

CHINESE LITERATURE

Monthly



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Front Cover: *HARVEST CELEBRATION*

by Huang Yung-yu

In 1958, China reaped her biggest harvest of all times. This woodcut of six children singing and dancing on a field of rice is taken from actual fact. The rice field was one belonging to the Red Flag People's Commune in Huankiang County, Kwangsi Province, who set a record with their yield of 130,434 catties of rice from a single *mou*. The rice came up so thick and strong that children could dance on the top of the grain.

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SHAO CHUAN-LIN

Chinese Literature in 1958

The past year has seen a new upsurge in Chinese literature, with marked developments and innovations. These developments and innovations are inseparable from the great victory of the socialist revolution on the political and economic fronts.

In 1956, China completed the socialist revolution in her economy, wiping out once for all the remnants of capitalist ownership; while in 1957 the socialist revolution on the political and ideological fronts smashed the attacks of the bourgeois rightists and greatly increased the people's confidence in socialism and their enthusiasm for work and creation. This was the basis for the unprecedented "big leap forward" in industry and agriculture which started in the winter of 1957 and was immediately followed by a "big leap forward" in the cultural field. This is a socialist cultural revolution of stupendous scope and power. It has had a great and dynamic influence on both the content and form of China's young socialist literature.

To gain a better understanding of this, the writer of this article recently made a two months' tour of various provinces in central, southwest and northwest China, to study the popular literary movements in factories and villages, and to visit worker and peasant authors as well as the writers and poets living with them. These visits made the most deep and vivid impression on me. Virtually every farm and factory is brimming over with art and literature. Everywhere

you find poetry and song, workers' and peasants' literary groups and cultural activity of every description. This unprecedented literary upsurge is natural enough, for during the great advances made in production and their heroic emulation in labour the people feel compelled to express their zest for work and creation through literature and art. One worker in Szechuan said: "Wherever there is work, there is poetry." This is a simple remark, but one full of wisdom. It shows that popular literature and art arise out of labour. The present high tide in literature exemplifies the amalgamation of work and culture, work and poetry. And this amalgamation is the main factor in our present socialist cultural revolution.

In Wuhan I learned that the provinces of Kiangsi, Hunan, Hupeh and Honan have more than thirty thousand literary groups composed of workers and peasants. In Szechuan there are even more: it is estimated that there more than one million workers and peasants are writing. A similar situation exists in other provinces. These literary groups are generally organized by the people themselves, then developed under the leadership of the local cultural organizations and propaganda organs. The last few years have seen a marked rise in the cultural level of the peasants; illiteracy has diminished rapidly; villages have vocational high schools or even colleges for peasants. In addition, most villages have cultural stations, clubs, reading rooms or broadcasting centres for cultural activities. Most of the members of the writing groups have their work published in local newspapers, magazines or wall-papers, while the number of authors of oral literature is past counting. Their favourite form is folk poetry, though they make up stories, plays and other forms of folk literature as well. It is hard to estimate the total figure of these popular songs: usually one county produces tens or hundreds of thousands of them. This is not only because folk poems are most suited to express a man's love for his work, but because our labouring people have a long tradition of folk poetry. Many Chinese peasants are able to toss off poems on the spur of the moment. China today has many "Poets' Villages" where the walls

or doors are covered with poems and paintings by the peasants. Kuo Mo-jo described a village in Hopei in these words:

Ten thousand trees in the orchard,
Ten thousand poems on the walls.

In Sian I visited such a village myself. There were only five hundred people there, but more than two hundred were peasant poets. Each house had a square foot of white-wash on its front wall, on which were written the best poems of that household, signed by the author. The stage in the middle of the village for poetry contests was pasted over with big sheets of the most popular poems and paintings. Since spring, this village had held three competitions at which the peasants recited their new work. As soon as I arrived, they held a small poetry meeting in the courtyard of the chairman of the agricultural co-operative. More than a dozen peasants, including some in their early teens and old men and women of sixty and seventy, composed impromptu poems. It was a most moving scene: their earnest voices and their shining eyes made you keenly aware of their love for the new socialist life. A verse of one poem ran:

When you make clothes, start by cutting out the front;
When you sing songs, they should come from the heart.

And they did indeed sing from their hearts. They told me how this type of gathering started. In the spring, while they were irrigating the wheat fields, one team leader decided to sing to express all that was in her heart and forget her fatigue. Soon many peasants in the fields were following her lead, and so was launched a campaign to make poems in that village. Significantly, they said: "For us, making poems is the best way to stop feeling tired and work with more drive." Among the toilers, artistic creation and labour are inseparable. Many folk poems describe scenes like this:

The wheat stalks rustle in the wind,
All round, the scythes gleam bright;

As lads stop singing, lasses sing
From dusk till day is light.

At present the creation of folk poems is a mass movement and the most widespread literary trend in the whole country. This is having a tremendous influence on the work of Chinese poets, and opening up a new path for Chinese poetry. In their songs the peasants say to the poets:

Where can good poems be found?
We suggest poets should come to the villages;
Hills, streams and fields are changing every day;
Each change is a moving story.

Their hearts as one, the people break old conventions,
Everywhere heroes are working miracles;
There are songs and epic legends everywhere —
Why don't you poets make haste to pick them up?

It is true that the daily life of the working people today abounds in "songs and epic legends," and this unprecedented outpouring of poetry reflects the needs of life itself. These millions of poems have certain common characteristics. First of all, as already noted, they are closely linked with labour. The genuine working men's feelings expressed in them are often absent from the poems of intellectuals. Secondly, all express nobility of spirit, heroism or optimism. They proudly affirm:

Rivers and waters must make way for us,
High mountains must bow their heads.

They declare:

We will use the lakes as ink-pots
And giant trees as our pens,
To inscribe beautiful poems
On the mountains and rivers of our motherland.

They are not overawed by natural barriers or the heroes of ancient history or legend. One widely known folk song runs:

There's no Jade Emperor in heaven now,
On earth no Dragon King;

I'm the Jade Emperor,
I'm the Dragon King!
I order the Three Mountains and Five Peaks:
"Make way there!
Here I come!"

The Jade Emperor and the Dragon King were the rulers of nature in ancient Chinese mythology; but now they have lost their power in the eyes of the peasants, and in their stead the working people have become the masters of nature.

There you see a splendid communist spirit.

Since the poetic form chosen fits the rhythm of work and uses the language of everyday speech, these poems are easier to remember than those by intellectuals. The language is concise, clear and highly graphic, in the best tradition of Chinese folk songs and classical poetry. "A Sea of Wheat" is an example:

Just see that golden hill and golden sky!
Their sparkling gold has dyed all heaven red;
When father's in the field, he stands breast-high;
When brother's there, you only see his head;
When granny goes, she falls into the sea;
Above my head the golden billows meet;
I hold my breath and jump two times and three,
But still I cannot reach the ears of wheat!

How vividly these eight lines describe the delight in an abundant harvest!

For many years a debate has been carried on concerning the form of modern Chinese poetry; but these folk poems have pointed a clear direction: the new poetry should develop on the basis of Chinese folk songs and classical poetry, adopting the national form and combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism. Chinese poets today are eagerly discussing these problems. Their slogan is: "Let this generation start a new school of poetry!" Folk poems are being collected, edited and studied on a national scale, and this work will undoubtedly bring about a renaissance in Chinese poetry.

In factories and mines this popular literary movement is developing vigorously too. Shanghai alone, in the spring of 1958, produced one million works, most of them written by workers. The Tientsin workers, learning from the example of Gorky, are writing the histories of their factories—collective reportage to record past struggles and the exploits of earlier heroes in their works. This method has caught on throughout the country. During my stay in Wuhan and Chungking, I found many factory workers there planning to write such histories. All the factories I visited had literary clubs and publications. Indeed, practically every workshop had its group of writers, and just as in the villages the walls of the plant were covered with poems. A member of one factory administration told me: "To us, literature is a physical as well as a spiritual force, because it helps directly to increase production."

Since China has a vast territory and many nationalities, we find widely differing varieties of folk literature. For instance, in Szechuan there are dozens of types of local opera and other forms of folk literature. Districts largely inhabited by minority peoples, like Sinkiang, Mongolia, Tibet, Yunnan and Kwangsi, all have a fine national literature, including songs, legends and narrative poems, which invariably possess a strong romantic flavour. In addition, these works have distinctive local styles of their own, another feature of mass literature. The varied development of national characteristics and local styles will greatly hasten the integration of socialist content with national form in Chinese literature. This high tide of popular literature also proves the correctness of the policy "Let a hundred flowers blossom!" adopted by the Party two years ago. Today on the soil of the life of our labouring people a hundred flowers have begun to blossom in all their glory.

The strength of mass enthusiasm and creativeness, once aroused is unimaginably great. A movement has now been set afoot in China for the communist emancipation of thought, advocating a communist spirit which dares to speak, think, act, create and introduce innovations. This spirit is fully manifested in the Party's General Line for

socialist construction. In the new society the people show far more initiative than ever before. This is the only way to account for the miracles that have taken place in the "big leap forward" in production and the cultural field with the flourishing of literature and art. Indeed in literature and art the emancipation of thought is even more clearly the crucial factor in stimulating creativeness. During my travels I was constantly hearing of moving incidents or meeting remarkable people. Thus in Hunan there is a thirty-one-year-old peasant named Liu Yung who this year plans to produce 1,400 pieces of writing, read books and journals amounting to more than 6,000,000 words, and put in two hundred workdays. He goes to the fields every day with his pockets stuffed with magazines and books. During intervals between farming and in the evening, he writes and reads. He is also the head of a literary group. Anything written by any one of its members is discussed by the whole group before publication. Our intellectuals have much to learn from this tremendous energy and selfless endeavour. In Chungking I met a blind elderly man, once a machinist, who has spent the last seven or eight years writing. He also organized a training class for young writers. He told me an interesting anecdote. One night he jotted down several dozen lines of poetry; but the next morning when he showed his manuscript to some friends, they found only seven words there—apparently his pen had run out of ink. However, he said cheerfully, "I don't let these difficulties get me down. I can write with pencil or chalk, but I mean to go on writing, and I'm also asking to go back to productive work." One hears stories of this sort everywhere. Talented and self-confident writers are appearing all the time among the workers and peasants. In the near future I am certain we shall have some outstanding writers and poets of working-class origin.

If I have laid stress on the literary movement of the workers and peasants it is because we fully understand its significance, regarding it as the beginning of communist literature. Such an estimate is no exaggeration, for although this mass literature is still in its infancy, it is incomparably

healthy and vital and has arisen directly from the life of the labouring people, inheriting the finest traditions of ancient Chinese literature. This movement has further hastened the integration of the writer with the labouring masses, as well as the linking of popularization with elevation in the field of letters, and has provided a new content for socialist realist literature.

Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature* in 1942 gave the direction since followed by Chinese writers. The basic message of these talks was that writers must integrate themselves with the masses, the workers, peasants and soldiers, and serve their needs. This is precisely what the bourgeois revisionists have always opposed and attacked. The anti-rightist struggle carried out among Chinese writers and artists last year was actually a struggle between two lines, the proletarian and the bourgeois lines. Victory in this struggle gave the writers a deeper understanding of the importance for them to merge with the labouring people. Since last winter many writers, responding to the call of the Party, have gone to live for long periods in factories, villages and army units; and since the "big leap forward" in production and the field of culture, they have done so more enthusiastically than ever. So far, over seven hundred writers have gone to work at the grass-roots level or joined the people in physical labour. This is very different from the old way of paying visits or remaining for short periods, which could hardly solve the problem of integrating the writers and the masses. A writer goes to the people not merely to observe their life and find material, but—and this is more important—to share their thoughts and feelings, to live as one, having one fate, one heart. To achieve this, the writer must live for long periods among the masses, taking part in physical labour and mass work. A socialist writer not only uses the pen but works directly for the people as an ordinary worker. We call ourselves "sons of the labouring people." But how can a man who does not take a direct part in the labour and struggles of the people share their experience and knowledge? How can he give an accurate picture in his work

of their thoughts and feelings, or truthfully convey their spirit? To us, this is a basic problem of socialist realism.

While in Wuhan and Chungking I called on some writers. It was their common experience that taking part in physical labour—even if it was comparatively light or short-term—made the workers and peasants feel quite differently towards you. They start considering you as one of themselves, open up their hearts to you and become true friends. Before this they might respect you as a writer, but usually they would look upon you merely as a visitor or guest and keep at some distance. That is why these writers felt that physical labour and work at the grass-roots level were the basic solution for the problem of making the writer one with the masses. Of course, this does not mean that we can do away at one stroke with the contradictions between mental and physical work: that can be achieved only under communism. But much can be done now to diminish such contradictions, and this should be effected gradually. The fact that writers are taking part in physical labour while the labouring people are taking up literary activities shows the connection between literature and art and labour. This is the inevitable trend of human civilization as it advances towards communism: the absolute gulf between mental and physical labour produced through many centuries in the old days of private property will begin to disappear. As Gorky has said: "When men's two hands teach the brain, the more intelligent brain teaches the two hands, and the clever hands further hasten the development of the brain—only then can men's social culture develop in a normal way." This is precisely the normal process of cultural development from socialism to communism.

This is the present mode of life of many of our writers. They work like other functionaries in factory or village Party committees, in trade unions, in agricultural co-operatives; every week they must take part in a certain amount of physical labour, and in their living standard they try as far as possible to conform to their fellows. Some of them actually work in the workshops or production brigades. The methods adopted naturally vary according to individual

preference. Thus Chou Li-po, author of *The Hurricane*, is now deputy secretary of the Party committee of a township in Yiyang County, Hunan. In charge of the work of several agricultural co-operatives, he himself runs an experimental sweet potato plot and keeps several pigs. He uses the afternoons and evenings for physical labour and co-operative work, keeping the mornings for his writing and reading. It was under such conditions that his new novel, *Upheaval in a Mountain Village*, was written. Chou Li-po finds such a life more satisfying than living in Peking.

Do physical labour and mass work interfere with writing? There are bound to be problems regarding the allocation of time, but the evidence shows that these can be overcome. If authors are engaged on a long work, the Writers' Union helps them to make suitable arrangements. The facts prove that when writers go to live among the masses, their output increases instead of diminishing. This has been the case with the poets Tien Chien and Li Chi, and the novelists Ai Wu and Chao Shu-li. The reason is very simple: living among the people, their urge to write is stronger and, more important, their new works reflect more fully the spirit of the age.

The integration of the writer with the people also hastens the dovetailing of popularization and elevation in literature. A writer who lives among the masses cannot fail to consider more carefully how generally his works will be understood and accepted, and how best he should serve the mass literary movement. Tien Chien is an excellent example of this. Working in Huayuan Township in Hopei, not only has he written many poems, but he is leading the poetry movement there. A few months after his arrival, Huayuan became the "Poets' District" famous throughout China.

The flowering of popular literature has strengthened and invigorated our writing with the heroism of the common man. Our people demand the maximum expression of the spirit of the age; they hate and reject the vile distortions of reality and pictures of the seamy side of life presented by the revisionists. So, as regards the method of writing, the slogan, put forth by Comrade Mao Tse-tung himself, is for

the combination of revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary realism. "Never before," said he, "have the masses of people shown such enthusiasm, such fighting spirit and such strength of will-power." If we want to reflect this heroic age in literature, we must make the combination of revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary realism our basic method. Of course, revolutionary romanticism is based on reality; it is the merging of ideals with reality, just as the people's enthusiasm, fighting spirit and initiative arise from their passionate struggles in real life. As I see it, revolutionary romanticism is the reflection in literature of the people's high communist ideals in their socialist construction, their aspiring communist heroism and optimism, their keen imagination and creativeness. In the seething life around us there is revolutionary romanticism everywhere. The writer's job is, by means of his art, to give a truthful picture of the people's life and fully express their enthusiasm, wishes and ideals.

The poems of Comrade Mao Tse-tung are the most outstanding examples of this combination of revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism. These poems are filled with the lofty spirit and heroism of the Communist and the fine ideals of the revolutionary. They are a notable expression of the communist character. Many modern folk poems reflect the same spirit.

