

CHINESE LITERATURE

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Fu Hu

Tian Han and His Immense Contribution to Modern Chinese Drama

In 1935, in Shanghai was staged the opera *Storm over the Chang-jiang (Yangzi)*, about how angry Chinese dockers, refusing to unload armaments which were to be used by the imperialists against the Chinese people, dropped them into the river. The opera ended with these lines from the song *March of the Volunteers*:

Arise, ye who refuse to be slaves,
With our flesh and blood, let us build our new Great Wall. . . .

The audiences applauded wildly. At that moment, however, the writer, Tian Han, was imprisoned in a Kuomintang jail, charged with inciting the Chinese people to resist the Japanese invaders. Arrested in February 1935, Tian Han was released that autumn, the noted artist Xu Beihong having stood bail for him. Just before his release, he wrote the above song on the inside of a cigarette packet and had it smuggled out of the jail. The famous young composer Nie Er set it to music. The song expressed the determination of an oppressed nation. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it was chosen as the national anthem.

During the Cultural Revolution, Tian Han was again imprisoned, this time by the “gang of four”, who charged him with having been a renegade during his imprisonment thirty years earlier by the Kuomintang. He died in 1968 in prison aged seventy.

On 25th April 1979, two years after the gang’s downfall, a memorial meeting was held in Beijing to exonerate and commemorate Tian Han. Over two thousand people were present, including the noted writer Mao Dun, vice-chairman of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, who in his memorial speech declared Tian Han to be an outstanding dramatist, founder of the revolutionary drama movement and a pioneer of the reform movement in traditional Chinese opera.

Born into a poor peasant family in Changsha, Hunan Province, in 1898, Tian Han since his childhood had loved drama. He often saw performances of shadow plays, puppet shows and Hunan operas in his hometown and he was such an enthusiast that he would beg his uncles to carry him on their backs at night to performances given by local peasants in neighbouring villages. Later, while studying at Changsha Teachers’ College, which offered free tuition, he pursued his interest in local operas and Chinese classical plays. He also started to write plays, publishing them in local journals. His first opera *Mother Teaches Her Son*, about how the wife of a dead soldier taught her son to carry out his father’s wishes to serve the country, is in the traditional form but with a new content. As Tian Han later said, his writings of this early period were “very naive and weak”.

In 1914, aided by friends, Tian Han went to Japan to study Japanese and European literature. There he came into contact with many new dramas, especially those by European realists. For a brief period he was influenced by the trend to oppose realism which was popular in Europe after the First World War, to the extent of almost embarking on the path of aestheticism and decadence himself. But the terrible conditions in China and the influence of Russian realistic literature convinced him that he should choose another path.

Tian Han published his one-act play *Night in a Café* in 1920



Tian Han

which he described as his “first creation of any importance”. That marked his start as a dramatist. The following year he published a more mature one-act play *The Night the Tiger Was Captured*. These two plays are the most important of his early works. The former tells how a waitress in a café is deserted by the son of a salt merchant, showing that the poor will be betrayed by the rich and that love and marriage in the old feudal society were based on family status and wealth. This is the positive side of the play. Yet the main characters are depicted as trapped by their fate. Although they aspire for a new life, what this life should be and how to attain it, they do not know. In giving no answers, Tian Han was still despondent and uncertain himself.

The Night the Tiger Was Captured describes the true love between a poor vagabond and the daughter of a rich family. Because of the strong opposition of the girl’s father, the lovers cannot marry and finally the boy in despair commits suicide. Ten years after its publication, Tian Han said of the play that since it deals with the social problem of marriage and class, the tragedy is unavoidable.

able. "Now we feel dissatisfied because the poor vagabond commits suicide, while the girl submits to her father's authority, and the way to a hopeful future is not even suggested."

This play was the first he wrote after his return from Japan in 1921. After that, Tian Han wrote about peasants, workers, soldiers, intellectuals as well as film and stage personalities. With his youthful enthusiasm and strong sense of justice, he conveyed the suffering of the Chinese people in their semi-feudal and semi-colonial state and voiced their determination to revolt.

In 1927, just when the Chinese revolution suffered serious setbacks, Tian Han became a revolutionary, writing many plays exposing the crimes of the reactionary ruling classes. In one short play, *Of One Mind*, he proposed the slogan, "Oppose the tyrants! Down with the tyrants!" In 1930 he wrote a long article *My Self-criticism* to expose and criticize the "decadent anarchist tendency" and the outlook of the declassed petty-bourgeoisie reflected in his and other dramatists' writings, which was published in the magazine *South Country Monthly*, which he edited.

All his writings of this period concentrated on one theme: the Chinese people's struggle against imperialism and feudalism. In a preface to a collection of Tian Han's works of the time, Hong Shen, a noted dramatist, said:

Tian Han's collection is one of few which represents the political and economic situation in China in the past four or five years, and which never loses the confidence that to fight against feudalism and imperialism is the only possible way for the Chinese nation.

With the outbreak of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1937, Tian Han reached a new stage in his development. His main theme now became resistance and patriotism. A play representative of this period is the four-act *Lugouqiao Bridge* with a cast of more than seventy characters. It praises the Chinese soldiers, peasants and students in their fight against the foreign aggressors, while disclosing the plans of the enemy and the policy of non-resistance of the Kuomintang government.

With the end of the War of Resistance Against Japan in 1945, Tian Han wrote a magnificent 21-scene play *The Song of Beautiful Women*, breaking away from the old formula that a play must be written in three to five acts. This is representative of his works in the middle period. He describes the current situation through the characters of three women, a weaver, an intellectual and a revolutionary. Raped by an imperialist soldier, the woman weaver is forced to prostitute herself to support her sick mother and blind husband. The intellectual is disappointed in love. The revolutionary fights for China's independence and freedom. All three are beautiful and noble in spirit, hence the title. Bound together by their common sufferings, they finally "embrace each other, welcoming the new life and struggle" with the victory over the Japanese.

Tian Han was over fifty when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. From Liberation until June 1964, when the attacks on him began, he published more than three hundred articles, poems, commentaries and reminiscences. He also wrote some plays such as *Princess Wen Cheng*, a historical one based on the story of a Tang-dynasty emperor who arranged the marriage of a Han princess to the Tibetan king, thus showing the close relationship between the Han and Tibetan peoples. In 1958, Tian Han wrote in a little over one month the play *Guan Hanqing* for the world-wide commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the publication of the works of Guan Hanqing, the great 13th-century Chinese dramatist. Chinese literary critics lauded the play as a "gem of Tian Han's dramas". Indeed the play is an outstanding example of Tian Han's later writings.

From the age of fourteen until he was in his sixties, Tian Han wrote, adapted and translated nearly three hundred dramas. No other dramatist in China has been so prolific.

His achievements not only brought him personal acclaim as an outstanding dramatist but also laid a solid foundation for the Chinese revolutionary drama movement. Speaking of the significance of his dramas in 1933, Tian Han said, "I express myself in my dramas, meet my friends in them, earn my living from them and lead a movement in them." By this he meant the Chinese revolutionary drama or new drama movement.

Prior to Tian Han's influence, a movement for new dramas had been started in China as a result of the May 4th Movement in 1919. This movement took the form of mainly theoretical discussions and debates, with very few new dramatic creations. Moreover it totally rejected the older opera forms, and, divorced from the people's tastes, it could not develop. It was not until the establishment of the South Country Society, a drama society of which Tian Han was the leader, that real new dramas began to appear. This opened a new way for the development of modern drama.

As early as 1921, Tian Han sponsored a magazine *South Country Fortnightly*. In its simple manifesto he wrote, "We want to create a fresh atmosphere in China's stifling literary field." In this magazine, he published *The Night the Tiger Was Captured* and other early works. Tian Han gained a lot of experience in leading the drama movement, and realized that if the movement was to be carried out well it was essential to train people and form the various cultural groups into a united front. For this purpose, he founded in 1927 the "South Country Arts University". Although the university was poorly equipped and did not survive long, it did train a number of cultural workers who became the core of the Left-wing Literary Movement, many of whom are still active today in the various cultural fields. Tian Han's later South Country Society was derived from this university. Its sole purpose was "to unite the young people who can share their joys and sorrows to work for the revolutionary artistic movement". Under his leadership, the society toured four southern provinces in 1928, performing in the main cities such plays as *Of One Mind*. This marked a development in the revolutionary drama movement, and its influence was felt by the whole country.

This society was independent of both the funds of the reactionary government and capitalist aid. The group included both famous artists and progressive youth, who succeeded in paving the way for the development of drama and the growth of the Left-wing Drama Movement under very difficult conditions. There is still the story told today in drama circles of how Tian Han, as the war spread, retreated from Guilin to Guiyang. Wearing a borrowed tattered overcoat, he walked the whole distance, one thousand *li*. When his

shoes wore out, he wrapped his feet in rags and carried on. On reaching Guiyang, the local provincial government gave him some money, but he refused to take it. Asked what he would like instead, he said he wanted to organize some performances.

After he became the head of the Left-wing Dramatists' and Stage Workers' League in 1931, Tian Han, during this period and the war of resistance, worked hard to unite those in drama circles, especially the old artists of the various local opera troupes. Under his guidance they sought reform and revolution. Thus he trained and united many talented drama workers and cultural leaders for New China. Even today those who were helped by Tian Han remember him with much affection.

During the war of resistance, under the guidance of Zhou Enlai, Tian Han helped to organize the National Salvation Drama Troupes. In 1944, he organized the Southwest Drama Festival, which was attended by nearly nine hundred drama workers from the dozens of troupes in the region. The festival lasted for ninety days, while Beijing and Guangxi operas, puppet shows, minority dances and acrobatics were staged. This was an unprecedented demonstration of the progressive resistance dramas in the Kuomintang-controlled areas.

After Liberation, Tian Han was appointed head of the bureau in charge of reforming operas. Even in his early years, he had paid attention to the reform of traditional operas. In an article he told of his experiences in 1933, saying, "At first my plays were adaptations of old musical dramas and then I became interested in writing new plays." Besides plays, Tian Han also wrote many operas. During the war of resistance, he wrote a dozen Beijing operas on the theme of resistance such as *The Fishermen's Song* and *The New Story of Heroic Sons and Daughters*. *Xie Yaobuan*, a Beijing opera he adapted after Liberation, describes how Xie Yaohuan, a woman official in ancient times, dared to risk displeasing other influential officials by pleading for the people. Compared with the original version, this opera emphasizes the element of democracy inherent in the original one and has a much richer ideological and artistic content. *The White Snake*, published in this issue, was based on an old legend. Tian Han transformed

the original version to emphasize the theme that love is irreconcilable with feudal forces through the fighting spirit of the main character, the White Snake. The opera is both moving and lyrical.

Tian Han always disagreed with the total rejection of traditional operas. As he said, "The old dramas have a history of several thousand years, and after being revised throughout the centuries are imbued with the ideas of the people." He added, "They appeal to the majority of audiences." Tian Han believed in "putting new wine into old bottles", in using the old forms of drama to express the new content and in giving a fresh meaning to historical themes. He brought to the opera many modern stage techniques such as sets, lighting and dialogue, so as to enhance the artistic effect and revitalize the opera. Correspondingly, he adopted some Beijing opera techniques for some of his plays, giving them a strong Chinese flavour. He also advocated that some gestures and symbolic movements in the traditional operas be used in Chinese drama.

For his immense contribution to Chinese drama, both in its development and by his own plays and operas, Tian Han will be remembered and honoured as one of the great men of modern Chinese revolutionary drama.

Tian Han

The White Snake

—A Beijing opera

The tale of a snake taking the form of a woman and falling in love with a man is one of the most popular old legends in the world. It probably first appeared in China during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). *The Tale of the Three Pagodas by the West Lake* tells of a man-devouring woman in white (White Snake) who a fortnight after her marriage attempted to devour her husband; but this monster was caught by a holy man and three stone pagodas were built to imprison her by the West Lake in Hangzhou. In *Stories to Warn the World* compiled by Feng Menglong in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) there is another tale entitled "The White Snake". The main plot of this is fairly complete. It is worth noting that in this version, instead of a man-devouring monster we have a woman who loves her husband and helps him to set up shop; but she still has some characteristics of a monster. A scholar of the time turned this story into a drama *Leifeng Pagoda*, and had it staged. In the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) many versions of the legend appeared in the form of popular dramas and ballads with the plot further developed, for they all describe the theft of the magic herb, the fight, the meeting at Broken Bridge and the final destruction of the pagoda by Green Snake. These additions bring out the courage and determination of White Snake and make her appear more human, willing to suffer all manner of hardships and even to risk her life for the sake of her love. She has taken on the virtues of tenderness and goodness, and lost all attributes of a monster.

China has many different types of local opera, and many of these have their own version of the old legend. The Beijing opera libretto was written by the well-known dramatist Tian Han in the fifties. He has cut out certain superstitious features of the original and emphasized White Snake's rebellious character. She is depicted as an ideal woman who dares to fight against the

feudal system for her own freedom and happiness, while Abbot Fa Hai typifies feudal reaction. Thus the play has been improved both ideologically and artistically.

— The Editors

CHARACTERS

WHITE SNAKE, *a white snake which has achieved immortality and taken the form of a beautiful girl*

GREEN SNAKE, *White Snake's maid*

XU XIAN, *a young man*

XU XIAN'S SISTER

BOATMAN

FA HAI, *abbot of Jinsban Monastery*

FA MING, *his disciple*

ACOLYTE

MONKS

STAG ANGEL

STORK ANGEL

CANOPUS, *god of longevity*

CLOUD SPIRITS

WATER SPIRITS

DEITIES

GUARDIAN DEITY OF THE MONASTERY

PAGODA SPIRIT

FAIRIES

Scene I

The Encounter at the Lake

*(The West Lake.)**

WHITE *(off)*:

*To Hangzhou we have come from Mount Emei!***

* A famous lake in Hangzhou.

**A mountain in the west of Sichuan.



White Snake

(Enter White Snake and Green Snake.)

*Who could have looked for such beauty in the world of men?
Here a pagoda casts its shade on the water,
There a pavilion nestles beside the lake;
Willows on the bank lean down to catch the boats,
And the peach blossom seems to shiver in the breeze.*

GREEN *(with girlish high spirits)*: We've come to the right place, sister! This is fun! Look, all the sightseers here seem to be couples!

WHITE: Yes. When we were searching for the Truth on Mount Emei we lived high up in a cold cave, shut off from the world every day by white clouds. In our spare time we could only wander aimlessly between the frosty pines or look wistfully at

the horse-chestnuts. It is lovely to come to this smiling countryside here. Look, Greeny, there in front is the famous Broken Bridge.

GREEN: If it's called Broken Bridge, why isn't it broken, sister?

WHITE: Ah, Greeny!

*The bridge is not broken in spite of its name,
And pleasure-seekers stroll here in twos and threes.
Such lovely hills and lakes drive care away,
We were right to leave Mount Emei!*

(The day suddenly becomes overcast.)

*A wind has sprung up
And the sky is overcast.*

GREEN: Look, sister! There's a young man with an umbrella coming this way. How handsome he is!

WHITE: Where? *(Green Snake points him out to her.)* Ah!

This is like meeting Pan An
In the streets of Luoyang.*

GREEN *(smiling to see her stare so raptly)*: It's raining, sister. Let's go on.

WHITE: Yes, let's go on.

*After a thousand years of tranquillity
My heart is in a turmoil.*

(Green Snake helps her to find shelter. Xu Xian comes through the wind and rain holding an umbrella.)

XU:

*Homeward bound from my mother's tomb
I am caught in a sudden storm;
Wind tosses the willow tendrils high,
Rain swirls the peach blossom petals,
But I have no time to stop.*

GREEN: It's raining harder than ever now, sister. Let's shelter for a minute under that willow.

WHITE: Very well.

XU *(coming nearer he sees the two girls under the willow)*: Ah!
That willow is no shelter!

*A man famous for his good looks. It is said that when he walked through Luoyang women gathered round and tossed fruit to him.

(To the girls) Excuse me, ladies. May I ask where you are going?

GREEN: My mistress and I were enjoying the sights of the West Lake when this heavy rain started. We want to go back to Qiantang Gate. Where are you going, sir?

XU: I am going to Qingpo Gate. How can you shelter from a downpour like this under that willow? You had better take my umbrella.

WHITE: But what about you, sir?

XU: I shall be all right.

WHITE: No, we can't do that.

BOATMAN *(off)*:

*I row visitors through the duckweed
To look at the fallen blossoms.*

XU: It is raining harder than ever. Please don't stand on ceremony. I'll go and hire that boat.

WHITE: Well — it's very good of you. *(She takes the umbrella.)*

XU: It's nothing.

(The Boatman rows his boat in.)

BOATMAN:

*A pot of wine, a spot of cover —
I'll drink until the storm is over.*

XU: Hey, boatman!

BOATMAN: Want a boat, sir?

XU: Yes.

BOATMAN: Where do you want to go?

XU: First row these ladies to Qiantang Gate, then take me to Qingpo Gate. I'll pay you extra.

BOATMAN: All right. Step aboard.

XU: Put down the gang-board.

BOATMAN: The deck is slippery. You ladies had better be careful.

WHITE: Give me a hand, Greeny. *(She steps aboard.)*

XU *(stepping aboard)*: Put off! *(He stands at some distance from the girls, and shelters his face from the rain with his sleeve.)*

BOATMAN: There's a high wind on the lake — stand closer together.

GREEN: Yes, the rain is pouring down. Let's share this umbrella.

XU (*declining with a gesture*): I'm all right.

WHITE: No, you really must.

(*Green Snake steps across to hold the umbrella over Xu, but since that means White Snake is half in the rain she steps back. So White Snake and Xu are forced to keep close together.*)

BOATMAN:

*Oh, it's good on the lake in the spring,
In the showery, squally weather —
It is bliss to cross in one boat,
But greater bliss to be lovers!*

(*White Snake and Xu Xian steal glances at each other.*)
(*The rain stops, and Xu steps apart to look at the bridge.*)

XU: Good, the rain has stopped.

*The clouds drift off, the sky is blue,
My clothes are pearly with drops from the willows.*

GREEN: See how different the West Lake looks, ma'am, now that it has cleared.

WHITE: Yes.

*Clear sky above the rain-washed hills —
The spring breeze blows through my silk skirt.*

XU (*struck by her beauty*):

She is as beautiful as Xi Shi of old,
As full of infinite variety.*

WHITE: Greeny —

*Find out where the gentleman lives —
One day we'll call to thank him.*

GREEN: Yes, ma'am. (*To Xu*) Tell me, sir, where do you live? My mistress wants to thank you.

XU: Oh, there's no occasion for that!

*My humble home is outside Qingpo Gate,
By Prince Qian's Temple west of the little bridge;
But this was a trifling service —
How can I trouble you to call on me?*

*A famous beauty.

