little brother. However, I was in for a surprise. Bedding, clothes, skeleton, all had gone!

"I thought, 'These have all disappeared, but hair, I have always heard, is the last thing to rot. There may still be some hair.' So I bent down and searched carefully in the mud where the pillow should have been, but there was none. Not a trace remained."

I suddenly noticed that the rims of his eyes were rather red, but immediately attributed this to the effect of the wine. He had scarcely touched the dishes but had been drinking incessantly and must have drunk more than a catty; his looks and gestures had

become more animated, more like the Lu Weifu whom I had known. I called the waiter to heat two more caddies of wine, then turned back to face my companion, my cup in my hand, as I listened to him in silence.

“Actually there was really no need to move it: I had only to level the ground, sell the coffin and make an end of the business. Although it might have seemed odd my going to sell the coffin, if the price were low enough the shop from which I bought it would have taken it, and I could at least have recouped a few cents for wine. But I didn’t. I still spread out the bedding, wrapped up in cotton some of the clay where his body had been, covered it up, put it in the new coffin, moved it to my father’s grave and buried it beside him. And having a brick vault built kept me busy most of yesterday too, supervising the work. But in this way I can count the affair ended, at least enough to deceive my mother and set her mind at rest. Well, well, the look you’re giving me shows you are wondering why I’ve changed so much. Yes, I still remember the time when we went together to the tutelary god’s temple to pull off the idols’ beards, and how for days on end we used to discuss methods of reforming China until we even came to blows. But this is how I am now, willing to let things slide and to compromise. Sometimes I think, ‘If my old friends were to see me now, probably they would no longer acknowledge me as a friend.’ But this is what I am like now.”

He took out another cigarette, put it to his lips and lit it.

“Judging by your expression, you still expect something of me. Naturally I am much more obtuse than before, but I’m not completely blind yet. This makes me grateful to you, at the same time rather uneasy. I’m afraid I’ve let down the old friends who even now still wish me well.” He stopped and took several puffs at his cigarette before going on slowly, “Only today, just before coming to this One Barrel House, I did something futile yet something I was glad to do. My former neighbour on the east side was called Changfu. He was a boatman and had a daughter named Ashun. When you came to my house in those days you may have seen her but you certainly wouldn’t have paid any attention to her, because she was still small then. She didn’t grow up to be pretty either,

having just an ordinary thin oval face and pale skin. Only her eyes were unusually large with very long lashes and whites as clear as a cloudless night sky — I mean the cloudless sky of the north on a windless day; here it is not so clear. She was very capable. She lost her mother while in her teens, and had to look after a small brother and sister besides waiting on her father; and all this she did very competently. She was so economical too that the family gradually grew better off. There was scarcely a neighbour who didn’t praise her, and even Changfu often expressed his appreciation. When I was setting off on my journey this time, my mother remembered her — old people’s memories are so long. She recalled that once Ashun saw someone wearing red velvet flowers in her hair, and wanted a spray for herself. When she couldn’t get one she cried nearly all night, so that her father beat her and her eyes remained red and swollen for two or three days. These red flowers came from another province and couldn’t be bought even in S —, so how could she ever hope to have any? Since I was coming south this time, my mother told me to buy two sprays for her.

“Far from feeling vexed at this commission, I was actually delighted, really glad of the chance to do something for Ashun. The year before last I came back to fetch my mother, and one day when Changfu was at home I dropped in for some reason to chat with him. By way of refreshment he offered me some buckwheat mush, remarking that they added white sugar to it. As you can see, a boatman who could afford white sugar was obviously not poor and must eat pretty well. I let myself be persuaded but begged them to give me only a small bowl. He quite understood and instructed Ashun, ‘These scholars have no appetite. Give him a small bowl, but add more sugar.’ However, when she had prepared the concoction and brought it in it gave me quite a turn, because it was a large bowl, as much as I could eat in a whole day. Though compared with Changfu’s bowl, admittedly, it was small. This was the first time I had eaten buckwheat mush, and I just could not stomach it though it was so sweet. I gulped down a few mouthfuls and decided to leave the rest when I happened to notice Ashun standing some distance away in one corner of the room, and I simply hadn’t the heart to put down my chopsticks.

In her face I saw both hope and fear — fear presumably that she had prepared it badly, and hope that we would find it to our liking. I knew that if I left most of my bowl she would feel very disappointed and sorry. I made up my mind to it and shovelled the stuff down, eating almost as fast as Changfu. That taught me how painful it is forcing oneself to eat; and I remembered experiencing the same difficulty as a child when I had to finish a bowl of worm-medicine mixed with brown sugar. I didn't hold it against her though, because her half-suppressed smile of satisfaction when she came to take away our empty bowls more than repaid me for all my discomfort. So that night, although indigestion kept me from sleeping well and I had a series of nightmares, I still wished her a lifetime of happiness and hoped that for her sake the world would change for the better. But such thoughts were only the residue of my old dreams. The next instant I laughed at myself, and promptly forgot them.

"I hadn't known before that she had been beaten on account of a spray of velvet flowers, but when my mother spoke of it I remembered the buckwheat mush incident and became unaccountably diligent. First I made a search in Taiyuan, but none of the shops had them. It was only when I went to Jinan. . . ."

There was a rustle outside the window as a pile of snow slithered off the camellia which had been bending beneath its weight; then the branches of the tree straightened themselves, flaunting their thick dark foliage and blood-red flowers even more clearly. The sky had grown even more leaden. Sparrows were twittering, no doubt because dusk was falling and finding nothing to eat on the snow-covered ground they were going back early to their nests to sleep.

"It was only when I went to Jinan. . . ." He glanced out of the window, then turned back, drained a cup of wine, took several puffs at his cigarette and went on, "Only then did I buy the artificial flowers. I didn't know whether they were the same as those she had been beaten for, but at least they were made of velvet. And not knowing whether she liked deep or light colours, I bought one spray of red, one spray of pink, and brought them both here.

"This afternoon straight after lunch I went to see Changfu, having stayed on an extra day just for this. Though his house was still there it seemed to me rather gloomy, but perhaps that was simply my imagination. His son and second daughter Azhao were standing at the gate. Both of them had grown. Azhao is quite unlike her sister, she looks simply ghastly; but at my approach she rushed into the house. I learned from the boy that Changfu was not at home. 'And your elder sister?' I asked. At that he glared at me and demanded what my business with her was. He looked fierce enough to fling himself at me and bite me. I dithered, then walked away. Nowadays I just let things slide. . . ."

"You can have no idea how I dread calling on people, much more so than in the old days. Because I know what a nuisance I am, I am even sick of myself; so, knowing this, why inflict myself on others? But since this commission had to be carried out, after some reflection I went back to the firewood shop almost opposite their house. The proprietor's mother old Mrs. Fa was still there and, what's more, still recognized me. She actually asked me into the shop to sit down. After the usual polite preliminaries I told her why I had come back to S — and was looking for Changfu. I was taken aback when she sighed:

"'What a pity Ashun hadn't the luck to wear these velvet flowers.'

"Then she told me the whole story. 'It was probably last spring that Ashun began to look pale and thin. Later she had fits of crying, but if asked why she wouldn't say. Sometimes she even cried all night until Changfu couldn't help losing his temper and swearing at her for carrying on like a crazy old maid. But when autumn came she caught a chill, then she took to her bed and never got up again. Only a few days before she died she confessed to Changfu that she had long ago started spitting blood and perspiring at night like her mother. But she hadn't told him for fear of worrying him. One evening her uncle Changgeng came to demand a loan — he was always sponging on them — and when she wouldn't give him any money he sneered, 'Don't give yourself airs; your man isn't even up to me!'" That upset her, but she was too shy to ask any questions and could only cry. As soon as Changfu knew

this, he told her what a decent fellow the man chosen for her was; but it was too late. Besides, she didn't believe him. "It's a good thing I'm already this way," she said. "Now nothing matters any more."

"Old Mrs. Fa also said, 'If her man really hadn't been up to Changgeng, that would have been truly frightful. Not up to a chicken thief — what sort of creature would that be? But I saw him with my own eyes at the funeral: dressed in clean clothes and quite presentable. And he said with tears in his eyes that he'd worked hard all those years on the boat to save up money to marry, but now the girl was dead. Obviously he was really a good sort, and Changgeng had been lying. It was too bad that Ashun believed such a rascally liar and died for nothing. Still, we can't blame anyone else: this was Ashun's fate.'

"Since that was the case, my business was finished too. But what about the two sprays of artificial flowers I had brought with me? Well, I asked her to give them to Azhao. This Azhao had fled at the sight of me as if I were a wolf or monster; I really didn't want to give them to her. However, give them I did, and I have only to tell my mother that Ashun was delighted with them and that will be that. Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? One only wants to muddle through them somehow. When I have muddled through New Year I shall go back to teaching the Confucian classics."

"Is that what you're teaching?" I asked in astonishment.

"Of course. Did you think I was teaching English? First I had two pupils, one studying the *Book of Songs*, the other *Mencius*. Recently I have got another, a girl, who is studying the *Canon for Girls** I don't even teach mathematics; not that I wouldn't teach it, but they don't want it taught."

"I could really never have guessed that you would be teaching such books."

"Their father wants them to study these. I'm an outsider, it's all the same to me. Who cares about such futile affairs anyway? There's no need to take them seriously."

* A book describing the feudal standard of behaviour for girls and the virtues they should cultivate.

His whole face was scarlet as if he were quite drunk, but the gleam in his eyes had died down. I gave a slight sigh, not knowing what to say. There was a clatter on the stairs as several customers came up. The first was short, with a round bloated face; the second was tall, with a conspicuous red nose. Behind them followed others, and as they walked up the small upper floor shook. I turned to Lu Weifu who was trying to catch my eye, then called for the bill.

"Is your salary enough to live on?" I asked as we prepared to leave.

"I have twenty dollars a month, not quite enough to manage on."

"What are your future plans then?"

"Future plans? I don't know. Just think: Has any single thing turned out as we hoped of all we planned in the past? I'm not sure of anything now, not even of what tomorrow will bring, not even of the next minute."

The waiter brought up the bill and handed it to me. Lu Weifu had abandoned his earlier formality. He just glanced at me, went on smoking, and allowed me to pay.

We left the tavern together, parting at the door because our hotels lay in opposite directions. As I walked back alone to my hotel, the cold wind buffeted my face with snowflakes, but I found this thoroughly refreshing. I saw that the sky, already dark, had interwoven with the houses and streets in the white, shifting web of thick snow.

February 16, 1924

The Misanthrope

My friendship with Wei Lianshu, now that I come to think of it, was certainly a strange one. It began and ended with a funeral.

When I lived in S—, I often heard him mentioned as an odd fellow: after studying zoology, he had become a history teacher in a middle school; he treated others in cavalier fashion, yet liked to concern himself with their affairs; and while maintaining that the family system should be abolished, he would remit his salary to his grandmother the same day that he drew it. He had many other strange ways, enough to set tongues wagging in the town. One autumn I stayed at Hanshishan with some relatives also named Wei, who were distantly related to him. However, they understood him even less, looking on him as if he were a foreigner. "He's not like us!" they said.

This was not strange, for although China had had modern schools for some twenty years, there was not even a primary school in Hanshishan. He was the only one to have left that mountain village to study; hence in the villagers' eyes he was an undoubted freak. They also envied him, though, saying he had made a lot of money.

Towards the end of autumn, there was an epidemic of dysentery in the village, and in alarm I thought of returning to the town. I heard his grandmother had contracted the disease too, and because of her age her case was serious. Moreover there was not a

single doctor in the village. Wei had no other relative but this grandmother, who led a simple life with a maidservant. As he had lost both parents in his childhood, she had brought him up. She was said to have known much hardship earlier, but was now leading a comfortable life. Since he had neither wife nor children, however, his family was very quiet, and this presumably was one of the things considered freakish about him.

The village was a hundred *li* from the town by land, and seventy *li* by water; so that it would take four days to fetch Wei back. In this out-of-the-way village such matters were considered momentous news, eagerly canvassed by all. The next day the old woman was reported to be in a critical state, and the messenger on his way. However, before dawn she died, her last words being:

"Why won't you let me see my grandson?"

Elders of the clan, close relatives, members of his grandmother's family and others crowded the room anticipating Wei's return, which would be in time for the funeral. The coffin and shroud had long been ready, but the immediate problem was how to cope with this grandson, for they expected he would insist on changes in the funeral rites. After a conference, they decided on three terms which he must accept. First, he must wear deep mourning; secondly, he must kowtow to the coffin; and, thirdly, he must let Buddhist monks and Taoist priests say mass. In short, all must be done in the traditional manner.

This decision once reached, they decided to gather there in full force when Wei arrived home, to assist each other in this negotiation which could admit of no compromise. Licking their lips, the villagers eagerly awaited developments. Wei, as a "modern", "a follower of foreign creeds", had always proved unreasonable. A struggle would certainly ensue, which might even result in some novel spectacle.

He arrived home, I heard, in the afternoon, and only bowed to his grandmother's shrine as he entered. The elders proceeded at once according to plan. They summoned him to the hall, and after a lengthy preamble led up to the subject. Then, speaking in unison and at length, they gave him no chance to argue. At last,

however, they dried up, and a deep silence fell in the hall. All eyes fastened fearfully on his lips. But without changing countenance, he answered simply:

"All right."

This was totally unexpected. A weight had been lifted from their minds, yet their hearts felt heavier than ever, for this was so "freakish" as to give rise to anxiety. The villagers looking for news were also disappointed and said to each other, "Strange. He said, 'All right.' Let's go and watch." Wei's "all right" meant that all would be in accordance with tradition, in which case it was not worth watching; still, they wanted to look on, and after dusk the hall filled with light-hearted spectators.

I was one of those who went, having first sent along my gift of incense and candles. As I arrived he was already putting the shroud on the dead. He was a thin man with an angular face, hidden to a certain extent by his dishevelled hair, dark eyebrows and moustache. His eyes gleamed darkly. He laid out the body very well, as deftly as an expert, so that the spectators were impressed. According to the local custom, at a married woman's funeral members of the dead woman's family found fault even if all was well done; however, he remained silent, complying with their wishes with a face devoid of all expression. A grey-haired old woman standing before me gave a sigh of envy and respect.

Then people kowtowed; then they wailed, all the women chanting as they wailed. When the body was put in the coffin, all kowtowed again, then wailed again, until the lid of the coffin was nailed down. Silence reigned for a moment, and then there was a stir of surprise and dissatisfaction. I too suddenly realized that Wei had not shed a single tear from beginning to end. He was simply sitting on the mourner's mat, his two eyes gleaming darkly.

In this atmosphere of surprise and dissatisfaction, the ceremony ended. The disgruntled mourners seemed about to leave, but Wei was still sitting on the mat, lost in thought. Suddenly, tears fell from his eyes, then he burst into a long wail like a wounded wolf howling in the wilderness at the dead of night, anger and sorrow mingled with his agony. This was not in accordance with

tradition and, taken by surprise, we were at a loss. After a little hesitation, some went to try to persuade him to stop, and these were joined by more and more people until finally there was a crowd round him. But he sat there wailing, motionless as an iron statue.

With a sense of anti-climax, the crowd dispersed. Wei continued to cry for about half an hour, then suddenly stopped, and without a word to the mourners went straight inside. Later it was reported by spies that he had gone into his grandmother's room, lain down on the bed and, to all appearances, fallen sound asleep.

Two days later, on the eve of my return to town, I heard the villagers discussing eagerly, as if they were possessed, how Wei intended to burn most of his dead grandmother's furniture and possessions, giving the rest to the maidservant who had served her during her life and attended her on her deathbed. Even the house was to be lent to the maid for an indefinite period. Wei's relatives argued themselves hoarse, but he was adamant.

Largely out of curiosity, perhaps, on my way back I passed his house and went in to express condolence. He received me wearing a hemless white mourning dress, and his expression was as cold as ever. I urged him not to take it so to heart, but apart from grunting noncommittally all he said was:

"Thanks for your concern."

2

Early that winter we met for the third time. It was in a bookshop in S—, where we nodded simultaneously, showing at least that we were acquainted. But it was at the end of that year, after I lost my job, that we became friends. Thenceforward I paid Wei many visits. In the first place, of course, I had nothing to do; in the second place he was said to sympathize with lame dogs, despite his habitual reserve. However, fortune being fickle, lame dogs do not remain lame for ever, hence he had few steady friends. Report proved true, for as soon as I sent in my card, he received me. His sitting-room consisted of two rooms thrown into one,

quite bare of ornament, with nothing in it apart from table and chairs but some bookcases. Although he was reputed to be terribly "modern", there were few modern books on the shelves. He knew that I had lost my job; but after the usual polite remarks had been exchanged, host and guest sat silent, with nothing to say to each other. I noticed he very quickly finished his cigarette, only dropping it to the ground when it nearly burnt his fingers.

"Have a cigarette," he said suddenly, reaching for another.

So I took one and, between puffs, spoke of teaching and books, still finding very little to say. I was just thinking of leaving when shouts and footsteps were heard outside the door, and four children rushed in. The eldest was about eight or nine, the smallest four or five. Their hands, faces and clothes were very dirty, and they were thoroughly unprepossessing; yet Wei's face lit up with pleasure, and getting up at once he walked to the other room, saying:

"Come, Daliang, Erliang, all of you! I have bought the mouth-organs you wanted yesterday."

The children rushed in after him, to return immediately with a mouth-organ apiece; but once outside they started fighting, and one of them cried.

"There's one each; they're exactly the same. Don't squabble!" he said as he followed them.

"Whose children are they?" I asked.

"The landlord's. They have no mother, only a grandmother."

"Your landlord is a widower?"

"Yes. His wife died three or four years ago, and he has not remarried. Otherwise, he would not rent his spare rooms to a bachelor like me." He said this with a cold smile.

I wanted very much to ask why he had remained single so long, but I did not know him well enough.

Once you knew him well, he was a good talker. He was full of ideas, many of them quite remarkable. What exasperated me were some of his guests. As a result, probably, of reading Yu Dafu's* romantic stories, they constantly referred to themselves

* A contemporary of Lu Xun's, who wrote about repressed young men.

as "the young unfortunate" or "the outcast"; and, sprawling on the big chairs like lazy and arrogant crabs, they would sigh, smoke and frown all at the same time.

Then there were the landlord's children, who were always fighting among themselves, knocking over bowls and plates, begging for cakes, keeping up an ear-splitting din. Yet the sight of them invariably dispelled Wei's customary coldness, and they seemed to be the most precious thing in his life. Once the third child was said to have measles. He was so worried that his dark face took on an even darker hue. The attack proved a light one, however, and thereafter the children's grandmother made a joke of his anxiety.

"Children are always good. They are all so innocent," he seized an opening to say one day, having, apparently, sensed my impatience.

"Not always," I answered casually.

"Always. Children have none of the faults of grown-ups. If they turn out badly later, as you contend, it is because they have been moulded by their environment. Originally they are not bad, but innocent. . . . I think China's only hope lies in this."

"I don't agree. Without the root of evil, how could they bear evil fruit in later life? Take a seed, for example. It is because it contains the embryo leaves, flowers and fruits, that it can grow later into these things. There must be a cause." Since my unemployment, just like those great officials who resigned from office and took up Buddhism, I had been reading the Buddhist sutras. I did not understand Buddhist philosophy though, and was just talking at random.

However, Wei was annoyed. He gave me a look, then said no more. I could not tell whether he had no more to say, or whether he felt it not worth arguing with me. But he looked cold again, as he had not done for a long time, and smoked two cigarettes one after the other in silence. By the time he reached for the third cigarette, I had to beat a retreat.

Our estrangement lasted three months. Then, owing in part to forgetfulness, in part to the fact that he fell out with those "innocent" children, he came to consider my slighting remarks about

children as excusable. Or so I surmised. This happened in my house after drinking one day, when, with a rather melancholy look, he cocked his head, and said:

"Come to think of it, it's really curious. On my way here I met a small child with a reed in his hand, which he pointed at me, shouting, 'Kill!' He was just a toddler."

"He must have been moulded by his environment."

As soon as I had said this, I wanted to take it back. However, he did not seem to care, just went on drinking heavily, smoking furiously in between.

"I meant to ask you," I said, trying to change the subject. "You don't usually call on people, what made you come out today? I've known you for more than a year, yet this is the first time you've been here."

"I was just going to tell you: don't call on me for the time being. There are a father and son in my place who are perfect pests. They are scarcely human!"

"Father and son? Who are they?" I was surprised.

"My cousin and his son. Well, the son resembles the father."

"I suppose they came to town to see you and have a good time?"

"No. They came to talk me into adopting the boy."

"What, to adopt the boy?" I exclaimed in amazement. "But you are not married."

"They know I won't marry. But that's nothing to them. Actually they want inherit that tumble-down house of mine in the village. I have no other property, you know; as soon as I get money I spend it. I've only that house. Their purpose in life is to drive out the old maidservant who is living in the place for the time being."