Gorky once said that the combination of romanticism and realism was the chief characteristic of Russian literature; and this is true also of Chinese classical literature. The works of Chu Yuan, Ssuma Chien, Li Po and Tu Fu, as well as such later novels and plays as *Water Margin*, *Pilgrimage to the West*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Canonisation of the Gods*, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *The White Snake* and *The Yang Family Generals* are filled with heroic figures, a combination of ideals and reality, imagination and truth. Such characters have been favourites with the Chinese labouring people for generations. Any Chinese peasant can easily reel off a whole list of their names. In today's folk poetry, they often mention these ancient heroes too, declaring that we shall now surpass them. These

fearless popular figures are the most outstanding characters in Chinese literature, and this is one of our finest literary traditions.

In recent years this trend has been clear in Chinese literature: all works reflecting the people's heroism are invariably popular. Cases in point are the novel *Defend Yenan*, the play *The Long March*, the film *Tung Tsun-ju*, the opera *Liu Hu-lan*, the autobiography *Son of the Working Class*. On the other hand, the works "exposing the seamy side of life," so praised by the revisionists, were angrily condemned by the general public. During the last year in particular, the vivid pictures of the people's heroism have been even more striking. In 1958 China has produced more fine works than in all recent years, works such as *Keep the Red Flag Flying* by Liang Pin, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* by Chu Po, *Red Sun* by Wu Chiang, *Bitter Herbs* by Feng Teh-ying, *Song of Youth* by Yang Mo, *Tempered Steel* by Ai Wu, *Upheaval in a Mountain Village* by Chou Li-po, *In Time of Peace* by Tu Peng-cheng and *Red Storm* by Chin Shan. All these have been warmly welcomed by readers far and wide, not only because they describe the people's struggles but because they show the heroism of China's millions today and have a romantic colour. This is the chief reason for the popularity of *Keep the Red Flag Flying* and *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, the two best-selling novels. The former describes the revolutionary struggles in the Chinese countryside during the last thirty years and more, through the story of three generations. It describes how grandfather, father and son battled against the local despots, and how finally under the leadership of the Party a great revolutionary movement swept the country. In this tale full of blood and tears the writer describes the resolution and tenacity of the Chinese peasants, qualities which Comrade Mao Tse-tung has called the noblest characteristics of the Chinese people. *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* deals with a small band of the People's Liberation Army who fight the enemy in wild and difficult country and in snowy forests. The courage and shrewdness of the people's fighters are well brought out, and the

book has a strongly romantic and intensely Chinese style. Though its characterization is not as penetrating as that of Liang Pin's, it has a gallantry and verve all its own which have made it a great favourite with readers.

Liang Pin and Chu Po are both new writers. The reason for their success is that both of them have lived for long periods through mass struggles, and although artistically there may be shortcomings in their work they have firmly grasped the most essential things in life. This confirms the truth that a writer cannot separate himself from the life and struggles of the masses.

The people's likes and dislikes play an important part in deciding the direction of literature. The call to combine revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism is a slogan put forward by Comrade Mao Tse-tung on the basis of the special characteristics and needs of this age and the whole past experience of our literature. We believe this marks an important step forward in our socialist realist literature.

The unprecedented upsurge of the mass literary movement, the integration of the writer with the labouring people and the rise of revolutionary romanticism are the salient features of Chinese writing in 1958. From this it is apparent that our literature is entering upon a new period: continuous innovations and new developments may be expected on the broadest, firmest foundation—that of the labouring people—and the literary level of our country will be raised. These innovations and new achievement will not only have a decisive effect on the development of China's socialist literature, but will, we believe, make a significant contribution to the revolutionary literature of the world.

LIANG PIN

Keep the Red Flag Flying

Liang Pin, the author of this novel, was born in a village in Lih sien in the province of Hopei in 1914. He has published short stories and plays, but won wide popularity only after the appearance of *Keep the Red Flag Flying* published in November, 1957. During the War of Resistance to Japanese Aggression he worked for a long time in the countryside, living among the peasants. He is thoroughly familiar with Chinese village life, with the struggle and aspirations of the peasants. This novel is set largely in the countryside and deals with the people's fight against local despots representing the feudal and imperialist forces in north China's villages and cities from before the 1927 revolution to after 1931, when the Japanese invaded China's three northeastern provinces. Beginning from this issue we will publish this novel in instalments.

I

Like a bolt from the blue, word spread through the forty-eight villages around Soching: "That vicious brute Feng Lan-chih wants to smash the old bell!"

Tiger was little more than ten at the time. Hearing that the whole township was seething because of the bell, he slipped out of his home and up the long winding dyke

just behind it known as Thousand *Li* Dyke. Here stood the River God Temple with two ancient cedars before it, and a bronze bell under them twice the height of a man. It boomed if struck, but the hardest push would not budge it.

A famous craftsman had made this bell, said the old folk. Indeed it was covered with beautiful designs: a lion rolling an embroidered ball, two dragons playing with pearls, five phoenixes paying homage to the sun, the names and addresses of the contributors, and a picture of Great Yu who subdued the flood. The country people thought the world of this bell. Whenever they passed that way they would stop for a look and rub it lovingly. Years of constant rubbing had made some parts as bright as a bronze mirror, so that you could see yourself in them. Sunrise and sunset, the morning mist, the rainbow after a shower, and the Huto River through the pageant of changing seasons were all reflected here. And the parts out of reach were dark green, as brilliant and glossy as if they had been glazed.

Now some tremendous change, it seemed, was going to happen on account of this bell. Out of curiosity, Tiger climbed the dyke to have another look, and licked a finger to trace the lines on the bronze. His childhood had been such a hard one that although he had passed the bell time and again, he had never paid very much attention to it. "It's big, all right," he thought. "But is it worth enough money to make such a stir?"

He raced down the dyke and home. From the courtyard he heard his father's resonant voice. "Those high and mighty landowners have treated us like dirt for generations! . . . As dyke trustees they've swallowed up the dyke funds, but they don't strengthen the dyke. Yet when there's a breach and our fields are flooded so that we can't pay the rent, Feng wants to smash the old bell!"

"What can we do?" asked father's friend, Uncle Yen Hsiang. "Our betters have decided that the bell's to be broken and sold to pay the taxes. Well, why not? There've been floods now for several years running, and in times like these there's bound to be trouble when the tax-collector comes."

Tiger peered through the window from which their voices were coming. Father was sitting on the edge of the *kang*, his moustache bristling, his face dark with rage. Now he jumped forward, striking one palm on the other. "Don't you see their game, brother? Feng's not smashing the bell for bronze to pay the tax. That's only a blind! He's after those forty-eight *mou* of public land around the River God Temple!"

Uncle Yen put down his pipe and looked up, blinking, as he digested this. "You're right," he said at last. "After Feng became trustee he planted the south side with willows, the north with reeds. Those willows are a fair size now. Does look like dirty work. . . ." His jaw fell as he thought it over. Then he straightened up to ask: "But who's to stop him?"

Father's jaw tightened. "Who's to stop him? I shall!"

Uncle Yen threw up his hands. "How? Talk is easy, but we're licked before we start if we go to law. Even as a brat Feng was sharp as a pettifogger. We country fellows are no match for him."

Father's breath was coming short and his eyes were bloodshot. He stamped and bellowed: "I'm not going to court with him, but I'll risk my neck to get even with him!"

Chu Kung was a peasant like all his fathers before him. He was an expert boxer, who had pulled carts and worked for landlords the whole of his life. He was now in his prime, a man of medium height, all bone and muscle, who roared like thunder whenever he was roused. So Feng meant to smash the bell with the evidence on it, in order to take over public property! Chu ground his teeth with fury. "I'll have it out with the dog!"

Soon word got round: "Chu Kung's going to stick out his neck over the old bell. He'll stand up for the rights of the forty-eight villages."

Dusk found him sitting in front of the River God Temple, his eyes fixed on the bronze bell. "Melting this down for the village tax is the same as swallowing it himself," he thought. "I'm not going to let Feng get away with it! This belongs to forty-eight villages!" The red sun sank slowly

behind the western hills. Night came like a grey gauze veil thrown down from the sky. Without going home to eat, Chu strode to Lesser Yen Village to find Yen Hsiang. Yen's wife was cooking by lamplight when Chu arrived and sat down with lowered head on the doorstep.

"Let it go, even if it hurts, Chu Kung!" she urged. "Why should humble folk like us meddle with what's not our business?"

"The very idea makes my blood boil," answered Chu. "Feng Lan-chih thinks he can get away with anything."

"Take it easy, brother! Things have always been this way. What can you do?"

"No! The time has come to have it out with him!"

Though it was dark there was still no sign of Yen Hsiang. Chu, standing up to go, did not even hear when Mrs. Yen invited him to supper. He hurried back to Soching.

Chu Chuan-fu was waiting at the entrance to the village. When Chu Kung loomed up, he stepped forward. He pulled him into his porch and closed the door.

"Nephew!" he whispered. "I want a word with you. If you take my advice, well and good. If not, it can go in at one ear and out at the other."

"I always take your advice, uncle!"

Chu Chuan-fu stroked his beard. "Is it true that you're going to stick out your neck over the bronze bell at the River God Temple?"

Chu Kung nodded. "Quite true!"

Chu Chuan-fu bowed and pressed his palms together. "Gracious Heaven! Why stir up a hornets' nest? Your dad and grandad walked with bent necks, trying to keep out of harm. Must you go looking for trouble? Does a man jump head first into a fiery pit?"

"I know what I'm up against. No man can live for ever — I'm willing to risk my head now."

"Don't talk like that!" Chu Chuan-fu shook his head. "A wise man doesn't fight against impossible odds. Don't rush into danger!"

They argued for some minutes in the darkness.

"Any other time I'd be guided by you, uncle," said Chu Kung finally. "But on this my mind's made up!"

He took his leave and went out of the gate. Once home, he ate not a bite but sat stockstill on the *kang*. When Tiger and his sister had supped and gone to bed, he took down a chopper from the wall and started whetting it.

Tiger heard the *shirr* of whetting in his sleep. He opened his eyes and crawled to the edge of the *kang*. By the light of a small oil lamp his father, with narrowed eyes, had quietly sharpened the blade until it gleamed. Chu Kung pursed his lips when he caught sight of the boy. "Hey, Tiger!" he called softly. "Tomorrow morning you're to keep a look-out on Thousand *Li* Dyke. Understand? If anyone touches the bell, come straight home and tell me!"

Tiger nodded and blinked, then burrowed back under the quilt. The next morning he got up early. Hugging his arms to his chest, he sprinted to Thousand *Li* Dyke. After walking up and down beneath the willows he stood there with his hands behind his back, the way he had seen grown-ups do.

In front of him stretched the Huto River. It galloped down from Taihang Mountain like a charger to race, foaming, through gullies and plunge across the plain. In summer and autumn it flung up fearful waves. In winter it flowed swiftly under thick, fluffy drifts of snow.

On and on it ran, west to north and north to east, forming an enormous bend. And here in days long gone Thousand *Li* Dyke had been built. At its foot nestled Soching township with Lesser Yen Village and Greater Yen Village to its east, Greater Liu Village and Lesser Liu Village to its west, and Li Family Market across the river. The top of the dyke commanded a view of a whole chain of woods and villages.

Standing there all alone, Tiger could hear reeds rustling to the north. The autumn wind was here!

Autumn was here, but there was no fuel in the village, no grain in the fields. The brimming river sparkled in the open country and the wind blew from the northwest. None of his family had clothes for the winter. Sitting on the

altar he hugged his knees and yawned. The chilly wind from the Huto blew red and yellow poplar leaves whispering to the ground. White reed flowers floated skyward.

The trembling of the withered grass on the dyke made Tiger shiver.

He was asleep when two men came up, chatting, from the other side. They put their sledge-hammers and ration bags on the altar and lit their pipes, puffing as they walked round the bell. Tiger woke with a start and stared, then scampered down the dyke and raced home.

"Dad! Dad!" He rapped on the window. "Men with hammers have come to smash the bell!"

Chu Kung was whetting an axe. He tried its blade and put it aside, wrinkling his brow. Then he strode up the dyke. With head thrust forward, he stared at the two men.

"And what may you be doing?" he growled.

The smiths were short, chunky men. They cocked their heads at Chu Kung. "Smashing the bell!"

"Is it your bell?"

"It is — since we've paid for it."

Chu took a step forward. "Whom did you pay?"

"Feng Lan-chih, the dyke trustee."

Chu's temper was up and he shouted: "If you paid Feng Lan-chih, go and smash Feng Lan-chih! Don't you dare touch this bell!" His neck was scarlet and his chest was heaving.

The smiths after eyeing him twice paid no further attention. Having finished their meal, they took off their blue padded jackets and raised their hammers. Not wasting words this time, Chu lunged at them and slapped their faces.

"Get the hell out!"

The copper smiths were sent sprawling. When they scrambled up and saw that he meant business, they ran down the dyke to fetch Feng.

Feng Lan-chih was in his thirties at this time, tall and lean with a pale complexion. Village head of Soching and dyke trustee, from boyhood he had been a black-hearted bully. Now, in a blue cotton gown and sleeveless black

brocade jacket, he was standing before a shop in the village street, holding a cage with a grey thrush in it. His head on one side, his eyes like slits, he was listening to its song. When he heard what Chu Kung had done, he picked up the skirt of his gown in his left hand and swept like the wind to the dyke.

"Who dares interfere with the sale of the bell?" he called. "Let him pay the whole village's taxes!"

Chu watched as Feng drew near, swearing. He slapped his chest with both hands. "I dare!" he shouted.

Feng hung the bird-cage on a willow and swung round menacingly. "What bastard let you out of his mother's pants?"

At this jibe, Chu's nostrils flared and he charged, his arms like flails. He caught Feng's wrist. "Damn you, Feng! Say that again!" His eyes nearly burst from their sockets. He was panting with rage.

Word of this soon reached the forty-eight villages. Chu Kung and Feng Lan-chih meant to fight to the bitter end over the bell — till the white knife came out red! In groups and bands the peasants came trooping up. Those personally indifferent came along to watch the excitement, those with grievances of their own to give moral support. Soon the willow grove along the dyke was black with men and women.

"Let's see what the bastard does now!" muttered some.

"He can't go on shitting on poor folk's heads."

"If he goes too far, we'll have something to say."

Tiger's heart was thumping as he watched from the altar. He was afraid something terrible was going to happen, and this support for his father reassured him.

With a glance at the warm-hearted villagers gathered round, Chu tightened his grip on Feng's wrist. "Here, you! Come and have a look!" He dragged Feng to the bell and pointed out the inscription. "There it is, engraved clearly for all to see. 'In the reign of Chia Ching in the Ming dynasty, the forty-eight villages by the Huto River raised money to purchase forty-eight *mou* of land for the purpose of repairing the bridge and dyke. As a testimony, this bell

has been cast. . . .' You can't take it upon yourself to sell the old bell!" The words poured out faster and faster, till the spittle flew from his lips.

This speech touched Feng on the raw. He raised his eyebrows and shouted hoarsely: "Hold your tongue! This bell is the property of Soching Temple — no other village has any claim to it. Why side against your own village? If some busy-body had this inscription made, it was nothing but a trick!"

Chu stamped with rage and hurled away Feng's right hand, catching his left. "That's a wicked lie! Because your family's rich and powerful, you think you can take over public property! . . ." He swept his arm to indicate the country round.

"Does this fellow really mean to fight?" wondered Feng. Taking a deep breath, he coiled his queue up above his cap and tucked his gown into his belt.

"Babble or gabble as much as you like," he sneered. "I have the title-deeds here." From his pocket he produced some documents.

Chu's eyes flashed fire. He grabbed at the deeds. But Feng was too quick for him. He whipped back his arm and stuffed them into an inner pocket. Chu pounded his chest and roared: "So since you became dyke trustee, you swindler, you've embezzled forty-eight *mou* of temple property. Feng Lan-chih! The day has come for a reckoning between us. I'll settle scores with you or kill you!"

Crimson with fury, Feng seized Chu by the collar. "Chu Kung!" he thundered, glaring. "You're spattering me with mud — that's a pack of lies! If you've any guts, come here and fight it out!"