WHITE: You are too kind. (*Aside, when Xu makes no reply*)

*How charming this gentleman is —
Too shy to answer me, he bangs his head!
Tell him, Greeny, where we live,
And ask him to call some day.*

GREEN: Yes, ma'am. (*To Xu*) Sir, we live near Cao Temple outside Qiantang Gate. You'll see a red pavilion there — that's where my mistress is staying. If you have time, you must come to see us.

XU: Ah, so you live near Cao Temple. In a day or two I shall certainly call on you.

BOATMAN: Well, here we are at Qiantang Gate.

(*Holding the umbrella, White Snake looks longingly at Xu.*)

GREEN (*understanding her, points at the sky which is growing dark again*): Oh, it's raining again.
(*It really starts to rain.*)

WHITE: So it is. What shall we do?

GREEN: Yes, this umbrella. . . .

XU: That's quite all right. Take the umbrella. I'll come for it another day.

WHITE: Thank you, sir.

*Thank you for your kindness
In escorting us to Qiantang Gate.*

(*She points to the bank.*) Look, sir —
*That red pavilion is where we live,
We hope you will call on us soon.
Now, Greeny, help me ashore.*

(*Turning back towards Xu*) Sir, be sure to come tomorrow!

XU: I'll certainly come. Goodbye!

WHITE: Goodbye, sir.

Don't make us wait in vain!

XU (*watching them leave*): What a delightful girl! Ah!
*The goddess has gone back to heaven,
I never asked her name!*

One moment, ma'am.

(*Green Snake turns back.*)

GREEN: What is it? Do you want your umbrella back?

XU: Oh, no. May I ask your mistress's name?
 GREEN: Her name is White.
 XU: Ah, yes, Miss White. Do you know my name?
 GREEN (*smiling*): Your name? Your name is Xu, isn't it?
 XU: That's right. But how did you know?
 GREEN (*smiling*): Isn't there a big "Xu" on that umbrella of yours? Please come early tomorrow, sir. My mistress will be waiting for you.
 XU: I certainly shall. Goodbye.
 GREEN: Goodbye. (*She curtseys and leaves.*)
 XU (*chuckling as he watches her walk away*): . . .
*That's a clever girl,
 Fit to serve a lovely young lady.
 (In his delight, he forgets White Snake's name again.)*
 Ah, what is her name? It's . . .



The encounter at the lake

BOATMAN (*quizzically*): Her name is White.
 XU: That's right. White.
 BOATMAN: You mean to say after all that carrying on you'd never met before? I thought you were one of the family.
 XU: Ah, that's what the poet meant when he said:
If strangers meet in stormy weather,
 BOATMAN (*capping the verse*):
The rain will bring them close together!
 (*He pushes off, taking Xu by surprise.*) Steady, sir!
 (*Xu gazes raptly at the bank as the boat rows off.*)

Scene II

The Wedding

(*The red pavilion by the lake.*)
 GREEN (*off*): This way, Mr Xu.
 (*Enter Green Snake, followed by Xu Xian.*)
 GREEN:
*Sweeping the path before our door,
 I found the man my sister's waiting for.*
 (*To Xu*) Please take a seat. (*She hurries into the inner chamber.*)
 XU (*looking around*):
*So a fairy lives near Cao Temple,
 In this red pavilion by the lake.*
 (*Green Snake leads White Snake quickly in.*)
 WHITE: What is it?
 GREEN (*smiling and whispering*): He's come!
 WHITE (*delighted*): Ah, where is the gentleman? (*She goes into the sitting-room.*) Where . . .
 XU: Good day, ma'am.
 WHITE: Good day, sir. Please take a seat.
 (*They sit down and Green Snake serves tea.*)
 WHITE: When we were caught in the rain on the lake yesterday, if you hadn't lent us your umbrella and called a boat, I don't know what my maid and I should have done.

XU: Any man would have done the same. It's not worth mentioning.

WHITE: Bring wine, Greeny. I'm going to drink a few cups with this gentleman to express our thanks.

GREEN: Yes, ma'am. (*She hurries out.*)

XU: This is putting you to too much trouble!

WHITE: Not at all.

(*Green Snake brings in cups and dishes, and pours out the wine.*)

WHITE: Your health!

XU: Your good health!

WHITE: May I ask how large a family you have?

XU: As my parents died when I was a child, I live with my sister. My brother-in-law is good to me, but since they are not too well off he has found me a post as assistant in a drug shop.

WHITE (*sympathetic*): If you work in a drug shop, how did you have time to visit the lake yesterday?

XU: I didn't go out to visit the lake. My mother is buried behind Lingyin Hill, and yesterday was the anniversary of her death, so I asked for half a day off to pay my respects at her grave. I was coming back along Su Embankment when that heavy rain started, and I met you.

WHITE: What a good son you are! (*Raising her cup*) Please drink.

XU: Please join me.

(*After sipping the wine, White Snake gets up slowly and takes Green Snake aside.*)

WHITE: Greeny!

GREEN: Yes, ma'am.

WHITE: Let me whisper something to you. (*She whispers to Green Snake, blushing.*)

GREEN: But how can I ask him that?

(*White Snake nudges her.*)

GREEN (*whispering*): Why don't you ask him straight out yourself?

WHITE: Please, sister. . . . (*She turns away, blushing, and goes out.*)

GREEN (*turning to Xu*): Mr Xu, my mistress wants to know if you are married or not?

XU: I am a poor orphan — how can I think of marriage?

GREEN: Why, Mr Xu, if you are not married, neither is my mistress — and we are all on our own. My mistress would like to become your loving wife. What do you say to that?

XU: This is more than I ever dreamed of! But as I just told you, I am an assistant in a drug shop with no home of my own — how can I support you both?

GREEN: That's easy. We don't have to worry about our daily needs. When my mistress's father died he left her some property. Since you work in a drug shop and my mistress understands medicine too, after your marriage you can work together. What is there to worry about?

XU: I had better go back to tell my sister first.

GREEN: Why be in such a hurry? Wouldn't it be more fun if you got married first, then took your bride home to meet your sister and brother-in-law?

XU: But I have no wedding presents ready.

GREEN: Pah! What wedding presents do you need? That umbrella of yours will make a fine betrothal gift, and today is a lucky day. Let me light the wedding candles, and you can go through the ceremony now. (*Green Snake lights the candles.*)

XU (*bewildered by this unexpected good fortune*): Why, this is. . . .

GREEN: Now everything is ready. Let me do the chanting:

*One umbrella to shelter the pair
Of young strangers come hither today,
Now the lake is an ocean of love,
And no gods are as happy as they.*

Now music is starting. It is time for the bride to come out. (*As music sounds in the adjacent room, Green Snake makes Xu stand facing east, then goes to fetch White Snake who is wearing a red dress and chaplet of flowers. White Snake and Xu bow together.*)

GREEN: First bow to Heaven and Earth, then to your parents, then to each other! Now go to your bridal chamber.

(The ceremony at an end, Green Snake escorts them to the bridal chamber.)

Scene III

Fa Hai Looks into the Matter

*(Jinshan Monastery.)**

(Fa Hai sits on a couch, attended by Monks.)

TOGETHER:

*For centuries our monastery has stood
Through the rise and fall of kingdoms,
As rushing water flows eternally
Into the mighty ocean.*

FA HAI:

*I pity the folly of mortals,
Sunk in three deadly sins — lust, anger and greed;
But the sea of bitterness has its bourn,
The holy mount is here.*

I am Fa Hai, abbot of Jinshan Monastery. Recently a girl named White has come to Zhenjiang,** and I find she is a thousand-year-old snake spirit in human form. She has fallen in love with Xu Xian of Hangzhou and married him, and now they have opened a drug shop. How can we suffer a monster in our midst, in this land of the Buddha? I must save Xu Xian and capture this White Snake. I have sent Fa Ming to make investigations, but he has not come back yet.

(Enter Fa Ming.)

FA MING: I am back, father.

FA HAI: What did you learn about White Snake and Xu Xian?

FA MING: I saw Xu Xian, and he presented a load of sandalwood to our monastery.

FA HAI: You should have brought him to me.

* A monastery on an island in the Yangzi, near Zhenjiang.

**A town in the province of Jiangsu, on the south bank of the Yangzi.

FA MING: I told him that the fifteenth of this month is the day on which we adorn our image of Guanyin, and our abbot invites him to come and offer incense. Xu would have come, but his wife's maid Greeny said her mistress had ordered them to have nothing to do with monks and Taoist priests — even if Fa Hai invited him in person, he could not go.

FA HAI: What insolence!

*Here where Buddha reigns supreme,
How dare the monster rave?*

(He changes his clothes and picks up his staff.)

*In monk's gown, with staff in hand, I go
To save Xu Xian from this iniquity.*

MONKS: We will see you off, father.

FA HAI: No, stay here. *(Exit.)*

Scene IV

The Warning

(Baohe Drug Shop.)

XU:

*Here's fresh fruit bought beside the river
To take to my wife, who is a fine physician.*

(Green Snake comes out to welcome him.)

GREEN: So you are back, sir.

XU: Yes, where is your mistress?

GREEN: She is still treating patients.

WHITE *(off)*: Goodbye, granny.

PATIENT *(off)*: Thank you so much, ma'am.

WHITE *(off)*: Goodbye. *(She comes out and sees Xu.)* Ah, you are back!

XU: Yes. Don't work so hard. Have a rest.

(He hides the basket of fruit.)

WHITE: There are patients waiting — how can I take a rest?

XU: Don't forget your condition, my dear.

WHITE (*blushing*): Of course not. (*She sees the basket.*) What is that?

XU: Just now I met a fruit vendor from Dongting Island by the shore. This fruit is rather rare, so I brought some back for you.

WHITE: You are too good to me. (*She takes the fruit.*) Thank you very much.

XU (*placing the basket on the table and putting his arm round his wife*): You mustn't say that. I was a poor orphan when I met you. It's only since marrying you that I have known happiness. Here we are in Zhenjiang, and it's thanks to you that our shop is doing so well. I don't know how to thank you enough.

My wife's love is deep as the sea!

Greeny!

GREEN: Yes, sir.

XU: Go and ask Dr Dou to see the patients while your mistress has a rest.

GREEN: Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

XU: Come, my dear.

I am going to prepare your bed for you.

(*Smiling, he goes out.*)

WHITE: I'll come presently.

My husband loves me so tenderly,

He shares joy and pain with me.

At last I know the happiness of men —

I did not leave my mountain cave in vain.

(*Enter Xu again.*)

XU: What's keeping you?

WHITE: I'm coming.

(*As they go arm in arm towards the inner room Green Snake comes in.*)

GREEN: I've told Dr Dou, sir.

(*They leave together.*)

(*Soon Fa Hai enters, with his staff.*)

FA HAI:

I have crossed the Yangzi on my raft

And come to this shop to track the monster down.

Is anybody in?

(*Xu, coming in to fetch the fruit basket, hastily greets Fa Hai.*)

XU: Ah, welcome, father.

FA HAI: Good day, sir. Are you Mr Xu?

XU: Yes. May I ask your name?

FA HAI (*solemnly*): I am Fa Hai.

XU: So you are Abbot Fa Hai. I suppose you are here for alms.

I have already given one load of sandalwood.

FA HAI: You have our deepest thanks. Today, however, I am not here for alms.

XU: Then perhaps you have come as a patient? My wife is tired and has gone to bed.

FA HAI: Don't disturb her. I have come to cure *your* illness.

XU: I am not ill.



The warning

FA HAI (*menacingly*): Your face is dark. Some evil spirit has bewitched you. How can you deny you are ill?

XU: Where is this evil spirit?

FA HAI: At your side.

XU (*looking round in dismay*): I don't see anything.

FA HAI: Mr Xu, please come over here. (*He leads Xu to the left and whispers.*) I have found out that your wife is a thousand-year-old snake spirit in human form.

XU: I assure you my wife is a very good woman. How dare you say she is a snake spirit? This is gross discourtesy, father.

FA HAI: Mr Xu, it is because I know you are a good man that I have come here myself to reveal the truth to you. If you persist in this folly, some day she will murder you.

XU: If she wanted to murder me, why should she love me so dearly?

FA HAI: That is just to deceive you. When the time comes, she will devour you.

XU: She gives up her food and rest to attend to patients — is that to deceive me too?

FA HAI: Well. . . .

*Do not be so stubborn, young man;
Your wife is a snake spirit from Mount Emei;
When the time comes she will kill you,
And in your next existence you will repent.*

XU: Father,

*My wife is sweet and kind,
It is wicked to slander her!*

(*Annoyed.*) Bah!

FA HAI: Mr Xu, I see you are too infatuated to listen to reason. But when the Dragon Boat Festival* comes, persuade her to drink a few cups of wine with realgar in it. Then she will show her real form, and you will see that I am speaking the truth.

*You turn a deaf ear to my warning,
But if she drinks on that day*

* The fifth day of the fifth month by the lunar calendar. On this day it was customary to drink wine containing realgar as a safeguard against snake bites.

You will know the truth.

Well, I will leave you now.

XU: Goodbye, father. (*As Fa Hai goes out, Xu cannot help buckling.*)

GREEN (*off*): Sir, the mistress is asking for you.

XU (*with a start*): Oh! . . . (*Beset by misgivings, he hesitates. But the thought of his wife's goodness convinces him that the monk has been lying. With a smile he dismisses his fears.*) What nonsense! (*He walks off with the fruit basket.*)

Scene V

The Transformation After Drinking

(*A hall leading to the inner chamber.*)

(*Enter Green Snake in low spirits.*)

GREEN:

*With flag leaves and sticky rice dumplings,
We remember a worthy man.*
This is a day of sadness in the fifth month.
The loyal minister of old was scorned,
But his poems still live on.*

Time flies like an arrow, and the Dragon Boat Festival is here again. I have asked my sister to slip away today so as not to arouse her husband's suspicions, but she says she must stay with him because they have never been parted. She is pretending to be ill. She wants me to go to the hills before noon and hide for a while. I would like to go, but I am afraid to leave her.

*The city is merry on this festival,
(Off-stage drums, cymbals and crackers are heard.)*

But who knows what we sisters suffer?

I ought to go alone to the bill —

WHITE (*off*): Greeny!

* Qu Yuan, a patriotic poet believed to have drowned himself on the fifth day of the fifth month, lunar calendar. His death is commemorated on the Dragon Boat Festival.

GREEN (*coming*):

Why is my sister calling?

I wonder if she has decided to slip away too?

(She hurries out.)

(Enter Xu, slightly intoxicated, carrying a wine pot.)

XU:

On a festive day people are gay —

I carry wine to my room!

(Calling) Are you up, my dear?

WHITE (*off*): Yes.

(The back curtain is raised, and Green Snake helps White Snake out.)

I suffer each year on this day,

But for my husband's sake I must look cheerful.

Have you eaten, my dear?

XU: Yes, just now I had a few cups with my assistants in the shop to celebrate the festival and we were very merry together.

You and I usually eat at one table, but today I am worried because you are not feeling well. My assistants want me to offer you a few cups of realgar wine for them. Here you are, then. I'll drink a cup first. *(He drains the cup and fills it again.)*

WHITE: I am not feeling well enough to drink. Please thank them for me.

XU: You are a good drinker. Why shouldn't we drink together on the Dragon Boat Festival?

GREEN (*thoughtlessly*): Oh, but today is different. You mustn't make her drink today.

XU (*astonished*): Why can't your mistress drink today?

GREEN (*hastily correcting her slip*): The mistress isn't well today. Besides, there's the baby to think of.

XU: That's true. But there's still a long time to go till that.

What do a few cups matter? I know! *(To Green Snake)* You have worked hard, Greeny. Have a cup of wine.

GREEN: Thank you, sir. You know I never touch wine.

XU: Well then, take the day off.

GREEN: I want to look after my mistress.

XU: I can do that. Off you go.

WHITE: Yes, do go, Greeny. *(She looks at her significantly, meaning her to bide in the hills.)*

GREEN: But...

WHITE: It's all right.

(Green Snake reluctantly leaves.)

XU: We are spending the festival away from home, my dear. For my sake, do drink one cup.

WHITE (*declining*): I am not feeling well. Please don't insist.

XU: But you are such a good drinker. If you won't drink today, the assistants will laugh at me. One cup!

WHITE: But... I really am unwell. I can't drink today.

XU: All right, then... But I... *(He suddenly laughs.)*

WHITE: Why are you laughing?

XU: I just remembered a joke.

WHITE: What is it?

XU (*afraid to go too far*): Well, nothing really.

WHITE: Why should you hide anything from your wife? Do tell me.

XU: The other day someone told me that you were...

WHITE: What?

XU: That you were a thousand-year-old snake spirit, and that if you drank wine with realgar in it you would change back into a snake.

WHITE (*shocked but trying to look calm*): What! Who told you such nonsense? *(She smiles.)* So I suppose you asked me drink in order to test me.

XU (*embarrassed*): Certainly not. If I believed that nonsense, I wouldn't have told you. But seriously, as you aren't well I won't ask you to drink much — just one cup.

WHITE (*smiling*): How terrible it will be if I change back into a snake!

XU (*smiling apologetically*): Don't be angry. You know how much I love you. Even if you were a monster, I couldn't help loving you. *(He thinks.)* All right, I'll fetch you that small jade cup. *(He goes inside.)*

WHITE (*very shaken*): Ah!
My husband spoke in fun,

But this joke appals me!
I hoped we could work happily here together,
But this Dragon Boat Festival is my undoing!
I have never injured or cheated a single soul —
Why should anyone try to turn my husband against me?
If I lie down and refuse the wine
He will think I am afraid of the realgar,
Doubt will spring up in his mind
And destroy our love.

(Xu brings a small cup and pours out the wine.)

XU: Drink this cup, my dear.

WHITE:

Forced to take the cup, I think quickly —
(Trusting to her magic power, she makes a wrong decision.)
Never mind!

All will be well, for I have magic power.
(She drains the cup.) There!

XU: Good! Have another cup.

WHITE: Well. . . *(She hesitates.)*

XU: To a long and happy life together!

WHITE: To a long life together?

XU: Yes. May we live to old age together without ever quarrelling or doubting each other.

WHITE *(forgetting herself, she drinks another cup)*: Yes. There!

XU *(filling her cup again)*: One more.

WHITE: Oh! *(She is racked with pain.)* I can't drink any more.

XU *(worried)*: Are you all right?

WHITE *(making a great effort)*: Yes. *(Desperately)* Greeny!

XU: She's gone. Let me help you to bed.

WHITE *(laughing drunkenly)*: I'm all right. I'm not drunk. . . .
(She retches.)

(Xu hastily carries her to the bed behind the curtain. There she is sick again.)