The cynicism of his remark took me aback. However I tried to soothe him, by saying:

"I don't think your relatives can be so bad. They are only rather old-fashioned. For instance, that year when you cried bitterly, they came forward eagerly to plead with you."

"When I was a child and my father died, I cried bitterly because they wanted to take the house from me and make me put

my mark on the document, and they came forward eagerly *then* to plead with me." He looked up, as if searching the air for that bygone scene.

"The crux of the matter is — you have no children. Why don't you get married?" I had found a way to change the subject, and this was something I had been wanting to ask for a long time. It seemed an excellent opportunity.

He looked at me in surprise, then dropped his gaze to his knees, and started smoking. I received no answer to my question.

3

Yet, even this inane existence he was not allowed to enjoy in peace. Gradually there appeared anonymous attacks in the less reputable papers, and in the schools rumours spread concerning him. This was not the simple gossip of the old days, but deliberately damaging. I knew this was the outcome of articles he had taken to writing for the magazines, so I paid no attention. The citizens of S— disliked nothing more than fearless argument, and anyone guilty of it would indubitably become the object of secret attacks. This was the rule, and Wei knew it too. However, in spring, when I heard he had been asked to resign by the school authorities, I confessed it surprised me. Of course, this was only to be expected, and it surprised me simply because I had hoped my friend could escape. The citizens of S— were not proving more vicious than usual.

I was occupied then with my own problems, negotiating to go to a school in Shanyang that autumn, so I had no time to call on him. Some three months passed before I was at leisure, and even then it had not occurred to me to visit him. One day, passing the main street, I happened to pause before a second-hand bookstall, where I was startled to see displayed an early edition of the *Commentaries on the "Records of the Historian,"** from Wei's collection. He was no connoisseur, but he loved books, and I knew he prized this particular book. He must be very hard pressed to have

* By Sima Zhen of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

sold it. It seemed scarcely possible he could have become so poor only two or three months after losing his job; yet he spent money as soon as he had it, and had never saved. So I decided to call on him. On the same street I bought a bottle of liquor, two packages of peanuts and two smoked fish-heads.

His door was closed. I called out twice, but there was no reply. Thinking he was asleep, I called louder, hammering on the door at the same time.

"He's probably out." The children's grandmother, a fat woman with small eyes, thrust her grey head out from the opposite window, and spoke impatiently.

"Where has he gone?" I asked.

"Where? Who knows — where could he go? You can wait, he will be back soon."

So I pushed open the door and went into his sitting-room. It was greatly changed, looking desolate in its emptiness. There was little furniture left, while all that remained of his library were those foreign books which could not be sold. The middle of the room was still occupied by the table round which those woeful and gallant young men, unrecognized geniuses, and dirty, noisy children had formerly gathered. Now it all seemed very quiet, and there was a thin layer of dust on the table. I put the bottle and packages down, pulled over a chair, and sat down by the table facing the door.

Very soon, sure enough, the door opened, and someone stepped in as silently as a shadow. It was Wei. It might have been the twilight that made his face look dark; but his expression was unchanged.

"Ah, it's you? How long have you been here?" He seemed pleased.

"Not very long," I said. "Where have you been?"

"Nowhere in particular. Just taking a stroll."

He pulled up a chair too and sat by the table. We started drinking, and spoke of his losing his job. However, he did not care to talk much about it, considering it as only to be expected. He had come across many similar cases. It was not strange at all, and not worth discussing. As usual, he drank heavily, and

discoursed on society and the study of history. Something made me glance at the empty bookshelves and, remembering the *Commentaries on the "Records of the Historian"*, I was conscious of a slight loneliness and sadness.

"Your sitting-room has a deserted look. Have you had fewer visitors recently?"

"None at all. They don't find it much fun when I'm not in a good mood. A bad mood certainly makes people uncomfortable. Just as no one goes to the park in winter."

He took two sips of liquor in succession, then fell silent. Suddenly, looking up, he asked, "I suppose you have had no luck either in finding work?"

Although I knew he was only venting his feelings as a result of drinking, I felt indignant at the way people treated him. Just as I was about to say something, he pricked up his ears, then, scooping up some peanuts, went out. Outside, the laughter and shouts of the children could be heard.

But as soon as he went out, the children became quiet. It sounded as if they had left. He went after them, and said something, but I could hear no reply. Then he came back, as silent as a shadow, and put the handful of peanuts back in the package.

"They don't even want to eat anything I give them," he said sarcastically, in a low voice.

"Old Wei," I said, forcing a smile, although I was sick at heart, "I think you are tormenting yourself unnecessarily. Why think so poorly of your fellow men?"

He only smiled cynically.

"I haven't finished yet. I suppose you consider that people like me, who come here occasionally, do so in order to kill time or amuse themselves at your expense?"

"No, I don't. Well, sometimes I do. Perhaps they come to find something to talk about."

"Then you are wrong. People are not like that. You are really wrapping yourself up in a cocoon. You should take a more cheerful view." I sighed.

"Maybe. But tell me, where does the thread for the cocoon come from? Of course, there are plenty of people like that; take my

grandmother, for example. Although I have none of her blood in my veins, I may inherit her fate. But that doesn't matter, I have already bewailed my fate together with hers."

Then I remembered what had happened at his grandmother's funeral. I could almost see it before my eyes.

"I still don't understand why you cried so bitterly," I said bluntly.

"You mean at my grandmother's funeral? No, you wouldn't." He lit the lamp. "I suppose it was because of that that we became friends," he said quietly. "You know, this grandmother was my grandfather's second wife. My father's own mother died when he was three." Growing thoughtful, he drank silently, and finished a smoked fish-head.

"I didn't know it to begin with. Only, from my childhood I was puzzled. At that time my father was still alive, and our family was well off. During the lunar New Year we would hang up the ancestral images and hold a grand sacrifice. It was one of my rare pleasures to look at those splendidly dressed images. At that time a maidservant would always carry me to an image, and point at it, saying, "This is your own grandmother. Bow to her so that she will protect you and make you grow up strong and healthy.' I could not understand how I came to have another grandmother, in addition to the one beside me. But I liked this grandmother who was 'my own'. She was not as old as the granny at home. Young and beautiful, wearing a red costume with golden embroidery and a headdress decked with pearls, she resembled my mother. When I looked at her, her eyes seemed to gaze down on me, and a faint smile appeared on her lips. I knew she was very fond of me too.

"But I liked the granny at home too, who sat all day under the window slowly plying her needle. However, no matter how merrily I laughed and played in front of her, or called to her, I could not make her laugh and that made me feel she was cold, unlike other children's grandmothers. Still, I liked her. Later on, though, I gradually cooled towards her, not because I had grown older and learned she was not my own grandmother, but rather because I was exasperated by the way she kept on sewing

mechanically, day in day out. She was unchanged, however. She sewed, looked after me, loved and protected me as before; and though she seldom smiled, she never scolded me. It was the same after my father died. Later on, we lived almost entirely on her sewing, so it was still the same, until I went to school."

The light flickered as the kerosene gave out, and he stood up to refill the lamp from a small tin kettle under the bookcase.

"The price of kerosene has gone up twice this month," he said slowly, after turning up the wick. "Life will become harder every day. She remained the same until I graduated from school and got a job, when our life became more secure. She didn't change, I suppose, until she was sick and couldn't carry on, but had to take to her bed. . . .

"Since her later days, I think, were not too unhappy on the whole, and she lived to a great age, I need not have mourned. Besides, weren't there a lot of others there eager to wail? Even those who had tried their hardest to rob her wailed, or appeared bowed down with grief." He laughed. "However, at that moment her whole life rose to my mind — the life of one who created loneliness for herself and tasted its bitterness. And I felt there were many people like that. I wanted to weep for them; but perhaps it was largely because I was too sentimental.

"Your present advice to me is what I felt with regard to her. But actually my ideas at that time were wrong. As for myself, since I grew up my feelings for her cooled."

He paused, with a cigarette between his fingers and bending his head lost himself in thought. The lamplight flickered.

"Well, it is hard to live so that no one will mourn for your death," he said, as if to himself. After a pause he looked up at me, and asked, "I suppose you can't help? I shall have to find something to do very soon."

"Have you no other friends you could ask?" I was in no position to help myself then, let alone others.

"I have a few, but they are all in the same boat."

When I left him, the full moon was high in the sky and the night was very still.

The teaching profession in Shanyang was no bed of roses. I taught for two months without receiving a cent of salary, until I had to cut down on cigarettes. But the school staff, even those earning only fifteen or sixteen dollars a month, were easily contented. They all had iron constitutions steeled by hardship, and, although lean and haggard, would work from morning till night; while if interrupted at work by their superiors, they would stand up respectfully. Thus they all practised plain living and high thinking. This reminded me, somehow, of Wei's parting words. He was then even more hard up, and often looked embarrassed, having apparently lost his former cynicism. When he heard that I was leaving, he had come late at night to see me off, and, after hesitating for some time, had stuttered:

"Would there be anything for me there? Even copying work, at twenty to thirty dollars a month, would do. I—"

I was surprised. I had not thought he would consider anything so low, and did not know how to answer.

"I — I have to live a little longer."

"I'll look out when I get there. I'll do my best."

This was what I had promised at the time, and the words often rang in my ears later, as if Wei were before me, stuttering, "I have to live a little longer." I tried to interest various people in his case, but to no avail. There were few vacancies, and many unemployed; they always ended by apologizing for being unable to help, and I would write him an apologetic letter. By the end of the term, things had gone from bad to worse. The magazine *Reason*, edited by some of the local gentry, began to attack me. Naturally no names were mentioned, but it cleverly insinuated that I was stirring up trouble in the school, even my recommendation of Wei being interpreted as a manoeuvre to gather a clique about me.

So I had to keep quiet. Apart from attending class, I lay low in my room, sometimes even fearing I might be considered as stirring up trouble when cigarette smoke escaped from my window.

For Wei, naturally, I could do nothing. This state of affairs prevailed till midwinter.

It had been snowing all day, and the snow had not stopped by evening. Outside was so still, you could almost hear the sound of stillness. I closed my eyes and sat there in the dim lamplight, doing nothing, imagining the snowflakes falling to augment the boundless drifts of snow. It would be nearly New Year at home too, and everybody would be busy. I saw myself a child again, making a snowman with a group of children on the level ground in the back yard. The eyes of the snowman, made of jet-black fragments of coal, suddenly turned into Wei's eyes.

"I have to live a little longer." The same voice again.

"What for?" I asked inadvertently, aware immediately of the ineptitude of my remark.

It was this reply that woke me up. I sat up, lit a cigarette and opened the window, only to find the snow falling even faster. Then I heard a knock at the door, and a moment later it opened to admit the servant, whose step I knew. He handed me a big envelope, more than six inches in length. The address was scrawled, but I saw Wei's name on it.

This was the first letter he had written me since I left S—. Knowing he was a bad correspondent, I had not wondered at his silence, only sometimes I had felt he should have given me some news of himself. So the receipt of this letter was quite a surprise. I tore it open. The letter had been hastily scrawled, and said:

. . . Shenfei,

How should I address you? I am leaving a blank for you to fill in as you please. It will be all the same to me.

I have altogether received three letters from you. I did not reply for one simple reason: I had no money even to buy stamps.

Perhaps you would like to know what has happened to me. To put it simply: I have failed. I thought I had failed before, but I was wrong then; now, however, I am really a failure. Formerly there was someone who wanted me to live a little

longer, and I wished it too, but found it difficult. Now, there is no need, yet I must go on living. . . .

Shall I then live on?

The one who wanted me to live a little longer could not live himself. He was trapped and killed by the enemy. Who killed him? No one knows.

Changes take place so swiftly! During the last half year I have virtually been a beggar; it's true, I could be considered a beggar. However, I had my purpose: I was willing to beg for the cause, to go cold and hungry for it, to be lonely for it, to suffer hardship for it. But I did not want to destroy myself. So you see, the fact that one person wanted me to live on proved extremely potent. But now there is no one, not one. At the same time I feel I do not deserve to live, nor do some other people either, in my opinion. Yet, I am conscious of wanting to live on to spite those who wish me dead; for at least there is no one left who wants me to live decently, and so no one can be hurt. I don't want to hurt such people. But now there is no one, not one. What a joy! Wonderful! I am now doing what I formerly detested and opposed. I am now giving up all I formerly believed in and upheld. I have really failed — but I have won.

Do you think I am mad? Do you think I have become a hero or a great man? No, it is not that. It is very simple; I have become adviser to General Du, hence I have eighty dollars salary a month.

. . . Shenfei,

What will you think of me? You decide; it is the same to me.

Perhaps you still remember my former sitting-room, the one in which we had our first and last talks. I am still using it. There are new guests, new bribes, new flattery, new seeking for promotion, new kowtows and bows, new mahjong and drinking games, new haughtiness and disgust, new sleeplessness and vomiting of blood. . . .

You said in your last letter that your teaching was not going well. Would you like to be an adviser? Say the word,

and I will arrange it for you. Actually, work in the gatehouse would be the same. There would be the same guests, bribes and flattery. . . .

It is snowing heavily here. How is it where you are? It is now midnight, and having just vomited some blood has sobered me. I recall that you have actually written three times in succession to me since autumn — amazing! So I must give you some news of myself, hoping you will not be shocked.

I probably shall not write again; you know my ways of old. When will you be back? If you come soon, we may meet again. Still, I suppose we have taken different roads, so you had better forget me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for trying to find work for me. But now please forget me; I am doing "well".

Wei Lianshu

December 14th

Though this letter did not "shock" me, when, after a hasty perusal, I read it carefully again, I felt both uneasy and relieved. At least his livelihood was secure, and I need not worry any more. At any rate, I could do nothing here. I thought of writing to him, but felt there was nothing to say.

In fact, I was gradually forgetting him. His face no longer sprang so often to my mind's eye. However, less than ten days after hearing from him, the office of the *S— Weekly* started sending me its paper. I did not read such papers as a rule, but since it was sent to me I glanced at some of the contents. And this reminded me of Wei, for the paper frequently carried poems and essays about him, such as "Calling on the Scholar Wei at Night During a Snowstorm", "A Poetic Gathering at the Scholarly Abode of Adviser Wei", and so forth. Once, indeed, under the heading "Table Talk", they retailed with gusto certain stories which had previously been considered material for ridicule, but which had now become "Tales of an Eccentric Genius". Only an

exceptional man, it was implied, could have done such unusual things.

Although this recalled him to me, my impression of him was growing fainter. Yet all the time he seemed to be gaining a closer hold on me, which often gave me an inexplicable sense of uneasiness and cast a shadow of apprehension. However, by autumn the newspaper stopped coming, while the Shanyang magazine began to publish the first instalment of a long essay called "The Element of Truth in Rumours", which asserted that rumours about certain gentlemen had reached the ears of the mighty. My name was among those attacked. I had then to be very careful. I had to take care that my cigarette smoke did not get in other people's way. All these precautions took so much time I could attend to nothing else, and naturally had no leisure to think of Wei. I had actually forgotten him.

However, I could not hold my job till summer. By the end of May I had left Shanyang.

5

I wandered between Shanyang, Licheng and Taigu for more than half a year, but could find no work, so I decided to go back to S—. I arrived one afternoon in early spring. It was a cloudy day with everything wrapped in mist. Since there were vacant rooms in my old hostel, I stayed there. On the road I had started thinking of Wei, and after my arrival I made up my mind to call on him after dinner. Taking two packages of the well-known Wenxi cakes, I threaded my way through several damp streets, stepping cautiously past many sleeping dogs, until I reached his door. It seemed very bright inside. I thought even his rooms were better lit since he had become an adviser, and smiled to myself. However, when I looked up, I saw a strip of white paper* stuck on the door. It occurred to me, as I stepped inside, that the children's grandmother might be dead; but I went straight in.

* White is the mourning colour in China. White paper on the door indicated that there had been a death in the house.

In the dimly lit courtyard there was a coffin, by which some soldier or orderly in uniform was standing, talking to the children's grandmother. A few workers in short coats were loitering there too. My heart began to beat faster. Just then she turned to look at me.

"Ah, you're back? Why didn't you come earlier?" she suddenly exclaimed.

"Who — who has passed away?" Actually by now I knew, but yet I asked.

"Adviser Wei died the day before yesterday."

I looked around. The sitting-room was dimly lit, probably by one lamp only; the front room, however, was decked with white funeral curtains, and the woman's grandchildren had gathered outside that room.

"His body is there," she said, coming forward and pointing to the front room. "After Mr. Wei was promoted, I let him my front room too; that is where he is now."

There was no writing on the funeral curtain. In front stood a long table, then a square table, spread with some dozen dishes. As I went in, two men in long white gowns suddenly appeared to bar the way, their eyes, like those of a dead fish, fixed in surprise and mistrust on my face. I hastily explained my relation with Wei, and the landlady came up to confirm my statement. Then their hands and eyes dropped, and they allowed me to go forward to bow to the dead.

As I bowed, a wail sounded beside me from the floor. Looking down I saw a child of about ten, kneeling on a mat, also dressed in white. His hair had been cut short, and had some hemp attached to it.

Later I found out that one of these men was Wei's cousin, his nearest in kin, while the other was a distant nephew. I asked to be allowed to see Wei, but they tried their best to dissuade me, saying I was too "polite". Finally they gave in, and lifted the curtain.

This time I saw Wei in death. But, strangely enough, though he was wearing a crumpled shirt, stained in front with blood, and his face was very lean, his expression was unchanged. He was

sleeping so placidly, with closed mouth and eyes, that I was tempted to put my finger before his nostrils to see if he were still breathing.

Everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead. As I withdrew, his cousin accosted me to state that Wei's untimely death, just when he was in the prime of life and had a great future before him, was not only a calamity for his humble family but a cause of sorrow for his friends. He seemed to be apologizing for Wei for dying. Such eloquence is rare among villagers. However, after that he fell silent again, and everything was deathly still, both the living and the dead.

Feeling cheerless, but by no means sad, I withdrew to the courtyard to chat with the old woman. She told me the funeral would soon take place; they were waiting for the shroud. And when the coffin was nailed down, people born under certain stars should not be near. She rattled on, her words pouring out like a flood. She spoke of Wei's illness, incidents during his life, and even voiced certain criticisms.

"You know, after Mr. Wei came into luck, he was a different man. He held his head high and looked very haughty. He stopped treating people in his old pedantic way. Did you know, he used to act like an idiot, and call me madam? Later on," she chuckled, "he called me 'old bitch'; it was too funny for words. When people sent him rare herbs like *atractylis*, instead of eating them himself, he would throw them into the courtyard, just here, and call out, 'You take this, old bitch!' After he came into luck, he had scores of visitors; so I vacated my front room for him, and moved into a side one. As we have always said jokingly, he became a different man after his good luck. If you had come one month earlier, you could have seen all the fun here: drinking games practically every day, talking, laughing, singing, poetry writing and mahjong games. . . .

"He used to be more afraid of children than they are of their own father, practically grovelling to them. But recently that changed too, and he was a good one for jokes. My grandchildren liked to play with him, and would go to his rooms whenever they could. He would think up all sorts of practical jokes. For instance,

when they wanted him to buy things for them, he would make them bark like dogs or make a thumping kowtow. Ah, that was fun. Two months ago, my second grandchild asked him to buy him a pair of shoes, and had to make three thumping kowtows. He's still wearing them; they aren't worn out yet."

When one of the men in white came out, she stopped talking. I asked about Wei's illness, but there was little she could tell me. She knew only that he had been losing weight for a long time, but they had thought nothing of it because he always looked so cheerful. About a month before, they heard he had been coughing blood, but it seemed he had not seen a doctor. Then he had to stay in bed, and three days before he died he seemed to have lost the power of speech. His cousin had come all the way from the village to ask him if he had any savings, but he said not a word. His cousin thought he was shamming, but some people had said those dying of consumption did lose the power of speech. . . .

"But Mr. Wei was a queer man," she suddenly whispered. "He never saved money, always spent it like water. His cousin still suspects we got something out of him. Heaven knows, we got nothing. He just spent it in his haphazard way. Buying something today, selling it tomorrow, or breaking it up — God knows what happened. When he died there was nothing left, all spent! Otherwise it would not be so dismal today. . . .

"He just fooled about, not wanting to do the proper thing. I had thought of that, and spoken to him. At his age, he should have got married; it would have been easy for him then. And if no suitable family could be found, at least he could have bought a few concubines to go on with. People should keep up appearances. But he would laugh whenever I brought it up. 'Old bitch, you are always worrying about such things for other people,' he would say. He was never serious, you see; he wouldn't listen to good advice. If he had listened to me, he wouldn't be wandering lonely in the nether world now; at least there would be wailing from his dear ones."