His face twitching with passion, Feng dragged Chu down the dyke towards the willow grove. The villagers followed after. The two men abused each other as they went. Feng's attempts at self-justification were torn to shreds by Chu, who bitingly listed the crimes of Feng's family till his enemy was scarlet. He dragged Chu back to the dyke, and the villagers flocked at their heels. Feng flung up an arm.

"Here!" he shouted to the smiths. "I take the responsibility! Smash that bell!"

Tiger watched, round-eyed, furious yet terrified, as like a fury Feng dragged his father along. Tears started to his eyes, but he clenched his fists at his side and stuck close to the combatants. The villagers who witnessed this injustice wrung their hands over the bell and trembled to think of the consequences for Chu Kung. The smiths were swinging their heavy hammers again when a man pushed out of the crowd, a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, strongly built. Brandishing a large axe, he strode forward and shouted:

"Don't touch that bell!"

It was Yen Hsiang.

Chu rushed home for his chopper, bellowing: "Don't let them smash it, Brother Yen!" Still shouting, he raced back.

The smiths took off their jackets and raised their hammers once more. Chu dashed up and spread-eagled himself before them.

"If you want to smash the bell, you must smash me first!"

The hammers were poised to crush Chu Kung's skull. Tiger flung himself forward, throwing his arms round his father.

"If you want to kill my dad, you must kill me first!"

The dumbfounded smiths dared not strike.

The villagers watched in horror, some crying softly.

"Heaven above!" exclaimed Chu Chuan-fu. "Blast my eyes rather than let me see such a sight!"

Yen's wife wailed: "Help! Murder!"

Tiger dug his fists into his eyes. Had his father slaved all these years, getting up by starlight, not downing tools till the moon rose, only to end like this?

Feng Lan-chih was adamant. The bell must be broken! He was foaming at the mouth and ranting. "Take it to court, then! Go on! This bell is the property of the whole village. It's being melted to pay the public tax. Take the case to Peking — to the imperial court — I'm not afraid!"

"What public tax?" countered Chu. "Half the land in Soching belongs to your family!" Determined to stick at

nothing, he stripped to the waist. He fastened his short queue on his head, then straightened up and straddled in front of Feng, brandishing the chopper. "This bell belongs to the forty-eight villages! Whoever lays a finger on it will taste my chopper!"

Yen Hsiang swung his axe and swore: "Mother's! Anyone who lays a finger on this bell is going to lose his head!"

Feng Lan-chih was at a loss. Chu and Yen were like raging tigers. The Feng family might be large and powerful, but not one of them dared move. He was reduced to sending for Yen Shang.

Yen Shang was a bold, ambitious man who was known as Big Heart Yen. He had led a force of boxers during the Boxer Rising at the turn of the century, burnt down a church and killed a foreign missionary. He enjoyed great local prestige.

Now this tall, stooped old man walked up Thousand Li Dyke, his pipe in his hand. When he saw Chu Kung and Yen Hsiang all set to fight, he tugged his long beard and laughed.

"What's up? Is this a circus? What show are you putting on to draw such a crowd in broad daylight?"

"I dare anyone to smash the old bell!" bellowed Chu.

"Touch this old bell and our ancestors will curse you!" cried Yen.

Big Heart laughed sarcastically. "When dog bites dog each gets a mouthful of fur!" He took Chu's left hand in his right, Yen's right hand in his left. "Two grown men like you, well over five foot — aren't you ashamed to be making fools of yourselves?" He threw Yen Hsiang a stern look, and Yen, who had worked for him, hung his head and was silent. Together they went to a tavern on the main street, where the old man called for wine.

All this time Tiger stuck to his father. His angry, fearful heart was still thumping wildly.

Big Heart Yen let loose a flood of eloquence. Using honeyed words, quoting ancient precedents, he urged them both to let the matter drop. Chu Kung, on his stool, had drunk two cups of wine when — Dong! — he heard a mighty

crash! He sat as if paralysed, staring at the cup in his trembling hand. The first crash was followed by others. The hammers seemed to be smashing in his skull. Wide-eyed, he shook his head and shuddered. "Listen! Aren't those the hammers? Have they smashed the bell?"

So this had been a trick to lure the tiger from the mountain! Chu Kung's lungs nearly burst with rage. Glaring at Big Heart, he spat out two mouthfuls of blood. Then he fell to the ground, his face the colour of wax.

With a great show of indignation, Big Heart banged the table and bellowed: "What the devil does Feng think he's doing! He's used me as a decoy, trying to bury the mourner in place of the dead!" He flapped his broad sleeves in disgust and stalked away.

Yen Hsiang was in a panic. He raised Chu in his arms and said: "Wake up, brother! Wake up! As long as the hill remains, we shan't lack firewood. The matter's not ended. This feud will last three generations — don't take it so hard!"

Tiger, through his tears, pounded his father's legs and pinched his neck, trying to bring him round.

Chu Kung's head had sunk, and a mere trickle of clammy breath was coming from his nostrils. He would be unconscious for some time. Yen had to carry him home.

This battle had raged all day. The villagers were still on the dyke when the sun sank in the west. By then they had seen the destruction of the bell. Each blow of the hammer had seemed a blow at their hearts. Not till dark did they go home.

That night the Huto River flowed quietly. Deathly silence reigned in the main street of Soching, which was utterly deserted. For hours not a soul passed by, not a sound was heard. Folk closed their gates tightly, lit the lamps and sat in a breathless hush, discussing in whispers this change and its probable outcome. In their eyes, Chu Kung was a hero. He had risked his life in a gallant attempt to save the old bell and strike a blow for justice. But now that he had failed and their hopes were dashed, they could only

droop and sigh. Would they ever dare hold up their heads again?

Chu Kung lay ill on the *kang* for half a month. . . .

A sick man on the *kang* means worry at home. Tiger's mother had died when he was a child, and he and his sister had their work cut out to nurse their father. There was nothing in the house: no food, no medicine. The patient grew thinner and weaker every day. Tiger's sister was just nineteen, in the springtime of life, as pretty as a flower. The glazed look in her father's eyes filled her with terror.

"Lass! After your mother died, your old dad tried to do his best for you. But now it's all up with me." He gazed at her intently. "You must bring your brother up, girl!" He stroked Tiger's head. "Son! These landowning bullies think because they've money and land they can grind the peasants down. They're brought up on a pile of silver while we are plucked fowls — like fire and water, we're natural enemies. They've trampled on us for years. My generation is finished. But remember this. You must avenge me. . . ." His eyes clouded over and he said no more.

Tiger and his sister threw themselves down and wept. Chu's heart seemed to turn right over at the sight. Once more he vomited blood. Falling back, he knocked his head against the *kang*. Too weak to fight for breath, he closed his eyes — and everything was over!

His daughter and son flung themselves on his body and burst into frenzied weeping.

That evening Yen Hsiang stood silent, with bowed shoulders, by their door. Presently, clasping his head, he dragged himself to the kitchen to sit by the stove, tears coursing in silence down his cheeks. . . . The orphans' sobs cut him to the quick, and he paced slowly to the room where the dead man lay. Squatting down by Chu Kung he cried out bitterly:

"Take me with you, brother! I was the one to blame. I should never have stopped you from going to the north-east. . . ."

One spring day, twenty-five years later, a train puffed towards Paoting from the northeast. As it rattled and swayed across a long bridge, its piercing whistle woke Chu Chung from a dream. He sprang to his feet, lost his balance and staggered back into his seat. The other passengers thought he was having a fit. Craning their heads, they asked: "What's wrong with that fellow?"

A woman in her mid thirties hurried over and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Wake up! What's the matter?" Glancing at Chu Chung's red face and the tears on his lashes, she passed him a coarse linen handkerchief gay with stripes. "Wipe your face! Go on! Just look at you!"

She was tall and dark, her feet had never been bound, and her thick black hair was glossy. Her voice was as clear as a bell, but she did not speak with the local accent. Chu Chung took off his cap of curly goat wool, turned up the sleeves of his old goat-skin jacket and opened it to expose his chest, for his shirt inside was unbuttoned. Then he mopped his face with the handkerchief.

"What a dream I had!" He shook his head. "No, it wasn't a dream."

The woman reached over and pulled his jacket together. "What a man! Do you want to catch cold?"

He sank back, closing his eyes, but presently opened them to go to the window. Leaning out he watched the brown plain with its houses and trees, fields and rivers, as they rapidly receded behind the train. The willows by the track were green, and the sun shining through their branches into the carriage cast pale green shadows over the passengers. He gripped the window with both hands. "How time flies!" he murmured. "How the time has flown! Here are twenty years gone in the wink of an eye! And I'm only now going home — over forty!" Why, his father had been about this age when he died — exactly the same age for all he knew.

A dark, sturdy young fellow of eighteen or nineteen came up. "Are we home already? Isn't it another day's journey?"

At the mention of the home he had never seen, a seven or eight-year-old boy squeezed in between them. "Where is it?" He tapped the window. "Are we nearly there?"

The stocky youth was Ta-kuei, the boy Erh-kuei and the woman in her thirties their mother. The youngsters were excited by any talk of their father's native district, and Chu Chung told them with feeling: "When you're far from home and see a man from Hopei, it's like meeting a fellow-villager. Paoting seems like home already. I feel all aglow."

Their hearts beat faster, as if they were really there. And as though in a dream Chu recalled that he had been a few years younger than Ta-kuei, a few years older than Erh-kuei, when he left home. . . . He stretched and yawned, then lowered his head and closed his eyes again to recapture his dream. His sturdy, tenacious father, Chu Kung, would live for ever in his heart — that image could never fade. And then there was his sister, from whom he had heard nothing for twenty-five years. . . . The past came back to him.

After their father died, he and his elder sister had to fend for themselves. As before, he went out every day to work, and on his return they ate the meal she had ready. Because they were young, life was hard. One evening they had bolted the gate and gone to bed, when two men climbed over their wall. His sister shook him awake. "Tiger! Tiger! Someone just jumped over the wall!"

Still half asleep, he stumbled to the window to look. In the moonlight he could make out two shadowy figures in the courtyard. They were both in white masks so that only their eyes could be seen. They hammered on the window and shouted: "Open the door!"

His sister nearly fainted away for fear. "Don't be afraid, sis!" he whispered. But that pounding had made his own heart miss a beat.

The sinister-looking scoundrels called through the window: "Hurry up and open the door or we'll break it in!"

He tiptoed to the hall, snatched up a rake and took his stand by the range facing the door. His sister, behind him, was doubled up with fright. Crash! Bang! The two

roughs hammered on the door. In a minute it gave and they hurtled into the room. He thrust with the rake, but missed them. They wrenched the rake from his hands and twisted his arm. Throwing him to the ground, they trussed him up and stuffed a wad of cotton in his mouth. His sister screamed and tried to run away, but they seized her and dragged her into the inner room. . . .

His sister's cries drove Tiger frantic, but what could a weak lad do?

When the roughs had gone, his sister limped up to him, her face a fearful white. With fingers that trembled she untied his ropes. "Go, Tiger, go! Run for your life! Dad's dead, but the bullies won't leave us in peace!"

He blinked and asked: "Where can I go on my own?"

Weeping, she put together some old clothes and wrapped them in a tattered quilt. "Go to Uncle Yen Hsiang. Ask him to see you off. Go on! Green shoots spring from brown soil the whole world over — must you stay here and die?"

"What about you?"

"Me?" She fell silent for a time, then gazed intently at Tiger in the dark. "Brother, oh, brother! Never mind about me!" she sobbed. "I could never hold my head up again. But you must leave. Go on!"

Through the sinister silence which hung over them like a pall, sister and brother slipped out of their little yard. They turned west, skirted the pond behind the house and crossed the willow plantation to River God Temple. There Tiger stopped. He could see his father again. His sister wrung his hand. "Don't dawdle! Go!" Then he slithered down Thousand Li Dyke. A dog barked when he left the village, and far off he heard the swirl of the Huto River on the other side of the dyke. East of Lesser Yen Village he reached Uncle Yen Hsiang's house.

Yen Hsiang was shocked to hear that young Tiger was going out into the world alone. For a long time he said nothing. His wife silently wiped her eyes, her heart bleeding for their old friend's children. How could they let Tiger go! Presently a cock crowed. It would soon be

light. Yen Hsiang tightened his belt and shouldered the red-tasselled spear he had taken down from the roof. He told his son Chih-ho to carry Tiger's bundle, and they set off through the pear orchard. When they reached the end of the orchard, Mrs. Yen called Tiger back and patted his shoulder. "Tiger! Tiger! Wherever you go, be sure to write! You know what the proverb says: 'When the son is a thousand *li* away, his mother's heart must grieve all day.' Your mother is dead, but you've still me and your sister. We shall be thinking of you, lad!" Her tears fell again.

As they walked on, Chih-ho said: "Let me know, Tiger, when you find somewhere to settle. I'll come and join you."

Tiger stared back at Chih-ho as he walked on. "No, brother! In a few years I'll come home!" He looked at tall Uncle Yen behind with the spear over his shoulder.

After about ten *li* they said goodbye.

Tiger made his way quietly from Soching to Paoting. There was already a railway in those days, but he had no money for a ticket. He walked from village to village along the line, till he begged his way to Peking. There he saw mandarins with long queues in feathered, tasselled caps, borne along by eight bearers in their big sedan-chairs. And there he worked at odd jobs for half a year before going on to Tientsin to learn carpet-making. But as he wove day after day at his frame, his father's face kept rising before his eyes. His father's death haunted him. "Where is it going to get me," he wondered, "weaving weft after weft, year in year out?" Once more he shouldered his bedding-roll and trudged off — all the way to the northeast.

He roamed, alone, the whole northeastern steppes, dug ginseng on Changpai Mountain, fished in the Heiho River, washed gold dust at Hailanpao. After years of bitter privation he saved up enough to marry, and soon his wife had a son and they were a proper little family. But each time he thought of his home, his heart jiggled like a pulley that would not be still. "Let's go back!" he urged. "Let's go home! Even if he chops me in three with a chaff-cutter, I've a debt of blood I must go back to settle!"

Swaying as the train rocked and jolted, with half-closed eyes he thought back over the past. He heaved a long sigh and tears trickled down his cheeks. He was shaken by bitter sobs. Everyone in the coach stopped talking to stare or snigger. "What's wrong with that fellow?"

The train slowed down before it reached the station, and the passengers started to gather together their things. Chu Chung's wife stood up, stretched herself and lifted some of their bundles from the rack. "There's no hurry," he said. "If you hurry you may drop something."

She stopped and passed him the handkerchief again. "Take this. What a sight you are!"

Chu took it, saying: "It's warmer here than in North Manchuria — you feel the difference at once."

The moment the train reached the station there was a great noise and bustle. On the fences made of old wooden sleepers perched vendors selling cooked chicken, bean sauce and pickles, all loudly crying their wares.

When Chu and his family got off the train, the crowd was too thick for them to leave at once. So Chu stood on the platform and looked around. When he left home this station was newly built, and saplings had just been planted on either side of the track. Now they were tall trees which gave an ample shade

3

When the other passengers had gone and the platform was nearly deserted, Chu Chung shepherded his family past the barrier. By the booking-office in the waiting room they saw a man with his back to them, a bricklayer's trowel under one arm, in the other a small bedding-roll done up in sacking. This tall, upright, long-headed fellow struck Chu as strangely familiar. With a start of surprise he laid a hand on his heart. "Surely I know that face!" He stopped for a better look. The man's sturdy bearing — even the way he was smoking — reminded one of a boxer, no doubt about it! But that beard was out of place.

Chu smiled as he strode over, deliberately bumping the other's knee with his bedding. The tall man staggered and turned slowly round. "Why don't you watch where you're going?"

Chu had passed him but now came back to stare intently. That voice, those features — he couldn't be mistaken. "It is — it must be Chih-ho!"

A policeman who had been observing them from a distance started forward. Before he could reach them, however, Chu dropped his bedding and in two paces seized the other's hands. "Brother! What are you doing here?"

The tall man shook Chu off and drew away, contracting his bushy brows and hunching his shoulders. Then he raised his lashes to scrutinize in turn Chu Chung, the two boys and their mother. Gruffly, separating each word from the next, he said: "Aren't you mistaking me for someone else?"

Again Chu caught his hand, with a bellow of laughter. "I'm not! I'm not mistaken!"