XU *(coming out from behind the curtain)*: Ah, she is seven months with child and not feeling well. I shouldn't have forced her to drink. What's to be done? *(He thinks.)* I know. I'll go to the shop to prepare an antidote for her.

(He goes out and soon comes back.)

Why didn't I stop to think?
I shouldn't have made her drink realgar wine.
She has been working hard,
And soon she will bear me a child.
Well, let me raise the red curtain.

(He hesitates.) Wait!

What if my wife is not human?

The other day Fa Hai told me that my wife was a thousand-year-old snake, who would take her old form again if she drank realgar wine. Now she is drunk. If I raise the curtain and find a snake — how frightful that will be! *(He thinks again.)* No. She is so good to me, and pretty as a flower — how can she be a monster? I mustn't pay any attention to that monk's foolish talk. *(He listens.)* She's asleep now. I'd better put the draught on her table, and apologize to her when she wakes up. *(He puts the medicine on the table.)* Here is the potion, my dear. I'll leave you now. *(He turns to go.)*

FA HAI *(off)*: Xu Xian, what's behind that curtain will be your antidote. Pluck up courage, man, and look at your charming wife!

XU: Ah!

Fa Hai has warned me again
That my wife is a snake.
I did not want to wake her,
But how otherwise can I banish this terrible doubt?
I must take this medicine to her.

(Groans can be heard from behind the curtain.)

Don't be upset, my dear. I've an antidote here for you. *(He raises the curtain.)* Help! *(He falls unconscious.)*

(Green Snake hurries in.)

GREEN: Ah! *(She feels Xu.)* Wake up, sister! Wake up!

WHITE: Oh. . .

GREEN: Wake up quickly! Your husband has died of fright. *(White Snake raises the curtain, and is horrified to see Xu lying on the floor. She kneels down to shake him, then begins to weep.)* Ah, my poor husband!

*My husband has died of fright!
His eyes are closed, his teeth are clenched,
The antidote is spilt on the floor
My heart is broken at the sight.*

Ah, husband!

GREEN: This is no time to cry. You must think of a way to bring him back to life.

WHITE: You are right. I'll leave him in your care while I go to the Fairy Mountain to steal the magic herb.

GREEN: Wait, sister! What if you are caught by the fairy guards on the mountain?

WHITE: I must get that herb to cure him. Even if it lay beyond a hill of swords or a sea of fire, I should still have to go.

Ah, sister —

*Bidding farewell with tears, (curtseying to her)
I leave for the Fairy Mountain,
Entrusting my husband to you!
If I return in time
We may restore him to life;
But should I never return,
Lay him on the cold hillside.
Plant love-lies-bleeding on his grave,
A willow tree near by,
And changed into a nightingale
I will fly there to mourn him.*

GREEN: Leave him to me, sister. *(She gives White Snake her sword.)*

(White Snake takes the sword, gazes at Xu again, then curtseys to Green Snake.)

WHITE: I leave him in your charge, sister! *(She hurries out.)*

Scene VI

The Guards of the Fairy Mountain

(The Fairy Mountain.)

(Enter the Stag Angel and Stork Angel, dancing.)

TOGETHER:

*The fairy hill is strange and rare,
Sweet bird-song fills the golden air;
By emerald lake the lily blows,
On purple cliff the charmed herb grows;
Where mountains meet, white clouds drift by,
And cedars ring the palace high.*

STORK: Hail!

STAG: Hail!

STORK: Canopus has ordered us to guard this mountain. Let us make a round of the hill now to see that no evil spirit trespasses here.

STAG: Very well.

STORK:

*Our flashing swords gleam coldly,
As we guard this holy ground
And keep all fiends away.
(They dance and go out.)*

Scene VII

Stealing the Magic Herb

(The Fairy Mountain.)

WHITE *(off)*:

*Sword in hand and in tears,
(She enters.)*

I come to the Fairy Mountain.

I should have done as Greeny said,

And drunk no wine on the festival.

Having left my husband in her care

And vowed not to return without the herb,

I march boldly up to the hill.

(She recoils.) Ah!

A fierce angel is guarding the way,

*I shall have to slip round to the back.
(Enter the Stag Angel, who bars her way with his sword.)*

STAG:

*Here is the stag,
A mountain sentry I;
What wicked thing are you,
Come here so stealthily?*

WHITE:

*Bowing low I plead —
Fairy sentry, hear me out!
Once I, too, served the gods,
And sought eternal Truth,
Then left Emei to see the world of men,
And married Xu Xian in Hangzhou.
Now he lies sick to death,
And I have come to fetch your magic herb.*

STAG:

*This herb is ours alone,
How can we give it to a mortal man?*

WHITE:

*The gods should be merciful,
Should save poor mortals in danger.*

STAG:

*Cunning arguments will not serve you,
My bright sword will strike you dead!*

WHITE:

*Once the magic herb is mine
I will gladly die nine deaths!*

STAG:

*I warn you — make haste and go!
(He strikes at her.)*

WHITE (parrying):

*Excuse me, Stag, if I am rough!
(They fight. White Snake wounds the Stag Angel and
hastily plucks the magic herb. The Stork Angel hurries in.
White Snake puts the herb in her mouth to fight with both*

*of them, until she is beaten to the ground. Still she clings to
the magic herb.)*

STORK (raising his sword): Take this, you monster! (Canopus comes quickly in with Cloud Spirits.)

CANOPUS: Hold your hand, Stork! (To White Snake.)
How dare you come here to steal our herb?

WHITE: Ah, heavenly father! It matters little if I die here, but then who will restore my husband to life?

CANOPUS: I admire your wifely devotion, and since you are with child I shall spare you. You may take home the magic herb to save your husband's life. Now leave this mountain.

WHITE (shedding tears at this unlooked-for kindness): Thank you, great god!

*Clutching the herb, I shed tears,
For I nearly met my death here;
But now I bid farewell of Canopus,*

(She curtseys.)

I must haste a thousand miles to save my husband.

(She turns to leave.)

(The Stag Angel snarls angrily.)

CANOPUS: Don't stop her! (He sighs as he watches White Snake leave.) Cloud Spirits!

SPIRITS: Ready!

CANOPUS: Let us return to our palace. (Exeunt.)

Scene VIII

White Snake Reassures Her Husband

(The inner chamber.)

WHITE:

*At the risk of death I stole the herb
To save my husband's life,
But now he treats me coldly
And I weep before my glass.*

(Green Snake comes in indignantly.)

GREEN:

*He treats my mistress cruelly,
And even acts a lie to me!*

Sister! (*Looking at her closely*) Are you dressed?

WHITE (*bappily*): So you are back! Is my husband coming?

GREEN: Pah! As soon as he saw me, he busied himself with some accounts, clicking his abacus. But when I looked, it was an old account book — several months old!

WHITE (*very hurt*): I suppose he still means to ignore me. . . . (*She weeps.*)

GREEN: That's it. You saved his life at the risk of your own, and now he behaves in this heartless fashion. If I were you, I'd give him up and go away. Don't break your heart over him!

WHITE: Have you forgotten that I am with child, sister?

GREEN: Of course not. But after it's born you can give the child to him.

WHITE: Greeny, I love Xu Xian so much that even if the seas dried up and the rocks crumbled away I could never bear to leave him.

*You urge me to go back to Mount Emei
And leave Xu Xian before my heart is broken;
You little know how I love him —
Though heaven and earth decay I will never leave him.*

GREEN:

*We have no love of saintly solitude —
Do fallen leaves fly back to wintry boughs?
But your husband no longer loves you —
All his vows have gone with the wind.
Before love turns to hate you ought to part,
Not wait till he breaks your heart.*

WHITE: I don't think he is like that.

*Although I admire your spirit,
Man and wife should not part so lightly.*

GREEN: Well, if you decide not to leave him, you must think of a way to make him trust you again.

WHITE (*nodding*): Yes, you are right.

I lower my head to think of a plan. . . .

(*Coming to a decision*) I have it!

Seven feet of white silk will drive away all his doubts!

Greeny, I've thought of a plan.

GREEN: What is it?

WHITE: I'll change my white silk belt into a silvery serpent, and make it crawl on the beam in the kitchen. Then I'll get my husband to look at it with me, and tell him it's the dragon of good luck. That will stop him suspecting me.

GREEN: That's a splendid idea. Get ready quickly while I fetch him. (*She hurries out.*)

WHITE: Yes, since dust has darkened the mirror of our love, I will fling my silver girdle over the beam. (*She takes off her belt and throws it over the beam.*)

(*Enter Green Snake.*)

GREEN: Dr Dou and the others are urging him to come in.

DR DOU (*off*): Your good wife expects you, sir. Go on in.

(*They push Xu in.*)

WHITE (*rising to welcome Xu*): Ah, husband!

XU (*still frightened of her*): Good day. (*He forces himself to sit down by her.*)

WHITE: Greeny tells me you have been checking your accounts in the shop. But you have only just recovered from your illness — you mustn't work too hard.

XU (*nervously*): I'm all right.

WHITE: But I can't help worrying. I've told Greeny to prepare some dishes, so that we can enjoy a few cups of wine together.

XU: There was no need.

WHITE: Oh, but you must drink a little. Greeny, fetch the wine.

GREEN: Yes, ma'am. (*Exit.*)

WHITE: Ah, husband,

For twelve days now you have left me —

Promise me never to leave your wife again!

GREEN (*off, cries out in horror*): Oh! Come here quick, ma'am!

WHITE: What is it? (*To Xu*) Wait a moment. I'll come straight back. (*She walks gracefully off.*)

XU:
*My wife is as lovely as ever,
 But how can a man love a snake?*
(White Snake hurries back looking upset.)

XU: What has frightened you?

WHITE: I'll tell you. Just now Greeny was fetching wine from the kitchen when she saw a white serpent on the beam.

XU (*trembling*): What! The white snake again!
(Green Snake comes quickly in.)

GREEN: There's no need to be afraid, ma'am. Dr Dou says this is the dragon of good luck which is protecting our house. It won't hurt anyone.

XU: What? The dragon of good luck which is protecting our house and won't hurt anyone?

GREEN: Yes. "When man and wife are provident, to them the dragon of luck is sent." This is a lucky sign.

WHITE: Oh, this is a lucky sign, is it?

XU: Has the dragon gone?

GREEN: It's still there. Shall we go and have a look at it?

XU: Is it safe to look?

GREEN: Why not? I'm not afraid.

XU (*curious*): In that case, let's go together.
(Xu, White Snake and Green Snake go out, then come back again.)

XU (*laughing*): Now all is well.
*It is really the dragon of luck,
 Come to bring us good fortune.
 All my doubts are driven away.*

So it really is the dragon of good luck! That reminds me of something, my dear!

WHITE: Yes?

XU: On the festival because you had too much to drink I brought you an antidote, but when I raised the curtain — ha! — there was a white snake there exactly like this one.

WHITE: What? You saw it that day?

XU: Yes, I suppose it must be the same. And that was what made me ill.

GREEN: Why didn't you say so before?

XU: Ah... I was stupid enough to believe a silly tale I heard. I really was a fool. Sit down, my dear. *(They take seats.)* Bring us the big cups, Greeny, and we'll drink heartily to make up for this fortnight's coolness.

WHITE: You are only just better; you shouldn't drink too much.

XU: That's all right. Now that my mind is at rest, my illness is cured.

WHITE: On the day of the festival I was not well enough to drink with you. Tonight I want to make up for that. Still, we are both only just getting over an illness — let us use small cups.

XU: As you wish.

WHITE (*to Green Snake*): Take the cups and dishes to the inner room, Greeny. *(She looks back at Xu.)* I shall serve you myself.

XU: Thank you, my dear.

WHITE: Ah, husband —
All these days my pillow has been drenched with tears,
 XU (*feroently*):
But now the moon is shining through the clouds again.

WHITE: Husband, *(scolding him gently)*
You shouldn't believe these rumours so readily.

XU: Ah, my dear, *(pointing to the stars)*
The stars above will bear witness to my love.
(They walk out arm in arm, while Green Snake follows them, delighted.)

Scene IX

Xu Xian Goes to Jinshan Monastery

(On the river bank.)
(Fa Hai enters clutching his staff.)

FA HAI:
I come to the river pavilion, staff in hand,

To wait for the sheep gone astray.

(Seeing Xu Xian approach, he steps aside.)

XU:

We burnt incense that day and drank

To celebrate the festival;

As my wife lay unconscious

I prepared an antidote for her,

But on raising the red curtain

I was frightened out of my wits!

I thought my wife was a snake spirit,

But now it seems that was the dragon of good luck;

Yet why should the dragon that brings good luck

Be lying on my wife's bed?

Disturbed in mind, I come to the river bank.

(He is impressed by the view.) What a magnificent river!

*The Yangzi is grander than the River Qiantang.**

(Fa Hai comes quietly forward.)

FA HAI: If you enjoy this splendid view of the Yangzi, why don't you visit Jinshan Monastery which overlooks the river?

XU: Ah, it is you, father. I haven't seen you for a long time.

FA HAI: I am growing old. Not long ago I had a grave illness which nearly cost me my life.

XU: What illness was that?

FA HAI: It was caused by fright.

XU: How could you, with your great wisdom, be frightened?

FA HAI: Why not, if I received a sudden shock?

XU: What a coincidence! The same thing happened to me.

FA HAI: Ah, were you frightened too? Was it because of an antidote?

XU (*amazed*): Yes ... it was.

FA HAI: Was I right or not?

XU: You were right. But that snake appeared again later on the kitchen beam, and my wife told me it was the dragon of good luck which would not harm anyone.

* A river near the West Lake.

FA HAI: Let me tell you what really happened. That day you died of fright, but she went to the Fairy Mountain and stole the magic herb to restore you to life. The dragon of good luck was her white silk belt. How could she do such things unless she was a monster?

XU: But she must be good if she went to the Fairy Mountain to steal a magic herb to save my life.

FA HAI: She did that not to save your life, but because she likes your good looks and wants to keep you a little longer.

XU: But now she is seven months with child. Surely there is nothing false about that?

FA HAI: Well, listen to me:

A pilgrim long ago

Met a fair maid weeping by the road;

She told him that her wicked stepmother

Had ordered her to pick wild mulberries;

Pitying her, the pilgrim took her home

And they became man and wife;

In ten months she gave birth to a son,

And their happiness was complete.

(His tone becomes menacing.)

But then disaster befell him —

One night she changed into a long white snake,

First devoured their darling child,

Then bit and killed her husband.

Now that you are young and handsome

The white snake dotes on you,

But once your youth is gone

The white snake will swallow you!

XU (*in fear and trembling*): Ah, father, how can I escape?

FA HAI: Trust in Buddha — he will save you.

XU: During my illness I promised to sacrifice to Buddha, and today I told my wife that I was going to your monastery to offer incense. Please give me good counsel, father.

FA HAI: Well, I cannot do that for nothing.

XU: Here are ten taels of silver. Please accept them, father.

FA HAI: As the proverb says: You cannot buy salvation with gold.

XU: What must I do then?

FA HAI: Become my disciple.

XU: Oh... Shall I begin tomorrow?

FA HAI: Tomorrow will be too late.

XU: You are in too much of a hurry, father.

FA HAI: You have to hurry to rescue a burning or a drowning man.

XU: Very well. Let me bow to you, father.

FA HAI: Amida Buddha! Now come with your master.
(*Laughing, he pulls Xu along. Xu hesitates and looks back.*)
Where are you going?

XU: I think I'll just go home first.

FA HAI: Don't you know the saying: It is easy to enter holy orders, but hard to leave them?

XU: But I don't want to be a monk.

FA HAI: What is holding you back?

XU: I am willing to give up my home, but not my wife's love.

FA HAI: If you are still infatuated, how can you hope to escape from this terrible danger? Well, didn't you say you wanted to come to the monastery to offer incense?

XU: Yes.

FA HAI: After you have offered incense, I shall tell you your past and future. Then you can decide for yourself whether to take the way of life or the way of death. You shall choose between good and evil.

XU: Very well.

FA HAI: Come on.

XU: Let's go.

*I want my wife, yet I want to be a saint —
I am standing on two boats at once.*

FA HAI:

*But I have a ruthless sword
To sever all sinful ties.*

(*He laughs.*) Come, Xu Xian! Amida Buddha! (*He triumphantly drags Xu off.*)

Scene X

Crossing the River

(*On the Yangzi.*)

(*White Snake and Green Snake enter rowing a boat.*)

WHITE:

Our little craft goes quickly.

Greeny!

GREEN: Yes.

WHITE: Remember how he loved me when we first met by the lake; but now that he has listened to Fa Hai and left me, I am wretched.

GREEN: Now that it's come to this, sister, it's no use wringing your hands. Let us go straight to Jinshan to settle scores with Fa Hai.

WHITE: Yes.

*I do not care how high the waves leap up —
That bald-headed ass envied our love
And has tricked my husband into leaving me.
He has been away for three days and sent no word —
The love birds are torn apart.*

I clench my teeth as I gaze towards the monastery.

Greeny,

Help me row, sister!

*We'll unsheathe the swords at our waists
And teach the bald-headed ass a good lesson!*

(*Exeunt.*)

Scene XI

White Snake Demands the Return of Her Husband

(*Jinshan Monastery.*)

FA HAI (*off*):

I have been practising yoga in my chamber,

(He comes in and stands on the cliff outside the monastery.)

I have started to teach Xu Xian the Buddhist sutras.

I know that the snakes will come,

And I am ready for them.

GREEN: Give back my master, you bald-headed ass!

WHITE (*hastily stopping her*): Don't speak like that! (*She turns to plead with Fa Hai.*) Father, my husband Xu Xian came to your monastery to offer incense three days ago. Please call him out, so that he can come home with me.

FA HAI: What did you say your husband's name was?

WHITE: Xu Xian.

FA HAI: He is not here. You must look for him elsewhere.

WHITE: When my husband left, he told me quite distinctly that he was coming here to offer incense. We are so fond of each other that we cannot bear to be parted for a single day. Please let him go, so that we can be together again.

FA HAI: I will tell you the truth. Your husband has become my disciple and a monk of this monastery. He cannot go back now.

WHITE: That can't be! We swore to be true to each other — how can we let our marriage be destroyed like this? You are a great abbot and should be merciful. I beg you to let my husband come home with me. Then we shall always be grateful for your great kindness. Oh, father —

My husband is true to me too,

We have sworn to love for ever;

Be merciful and release him —

We shall always remember your kindness.

FA HAI: Vile monster!

(Green Snake is furious, but White Snake restrains her.)

FA HAI:

A monk in his last existence,

How can he love a monster?

I advise you to go back to Mount Emei,

If you stay here longer you will meet your death.

GREEN: Bald ass!

My mistress and Xu Xian were happy

Till you tore them apart, you scoundrel!