A shop assistant arrived, bringing some clothes with him. The three relatives of the dead picked out the underwear, then disappeared behind the curtain. Soon, the curtain was lifted; the new

underwear had been put on the corpse, and they proceeded to put on his outer garments. I was surprised to see them dress him in a pair of khaki military trousers with broad red stripes, and a tunic with glittering epaulettes. I could not say what rank these indicated, or how he acquired it. Then the body was placed in the coffin. Wei lay there awkwardly, a pair of brown leather shoes beside his feet, a paper sword at his waist, and beside his lean and ashen face a military cap with a gilt band.

The three relatives wailed beside the coffin, then stopped and wiped their tears. The boy with hemp attached to his hair withdrew, as did the old woman's third grandchild — no doubt they had been born under the wrong stars.

As the labourers lifted the coffin lid, I stepped forward to see Wei for the last time.

In his awkward costume he lay placidly, with closed mouth and eyes. There seemed to be an ironical smile on his lips, mocking the ridiculous corpse.

When the nails began to be hammered in, the wailing started afresh. I could not stand it very long, so withdrew to the courtyard; then, somehow, I was out of the gate. The damp road glistened, and I looked up at the sky where the cloud banks had scattered and a full moon hung, shedding a cool light.

I walked with quickened steps, as if eager to break through some heavy barrier, but finding it impossible. Something struggled in my ears, and, after a long, long time, burst out. It was like a long howl, the howl of a wounded wolf crying in the wilderness in the depth of night, anger and sorrow mingled in its agony.

Then my heart felt lighter, and I paced calmly on along the damp cobbled road under the moon.

October 17, 1925.

Yang Xianyi

Amid Pale Bloodstains

—on re-reading some of Lu Xun's
early short stories

In this number we feature three of Lu Xun's short stories. Our French edition is introducing "Kong Yiji"* and "In the Tavern", our English edition "In the Tavern" and "The Misanthrope". Lu Xun (1881-1936) is China's greatest twentieth-century writer. The earliest of his stories presented here, "Kong Yiji", was written in March 1919 and later printed in Lu Xun's first collection of short stories *Call to Arms*; "In the Tavern", written in February 1924, and "The Misanthrope", written in October 1925, were included in his second collection *Wandering*.

All three stories deal with the unhappy lot of intellectuals in old China, but "Kong Yiji" belongs to an earlier period than the other two. "Kong Yiji" was Lu Xun's second short story following "A Madman's Diary" (1918). Like the latter it was written on the eve of the May 4th Movement of 1919, a milestone in China's democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism which was also a new cultural movement to attack the old feudal morality and culture and advocate a new morality and new culture. Lu Xun was the most courageous banner-bearer of this great

* For an English translation of "Kong Yiji", see *Chinese Literature* No. 12, 1972.

cultural movement. His highly militant writings were in keeping with the headway it made.

Lu Xun, born into an old literati family, had firsthand knowledge of the wretched position of intellectuals in old China and of how they were mentally and spiritually warped by being humiliated and trampled underfoot by the ruling class. A thoroughgoing rebel himself, he had a profound sympathy for them and therefore issued his call to arms to arouse them to join in the struggle. In a conversation with a friend recorded in his preface to *Call to Arms* he wrote:

“Imagine an iron house having not a single window and virtually indestructible, with all its inmates sound asleep and about to die of suffocation. Dying in their sleep, they won’t feel the pain of death. Now if you raise a shout to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making these unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you really think you are doing them a good turn?”

“But if a few wake up, you can’t say there is no hope of destroying the iron house.”*

This belief made Lu Xun raise his call to arms on the eve of the May 4th Movement.

Kong Yiji was a scholar who failed to pass the official examination and, having no means of support, was virtually reduced to beggary. Later he eked out a living by doing copying work, but because he was lazy and liked to drink he lost his customers and occasionally resorted to pilfering; then one of the local gentry had him beaten until his legs were broken, and finally he died. Lu Xun gives a deeply sympathetic portrayal of this minor intellectual who was a social outcast. Although we are shown much that is ludicrous and pathetic in Kong Yiji’s behaviour, as well as his various weaknesses and shortcomings, Lu Xun neither caricatures him nor presents his foibles so as to raise a laugh. He describes Kong Yiji’s wretched fate to show how kindly scholars of this kind

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 5, 1973, p. 7.



Lu Xun with his wife and son in 1930

were victimized by the old society, and to denounce China's feudal education and examination system.

The chief characters in "In the Tavern" and "The Misanthrope" are intellectuals after the May 4th Movement. During this stirring movement itself, intellectuals had served as a vanguard and a bridge, but afterwards their ranks split up. In Lu Xun's words, "... During the struggle men may drop out, run away, grow decadent, or turn renegade."* This was bound to happen to any fighting contingent, and among the intellectuals of that time this disintegration was particularly evident, due both to their own intrinsic weaknesses and to the tenacity of the reactionary forces after centuries of feudalism in China. Thus when the diehards counter-attacked, some intellectuals wavered, some knuckled under and worked for warlords, while others grew passive and decadent, abandoning their ideals. Not daring to look life in the face they muddled through by deceit, closing their eyes to the facts to fool even themselves. Some even gave up all hope and set out to destroy themselves.

On the other hand, as Lu Xun wrote, "Those who drag on an ignoble existence will catch a vague glimpse of hope amid the pale bloodstains, while true fighters will advance with greater resolution."** But although he himself was a true fighter of this kind, he had known many intellectuals who allowed themselves to be crushed by the forces of reaction and became the victims of that age. Lu Weifu in "In the Tavern" and Wei Lianshu in "The Misanthrope" both belong to this category. Later Lu Xun wrote this short verse for his collection *Wandering*:

Lonely, the new garden of literature;
Pacified, the old battlefield.
Between the two fronts, the last solitary soldier,
With my halberd I wander alone.

Lu Xun had witnessed the downfall of many former comrades-in-arms while with his halberd he reconnoitred a way forward, his

* Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1959, Vol. III, p. 90.

** Ibid., 1957, Vol. II, p. 262.

heart filled with grief and anger. Lu Weifu in "In the Tavern" had originally dreamed of reforms, believed in science and democracy, opposed the old morality and advocated a new culture; but ten years later, crushed by the forces of reaction, he backslid and lost the courage to keep up the fight, until finally he was content with a life of duplicity. In his conversation with a former colleague in the tavern he tells how he had a younger brother who died at the age of three, whose face he cannot remember, but whom his mother described as most lovable. When word came from a cousin that the child's grave was being swamped, his mother was most upset. To comfort her, he went back to their old home in the south to move the grave -- only to find that the corpse had already vanished. This being the case, there was no need to move it; yet he scooped up some clay to put in the new coffin and had it reburied in order to deceive and console his mother.

He goes on then to speak of another story. He once had a neighbour, a boatman, who had a daughter Ashun. His mother told him that Ashun had once cried so bitterly for some red artificial flowers to wear in her hair that her father had beaten her. So when he went south, at his mother's request, he bought two sprays of these artificial flowers. Upon reaching their home, however, he discovered that Ashun had wasted away and died, partly from worry about the marriage planned for her. He gave the flowers to her younger sister instead and simply told his mother, to humour her, that Ashun had been delighted with them.

Through these two anecdotes Lu Xun skilfully reveals the psychology of an intellectual who has lost his ideals.

"The Misanthrope" presents an eccentric intellectual Wei Lianshu, who lived in a remote mountain village and was regarded by his neighbours as a freak and a "modern" because he was the only one to have gone to study outside. He aspired to reform society and opposed the old code of ethics, liked to befriend lame dogs and had high hopes of the younger generation. But later he was attacked anonymously and rumours were spread about him in the schools, so that he had to resign his teaching post. With no way to make a living, not even being able to find copying work, he was virtually reduced to beggary. He admitted that he

was a failure, unfit to live, but he determined to live on to spite those who wished him dead. So he embarked on a course of self-destruction, becoming the adviser to a warlord, stooping to conduct which he had once detested and opposed, and giving up all which he had most believed in and upheld. But he rejected advice to buy a few concubines to carry on his line, and he squandered money so that by the time he died of illness he had nothing left. "In his awkward costume he lay placidly, with closed mouth and eyes. There seemed to be an ironical smile on his lips, mocking the ridiculous corpse."

Lu Weifu and Wei Lianshu were two intellectuals who turned out to be failures after the May 4th Movement. They both came to a wretched end, but their characters differed and they chose different ways out. Although Lu Weifu knuckled under to the forces of reaction and lost all hope in life, he tried to compromise with the diehards, not caring what he did, just muddling along. It made no difference to him whether he taught the feudal *Four Books* and *Five Classics* or modern science and technology. He kept his consideration for others, however, hoping to do what little he could to comfort the few people he loved and pitied, even though this amounted to nothing more than deception.

Wei Lianshu was different, being both more eccentric and more of a rebel. After his grandmother's death he remained a bachelor and became a "misanthrope". At first he retained some hope for human beings, especially for children. "Children are always good. They are all so innocent. . . . I think China's only hope lies in this." But later, his ideals completely shattered, he no longer believed in the goodness of human nature, including that of innocent children. When a child asked him to buy something he would make him bark like a dog or give a thumping kowtow. Not long before writing "The Misanthrope" Lu Xun wrote a prose poem "The Epitaph" in which were these lines, "There is a wandering spirit which takes the form of a serpent with poisonous fangs. Instead of biting others, it bites itself, and so it perishes."*

* Lu Xun, *Wild Grass*, FLP, Beijing, 1974, p. 44.

Wei was the type of intellectual who "bit" himself so that he perished.

Lu Xun wrote both these stories out of the depth of indignation and grief to denounce the old society. But his attitude was neither passive nor pessimistic. He made a thorough exposure of its crimes in order to sweep away that old man-eating system and the feasts of human flesh. He dissected the corpses of those who had died of disease in order to cure those who had not yet succumbed. After the May 4th Movement he witnessed the polarization of intellectuals. "Some . . . rose to high positions, some went into retirement."* For himself, he still had confidence in the future and slogged along the revolutionary road. As the ancient poet Qu Yuan wrote in the poem Lu Xun quoted at the start of *Wandering*, "The way stretches far ahead, I shall press on to find it." He went on reconnoitring the revolutionary road and raising his call to arms to induce others to advance with him.

In the years when these stories were written, Lu Xun was brimming over with fighting spirit. At that time he was editing the works of Ji Kang, a well-known man of letters of the third century AD who rebelled against the old morality and was finally killed by the rulers of his day. In Wei Lianshu in "The Misanthrope" we can see traces of this noted writer of old. During this same period Lu Xun also wrote a number of militant prose poems declaring war on the old society. As we read in "Such a Fighter":

He walks into the lines of nothingness, where all that meet him nod to him in the same manner. He knows that this nod is a weapon used by the enemy to kill without bloodshed, by which many fighters have perished. Like a cannon-ball, it renders ineffective the strength of the brave. . . . But he raises his javelin.**

Again, in "Amid Pale Bloodstains" he wrote:

* Lu Xun, *Selected Works*, FLP, Beijing, Vol. III, p. 173.

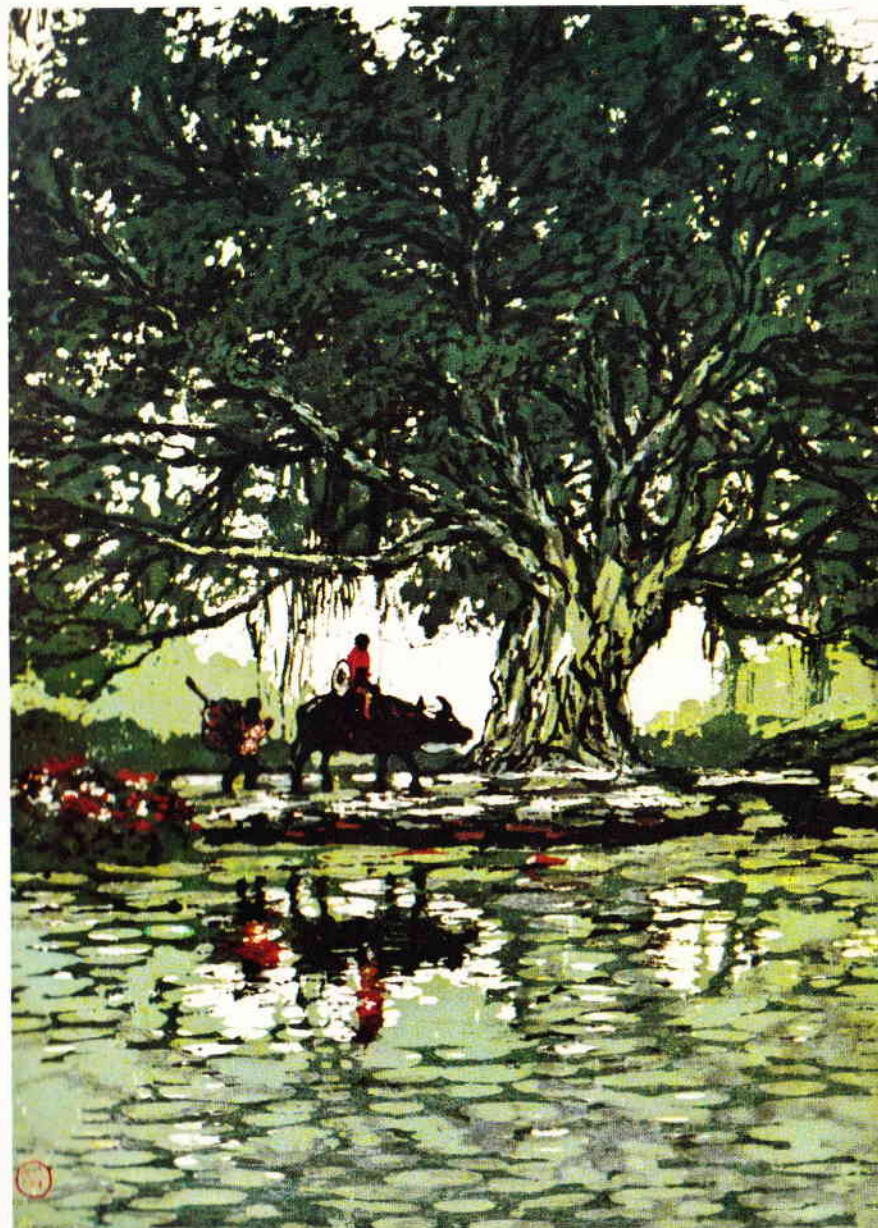
** Ibid., p. 57-58.

A rebellious fighter has arisen from mankind, who, standing erect, sees through all the deserted ruins and lonely tombs of the past and the present. He remembers all the intense and unending agony; he faces squarely the whole welter of clotted blood. . . .

The creator, the weakling, hides himself in shame. Then heaven and earth change colour in the eyes of the fighter.*

In these hard-hitting prose poems we can find no pessimism or despair. Lu Xun faced squarely the cruelty of life in order to change the social environment which caused such suffering.

* Ibid., p. 65.

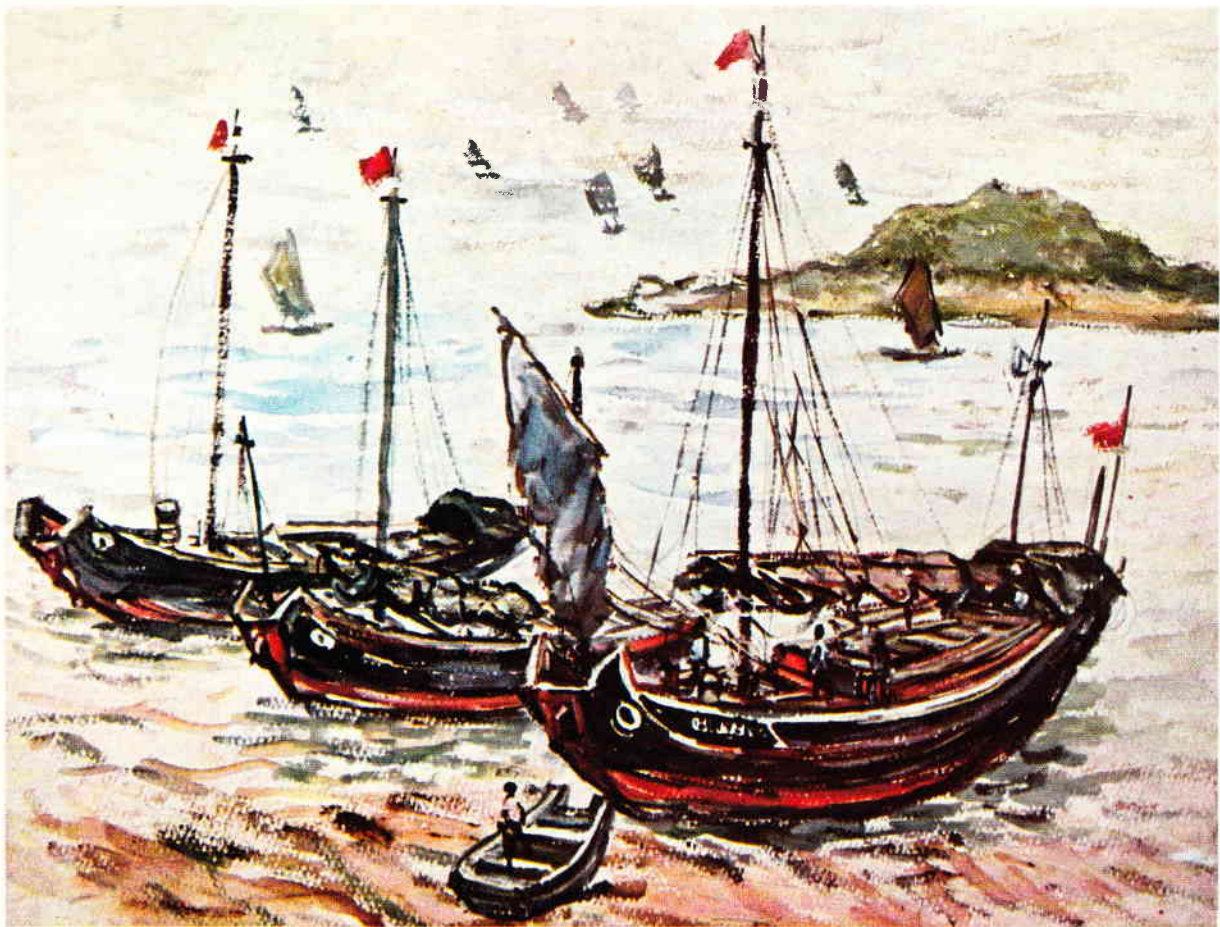


Early Spring

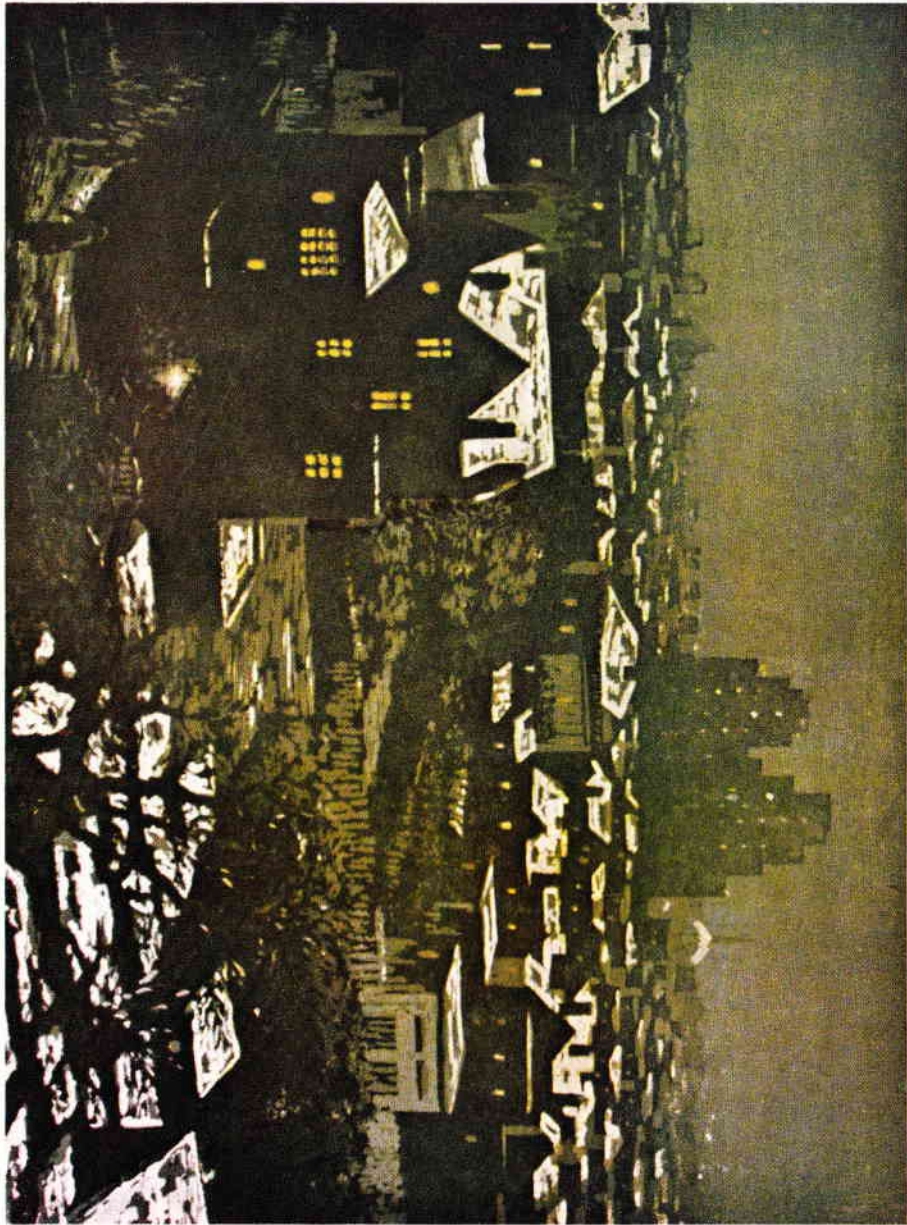
Woodcuts by Shen Roujian



Florence



Fishing Boats



Xiao Feng

The Woodcut Artist Shen Roujian

It was a holiday, but Shen Roujian was still busy painting in his studio when we called. On the paper, with the paint still wet, several fishing boats were about to set sail in the blue water. So as not to disturb him, I suggested we talk after the painting was finished. He dipped his brush in some clean water, then, as he applied ultramarine and pink, colourful clouds immediately appeared. With thick black ink, he painted the masts. The charming picture was complete. "This is like the sea at my hometown in south Fujian," Shen told us. He had just come back from a visit there where he had done a lot of sketching and he was very eager to talk about the trip.