The other stared hard at him for several minutes. Unable to recognize Chu, he studied Ta-kuei and Erh-kuei till he recalled the Tiger of his young days. With a cry he looked up, raising his hands to calculate on his fingers. Then he nodded and muttered: "It's more than twenty years! More than twenty years since we parted!" He threw his long arms round Chu Chung. His trowel, forgotten, clattered on the cement, startling everyone near by.

This was Yen Hsiang's son, Yen Chih-ho. As a boy he and Chu had learned boxing together from the men and collected firewood together. Later on, they had snared birds and done odd jobs together. When Chu Chung left to roam the wide, wide world, Chih-ho had seen him off, carrying his luggage for ten *li*. And here they had met again twenty-five years later! As they stood side by side, Yen a head taller than Chu, into his mind flashed a picture of his father, red-tasselled spear over one shoulder as he escorted Tiger out of Soching.

Yen Chih-ho held Chu Chung close. "Tiger, you're back!" Two big tears welled from the corners of his eyes and fell on his old friend's cheek.

Chu took Yen's face in his hands and turned it this way and that, patting Yen's long head. "I was homesick, brother! Homesick for all of you!"

The policeman was still prowling, swinging his baton, suspicious of these two men's strange behaviour. Now he hurried over with raised baton to break up the crowd which had gathered. Yen had taken Chu's hand and was saying: "More than twenty years you've been gone, brother! And all that time never a word from you!"

"How could I bring myself to write?" asked Chu. "Just the thought of home was a wrench." He drew Yen forward. "Here! Meet your sister-in-law. And these two are your nephews." Stroking his beard, he smiled.

Yen grinned from ear to ear. "Well, well! You left home a beardless boy. Now you're back with a wife and two great lads of your own!"

Aware at last that they were old friends who had no intention of fighting, the policeman growled disgustedly: "What the devil! All this to-do about nothing!"

Chu turned to look him in the eye. Then he said to Yen: "I still don't know what you're doing here."

Yen flushed. "I was going north," he muttered sheepishly. "I was going to leave this cursed place."

"What! Leave? You?" Chu was staggered. During his twenty odd years in the north, each thought of Soching, the old neighbours, the poplars on Thousand *Li* Dyke or the water of the Huto River had filled him with longing. Because he missed home so badly, he had made his way back all these thousands of *li*. Yet Chih-ho was talking of leaving. "But why?" he asked.

Yen's lips twitched and he hung his head. "I want to find my old man."

"What?" Chu Chung blinked. "Has uncle gone north too?"

"It's a long story. Let's find you lodgings first."

Yen stooped to pick up his trowel, hoisted his bedding-roll over one shoulder and started into the city. Chu and

his family followed, their baggage on their backs and bundles in their hands.

The streets were crowded with passers-by, carts and horses. The place had changed out of all recognition: it now had a few large, Western-style buildings as well as shops with glass fronts. Soon they came to Good Fortune Inn, where the inn-keeper produced a bunch of keys and opened a small room. "Did you miss your train?" he asked Yen.

"I met an old friend—a new customer for you." Yen pointed to Chu. "He's the son of Chu Kung of Soching. We're friends from way back." He dropped his bedding with a thud on the *kang*. "What a weight!"

When the lanky inn-keeper heard this, he wiped his hands and stepped forward to look Chu over keenly. "Chu Kung's name is well known in these parts," he said with a smile. "He used to put up here each time he came to town. I'm not trying to make up to you, but our old men were very close—Uncle Chu Kung and my father were lifelong friends!" He wrung Chu's hands. "The son of a hero must be a stout fellow too. You're the living image of him!"

After Chu Kung's death his fame had spread. His story, still told, would never be forgotten. One ballad-singer had made his name by composing a drum ballad called *Chu Kung Plays Havoc Among the Willows*. When operas were staged, at temple fairs, weddings or funerals, a cart with bells was often sent to fetch him. So that the children should not forget Chu Kung, white-bearded old men carried them off in summer to the shade of some great tree or sat with them in winter on the warm *kang*, cracking melon seeds and telling the story as if it were an adventure from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Their small hearers were invariably moved to tears. Hence Chu Kung's name was known to young and old. And Chu Chung, both in appearance and character, could hardly fail to remind them of his father.

When the inn-keeper had spoken, Chu smiled and bowed. "I was just a kid at the time. I had forgotten..."

"You must look on this as your home," said the inn-keeper. "Are you newly back from the northeast? Did you bring much silver?"

"None at all. I've come home exactly as I left — with the seat almost out of my pants."

"Those who've been north usually come back with silver. Without it, how can they show their faces again?"

"A true word!" agreed Chu. "But most of them don't save money. Instead they leave their bones in the northeast!"

As he swept the floor the inn-keeper asked: "Well, is there fighting now up there?"

Chu had fetched a whisk from the office and was flicking the dust from his clothes. "Not at the moment. . . ." He sighed. "Since the Republic was founded, there's been fighting pretty well non-stop. This is a splendid time for the military. Today you fight me, tomorrow I fight you; but neither of us gets killed. It's the people who suffer." He wrinkled his nose as if he still smelt the acrid smoke of the warlords' guns.

"Each is out for all he can get," said the inn-keeper. "Soon as a new army arrives it starts conscripting men, and we have to pay to get off. They make us plant poppies too, but impose a six-dollar fine on all who grow opium. Did you ever know anything like it? Talk about stopping your ears while you ring a bell!"

Yen jerked his head and growled: "They make you grow it whether you like it or not. Then they make you pay the fine. What is the world coming to? They'll soon have squeezed the last drop of blood out of us." He puffed morosely at his pipe.

The inn-keeper gave his old friend a warm reception. He brought in a small table for the *kang*, brewed a pot of the best tea and produced a package of Kingfisher cigarettes. He insisted that they should eat on the house that day. "Whenever you come into town you must stay here," he said. "I've nothing left but these few ramshackle rooms." Then off he hurried again to see to their meal.

When Chu's wife had tidied up, she decided to go out to have a look round. She took the two boys with her.

Chu poured out two bowls of tea and squatted on the edge of the *kang*. "Tell me, brother!" he urged Yen Chih-ho. "Why are you going off to the northeast on your own?"

Yen sipped his tea and stared at the floor. After some time he looked up and gulped. But he shook his head and would not say a word.

Chu saw there was something serious on his mind. He sat down beside him, clapping a hand on his shoulder. "Go ahead and tell me!"

But Yen shook his lowered head and would not speak.

This was too much for Chu, who remembered how tongue-tied Yen had been as a boy. The more you asked, the less he told. If you pressed him, he started stammering. "So you're still as close-lipped as ever! This is as hard as getting blood out of a stone!"

After some moments' silence Yen said slowly: "Let's not talk about it. They want to hound us to death."

"Has there been fresh trouble in the village?" Chu frowned.

"I should say there has!" After this deliberate answer Yen shook his head several times. "It's a long story," he went on. "Three years ago there were two battles here, and twice this district was overrun by troops. Feng Lanchih and Feng Hung got up a militia in Soching. They made it fight the beaten side and grabbed the army carts and flour as loot. What they didn't foresee was that the same army would send a regiment from Paoting against them with big guns to blow Soching to blazes. Feng Lanchih was in such a state that he went to Shenhsien to get the bandit chief, Black Whirlwind, to make peace for him. And what do you think Black Whirlwind did? Demanded five thousand dollars to call the troops off. And who do you think had to raise five thousand dollars? The poor! I tell you, there was panic in the fields. . . ."

Yen was a man who never went straight to the point but beat about the bush. Chu's heart was on fire as he listened. He threw back his head and sighed, fighting down his anger. Presently he asked: "Didn't the rich folk pay?"

"You ask that, brother! Tell me — when did the rich ever pay a public levy? It's the poor who shoulder the whole load every time!"

Chu felt a ball of fire whirl round in his heart. Red with fury, he clenched his fists and pounded his chest. Tearing open his jacket, he slammed his bowl down on the table and slapped the top of his head. He paced up and down with his hands behind his back before halting by the window, his lips in a grim line. Then he sat cross-legged on the *kang* and growled: "So that devil Feng Lan-chih is as big a bully as ever!"

Yen threw out both arms and shouted: "Worse — much worse!"

Shaking with rage, Chu banged the table with his knee. The teapot and bowls jumped and rattled. The tea slopped over. That brought Chu to his senses. He shot out an arm to stop the pot from falling, and thrust out his tongue in dismay. "I'm a clumsy fool!" With a rueful smile he fetched a duster to wipe the table.

Yen did not realize that Chu was seething with rage. In fact he was thinking: "Travelling north and south has damped his fire!"

Chu lit a pipe and smoked with closed eyes. Suddenly he burst out: "Fine! So he's much worse now! But our day will come. He laughs best who laughs last!" The room rang as he shouted. The mention of Feng Lan-chih had brought his old enemy before his eyes and lashed him into a fury. Yen straightened up, thinking: "Still waters run deep. His temper is hotter than ever!"

"Didn't you sue him?" asked Chu.

"We certainly did! He was sued by Chu Ming of Soching and twenty-eight other poor men, myself included. First we took the case to the county court, and lost it in the county. Then we took it to Paoting Law Court, and lost it in Paoting. Finally we took it to Peking — and lost it in Peking!"

Chu gulped down a mouthful of tea and smacked his lips. "Good work!" he boomed. "Chu Ming is a fellow after my own heart."

"He had wit enough to take us to the county town and Paoting, and to fight the case for three years — but we lost in the end."

"Lost completely?"

"So completely that we still haven't crawled to our feet. Of course, Chu Ming lost most. My share was an ox. We lost so badly we just can't go on!"

"But what had Soching's troubles to do with you?"

"I met Chu Ming one day on my way back from market, and dropped in for a chat. When I heard him carrying on about this lawsuit, I felt for him and said: 'Count me in!' That one sentence cost me an ox! Now we're finished, I must go. We can't hold up our heads here any more."

Chu saw that Yen Chih-ho had a sense of justice. That was the friend for him.

"Seems you shouldn't have gone to court!" Frowning thoughtfully he rose to pace up and down. Then he tossed back his head. "Don't go!"

"Don't go?"

Chu drew himself up and shook his head. "No!"

Yen looked down for a time. "How can I stay? I'm ready to burst with rage. I take these things hard. . . . But we can't afford to offend those landlord devils."

Chu flushed and slapped his chest, then raised one hand above his head. "If the sky falls, I'll prop it up," he declared. "My whole life I've been poor, but I've been straight. If need be, to help a friend I'll stick a knife between my ribs! To me, your head's as precious as my own. There — I can't say fairer than that."

Yen's eyelids fluttered as he looked at Chu, silent for the time it takes to smoke a pipe. The fellow had guts, all right, and might pull it off. Well, on second thoughts he wouldn't leave. He nodded. "As you say, brother. Shall we go back?"

Seeing that Yen was persuaded, Chu Chung urged him: "Go back and have it out with him!"

Yen looked up slowly: "But can we get the better of him, brother?" He shook his head several times.

Chu walked over and slapped him on the back.

"Take a long view," he urged softly. "The old proverb is right: 'Ten years is not too long to take revenge.'"

Yen Chih-ho bent down to stare fixedly at the ground. He was thinking of how his father had left the village.

Yen Hsiang and Chu Kung were born in the same year, with just three months between them. A few years after Chu Kung played havoc among the willows there were two bad floods — not a grain was harvested. And that autumn it rained almost without intermission. One day soon after it had cleared, when the sun was shining, Yen Hsiang squatted silently on Thousand *Li* Dyke to watch the Huto River swirling past. The frogs beside the dyke croaked raucously. The future looked very black. Suddenly he smelt strong tobacco over his shoulder. When he turned, Feng Lan-chih was standing there smoking, his great blood-flecked eyes boring straight into Yen's skull. A shudder ran through the peasant. He stood up and made fearfully off. Feng might catch him off his guard and push him into the river.

Yen Hsiang went home and squatted on the roller at his gate. Alone there, he smoked one pipe after another. He feared the gleam he had seen in the landlord's eyes. For hours he could not forget that vicious look.

Chu Kung's death had robbed him of a staunch friend and ally. One strand of silk is not a thread, one tree is not a wood. And now Feng meant mischief. Yen decided to leave Soching, where the very air was charged with hate. He would go northeast or northwest. . . .

As he stood up crows were cawing on the tall poplars. Alone, carrying his pipe, he paced up and down the dyke. When he was younger, they had lived in the lower bend of Huto River. Year after year of flood or famine had forced them to sell their last room, their last *mou* of land. When everything was gone he had pushed his cart up the river to Greater Yen Village, bringing his wife, his son and their worldly goods — a tattered quilt and cracked pan. He had asked Big Heart Yen for a job. Big Heart saw he was a good worker and kept him on. He tended pear trees and

tilled the land, and when Chih-ho was older he worked for Big Heart too. In the winter the landlord gave them some ragged clothes. In spring when one crop was eaten and the next still green, he gave them a mess of husks and vegetables and a measure or so of grain. The whole family slaved, putting up with every hardship, till they had enough to build a three-roomed cottage. Then they got two *mou* of land south of the village and at long last had some family life again. Now, old as he was, he must leave his beloved home and chance it in the far northeast. His heart smarted as if plunged into scalding water. Heaven, it was hard! Hard to leave your home, be it ever so humble. Hard to leave the place where you were born.

High on the dyke he looked down at his cottage nestling below, lower even than the river. If the dyke were to break they would be flooded out. He had saved for twenty years for that two *mou*, which might so easily disappear under water. . . . Tear filled his eyes and welled over to fall on his jacket. . . .

His old friend's death had left him very lonely. Soon autumn would have passed. The fields were water-logged, the streets were empty. All round were gloom and desolation. . . . His heart seemed to be drifting high in the sky. Yes, he must leave his wife and son, leave the homestead he had built by the sweat of his brow.

He stood there completely alone. When the sun was high he went home and asked for a pair of cloth socks. He washed his feet in the pool in front of the gate and put on the socks, then called his son, Chih-ho, and his grandson, Yun-tao. "Son!" he said. "Twenty years I worked as a hired hand. Twenty years I shed blood and sweat to build this mud cottage and get these two *mou* of land to give you a start in life." Tears ran down his cheeks. "Your Uncle Chu Kung is dead, and now that devil has got his knife into me. Unless I leave, I shall come to a bloody end. I'm going to try my luck in the northeast — I can eat bitterness there."

Tears coursed down Yen Chih-ho's face. His father was like a yellow leaf in the autumn, yet he meant to go north-

east to face untold new hardships. "Don't go, dad!" he urged. "You've had a hard life of it. Here you've a roof over your head, you've a son and grandson — things could be a great deal worse."

"Are you out of your mind?" cried Yen's wife. "Things have been bad this year, but there's always next year. If grain won't grow, we'll try pears. If pears won't grow, we can learn to fish. . . . Are you out of your mind?" She burst into angry weeping.

Yun-tao was less than ten. When he heard that granddad was leaving them, he threw his arms round the old man's knees and would not let go.

Since Chih-ho could not change his father's mind, he fetched the Donkey Man. The Donkey Man stamped his feet. "You're not going north, uncle? You can't! I wouldn't leave home, not if they ordered me! My great-grandfather was born here, my granddad was born here, my old man was born here. They're all of them buried here. If anyone told me to go, I wouldn't listen. Not if you beat me to death!" He gestured wildly as he talked.

Just then the Carter came up with a crate on his back, and heard that Yen Hsiang was leaving. "Heavens, man! Where do you think you are going?" he asked. "Do you imagine the streets up there are paved with gold or silver? Even if they are, the gold and silver there aren't as good as a poor home of your own. Don't go, uncle! Think of your family! How can you leave them?"

The Donkey Man had not the gift of words. All he could do was stamp and say: "Don't go! Don't go!"

Soon quite a crowd had gathered. Each put forward some fresh argument, but they could not shake Yen's resolve. To him these were all beardless youngsters with little experience of life. He need not take what they said too seriously.

That evening Chu Chuan-fu bought four ounces of wine and invited Yen to his home. He got his wife to cook them a couple of eggs, and they sat on the *kang* to drink. But no matter what was said, Yen would not change his mind.