Release him at once, and we'll spare you;

If not, we shall flood this abbey!

WHITE: Don't talk so roughly. Ah, father,
Greeny is rude and doesn't know how to behave,
But you should be as magnanimous as the ocean.
Buddha considers all that exists as equal,
That is why all living creatures worship Truth.

Have pity on me, father!

We met at the West Lake and came here together,

I am seven months with child;

I beg you to think of my plight,

And in your great mercy let my husband go!

FA HAI:

Your hopes are vain,

Not till the river flows backwards

Will you see your husband again.

We will not have monsters in the world of men,

Honest folk must be protected.

WHITE (*trying hard to control her anger*):

I have aided hundreds of the poor and sick,

The whole neighbourhood praises me.

The monster is surely he

Who separates man and wife.

FA HAI (*menacingly*):

Do you know the power of my dragon staff?

I shall not let monsters threaten me!

WHITE:

Even your dragon staff

Cannot override reason and justice!

GREEN (*unable to contain herself*):

Why waste breath on him?

Today. . . .

BOTH:

We will overturn this place.

FA HAI:

I call my Deities from the sky.



The battle on
the river

DEITIES (off): Here!

(Enter the Deities.)

FA HAI:

Arrest these monsters and protect the abbey! (White Snake and Green Snake hastily make off.)

DEITIES: Yes, father! (They give chase. Exeunt.)

Scene XII

The Battle on the River

(The Yangzi River by Jinsban Monastery.)

(Enter White Snake, grieved and indignant, carrying the com-

mander's flag. After a moment's reflection she tosses it angrily to Green Snake, who starts summoning Water Spirits with it. White Snake appears in their midst.)

WHITE (to the Water Spirits): These are your orders —

Relying on our magic power,

(The Water Spirits join in.)

Relying on our magic power,

Husband and wife sold drugs to make a living.

But one day Fa Hai came,

And made my husband give me realgar wine;

Though I stole the magic herb from the Fairy Mountain,

Still Xu Xian listened to slander

And left his young wife lightly.

All the trouble was caused by the abbot's jealousy;

This injustice is deep as the sea —

I must have revenge!

Brothers and sisters, come with me to kill Fa Hai.

ALL: We come!

(The Deities enter and join battle with the Water Spirits. White Snake and Green Snake fight desperately and defeat the Deities repeatedly, until White Snake's condition prevents her from carrying on. Then, with Green Snake and the Water Spirits protecting her, they beat a retreat.)

WHITE (crying sadly): Ah, husband!

(The Deities pursue them.)

Scene XIII

The Escape from the Monastery

(The main hall of the monastery.)

(Xu Xian comes in carrying Buddhist sutras.)

XU:

Come to Jinsban to take refuge,

I have been locked up and live a dreary life;

Holding the sutras, I call my dear wife's name.

(Drums are heard.)

Ah!

What is that noise of battle outside the gate?

(An Acolyte brings in tea.)

Tell me, little brother, what is all that uproar outside?

ACOLYTE: That — I mustn't tell you.

XU *(understanding)*: Can my wife have come here to find me?

ACOLYTE: So you've guessed it. Yes, it is your wife looking for you. How beautiful she is! But that maid of hers is a terror!

XU: Where are they now? I must go to them.

ACOLYTE: Steady on! How can you go to them now? Besides, our abbot says your wife is a monster — a fake.

XU: But her love is real and true. Oh! All this din outside must mean your abbot is fighting them.

ACOLYTE: Our abbot has sent Deities to arrest your wife. Now it's a fight to the death.

(Drums roll.)

FA HAI *(off)*: Deities, don't let her escape! Surround her!

(Drums roll.)

XU *(anxiously)*: Ah, my wife is seven months with child. How can she live through a battle like that? Little brother, let me out!

ACOLYTE: What do you want to do?

XU: I want to . . . help. . .

ACOLYTE: Which side do you want to help?

XU: I want to help my wife.

ACOLYTE: You are just making trouble for me. Our abbot is all-powerful, and your wife will soon be arrested.

XU: Ah!

(Drums roll.)

WHITE *(off)*: Where are you, husband? Where are you? Ah, Xu Xian!

XU *(frantically)*: I am here, my dear! *(To the Acolyte)* Little brother!

Let me out of this trap!

I cannot bear to hear her cries.

Ah, brother, let me out at once. I shall repay you well.

ACOLYTE: Don't be in such a hurry. Listen! The sound of fighting is dying down. Very likely your wife has been beaten and run away.

XU: Then I must catch up with her. Please help me, brother. I'll kneel to you.

ACOLYTE: All right, all right! Don't worry. As the abbot isn't back yet, I don't mind letting you out.

XU: I can never thank you enough, brother.

ACOLYTE: This way. *(They walk round.)* See that small path? Run away quickly while there's no one about.

XU: Now I am safe. *(He hurries off.)*

ACOLYTE: Just a minute. When the abbot finds out that Xu Xian has escaped, I shall get a big beating. Why should I wait here for that? I may as well run away too. *(He runs off.)*

Scene XIV

The Broken Bridge

(By the West Lake in Hangzhou.)

(White Snake comes in, exhausted after the battle.)

WHITE:

Blazing with anger,

I fought my way out.

Ah, my cruel husband!

(Green Snake runs in to look for White Snake. She puts her arms round her and weeps.)

Wicked Fa Hai has wronged me cruelly,

But how could my husband leave me,

Breaking my heart like this? (She staggers.)

GREEN *(supporting her)*: Are you all right, sister?

WHITE: I can hardly walk another step for pain. What shall I do?

GREEN: I expect your time has come. Let us rest a little by the bridge in front, while we think of some way out.

WHITE: Yes, that's all we can do now.

(Green Snake helps White Snake forward, and they look at the lake.)

WHITE *(wistfully)*: Isn't this the Broken Bridge, Greeny?

GREEN *(looking)*: Yes.

WHITE: The Broken Bridge! We were passing this bridge when I met him that day in the rain. The bridge is not broken, but my heart is broken.

*The West Lake is the same as ever;
The bridge is not broken, but my heart is broken,
For he has forgotten all our vows of love,
Faithless, heartless Xu Xian!*

GREEN: He's such a heartless man that I advised you long ago to give him up, but you wouldn't listen to me. Now he leaves you so near your time to wander homeless. If I see him again, I'm not going to let him off!

WHITE: I do blame him for his ingratitude. Still, if you think carefully, it was Fa Hai with his slandering tongue who drove him to it.

GREEN: Of course Fa Hai is to blame. But Xu Xian shouldn't have believed his slanders and forgotten your love.

WHITE: You can't wonder at his being suspicious — after all Fa Hai told him.

GREEN: What! Are you still standing up for him? Hasn't he hurt you enough yet?

WHITE: Ah, Greeny,
*Before the stars we vowed
To be true for ever.*

GREEN:
*You have been true to him,
But he has changed. (She angrily draws her sword.)
Let me kill all unfaithful lovers with this sword!*

XU *(off)*: I must hurry!
*(Xu Xian runs in.)
Travelling day and night I have hurried home,
Searching for my wife in vain.
(Catching sight of them he is overjoyed.) Ah!
There she is, pale and wan, by the bridge,*



The Broken Bridge

*While Greeny with drawn sword
Glares round furiously.
No wonder she is angry —
I have dragged them into such danger.
At the risk of my life let me greet her.*

Wife!

WHITE *(in surprise)*: Husband!

GREEN *(at the same time)*: Ha, so you've come!

(She strikes him and draws her sword.)

(Xu flies with Green Snake in pursuit.)

WHITE: Stop, Greeny! *(She staggers after them.)* Stop! *(Exit.)*

(Xu runs in again.)

XU:

I am frightened out of my wits!

GREEN: Don't think you're going to escape! *(She chases him round the stage.)*

(White Snake rushes in.)

WHITE: Stop, Greeny, stop!

(Green Snake raises her sword.)

XU *(kneeling and trembling)*: Save me, wife! Save me!

WHITE *(shielding him, and speaking with great bitterness)*: So you — you — expect me to save you today? You . . .

*You could bring yourself to harm me
By forcing me to drink on the festival;
You could bring yourself to deceive me,
After swearing by the stars to be true;
You could bring yourself to break my heart
By going with Fa Hai to the monastery.
Though you no longer loved me,
At least you should have thought of our child —
Yet instead you left me to die.
I fought the Deities,
My sword against their spears,
Till I was exhausted,
Reeling in agony,
While you looked on from the abbey!
Think for yourself —
How dare you come back to me?*

XU: My dear —

*When I heard the fighting outside,
I shed tears in my longing to join you;
I tried several times to escape,
But Fa Hai would not let me go.*

GREEN: If Fa Hai would not let you go, how do you come to be here now?

XU: It was . . .

GREEN *(not waiting for his explanation, with rising anger)*: I suppose Fa Hai sent you here to catch us. You heartless wretch! I'll kill you!

XU: That's not true. Please listen, wife! Let me explain.

WHITE *(to Green Snake)*: Let him speak.

GREEN *(angrily pointing a finger at Xu)*: Speak!

XU: Ah, wife! Greeny —

That day I went to the river,

*Fa Hai persuaded me to become a Buddhist;
I meant to come back after burning incense to Buddha,
But I was a prisoner behind high walls.
As the monks chanted, my one thought was of you.*

Ah, my dear —

*I had no rest on those nights;
When you came to Jinsan to find me,
Near as we were, we could not see each other.
When Fa Hai fought against you
My heart seemed pierced by arrows,
Until a kind acolyte let me go,
And I came all the way to this bridge.
Now I have seen you once more
I can die content.*

GREEN: Bah!

*If you were thinking of her all the time
Why did you listen to slander?
When my mistress fought Fa Hai
Why were you on his side?
Your lies take no one in —
Have a taste of my sword, you wretch!
*(She raises her sword.)**

WHITE *(hastily stops Green Snake)*: Greeny,

Don't brandish your sword like that!

(To Xu) Ah, husband,

*Don't be afraid, but listen carefully:
Your wife is no mortal woman,
But a snake spirit from Mount Emei.*

(Hearing her tell the truth, Green Snake steps forward to stop her, but White Snake pays no attention.)

*To see the world of men I left my cave
And came to the West Lake with Greeny;
In the wind and rain I met you,
And loved you for your kind heart and courtesy,
For being a good son to your mother,
And for earning an honest living.
We knew love and happiness in the red pavilion*

*Before our joy turned to sorrow;
We left Hangzhou and settled in Zhenjiang
Where I helped you in your trade;
During the festival you all but died,
And I risked my life to cure you.
Though not a mortal I love you
And am going to bear you a child.
What made you change after your recovery,
And fall into Fa Hai's trap?
I waited for you but you never came;
Each night I watched till dawn,
Wetting my pillow with tears,
And waking from dreams of love to bitter sorrow.
Then I went to Jinsan Monastery to find you,
Hoping man and wife might come together again;
If not for Greeny's desperate resistance
Even our child would have perished;
No wonder, then, if Greeny frowns on you.*

Ah, husband —

Ask your own heart who was right and who was wrong.

GREEN (to Xu): Well, Xu Xian, now my mistress has told you
the whole truth you had better go to find your master Fa Hai.

(To White) Let's leave him, sister.

XU: My dear! And you, too, Greeny.

WHITE: Greeny, listen to what he has to say.

XU:

*As my wife told me the true story
The past flashed back to my mind.
We met first in wind and rain on the West Lake,
And went together to sell drugs by the Yangzi,
I was wrong to make you drink on the festival,
Hurting you so and frightening myself to death;
It was only because you went to the Fairy Mountain
That I was restored to life.
On the day that I went to the abbey
Fa Hai urged me to break with you,
And kept me a prisoner there,*

*While you watched every night till dawn,
And spared no pains to find me,
Going all the way to Jinsan.
Now I know that you love me truly
And that your heart is kind,
For you suffered all this for my sake.
Although you are not a mortal I love you still.*

GREEN (stepping over and seizing him): Xu Xian,
What a glib tongue you have!

Heartless, selfish man! Did you care how your wife suffered?

WHITE: He understands it now, Greeny.

GREEN: How can you be sure? (She thrusts Xu aside.) Ah,
sister —

You are too soft-hearted.

You don't know how fickle men are.

XU: Ah, my dear, and Sister Greeny,

If I change again,

May your sword cut off my head!

WHITE: Alas! (She helps Xu up and clings to him weeping.)

GREEN: H'm!

They are still so fond of each other;

There is bound to be more trouble;

I had better leave them and go far, far away. . . .

(She bows sadly.) Take good care of yourself, sister. I must
leave you now.

WHITE (stopping her): Greeny!

How can you speak like that to your own sworn sister?

Don't you know that my pains have begun,

That I have no roof over my head?

How can you be so unkind as to leave me now?

Ah, Greeny! (She weeps bitterly.)

GREEN (comforting her): Don't be upset, sister.

You and I are one flesh and blood,

When we left Emei we swore

To share life and death

And every hardship together.

I hope you will bear your son safely,

*And I hope that Master Xu...
(White Snake weeps, and Xu bows his head in shame. Green Snake has to forgive him for her sister's sake.)*

*... that he will be true.
If ever he deceives my sister again,
With these three feet of steel I shall take revenge!*

XU: Sister Greeny,
*Like pure gold refined by fire,
My wife's love moves earth and heaven;
Set your mind at rest —
I shall never wrong her again.*

WHITE: Where shall we go, husband?

XU: Shall we go for the time being to my brother-in-law's house?

WHITE: Very well. But don't tell them what happened at Jinshan Monastery.

XU: Of course not.
WHITE: Come, Greeny. *(She takes Green Snake's arm.)*
*We have come together again after all our trials,
As swallows bring mud to mend the broken nest;
Come with me, Greeny, to Qingpo Gate. (She looks at the lake.)*
*That spot where we sheltered looks the same as ever.
(They go out by the left.)*

Scene XV

Caught by the Alms Bowl

*(In the house at Hangzhou.)
(Enter Xu Xian's Sister holding bright baby clothes.)*

SISTER: Life is good!
*Now the Xu family has an heir,
I come with clothes for the child.
(Green Snake comes out from the inner room carrying the baby.)*

GREEN:
My sister has a son! Oh joyful day!

She did not suffer in this world in vain!
Ah, baby's aunt has come.
SISTER: Good morning. Is my sister-in-law up?
GREEN: Yes, for some time now.
SISTER: And my brother?
GREEN: He has gone out to pick some flowers. He wants her to look her best today.
SISTER: Yes, her son is a month old today, of course she must dress well. Here are some baby clothes I made hurriedly last night, and a gold lock, nappy and pair of tiny socks. They are just a little token.
GREEN: How lovely! My mistress has made some clothes for the baby too, so now he has enough to last him a year. Let's dress the young master now.
SISTER: Yes. Come to my room. *(Exeunt.)*
(Enter Xu carrying flowers.)

XU:
*My son is one month old, I am a proud father!
He is making his first public appearance today.
I have picked some sweet-scented flowers
For my dear wife to wear.*
Are you up, my dear? You had better dress quickly. Our kinsmen and friends will start arriving soon.
WHITE *(off)*: Yes, I'm coming.
XU: Wait a minute. Let me help you.
(Xu goes out, and helps White Snake in. She looks frail but radiant.)

WHITE:
*On my husband's arm, I come out from behind the curtain;
Today I shall use my dressing-table again;
Please set the mirror straight, husband.*
(White Snake stands before the mirror as Xu combs her hair.)
XU:
*I smile before the mirror,
My wife is still so lovely,
Lovely as an angel from heaven,*

And now I put flowers in her hair.
 (Xu pins on the flowers, and White Snake turns to smile at him.)
 WHITE:
 From now on man and wife
 Will lead a happy life!
 (Suddenly Fa Hai appears.)
 FA HAI: Xu Xian! This scandalous affair of yours must end now. I am going to catch her with my alms bowl, and take you back with me to Jinshan.
 XU (*hastily shielding White Snake*): What! You again!
 WHITE: Bald-headed ass!
 (*White Snake draws her sword and strikes out at Fa Hai, but he wards off the blow.*)
 FA HAI: Come, Guardian Deity!
 (*The Guardian Deity comes in holding a golden alms bowl on high.*)
 WHITE: Greeny! Greeny! (*She is caught in the rays shed by the blazing alms bowl.*)
 FA HAI: I defeated your Green Snake, and she has fled.
 WHITE: Ah!
 So Greeny is gone!
 (*But Green Snake darts in again with drawn sword to rescue White Snake. She fights hard against the Guardian Deity, until Fa Hai passes his magic staff to the Deity who beats Green Snake back with it.*)
 GREEN: Sister! Sister!
 WHITE: Run, Greeny! You can avenge us later.
 FA HAI: Guardian Deity, kill her!
 GREEN: You scoundrel! (*She fights hard.*) Sister! (*Defeated, she escapes.*)
 WHITE: Alas!
 Now Greeny is torn from my side;
 May she fight her way out
 And come back to avenge me later!
 (*Clasping Xu*) Ah, husband!
 For you I sold drugs in Zhenjiang,
 Stole the herb from the Fairy Mountain

And fought Fa Hai at Jinshan,
 Then after these trials presented you with a son.
 Today our love and happiness must end.
 (*She weeps.*) Ah, husband!
 XU:
 My heart seems pierced by a sword,
 But I swallow my anger and bow to Fa Hai,
 Begging him to have mercy.
 My wife has done no wrong, father. Why are you so cruel? If she dies and our love is ended, who will look after this tiny child? Have pity, I beg you, and spare her. I kneel before you.
 FA HAI (*turning away*): Bah!
 WHITE (*stopping Xu*): Husband,
 Why speak of mercy to a butcher?
 (*The baby cries.*)
 Bring me my child!
 (*Xu's Sister comes in with the baby.*)
 WHITE: Ah, little son! (*Taking the baby*)
 Why should this innocent suffer?
 Just one month old,
 Yet he has to leave his mother —
 Poor mite, come to my breast
 For the last time.
 Dear child!
 Your mother will never return again.
 (*She turns round to nurse the baby.*)
 SISTER (*clasping White Snake indignantly*): Sister-in-law,
 You have been one month only in Hangzhou,
 What is the meaning of this sudden disaster?
 Have you no message for me?
 I would risk my life to save you.
 WHITE (*turning to Xu's Sister*): Ah, sister,
 My son, just one month old,
 Must leave his mother;
 My heart bleeds for him,
 So I ask you this favour —
 Treat him as you would your own child,

And bring him up to be an honest man.
Xu Xian will tell you my story later, sister. This wicked Fa Hai has destroyed us. Take pity on this infant who is losing his mother at one month. He is your own flesh and blood, so I beg you to bring him up as your own son. Then, even in death, I shall be grateful to you.