As the chairman of the Shanghai branch of the Chinese Artists' Association, Shen Roujian is a well-known woodcut artist of forty years' experience. In the late 1930s, when the Japanese army penetrated deep into China, he walked the whole way from his hometown to Anhui where he joined the New Fourth Army as an army artist. Under extremely difficult conditions, he made many woodcuts reflecting the life of the soldiers and people resisting the Japanese aggressors. As the war raged, he travelled widely over



Shen Roujian, the woodcut artist

the mountains and plains of Anhui. In his bag, besides a few daily necessities, he carried his sketch-books, pencils, wood-blocks and knives. Shen produced mainly black-and-white woodcuts, many of which he did in the breaks between marches. He also collected the folk-art New-Year pictures and made many of these himself, which the peasants loved and which he printed with the simple equipment at his disposal. The wartime newspapers and periodicals published reproductions of his woodcuts and illustrations which remain a witness to his hard work. In recalling that period, Shen said modestly, "I was young then. My artistic achievements were really a process of trial and error. I learnt a lot during those difficult years."

After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, Shen's art began to mature. He often went to the factories and the coun-

tryside, getting to know the workers and peasants better. He also visited several foreign countries, sketching and studying.

At our request he showed us his works, a big pile of woodcuts, sketches and drawings — an impressive record of Shen's dedication to his art.

Shen Roujian's earlier black-and-white woodcuts are realistic and carefully executed, but since the 1950s his style has gradually changed, becoming freer and more succinct. He has concentrated more on coloured woodcuts and water-colours. Many of his works



An Old Cobbler (1965) a sketch

reflect the spirit of our times and have a strong national flavour. Shen is skilled both in the meticulous and free-hand styles of painting, in composition, and in his handling of light and shade, warm and cool colours and the gradation of tones.

A large proportion of his work from the 1950s deals with industrialization, a subject which many artists are chary of tackling. Shen Roujian, however, with his exquisite designs and lyrical colour presents the subject in an interesting way. In *Spring Comes to the Mountains*, for example, there is huge pylon which towers above the landscape. To avoid a flat and monotonous picture, he took pains to portray a lovely mountain scene, with terraced fields, newly-built houses, and a flock of sheep among wild flowers. The picture has therefore an idyllic flavour.

Shen said, "People often compare our mountains and rivers to a landscape painting. This shows that art is not simply a reproduction of nature. Rather it is a product of the artist's mind. It must reflect reality and transform it into something higher."

While devoting himself mainly to woodcuts, in the past decade Shen Roujian has also tried painting in the traditional Chinese style. Quoting an ancient Chinese painter's words, "The more the scenery is hidden, the more the imagination comes into play and vice versa," Shen said, "To some extent, this explains the dialectics in the treatment of space. I often admire the traditional Chinese method of laying out gardens. They convey infinity within a limited space."

Shen added, "Conceiving of an idea is often a long and tortuous process. Take my woodcut *The River Is Being Tamed*,* for instance. At first I wanted to present a comprehensive picture. The effect I achieved was just the opposite of what I wanted. I then chose a corner of the dam, giving prominence to the rushing waves and the splashing spray. The vastness of the project was in this way emphasized. A picture's atmosphere is most important. When seen from a distance it must be able to catch people's attention immediately, and then hold it on closer examination. Of course, this is not easy to achieve but artists must strive for this."

* See *Chinese Literature* No. 12, 1965.

As we examined his works, we were impressed by those with a distinctive Chinese style. At the same time we detected the influence of certain European schools. He admires Chinese romanticism in painting, and often studies the works of famous modern Chinese masters. He has also shown a keen interest in European art, ancient and modern.

Shen insisted that in learning from tradition and the experiences of others, one must not copy them. We found his woodcut entitled *Fishing Boats*. The sea is represented by only a few waves cut in simple lines, while the boats rock in the water. This shows his debt to traditional classical and folk techniques which he has absorbed and transformed into something new.

We talked for several hours until it was night. Outside the window, lights extended far into the distance. As we bid goodbye to the artist, one of my companions recited with emotion the lines of a poem by the great writer Lu Xun:

I request from our artist
A new composition —
Some mountains in spring,
Painted red.

Zhang Jie

The Music of the Forests

Before setting off, Sun Changning, a forester's son, set free all his birds, who were his childhood friends. They twittered and chirped as if trying to tell him they were loath to part from him. But Sun's heart was already winging towards the clouds like one swift swallow, which suddenly turned back, descending and circling for a long time above a cluster of birch trees, and then settled on a grave.

Who was at rest under the birch tree? Whose memory was affecting the boy? He was neither a relative nor a childhood companion.

Six years ago during a summer holiday, Sun accompanied the people delivering fish to the foresters' team, to which his father belonged. He missed his father a lot and loved the deep forest, as any boy would who lived there.

The summer nights were short and dawn broke early. Before the sun rose, the forests, mountains and small plains were all shrouded in a dense mist, through which only the highest treetops

penetrated. As the sun climbed high in the sky, the mist vanished. The sleeping forests and the ribbon-like streams on the small plains became visible in varying shades of green, some deeper, others lighter, but far and near all green.

The forest was a paradise for Sun Changning. His lips were dyed red by its berries, his pockets stuffed with its fruits and his heart was delighted by its music. Fallen leaves rustled under his feet; the wind sighed among the leaves; butterflies fluttered here and there; beetles and insects droned while bees buzzed; and the woodpeckers pecked.

A chirp from a bird was answered by a fainter one from the depths of the forest. The birds sang as if conversing while many others from their hiding-places joined in the chorus. In the distance the work-chants of the foresters could be heard. Everywhere the forest was filled with music.

That morning, Sun had set out with a big basket to gather mushrooms for the kitchen. Rain was plentiful that summer, and the mushrooms were at their best. Just when he thought he'd gathered enough, he'd look up and see even bigger ones under the trees ahead. They were like fat babies wearing white hats, their heads cutely tilted, luring him deeper and deeper into the forest.

He suddenly heard a strange sound, unlike all the birds' songs or the rain beating on the leaves; nor was it the faint drawl of the foresters' work-chant or the whispering wind. Yet it was like all those sounds he had known so well since childhood. Vague and ethereal, it had a dream-like, enchanting quality.

Following it, Sun reached a clearing where the foresters were resting among the felled trees. Teacher Liang, who shared a tent with his father, was playing an entrancing melody on a long glittering pipe to a rapt audience. The music rose above the sighing wind, transporting Sun into a new world. Until then, he had never known there was such beauty except the forest.

What was that pipe? A fairy-tale magic flute?

Sun had long ago asked his father about Teacher Liang, who had been sent from Beijing to that remote forest because he was being persecuted by the "gang of four". He was also suffering from cancer.

Sun had asked his father what Teacher Liang's crimes had been. His father was silent. Finally, when he asked if Liang was a bad man, his father furiously snapped, "Nonsense!" Confused, Sun gave up questioning. Since his father was a good man who had befriended Liang, the teacher could not be bad. Of that Sun was sure.

"Why doesn't he go back to Beijing and see a doctor?"

"He refuses to go."

Sun was baffled again. Would a person rather die than see a doctor? "Why?" he asked.

"Because first he'd have to admit he's guilty and betray others."

Sun said nothing more. Even to the boy, surrender and betrayal were shameful.

Thus Sun began to admire Teacher Liang, a man who would rather die than give in.

Applause and laughter interrupted Sun's thoughts. The foresters stretched their limbs and went back to work. Sun remained where he was gazing silently at Liang, unable to express his feelings. His expression was strange and unfathomable, as if he had lost one thing while finding another.

The music of the flute abruptly chased away his childhood ignorance, as the forest sounds he had heard, confused, blurred and formless, at last found a clear shape. Among the enthusiastic and responsive audience, only Sun seemed to have been waiting for the music for a long time.

Touched by his expression, Liang asked him, "You liked it?"

Sun nodded. There was no need for words.

Liang played for him alone. Sun was again moved but silent. He frowned as if in pain. Then suddenly he whistled a short passage from the piece Liang had just played. His face brightened. The notes expressed his feelings better than words.

Delighted that Sun could repeat the passage correctly, Liang tested him with another part which Sun reproduced without a fault. Liang was excited by the boy's accurate memory and precise musical ear. He realized that Sun had musical gifts which were lying dormant.

United by their excitement and happiness in the music, their warm friendship began, the difference in their ages vanished, and time passed unnoticed.

Sun refused to go back to school. In the forest with Liang, he could learn many things that weren't being taught in the classroom. Besides teaching Sun to read, write and do arithmetic, Liang also taught him to play the flute. As usual he played impromptu tunes for the foresters at their breaks, based on the folk-songs they liked to sing. The music was familiar and soothing.

A deep attachment developed between the man and the boy. Like his father and other foresters, Sun took care of the ailing man, forcing him to rest. Liang obeyed and humoured the boy, so as not to worry him, hiding his real condition from him. "I'm feeling much better," he would tell Sun. "Doing a little work will help me strengthen my body and fight this illness." He worked because he loved it, not because he had to.

Liang saw how Sun's love of nature and work enriched his imagination. Many simple melodies poured effortlessly from his lips. Liang had to work hard with Sun to turn these into real music. He was very fond of the boy and treasured his talents. Aware that he had not long to live, Liang concentrated all his time on Sun hoping to hand down his art to him so that one day the forest lad would become an outstanding musician. He was sure Sun would attain this.

He never let Sun slacken, but made him repeat a phrase dozens of times. Sometimes Sun felt like throwing away the disobedient flute, which paid no heed to him, missing a note or playing the wrong rhythm. Liang said, "Of course you have gifts, but gifts are like deeply buried precious stones, that need to be laboriously dug out and polished until they sparkle."

Sun again picked up the flute he both loved and hated. Who else could understand the joy and frustration it caused?

Liang wouldn't let Sun concentrate on technique alone. "That's too superficial," he said. He tapped the music book and stressed, "You must have more expression, not just technique. You must struggle to understand what you are trying to express. Understanding is the principal thing." When Sun finally interpreted a

piece well, Liang smiled in joy, banishing the pain caused by his illness. A smile so beautiful that Sun could never forget it.

Liang's condition deteriorated despite the traditional Chinese herbal medicines which the foresters made, and the many prescriptions which friends sent. Instead of losing heart, Liang was comforted by Sun's progress. The knowledge that he had spent his last days in such significant work consoled him. The "gang of four" and his disease could destroy his body, but his spirit would live on in Sun, hopeful, dedicated and vigorous.

At his death his mind was clear. He thought over the important things to which he still had to attend. His flute and all the music he had written in the forest over the years, he gave to Sun, telling the boy, "I have worked and fought with them all my life. Now you must always serve the people with this flute. Music originates from work. It must serve the working people. You've made a lot of progress, but you've a long way to go before you become a musician who can express the feelings of the workers and be loved by them. Study hard and never give up. I only regret that I can't help you to the end. Still spring will come again; flowers will bloom and birds will sing. Then you should go to Beijing, where someone else will help you to finish your studies. However successful you become, never barter your talents. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Sun replied choked with emotion.

"Now don't cry, you silly boy. Just remember all that I taught you." By this, he did not mean the music alone.

"Of course!"

At peace Liang closed his eyes and died a wronged man. With him went his talents, his loyalty to the Party, his unsaid words and unfinished work. His body lay serenely in the small forest hut.

The wind blew as the last sod was placed on the grave.

Forgetting that he was a "man" Sun threw himself against the birch tree in front of the grave and burst out crying. He wasn't ashamed of his tears; they showed no weakness.

Teacher Liang lay under the birch tree but Sun would never forget him.

Sun sat at a window seat on the train. He couldn't sleep a wink during the long journey of several days.

He gazed at the village lights flickering in the dark night as they slid by. He saw the earth awakening. The forests, fields, mountains, rivers and lakes were more beautiful in the sun's rays, more alive with each moment. This was the land Liang had tried to express in his music.

Sun grasped the long flute case, as if immersing all his passions in it. His thoughts wandered far ahead, but he always saw the expectant expression in Liang's eyes.

He arrived at Beijing, his innocent heart filled with eagerness and hope of success. At the music conservatory, he pushed open the door of the office for enrolments. A woman smiled sweetly and asked, "What can I do for you?"

In high spirits, Sun replied, "I want to enroll."

"You're too late," she answered casually. "The enrolment period has expired."

Stunned, Sun almost wept out of disappointment. Then he added eagerly, "But I've travelled a long way to get here."

"Well, the preliminary exams are over and this is the last day of the final exam."

"Please can I sit that?" Hope revived.

"Of course not. The finalists have been picked from those who sat the preliminary exams. You didn't sit those, so how can you sit the final?"

His hopes faded. He stood there dumbly, not knowing how to save the situation. Who could help and understand him, a stranger in such a large city?

Sympathetically the woman added, the smile gone from her face, "I'm so sorry. These are the regulations."

Everywhere in the grounds there were smiling faces. Sun was reluctant to leave. The sound of the piano, violin, clarinet and Chinese national instruments drifted out of many rooms. Then Sun's sharp ears distinguished the plaintive sound of a flute coming from one of the rooms. He walked towards it as if answering

the call of a friend. No one stopped him. Involuntarily he pushed open the door which creaked. Someone exclaimed at the sound. Sun was a conspicuously amusing figure in the warm room in his fur-lined jacket, fur hat and boots.

At one end of the room sat the examiners behind a desk. Professor Fu Tao, the chief examiner, glared at the intruder. Apart from a girl who was playing, six other competitors sat against the wall. The girl was playing quite well and she produced some original touches. Gradually Sun forgot his misfortune, lost in the familiar music and his thoughts. When she had finished, she bowed to the examiners and returned to her seat. Then Sun heard someone ask him severely, "What's the reason for your intrusion?" Sun looked blankly at the people, bewildered by their angry looks. "Please leave immediately, boy. There is an examination in progress."

Sun apologized, "I beg your pardon. I want to sit the exam."

The astonished examiners talked in low voices.

"Who allowed him to burst in like this?"

"It's absurd! Where's he from?"

"What a to-do!"

Then the professor explained patiently, "The enrolment period has expired, and the final exam is almost over."

Sun was hurt by their coldness. Flushed, he mumbled to himself, "I'd have gone away already if all I wanted to do was enter the conservatory." Sweating and embarrassed he found it even more difficult to express his feelings and longed to escape from the room.

"Try again next year. Now the gang has fallen, gifted students can enroll every year. Please go away. You're holding up the exam."

Sun stood stock-still. It was easy to leave, of course, but he had not come all that way merely for himself. No, he wouldn't leave. He had to carry out Liang's wishes. There was no backing out. He had to complete what Liang had left unfinished.

Shyly but firmly, Sun said quickly, "My home's over a thousand kilometres away and I came here because the gang has gone.

Please listen to me. Let me play just one tune. Otherwise I've come all this way for nothing." Tears filled his eyes.

Professor Fu sized up the strange stubborn boy. The flute case, worn at one corner, caught his attention for some odd reason. He felt as if he'd seen it somewhere before. Perhaps this boy was rather special. Should he let him play?

It was either Sun's exhausted state or his determination which finally won the sympathy of the seven candidates, who also began pleading, "Please let him play."

Sun felt some relief. Their sympathy moved him, and he immediately felt more at home in the strange surroundings. Of course the candidates knew that only three of them would be chosen and that Sun would lessen their chances. Even from among the present seven, the examiners were hard pressed to choose. They were all so good. Touched by their unselfishness, the examiners agreed to let young Sun have a chance.

Sun removed his fur jacket and hat. With the awkwardness of an adolescent, he looked questioningly at the examiners as if to say, "May I begin?" The professor nodded and thought the boy was like a real performer. Sun started to play, shyly as if afraid to startle his listeners. One teacher fidgeted with his chair, wondering if it was nonsense after all.

Soon Sun forgot where he was, lost in the music. He played for the vast forest, for the snow-covered hut at the foot of the mountain, for the warm glow shining from the hut's frozen windows; he played for his home, where his late respected teacher lay at rest.

The professor was stirred by the melody, bright, unsophisticated and as beautiful as poetry. He was charmed by the boy's playing although he had listened to many famous musicians and compositions. Sun disappeared as the professor thought of the person who had taught and inspired the boy to search for beauty and truth. The music conveyed what words could not.

A sense of guilt filled the professor, for almost having refused the gifted boy, who one day might become one of the world's great musicians. How subjective one could be!

Since the boy was obviously from the countryside, where had



He was charmed by the boy's playing.

he obtained his rigorous and basic training? There was something familiar about it. The boy's playing, like the worn flute case, reminded him of someone else, but whom? A faint voice seemed to call to him from the wilderness. . . . These thoughts flashed through the professor's mind until he pulled himself up, remembering he was in the examination room. Shaking his head, he reproved himself for having allowed his mind to wander. The last note from Sun's flute softly died away. Forgetting he was the main examiner, the professor said as if he was at a recital, "Please play another piece."

Sun played one melody after another with ease. Before his eyes the leaves of the birch trees danced in the spring breeze. The examination room faded away as all the candidates and examiners recalled the most beautiful scenes they had experienced in their lives. At last the music ended. All were silent. No one wanted to disturb the feelings that had been aroused, a pure desire for a better world.

Sun shuffled his feet, puzzled and disturbed by the silence. Had he let his teacher down? Had the melodies he loved not succeeded in touching their hearts? He was filled with anguish at having failed to realize his desire to let Liang live on through his works.

The silence was suddenly broken as all the candidates cried out, "He's better than any of us!"

"Yes, he's the best!"

"Give him a place!"

The examiners looked at the seven candidates, who, although they came from all over China, were filled with a common desire. Innocent, sincere and selfless, they were fine young people.

Sun's hopes soared as it dawned on him what they were saying. He protested, "No, it's not me. It's the music!"

The professor understood his modesty. "Tell me who wrote those pieces," he asked. "I've never heard of them before."

"My teacher wrote them."

"Oh? Where is he now?"

"In the forests."

"In the forests?" he repeated as the faint calls from the wilderness suddenly found shape in a familiar figure. Could it be he?

Had this boy been his student? Could such a coincidence be possible? Pain, indignation and hurt tugged at his heart. He stared at Sun tensely, concentrating on every movement lest he miss a single word, as if fearing the boy would vanish.

Taking up the flute, Sun said briefly, "I wrote this for my teacher." The music was crude and simple, the variations too brusque, yet it was a furious denunciation, with a memory so painful, that it overwhelmed them. Bitter tears stained Sun's cheeks as his audience wept with him. Slowly he laid the flute on the desk in front of the professor and produced a thick stack of music from his satchel. "My teacher left me these," he said.

On the cover, the professor saw the name Liang Qiming written in the familiar script. So it was he! His feelings were indescribable. He seemed to meet and then part with him again. Liang had been his best friend, the most talented among his contemporaries. Now he was dead, and they would never see each other again. He touched the flute and the sheets of music which Liang, talented, hard-working and loyal to his ideas, had left behind. Was this all? His eyes blurred with tears, he looked at the tearful Sun, took his hand and drew him near. Life had not ended under the birch tree. Memories were not gone for ever. In the boy and his music Liang's life would continue.