The next day Yen Hsiang's wife borrowed half a catty of flour from a neighbour, and cooked him a good meal to make him relent and stay.

But nothing they could say was any use. He was quite determined to go.

After finishing his meal, he made his wife pack up his bedding and clothes. "All right, I'm off!" he told his family. "Till these two *mou* for food and clothes, but whatever happens don't sell them. When I come back, if I've done well so much the better. If not, this will still be a means of livelihood. Think what happened when we sold our land down river — we've never been able to go back to our old home. Land is the root of life for poor folk like us. Without it, we're lost!"

Because of the old man's parting words, right up to the present, no matter how hard they were pressed, Yen Chih-ho had never sold those two *mou* of land. This was their "treasure trove." Each year it gave them not a little grain.

When Yen Hsiang had delivered these instructions, though his wife was weeping as if her heart would break, he shouldered his bedding-roll and started off. Two tears ran down Chih-ho's cheeks as he begged: "Dad, don't go!" He pointed at Yun-tao and his wife. "Have pity on 'us and the boy!" The old man shook his head. "I'd only get the lot of you into trouble. I'm going northeast." They saw him up Thousand *Li* Dyke, and Chih-ho carried his bedding to the River God Temple south of Soching, where Yen boarded a boat to go to Tientsin. After the continuous rain, the river was in full spate. Chih-ho stood on the dark boulder in front of the temple as the small boat bobbed up and down, dwindling in the distance. That was over ten years ago, and nothing had been heard of his father since. The thought of the hard life his old man had led was more than he could bear. He had suddenly found himself saying: "I must go northeast to fetch him back. If he's dead, at least I can bring home his bones." He told this haltingly to Chu, then bent his head and wept.

"Brother!" said Chu. "I'll speak frankly. The three provinces of the northeast are mighty big — do you know

which one he is in? And even if you know which province he's in, do you know which county, which village?"

Yen Chih-ho looked up with a start. "Is that true? But that means, my old man. . . ." He stared at the rafters and fell silent again. The room became so still that each could hear the other's heart beat.

Chu, too, started recalling the kindly old man, but when he saw Yen lost in thought he tapped his shoulder. "You've never been far from home, brother. With things as they are now, I'm afraid if you went out alone you'd just leave your bones in the northeast." Presently he went on: "One year a native of these parts, back from East Manchuria, told me that a man named Yen from Soching had settled there. I'll write and ask. If it's uncle, you can go. If it isn't, you'd better not. Ah, I'd no idea the old man had gone north too. If I'd known, you may be sure I'd have looked for him. It's too late now!"

Yen nodded. "That is a good plan of yours, brother."

"If you go out with no notion where he is, you'll probably never find your own way home!" Smoking his pipe, he paced the room. Suddenly he asked: "What about my elder sister?"

"I can't tell you that yet."

"Why not?"

"No!" Yen shook his head.

The gloomy tension in the room increased. They looked at each other and looked away again, neither knowing what to say.

What Yen had told him filled Chu with misgiving. He thought of the mountains of the north, and their dense forests locked in snow and ice. He had passed the icy winter in one of those primeval forests, with a fire as his only companion. Now he had come home from the vast, wild open spaces, and his blood boiled at the thought of Feng Lan-chih waiting for him in Soching and of their long-standing feud. "I went north. I came south again," he thought. "I've roamed the land, but I can't keep out of their way." He had no regrets, however. His heart had been set on returning to the home of his fathers. "I'll go

back and keep my eyes skinned," he decided. "Yes, I must watch out. I'm willing to wait. I'll look on while things go well for him; I'll look on when they go badly. If I can't see that day, my sons will see it. If my sons can't see it, then my grandsons will. The Fengs' day of doom will come — he laughs best who laughs last!"

4

As soon as it was light the next day, Yen Chih-ho went to the South Gate and hired a mule cart. The bedding and bundles were loaded on the cart, and Mrs. Chu and the two boys sat on top of them. Yen perched on the right-hand shaft, Chu on the left. Cracking his whip, the carter shouted at the mule and they rumbled off.

They crossed South Bridge, rolled through the South Gate, and creaked towards the open country. It was March, the willows were in leaf, and the wheat was well up already. After winter the soil was soft and friable, and men were ploughing the fields with oxen or donkeys. They passed group after group already sowing. Yen's heart grew lighter as he looked at the plain, the river flowing through it, the moist, shady banks on either side, the dark-stemmed reeds with their soft green leaves. "I was right to come home!"

Back on his native soil, Chu felt like a child who has snuggled up to its mother — filled with an indescribable sense of content. "Up in the northeast the seasons are late," he remarked. "They don't sow till some time after this."

"We sow earlier now than we used to," Yen rejoined. "I remember when I was a boy we didn't sow cotton till the wheat had sprouted. We didn't sow *kaoliang* or millet till after the spring rain. But now folk like to sow early: they start the *kaoliang* and millet much sooner. Attend to your children and your crops, says the proverb. You're lucky to have these two big boys: they'll be a help on the land. If a fellow waits till he's middle-aged to have children, by the time he's old they're still not fully-fledged!"

Yen's quiet, deliberate manner of speech reminded Mrs. Chu of a flowing stream, and she was hard put to it not to laugh. "Why, you're quite an orator!" she told him. Then her face clouded over. She had consented to come back with her husband, thinking that they would have a home of their own, but now it seemed they owned not one inch of land! "Can we put up with you, Chih-ho?" she asked.

"Of course! You'll stay in my house. We haven't too much grain this year, but we'll make do. Yun-tao, Chiang-tao and I will help you build a house. I don't suppose you've come back empty-handed, and I'll pay you the interest on that *mou* of your land I've been planting. By thinking up ways and means and borrowing a little here and there, you'll be able to get three or four *mou* of land and make a living."

"A man lives by the work of his hands," replied Chu. "Here I've travelled all over the country, and earned my food with these two hands."

"No doubt about it," said Yen. "With our own hands we'll build you a house and till the land."

"Men tramp the country just to fill their bellies" — Mrs. Chu sighed.

In the spring sunshine the cart creaked slowly along the dusty highway into a breeze from the south. Yen felt almost as drowsy as if he were drunk, and cast his mind back to his own departure from home.

After their defeat, Chu Ming had found his way to Yen's house with a stick — he was having bad trouble with his eyes. "We've lost completely, brother!" He wiped his streaming eyes on a shabby sleeve. "We can't fight our case any longer. I've sold every inch of land. You're a friend — help me out!"

Impressed by Chu Ming's indignation, Yen Chih-ho had nodded and said: "Don't you worry, brother! If I lost each room I have, and each ridge of land, I still wouldn't be sorry we tried!"

Chu Ming groped his way to the gate, and Yen watched him till he disappeared from sight. Then without a word he led the ox out from their stall. "Going to the fields?"

asked his wife. But she did not hear his muttered reply: "I'm not ploughing any more." He sold his ox in the market, and gave all but a few dollars to Chu Ming. After that he hadn't the courage to go home. What could he say when his wife asked: "Where is the ox?" He sat for hours on the outskirts of the village and shed tears at the thought of his father, alone in the northeast in his old age.

That night, when the rest of the household was asleep, he came to a decision. Taking his trowel and his bedding, he left home.

Now, after roaming about for several days, he hardly had the face to go back.

Late the next afternoon, when the sun was sloping towards the west, the cart approached Soching. In the distance Chu caught sight of Thousand *Li* Dyke. The leaves of the poplars were gleaming white in the sunlight. The weather was balmy, and the scent of peach blossom and plum blossom hung on the evening air. Some of the pear branches were in tiny leaf, covered with the softest down. Black midgets swarmed between the boughs.

Chu dusted off his clothes and jumped down from the cart. He gazed about him and smiled. "Home at last!" His whole body tingled.

Yen jumped down too. "At last we're really home!" His spirits rose at the sight of his fields. He walked into the orchard and knelt to scoop a hole in one of the ridges. Probing gently with his fingers in the damp brown earth, he drew out a seed which he held up and surveyed with narrowed eyes.

Chu walked over and bent down. "Has it sprouted yet?"

"Just about. We sowed this only a few days ago." He put the seed carefully back, the right way up, sprinkled it with damp earth, then covered it with mud and dry soil.

After his father went north, Yen Chih-ho had stopped working for Big Heart Yen and set up on his own.

In their mud cottage his wife had given birth to Chiang-tao, and when Yen heard he had another son he couldn't wipe the grin off his face. "The last few generations there's been only one son," he boasted. "But now I've changed

all that!" As a matter of fact, his real change was to learn a trade. He did this in spring and winter, the two slack seasons. First he took up carpentry, but found himself an awkward hand at that. Then he tried a blacksmith's job, but failed again. Last of all he learned a mason's trade, which suited him down to the ground. After that he was half peasant, half artisan. "A craftsman makes as much as three unskilled workers." His family stopped living on husks and herbs, and he was able to get three *mou* of sandy hillside by the village, where they had planted pear trees.

When the mule reached Nine Dragon Mouth, two seated figures could be seen on a kiln. The smaller jumped down and ran over to them, shouting: "Please! Have you seen a tall man with a beard and moustache?"

It was Chiang-tao. His father took cover at once behind Chu Chung, patting his friend on the shoulder as he whispered: "Look, that's my second — Chiang-tao."

Chu grinned. "What's your father like, young fellow?"

Chiang-tao walked over and said earnestly, "He's tall, with a beard, a moustache and a high forehead. If you don't speak to him, he may not say a word from morning till night. If you don't call him to a meal, he'll work right through the day. If my mother didn't make him change his clothes, he'd wear the same ragged shirt the whole year round. If you know where he is, please tell me! If you don't know, please keep your eyes open. He's driving my mother out of her mind by running off like this."

"Hear that?" said Chu to Yen. "Your lad's properly worried!" He turned back to Chiang-tao. "This man you want — has he bushy eyebrows and big eyes?"

"That's right! Then you know where he is?"

"I know only one like that."

"One's enough — how many do you think I want?"

Yen suddenly thrust his head over Chu Chung's shoulder, opening his bearded mouth to bellow with laughter. Chiang-tao jumped up to his father and threw his arms round his neck. "So you're back! Mother's in such a state!" As he buried his smiling face in his father's chest two big tears rolled down his cheeks.

Yen hugged the boy. "Of course I'm back. What else did you expect?"

Yun-tao came up now, having seen Chiang-tao on the cart. He ran over with a racing heart, and at the sight of his father his face lit up. "You're back, dad!" With strangers there he said no more.

"This is Uncle Tiger," said Yen. "This is your aunt, and these are Ta-kuei and Erh-kuei. You'll have company in future when you collect fuel and manure."

"Uncle Tiger!" Yun-tao stared round-eyed. "We've heard so much about you!"

Chu walked up to the young man and tilted his head to look him over carefully. He slapped him on the back, felt his broad shoulders and said: "Two strapping lads! How tall they are already!"

After Yen Chih-ho's disappearance, his wife sent their sons round to all the friends and neighbours; but no one had seen any sign of him. The brothers did not come home till the sun was setting. As they stepped through the gate, their old grandmother sitting on the doorstep was complaining: "The heartless creature, running off like that! Another one gone!"

Yen's wife, cooking by the kitchen door, knew her mother-in-law was pining for her son. She looked up through her tears. "Don't worry, mother! Your son has a heart. How can he forget us?"

Grandmother rapped the ground with her stick. "As a lad he was tender-hearted. But men change as they grow older. Ah! This will be the death of me."

These slurs on Yen Chih-ho unnerved his wife. Trying to take a grip on herself she said: "It's fated, mother. So long as he lives, he'll come back to us one day. Don't take it too much to heart. Worry isn't good for you. Now time's getting on, we must see to the pears, and I shan't have time to nurse you if you're ill."

From where he was sitting on the steps, Yun-tao heard what the women were saying. He believed something more lay behind his father's going. Crossing his arms on his

chest, he threw back his head to gaze at the cold blue sky. "Those devils — do they mean to wipe us all out?" Chiang-tao, beside him, neither wept nor spoke. His great eyes were fixed on a large, bright star which was rising slowly from the far horizon. Young as he was, the boy already knew the burden of care and grief handed down from their forbears.

Unable to stand the silence in the little courtyard, their grandmother stood up, leaning on her stick, and sighed. Taking a handful of grain from a crock by the door, she called the hens, and when they had pecked up the last grain she hobbled out of the yard.

She went to the well-head in front of the gate and with her stick rapped the two poplars. Her old man had planted these trees years ago. Each morning and evening without fail he would water them, rub his hand up their trunks and see how they were growing. When the poplars reached the top of the windows and had large shimmering leaves, they had brought a wife for Chih-ho to the cottage, someone to help her with the housework and cooking. When the poplars were up to the eaves, giving a shade and rustling in the wind, Yun-tao was born. How happy she had been to have a grandson! With her own hands she had tied a strip of red cloth to the window* and fastened a clothes-line between the poplars to dry the baby's red nappies and little green vests. When the poplars were twice as high as the house and the wind souged through their leaves with a swirl like the rushing of the Huto, Yen Hsiang had left her and gone north. Not for a single moment could she forget him, the heartless old man! A few years later Chiang-tao had been born, and she had brought up both her grandsons herself. But she felt her age: her hair was turning white. After Yen Chih-ho became a mason, they managed to make ends meet. "My luck isn't so bad after all," she thought. "If only my old man were back!"

* Red was an auspicious colour. It was an old Chinese custom to hang a red cloth outside a house when a child was born.

Yun-tao watched his grandmother as she stared towards the north, swearing from time to time: "Draatted turtle eggs! Demon kings! You've driven all our men away!"

Yun-tao listened in great bitterness of heart. "Haven't we had our share of trouble yet?" He went out and took the old woman's arm. "Granny! Come in and have supper!"

She looked at the stars and muttered: "No! You and your mother eat first. I'm not hungry. . . . Stop up the coop for me."

As Yun-tao found a large stone to block the hen-coop, his heart was heavy within him. For three days now granny hadn't eaten properly, worrying about his father.

When the boys finished their meal, their mother stacked the dishes in the pan and covered it up. She bolted the gate early and helped grandmother to bed, then went out and sat on the porch. Her only source of consolation these days was the sight of the clear blue sky. She sat there till both boys were snoring. But hard as she puzzled her head, she could not think what devil on what evil day had chosen such a cruel fate for her.

As a girl, she sewed industriously all day. After her marriage, she spent the entire year between the kitchen, mill and threshing-floor, busy from morning till night. True, Chih-ho was a mild-tempered man, fond of her in his way. But he was a true son of the soil — if he lost his temper it was like thunder in spring. Sometimes he sulked, at others he lashed out—even in the middle of the night. When that happened, she poked her head out of the quilt and said: "Go on! Go on! Hit me on the head! When I'm dead we'll see who makes your shoes for you, or cooks and looks after your mother." Then Yen would sheepishly lower his fists and chuckle. "Well, well! I can't do without you!" She would throw him a smiling, sidewise glance. "I should think not, indeed!"

But that was when they were young. As peasants get on in years, the mere struggle for existence kills their feeling. They wither like old trees without rain or dew. Sometimes she thought wistfully of their early love; but

men are the playthings of Heaven, and they were growing older day by day.

Late at night the air becomes as cold as water. Pulling her jacket round her she walked inside. Grandmother had lit three candles before the Buddhist shrine and was kneeling there, kowtowing. "Chih-ho!" she prayed. "You've left your family to roam the country! May you keep well, my son!" She was thinking more of her old man than of Chih-ho as she wiped her eyes with a corner of her jacket.

The next day when Mrs. Yen had lit the stove for breakfast, she sat on the *kang* and looked at her sons. Yun-tao, sound asleep, with his head on his arms, had a line between his brows. Chiang-tao, lying on his back, wore an expression of mingled hope and worry. She sighed. "They're tired out, both of them, after chasing all over the place." She shook Yun-tao's arm. "Get up now! Get up!"

Yun-tao stretched and gave a yawn. "What? Light already?"

"It was light long ago. Are you going on sleeping for ever?"

Yun-tao opened his eyes and saw that the sky was red. He sat up and shook his brother. "Get up! The sun's risen!"

Still half asleep, Chiang-tao crawled out of bed. Rubbing his eyes, he mumbled: "I must go to school."