In agony, I give my child to his aunt.
(*She holds the child out, but when it cries, she draws back.*) Poor child!

From now on your aunt is your mother.
(*She forces herself to give the child to Xu's Sister.*)

XU: I am bursting with anger!
*The love birds are cruelly parted,
I am choking with rage.
I should never have gone to Jinsban,
Never listened to Fa Hai!*

FA HAI: Xu Xian,
*Had you not gone to Jinsban,
This monster would have devoured you!*

XU: Bah!
*Now I have seen the light:
The monster is not my wife
But the abbot Fa Hai.
I'll break the alms bowl to deliver her!*
(*He tries to seize the alms bowl but cannot move it.*)

FA HAI: Xu Xian,
*My power is supreme,
You are no match for me.*
(*He laughs.*)

WHITE (*pointing accusingly at Fa Hai*): Fa Hai, you scoundrel, don't laugh! Our love can never be crushed by your alms bowl.
*You need not gloat, Fa Hai,
You butcher chanting Buddhist sutras!
Though you imprison me in a golden alms bowl
Our love can never be vanquished.*

FA HAI: Now, Guardian Deity, put this White Snake under

Leifeng Pagoda. Only when the lake dries up and the pagoda falls shall she come out again.

WHITE: Scoundrel!
(*The Guardian Deity leads White Snake off. Xu and his sister try to stop him, but Fa Hai pulls them back.*)

XU (*in despair*): Wife!
SISTER: Sister!
WHITE: Ah, husband! Sister! Son!
(*The stage turns dark.*)

Scene XVI

The Pagoda Crumbles

(*The mouth of the River Qiantang. The water stretches to meet the clouds.*)

GREEN (*off*):
*Having summoned all my forces from the mountains,
(Enter Green Snake with Fairies)
I return to the West Lake to take revenge,
Rescue my sister from prison,
And defeat Fa Hai at Jinsban.
Armed with bright spears we press on.
(The clouds disperse, revealing the West Lake and Leifeng Pagoda in the distance.)*

*The sight of the pagoda
Convulses me with rage!*
Here, Pagoda Spirit! Come out to fight!
(*Enter the Pagoda Spirit with his followers.*)

PAGODA: What monster dares challenge me?
GREEN: I am the Green Snake. If you let my sister out at once, I will spare your life.
PAGODA: How can I do that without orders from the abbot?
GREEN: My sister has been imprisoned under this pagoda for hundreds of years. With sorrow and anger in my heart, I have

been preparing for this day. And now I am here with my fairies to avenge her.

PAGODA: Don't go away, monsters! Take this!

(Green Snake and her Fairies fight with the Pagoda Spirit and his followers. The Pagoda Spirit is defeated and runs away. The Fairies set fire to the pagoda.)

GREEN: Now the pagoda has fallen, sister! Come out!

(The pagoda crumbles, and White Snake appears resplendent among coloured clouds.)

(The End)



Admiring a Painting

Paintings by Li Keran



Enjoying the Lotusos



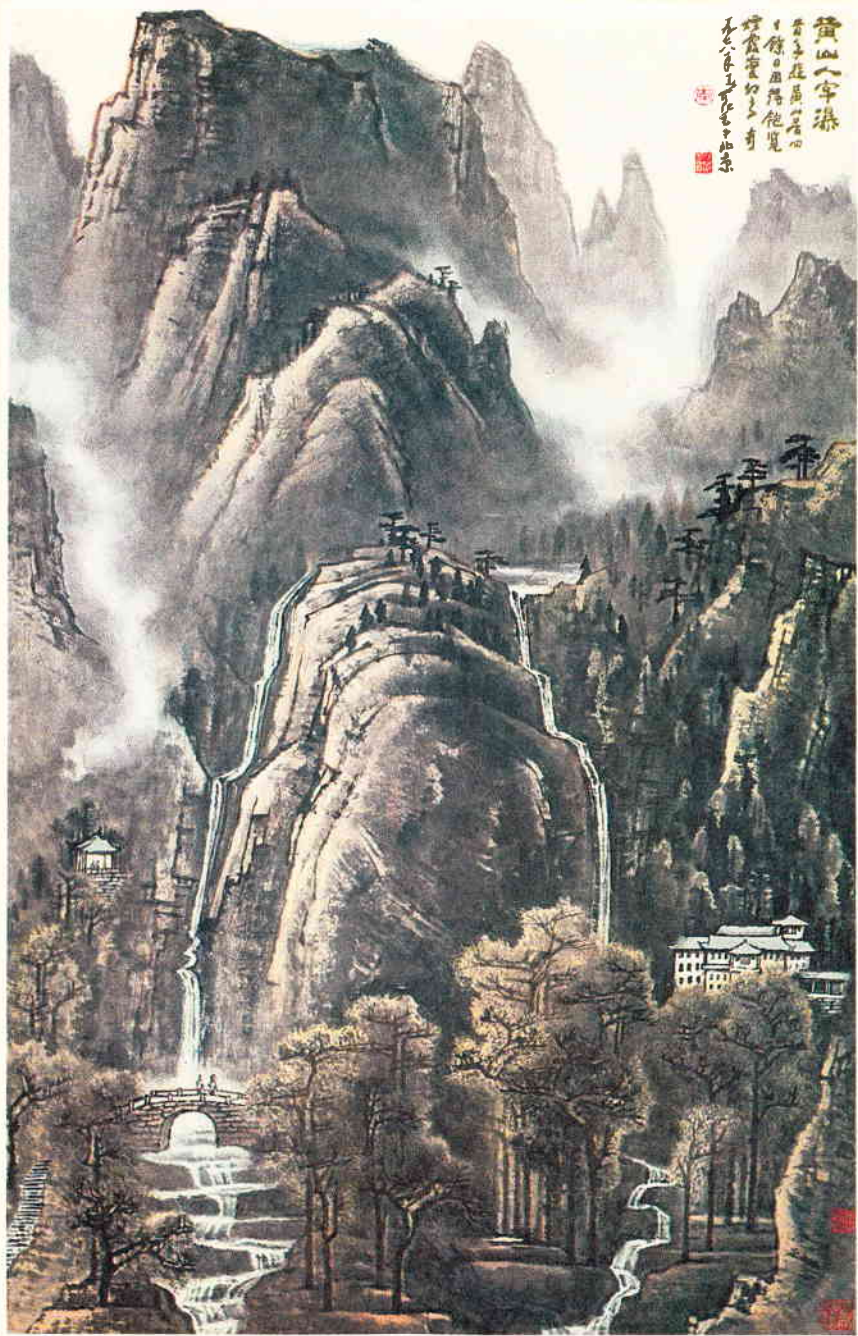
The Lijiang River



Mountain Village After Spring Shower



The Pavilion of Orchids



Huangshan Waterfall



Paddy Fields in the Mountains



Primerose Gigliesi

The Paintings of Li Keran

One who tries to penetrate the extraordinary and richly colourful world of contemporary Chinese painting will suddenly encounter a spring of clear, transparent water — the paintings of Li Keran.

Born in Xuzhou in 1907 into a poor family, Li Keran became part of the galaxy of Chinese artists without ever losing the characteristics of the working people, although his training encompassed long years of study in several schools and with prestigious masters. Both parents were illiterate. Life was hard. When he could find no job the father took to catching fish with bamboo baskets. Later he became a cook.

Li Keran developed his interest in art very early, being fascinated by painting when he was only six or seven. Shy and oriented towards his own internal world, he spent much of his childhood wandering in that wonderful world of acrobats, jugglers and storytellers — the local fairs and markets. Being too poor to buy paper, brushes or ink, he drew opera figures and tried to copy the illustrations in novels on the bare ground. When he was eleven he found two old painting books, his most precious possessions, and began to practise painting. Since calligraphy cannot be separated from



Li Keran at work

painting, he also wrote tirelessly. Soon the neighbours were asking him to write couplets for them.

Quite by chance he discovered his first master, Qian Shizhi, a landscape painter in the town. The artist had been painting together with some other artists in a house and the boy, only thirteen, had silently spent many hours watching him through a window. The artists were moved by this and invited him in. For the next two years Li Keran worked almost fanatically to learn the elementary principles of brush and ink. At sixteen he was able to enter

a private art school in Shanghai, though to his regret the teaching had little to do with landscapes and the curriculum was very elementary. Two years later he returned to Xuzhou, continuing to paint on his own. In 1929, at twenty-two, he was enrolled as a research student in the National West Lake Art Academy in Hangzhou, at that time under Lin Fengmian the highest academy in China. His entry, though seeming to have elements of chance in it, was in reality evidence of his talent. The graduate department required an oil as part of the entrance examination. Though he had never studied oil painting, Li Keran learned quickly from a friend and produced a large picture. The academy liked it and enrolled him.

At the West Lake Art Academy Li Keran studied sketching and oil. Knowing little about sketching, he made up his mind to learn or be finished with it. His charcoal sketches became strong and powerful, in many ways like sculptures — a characteristic due in the first place to the fact that, being poor, he could afford to erase only with his finger — the resulting smudged effect giving his drawings more solidity, depth and feeling. He evolved a remarkable new style of sketching and by the end of the course he headed the class.

Li Keran's time at the West Lake Art Academy was an important period in his life not only because he was developing the personal style which was later to make him so famous but because here — like thousands of other students across China — he became greatly concerned about his country's tremendous and growing social and political problems. In 1929 he joined the Eighteen Art Society (for the eighteen years since the Revolution of 1911), which later moved to Shanghai and, under Lu Xun's influence, became the Woodcut Society. "This period," the artist says, "was the turning-point in my career. My vision broadened. I was learning to understand society." The Kuomintang persecuted the members of the Eighteen Art Society, harassing and arresting some of them. Lin Fengmian tried to help by sending students to other schools in the country and interceding for those already in trouble.

After the Japanese invasion in 1937 Li Keran organized a propaganda team of artists to paint and spread the message of resist-

ance in and around Xuzhou. Later he went to Wuhan, then the centre of the government. Here he entered the Third Bureau of the Political Department where he found himself working under Guo Moro and Zhou Enlai. In this period Li Keran came into contact with the woodcuts of Kaethe Kollwitz and was greatly struck by the vigour and sweep of the German artist's work, a characteristic he consciously adapted in his painting.

The year 1943 found him in Chongqing teaching Chinese traditional painting in the National Art Academy (formed by a merger of the academies at Beijing and Hangzhou). In 1945, Xu Beihong, then the head of the academy, invited Li Keran to go to Beijing where, with the end of the war against the Japanese, he became a teacher in the Academy of Fine Arts. In this city he met Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, two of the most illustrious painters of our time. Both men, recognizing a great talent, gave him their teaching, advice and affection.

What characteristics mark the work of Li Keran? First, his landscapes reveal a technique of composition accurately studied and laboriously developed. Patience and imagination fuse to give life to works of great beauty and logical coherence. The brush work is concise, simple and vigorous, the ink rich in tones and nuances. In fact, this painter has dedicated most of his efforts to landscapes and the original solutions he has chosen for the problems of pictorial representation are an excellent example of how it is possible to learn from tradition and bring it forward in harmony with the new necessities of society.

Li Keran's art owes much to the work of Huang Binhong but is less severe than that of the master, who at times preferred rather austere landscapes, scenes of massive rocky structures seeming to overwhelm tiny, lonely figures going towards a fragile pavilion or sitting in meditation in a solitary boat. The landscapes of Li Keran, on the other hand, contain nothing menacing. His portrayals of mountains and gorges have the feel of open air and serenity, and the waters that wind down like white crystal enter the composition with the same striking light as in a Leonardesque painting. His *The Jinggang Mountains* done in 1972, for example, is built of a series of superimposed peaks of an intense green attenuated by

banks of mist, the foreground occupied by pines of a darker tone and groups of schoolchildren with their flags. The eye wanders quietly from one centre of interest to another without getting tired, finding each time the same equilibrium, the same poetry.

The Li River near Guilin is another example of Li Keran's ability to express the creative force of nature without anxiety or dismay. Long lines of sampans drift down a stream from which light white vapours rise like gossamer. The rocks, shaped by millions of years of erosion, miraculously thrust up out of the water almost as if using their giant and bizarre presence to protect man, who with his hard work is daily building his life.

Boats and Boating in the Rain are examples of one of Li Keran's most noted and better appreciated styles. Through a series of horizontal and vertical lines and the use of light washes of ink and blue, the artist succeeds in recreating that atmosphere of silence, awe and enchantment that accompanies the dawn and the unreal, slightly melancholy beauty of mountains and waters when a fine, misty rain plays hide-and-seek with the light.

The Pavilion of Orchids is another proof of the ability of this artist to transmit his own emotion without falling into banality. The Orchid Pavilion was built by Wang Xizhi (AD 321-379), China's most famous calligrapher and one whose art has rarely been surpassed. Wang Xizhi's well-known essay was written at this place. During the centuries the site has been the target of pilgrimages, and many poets and painters have been inspired by it. In this painting the countryside comes to us with all its fascination in a suggestive symphony of very light greens and muted grays and blues. The mountains cover almost the entire painting, protagonist, together with the waters, of the immense landscape.

The art of Li Keran, so concise and devoid of verbosity, expressed through skilful mixings of ink and a parsimonious use of pigments, becomes incomparable when he handles a theme which he particularly loves — the water buffalo with its little child guardian. This meek and gentle animal was often the modest subject of paintings by famous masters. Among the most ancient examples it is enough to cite the well-known *Rustic Scene* and *Return from the Village Festival* by Li Tang (c. 1050-1130) and *The*

Return of the Hunter by Li Di (c. 1130-1180). Differing from these painters, with whom the landscape seems to form a reality that stands by itself independent of the narration, Li Keran boldly eliminates any element he considers superfluous and insists on the relation between the characters and their feelings. This gives his works an overwhelming power and matchless vitality.

"I painted my first buffalo in 1942," he says, "in a small village called Jingangpo outside of Chongqing. I was living with a peasant family next door to a buffalo. Every day the animal plodded out to work and plodded back home again in the evening. I could hear it munching and knocking against a post to get rid of itching. I was ill and couldn't sleep at night for the sounds. So I would get up, light the oil lamp and paint. I thought of the buffalo which worked tirelessly, ate only grass, and gave everything — milk and even its flesh and blood — to the people. I wrote in my notes, 'The buffalo is typical of the Chinese character: hard-working, simple and labouring for the people. It should be the national animal.'"

Li Keran has painted this motif innumerable times, and always with the same purity of stroke and the same simplicity of composition, the same harmony of intense blacks and ochre. He has captured the essential beauty held in the sleep of a child, in the notes of a flute on a summer day, in the hanging branches of a willow, always giving this primal beauty back to us transfigured by his quiet, delicately lyric sensitivity. Like Qi Baishi, his other great master, Li Keran exploits some techniques of Chinese theatre where a great part of the action and stage props is left to the imagination. His buffalo and its little boy custodian are represented on the empty white background of the paper, but the suggestive power of these empty spaces is extraordinary. Painting only a straw hat and two little shoes thrown down apart from each other, the artist not only succeeds in creating the illusion of grass, flowers and insects but in evoking the heat of summer.

At times in these paintings, to the black and ochre is added a third colour: the deep red of the leaves of autumn. In one of them, *The Red Rain*, the buffalo appears in the foreground tied to a tree. A little farther, kneeling on the ground in front of a wooden box, two small boys are carefully observing two crickets fighting,

while slowly the leaves fall. On the right a line of characters seems to balance the composition with the same agility of the long tree trunks that cover the other half of the painting. It reads, "Shi Tao says that the autumn wind sweeps away the red rain. I have tried to express this thought in this picture."

In *On a Poem by Du Mu*, two buffaloes rest half-asleep on the ground while their little masters sit one in front of the other. Both seem to be fascinated by the crimson rain of leaves that fills the air with colour. In the graceful profile of one, as well as in the quiet attitude of the other, one has the impression of seeing the poignant regret that accompanies the end of the games and running of the summer. The characters above say, "In a poem by Du Mu it is said, 'Autumn leaves covered with frost are red like springtime flowers.' Shi Tao says, 'Autumn wind sweeps away the red rain.' Both these pictures are to the point." In these paintings, perhaps more than anywhere else, the influence of Qi Baishi appears evident, above all for certain very beautiful tones of ink and for some splendid combinations of black and crimson.

Like Qi Baishi, Li Keran studied nature meticulously and at first hand with all the curiosity and joy of discovery that is so typical of childhood. Recalling his master, he once wrote, "Throughout his life Qi Baishi loved the things around him with a childlike fervour. He once gave me a picture: two sprigs of orchid in a glass with the flowers facing each other, and the inscription, 'A Conversation'. Indeed, the painting conveyed the impression of 'smiling at each other as they whisper'." Li Keran's own temperament as an artist, his great psychological acumen and an exceptional, poetic freshness drew him strongly to Qi Baishi, who was to be his teacher for ten years. But his compositions reveal a different, more complex personality — his is a language reflecting the labour of a society in formation, new spiritual attitudes, the concrete needs of a collective life.

Return from Grazing is a recently accomplished example of the art of this painter because the landscape theme he loves so much is united with an equally loved theme, the water buffalo. The little boy on his heavy mount contemplates the distant water cascading down the slopes of a vast, blue mountain which fills the

scene with space and silence. It is the moment of return from a day of quiet grazing. The animal walks with steady, contented steps, and in the open solitude of the surrounding countryside the fragile figure of the child seems to dominate the landscape. Almost to underline again the communion of these two beings with nature, the characters of the inscription add their own loveliness, "The boy and his buffalo are as beautiful as the landscape."

Li Keran shows the same conciseness and precision of lines when he treats human figures as his theme. In *Enjoying the Lotus* three-fourths of the painting is occupied by the presence of large, black velvet leaves among which here and there the scarlet petals of the flowers stand out. A man sits with a palm-leaf fan, his face towards the flowers. The evocative power of this painting is extraordinary: the man is listening to who-knows-what voices and his regard seems to lose itself in contemplation of the calm water of the pond.

In *Admiring a Painting* one could say that Li Keran follows the example, for equilibrium and unity of action of the characters, of the great masters of the past. The three figures in their long gowns are depicted with great economy of lines and a superlative use of ink. The faces have expressions which are intense, underlined by few details — a thin beard, heavy eyebrows, and a fairly pronounced boldness made more evident by small coils of hair on top of their heads. The refined amusements of the literati are described with measured grace and subtle irony, as usual without a disturbing over-emphasis.

Often, to close his paintings, we find a wise and warm note, a seal made by Qi Baishi which shows a tree and a man with his hat askew. A Chinese proverb says, in fact, "Don't fix your hat under a plum tree" (if you raise your hands you might be accused of stealing the fruit). Qi Baishi has made a play on words: *li*, plum, is also the name of his student.