That night, after a warm bath, Sun climbed into the soft bed in the professor's home. He gazed at the stars twinkling in the sky through the gap in the curtains.

Just as he was drifting off, someone bent over him and asked, "Are you cold?"

"No. It's very warm, thank you." He opened his sleepy eyes, the warmth coursing gently through his whole body. He closed his eyes and was dropping off again, when he remembered something Liang had told him. "You must always serve the people with your flute."

Illustrated by Gao Yan

Zhang Jie

A Bouquet for Dajiang

Even Gu Dajiang himself could not tell when his love had been kindled!

He remembered how he had first met her twelve years before when he had been Coach Su's guest. He was then a sixteen-year-old table-tennis player. Yingying was the coach's daughter. With a gay ribbon in her hair, she sat quietly beside them and kept sizing him up with her shining eyes.

When the two of them were left alone, she asked suddenly, "Do you think you'll be a champion one day?"

"I don't know," he replied shyly.

"What a pity!" She sighed and left.

It was their first encounter but he was quite thrown off his balance.

Ten years had passed. As they grew older, both of them had matured.

Dajiang might have won this girl's proud heart before if only he had been bolder.

However, he kept hesitating, biting back the avowal of his sentiments. Why? Because of shyness, self-respect, timidity or stupidity?

No. It was only that with respect to love he lagged far behind the times. He had no idea how to approach a girl.

An athlete's strength doesn't mean that he has no tender feelings. Poets aren't the only ones with imagination.

Dajiang often thought himself almost as brave and romantic as Romeo!

He imagined her falling into a river one day and his swimming to her rescue through the racing current. Frightened, she would clasp her frail arms around his neck. . . .

But in fact she was a good swimmer, completely at home in the water!

Perhaps by some lucky chance a car would nearly run her over, and springing forward he'd carry her to safety. How would she respond in his arms?

Unfortunately he had no chance through exploits of this kind to show his love for her, nor were there likely to be any in future.

Yingying was a dancer. So whenever he had time he would buy a ticket, without telling her, and sit quietly in one corner of the theatre watching raptly while she danced. She concentrated hard on her performance, and it was only at such times that she looked gentle and tender — the way he always longed for her to be. At other times she was a tease, so hard on him that she kept him in a tizzy.

She was not one of the main dancers in the company and appeared only occasionally in group dances. But to him, she was the best of them all.

In this way, he guarded his goddess at a distance. The mere sight of her made him happy. His utter devotion to her reminded people of some beautiful stories of old.

But he received no recompense for his devotion. The goddess behaved as if Gu Dajiang did not exist.

Her younger brother Linlin was a close friend of his, however. It was when he had first visited Coach Su that the two boys struck up a friendship.

Linlin was a table-tennis enthusiast, but no one in the family

took this seriously or was willing to play with him. He had to ask visitors, "Can the two of us have a game?"

He either got fobbed off with: "Later when I have time." Or one of the family scolded, "Go and play by yourself. We're busy!" The grown-ups thought his longing a childish whim, and their indifference left him depressed and lonely.

But his determination was too great to be easily damped. In spite of being turned down so many times, he made the same proposal to each new guest. Now Dajiang was a godsend at last!

Dajiang not only readily accepted but missed seeing a good film in order to play with him.

A child may not be able to assess everything accurately, but he has intuitive judgement. Linlin knew that Dajiang was not merely being polite but was treating him — a five-year-old — on an equal footing.

Dajiang did not regard this as a pointless children's game. He felt from his own experience that any interest might embody an innate aptitude — maybe even a budding talent! How could he take it lightly? He had to make a sympathetic response.

Now Linlin was already a member of the national table-tennis team with Dajiang as his "training-partner".

What is the role of a "training-partner"?

He has to relinquish his own style of play to imitate the new "dodges" of players from other countries, so that by practising with him his partner can learn how to cope with them. Naturally "training-partners" have no chance to take part in international tournaments or win a name for themselves.

2

"Don't forget to tell Dajiang," Mrs. Su reminded Coach Su before going to work in the morning, "it's Yingying's birthday tomorrow. Ask him to come to dinner."

Though the old couple had been married for some thirty years, they still liked to tease each other. "So you're still after him, eh?" the coach joked.

As usual she got the better of him by retorting, "Why did you keep after me when you were his age?"

It was true that if not for his quick, hard attacking style, she would have been "lost" to somebody else. But Dajiang was quite different. What made the young fellow so slow? He hadn't made any advances yet to Yingying. The old couple were anxious yet could do nothing to help him.

As Yingying had reached marriageable age, her parents naturally regarded Gu Dajiang as the best choice for a son-in-law. Having some old-fashioned ideas, they wanted her to attach herself to Dajiang so that they could die at peace in the knowledge that she had a reliable husband. Years of observation had convinced them that Dajiang was not the flippant type. What preyed on their minds was the way Yingying turned a deaf ear to their advice by saying, "Your feelings can't replace mine!" or simply, "Father, don't you know choosing a husband is different from finding a good sportsman?"

What a pity! If only they could replace her feelings with their own!

Everything that happens in this world leaves its mark. One thing the old couple could never forget was Dajiang's reaction when he was asked to be a "training-partner". Many people had been surprised by his ready acceptance. Even Su had wondered if the boy had been too young to understand.

He had asked Dajiang once and the reply was, "Only a few people have opportunities to win the championship. Not everybody can be a champion."

"But you might be one?" he probed.

To his surprise, the naive-looking youngster answered like an experienced coach, "I'm not up to the other players. Each of us should make the best contribution he can, and I think my best role is that of 'training-partner'. Besides, if we win the world championship, the honour belongs to our country. So it doesn't matter who wins it."

Su and his wife were moved not only by the boy's attitude but also by his honesty and self-effacement. These were fine qualities,

Being Dajiang's coach, Su told someone higher up, "He has a solid foundation and could well become a champion."

The answer was, "He's a fine boy. He has the qualities a 'training-partner' needs and not many people have such qualities."

Yes. He had the fine spirit of self-sacrifice, so valuable at any time. The old couple didn't want to lose this potential son-in-law on whom they had set their hearts.

They determined to give him a hand! Otherwise he might even sacrifice his own love. What was more, they knew that quite a few girls were after him. It was strange that Yingying had no eyes for all this!

3

Yingying happened to see two unusually handsome armchairs in the furniture store and she bought them on the spot.

All pretty, headstrong girls who have devoted admirers tend to be "tyrants"! They abuse their power to torment their complaisant suitors.

Yingying hurried to the sports centre where Dajiang and Linlin were practising and asked Linlin to stop to help her get the armchairs home. To her surprise, Dajiang made no offer to help but stood stock-still beside the table. He seemed to be avoiding the errand deliberately. The blockhead! Didn't he get the hint? Though she had asked Linlin to go she was actually offering him a chance to please her.

Dajiang was not daft. In general, he seized every opportunity to volunteer to help her. Sometimes, she thought, he was a bit too officious. Today she had given him this chance — but they were busy training. So he avoided her eyes, dared not even approach her, for fear he might be unable to resist her imperious yet lovable command. It took him all his self-control not to go dashing off to the furniture store.

He would stick it out and act dumb, though it wasn't easy. Lowering his eyes, he spun the ball vigorously in a loop drive as if to build up a wall of defence against the magnetism she exercised,

or as if to convince her that loop drives were the most important thing on earth.

Yes, he loved her! He was willing to sacrifice everything for her. But he couldn't stop training because that wasn't a personal affair. If it had been, he would willingly have sacrificed it too! It was just too bad. . . .

Linlin was playing badly that afternoon. The ball was either trapped in the net or flew off the table. Besides, by now he was tired. But Dajiang speeded up his loop drives and Linlin kept failing to return the ball. Soaked through and crestfallen, he dashed right and left.

Yingying sympathized with her brother, thinking that Dajiang was making fun of him or showing off on purpose.

Suddenly, Linlin slipped and fell — a heavy fall from the sound.

"Are you all right?" Dajiang asked with concern.

"It's nothing," Linlin replied casually.

Yingying glowered at Dajiang with her bewitching eyes and blurted out, "You're making a fool of him!"

Good gracious! How could she say a thing like that to Dajiang? Linlin bit back an angry retort for fear she might say something even worse. If it were not for Dajiang, he would have had it out with her. Instead, he fumed, "What do *you* know?"

Dajiang was in a fluster. He hated to see her pretty face clouded over because of him.

He knew that Linlin would have been able to beat him if he relaxed a little. Why hadn't he done so? It was nothing difficult, actually it was easier.

But no! He couldn't do that. The international invitation tournament was approaching, the people of the whole country were expecting them to win.

Ignoring Yingying's outburst, Dajiang said patiently to Linlin, "Take it easy. Think, why can't you control the ball today?"

Linlin shook his head, thoroughly exasperated.

"Is it because you're a bit slow? Do you have this feeling?"

"No, I don't."

"From what I can see over here, you're not hitting the ball when it bounces up but when it comes down. Try again!"

Yingying, her cheeks burning, quietly slipped out.

When she got back to the furniture store, Dajiang was waiting for her in the cold wind. He still had his sports suit on, obviously he must have come here in a great hurry.

"Why didn't you put on your overcoat in such cold weather?" she asked sulkily.

He said nothing but followed her into the store with a guilty smile, which made her feel somewhat rueful. However, her face was expressionless.

When the armchairs that had troubled Yingying for several hours were finally ensconced in her room, Dajiang asked, "Could I have something to eat?"

Yes, he had missed his meal! She jumped up from the new armchair and ran ahead of her mother into the kitchen to forage left and right with a great clinking of bowls and dishes. She meant to prepare a delicious dinner for him.

The oil in the saucepan was already smoking, yet she had not minced the leeks. In a fluster, she grasped the hot handle of the saucepan. It burnt her hand and she dropped it with a smothered scream. But Dajiang heard it or, to be more exact, felt it.

He couldn't have been more upset if he had been burnt himself. Now he didn't feel like eating.

When he cradled her hand and blew on it, tears welled up in her eyes.

"Why make a mountain out of a mole-hill?" Linlin squinted at his sister. "You're not even blistered."

4

Dajiang had planned to buy Yingying a good birthday present, but the armchairs had delayed him. It was late now and he had to rack his brains to find a good solution.

"Today's Yingying's birthday," he said to Linlin. "What present do you think I should give her?"

"Present?" thought Linlin in dismay. "Dajiang must have forgotten how she carried on yesterday."

In his eyes, Dajiang was perfect except that he was too soft where Yingying was concerned.

"What do you say?" Dajiang asked again.

"How should I know?" Linlin did not want to bother his head about trifles. He was too young to understand Dajiang's feelings in the first place. Secondly, he was still angry after yesterday's incident. Why should everybody dote upon her? Father, mother, and Dajiang too! The more you pandered to her, the more conceited she grew!

"What's her favourite food?"

If Dajiang had not been his best friend, he would have sneered at him. But he sensed that this was something of vital importance to Dajiang. He had to think.

He really could not think of anything and looked at Dajiang helplessly.

Dajiang was not dispirited. "What colour do you think she likes best then?"

That was even less important. Not wanting to hurt Dajiang, he cudgelled his brains without reaching any conclusion. He would not have cared if it were not for the expectant look in Dajiang's eyes. This prompted him to answer "red" without thinking.

All girls love red, don't they? To soothe Dajiang he added confidently, "Anything red will do. I'm sure she'll be pleased."

Yingying took the birthday present Dajiang gave her: a fluffy red scarf.

She stared at him with her beautiful yet mysterious, unfathomable eyes. He dared not look at the light in her eyes for long, for fear he might be dazzled.

"What colour is this?"

"Red!" Dajiang replied honestly.

"So you're not colour-blind."

What did that mean? He could not work it out. He found himself always so slow in her presence, not like his usual self.

"You know the best use for it?"

"A scarf. . . ."

"It'll be fine to bait the bull in our Spanish dance!" She broke into a peal of laughter.

Dajiang looked helplessly around.

"Dinner's ready! Dinner's ready!" Linlin shouted in the next room.

Yingying could not find any special fault with Dajiang. But she felt love could only be based on mutual attraction. Dajiang lacked a sense of humour and wasn't engaging. He wasn't handsome either, compared with the young men in her company. Besides, he hadn't distinguished himself in his profession: he'd not even won a third place, not to say a championship. Still, she felt there was something touching about him. What was it? She did not know, yet she could not rid herself of this impression.

5

Was a dancer sitting in the first row of the grandstand because she was a table-tennis fan? It was because this was the final of the individual event of the international table-tennis invitation tournament which would decide Linlin's fate. How could his sister fail to take an interest in it?

It was the fifth game and nobody knew who would win, for the scores were very close.

Yingying's heart, like that of thousands of spectators, was pounding like the ping-pong ball on the table. The play evoked loud sighs and wild applause. What art could bring about such lightning changes of mood?

Yingying heard a conversation behind her.

"Forehand and backhand loop drives are really a menace!"

"Do you think our player can win?"

"Touch-and-go! This foreign method of attack from both sides is hard for us to take!"

Forehand and backhand loop drives? She had heard a lot about that lately.

It suddenly dawned on her why Dajiang had changed his style of cutting to loop drives. She began to understand why he had no fixed way of playing of his own but adopted one way today and

another tomorrow. And she realized how her brother had been able to join in the final of the championship.

She remembered how often her father had said, "If we hadn't arranged things this way, Dajiang might already have won the cup in some international tournament. But he willingly accepted the role of a 'training-partner' to pave the way for others to win the cup. For years, he has helped many players in this way. Though not a line of poetry has been written about him and not a single bouquet presented to him, he is still working hard and selflessly to enable others to win honour for our country."

She recalled what had happened that day when she had gone to the sports centre to ask for their help and regretted what she had said to him. Analysing her own selfish motives, for the first time she felt inferior to Dajiang.

All of a sudden it dawned on her what his latent power of attraction was.

He was there too watching Linlin intently though he himself was not in the running for the championship. But she began to understand him.

He looked powerful and determined, with none of the awkwardness he showed in her presence.

The game was being hotly contested, but Yingying calmed down, not caring much whether Linlin won or not. So long as there were people like Dajiang, she thought, there would sooner or later be players able to defeat forehand and backhand loop drives, and win the championship.

Linlin won! Excited spectators rushed down to congratulate him. Someone presented him with a bunch of flowers.

Turning to his sister, he held up the flowers.

Yingying vehemently beckoned him over. To avoid a scolding later, he approached her reluctantly.

When he was within reach, she snatched the flowers from his hands and turned to leave.

"Yingying! Yingying!" He stamped angrily. He would certainly have given her the flowers later. What use were flowers to a boy? But this wasn't the right time, just after the biggest victory in his life!



Whom was she waiting for?

Just as the players entered the resting room, someone called, "Dajiang, you're wanted on the phone."

It was unusual for anyone to call him up at such a time.

He picked up the receiver. The very first sentence he heard put fresh life into him.

"Come at once! I'll be waiting for you at the south gate of Green Bamboo Park." Yingying sounded strangely grave and in earnest.

"Fine!"

Not many people passed Yingying, but those who did threw an inquiring glance at this girl standing there, alone, with a bunch of flowers. Whom was she waiting for?

Was it so strange?

Plenty of young men in this world wait with thumping hearts on unpropitious occasions, holding bouquets for their sweethearts. Why couldn't a girl do the same? Some old people recalled the follies of their youth and a smile appeared on their lined faces as their hearts filled with happiness mingled, perhaps, with a faint regret for the past.

So why should they be surprised?

Dajiang had run over so fast that he was out of breath. Yingying couldn't help being touched by the weight he attached to the least thing she said. She regretted having tormented him before and, at the same time, felt proud that a man so deserving of respect belonged to her! Her brain was in a whirl, and her emotions were too mixed to be expressed by a bunch of flowers.

"Anything I can do for you?" Dajiang asked anxiously without even noticing the flowers in her hands or her confusion, so eager was he to be of some service to her.

"Nothing. Take these." She gave him the flowers shyly.

He was beside himself with surprise and joy. Though unable to see right away just what this meant, in fancy he conjured up a beautiful future for the two of them.

His eyes, like two deep pools of water, had concealed his devotion and love for her. But now she jumped into the water. . . .

Dajiang lowered his eyes. He shrank from accepting these flowers which symbolized honour.

Yingying thrust them into his hands, then took his arm and they walked off together.

Enveloped by the fragrance of the flowers and her faint scent he felt intoxicated.

Illustrated by He Yunlan

Bai Honghu and Yang Zhao

Hansuai, the Living Ghost

Aijud's and Hansuai's rooms faced each other on either side of the garden, in which lay a pond encircled with banyan and fruit-laden papaya trees. From time to time Aijud would interrupt his studies to stare out of his window across at Hansuai. Through her window, he saw her erect figure by the lamp, as she concentrated on writing down the figures with one hand, while calculating with the abacus with the other.

Hansuai always studied diligently and was one of the top students in her class. At first, Aijud had found the calculating with abacus difficult, though he could recite mathematical tables fluently, but Hansuai had never laughed at him.

"Just use this and don't be afraid," she said, pointing to her head to encourage him. "The more you use your brains the sharper they become."

Whenever Aijud looked at Hansuai's lighted window, he was encouraged.

One afternoon, the students were going to see a film. Aijud had never seen Hansuai go out or see a film. When he met her he asked, "Are you going to the film, Hansuai?"

"Me? I — I haven't made up my mind yet."

"Why not?"

She was silent.

"You should go. I was intending to do some washing, but Comrade Aifuang said the film is a very good one. Studying isn't the only way to learn. Films can teach you something too."

"O.K., I'll go then."

On reaching the cinema, Aijud searched everywhere for Hansuai, but couldn't find her. Why hadn't she come, when she said she would?

Before the film ended, he left the cinema and hurried to Hansuai's room. No one was there. Through the window he looked into the garden and spotted Hansuai squatting by the pond, washing a man's headdress in a basin. Aijud wondered to whom it belonged. Then as she lathered it, he noticed a sky-blue stain on it. It was his. He had carelessly spilt ink on it the previous day.

Eagerly, he ran out of the room and, turning a corner, rushed to Hansuai shouting, "Hansuai! Hansuai!"

With her head bent over her washing, she was startled to see Aijud. Raising her eyes, she asked, "Has the film finished already?"

"Why didn't you go to the film? Why stay here and wash my clothes instead?"

"Look, silly! I was doing my own washing, so I thought I'd do yours too. You're so busy with your studies. I can wash quicker than you."

Aijud found there were many clothes in the basin, not just his but those of other friends too. Rolling up his sleeves, he squatted down beside her. "Let's do them together." So saying, he took some clothes and began scrubbing one of them, a skirt of Hansuai's.

Feeling embarrassed, she tried to snatch it back. "Put it down! Put it down!"

Looking at the skirt in his hand, Aijud smiled, not minding a bit. "Calm down! If you can wash our clothes, why can't we wash yours?" He glanced at her affectionately.

Their eyes met, so that she turned hastily away. Her manner suddenly grew cool and she fixed her eyes on the ground as if

preoccupied with some problem. After a while, she picked up her basin and went away without a word.

Looking at her retreating figure, Aijuad was puzzled. She was as beautiful as a flower, yet as cold as stone. Back in his room, he was in an emotional turmoil. When the other students returned from the film, laughing and talking, he went to see Aifuang, the dean of the Nationalities' Cadre School and secretary of the Youth League branch of the accountants' training class. Aijuad told him abruptly, "Hansuai is so good. She doesn't just help us in our studies, but also in our daily lives. She was washing our clothes today. I think we should admit her into the Youth League."

Whatever the problem, Aifuang was never at a loss. But now he frowned and was silent for a long time, before sighing.

"What's the matter? Have I said something wrong?" Aijuad asked.

"Of course not! That's a good suggestion. We should try to help her, but it will take time. Now, how are you getting on in your studies? Any difficulties?" he said, changing the subject.

Since Aijuad had not come to talk about this, he soon left.

After that, Aijuad began to watch Hansuai's behaviour more closely. She was a strange contradiction of modesty and friendliness and unreasoning stubbornness. She would gaily chat in class and then snub everyone afterwards.

One fine Sunday morning, the students were up early and hurrying to go home or out. Aijuad watched while Hansuai took her time having breakfast. As always, she clearly wasn't going anywhere. He walked over and said, "Won't you go home today?"

"No."

"Where do you live?"

"Oh, far away," she replied.

"Then come to my home instead and meet my family."

"No, thank you."

"Come on! My family live in Manliu Village near the town. There's no need to be so formal."

When he tried to take her arm, she dodged away with a curious look, declining his invitation in a proud and bitter tone. As she ran away, he noticed there were tears in her eyes. Since he was

now in no mood to go home, he went to see Aifuang again. He began, "Hansuai seems to have some problems."

"How do you know that?" the dean asked in astonishment, his composure shaken.