"Not today," his mother said. "First have another look for your father. What are we going to do if we don't find him?" She dabbed her eyes again with the hem of her jacket.

"Don't take on, now, mother!" said Yun-tao. "At the most, father's gone for a few years to the north. He's sure to be back. If he doesn't come back, Chiang-tao can give up his school. I can raise crops and pears and between whiles I'll weave. We'll manage somehow."

Their mother could not help saying: "Your grandad's never come back after more than ten years!" She burst into sobs.

"Don't talk about him!" cried grandmother. "Heartless old man! He's forgotten us."

"There now, mother!" said Yen Chih-ho's wife. "You're not young any longer and neither is he. If you keep wor-

rying about him, wherever he is in the north he'll feel a twinge."

"Serve him right! At that rate, he might remember us. Ah! Those turtle eggs, to drive all our men away!"

"Say no more, granny!" cried Yun-tao. "We'll never forget!"

"We'll never forget!" echoed Chiang-tao. "Ten generations of our sons will never forget!"

Grandmother hobbled up to them. "Good boys! That's the spirit."

"Go on!" cried their mother. "Go to Nine Dragon Mouth, where nine roads meet and many people pass by. When anyone comes, ask: 'Please, have you seen my father?' You may get news that way. Take a pitcher of water with you and some bread, and sit on the brick kiln there. Understand?"

The boys did as their mother said. The morning air was chilly as they walked down the grassy verge by the side of the road to the brick kilns at Nine Dragon Mouth.

Talking as they sat there, they kept a look-out towards the north. At the far horizon, white clouds sprang up and scudded over the fields. . . .

A pedlar passed and they ran to question him. A carter appeared, and they put the same question to him. They waited till the sun was in the west, when down the long road from the north rumbled this mule cart.

5

Yen Chih-ho and Chu walked in front of the cart, talking. They skirted Lesser Yen Village because Yen had no wish to be seen. When at last they reached his gateway, Chu stood there and looked round. Everything was unchanged: the mud gatehouse, the double gate of unvarnished wood, the threshing-floor outside, the small dark stone roller. Only two poplars, which had been saplings when he left, now seemed to have their heads in the clouds. In the light wind their purple flowers swung to and fro.

With his hands behind his back, Chu paced the little threshing-floor, smoothing his beard. "Everything seems just the same," he murmured to himself. "But times have changed. Times have changed!"

He gazed around him with the keenest interest, till under the poplars on Thousand *Li* Dyke he saw an old woman with a stick. She was straining her eyes towards the north. The setting sun had bathed her, the dyke and the poplars in a rosy light. Hundreds of thousands of crows were circling over the trees. Thick and fast they came, cawing incessantly as they flew up and down, this way and that.

Chu walked slowly over to the woman. Her hair was flecked with white, her face lined with wrinkles, but he recognized Yen Hsiang's wife. Climbing the dyke, he called: "Why are you here all alone, aunty? The wind has a nip in it. Mind you don't catch cold!" He fancied she was worrying over Chih-ho.

Grandmother Yen had been standing there for some time, reckoning the number of years and the number of days her husband and son had been gone. She felt her age. Losing her husband in middle life and her son now that she was old, she had surely had more than her just share of grief. . . .

She peered at Chu. "Who's that?"

With a smile he strode forward to seize her hands. Putting his lips to her ear, he said: "It's Tiger!"

Grandmother stared in bewilderment. "Which Tiger?" A few years back someone had told her that Tiger had died in the north. She could hardly believe her ears.

Chu wrung her hands, stamping and laughing in excitement. "I'm young Tiger, Chu Kung's son!"

She looked up at the sky and her old legs trembled. "Tiger? Tiger?" Screwing up her eyes, she tried to remember how he had looked as a boy. After the time it takes to smoke half a pipe, she shook her head. Her lips worked spasmodically but she could not speak. Finally she threw her stick aside and put both hands on Chu's shoulders, gazing at him in frowning recognition. "Tiger! Tiger! I wouldn't have known you!" Tears gushed from her eyes.

"Poor boy, have you come back? More than twenty years you've been gone, more than twenty years without sending us any word. Your mother's dead, your father too; but your old friends and neighbours never forgot you! Why didn't you write to us? I tell you, I thought the Chu family had died out. Now you're back to carry on the line."

"Don't talk like that, aunty! I can't bear it."

"You can't bear it? All these years, by day or by night, each time I thought of your father my heart turned over. Ah, how my heart has ached for the folk who left home! My blood's like the oil in a lamp—quite burnt out with longing." She started sobbing bitterly. "It's a terrible thing when children leave home!"

Chu half closed his eyes to hold back the tears in them, and patted the old woman's shoulders. "I'm back now, aunty. Doesn't that make you feel better? You mustn't cry!"

She wiped her eyes. "It does me good, it does indeed. Let me have my cry out, and I shall feel better."

All this time Yen was waiting at the foot of the dyke, not liking either to go up or stay where he was. When his mother saw someone down below, she asked: "Who is that?"

"Brother Chih-ho," said Chu.

Then she wept as if a bucket were being emptied. "Chih-ho!" she cried angrily. "What have you come back for? Why did you run away like that? Had you no thought for the old folk and children at home? Whom did you expect to look after them?"

Chu said: "When you left you should have told the old lady."

"He was close-mouthed even as a child. Never a word to throw at anyone!"

Flushing all over his neck, Yen clambered up the bank and picked up his mother's stick. "I was in such a state that I just up and left!" He laughed sheepishly.

When he brought back the stick she screamed, with a catch in her voice: "Ah! I might as well kill myself here!" She stumbled down the dyke.

"Catch her, Chih-ho!" cried Chu. "Hurry!"

Chu and Yen took one arm each, and grandmother looked first at her son, then at Tiger. In Yen's courtyard they found Mrs. Chu, Ta-kuei and Erh-kuei sitting on the doorstep. "Come here!" called Chu. "Meet aunty!"

At the sight of Chu's wife, grandmother wiped her eyes. Her sadness turned to joy. She stepped forward and looked her over carefully. "Well-favoured!" she commented to herself. Then she looked at the boys and chuckled delightedly before turning back to Chu. "Good! Two fine sons and a good wife!"

Chu nodded and laughed. "I'm glad if you're pleased, aunty!"

"Hefty lads too," she remarked. "So much the better! Those cursed turtle eggs thought they could wipe us out, but to spite them we've multiplied!"

Their three rooms facing south were unchanged, but after so many winters the moss on the eaves had turned black. In front of the door grew a small cedrela tree. A shed on the west side held tools, fuel and other odds and ends.

Grandmother Yen helped her daughter-in-law to lay supper, sending Yun-tao to West Soching for wine. By the time the lamps were lit the food was ready. Mrs. Yen swept the *kang* before putting the table on it, and lit the small oil lamp. Grandmother went to the yard and called: "Come and eat!"

Chu and his wife helped the old lady in, and she noticed that Mrs. Chu lowered her head to enter. "Aha!" exclaimed grandmother. "We're shabby here."

"Shabby or not, this is home!" said Chu. "As soon as I crossed your threshold I felt good!"

He and his wife seated grandmother in the place of honour, and sat down one on each side. Mrs. Yen brought in the food: fried eggs, salted eggs, chopped turnips, shredded turnips. . . . The table was covered with dishes big and small.

"We're putting you out too much!" protested Mrs. Chu. "You shouldn't have troubled to prepare such a feast!"

Grandmother smiled in the lamplight. "We've nothing to offer you, just country fare. Now, help yourselves!"

Yen poured out wine for Chu and for himself. Chu picked up his cup and said: "Come, aunty! Drink a cup with me!"

"Well, I never!" she cried. "I've never touched a drop in my life. Here, Tiger, have something to eat!" She put chopsticks into Chu's hands and asked: "What about the children?"

Presently the four boys came in. Erh-kuei snuggled up to his mother on the *kang*, Chiang-tao sat by his grandmother, and Yun-tao made Ta-kuei sit on the edge of the *kang* while he stood at the end. Chu looked at Chiang-tao and said: "I can see that boy's intelligent."

"They're graceful, well-built lads," put in his wife. "Quite different from our young lubbers."

Chu pulled Chiang-tao to him and stared at the palm of his hand. "This child's got brains. He'll grow into an able man."

"How do you know?" asked grandmother. "Can you tell fortunes?"

"No. But he's bright-eyed and has good features. You should give him a few years more in school!"

"Chiang-tao is a good scholar," said grandmother. "He knows his multiplication tables already."

The sight of four grandsons gathered round her *kang* restored the old woman's appetite and good spirits. Half closing her eyes, she asked with her head on one side: "Well, Tiger! And how have you been doing all these years?"

As Chu told her what he had been through since leaving home, his heart was heavy within him. The boys laid down their chopsticks to listen to his sad story.

"You've had a hard time of it!" Grandmother sighed. "You were just a boy when you left, and now your beard has grown. But you're not eating!" She dropped some egg into Chu's bowl and signed with her chopsticks to him to eat.

"More than twenty years I was up north," said Chu. "But I kept longing for home. It's only now that I'm back, sitting here beside you, that I feel settled!"

"That was an ill parting you had. My heart bled for you each time I thought of it."

Sweat stood out on Chu's temples. His breath came short and fast. Unbuttoning his jacket, he thrust out his arms. "Aunty! Tell me about my sister!"

Grandmother Yen stopped eating and tears fell from her eyes. "You'd no sooner gone than she jumped into the river!"

Chu stared hard at the flickering lamp and for a long time said nothing. His sister's youthful face was before his eyes.

"I tell you, this world is full of wolves and tigers," said grandmother. "It's a hard life!"

Chiang-tao was a sensitive lad. He glared and shook his small fist. "They want to bully us! But we won't let them!"

Yun-tao cast him a side-long glance: "How will you stop them? They're the bosses."

"They break up homes," said Yen Chih-ho. "They make us fly east and west. How can we ever settle scores with them?"

Grandmother cursed: "May lightning from heaven blast the dirty scoundrels!"

Yen's wife had heard this story many a time from her husband, but she was moved to tears again. Grandmother's eyelids quivered and her voice broke as she said: "Poor children! Poor, unhappy children! I didn't want to tell you. She was a good girl." It was on the tip of her tongue to ask for news of her husband; but Chu, guessing this, made haste to change the subject. "You must give Chiang-tao a few years' schooling," he said. "We need a scholar in the family. All those years we had no one to read an official notice or receipt — that made it easy for them to play fast and loose."

Yen had kept silent while Chu told his story, so familiar with these troubles that he hung his head and said nothing, though his heart ached. Now he remarked: "It was Yun-tao's idea to send him to school in town for a few years.

But since we lost the lawsuit times have been hard. I can't afford it."

"Don't let that worry you, brother," said Chu. "If the year's bad, I'll help out. You make a scholar of Chiang-tao and I'll make a soldier of Ta-kuei. We'll train one in the arts of peace, the other in the arts of war. They've treated us like dirt long enough, brother! I'm not going to take it for ever. But without guns what can you do? Look at the sons of the rich: they send them either to college or into the army."

"All right," said Yen. "Even if we have to live on husks and herbs."

Chu shook his head. "No! We've strong arms and legs. They say the poor are doomed to eat husks and herbs, but I say not if they've guts!"

Grandmother made a gesture with her right hand. "Yes, children! Do as your uncle says."

"Whatever you decide, brother," said Yen.

When all heads were bent over their bowls grandmother looked up, holding her chopsticks still, and blinked. "I've something to ask you, Chung!"

"About Uncle Yen, isn't it?" Chu said smiling.

Grandmother laughed. "How did you know?"

"That was easy to guess!" He told her what he had heard, concluding: "I advised Chih-ho to write a letter to find out."

"If only it's true!" she cried. "We must write at once." She could not stop herself from beaming.

When the wine and dishes were finished, they brought in cakes of maize-flour, noodle soup and fried paprika with green onions. An appetizing fragrance filled the room and old and young ate their fill. Then the conversation came back to old Yen Hsiang. Grandmother insisted that Yun-tao go out at once to buy a sheet of note paper and an envelope so that they could write to find out his grandfather's whereabouts.

News of Chu Chung's return spread quickly through East Soching. That evening Chu Hsing, Chu Chuan-fu and some other boyhood friends came over without stopping to

finish their supper, bringing their rice bowls with them. They smoked and talked till midnight.

6

At night, when the smoke above the village had scattered and a bright full moon hung over the tree-tops, the dyke with its poplars seemed like some beautiful painting. Boys and girls were playing late on the threshing-floors in front of their homes, shouting and screaming with laughter.

While the others were talking inside, Yen's wife sat by the stove in the hall uncertain whether to be glad or sorry that Chu Chung was back with his family. Would Feng Lan-chih let them settle down in peace? She dreaded the prospect of any further trouble. When all their friends had left, she settled Chu's family in grandmother's room and told Yun-tao to sleep in the shed.

Yun-tao said: "The house is so full I think I'll put up for the night in Uncle Donkey's place."

"No, child! Why go out when you can sleep at home?"

"I'd rather." Yun-tao picked up a quilt and left.

His mother's eyelids fluttered as she said to her husband: "Make him come back at once!"

"Never mind him," said Yen.

"But you know how friendly he's getting with their Chun-lan!"

"They're only children."

"Only children? How old do you think they are?"

Yen reckoned it up. "Why, yes! They've reached the age."

"That's what I'm telling you. If we aren't careful and they get into trouble, fine fools we shall look."

Chiang-tao, who heard all this, had no idea what they meant. Presently his eyelids started drooping, he undressed and went to bed. During the day Yen had felt extremely sheepish, though he had Chu to keep him company. Here he was back again, after deserting his wife and children.

Sitting on the edge of the *kang* he smoked a pipe before lying down to sleep. No one said a word.

His wife heaved a long, long sigh. "It's no joke to be a woman," she muttered. "Next time it's my turn to be born, I shall ask the King of Hell what I'm to be; and if he says a woman, I'll choose to remain a ghost in the underworld. . . ."

Hearing his wife muttering, Yen nudged her bedding and asked: "How have you made out these days?"

"Never you mind!" She tossed her head. "Why should a man who drifts off trouble to come back? If you want to go, go! There are old and young at home — who's going to look after them for you?"

"You!"

"Am I a slave girl to wait on your family all my life? I'd made up my mind to marry again if you didn't come back. With their father gone and their mother remarrying, I wonder how they'd have managed!"

"You wouldn't have had the heart!"

"You had the heart!"

Mrs. Yen got up early the next day to light the stove for breakfast. When Mrs. Chu heard her, she put on a white cloth apron and went to help.

Chu and Yen got up too, and Ta-kuei went out to draw water for them. Hearing grandmother racked with coughing Mrs. Yen murmured: "She can't have slept a wink. She coughed all night." She broke an egg into a bowl, poured boiling water over it, and took it in.

"Old folk can stand just so much," said Mrs. Chu.

Just then a clear, ringing girl's voice was heard outside: "Uncle Chih-ho, where's Yun-tao?"

"What do you want with him so bright and early?"

"I've something to ask him."

"Didn't he sleep in your shed last night?"

"Yes, but he ran off first thing!"

"He's probably gone to the fields."

The girl laughed. "I've come to see your guests!" With that she ran lightly in.

Mrs. Chu wondered whose daughter this might be. Slim, with rosy cheeks, she had great eyes which kept dancing mischievously. Her face, perhaps, was a little too long for beauty. Mrs. Chu took a fancy to her and asked with a smile: "Which family has such a fine big girl?"

Mrs. Yen told her softly: "This is Chun-lan from the Donkey Man's family."

By now Chun-lan was before them. "May I see your guests?" she begged.

Mrs. Chu darted a keen look at her. "Here we are. Go ahead and look. What brought you here?"

"I wanted to find Yun-tao."

"What do you want with him? He's gone to the fields."

"I have to ask him a word."

"Which did you want — to ask him a word or to see the guests?"

"Both!" admitted Chun-lan seeing Mrs. Chu was not in the least bit shy.

"What word?" grumbled Mrs. Yen. "You're together all day long: haven't you chances enough to talk to him?"

Since Mrs. Yen looked annoyed, Chun-lan said nothing but gave a ripple of laughter.

"Ask him another time!" said Mrs. Yen.