The seals used by Li Keran deserve a separate discussion. Like Qi Baishi, this artist seems to have put into his seals many of his more profound convictions. This is why their content is a good starting-point from which to know the artist and evaluate his work. Other seals he uses with major frequency are: "The mountain is high and the path is not smooth", "He who practises reality is

wise", "To record the mountains and rivers of the motherland", "At the age of seventy I began to learn that I didn't know anything", "White-haired, I learn from a child", "Learn from the buffalo" and "This, after three thousand discarded paintings".

Each of these seals seems to throw light on the character of the owner. With their impeccable synthesis of sculpture and calligraphy they speak in fact of his modesty, his warm tolerance and comprehension, his continuous and insatiable search for new forms of expression, but also of his strong will-power, courage and perseverance.

But perhaps the seal that encompasses best the meaning, or better, the essence of the work of Li Keran — an art made out of sincere devotion to all creatures — is the one that bears the last three characters of the well-known and moving poem by Lu Xun:

Fierce-browed, I coolly defy a thousand pointing fingers;
Head bowed, like a willing ox,* I serve the children.

SEALS USED BY LI KERAN



1



2

* *Niu*, ox, here means *sbui niu*, water buffalo.



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10

1. To record the mountains and rivers of the motherland
2. At the age of seventy I began to learn that I didn't know anything
3. The mountain is high and the path is not smooth
4. Learn from the buffalo
5. Don't fix your hat under a plum tree
6. He who practises reality is wise
7. This, after three thousand discarded paintings
8. White-haired, I learn from a child
9. An artist must have courage
10. An artist must catch the spirit

Wu Huizeng

A Love Formula: $1 + 1 = 1$

When the system of holding entrance examinations was restored in 1977, the first year after the fall of the “gang of four”, I was one of the lucky candidates, so I entered the university maths department in which my father taught.

As students, we had to sit all sorts of examinations and tests, and, believe it or not, I fell in love as a result of one of them.

It was a maths test. As soon as I got the paper I read through it and, steeling myself, began. The first two questions were very simple, and the third one, though trickier, was not too difficult either. The last two were even simpler, more like high-school standard. I soon finished. Looking at my watch, I found it had only taken me just over an hour. As there was still plenty of time left, I began to tackle the two optional questions.

What questions! I was completely at a loss — they were so hard. They were absolutely beyond me. With only twenty minutes left, it was impossible to solve them. So I decided not to waste any more energy on them since they were not counted in

the final mark. When I handed in my paper, there were still seven people in the room.

Two days later, Chen, our teacher, stepped on to the platform smiling, obviously pleased with the results.

“Congratulations!” he said. “You did quite well in your test. Nobody failed, and seven of you did extremely well.”

We all laughed as everybody relaxed and chattered. Indicating to us to quieten down, Chen continued, “There were two rather difficult optional questions. As we expected, not many of you got the answers right. However, six students got one of them correct and . . .” The excitement in the classroom mounted. Chen waited patiently for the din to calm down. Then he raised his voice, “I’m very pleased to tell you that one of you answered all the questions correctly.”

The news made the whole class buzz with excitement.

“Who was it?” someone asked loudly.

“Xiang Kai!”

There was a stir of admiration, and then the class was silent as all eyes rested on the boy. Blushing profusely, Xiang Kai lowered his head, perspiring in embarrassment. Unconsciously he fidgeted with his chair.

I recalled Xiang Kai burying his head in books in the classroom, or writing under a willow tree by the lake. . . . Now I realized why this thin, rather plain-looking student had done so well. Suddenly I felt a great respect for him. He probably came from an intellectual family like mine. It was true that he always wore an old bleached blue jacket, but that was no clue. Nowadays students did not bother much about their clothes.

When I got home one Saturday evening I saw my father carrying a pot of flowers into the sitting-room. I hurried over to take it from him.

“Be careful!” he warned.

Then he went to the terrace for another. I put the pot on the window-sill and, turning round, caught sight of a stack of blue-covered books on the side table. They were maths syllabuses. I picked up the top one and began to leaf through it.

Seeing my interest, father urged as he entered, “Go on, have

a look. I got them from abroad two months ago. It's for university students. You'll see how far you lag behind foreign students."

"Oh, look at this! Isn't this the question in our test?" I shouted as if I had discovered a new continent.

Rubbing the soil off his hands, he came over. I showed him the question and asked, "So you took it from here, didn't you?"

"Yes. But do you understand it?"

"No!" I sighed and closed the book, crestfallen. "It's hopeless."

"Don't be such a defeatist. Buck up and work harder!"

"It's easy to talk, but Rome wasn't built in a day. You don't achieve wonders overnight. You know my level pretty well. I'm nowhere near catching up with those foreign students." Sulkily I went to fetch the last pot.

Standing by the window, holding a cigarette, my father stared at me thoughtfully.

"It won't help you to dwell on the past," he suddenly said in a firm tone. "The question now is how to make up for lost time. You young people..."

His words made me think more. Xiang Kai appeared in my mind's eye. He was one of the new generation, wasn't he? Hanging my head, I said nothing.

"Well, we'll talk about it later," he said, suddenly changing the subject. "Rong, will you buy some food tomorrow morning? Some visitors are coming to lunch."

"So you want me to cook again?" I snapped, pursing my lips. "What about making up for lost time?"

He winked slyly at me and explained, "First, you don't have to cook. I've arranged for a real cook to come. You just give him a hand. Secondly, I'm quite sure after you've met our guests, you'll be inspired to work harder!"

A real cook! And somebody to encourage me to work harder! How incredible! Was Chen Jingrun, the well-known mathematician, coming to lunch? My head spun.

Early the next morning I went to the shops. When I returned with a basket full of chicken, duck, fish and pork, I was astonished to see our guests. There were no famous mathematicians,

no public figures, but only my seven classmates who had come out first in that test. Xiang Kai was among them of course. My father was chatting with them.

"So you're here!" I said as I barged into the sitting-room. "I thought some V.I.P.'s were coming."

"You mean we should go?" one of them joked.

"Don't be silly!" So saying, I bowed an apology, which made them all laugh. "But I really didn't know you were coming. All my father told me yesterday was that he had invited a wonderful cook for our guests."

"What? Invited a cook for us?" They became uneasy. Some even stood up and said, "Professor, this..."

"What now?" my father cut them short. "Sit down!" He flipped the ash off his cigarette and went on, "As I just told you all of you did very well in the test. The optional questions were really difficult. Actually they were both in these syllabuses." He pointed to the books on the side table. Xiang Kai had already picked up one of them and was reading avidly.

"We put those two questions in the test on purpose. You know, some of the teachers were a bit doubtful. But the results were amazing. Our department head and the university authorities were delighted. So today we're having a little party to celebrate. The cook I've invited is Xiang Kai!" He pointed to Xiang Kai, who was still reading.

Him? It must be a joke.

"You must be kidding!" I said as I poured more tea into my father's cup.

"It's no joke, Rong. Let me tell you something. Xiang Kai was a cook in a restaurant before he came to our university. I hear he's very good!"

Looking at Xiang Kai, I did not know what to say next. But he just kept his head down reading, unaware of everything. I went over, snatched away the book and handed him a white apron. Then I bowed and said, "Please, Master Xiang. Now it's your turn."

Everybody roared with laughter. Xiang Kai seemed rather sorry to part with the book. Reluctantly he rose to his feet,

tied the apron round his waist, and followed me to the kitchen.

In the kitchen, we could not hear the conversation in the sitting-room. However, I did not mind. Under Xiang Kai's guidance, I washed cabbages, spring onions, mushrooms and cauliflower, while he cut the fish and sliced the pork, chicken and duck. The little kitchen was filled with the noise of chopping, clinking bowls and dishes, and running water.

When I finished washing all the vegetables I asked if there was anything else to do.

"How shall I cut the cucumber? In slices or in strips?"

"In triangles, please."

"What? Triangles? I'm sorry I don't know how to do that." With that, I passed him the cucumber.

He took it and began to cut.

He was so skilful that I couldn't help asking, "Did you really work in a restaurant?"

"Yes. After leaving middle school. You know how it was in those days. You worked in the countryside, didn't you?"

"But I could still calculate with a stick on the ground."

"Well, I could practise geometry arranging the hors d'oeuvres!"

"Tell me, Xiang Kai," I moved closer to him and asked, my voice trembling a little, "Who are your parents?"

He raised his head and shot me a glance.

"My father was a pedicab driver and my mother attended to the house. But they died a long time ago, so I was brought up by my elder sister."

I was stunned for a time and then asked, "You've only your sister?"

"Yes. She's a textile worker. She's got three kids."

"Why do you work so hard?"

"Because of a fire."

He struck a match and lit the gas ring. The blue flame leapt up at once.

"Not this fire, of course! I mean the fire in the school library in 1966. Instigated by Lin Biao some ignorant pupils burnt the books! Incredible, isn't it? Don't you remember their slogan, 'The more knowledge you have, the more reactionary you are.'"

How senseless! Anyway, that fire taught me something. I made up my mind to study hard and read more than ever."

"But why are you so keen on maths?"

He added some food to the hot saucepan and it began to sizzle. While stirring it, he said, "It's my nature, I suppose. I've loved it since I was a little boy. Then you don't need any equipment. All you need is a piece of paper and a pencil. If you haven't those you can always write on the ground with a stick. In fact I often do calculations in bed!"

"I admire you!" With some emotion I gave him my hand and said, "Can I be your student?"

"What for? You want to be a cook?"

"Oh, come on. I want to study maths and learn from your spirit."

He hesitated. Frowning, he said, "Why don't you ask your father to teach you? He's the person to ask."

"But he's a professor. He's too busy to teach me alone. I'd rather you taught me."

"O.K., that's settled then." This time it was he who offered his hand.

My father is quite a character! He had predicted that the lunch would inspire me to study hard and sure enough, after I became Xiang Kai's student, in the evenings I began to work hard. He was very strict. He would not let me go home unless I had finished all the exercises. And when I had real problems he would not tell me the answer straight away but just dropped hints. Sometimes I was so frustrated that I wrote "no solution" beside the question and threw it at him. He just shook his head and glanced at me coolly. On those occasions, I did not know what to do, biting on the end of the pencil like a small child. When the time was up, he came over to me and looked at me silently. I was a proud girl and would never swallow this. "Go away!" I said sulkily. "I won't go home until I've got the answer." He just smiled and then left me.

Perhaps there is a kind of law in studies because sometimes, after racking my brains over a question for a long time in vain, I suddenly had a brain-wave and got the solution. Then rather

proudly, I showed it to him, saying, "Don't think you're the only one who can do it!" He would first glance at my tired, rather cold expression and then at the paper. A faint smile appeared on his serious face and soon he was all smiles. He then explained what was the correct method and what had been my problem. Finally he suggested that I do more examples. After his explanation, I understood it better. Closing my eyes, because of fatigue or happiness, I don't know which, I said softly, "You're a genius!"

Soon it was autumn. I was already one of the top students in my class. One day after a cold wind, the ground was strewn with fallen leaves. I put on a warm cardigan. Xiang Kai was still in his bleached blue jacket. Autumn in the north is short, and I soon wore a thin woollen jacket. He, however, remained as always. Seeing him sitting in the cold classroom, I felt concerned, but I could not bring myself to ask him about it since we talked nothing but maths in the day. On our way to the dormitory in the evenings we sometimes chatted about other things. I learned that he had given all his restaurant wages to his sister to help support her family. Both his student allowance and a small one from his sister for his daily necessities didn't amount to much. He was thrifty and had once said to me, "I'm quite content. I won't ask for more. I don't want to be more of a burden to my sister. She has quite a struggle."

Hearing him talk like this I sighed sympathetically and said, "You seem to love your sister very much."

"Of course, she's all I have."

"Oh no!" I stopped and then blurted out, "No, she's not. You've got many good friends, who love you like brothers and sisters."

Now he stopped. The lake beside us mirrored the myriad of stars in the autumn sky.

Suddenly, mustering all my courage, I asked, "Is there a formula for love?"

"What?" he was surprised.

I repeated my question.

Gazing at the dark water, he thought for a while before replying in a matter-of-fact way, "If there is, it must be $1 + 1 = 1$."

"What do you mean?"

"It's simple. The '1 + 1' are the two lovers. Equals '1' is their common ideal." He shot me a look.

I thought about this for a while. His words filled my heart with warmth.

He turned to me abruptly and murmured, "Can I ask you something?" My heart missed a beat though I said calmly, "Of course."

"Can you lend me your father's syllabuses?"

So that was it!

"You know," he explained, "there are only two sets in the university. The other is in the library. The other day I begged the librarian to let me borrow it but he just wouldn't listen to me."

"All right," I cut in. "Wait here." I rushed home and took the books out of the bookcase. Then I found a slip of paper and wrote on it, "I'm sorry I don't have time to knit you a sweater. Here's some money for you. Please buy yourself one. It's getting cold and you'll get sick if you don't keep warm." Together with two ten-yuan notes, I put it in one of the books. Then I raced back. He stood there in the same place. As soon as I gave the books to him, he leafed through the top one.

"Why the hurry? Read it when you are back in your room." Having said that, I turned round and dashed away.

Now that I had revealed my secret to him, I could only wait for him to respond. But nothing happened. He still wore his old blue jacket and never mentioned anything about my note. When we were together in the evenings I kept silent, with my head down, working hard and pretending I knew nothing.

One day after class, our teacher Chen told me to hurry home as my father was looking for me.

I ran back. The door was wide open and the floor was covered with books.

"Do you know where my books are?" my father asked as soon as I entered. "I remember I put them in this bookcase."

"What books?"

"The maths syllabuses. I want to take them to the conference on textbooks in Beijing."

"Oh those!" I stammered. "I —"

"Where are they?"

"I left them in the classroom," I lied.

"Well, go and fetch them quickly! There are only two sets in the whole university," he complained.

I dashed out and hurried to the classroom to find Xiang Kai. He was studying the books.

"I'm awfully sorry, Xiang Kai. Please give me them back right now."

"Why?" He looked up puzzled.

"My father's going to a conference in Beijing and he wants to take them with him. He ticked me off for not having told him."

"O.K." He closed the book reluctantly and, with a sigh, gave all the books to me. "Don't worry," I consoled him. "You can have them when he comes back." Then I turned to leave.

"I'll go with you," he said. "I'm the one to blame. I'll go and apologize to him."

Not caring what I thought, he followed me home. I asked him to wait at the door when I entered. The room was tidy again, and my father was pacing about anxiously, smoking a cigarette. As soon as he saw me, he came over to take the books. Before I could open my mouth, Xiang Kai's voice sounded behind me, "Professor Shao, don't blame her. It was my fault."

"What?" my father was astonished to see Xiang Kai. "So you're studying the syllabuses?"

"Yes."

"Do you understand them?"

"Most of the time, but not always."

"Good," my father nodded. He sat down and took a piece of paper and began to write something on it. After second thoughts, he crumbled it into a ball. Then he got up and said warmly, "I was going to write a note to the librarian so that you could borrow the other set. But it'll be easier for me to get that. You keep this one."

"Oh no!"



"Here are some clothes. Give them to Xiang Kai."

"Why not? You need it more than I. I'll go and borrow it now."

Suddenly a slip of paper and two ten-yuan notes dropped out of one of the books. I blushed to the roots of my hair! What a swot! He hadn't even seen them!

My father picked them up, read the note and then glanced at me. He sized Xiang Kai up for some time and then asked, "You're just reading the first volume? Haven't you had a look at the others?"

"No. I never do that. Is that wrong?"

"Of course not! But these are yours. Perhaps you didn't see them," he said showing him the note and money and then putting them back in the book. "I don't know how to say this. Listen, Xiang Kai. It's not wrong to study books one by one. But there's more to life than books." He tried to sound casual.

Ashamed, I fled to my room. I don't know what else they talked about, nor what time it was when Xiang Kai left. I buried my head in the pillow while my father stood there for some time before saying, "You silly little girl!" He didn't stay long. Then I sat up, wondering what to do next. He came back with a big bundle of clothes.

"You're right, Rong. Here are some clothes. Give them to Xiang Kai. I know he's hard up. I should have thought about it before. Really. . ."

I went to the classroom with the bundle, sure that Xiang Kai would be sitting there doing his maths as usual. But no! After a closer look, I saw he was lost in thought. That was very unusual. On the desk in front of him were my note and money. For once he was stuck by this human problem.

"Take it," I said and gave him the bundle of clothes. "This is for you."

"For me?" He stood up abruptly and searched my face as if he had seen me for the first time. I lowered my head, embarrassed.

"It's getting cold. . . ." I faltered.

"Is this true?" he murmured.

"Take this. My father asked me to send his regards to you."

"He's so kind. But I can't accept it like this. I really can't." He looked away.

"You can't refuse!" I became angry. "Don't think it's charity! It isn't."

He suddenly turned to me and, with trembling hands, took mine in his. I felt a warmth shoot through me. His lips were trembling too. I blurted out the words in my heart, "I've not forgotten your love formula: $1 + 1 = 1$." Shocked by my own boldness, I blushed deeply and ran away.

Two days later I got a letter from him, which read:

Now I know your heart. As your father once said, maths isn't the only thing in life. Life is far richer and fuller. There's love. But we can't put love above everything either. We lost so much time in the past ten years and now there are so many things crying out to be done. We must work hard to make up for lost time. I want to be the "1" exploring the field of mathematics and the other "1" must be you. So now our love formula is complete:
 $1 + 1 = 1$.

Illustrated by Gao Yan

Gu Wanming

Taiwan Carrier Pigeon

Just before three one afternoon, when our fishing boats were following a shoal of yellow croakers in the East China Sea, we received a forecast from the Central Meteorological Observatory that Typhoon No. 7 was approaching from the southeast. Our boats put in to the nearest harbour at Lianyun. At dusk, as soon as our boat, the *Dalu*, dropped anchor, the storm broke. I heaved a sigh of relief.

I was deciding where to fish next when the door was thrown open and Xiao Cai, one of our crew, staggered in. Gesticulating, he panted, "Hurry up, First Mate Wang. A bird . . . on the mast. Perhaps it's a pigeon!" He had come to tell me, knowing that I was a pigeon fancier. Curiosity drove me to see for myself. I followed Xiao Cai onto the deck.

Great banks of clouds had gathered. The wind was howling. Standing on the leeward side, I looked up at the top of the mast. In the dusk, a grey bird was faintly visible, buffeted by the wind. Before I could identify it, it dropped on the deck. It was a pigeon! Lying on its side, it breathed hard and flapped its wings, but could not take flight. It seemed to be wounded. Gingerly picking it up, I went back to the cabin.