"I feel it."

With a deep frown, Aifuang sighed.

"Really, Comrade Aifuang! Whenever I mention Hansuai, you just sigh!"

As if he had not heard him, Aifuang moved nearer to Aijuad and stared at him. "Isn't your home in Manliu Village?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And how many are in your family?"

"Only two. My mother and I."

"What's your mother like?"

"She works very hard."

The dean nodded. "Are there many superstitious people in your village?" he continued after a pause.

"Of course. Too many!" Not quite understanding the line of questioning, Aijuad added, "A lot of them believe that illness is caused by ghost people. Once when I was sick, my mother pricked my chest with a tiger's fang and muttered to herself, 'Which village are you from, you evil ghost? What's your name? Tell me or I'll stab you with this tiger's fang.' Then she pricked me until I bled."

"Have you ever seen any ghost people?"

"Yes. It was the year before Liberation, and I was just over fifteen then. I saw a man living ghost being driven out of a village near ours. He brought his wife and two children with him. On the orders of the chief, he sacrificed a cock to the gods at the crossroads. Kneeling on the ground, he made a pledge that he and his family would live far away and never return, even when they became real ghosts at their deaths. . . ."

Aifuang's expression was furious. Cutting Aijuad short, he demanded, "Is that man a human being or a ghost person?"

"A human being of course!"

"Then you've never seen any ghosts?"

"Never! Who could see a ghost?"

"Are there any ghosts?"

"No, of course not!"

Back in his room Aijud realized that he was still in a dilemma over Hansuai. Why had Aifuang talked to him about living ghosts? Was it possible that . . . ? He dared not think any longer. His heart pounded. Such thoughts were ridiculous!

2

Filled with suspicion, Aijud tried to find out where Hansuai lived, but she seldom chatted after class, especially with him. Whenever he approached she would avoid him.

It was early in April that the accountants' training class ended. The day after the graduation ceremony, the students would return home, so Aijud was very anxious to have a talk with Hansuai. It had not been easy for them to study, since both came from poor families. But for Liberation this would not have been possible. Even if they were not to be close friends, he hoped they could at least keep in touch. That afternoon he saw her packing, alone in her room. Going over he said:

"How time flies! Half a year has passed in a flash."

Like a deer, Hansuai was flustered to see him. Controlling herself a little, she murmured, "Yes."

Sitting down Aijud watched her packing. "We've studied and learnt how to calculate with an abacus."

"And how to develop these border areas."

"Exactly! Back home in our villages we must do all we can."

"We'll work for better harvests too."

Hansuai was rather reserved at first, but the more they talked the more ardent and intimate they became. The afternoon passed until it was almost time for supper. Aijud went on in high spirits:

"I'm so happy for the future of us Dais."

"And I'm so happy for the people of my village."

"Aren't your people Dais?" Aijud asked puzzled.

"No. They — they aren't!" she retorted, her voice rising.

"Where is your village then?" he pressed, hoping to solve the mystery.

"Here on earth, in the world of men! It's a fascinating place, better than anywhere else." Although she praised her village, there was no happiness in her tone. It was as if she was arguing a case.

"So where is this paradise?" Aijud tried to ascertain.

"Oh, it's getting late. Come on! Let's go to the office. There's so much to be done before we leave tomorrow."

She changed the subject, her face grave. Turning round she walked away before Aijud could say anything more, leaving her clothes scattered on her bed.

The next morning, the graduates were about to set off for home, scurrying about bidding each other farewell. Aijud knew Hansuai would neither come to say goodbye to him nor expect him to say it to her. Walking to a huge banyan tree outside the gate, he stood hoping to see her once more before they parted. She appeared carrying two bamboo crates on a shoulder-pole. She walked slowly, her head down, her eyes misty. As she passed him her pace quickened, but at the bend of the road by a cocoanut palm she turned round to glance at him. Looking after her, Aijud forgot that he too must leave for home. After she had disappeared into the distance, he went to see the dean once more.

With tears in his eyes, he asked where Hansuai lived. Instead of answering, the dean asked him why he wanted to know her address. Aijud urged him to tell, but the dean just replied, "Now let things be. You run off home immediately."

"No, I won't!" declared Aijud.

"Why not?"

"She's so mysterious. There's something troubling her. I want to find out the truth or I'll never have any peace of mind."

"Young men should be light-hearted, not so heavy."

"Comrade Aifuang, you kept her secret while she was still a student. But why won't you tell me the truth now that she has left? Must I be kept in the dark all my life?"

His sad face reminded Aifuang of another's, which had appeared six months previously, on the last day of registration for the accountants' training class.

A slender girl had entered, wearing a light green top and bright

blue skirt. Pretty and intelligent-looking, she glanced around uneasily, her eyes sparkling. When the clerk asked from which village she came, she blushed and answered, "From Mengjang district."

"Yes, but which village?"

"From Mengjang district!" she insisted, as if defending herself.

Overhearing her arguing, Aifuang invited her into a vacant office and asked, "Is your name Hansuai?"

"Yes," she answered, raising her head puzzled.

"You can tell him the name of your village."

"No, I won't." She lowered her head again, biting her lips.

"Why not?"

"Because I won't tell anyone except a Communist Party member."

"Who do you think I am?"

The girl raised her head again. In spite of his cadre's uniform, one could tell he was a Dai from his face, even without hearing his pure Dai dialect. She scrutinized him, while she nervously fingered her skirt.

"As a Dai and a Party member, I understand your dilemma. But we've been liberated and those terrible dark days have gone for ever. You must believe that things have changed. Others won't judge you as before and you shouldn't expect the worst from others."

Although he talked with her for a long time, she kept her head down and said stubbornly, "I've nothing more to say. I'm here to study for my people, that's all!"

He talked with her often about her studies, and she would beam with joy and talk animatedly. But the moment he touched on her personal life, she would stubbornly clam up, "I've nothing more to say!"

She seldom left the school grounds.

Recalling this, Aifuang paced the room in agitation, stopping at last in front of Aijud. Patting him on the shoulder he sighed, "She's very unfortunate. No need to increase her pain."

"Please tell me the truth."

"She — she's from Mengbie Village. . . ."

Aijud felt a shiver go down his spine. Mengbie Village? That's where the living ghosts lived before Liberation. Only after Liberation, it had got a name.

"I can't believe it. She — she's a good girl. . . ." His voice trembled so that he couldn't continue. No, it wasn't true! Hansuai from Mengbie Village! The fond dream he had hoped would come true a moment ago of Hansuai and he marrying and working together in the same co-operative suddenly turned into nightmare. He visualized his friendly relatives and neighbours cursing and sneering at Hansuai, his mother refusing to agree to their marriage. Aijud was deeply upset.

As if he had read his mind, Aifuang said, "Hansuai is a good girl and all the Mengbie villagers are good too." Then he added, "Have you ever seen a village headman being accused of being a living ghost? No, all accused were peasants!"

Aijud began to understand what Aifuang was saying, and so staring at the dean, he listened carefully filled with grief and indignation.

"There is no such thing as a ghost," Aifuang emphasized. "For example, take Hansuai's mother. About thirty years ago, when she was a beautiful teenager, she lived with her parents in Mangbang Village, which had been their home for generations. The headman was a known womanizer and wanted to seduce her. At dusk one day, when she was on her way to husk rice, he jumped out from his hiding-place in a bamboo grove near the river and tried to embrace her. Although she looked frail, she was strong and slapped his face so hard that he staggered back. After that he hated her and planned his revenge. Later that summer, a woman transplanting rice seedlings fell ill with malaria. The headman started the rumour that Hansuai's mother had gone to the sick woman's home to borrow a bamboo crate and that her ghost had caused the illness. On the orders of the wicked headman, their hut was burnt and they were driven out of the village."

Aijud cried out, "Why doesn't the government issue a law stating that there are no living ghosts and that it is against the law to brand a person as one?"

Shaking his head, Aifuang explained, "That wouldn't do. Peo-

ple must get rid of these ideas themselves. You asked me twice about Hansuai's past, but I didn't tell you because I was afraid you'd look down on her and discriminate against her."

Aijud hung his head in shame. Although he didn't believe in ghosts, he hadn't known the reasons why people were branded as such. If only he had known earlier, he could have helped Hansuai. How childish and ignorant he had been!

3

After leaving the dean's room, Aijud set off for Mengbie Village, walking quickly hoping to catch up with Hansuai.

Mengbie Village was far away in a valley at the foot of a mountain. On the way, Aijud passed many villages, fields, ridges and streams. The further he went the fewer the villages and the more rugged the path. The area, formerly a wild forest, was the haunt of tigers and leopards. As more and more living ghosts were banished there, they set up their village, clearing the forest. As Aijud walked along the rough mountain path, he thought of those wretched people who had dragged themselves along that same way such as Hansuai's mother and her grandmother, who must have suffered deeply. But for the Communist Party and Liberation, they would have endured those injustices for ever, leading the life of outcasts from generation to generation, while more and more victims were driven there.

He lost all sense of time. Suddenly the path broadened with neat rows of banyan trees lining it like bright trellises. Among the luscious green grass colourful wild flowers ran riot. The surface of the pools mirrored the blue sky and the white geese. Golden wheat grew in abundance. There was beauty and tranquillity wherever one looked. Aijud's eyes drank in the beauty. Expecting to arrive at Mengbie Village soon, he wondered what it would be like and how the people were.

Suddenly he spotted a girl emerge from a wheat field. It was Hansuai! Her eyes sparkled with joy at the good harvest. Aijud rushed towards her, taking her hand and saying, "Hello, Hansuai! I followed you here!"

Hansuai was delighted to see him, but she was uncertain what he meant. Why had he followed her?

While she had been a student, Aijud had often been in her thoughts. He was warm-hearted and honest, an idealistic young man. She had become very fond of him and sensed he was in love with her. But whenever she thought about their future, her joy was overshadowed by her past.

As a child, she had not known there was such discrimination. When selling eggs at the fairs, the boys had buzzed around her like bees round a honey-pot, singing love songs and competing with one another for her attentions. She ignored them all. One day when she went to the market, the boys began to swarm around her as always, singing until their throats ached. Hansuai smiled. Suddenly a voice rang out, "She's from Mengbie Village! A living ghost!" The boys' faces registered horror as they fled in panic.

Heart-broken, Hansuai sobbed out her story in her mother's arms when she reached home.

Indignantly her mother said, "Ignore them, Hansuai. We live in Mengbie Village. Let the rest of the world go by!"

From that time, Hansuai's heart was heavy and she swore never to leave the village again. After Liberation, however, there were the movements to give the land back to the peasants and set up co-operatives. She was chosen by the district administration to learn accounting, but she refused, afraid of persecution. "I won't go," she protested. "We can run the co-operative well without any accountants."

The Party secretary of the district committee had at last persuaded her and so she had entered the Nationalities' Cadre School. There she seldom went out in case someone recognized her, and kept her distance from her classmates in case they discovered about her past. She was afraid they would sneer at her if they knew the truth. As for Aijud, he was a sincere friend, but she was sure that if he knew, he would abandon her and break her heart. Whenever she thought of this she trembled.

Now Aijud had come to her! Had the Communist Party really destroyed superstition? Had she misjudged Aijud?

Seeing her bewildered expression, Aijud tried to reassure her,

“This new society has given us Dai people a new life!”

Touched, she replied, “How did you find me?”

“Comrade Aifuang told me everything so I decided to come after you.”

Hansuai was deeply grateful to Aifuang, who had told her many times not to expect the worst from others. Yet she still was uncertain if Aijuad was really as determined as he declared.

“How could you love such an unfortunate girl as me?”

“The past is past. Now we have a new life, a new beginning, a new way of thinking,” Aijuad said, hugging Hansuai.

A pair of swans rose from the pool, flapping their wings and soaring into the blue sky.

1953

The Broken Balustrade (anonymous)



Li Song

“The Broken Balustrade”

Figure painting in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) reached a very high level. *The Broken Balustrade*, whose painter is unknown and which has been handed down to us, is a fine example of how to deal with a complicated composition and portray the spirit of the different characters.

This painting is based on a historical story. In the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC — AD 8), Zhu Yun, an official, asked for an audience with Emperor Cheng Di (52-6 BC). In front of all the court officials, he said to the emperor, “Today, the high officials at the imperial court are all parasites because they don’t try to correct Your Majesty’s mistakes or do something good for the people. I ask to be granted the imperial sword so as to kill a sycophant official as a warning to the rest.”

“Whom?” Emperor Cheng Di asked.

“Zhang Yu, Marquis of Anchang.”

Zhang Yu was the emperor’s former tutor and was favoured by him. On hearing this, Emperor Cheng Di flew into a fury and said, “How dare you mock your sovereign and insult my tutor at

court! You're condemned to death!" He ordered the palace guards to drag Zhu Yun away. Zhu grasped the handrail of a balustrade so hard to resist that it broke. He shouted, "I'll be happy to be with the ancient sage officials Long Pang and Bi Gan in the nether world, but what will become of the Han Dynasty?" Finally, the guards succeeded in dragging him away. At that moment, Marshal Xin Qingji took off his official hat, untied his seal ribbon and kowtowed before the emperor, saying, "This man has always been known for his pride and straightforwardness. If he is correct, he should not be killed. If he is wrong, he should be treated leniently. I'm prepared to die defending him." So saying, he kowtowed till his head bled. Thus Emperor Cheng Di came to see his own error and pardoned Zhu Yun.

Later, when some workmen came to repair the broken balustrade, Emperor Cheng Di ordered, "Leave it as it is! Let it remain to remind us of this honest official!"

Zhu Yun's opinion, however, was not accepted. He, therefore, cut himself off from politics, spending the rest of his life teaching. Zhang Yu retired under favourable conditions, still securing for himself wealth by force or trickery. The incident had no impact on political life in the declining years of the Western Han Dynasty. Yet the story has been remembered since it was not easy for Emperor Cheng Di, a feudal ruler, to be so tolerant. Despite his rage, he controlled himself and spared Zhu Yun's life, listening to others' opinions.

It is interesting to see how this incident influenced palace architecture. According to a later historical record, there was no handrail on the middle section of the balustrade in imperial palaces, and this was called a "broken balustrade" to commemorate the incident.

In *The Broken Balustrade*, Emperor Cheng Di and Zhu Yun are in deep dispute. The latter is being hauled away by the guards, but is resisting, grasping a handrail. At this critical moment, Xin Qingji enters, implying a change in the situation. All this is clearly and simply shown by the nine figures in three groups. It is an example of traditional Chinese figure paintings, which effectively

express themes using the minimum number of figures and a simple background.

While being faithful to the main historical facts, the painter has made some minor changes in the composition. First, his setting is in the garden, instead of the palace court, where all the officials would have to be present. The timing of the event is also altered. In the picture, Xin Qingji appears to plead with the emperor before Zhu Yun is dragged away, and he has neither taken off his hat, nor untied the seal ribbon, nor kowtowed. The three groups are arranged so that the viewer can easily follow the drama. Thus the painting neither rigidly adheres to historical details, nor suffers from exaggeration or affectation, while allowing the painter full scope for artistic expression, a common feature of many fine ancient figure paintings.

The success of the painting lies not only in the artist's treatment of the story, but also in his striking characterization of the conflicting parties. The two sides are unequally balanced. Emperor Cheng Di has absolute power over Zhu Yun's life. Around him stand his courtiers and attendants. Beside Zhu Yun, the strong palace guards are dragging him away, but Zhu's expression is steadfast and courageous. Although the attendants and maids are not directly involved in the conflict and are the emperor's subjects, they show their concern and sympathy for Zhu Yun. Truth and falsehood are clearly expressed, the former being stronger than numbers or power.

The artists in the Song Dynasty paid much attention to depicting the feelings of the characters rather than their appearance. The expressions in Zhu Yun's and the emperor's eyes show their intense conflicting emotions. Zhu Yun, grasping the balustrade, shows his anger and defiance, challenging the arrogant and merciless Emperor Cheng Di, who has lost his self-control.

The other expression, which cannot be ignored, is the evil, rapacious look of the sycophant official, Zhang Yu, who is standing beside the emperor. The slight tilt of his head conveys his complacency. His meanness is strikingly contrasted with Zhu Yun's uprightness.

The celebrated modern Chinese painter Xu Beihong (1895-1953)

highly praised the work. He said, "When Zhu Yun is struggling against the palace guards, their expressions and movements are so vividly depicted that few ancient or contemporary Chinese paintings have attained its artistic level."

There exist two versions of *The Broken Balustrade*. The one illustrated in this issue was once preserved in the Beijing Palace Museum, and is now in Taiwan. It was painted on coloured silk (173.9 cm × 101.6 cm). The other (133 cm × 76 cm), in the Xu Beihong Museum, Beijing, is torn in the middle. Xu Beihong repaired it when it was remounted. Both emphasize characterization, but there are some slight differences in details. Probably both are copies of the same painting, which were changed a little by the artists.

Zhang Xihou

The Classicist Movement in the Tang Dynasty

The famous Tang-dynasty (618-907) classicist movement was both an important ideological and a literary reform one. It advocated learning from classical prose and was opposed to the ornate and euphuistic style predominant in the early Tang period. The main feature of the latter was the emphasis on balance, affected language and euphony. The content, however, was empty; the form stereotyped. This hampered the free expression of ideas and the reflection of reality.

From the middle of the seventh century, as more local governors became independent warlords, the political situation more corrupt and social contradictions more acute, public opinion demanded political reform, while the literati urged that the classics should be studied so that the language could better express their political ideas. They took as their models Han-dynasty writings. They thus created a new prose style, freer and more comprehensible,

which was a suitable vehicle for theoretical discussions and narratives. Such writings were appreciated by the people.

The classicist movement had begun in the early Tang period with Chen Zi'ang (651-702) as its main representative. He was the first to write in the classicist style, advocating robust ideological content and forceful language, while the euphuistic style was still fashionable. Later, in the eighth century, more celebrated classicist writers appeared, such as Xiao Yingshi (708-759), Li Hua (715-766), Dugu Ji (725-777) and Yuan Jie (719-772). Their efforts had a certain influence. From the late eighth century to the early ninth century, during the middle Tang period, the outstanding classicist writers Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan dealt the final blow to the ornate, formalistic style which had been in vogue for centuries.

The achievements of the classicist movement were great. Classical prose once again was studied by writers. They sought distinctive prose styles, in which the language was lucid, fluent and concise. While learning from the spirit of the classics, they were against blind copying. Instead they aimed to create something new.

Han Yu (768-824) was a native of Nanyang, but because his ancestral home was in Changli, he was known as the "Master of Changli". Although of poor birth, he studied diligently so that aged twenty-five he passed the court examination. At twenty-nine, he was appointed as a government official and served both in the central government and the provinces. Because he criticized certain policies, he was twice demoted from office.

After Sima Qian (145?- BC), Han Yu was the most outstanding ancient Chinese prose writer. His political views, however, were mixed. Although he supported the feudal order and believed in the Confucian moral code, he was a man of political vision who opposed the local warlords gaining independence, supported the unity of the empire and criticized the officials' extortion of excessive taxes and levies from the people. In those days such ideas were fairly progressive, and he boldly expressed these in his writings, many of which had a positive significance.

Varied in form and rich in content, his miscellaneous essays are thought-provoking. In the essay, "On Teachers", which criticizes

the tendency to belittle the role of teachers, Han Yu clearly points out the important role of the teacher and the necessity to respect him. He writes, "Whether he is of noble or common birth, old or young, whoever knows the truth can be a teacher." Yet he was not restricted by the traditional view of a teacher, adding, "Pupils are not necessarily inferior to their teachers, nor teachers better than their pupils." In four other short miscellaneous essays, he used animals to express his ideas. In this issue is published one of these, "On Horses", in which a horse possessing unusual gifts represents a talented but unrecognized man.

Han Yu's narrative prose was also very vivid. "Postscript to the Life of Zhang Xun" is about the local officials Zhang Xun and Xu Yuan who, in 575, resisted the rebels led by An Lushan and Shi Siming and died as heroes. Han Yu argued that Xu Yuan, who died in captivity, was just as courageous as Zhang Xun who died fighting. He thus refuted the charge that Xu Yuan was a coward. His concise, vivid language and dramatic narrative is in the best tradition of ancient historical writings. His personal writings are also outstanding. "In Memory of My Nephew" is considered the finest example of this genre. Han Yu expresses his grief at the death of his nephew, reminiscing about his family, life and other details. The prose is genuinely moving and poignant.

Thus Han Yu's style and writings had a great influence on later prose writers.

Liu Zongyuan (773-819) was a native of Hedong, in present-day Shansi Province. His mother, a well-educated woman, taught him to read and write both poetry and prose when he was only four years old. When he was only thirteen, he was already an accomplished writer, and his early works were praised. Aged twenty-one, he passed the court examination and served in both the central government and provinces. Later, he was banished to remote provinces as a minor official because of his connections with the political reform movement. He died at Liuzhou.