"Can I go in to have a look?"

"Go on in!" said Mrs. Chu. "There's no thread across the door to trip you up."

Chun-lan went in to chat and laugh with grandmother and Chu Chung. Having heard from Yun-tao the story of how Chu Kung raised havoc among the willows, she was curious to see what the hero's son was like. That was the reason for her early visit.

Outside, Mrs. Chu was whispering to Mrs. Yen: "Is that the girl you were talking about last night?"

Mrs. Yen threw a glance at the door and answered softly: "The same."

As the Yens were short of space, after Yun-tao learned to weave he had set up a loom in Chun-lan's house. When grandmother fell ill and no one at home had time to help him, Yun-tao often asked Chun-lan to lend him a hand

with his spinning or weaving. Little by little they had become fast friends. Yun-tao was a great reader, and Chun-lan had started to learn characters from him. He proved a patient teacher, and she a quick, eager student. Before two years were up she was able to read. After that the two of them were inseparable.

Mrs. Yen sighed. "I'm always telling Chih-ho to fix up that small shed in our yard and put the loom there. But he never finds time. This keeps me so worried!"

"But why should you worry?"

"If anything should happen, we'd be laughed at by all the village."

Just then Yen Chih-ho went inside and Chun-lan slipped out.

"Stay a little longer!" urged Mrs. Chu.

"No, I must go!" said Chun-lan.

"Wait and have a meal with us. You can help to entertain our guests," said Mrs. Yen.

"I can't. Right after breakfast we're going to sow melons."

As Chun-lan was walking out, Mrs. Chu called after her: "How old are you, lass?"

The girl turned. "Seventeen."

"You've reached the right age."

"The right age for what?"

"For a trip in a bridal sedan-chair!"

Chun-lan's laughter rippled. "Now you're teasing, I must go!" Chuckling, she scampered off.

Mrs. Chu watched her go and said with a smile: "A thick, glossy braid hanging below her waist! That's a fine, bonny girl!"

Yen was struck by Mrs. Chu's outspoken manner and decided views. He stepped out to ask: "Were you talking about Chun-lan?"

"We were!" She looked at him and chuckled. "Why don't you send a go-between over, to get yourselves a good daughter-in-law?"

"I don't fancy that type," said Yen.

"What a lovely girl, though!" Mrs. Chu winked at him.

"She may be lovely, but can we eat her or drink her? Can we hang her on the wall and look at her? Farmers like us like simple farming folk. Put this girl behind bars and she'd still make trouble."

"Doesn't everyone want a nice-looking daughter-in-law?"

"I don't."

"You'd better marry your sons to two pock-marked frights."

"That sort of woman is more dependable: she'll stick to you all your life."

Chun-lan took the shady path through the fields at the back of their house, a mud cottage at the end of Soching. Her first action on reaching home was to look in the shed for Yun-tao. The old loom, used for generations without number, was tied together with odd scraps of rope and cloth. Next to it was a small *kang* bearing a shabby pillow and faded quilt. The oil lamp on the *kang* was completely dry. He must have read till he dropped off to sleep last night, leaving the lamp to burn itself out. Beside the pillow was a copy of *Water Margin*.

Chun-lan left the shed and went into the courtyard and through the second door. "Mum!" she called. "I've news for you!"

Her mother leaned out from behind the stove where she was cooking breakfast. "What's your news?"

"Uncle Tiger has come back!"

"Which Tiger is that?" Her mother frowned.

"Have you forgotten? The son of Old Chu who raised havoc among the willows."

"So he's back! But everyone said he was dead. Fancy his coming home! When old Chu Kung died after fighting for the bell, Tiger went to the north. His sister jumped into the river and drowned herself. The bell was broken up and the bronze was sold."

"The year before last when Yun-tao told me the story, I couldn't sleep all night. Do those landowners mean to lord it over us all our lives? It's enough to make you burst with anger!"

"Now listen to me! A big girl like you should know better than to run after Yun-tao all the time. Aren't you afraid of tongues wagging?"

Chun-lan went straight on as if she had not heard. "Yun-tao says in the big cities there's something called a 'Communist Party.' It wants to . . . overthrow the local despots and oppose feudalism. . . ."

Her mother looked at her sternly. "A girl like you has no business listening to young men's wild talk . . ."

"I don't believe all he says," protested Chun-lan. "What harm is there in talking?"

The Donkey Man walked in with a crate in his hand. He had a thick beard, and his long face bobbed up and down as he walked. Leaving the crate in the yard, he paced slowly into the hall and sat down at the table to smoke. "I hear Tiger Chu is back from the north," he told Chun-lan. "While I was digging you went to Yun-tao's house again, didn't you?"

Chun-lan had tiptoed past, hoping her father would not see her. She answered earnestly: "I went to ask Yun-tao the meaning of a word, and found Uncle Tiger with his wife and sons back from the north. They're staying with Yun-tao's folk."

"Asking the meaning of a word again! A girl should stick to her sewing instead of reading all those useless books. If they turn your head. . . . What, he brought a wife and children back with him, did he? He's lucky to be alive at all. Though he was away for twenty years and more, we all said if he were to come back — there's that unfinished feud between him and Feng Lan-chih."

"His wife's a good-looking woman," said Chun-lan.

"Have they any children?" asked her mother.

"Two sons."

"Ha! Just two boys?" exclaimed the Donkey Man. "It's good to have sons. If you were a boy, now, you'd be some help to me. What use is a girl?"

"Don't I work hard?" demanded Chun-lan.

Her mother had filled their bowls, and the Donkey Man went on slowly between mouthfuls: "A girl's not the same

at all. And to marry her off, at the very least her family has to part with two chests of stuff."

Chun-lan pouted. "I know you can't abide spending money."

"It's not that," replied her father. "But I've decided to keep you at home with us. You've no brothers, you're our only child. Who would look after us if you were gone? I've decided to find you a husband who will live here, to be a son to us as well as a son-in-law and carry on the family. Then when we old folk die, you won't have to make a special trip back for sacrifices."

Chun-lan blushed as she listened. Taking her food, she went out to eat by the door. In her confusion she stared up at the sky, forgetting the rice in her bowl.

Her mother and father were discussing their melons. Every year they sowed half a *mou* behind the house, and Chun-lan enjoyed seeing to them. In summer a little mat shelter was set up there, under which she sat to sew and keep an eye on the broody hen. And she loved to watch the chicks when they were hatched, black, white, and speckled, as they darted right and left, cheeping and pecking at insects and melon seeds. . . .

After breakfast, Chun-lan took two buckets while her father carried his crate and a large ladle of melon seeds to the plot behind their house. The Donkey Man dug holes and Chun-lan watered them: she poured a little water in each, put in a seed and covered it with earth. As they were hard at work, she saw Chu Chung approach with Yen at his heels. "Look, dad!" cried Chun-lan. "That man in front is Uncle Tiger."

The Donkey Man saw them, but did not recognize Chu, who had walked so much in his travels south and north that he covered the ground in great strides. In no time at all he had reached them.

"Where are you going, Uncle Tiger?" Chun-lan smiled.

The Donkey Man, spade in hand, chuckled. "So you are Tiger Chu!"

Chu laughed. "I'm Tiger Chu. Chu Chung."

"So you didn't know him either?" asked Yen.

"It's good to see you back!" said the Donkey Man. "It's been more than twenty years. When you left, the two of you weren't as tall as Chun-lan here. You were still playing every afternoon on the Feng threshing-floor. Now you're back and I'm an old man."

Chu rubbed his jaw. "So am I. My beard is long. What are you doing? Sowing melons? I've brought back some good melon seeds."

"I can see you're one who thinks ahead," said the Donkey Man. "I suppose you're going to settle down and farm?"

"Yes, I'm an honest-to-goodness peasant," said Chu.

"That's how it should be," said the Donkey Man. "I grow melons here every year. This girl of mine sees to this plot, so it doesn't take much of my time. The money comes in useful for oil and vegetables. Ah, these are lean times. If a man doesn't use his head, where's the cash to come from?"

"You've been growing melons so long that Chun-lan's a regular Melon Girl," said Yen. "Each summer I see her sitting in her little shed from morning till night, keeping watch."

"What else are girls good for?" asked the Donkey Man. ". . . Well, are you going to the village?"

"I'm off to see old Chu Ming," answered Chu. "When I left there wasn't a path here."

"You're right, there wasn't," said the Donkey Man. "But since Chih-ho put that loom of his in my shed, Yun-tao has been running over two and three times a day and trampled the earth so hard that nothing will grow. Nothing but grass."

"Yun-tao's not the only one!" protested Yen. "I don't know how often Chun-lan runs to our house every day. She comes skipping in with a troop of other girls to listen while Yun-tao reads stories."

"Well, it's done by the two of them," agreed the Donkey Man. "Otherwise who would trample crops to make a path? This path wasn't made in a day."

"No, indeed," said Yen.

Chun-lan had flushed crimson. Bending to her watering, she dared not look up. When her buckets were empty she ran with them to the well, where she rattled the pole to make a clatter. The red ribbon on her braid bobbed to and fro.

Chu nodded to himself. "Ah! A nimble, active girl, that one! Full of life!"

7

Presently Chu and Yen turned into a little lane. At its far end was a brick gatehouse, with the gate closed. They pushed it open and went in. The courtyard, strewn with bricks, tiles and firewood, was utterly still. An old elm before the house was hung with thick clusters of seeds and some bees just out of the hive were flying round it, keeping up a continuous hum. The place looked deserted. Chu coughed, but still there was no sound. He called: "Brother Ming, are you in?"

After some seconds the answer came: "Who's that?"

"It's me!"

"Come on in. How is it I don't know your voice? You sound like a stranger."

"He is at that!" said Yen.

Chu opened the door and entered a dank room with smoke-blackened walls. Passing through a second door, they found a tall old man lying on the *kang*. His hair and beard were unkempt.

"How are you, brother?" Chu greeted him.

At the sound of their entrance, the old man had sat up. He dabbed at his rheumy eyes, which he could not open. "I still don't recognize your voice," he said.

"You'll never guess!" cried Yen.

Chu Ming shook his head. "I can't say. You're not from Soching anyway. Your accent's a cross between Soching and some other part!" His face was haggard, his cheeks hollow. The discharge from his eyes had gummed his lashes to his deep eye sockets. He tried hard to raise his eyelids, but failed.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Chu.

"Eye trouble."

"Why don't you see a doctor?"

"Can't afford it!"

"That's easily managed."

Chu Ming tilted his head to consider who this visitor might be. "Chih-ho!" he cried. "Tell me: who is it? Don't keep me guessing!"

"Who is it?" repeated Yen. "Do you remember, twenty-five years ago, how Chu Kung played havoc among the willows?"

Chu Ming sat rigid for a second. "As if anyone could forget!"

"This is Chu Kung's son. He calls himself Chu Chung now."

Chu Ming clapped his hands and laughed. He laughed till his eyes opened, disclosing bloodshot eyeballs. But he could not see. He raised his wasted hands to grope in the air, and Chu Chung took two steps forward. Chu Ming gripped his arms, then felt his shoulders and ears. When he touched his beard, he exclaimed: "What's this! Why, brother, you're an old man too!"

"Not I. I've grown a beard, that's all."

"How old are you this year?"

"Forty-five."

"Well, if that's not old it's well on in middle age."

They talked for some time undisturbed. There was a pitcher on the *kang* and an abacus with two shrivelled steamed buns on it, probably his rations for the day.

"What of your family?" asked Chu Chung.

"There's no one left," said Chu Ming. "After my wife died, the girls had to leave home. My son, Number Two, is a hired hand. He drops in each evening to see me and get me something to eat. The family is finished."

Yen found a small brush and swept a chest to sit down. He took his pipe from his belt and lit up. "Would you like a smoke, Brother Ming?"

"Not while my eyes are inflamed."

"How did you get into this state?" asked Chu.

He had asked for it. Chu Ming thumped the *kang* matting and launched into a recital of his wrongs. He told how Feng Lan-chih and Feng Hung had raised a regiment to attack a fleeing army, and how five thousand silver dollars had been demanded from the people. He sobbed with rage. "Whatever we did, we were ruined. So I decided to sue him. At first no one else dared join me. You know what Feng Lan-chih is: if he appears at the cross-roads the four roads tremble. Who dares touch a hair of that old tiger's beard? Besides, they all till his land and borrow his money, don't they? Not one would risk it. Then Brother Hsing and Old Wu came out, and finally I collected twenty-eight men. We got together and talked it over, but no one had any money. I said: 'I'll put in the largest share. I'll start with five *mou* of land!'"

"Five *mou* wouldn't go far in a lawsuit," said Chu Chung.

"You've said it. Five *mou*, another five, yet another. Even fifteen *mou* wasn't enough. . . . Chu Hsing, Wu Pa and I took an ox-cart, half a peck of millet and some sorghum stalks to a broken-down shed in town, where we did for ourselves, sleeping in the courtyard. That's how we fought the case! But in this world, to win a lawsuit takes money. Each time we sent in a petition or a reminder, we had to pay. Where was so much money to come from? Sometimes the yamen clerks asked me to treat them to a meal, and all I could offer them was a bowl of millet and vegetable soup."

"How could you hope to win like that?"

"That's how we lost. We sent in three indictments, and lost all three of them. It cost us all we had to engage a lawyer, but Feng Lan-chih is a famous pettifogger—he didn't have to spend a cent. In any case, his son Feng Kuei-tang has been to university and studied 'law.'"

Chu Chung banged the table and sighed. "You shouldn't have gone to law then!"

"Once you're on a tiger's back it's hard to get off! After we lost, Brother Hsing sold his house and moved into Feng Hsi's shed. Wu Pa lost several *mou* of land. As I'd put up the biggest share, I had to sell my house and land. I'll

have to move soon. Otherwise I'd be letting the others down."

"Where will you go?"

"To our family graveyard to look after the graves."

"Ah! And is that the end then?"

"That's not the end! As long as I've breath in my body, I mean to have it out with him!" He pinched his eyebrows and sighed. "If only my eyes were better! That's what makes it hard. But if I go blind, I shall get at him somehow and hack him to death with an axe! We had right on our side, yet we lost our case. If I have to die, I'll drag one of them into the grave with me. That's the way I'm made!" He touched his eyes. "Will I ever see the light of day again?"

Chu Chung was silent for a moment, looking straight ahead. "Don't worry," he said presently. "Take it easy. That's what I came for. Just now he's in the saddle, we're eating dirt. One day he'll have to get down from his high horse. He laughs best who laughs last."

Chu Ming was doubled up with coughing. "Give me a drop of water, brothers!" he gasped.

Yen picked up the pitcher, but it was cold and empty. He fetched the bellows and some fuel and they boiled some water.

Chu Chung was thinking: "Away from Soching I was homesick. I felt eating husks at home would be better than roaming outside. Now I'm back I can't bear to see the way my old friends are up against it. . . . I'd have done better, after all, to die in the north. What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve for! . . . But the north has its troubles too. All the crows in the world are equally black. Well, we'll fight! Only the end can tell." The load on his shoulders seemed heavier than ever. New injustice as well as old pressed down on him.

"I must go to see Wu Pa," he said. "I want to ask him to help me with my house. Are you short of anything?"

"Short of anything? Don't ask. I'm short of everything!"

Tears of sympathy started to Chu Chung's eyes. "Don't worry, brother!" he said. "First cure that eye trouble of

yours, and then we'll see. So long as Chu Chung has food, you won't go hungry. So long as Chu Chung has clothes, you won't go cold." He took ten dollars from his pocket and tossed them on the *kang*. "There! Is that enough for your eyes?"

Chu Ming laughed to hear the clink of coins. "What's that? Silver dollars?"

"Get your eyes cured. I'll send my boys over with anything else you need." Chu Chung started out.

"You must come in often to see me," called Chu Ming. "It's lonesome here!"

As they reached the gate they heard him sigh: "Ah! When a man's sold all his land, what's he to live on?"

Chu Chung turned back to the window. "Brother! You're not to worry! All you have to do is rest. I shan't forget. Even if Feng were a mountain piled on top of us, I'd make shift to move it a little."

Yen Chih-ho was moved to tears. "Twenty years roaming the country has stiffened his backbone!" he thought.