Switching on the light, Xiao Cai and I examined it while it lay quietly in my hands, staring at me. Its feathers were light grey, except for a black line on each wing. It was not big, but well-proportioned. I saw that it was a fine female pigeon, a long-distance flier. Inadvertently I touched the aluminium ring on its foot, on which the words "Tai Pigeon 2001" were engraved. That puzzled me. I had seen many rings marked with the province or city from which a pigeon came, but this was the first time I had seen the mark "Tai Pigeon". Evidently the pigeon came from Taiwan.

"Where's it from?" Xiao Cai asked.

"From Taiwan! It's come a long way."

"From Taiwan?" He, too, was taken aback.

I lifted the wings. The twenty main wing-feathers were stamped with place names such as Taibei, Jilong, Gaoxiong, Tainan. . . . The last one was Hongkong. When carrier-pigeon societies organize races, the pigeons' records are stamped on their feathers. For instance, a Shanghai pigeon setting out from Xuzhou has "Xuzhou" stamped on it. Obviously this "Tai Pigeon" had flown in many long-distance races. Judging from the last stamp, it must have been caught in the typhoon on its way back to Taiwan from Hongkong. Unable to fly against the wind, it had headed for the mainland. Flights over the sea are the most difficult for pigeons, for finding no food, no reefs on which to rest, they may have to fly continuously for several days — a real test of endurance.

I put "Tai Pigeon" on the desk. She appeared exhausted, motionless and with eyes closed. Xiao Cai fetched a cup of water and a handful of wheat. The pigeon sipped some water, then pecked at the wheat. Looking on with great interest, Xiao Cai said, "You keep pigeons, don't you? Why not keep this one until we've tracked down the owner?" After a moment's reflection I agreed.

People have their different hobbies. Mine is keeping pigeons. As a child I was already devoted to pigeons. To me, they were the symbol of boldness and resourcefulness, so that I really loved them. Laughable as it sounds, I would cry when one died. Now twenty years had passed; I still kept about a dozen pigeons. Every

time I came ashore, the first thing I did was to tend my birds. My enthusiasm infected my whole family. So when I arrived home with the stray pigeon, both my wife and my daughter Yin welcomed the "little guest" from Taiwan. My wife took out a tin of beans, kept normally for females feeding their chicks. Yin fondled the pigeon in her small hand and gently pressed her cheek against it, asking, "Where is Taiwan, daddy?"

I opened a map and showed her Taiwan.

"Looks like a small boat on the sea!"

"After we've nursed her back to health, we'll send her back to her owner living on the boat," I said as I kissed her.

"Oh yes! Can I go there too, daddy?" She clapped her hands and smiled.

"Tai Pigeon" joined my pigeons, but she had to remain shut up in their loft, unable to fly with the rest. Two days later, I wrote a letter to a carrier-pigeon society in Taiwan, explaining how I had found her and giving her number. There was only a strait between Taiwan and our city, yet they seemed wide apart because we had no postal communications. The letter had to be sent there via Hongkong. Then I looked forward to a reply.

Autumn came. "Tai Pigeon" had recovered and grown plumper. But she kept cooing in the loft and seemed restless — it was the mating season. I gave some thought to finding a suitable mate for her and finally chose my pigeon "Black Rain Drops", who had flown back from Zhengzhou. Being strangers, they fought and he pecked out some feathers from her head. Later, "Tai Pigeon" lay in her nest of straw cooing, while "Black Rain Drops" preened her feathers. After two or three days they were inseparable. Every time he flew back, "Black Rain Drops" brought her some straw. They were preparing for their brood.

I went out on a trip again. When I came back, Yin showed me their two young chicks, already hatched. Chirping and covered with yellow down, they were really lovable. In pigeon families, both father and mother feed the young with a thick yellow secretion from their crops which the young pigeons suck from their parents' bills. Twenty days later, the young pigeons had grown as big as fists. With some light black dots among their grey

feathers, they looked like neither their father nor their mother. We named them "Light Black Dots". When Xiao Cai heard of this, he came specially to see them, calling them "doves of peace between the mainland and Taiwan".

Gradually, our "Light Black Dots" learned to fly, but I had still heard nothing from Taiwan.

Another spring approached. "Tai Pigeon" had hatched two clutches in more than half a year. She had four young pigeons and had become very tame. Thinking I might as well domesticate her, I stuck her main feathers together with adhesive tape and let her walk on the roof. How was I to know that she would tear off the tape and fly into the sky with the others? "Black Rain Drops" followed her closely. I watched from the balcony, my heart flying with them. The flock flew higher and higher. Then "Tai Pigeon" left the rest and headed southeast. "Black Rain Drops" flew after her and both disappeared into the distance. Half an hour later, "Black Rain Drops" came back alone, and refusing to eat anything, he moped in his nest missing his companion. I also worried about "Tai Pigeon". Could she fly back to Taiwan safely? Yin was unhappy all day long, only eating a few mouthfuls of rice.

Time went by, but "Tai Pigeon" did not come back.

One day when I came home from another voyage, Yin skipped towards me calling at the top of her voice, "Daddy, 'Tai Pigeon' is back!"

I could hardly believe it, but my wife confirmed it. I went straight to the balcony and opened the door of the pigeon-house. "Tai Pigeon" and "Black Rain Drops", nestling together, were billing and cooing as if to celebrate their reunion. As I took "Tai Pigeon" in my hands, my eyes rested on the ring round her foot which had a small piece of thin paper stuck to it. I unfolded it, my heart beating fast. The note read:

Dear Compatriot,

The letter you sent was forwarded to me, but I couldn't answer it sooner for some obvious reason. Now Pigeon No. 2001 has come back safely. She must have come

from you. As I am now fishing near the mainland, I'm setting her free, hoping that she remembers your place and will return safely.

Gao Mingtan

It is not strange that a carrier pigeon, after living in two places, can fly between them. I fondled "Tai Pigeon", imagining her flying over the vast sea day and night. This small creature able to fly freely back and forth between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait seemed incomparably superior to us.

I released her. She circled several times, as if reluctant to leave, before flying southeastward to Taiwan. As I watched her flying away, my heart went with her. However stormy the waves in the Taiwan Strait, they could not bar her way, nor could they hold in check the determination of the people on both sides to reunify their motherland. I thought the day must come when thousands of pigeons, white, grey and black, will build a bridge from here to Taiwan. I hope that day will come soon!

Li Ying

When the Whistle Sounded

Borrowed straw returned, vats filled to the brim,
Our troops assembled when the whistle sounded;
For the old granny, we weren't soldiers about to decamp,
But a flock of eaglets she was sending off.

Looking kindly at me, a little lost in thought,
Silver needle, golden thread in her hand;
Sewing on my button she said:
"Be careful of the chill wind!"

Shedding tears, sewing stitch by stitch,
In her trembling hand my uniform she held. . . .
When I fell into line as the whistle sounded,
A fervid heart burned into my breast.

July 1957

At a Ferry on the Yellow River

Amid a thick haze of misty rain,
I reached an ancient ferry;
Oh, Yellow River!
Please lend me a sheepskin raft.

Through many twists and turns, I know,
This great river flowed on as time passed.
The pole at this ancient crossing
Has punted away countless troubles and sorrows.

Steerers with their beards and hair white,
Boatmen shouting themselves hoarse;
The canvas rags, floating on the shallows,
Are still tinged with antiquity. . . .

Suddenly, braving the drizzle and wind,
A boat speeds along with a song.
Standing on the prow, a pole in hand,
Is a girl, slender and young!

In her hair a fiery flower glows,
Turning the swift waters red.
With deep feelings and smiling,
She's like a modern dragon-tamer!

The ancient river, too fierce to be harnessed,
Begins a new chapter in its history.
Amidst the noise of dyke-building and rain,
How many willows have turned lush and green?

May 1960

Tamarisk, Oleaster and Desert Vine

—To the young comrades who have gone to
work in the border areas

Tamarisk, oleaster and the desert vine
Are true staunch fighters.

So poor,
Without a single succulent leaf;
So modest,
Taking only a small space.

Little they seek,
Neither rain nor dew;
Plenty they give,
Even their shadows.

A vast expanse of desert trodden underfoot,
Withstanding savage thunderstorms;
Picking themselves up after each fall,
They only desire victory.

To thirsty travellers in the scorching sun,
They say, "Press forward. Don't halt!"
To cities buried in deep sand,
They say, "Stand up. Don't die!"

Firmly they believe one day,
A train of camels or wooden-wheeled ox-carts
Will transport the sand drifts
To the museum of man's history.

Perhaps only the blue sky
Can house their lofty aspirations,
Their profound love of life,
Their ardent loyalty to the people.

Young comrades, I say,
Aren't they the very images of you?

August 1961

In the Tamarisk Grove

The moon rises, lucid and clear like water,
Like sediment, the desert deathly quiet.
In the still night, piercingly cold,
From where the cheerful laughter?

Two tents appear out of the laughter,
Dotted with people's shadows outside.
Soldiers are busy gathering tamarisk twigs,
To weave baskets to welcome the spring ploughing.

Weaving wicker baskets for delivering manure,
Weaving wicker baskets for gathering the harvest;
When the east wind comes again next spring,
This will be an expanse of fertile green.

How bold the lamp looks tonight,
Lighting the dream of the vast wilderness!
Bolder the secret in the soldiers' hearts —
Their magnificent ideals, their profound love!

Who is playing a tune on a tamarisk pipe,
Expressing ardent fervour and lofty aspirations?
How moving the moonlit scene over the Gobi Desert,
Hark the sound of chopping in the tamarisk grove!

October 1961

The Pearl Brook

On patrol duty, wrapped in wind and sand,
We came across a glittering brook at night.
Where have I seen such a stream before,
Charming and varied, so happy and gay?

Was it those wild flowers in my memory,
Gathered in clusters, bursting in full bloom?
Was it the fruit abundant in this region,
Ripe at the same time, waiting to be picked?

Was it the flickering tongues of flame,
Ablaze, never extinguished, converging in a stream?
Was it flocks of chattering tits,
In a riot of colour, building their nests?

Perhaps it is not a brook at all,
But diamonds, pearls and other jewels.
Along this valley enveloped in the nightly gauze,
Our motherland stores these for a while.

Trying to scoop up treasures for comrades at home,
Yet from my hands they slip away.
“These stars look bigger and brighter tonight!”
Our squad leader’s words splash over the shimmering
ripples. . . .

If you haven’t guarded our land, gun in hand,
You cannot comprehend the grandeur of her landscape,
Or know the plateau in early autumn,
Its star-studded sky and many fairy-tales.

May 1962

Gazing About with Deep Feeling

—The words of an African sailor

The freighter is now setting off.
African sailor, wandering the world,
Why do you lean over the side,
Gazing about with deep feeling?

“All year round I travel the world,
Casting my past years into the surging waves;
But today, I’ll remember all my life,
Friendly sentiments which warmed my heart.

“Today is my birthday,
I’m leaving China on a long voyage;
I’d like to tell you, my friend,
How I came into this world thirty years ago —

“At the foot of a mountain my father lit a fire,
While bitter tears streamed down my mother’s cheeks;

My very first cry
Summoned a shrill burst of gunfire.

“Racists took my dear father away,
In the early morning hours after my birth;
On the ground, the cold ashes of the dead fire,
In my heart, my father’s eyes ablaze with rage.

“Golden fields and green hills are in my country too,
But today, our enemies are rampant there;
By the unforgettable sufferings of my people,
I know, my country’s history is being forged.

“Life’s taught me revolution, how to struggle,
And the immense strength of the people.
Tomorrow, smashing our chains we will arise,
Shouting, ‘To hell with colonialism, whips and death!’

“Today happens to be my birthday, my friend,
We’ll soon weigh anchor and set off among the waves;
Everlasting our sincere friendship,
How can I help gazing about with deep feeling?”

January 1975

Grief in January

(An abridged translation)

Esteemed and beloved Premier Zhou!
Unable to pay my respects in the hospital,
I can only stand in silence,
Grasping the ice-cold newspaper,
In the dusk on Changan Avenue.
Despite the bitter January wind,
Whipping my hair,
Despite the dim light of street lamps
Playing over tears on my cheeks,
Here I stand waiting,
Waiting for your hearse
To crush our hearts;
Here I stand waiting,
Waiting to pay the last homage
Of a soldier from a frontier post!

Cars, wreathed with white flowers,
People, wearing black arm-bands,
The square, solemn and quiet,
The long avenue, reigned by silence!

The setting sun, red as blood,
Offsets impressive Tiananmen,
While the winter clouds hang low,
The red flag at half-mast. . . .

The long funeral procession,
Like a stream, flowing slowly,
Braving the wind in late winter. . . .

Why are we forbidden
To mourn your great life?
Why are we forbidden
To praise your immortal deeds?
Yet, at this moment,
People in their tens of thousands
Stand still along the quiet avenue;
Each heart a surging sea,
Each pair of eyes a burst dyke,
Many call your name,
In the wake of your hearse.
Many run towards you,
With bouquets and their respects.
Many want to clasp your clothes,
And wake you from your slumber.
Many want to talk with you,
About all that is in their minds. . . .

The long funeral procession,
Like a stream, flowing slowly,
Braving the wind in late winter. . . .

Oh history, please note this:
On January 11, 1976,
In Beijing, China,
A hearse
Passed through an eventful era!
In it lies an outstanding member
Of the Chinese Communist Party!
In it lies a great revolutionary
Of the proletariat!
In it lies a real life,
A proud son of the people!
A great hero,
He devoted all his energies
To our eight hundred million people!
A great fighter,
He shed his last drop of blood
For three thousand million people!
Esteemed and beloved Premier Zhou,
In this way
Calm and unhurried, you passed along
Familiar Changan Avenue,
Like in your lifetime,
Quietly passing by,
Unwilling to disturb us. . . .

The long funeral procession,
Like a stream, flowing slowly,
Braving the wind in late winter. . . .

Oh, our motherland —
Draped in the misty veil of evening dusk,
In the thick haze of dark clouds.
Many families,
At this moment,
Open their windows wide,
To present their heartfelt respects.
Dazhai people, in the terraced fields,
Gaze into the distance.
Daqing people, on the high derricks,
Call your name.
Soldiers in their hundreds and thousands,
Guns in hand, at the sentry posts,
Mourn your death.
This is the great homage we pay:
The main memorial meeting —
Our vast land,
While everywhere memorial meetings,
Throughout the five continents.
Amid stormy clouds and waters,
Our memorial curtains flutter.
Amid roaring wind and thunder,
Our resolute oaths resound.
River keep silent,
Mountains stand erect,
Forests bow their heads,
Moon and stars remain motionless. . . .
What a funeral,
Grand, solemn and quiet!

The long funeral procession,
Like a stream, flowing slowly,
Braving the wind in late winter. . . .

Oh, beloved Premier Zhou!
My tear-filled eyes
Cannot see clearly your remains;
Yet I see, on your chest,
Neither ribbon nor medal,
Only the simple badge
You've worn for many years,
Like your fervent heart,
Beating steadily,
Never to cease.
With the golden characters,
"Serve the people",
Reflecting the gleam
Of the shining sickle and hammer
In your heart;
Reflecting the colour
Of the red flag draping your body,
Which endured innumerable storms;
Reflecting the radiance
Of the brilliant red sun over your head,
Casting golden rays over the world,
Shining through heaven and earth. . . .

January 15, 1976

Xie Mian

A Soldier's Songs

—On Li Ying, contemporary poet

In 1948, the magazine *New Poetry of China* was launched in Shanghai, then under Kuomintang rule. In its first issue, a young poet published his poem, *The Warning of Spring*.

All old attitudes should be changed,
All outworn concepts shattered.
Let the living burst through the earth
And the dead fill the vacuum.
Oh! I'll give some time
To those seeking light and warmth.
Make haste! Time waits for no man.

The author, Li Ying, was then twenty-two years old. Born in north China in 1926, the son of a railway worker, he hated the old system. With faith in the future, he acclaimed the new life that would "burst through the earth".

As predicted, those "seeking light and warmth" were victorious and the People's Republic of China was founded one year later in 1949.

In early 1949, Li Ying was a student in the Department of Literature in Beijing University. Beijing had just been liberated. With the war still in progress, Li Ying decided not to take his degree, but instead he joined the People's Liberation Army. Soon he became an army correspondent, going down to the south where battles were still raging. The promising young poet began to write verses of a new kind.

In the winter of 1950, Li Ying went to the frozen Korean battlefield, where he saw blazing ruins and tearless girls confronting death. Night after night he was unable to sleep. "Remember these ruins!" he wrote. Images of soldiers fighting for justice and human progress began to appear in his poetry.

In 1953, China embarked on reconstruction. In those days, he wrote many poems expressing his love for his country, for its mountains, rivers, flowers and clouds. He never ceased writing, however, melodies characteristic of soldiers. A cloud would remind him of the mother in the hills, who had not had so much as "a floating cloud" in wartime. In *Going Deep into the Mountains* he wrote:

Our hills were poor,
But the mother there poorer by far.
What did she possess?
Only chapped hands and a gaunt frame;
Not even a floating cloud belonged to her.
.....
But the mother in her cave dwelling
Washed our wounds with her last pinch of salt,
Made porridge to warm us with her last grain of rice.
.....
Spoonful by spoonful she fed the fighters,
Nourished the revolution,
Nursed our motherland with its countless mountains
and rivers.

The bitter sufferings of China in the past made poets throughout the ages lament their ancient but ill-fated nation, but Li Ying



Li Ying

is a poet of our new era. For thirty years, he has travelled all over the country, writing about the new life of our people. On the bank of the Yellow River, looking at the ancient canvas rags floating on the shallows, he wrote of a girl with a wild red flower in her hair, rowing swiftly across the rapids. Though the river has taken on a new look today, the poet never forgets its past:

Weeping waterwheels were too tired to move;
Cockles bobbing on the waves dared not look at the
endless water.

While writing of the present, Li Ying always recalls the sufferings of the past. Though China is still poor today, to him her future is bright. He often deliberately contrasts old and new, sufferings and joy to deepen his readers' insight into life. The basic theme of his poetry is his love for his land and his admiration for the

soldiers guarding it. The mountains, rivers, seas and fields are a part of his life. Even the desert becomes alive under his pen. In *Sunrise in the Desert* he writes:

The sun awakes,
Thrusts up above the horizon
And stands up gallantly
Gazing at this solid sea of sand,
Lengthening our shadows.
.
Then suddenly flying into a rage,
He leaps up over our heads
To pour fire on the cold Gobi,
And shoots thousands of golden arrows.

Li Ying's vigorous style is expressed in his subtle and detailed descriptions. His poems are well thought out and written with the meticulous care which a master craftsman devotes to carving jade.

He has an eye for beauty. In the mountains of the south he sees:

Morning mist like soundless rain;
Eagles flapping off the dew and taking wing.