An outstanding philosopher, statesman, prose writer and poet, Liu Zongyuan emphasized the importance of the desires of the people and stressed that officials were merely their servants. He

opposed excessive exploitation of the people by officials, strongly advocated a fairer tax system and criticized other social injustices. These progressive views were reflected also in his thoughts on literature, which he felt should criticize society and attempt to clarify the truth.

His skilful use of satire, humour and metaphor are among his literary achievements. In his fable, "The Deer of Linjiang", he describes a deer which is a household pet. It makes friends with the family dogs, unaware that they only refrain from attacking it because they are afraid of their master. When the deer ventures outside, the dogs kill it. "The Donkey of Guizhou" is about a donkey, which at first frightens a tiger because of its large size and fearful braying. Later the tiger realizes the donkey's limitations and devours it. In "The Rats of Yongzhou", Liu Zongyuan depicts some rats which have the free run of a house because the owner considers them as holy creatures. When a new master appears, they act as before until eventually he exterminates them. These three fables skilfully satirize men who arrogantly rely on the backing of others, but who have no power-base of their own. Liu Zongyuan's fables are ranked among the best in ancient China.

He also wrote many excellent biographical sketches, many of which, about the exploited and downtrodden in society, expose their misery. "The Snake-catcher" describes three generations of a certain family, who risked their lives to catch poisonous snakes in order to pay taxes. It thus strongly attacks oppressive taxation in feudal society, which was more terrible than poisonous snakes. "The Story of Ou Ji" tells about an eleven-year-old boy, who, by his wits and courage, killed two kidnappers who had been in league with some officials. The boy's fearless spirit is highly praised.

Finally, Liu Zongyuan wrote many poetical travel accounts, which have rarely been surpassed in ancient Chinese literature. The scenery is exquisitely described and combined with his feelings of loneliness and sorrow. The essays he wrote about the scenic spots of Yongzhou, where he was sent as sub-prefect after his demotion, are good examples of this. "The Knoll West of

Brazier Lake" describes the rocks like "cattle trooping down to be watered", or as "bears toiling uphill". He comments, "But in those forsaken parts, the peasants and fishermen pass by it, not valuing its worth." In fact, he was lamenting his own sad fate.

Another essay, "The Small Tarn West of the Knoll" has a beautiful description of the scenery:

A hundred and twenty paces west of the knoll, across the bamboos and bushes, I heard with delight a jingling like the sound made by jade bracelets. . . . Rocks formed little islets and crags, and were overhung by green trees and vines growing in great profusion. About a hundred fish seemed to glide as if through empty space without support. The sunlight illuminated the bottom, casting shadows on the rocks. The fish remained momentarily motionless, then suddenly darted away, scudding to and fro, as if sharing in the visitors' delight.

Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan had distinctive styles. The former's prose is vigorous and fluent, while the latter's is concise and elegant. Their works developed ancient Chinese prose writings, raising them to new heights. Thus the classicist movement in the Tang Dynasty was an important turning-point and exercised a deep influence on later Chinese prose writings.

Prose Writings of Han Yu

On Horses

Only after Bole* came into the world were there horses able to gallop one thousand *li*. Such horses are common, but a Bole is rare. So even fine steeds, if mishandled by slaves, will perish in their stables without being known as good horses.

A thousand-*li* horse may eat one bushel of grain at a meal, but if its groom does not know that this is what enables it to gallop a thousand *li* and fails to feed it enough, so that it lacks strength, it will not display its ability and natural gifts. Indeed, it may be no match for common horses; so how then can it gallop a thousand *li*?

If it is whipped and goaded on in the wrong way, too underfed to reveal its full worth, or if it neighs and the trainer treats it without understanding, then the rider may hold his whip over it exclaiming, "There are no good horses in the world!" But does this mean there are truly no good horses, or that he does not understand horses?

* A legendary figure in the seventh century BC, Sun Yang or Bole was an authority on horses.

Reply to Li Yi's Letter

On the twenty-sixth day of the sixth month, Han Yu sends Li Yi greetings. Your letter, sir, is most excellently written, yet your request is so modest and respectful, how could the one to whom it is addressed not be glad to answer it?

The Truth has long since departed, much more so the literature which was its outward form. Though I am one who can be said to have caught a glimpse of the gate and wall of the Sage's mansion, I have not yet entered the hall and am therefore unable to distinguish between right and wrong; yet I feel constrained to speak of it to you, sir.

Your desire to make your mark by writing is good, and what you have done comes very close to your aim; but I do not know whether your ambition is to learn from contemporaries and try to surpass them, or to aspire to reach the standard of the ancients. If the former is the case, you are sure to succeed; but you cannot expect quick results if you want to reach the standard of the ancients, nor must you be obsessed with the desire for gain. You should nurture the root but not hasten the fruit, add nutriment but not strive for lustre. When the root is vigorous, the tree will be laden with fruit; when the nutriment is rich, the lustre will shine; the writing of a humane and just man should be mild.

However, this is difficult and I do not know whether I have achieved it or not, although this has been my study for twenty years and more. In the beginning, I dared not read any books but those of the Han Dynasty and earlier ages, nor dared I harbour any ideas apart from those of the sages. Remaining in one place, I seemed to forget where I was; going out, I seemed to have mislaid something. I looked solemn as if deep in thought, dazed as if I had lost my way. When I tried to set down what was in my mind, I wanted to rid myself of all stereotyped phrases, but I found this an arduous task. When others read my writing I would not know whether they were laughing at me.

After some years spent undeflectingly in this way, what was

true or false in ancient books, or what was correct but not completely so, became as clear to me as black and white, and I began to learn how to discard what was wrong. When now I tried to set down what was in my mind, the ideas flowed freely. When I saw people laughing at me, I felt pleased; what worried me was when they praised me, for that meant there were still other people's views in my writing.

After some more years spent like this, I was like a river in spate. But for fear of confusion, I confronted my writing and checked it soberly. Finding it pure enough, I cast off restraint.

Nevertheless, I have to go on cultivating myself, keeping to the path of humanity and justice and going to the source of the ancient classics. I must never till the end of my days lose my way or forget the source.

The spirit is the water, language what floats upon it. When water abounds, all objects large and small can float upon it. So it is with the spirit and language: when the spirit abounds, all writing whether long or short, high-toned or low, will be appropriate.

Even so, can I be of any use to people? However, literature that expects to be of use is like a utensil: whether it is used or rejected depends on others. A noble-minded man is different: he has the Truth in his heart and his conduct is principled; if used, he will benefit others; if rejected, he will pass on his teachings to his disciples and hand down his writings as models for future generations.

Is this sufficient cause for gratification? Very few now aspire to reach the standard of the ancients. Those who do will be forsaken by the present age. So I feel both pleased and sad for such men and can only encourage them, not venturing either to praise or censure them. Many people have consulted me, but judging by what you say, sir, your aim is not profit, and so I have spoken of this. Here ends my letter.

Prose Writings of Liu Zongyuan

Refuting the Legend of the "Tong" Leaf

An ancient legend tells that King Cheng* played a joke on his puny little brother with a *tong* leaf.

"With this I confer a fief on you," he said.

The Duke of Zhou came to offer congratulations.

"It was a joke," said the king.

"The Son of Heaven never jokes," replied the duke.

So this puny little brother was given the district of Tang as his fief. . . .

I cannot believe this story. If the king's younger brother deserved to be enfeoffed, the Duke of Zhou should have spoken to the king in good time instead of waiting for him to play a joke and then offering congratulations, confirming it. If the brother did not deserve to be enfeoffed, the duke should have treated the business as a joke. What sagacious man would give a puny child land and people to rule over?

If the duke was unwilling to take the king's word lightly and felt constrained to confirm it, what if in some unlucky moment

* When King Cheng of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-770 BC) succeeded King Wu, because he was still a boy his uncle the Duke of Zhou acted as his guardian.

the king played a joke with a *tong* leaf on some woman favourite or eunuch? Would the duke uphold that too and follow it through? The virtue of a king depends on his actions. If they are wrong, even if he makes ten changes it will not alter matters. If he acts rightly, no changes should be made, the more so in the case of a joke. If a joke must be followed through, then the Duke of Zhou was teaching the king to do wrong.

To my mind, the Duke of Zhou as the king's guardian should have shown him the true way to rule with ease and good cheer, observing moderation in everything. He should not have gone along with his mistake and glossed over it; nor should he have reined him in or goaded him on as if he were an ox or horse. Impatience is its own undoing. Not even a father can curb his son in that way, to say nothing of a king and his minister. Such a petty trick only befits a mean fellow, not the Duke of Zhou. Hence this tale is incredible. Some have said that it was an archivist named Yi who induced the king to enfeoff his brother with the district of Tang.

The Story of a Master-Builder

My brother-in-law Pei lives in Guangde Lane. Once a master-builder knocked at his door and asked to rent a corner of the house. As gear he had compasses, a ruler, square, marking-line and ink, but in his room he kept no grindstone or chisel.

When asked what skills he had he said, "I am good at estimating the materials needed for building. When I design a structure, I calculate its measurements and decide what should be round, square, long or short, then give instructions to the various workmen. Without me they could not build it. So when I draw my pay from the government I get three times as much as the other workmen, and when I work for a private family more than half the fee is mine."

Another day when I went to his room, I saw that one leg of his bed was broken but he was unable to repair it and said he would find another workman to do it. I was very amused, considering him a useless fellow who was out only for money.

Later the city magistrate wanted to have his office repaired, and I went there. All sorts of building material had been assembled there and all kinds of workmen, some with axes, some with choppers, others with saws. They stood in a semi-circle facing the master-builder in the middle, a ruler in his left hand, a stick in his right. Having estimated the strength needed to support the beams and the roof and that of the timber, he waved his stick saying, "Cut here." As one workman with an axe ran to the right, he pointed at the other side and said, "Saw it off here." Thereupon a workman with a saw ran to the left. Then some hewed wood, others whittled it, all watching his expression and waiting for his orders, not daring to make any decisions themselves. If anyone bungled, he angrily dismissed him and the man dared not show displeasure.

He made a drawing of the building on the wall which, though only about a foot square, gave all the details. When it was completed according to this plan, nothing was a fraction out. Then he wrote on the ridge-pole the year, month and day of the construction and signed his own name, omitting those of the men who had done the job. I looked round in amazement, only then realizing how great was his skill.

With a sigh I wondered: Has he given up manual skills to concentrate on using his mind and grasping the overall plan? I have heard that those who toil with their minds make others work for them, while those who toil with their hands work for others and serve those who use their minds. This must be one who toils with his mind. Men with skill use their skill while men with intelligence make plans. This is an intelligent man, a worthy model for the prime minister who helps his sovereign rule an empire, for their tasks are very similar.

One who rules an empire has his roots in the people. Those who toil are the slaves and village heads, above them are the gentry, high and low, and above them the knights, ministers and

nobles. They are divided into six ministries or a hundred different professions. Then within the Four Seas there are barons commanding different regions, and each province has its governor, each district its magistrate, all of whom assist in the work of government; under them are the officers, and under the local officers are the bailiffs and runners, each with his task, just as workmen all do their individual jobs to earn their keep. Then the man who acts as the prime minister helps the emperor to rule over them all, giving orders, working out the general plan, making modifications and laying down rules to regulate them, just as a master-builder uses his ruler, square, marking-line and ink to decide on the system of work.

The prime minister selects men from all parts of the empire and settles them in the tasks for which they are suited, so that all the subjects live and work in peace and contentment. From the city he gains understanding of the countryside, from the countryside of the principalities, from the principalities of the whole empire. He can examine all things near and far, big and small, by referring to his plan, just as the master-builder brings a building to completion on the basis of the drawing on the wall. He promotes men of ability and lets them work according to their own bent, so that they feel indebted to no one; he dismisses men who are incapable, and they dare not show displeasure. He makes no boast of his own ability and seeks no personal fame, does not interfere with minor tasks or infringe on the rights of his officers, but spends all his time discussing affairs of state with men of talent. This is like the master-builder's skill in making use of all his workmen and not boasting of his own ability. By so doing he succeeds as a prime minister and can bring order to all the principalities. Then the people of the whole empire look up to him and credit the success to him, while posterity will follow in his footsteps and praise him as an able prime minister.

When men speak of the good government of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, they attribute this to such men as Yi Yin, Fu Yue, the Duke of Zhou and the Duke of Shao, while all those doing the routine tasks are not mentioned in the records, just

as the master-builder signs his name on the construction, omitting those of the workmen.

The art of the prime minister is indeed great. Only those who have mastered it can be called prime ministers, not those who do not understand the essential plan. Such men consider assiduity their duty and paper-work all important. They boast of their ability and seek personal fame, attend to minor affairs and infringe on the rights of their officers. They gloat in their office over all the routine work they have arrogated to themselves, but neglect important affairs and plans for the future. These are men who do not know the right way to govern. Like a master-builder unable to use the marking-line, ink, compasses, ruler and square, they take over the workmen's axes, choppers and saws to show their skill, but can get no work done. So finally they fail and achieve nothing. Such behaviour is certainly ridiculous.

Some may ask: What if the man who has commissioned the house wants to show his own intelligence and obstructs the master-builder's plan, taking the management out of his hands and adopting counter-plans? Although the result is failure, this is not the master-builder's fault but that of his employer.

My answer to this is no. For there are the marking-line, ink, ruler and square. If something should be high, one cannot force it to be low; if something should be narrow, one cannot extend it. If the plan is followed the building will stand firm; otherwise it will collapse. If the owner prefers it not to stand firm but collapse, then the master-builder should roll up his plan, keep his ideas to himself and leave, without compromising. Such a man is a good master-builder. If he hankers after profit and cannot bear to give up the work, but abandons the right measurements and design and compromises, so that later the beams buckle and the house collapses, how can he claim that it is not his fault? Impossible!

In the belief that a master-builder's way is similar to that of a prime minister, I have written this down as a record. In the old days a master-builder was called a contractor; now we

call such a man a supervisor or foreman. The one I came across was named Yang. I will not give his personal name.

The Thatched Pavilion on Matui Mountain

In the tenth month, a new pavilion was built on the south side of Matui Mountain. With a high mount at its back, it has no ornamental pillars, intricate carvings or painted ceiling; the beams are unpolished, the thatch untrimmed, and it has no walls. White clouds serving as its fence, green hills as its screen, set off its frugality.

This mountain looms over a vast expanse of green and soars up to the clouds, stretching for dozens of miles with its tail curled up in the wilderness and its head dipping into a big stream. All the other hills converge to pay homage to it like a cluster of stars. Verdant green and fantastically shaped, it resembles a magnificent embroidered tapestry. Heaven has indeed concentrated beauty here, although this is such a remote border region. However, since this is an uncultivated area and the people have barbarous customs, even King Mu of the Zhou Dynasty never came here with his fine horses, nor did the poet Xie Lingyun ever climb up here in his clogs; thus the mountain paths were desolate and people were deterred from trying to climb it.

In the sixth year of Yuanhe (AD 811), my second brother was assigned to this district by the governor. As his virtue spread, trust in him grew and he got on well with the people. Since they were in harmony, he could enjoy more leisure when his official duties were done, and he often came to this mountain to enjoy the superb scenery; then he decided to build this wooden pavilion which in no time was completed. When there was no wind or rain and the sky was clear and bright, putting on a peaked cap and a deer-skin coat he would climb this mountain with five or six young brothers and friends, then play the lyre

and follow with his eyes the clouds returning to the valleys. As the fresh air of the west hills filled his lapel and sleeves, all the myriad things in nature seemed to be within his grasp.

Now a beauty spot is only made manifest when men praise it: if the Orchid Pavilion had not had Wang Xizhi, its clear brook and luxuriant bamboos would have gone unrecognized in the empty hills. As this pavilion stands in the mountains of the south, this beauty spot is rarely visited, and did I not record its construction this fine sight would remain unknown. Hence I have made this record.

The New Hall of Prefect Wei of Yongzhou

To make valleys, cliffs and pools in a city, mountain rocks have to be carted there, chasms dug, many difficulties and obstacles overcome, and a great deal of manpower exhausted. Even then one cannot create a natural scene. However, if one avoids the artificial, laying out the grounds according to the terrain and preserving the natural surroundings, what has proved so difficult already takes shape there.

Yongzhou lies at the foot of the Jiuyi Mountains. Those who first opened up this district built the city round the hills, with rocks left hidden in the grasses and streams concealed by the roads. As snakes coiled through the undergrowth in which weasels roamed, while fine trees and rank vegetation contended together, it was known as a garbage dump.

After Prefect Wei had been here for over a month and ordered his affairs so that he had leisure, his interest was attracted to this place. First he ordered it to be weeded and had the roads repaired. Earth was piled up into mounds and the streams were dredged so that the water flowed clear. After the brambles had been burnt and the streams channelled, many wonderful sights appeared. The muddy water turned clear, fine plants took the place of the weeds. When you look at the vegetation now, it is

all graceful and luxuriant; when you view the streams, they are gentle and meandering; grotesque rocks loom on every side, some in rows or like men kneeling, some erect and others prostrate, with intricate crevices and caves as well as mounts rearing up as if in anger.

Prefect Wei had this hall built then for sightseers. At its foot, all manner of objects display themselves to contribute to the view. Beyond lie hills, high plains and forests, some clearly visible and others hidden, with a green stretch of grassland which merges with the blue sky at the horizon, and all these sights can be seen from the watch-tower. He invited guests to this hall to feast and take pleasure.

Congratulating him they said, "From what you have accomplished, sir, we see your ideal. You want to create beauty befitting the terrain; this surely means that you want to rule according to local customs. You select what is beautiful among what is ugly; this surely means that you want to get rid of despots and help the good. You dredge muddy streams to make them flow clear; this surely means that you want to dismiss corrupt officials and appoint honest men. You have built this hall on a height to command a view of the distance; this surely means that you want all local households to be familiar with your instructions. In this case, building this hall does not merely mean making suitable use of the flora, rocks and streams to create a beauty spot with hills, plains and forests, but through this small example you want your successors to grasp what is important."

So I asked to have this record inscribed on a stone and set at the northwest corner, as an example for future prefects.

Guo Linxiang

Zhang Jie, a New Woman Writer

The *Music of the Forests* won an award in the National Short Story Competition in 1978. The author, Zhang Jie, a woman writer with a detailed prose style, has been praised for her first success.

She was born in Beijing in 1937. Her mother was a primary school teacher. During World War II, she and her mother went to a small, out-of-the-way town in Shaanxi Province. Life was hard. Fortunately, Zhang Jie met a teacher and, under his guidance, read Grimms' and Andersen's fairy-tales, as well as Krylov's fables. Her teacher was also good at music and daily played both Chinese and Western classical music on an old harmonium. Thus Zhang Jie developed a deep love of literature and music. After she had finished her middle-school education in 1956, she decided to sit the entrance examinations for the Literature Department at Beijing University. Her school, however, hoped she would study economics. "Perhaps our country badly needed economists," she said. "When the notice for my enrollment in the Economics Department of the People's University came, I secretly wept in my room. However, I went." At this,



Zhang Jie

Zhang smiled bashfully. "But I don't regret it any more. While studying economics, I read a great many theoretical and philosophical works. This helped me understand life more and played an important part in my writing." After graduation in 1960, she was assigned to the National Bureau of Mechanical Equipment. She continued reading widely both Chinese and foreign literature.

She only began to write in 1978. In one year, she published seven short stories. In *The Music of the Forests*, she portrayed a musical-

ly gifted boy; *A Bouquet for Dajiang* and *A Young Man* have the theme of love; whereas in *Where Are You, Kite Girl?* and *Gathering Shepherd's Purse* she described the bitter life in the old society. Her heroes and heroines are all young people to whom she shows encouragement and voices her mild criticism.

Her success has encouraged her to work even harder. After office hours, she writes until late at night. Recently she completed another two short stories and two scenarios.



Cuff with bird-and-butterfly pattern

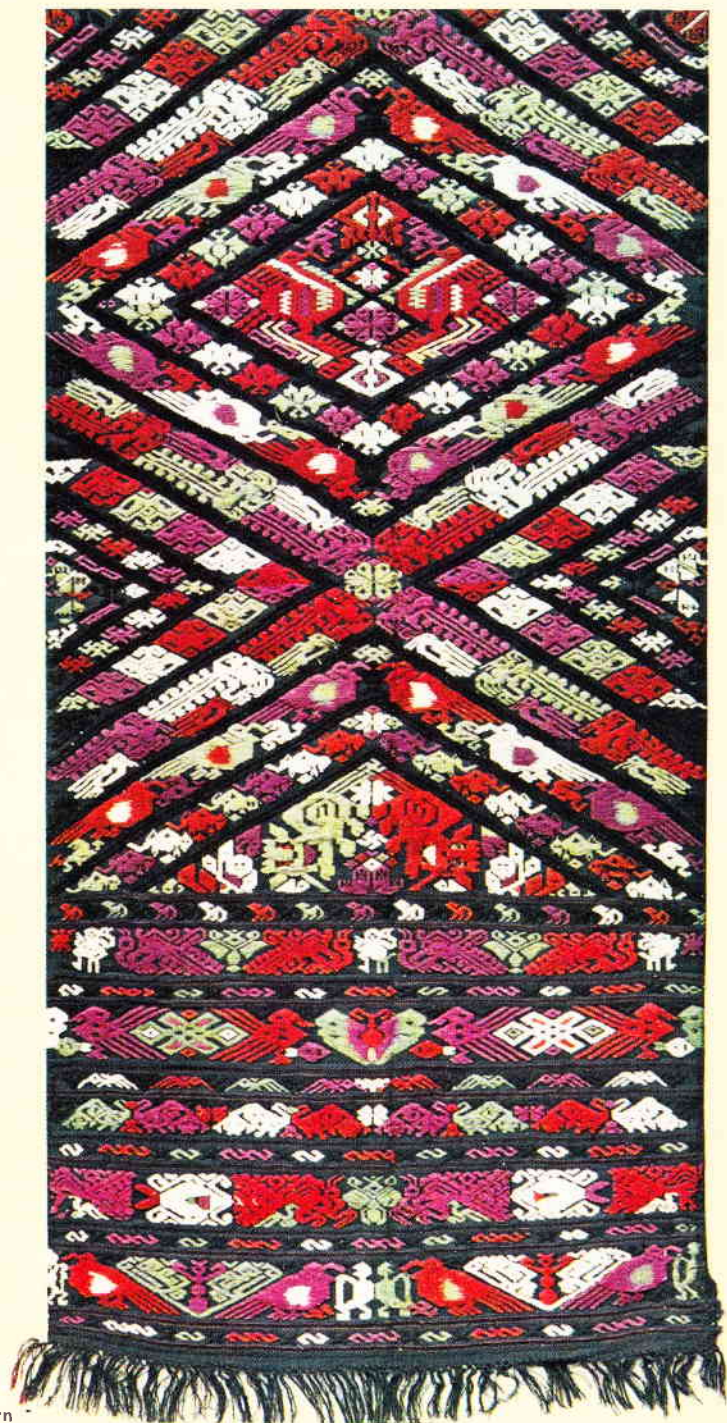
Miao Embroidery



Cuff with dragon-and-phoenix pattern



Cuff with two-dragons-catching-a-pearl pattern



apron with bird pattern



Apron with dragon pattern

Ma Zhengrong

Miao Embroidery

Guizhou Province in southwest China is a treasure-house of folk art with, for example, the embroidery of the Miao people, one of the local minority nationalities. In every Miao village the girls skilfully embroider cuffs, collars, aprons, skirts, sashes and headdresses.

Miao girls start embroidering at the early age of seven or eight. It can take three or four years to embroider a dress for festivals or special occasions. At the traditional hill-climbing and dragon-boat festivals, the boys play their reed-pipes while the girls dance. There are other sports such as bull-fighting and horse-racing. On these occasions the Miao girls wear dresses made by themselves to show off their skill in embroidery, and those whose work is the finest are praised by the young men in their songs. The girls give their most beautiful sashes to their sweethearts as a symbol of happiness.

There is a legend explaining the origin of Miao embroidery. It tells how a clever young man shot a golden pheasant which he presented to his sweetheart. She pinned her hair high on her head like the pheasant's crest and wore a dress with wide sleeves like its wings and a long pleated skirt like its tail.

The Miao people have created a rich folk embroidery tradition, reflecting their vitality, industriousness and love of nature, as well as the different localities in which they live. Those whose homes are near rivers depict fish, shrimps, frogs and egrets in their designs, while those in mountainous areas embroider birds, animals, butterflies, flowers and grass. Their designs are therefore varied, and a cock, for example, will be depicted in many ways such as pecking the ground, or flapping its wings.

Different varieties of stitching are used. Usually, Miao women stick a papercut pattern on the cloth, and then sew over this with colourful threads. Some never make patterns, but use their ingenuity and experience. Their ideas are often strikingly original: red cockscombs become flower buds; a bird's tail a bouquet of flowers; and cow's hide patterned with daisies.

Dragon designs are popular among the Miao people. Traditionally, dragons were auspicious creatures, bringing rain and good harvests to the people. Those depicted are, therefore, friendly and lively.

Liu Naichong

The Beijing Opera "The Conqueror Bids Farewell to Lady Yu"

Banned by the "gang of four" for over a decade, the famous Beijing opera *The Conqueror Bids Farewell to Lady Yu* has been recently staged again with many other fine pieces on traditional themes. The play is based on the well-known story told in "The Annals of Xiang Yu" from the *Records of the Historian*, written by Sima Qian in the first century BC.

Xiang Yu and Liu Bang led two peasants' armies which rose against the tyrannous Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC). After its fall a five-year power struggle ensued between the two leaders for control of the country. Xiang Yu's army was more powerful than Liu's. Arrogant and ambitious, Xiang claimed to be the "conqueror of Chu". Eventually, however, his pride caused his own downfall, so he killed himself.

In 1949, on the eve of Liberation, Chairman Mao used this story in the lines from his poem, *The People's Liberation Army Captures Nanjing*:

With power and to spare we must pursue the tottering foe
And not ape Xiang Yu the conqueror seeking idle fame.



Mei Lanfang playing Lady Yu

These served to educate and remind the people that the revolution must be continued.

The Conqueror Bids Farewell to Lady Yu is a popular opera of long standing. The present stage version is the one adapted by Mei Lanfang from an older one. Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), the celebrated Beijing opera star who specialized in female roles, played the part of Lady Yu in its première in 1921. It tells

of the tragedy of Xiang Yu and Lady Yu, who, being surrounded by Liu Bang's army, are forced to part company.

Liu Bang had torn up the agreement made with Xiang Yu to respect each other's territory and had attacked him. Enraged by the insulting posters pasted everywhere by Han Xin, a commander under Liu Bang, and disregarding his followers' and Lady Yu's advice, Xiang Yu decided to engage in battle. Surrounded in Gaixia (in present-day Anhui Province) by Liu's



The Conqueror Bids Farewell to Lady Yu performed by the China Beijing Opera Troupe

troops, Xiang Yu's army dwindled away as his supplies were exhausted. The opera begins at this point.

Lady Yu tries to comfort Xiang Yu with wine, persuading him to patiently wait for reinforcements. Tired and sleepy, he withdraws into the rear to rest. At this, Lady Yu takes a walk outside the tent and overhears the soldiers whispering in despair. All around Chu folk-songs can be heard. Startled, she quickly awakes Xiang Yu. Han Xin apparently has taught his men to sing those songs in order to make Xiang's soldiers homesick and disheartened.

Although she realizes that they are doomed, Lady Yu tries her best to cheer her lord. Xiang Yu is filled with grief, seeing that he will part with his favourite. Recalling his past victories and his present straits, he strokes his war horse and sings plaintively:

My strength uprooted mountains,
My spirit overshadowed the world;
But the times are against me,
And my steed can gallop no more.
What can I do?
Ah, Yu, my Yu,
What can I do?

To comfort him once more, Lady Yu holds back her tears and dances with her two swords. His relief is only temporary, as Liu Bang's army is closing in. In desperation he decides to break through the encirclement. So as not to hinder him, Lady Yu sings sadly:

Liu's army has seized our territories;
The songs of Chu are heard everywhere.
Now my lord's cause is ending,
I no longer wish to live!

She cuts her throat with the sword. The opera ends with Xiang Yu heart-broken.

The actor who plays Xiang Yu has his face painted mainly in black which symbolizes his courageous and rash character. He

has to sing, recite and perform acrobatics, to show both his heroism and his moving and tragic fate.

The roles of Xiang Yu and Lady Yu present a striking contrast to each other, in their different characters and status, through their make-up, costumes and acting.

Mei Lanfang's representation of Lady Yu is a superb artistic creation and has since been used as a model. An actor or actress must be well-trained before he or she can play this role. The double-sword dance composed by Mei Lanfang especially delights audiences. In Lady Yu he has created an unusual female character who is gentle, sober, yet dauntless.

The Conqueror Bids Farewell to Lady Yu portrays a defeated hero, highlighting Xiang Yu's unyielding spirit. This is a refutation of the historically prevailing concept that the victor is the emperor and the defeated the outlaw.

Zong Shu

The London Festival Ballet Company's Visit to China

Last May, the London Festival Ballet Company arrived in China for a two-week tour, performing in Beijing and Shanghai. For nearly everyone, this was the first time in China, and all hoped it would not be their last. The famous ballerina, who is the company's artistic director, Miss Beryl Grey, had danced and taught in China in 1964. For her, there was a happy reunion with old friends, such as the noted Chinese dancer and choreographer, Dai Ailian, who trained in England in the thirties before coming to China in 1940. Miss Grey was impressed with the progress and development of ballet in China, despite the ten difficult years during the Cultural Revolution, when the "gang of four" interfered with classical ballet training and performances.

Every night the British company performed for packed houses and wildly enthusiastic audiences. Their repertoire was an interesting contrast of classical and modern ballet. Their production of *Giselle*, a Mary Skeaping revival of the 1841 version, was a ballet with which the Chinese dancers and audiences were



The Sanguine Fan

familiar. The part of Giselle was danced by Eva Evdokimova, whose interpretation was acclaimed as "remarkable" by one Chinese dance critic. Indeed she won the hearts of the Chinese who saw her, both in the theatre and on the live television broadcast, for her sensitive presentation. In the first act, she captured perfectly Giselle's sweet innocence and frailty. Her portrayal of Giselle's madness was intensely dramatic. In the second act, she was a pure spirit creature, ethereal and fairylike. Her beautiful dancing seemed effortless. She was magnificently partnered by Peter Schaufuss, one of the world's top male dancers. As Albrecht, his interpretation was exciting and powerful, his technique faultless.

The triple modern bill which the company presented was a revelation to Chinese audiences. The first item was an essentially English ballet, *The Sanguine Fan*, with choreography by Ronald Hynd and music by Elgar. The Chinese audiences appreciated and understood it without difficulty. Glen Tetley's *Greening*,



Giselle

with the cacophonous music of Arne Nordheim, was more modern than anything Chinese audiences have been used to seeing and subsequently rather puzzled them. But the last item drew gasps and loud applause from the audiences. *Études* by Harald Lander, with music based on Czerny's *Études*, was an exciting display of ballet pyrotechnics and virtuosity.

The tour was a very successful cultural exchange. The company were able to see something of Chinese ballet, both in Beijing and Shanghai. Eva Evdokimova, after seeing performances by the ballet company under the China Opera and Dance Drama Theatre and by the students of the Beijing Academy of Dance, said that their standard was "an amazing achievement" considering they had only been practising classical ballet again in the last two years since the downfall of the gang in 1976. Peter Schaufuss was so enthusiastic that he said he was seriously considering returning to China for a period to teach. All the British company remarked on the grace and beauty of the young students who performed a programme of ballet and national dances for

them. "Wonderful potential!" commented the British dancers, trying to convince their Chinese counterparts just how good they are. For their part, the Chinese dancers sat through all the rehearsals and performances taking notes and studying technique. Eva Evdokimova admired their eagerness to learn.

All spoke of the friendliness and co-operation of the Chinese people, whether in the hotels where they stayed, at the theatres or in the shops. That was their strongest and most basic impression. Most liked Chinese food. They managed to snatch a little time for sight-seeing at the Great Wall. "Magnificent the way it stretches across the mountains," sighed Eva Evdokimova. Some even slipped away for an evening at the Beijing People's Art Theatre to see Lao She's masterpiece, *Teahouse*, about life in



Giselle

the old society before Liberation in the setting of an old Beijing teahouse. One young dancer remarked afterwards, "Now I understand why there was a revolution in China. The old society was so bad." Others saw part of the rehearsals for Cao Yu's new historical play *Wang Zhaojun* and felt deeply moved. They also chatted to the actors and actresses, exchanging views. "We wish people in the West could have a chance to see such plays," more than one said.

The tour was hard work for the London Festival Ballet Company, but they gave the Chinese people a vision of beauty and artistry that will always be remembered. The Chinese people in their turn tried to give their visitors a welcome they will never forget. At the airport, about to return to Britain, Miss Grey said, "We leave with many happy memories. Nothing but happy memories in fact!" And the London Festival Ballet Company members left behind in China many happy memories too of their visit.

Society for the Study of Lu Xun to Be Established

Recently the famous writer, Mao Dun, and the literary critic, Zhou Yang, co-sponsored the founding of the Society for the Study of Lu Xun. Famous scholars and researchers studying Lu Xun's life and works attended the first preparatory meeting in Beijing.

Speaking at the meeting, Zhou Yang said that while pretending to honour and study Lu Xun, the "gang of four" distorted the image of Lu Xun and his literary legacy, creating confusion. The important task now is to re-evaluate Lu Xun and learn from him. Only by studying the three changes in Lu Xun's ideology, from an evolutionist to a believer in class struggle, from a democrat to a communist and from an advocate of enlightenment to one of proletarian revolution, can we recognize Lu Xun's greatness. This lies in his persistent struggle against old ideas, old influences and outmoded customs. He exerted every effort to pave the way for a new social order. Zhou Yang hoped that the society would follow the policy of "letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend", unite all researchers throughout the country and achieve substantial results in the research work before 1982, the centenary of Lu Xun's birth.

The society, an academic body, will organize and promote the research work, collect research materials, promote academic exchanges both at home and abroad and edit and publish *The Bulletin of Lu Xun's Studies*.

The founding members are Mao Dun, Zhou Yang, Lin Mohan, Ba Jin, Cao Jinghua, Sha Ding and Chen Huangmei.

Journal for the Study of "A Dream of Red Mansions"

An editorial committee consisting of 29 members of the *Journal for the Study of "A Dream of Red Mansions"* was recently set up in Beijing. A number of celebrated writers, literary critics and specialists, concerned with the study and translation of this famous eighteenth-century classical novel, attended its inauguration.

Since the novel was published two hundred years ago there have been many different views on it. Speaking at the ceremony, He Jingzhi, Vice-minister of Culture, said he hoped that all specialists would collaborate to raise the level of its study.

The writer, Mao Dun and Wang Kunlun, a noted "redologist", are advisers to the journal. The literary critics, Wang Chaowen and Feng Qirong are the chief editor and assistant editor respectively.

Ding Ling at Work on a New Novel

Ding Ling, the noted 75-year-old woman writer, who was charged as a Rightist and stopped writing for more than twenty years, has recently been rehabilitated. Her famous novel, *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* written in 1948 about the land reform in China, will soon be reprinted. At present she is engaged in writing its sequel, *In Days of Bitter Cold*. At the request of the People's Literature Publishing House, Beijing, she is also re-editing her selected works including short stories, essays and articles for publication in three volumes.

Life Story of Folk Musician Filmed

Shooting has begun on a film about the life of China's famous blind

musician, Ah Bing (1893-1950), in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province, his hometown.

The film's title, *The Moon Reflected in the Second Fountain*, is taken from Ah Bing's best-known *erbu* (Chinese fiddle) composition, written in 1939 after he became blind. The Second Fountain is one of Wuxi's scenic spots. The music describes the beauty of the fountain in the moonlight.

An impoverished street singer in the old society, Ah Bing composed 200 pieces and was an expert *erbu* player.

Story of Naiserden Atainde Republished

The Story of Naiserden Atainde, a collection of Uygur folk-tales banned during the "gang of four" period, has recently been republished in a new Han language edition, containing 148 stories, by the Xinjiang People's Publishing House.

The hero of the stories, Naiserden Atainde is a legendary figure who overcomes kings, merchants, moneylenders and priests. He embodies the intelligence of the Uygur people.

Dough Figures Exhibited in Beijing

An exhibition of dough figures was recently held at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. A dough figure of Seiji Ozawa, conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra, was among the 60 attractive dough figures on display. The models were made by Tang Suguo, whose father was a well-known dough-moulder.

Other figures included characters from Chinese classics, traditional Chinese opera and folk-tales, as well as some from foreign classics. In addition, there were also women figures in the costumes of China's different nationalities.

Dough modelling, a popular art, has a thousand-year-old history in China.

Japanese Opera *Yuzuru* Performed in Beijing

The Japanese opera *Yuzuru* (*Magic Crane*) was much appreciated by the Chinese audiences in Beijing during its recent staging in China. Adapted by the noted Japanese composer, Ikuma Dan, from Jyunzi Kinoshita's play of the same title, the opera was presented by the visiting Japanese opera group.

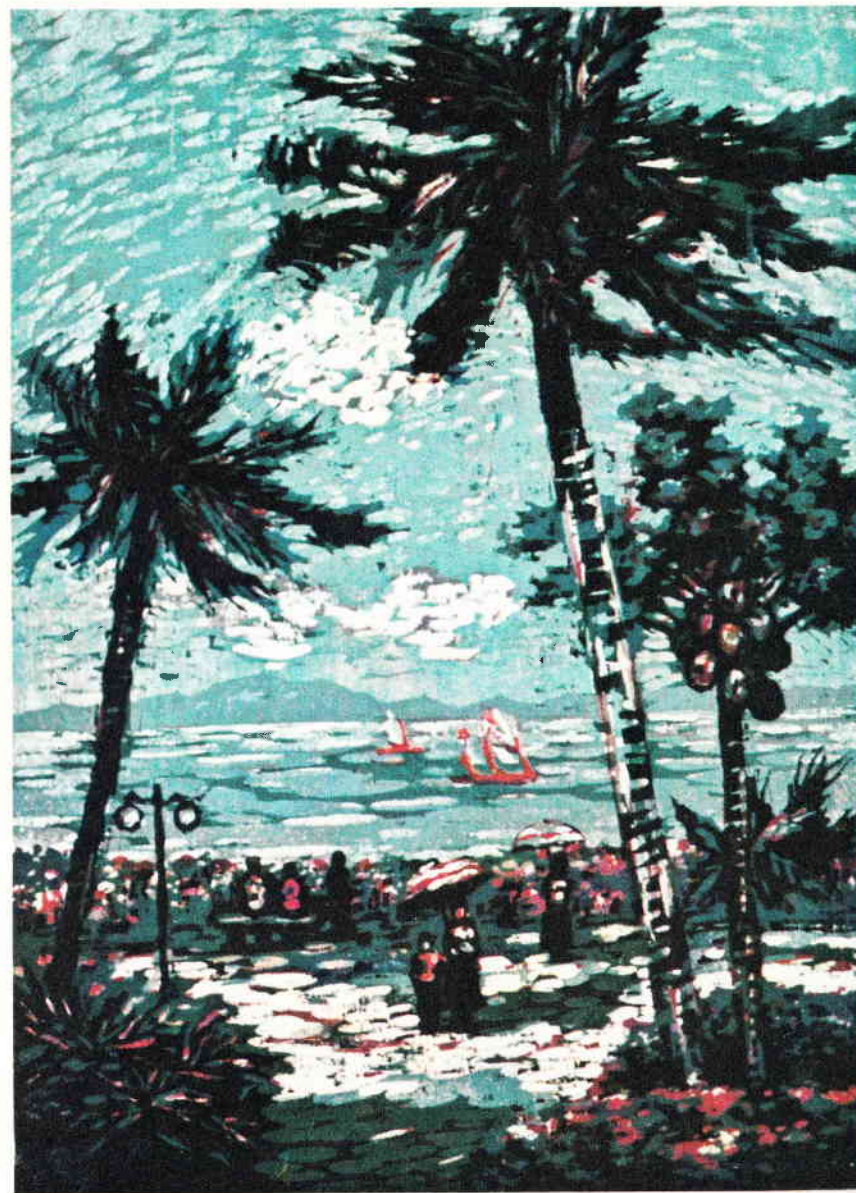
The story is a beautifully woven fairy-tale, which carries the message that greediness is the source of evil.

The opera was performed by the celebrated Japanese singers Katsura Nakagawa, Toshitaka Mori, Yoshinobu Kuribayashi and Kiyoshi Oda.

Contemporary American Short Stories Published

A Selection of Contemporary American Short Stories, of 19 stories by well-known authors, with short biographies, bibliographies and photographs, was recently published by the Shanghai Translation Publishing House. The volume is the first in a series of foreign literature publications scheduled for this year by the publishing house.

Among these are "Looking for Mr Green", written by the 1976 Nobel Prize winner Saul Bellow, and "The Spinoza Market Street" by Isaac Bashevis Singer, the 1978 Nobel Prize winner. Others are "God Bless America" by John Oliver Killens; "This Morning, This Evening, So Soon" by James Baldwin; "The Ballad of Sad Café" by Carson McCullers; and "In the Region of Ice" by Joyce Carol Oates.



A South China Sea Coastal Scene (woodcut)

by Shen Roujian



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