On the northern plains, he discovers "spring oozing through the cracks in the ice". Even a shell on a beach fires his imagination:

Though dead, I've left the golden ear
To listen to new songs of the time!

Such flights of fancy are by no means rare. To him, even an irrigation ditch is:

Another mirror for the girls on the steppe,
Another girdle for the young herdsmen,

Another string for the dairy-man's fiddle,
This sparkling rivulet.

When observing nature and society, he expresses deep feelings. But not all his poems are lyrical; he can use splendid images and polished language to describe gun-fire and the rhythm of marches, evoking the vigour and staunchness of Chinese soldiers. In *The Embattled City*, he wrote:

China is not just a name in the log of Marco Polo;
There's gunpowder too, besides shimmering silk!

This line is true of Li Ying's poetry, which has a beautiful as well as an explosive quality. His lyrical poems embody the pride of men fighting for justice.

Li Ying's inner strength comes from the people. The image of the poor mother in the hills is the reflection of the people who have nourished our revolution and the poet himself. "I love this new era and the land in which I grew up," he has said. "It is they which have taught me to understand our people, struggle, life and poetry as well." On his return from Korea, he became an editor of the magazine *Liberation Army Literature*. In 1955, he made a trip along the route of the Long March. Between 1958 and 1961, he twice went to the coast and spent altogether a year with the garrisons there. Later, he often visited or worked in barracks and villages in such places as the Zhoushan Archipelago, Hainan Island, the forests of Heilongjiang Province, the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, the Gobi in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region and the Tibetan Plateau. Last winter and this spring he toured the Xisha Islands in the South China Sea, visiting army units on our southern frontier. These trips are the sources of his songs. Thus when he flew over the Tianshan Mountains he wrote:

Kind Mother Earth,
You have nurtured so many happy lives,
Like countless stained-glass windows,

Or carpets with floral designs.
From the blue sky I send you my people's greetings.

Grief in January, lamenting Premier Zhou Enlai, was much acclaimed. It is a true reflection of the people's feelings, expressing their heartfelt grief as well as serious, incisive political comments.

Because of his knowledge of the people's bitter past and their determination to create a new world, Li Ying conveys his love for them in descriptions of virtually everything he sees. He uses obscure desert plants like tamarisk, narrow-leaved oleaster and desert vine as images in his poetry. He is particularly fond of tamarisks and made this the title of his collection of poems written over a period of ten years. In his eyes they are:

So poor,
Without a single succulent leaf;
So meagre,
Taking only a small space.
Little they seek,
Neither rain nor dew;
Plenty they give,
Even their shadows.

This typifies the Chinese people. China is poor, but she is full of vigour and hope, like the tamarisk braving wind, sand and drought in the desert.

Li Ying also follows closely the world situation. "Though I live in a quiet lane in Beijing," he writes, "the storms in the world keep shaking my door." He frequently writes on international themes. Azaleas in the fields and mountains of Asia, Chinese rape flowers in the valleys of Africa, waves and seagulls, winds from all parts of the world are often found in his poems praising the oppressed and the efforts of the world's people to create a better life.

Though a lyrical poet, Li Ying can be very stern when talking about existence, sovereignty, independence, freedom and peace. After all he is a soldier, and struggle is his motto.

To a true fighter,
Struggle is the only song.
Even when handcuffs cut his flesh,
His heart can never be fettered.

Li Ying is hard-working. Since becoming an editor in 1955, he has written poetry only in his spare time. However, he has already published nineteen anthologies. Now he is planning to make a selection of his poetry from the past thirty years. Though he is now a well-established poet, he says, "I regard all my anthologies simply as trials and preparations for a further advance."

Liu Enbo

Sword-Dance

People wore swords in ancient China and developed the art of sword-play with martial and graceful movements. A dance form, the sword-dance, gradually evolved from this art, which was performed for entertainment.

According to historical records, the sword-dance has an ancient history. In "The Annals of Xiang Yu" from the *Records of the Historian* written by Sima Qian (c. 145 or 135 BC-?), he describes a sword-dance at a banquet. In 206 BC, immediately after the overthrow of the Qin Dynasty, contradictions between Liu Bang (247-195 BC) and Xiang Yu (232-202 BC), two rebel leaders, grew so sharp that a power-struggle ensued, resulting in a war. One day at Hongmen, Xiang Yu supposedly gave a banquet in Liu Bang's honour. Xiang Zhuang, one of the generals under Xiang Yu's command, pretended to perform a sword-dance to entertain the guests but really in an attempt to kill Liu Bang on the spot. Xiang Bo, Xiang Yu's uncle, however, was an intimate friend of Zhang Liang, Liu Bang's adviser. Seeing through the plot, he wielded his sword and joined in the dance to protect Liu Bang. Thus Xiang



Sword-dance

Zhuang had no opportunity to accomplish his aim. This shows that sword-dances were performed as an entertainment at dinner parties as early as the second century BC.

Sword-dances were common in the Tang Dynasty. In one of his poems, *Watching the Sword-dance of Madam Gongsun's Disciple*, the celebrated poet Du Fu (712-770) vividly depicted the dance movements of the famous dancer Madam Gongsun:

Dazzling like the nine suns shot down by Yi,*
 Swift like gods riding dragons in flight.
 Ending like the passing of thunder and lightning,
 With slow movements, like the calm shimmering water.

In the Tang Dynasty, a famous general, Pei Min, had such expertise that his sword-dance, together with Li Bai's poems and

* A legendary archer who brought down nine of the ten suns in the sky with his bow and arrows.



Stealing the magic herb

Zhang Xu's calligraphy, were praised as the "three wonders" of the age.

When Chinese opera began to develop after the Song Dynasty, some sword-dances were incorporated into the operas, while also remaining a popular and independent performing art.

After a long period of development, a large variety of sword-dances have evolved, mainly preserved in *wu shu* (the art of fighting) and traditional operas. There are about one hundred of these in *wu shu*, but those in the operas are more colourful and graceful. There is an expressive sword-dance, for instance, in the Beijing opera *The Conqueror Bids Farewell to Lady Yu* in which Lady Yu, Xiang Yu's favourite, dances with two swords while singing a sad aria before she and Xiang Yu part. In another Beijing opera, *The White Snake*, there is an intricate sword-play between the White Snake and the spirits when she goes to steal the magic herb to bring her husband back to life. Generally speaking, sword-dances in *wu shu* concentrate on acrobatic skills, while those in traditional operas are for dramatic effect.

Sword-dances can be roughly divided into two main categories: stable and mobile dances. The former have quick, brief movements, but the poses are stable and graceful to elicit a sculptured effect. The latter have fluent and harmonious movements, giving an impression of tenacity. Either one or two swords can be used. When one sword is used, a tassel is usually attached to the handle. In ancient times this was to fasten the sword to the wrist, but now it is purely ornamental. As the dancer wields the sword, various kinds of lines appear between the sword and tassel, enhancing the beauty of the dance.

Many art troupes today, both professional and amateur, have created new sword-dances based on the traditional ones. In dance dramas, sword-dances are usually introduced to make the performance more vivid and colourful. Thus the ancient art of the sword-dance continues to flourish in modern China.

Qi Liang

Hua Yan and His Painting “A Lodge amid Pine Trees”

Most of China's ancient painters, coming from rich families, could go to school from childhood and have famous artists to teach them. But there were also a few who came from poor families. They had to work with their hands when they were still young and to overcome many difficulties in their lives and studies before getting a name in the painting world. One of these was Hua Yan (1682-1756), an outstanding Qing-dynasty artist and painter of *A Lodge amid Pine Trees* which we introduce in this issue.

Hua Yan was born in Shanghang, Fujian Province in south China, known in ancient times as Xinluo, a name which he later took. On the mountains around Shanghang grew groves of bamboo, with which the local people manufactured paper. So paper-making was very advanced in that area, and this was the trade of Hua Yan's father. But because of overwork, he died of illness at the age of about forty. In his childhood, Hua Yan had a few years of schooling, but soon he had to leave school to earn a living by working as an apprentice in a paper-mill. From childhood

he liked to paint and practise calligraphy, and later he loved to recite poems. During his apprenticeship, he painted in his spare time. Not only did he paint on paper, he also painted murals for local temples. Many workers and peasants liked his paintings.

When Hua Yan was nineteen, an ancestral temple was built in that locality and someone was needed to paint murals for it. The workers and peasants recommended Hua Yan, but the man in charge turned him down on the grounds that he was not a famous painter. Word of this depressed Hua Yan. Worried that he could never give full play to his talent if he continued to stay in this out-of-the-way district, he made up his mind to leave his home and travel extensively so as to realize his ambition. The night before he left, he went to the newly-built ancestral temple in the moonlight, climbed over the wall and found a ladder. Holding a torch in his left hand, he painted with his right four remarkable murals of which he already had a mental picture. He entitled them *Cranes over a Lofty Mountain*, *Swimming Buffaloes*, *Green Pine on a Cliff* and *Composing a Poem on Horseback*. Just as he completed the four murals, day broke. Then with his luggage on his back he left home to set out on his travels. The next day, when his paintings were discovered, people admired the spirit of this promising young artist and the four murals he had completed in one night. They took great care of them.

Hua Yan toured Hangzhou and Yangzhou in the south and Beijing and Rehe in the north. He visited many places of historic interest and scenic beauty and met people from all walks of life. This had a great influence on his later paintings.

He dealt with a wide range of themes. Most of his predecessors had usually confined themselves to painting either landscapes or flowers and birds. He was more versatile, and as he always laid emphasis on careful observation and drawing from life, the flowers, birds, grass, insects and animals he painted were lifelike and full of vitality.

Hua Yan painted *A Lodge amid Pine Trees* when he was fifty-three. Pine trees form a dominant part of the painting. Normally, artists first used ink as a base for the pine branches and then added to it some cyanine blue or cyanine blue with gamboge.

In his other paintings, Hua Yan adopted the same method. But in *A Lodge amid Pine Trees*, he painted all the pine branches with pure blue, conveying an atmosphere of coolness. White clouds make up another important part of the painting. White clouds are difficult to portray. If handled well, they suggest the vastness of space; the painting may look empty, but it is filled with infinite vitality. The dialectical relationship between space and substance is a key factor in Chinese painting, which helps produce spirited work.

Hua Yan once inscribed this poem on a landscape painted by Yun Ge, born fifty years before him:

Your painting brush has swept away worldly dust,
Making the rivers and mountains assume a new look.
I too strive to exert my ingenuity;
Though painting similar scenes, we belong to different times.

This poem was written to praise his predecessor, but in fact it expresses his own high aspirations.

A Lodge amid Pine Trees by *Hua Yan*

七
巖覆石壁 豁水幽深 巖巖 巖巖 巖巖
萬華嶺 冥霧中 朝飲花上露 夜臥
松下風 雲英化 為水光 彩興 我同 日
蕩精魄 寒天 府空
甲寅三月 刺蓮山人 寫于 小紅館



New Journal *Our Times* Published

Our Times, a comprehensive literary quarterly, was recently published in Beijing, containing mainly works by contemporary Chinese writers, including some by writers in Taiwan, Hongkong and Macao. It features novels, stories, prose writings, reminiscences, reportage, dramas, poems, children's stories, fables, articles on literary creation, reviews and some contemporary foreign literary works.

The first issue included a short commentary by the noted writer Yan Wenjing, a play by Zhao Zixiong, excerpts from novels by Ma Shitu, the young writer Liu Yazhou and Yang Qianru, a reminiscence by the veteran writer Xiao Qian, a poem by Zhou Liangpei and a short story by the contemporary Taiwan writer Bai Xianyong. A Romanian play and an American short story were also featured.

The Uyghur Opera *Alip and Saynam* Staged in Xinjiang

A full-length opera *Alip and Saynam* in the Uyghur language was staged recently in Urumuqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Adapted from a popular epic of the same title, *Alip and Saynam* tells of the faithful love of Saynam, the king's daughter, and Alip, the late prime minister's son. The young lovers fight against the intrigues of the new prime minister who wants to usurp the throne. Justice and loyalty prevail.

Traditional Kazak Designs Collected in China

Traditional Kazak designs from the multi-national Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region have been collected for publication in a new album entitled *Collected Patterns of Kazak Folk Art* by the Xinjiang People's Publishing House. With an accompanying text in the Han, Kazak and English languages, the album contains 184 illustrations.

The Kazaks are a pastoral minority nationality who live in Xinjiang, Gansu and Qinghai in northwest China. Their designs are based on flowers, plants, birds and animals of the grasslands. They also use geometric patterns. Their designs, characterized by bright colours and bold lines, are displayed in their embroidery and weaving and adorn their inlaid articles and painted lacquerware.

The First National Symposium on Guo Moruo

The first national symposium on Guo Moruo was held recently in his birth-place in Leshan County, Sichuan Province.

Guo Moruo, who died in Beijing last year, was a major Chinese literary figure and contemporary of Lu Xun.

The symposium was attended by over 130 specialists on Guo Moruo, including professors, writers, translators and other workers from the literary and publishing community from 23 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in China. Lectures given included *Guo Moruo and Foreign Literature, An Analysis of Guo Moruo's Poem "The Goddesses", The Emancipation of Thought in Guo Moruo* and *On Guo Moruo's Tragedies*.

The Journal *Studies in Literature and Art* Published

Studies in Literature and Art, a bi-monthly, edited by the Academy of Literature and Art under the Ministry of Culture, was published in Beijing recently.

The first issue features two talks by Premier Zhou Enlai on

literary and art work given in 1959 and 1962. Premier Zhou expressed important views on how literature and art should reflect the spirit of the times, portray typical examples and explore the relations between reality in life and history and reality in art.

In an article the 79-year-old noted writer Bingxin discusses her years of creative writing. The composer Lu Ji and others have traced the development of progressive music, films and cartoons since the May 4th Movement in 1919. Zhao Mingyi gives a detailed introduction to the celebrated dramatist Tian Han's early activities in the drama movement.

There is also an article on late 19th and early 20th century European and American literature, and another on the "Georges Pompidou Cultural Centre" in Paris.

Ancient Tomb Murals Published

An album of photos and copies of the murals from an ancient Han tomb was recently published by the Cultural Relics Publishing House. Built in AD 167-170, the Han tomb of a high military commander sent by the central government to a garrison in the northern area at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty was found in 1971 in Horing County in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

These colourful murals show in detail the life in feudal society of the officials, landlords and peasants at that time. It is one of the most important archaeological discoveries so far made in China.

The album contains 62 colour photos and 32 copied murals.

Collection of Foreign Stories Published in Shanghai

The *Collection of Foreign Stories* was published recently by the Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House. In three volumes, it contains 103 short stories by 71 foreign writers, including some by the critical realists Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dickens,

Hardy, Stendhal, Maupassant and Balzac, as well as by Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Oscar Wilde.

The publishing house plans to publish *Contemporary Foreign Short Stories* and *Works by the Foreign Modernist School*.

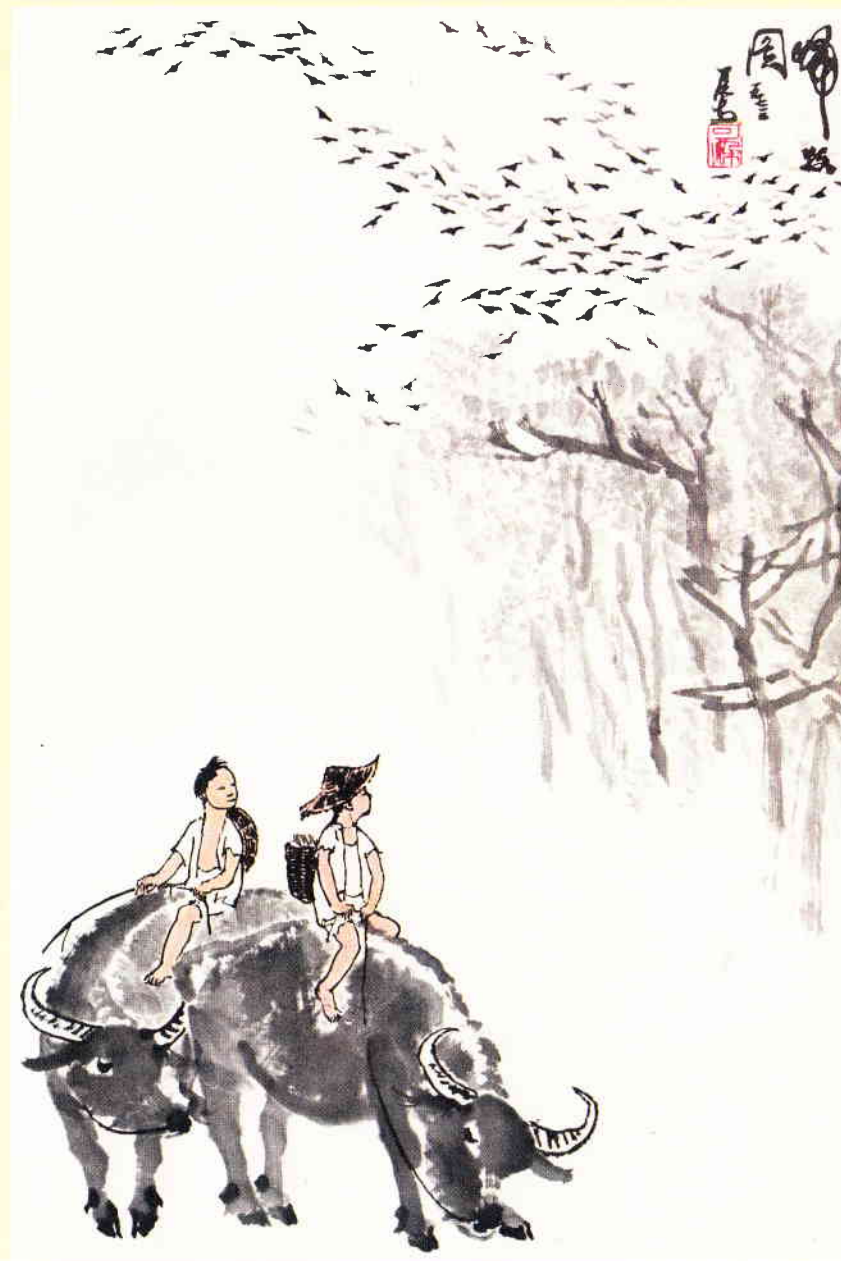
World-Renowned American Violinist Isaac Stern's Recital in Beijing

The internationally renowned American violinist Isaac Stern gave a recital recently in Beijing, at which he performed sonatas for piano and violin by Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy and Franck.

Mr David Golub accompanied him on the piano. Their fine performance was highly appreciated by Chinese music lovers.



Isaac Stern at one of his concerts in Beijing



Return from Grazing (traditional Chinese painting)

by Li Keran



中國文學

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