Chu's old home had been south of Soching under Thousand Li Dyke. The two men stopped when they came to the River God Temple. The cedars had disappeared but the big black boulder remained, while the crimson and emerald tiles on the temple roof were as bright as ever. Chu gazed, motionless, at the great grove of willows and the temple altar, stirred to his depth by scenes from the past which re-enacted themselves before his eyes. A lump came into his throat. Yen, not noticing his mood, called to him twice. Hiding his grief, Chu walked down the dyke with his friend.

They crossed the willow grove where the trunks were now so thick that you could barely get your arms round them and the branches were turning green. White willow fluff was flying everywhere. Anyone walking that way was covered with white.

After the willows they came to a pool with an expanse of reeds to its north. The band of children plucking young reeds there scampered off at the grown-ups' approach.

Climbing the slope beside this pond, they came to the site of Chu's house.

It was clear where, in the old days, there had been two brick rooms by the road overlooking the river. With the lapse of time, the buildings had caved in and become a heap of rubble. Every year weeds, wild herbs and convolvulus ran riot there with a host of other wild flowers. On the slope grew a few old willows.

"When you left that year," said Yen, "I sealed the door up with bricks and mud. Later, when the house fell into ruins, I took the wood home to burn. This small gatehouse is still standing."

By the road stood a lonely gatehouse, its foundations crumbling. The wooden gate and its frame had disappeared. Chu looked up and saw the sky through holes in the roof.

"How do you mean to build?" asked Yen. "Will you use mud or brick?"

"Mud. I haven't the money for brick."

"That's simple, then. We can mix the mud by the pond here to make blocks for the walls. Felling a few trees will give us the timber you need. This rubble will make a foundation. Without spending a cent you'll have a three-roomed cottage."

"That's fine!" Chu laughed.

"For the next few days we'll get through our work as quickly as possible. Old Wu will cut the trees while I mix the mud and make blocks, and with everyone lending a hand I guarantee you'll be in your new house by the summer."

Yen paced the distance from south to north, from east to west. "Later on, when times are better, you can build another three rooms on the west. This will be a stable, this a pigsty. You can plant a line of willows outside the wall, and when they've grown this little yard will be so shady in the summer you won't even see the sun."

"That's something to look forward to, brother!"

"All right. I'll go and ask Wu to help before he leaves."

"Where's he going?"

"To the Chang Timber Yard in Honanli. He can barely keep his head above water!"

"How is that?"

"He's so badly in debt."

They smoked a pipe under the willows while discussing the building plans. Chu looked west to where Feng's house stood half a *li* away on the other bank, surrounded by a mud wall, with willows inside and out. Some of the haystacks were as high as the willows in that dark, clammy compound. He stood motionless and his chest heaved. His heart burnt within him. The sight of the place where his father had lived and died reminded him of the circumstances in which he had left home. A bitter tide of anger surged through him.

8

Soon the news of Chu Chung's return spread to West Soching. At once it was carried to the Feng family.

The Fengs lived in an ancient mansion. It was common talk in the village that their family had grown rich in the Ming dynasty when they built this large house of massive bricks. After more than two centuries of wind and rain the doors and windows were mouldering but the masonry remained solid. The courtyard was paved with dark flags, the roofs were tiled, there were covered passageways and pavilions. The flying eaves had collapsed, however, and their ornamental tiles had fallen. The walls were thick, the doors and windows substantial, and the dark green moss on the sides of the house clung, shrivelled, to the wall like black freckles. The moment you stepped inside that courtyard, you smelt the odour of rotten wood and moss. An old creeper, which was choking a Judas tree with its tight embrace, had such thick, luxuriant leaves that it shaded the whole yard. The windows were closely latticed, the rooms dark and gloomy. None the less, Feng Lan-chih was accustomed to this house. He spent his entire day in this vast building, lighting a lamp in the daytime to make up his

accounts or reckon on his abacus. But the day he heard of Chu Chung's return he neither opened his ledgers nor flicked the beads of his abacus. Instead he leaned on the table lost in thought. He had a vision of Chu Kung brandishing the chopper and shouting: "The old bell belongs to the forty-eight villages. Whoever lays a finger on it will taste my chopper!" Though this was ancient history the recollection still bowed him over the table, to roll his yellow eyeballs and breathe hard. Now he thought in dismay: "So Tiger Chu didn't die in the north after all!" Feng had not seen Chu Chung for twenty-five years, but from what he remembered of the boy the grown man must be very like his father. He cursed himself inwardly: "I pulled up the grass without pulling up the root — he's brought two tiger-cubs back with him! Ha! Tiger! They're three tigers!" He felt acutely uneasy. His sallow face fell as he stared out of the window.

Twenty-five years had left their mark on him too. Feng Lan-chih was sixty now, his shoulders were bent, his hair and beard flecked with white. But in his gaunt face his crafty eyes still glittered.

He rapped his long pipe on the floor, then slowly crossed the room, his eyes on the ground. Pacing through three large courtyards, he came to the threshing-floor. Normally he would reflect with pride that no other household in Soching possessed such a mansion and grounds. Though the buildings were badly in need of repair, no one else had anything like them. In general, the sight of the Carter leading in the ox-cart reminded him that the Fengs alone in Soching could afford such a sturdy cart and such sleek oxen! His heart would swell with pride as he smoothed his long beard.

There was a cow-shed for over ten oxen by the threshing-floor, a sty for over ten pigs, and a huge locust tree like some immense umbrella whose thick foliage shut out the sun. He passed the cart, the well, the compost heap, and stood in the shade of a tree at the foot of the wall — his favourite spot for savouring past triumphs. . . .

His old eyes flashed past the broad willow grove, the purple flowers of the reeds, the ripples on the clear pond,

and came to rest on two men on the opposite bank. One was Yen Chih-ho, a freshly-defeated foe who gave him no cause for concern. The other reminded him of Chu Kung, and he thought: "That may be the root I forgot to pull up, the cinder which is starting to burn again. . . ." He shook his head in dismay. "I let one tiger go and three have come back!" No doubt about it, he had made a great mistake. He trembled with rage. His heart seemed too big for his chest, his brain was reeling. Picking up his pipe, he slowly retraced his steps. The two stone lions flanking the main gate bared their teeth and stared blankly at him. After a moment's hesitation he proceeded through the three yards, up the high stone steps into his dusky room, to sink with a long sigh on his large wooden chair. Just then in walked his second son, Feng Kuei-tang.

Feng Kuei-tang was tall with a pale, smooth face and long, sleek hair. He was wearing a gown and black jacket. After studying law in the university he had served in the army till his commander was defeated, when he came home to help his father with the village affairs and his brothers with the estate. For the last few days he had seemed preoccupied. Finding his father depressed, he asked: "What has happened now to vex you, father?"

"It's a long story!" replied Feng Lan-chih. "It starts with Chu Kung of Soching. I schemed for years and went to all that trouble to destroy the old bell and get hold of those forty-eight *mou* of public land, so that our house would prosper. That wasn't the main reason either. According to the geomancer, so long as that bell was there the Fengs must go down hill. Now we are prospering from day to day, from year to year, carrying on the good work of our ancestors. Ours is the richest family for a hundred *li* around."

"That's all right then," said Feng Kuei-tang. "Chu Kung is dead and nothing has been heard of his son."

His father pursed his lips and shook his head. "No, Tiger Chu came back to Soching yesterday, bringing two sons. I fancy we haven't finished with him yet."

Feng Kuei-tang's lips set in a stern line. He paced the room gloomily, his hands behind his back, digesting this information. "Haven't I always said that you mustn't let the peasants go too cold and hungry? You've got to let them live! In the country, it's best to have few enemies. When you antagonize a fellow like Tiger Chu, you lay up trouble for several generations!"

Feng Lan-chih scowled, pounding the table. "You've spent more than your own height in silver dollars, but it seems you wasted all those years of study. After frittering away your time outside, instead of trying to seize power you talk of 'democracy.' You want to get on, but not to antagonize anyone. How can you avoid making enemies? Tell me that! You backed Sun Yat-sen when he talked of revolution. But since Big Gun Sun overthrew the Ching dynasty, we've not had a day of peace! Under the Ching dynasty, a man with an estate could live in absolute freedom; but now there's fighting every day, levies every month. What is the world coming to? They're talking of equality for women too. Marriage is to be free, and girls are to study with boys. On your advice I pulled down the temple to build a school, but the whole village is cursing me because of it. . . ."

This goaded Feng Kuei-tang into a retort. "That's simply because the village has no 'democracy.' We must start by reforming the village government. If there were a village council and everything were 'democratically' discussed, you wouldn't have this trouble! Since we're in power, we ought to grant 'democracy.' Another thing: you're getting on in years, and you're village head as well as elder of our clan. How can you manage both? People are bound to be dissatisfied. Take the case of that bell: it belonged to the forty-eight villages, but you took it on yourself to sell it without consulting the village council. You handled a good job badly and Chu Kung lost his life, with the result that today you're in a panic. It's just not worth it. . . ." Feng Kuei-tang paused to catch his breath. As his father was staring at the floor, he continued: "Take my advice and don't demand such exorbitant rents and interest. Let the poor devils fill their

stomachs, and you'll feel more secure. Look at all the peasant revolts in Chinese history that started because the rich and great were too grasping, and drove men to banditry. No, what we need is 'humanitarianism.' A little kindness on our side and the world will be at peace. . . ."

Feng Lan-chih had meant to hear his son out, but now he could stand it no longer. He banged his fist on the table. "That's quite enough! Don't give me any more 'democracy'! I know what it means—too many cooks spoil the broth! If we listened to you, we'd make no profit on our land or silver and have nothing to spend. But it costs money to send the children to school, it costs money to go to court. Your way wouldn't get us anywhere. And if the family isn't prosperous, how can the country be at peace?"

Since the old man had lost his temper, Feng Kuei-tang smiled disarmingly as he walked up to him. "Look here, how about this?" he suggested. "You let me use my new methods, and the money will still roll in. Scientific analysis shows that this soil is suitable for cotton. We'll sink wells in all the fields. In Paoting they've invented a new water-wheel: yoke a mule to it, and in one day you can irrigate several *mou* of land. It's much faster than turning a windlass. We'll grow more cotton and sesame—two money-making crops. This is much more advantageous than high rates of interest or rent. Don't press the poor too hard and they'll work better. They'll speak well of us, too, instead of cursing us!"

Feng Lan-chih threw back his head. "That won't do, I tell you! That scum, they're born to be slaves! If we did as you want, they'd jeer at us for fools. Besides, once you irrigate the land the virtue goes out of it and you have to use loads of manure. Water without manure produces poor crops. But where are you going to find so much manure?"

This opposition made Feng Kuei-tang rage inwardly: "Old men are stubborn! What a stick-in-the-mud!" But he gave an ingratiating smile and kept a tight grip on his temper. "I've thought it all out," he said. "With all our

peanuts and beans we can set up an oil press. We'll stop using that clumsy wooden pestle and buy a proper press. We'll buy a few cotton presses too and gin our cotton, making oil of the seeds as well. We'll keep another sty of pigs, feed cotton-seed cakes to the oxen, peanut cakes to the swine, and use the beancakes as fertilizer for the fields. If we sell our oil and cotton in Tientsin, we can easily double our profit. At the same time we'll have plenty of good dung from our pigs, oxen and mules to enrich the soil. We're bound to have a good crop! This is a far better way of making money than dunning poor devils from door to door for their rent!"

Without waiting for his son to finish, Feng Lan-chih stood up and shook his hand in flat refusal. "I won't have it! I won't waste good foodstuff like that. What, press good beans into oil? Feed cotton seeds to the oxen? Feed beancake to the swine? I tell you, your fathers made their money by thrift. They never gave beasts anything that men could eat—I remember that well. Look, when it's cold I still wear that patched and tattered padded gown I've had for fifteen years. White flour and meat taste good, but I eat husks and vegetables. You seem to forget that the grain in our bins is grain—you want to fritter it away! That humanitarianism of yours is like keeping a tiger on your *kang*. Once grown, it will bite!"

Feng Kuei-tang smiled and went on as if he had not heard. "I had another idea. We've plenty of cash. Why not cut down on money-lending but open two general stores with foreign goods in the village? That's how to rake the dollars in! Another thing: before the wheat harvest, when the price is high, we should sell all the wheat in our granaries; after the harvest we'll buy the cheap new wheat. We'll sell our millet before autumn, our cotton in spring—you can get double that way. I've worked it out in detail. That's much more advantageous than keeping the grain in our barns."

"No, no, no!" Feng shook his head emphatically. "You're forgetting that ill-gotten gains are like flesh that's not your own—they won't stick to you. The proper ways

to make money are 'rent' and 'interest.' However much you get by other means, it's like half dried turnips — goes mouldy once it rains!" Still shaking his head, he insisted: "Your way would mean the ruin of the family!"

This was by no means the first time Feng Kuei-tang had broached these matters to his father, but the old man was completely unconvinced. He believed his ancestors' teaching implicitly. Hundreds and thousands of arguments could not shake him. He was adamant.

Now Feng Lan-chih stared moodily at the floor, displeased that his son took the news of Chu's return so lightly. All his life he had worked for the greater glory of their ancestors. While holding on tightly to what he had, fearful lest others might steal it, he stretched greedy hands towards the peasants, trying to wring their last drop of sweat and blood. Well does the proverb say: Old ginger is the sharpest. Just as the nails on his gnarled hands grew longer, his greed grew more insatiable year by year!

9

When Chu Chung came back with his wife and sons from the north, Yen Chih-ho's household kept both families. Determined to wrest a living from the soil and to build a house, young and old worked day and night. Yen and Wu Pa helped Chu fell trees for the beams; Ta-kuei, Erh-kuei and the two mothers lent a hand, while Chiang-tao continued to attend school every day. By the time the corn was golden the three-roomed cottage was ready. All left to be done was an outer wall, a gatehouse and a few other finishing touches.

While the others were still at their morning meal, Mrs. Yen put a straw hat and hoes on the porch, and prepared a hamper of food for Chu and the men. Ever since work started on the house, their meals had been sent to them; for they did not stop to rest or go home to eat.

Holding his rice bowl in one hand, Yun-tao ruffled his younger brother's hair. "Chiang-tao! Don't go to school

today. Help me weed our land instead. See, it's all over grass!"

Chiang-tao turned his bright, liquid eyes towards him. "All right. I'll go with you, brother." He bent to his food again, beads of perspiration standing out on his nose.

When they had finished, Yun-tao put a broad-brimmed straw hat on his young brother's head. Shouldering a hoe apiece, they took the path behind the house and turned west at the cross-roads east of Soching. On the north side was Feng Hsi's big square gate. Continuing west, they came to where Uncle Chu and their father were building the gatehouse and courtyard wall. After watching for a while they went on, past the pool and through the willow grove. Having walked for the time it takes to smoke a pipe, they passed the River God Temple and climbed down the dyke. There was a small wooden boat at the ford, and they ferried themselves across.

As soon as they reached their field Yun-tao started hoeing, not even stopping to rest. When he had hoed quite a stretch and looked back, Chiang-tao was still squatting at the end of the field, dreaming. Chiang-tao loved to study the countryside around him: the wild flowers of every colour by the river, and the boats with white sails which plied to and fro. . . . The boy was for ever asking questions, and weighed the answers given him carefully. Yun-tao threw a small clod of earth at him. "Hey, there! What are you doing?"

Chiang-tao grinned. "What's all the hurry, brother?"

Yun-tao made a face. "Hurry? If we hurry we can finish these two *mou* by noon, and get something else done this afternoon. Get a move on!" The whole village knew Yun-tao for a champion worker who put down the rake only to take up the broom. His hands were never idle.

Chiang-tao's long eyelids were fluttering over a problem. Why was this prize plot of theirs so far from home — two or three *li* away? When they ploughed or weeded, food had to be sent out. And carting in the harvest was even worse. Taking up his hoe, he asked his brother the reason.

"Grandad left us this land." Yun-tao described how Yen Hsiang had gone north, saying in conclusion: "This field supplies us with food and clothes! We're not allowed to sell it. All these years, no matter how hard times have been, dad has refused to give up this plot of land. This is our 'treasure trove.'" He imitated their father's way of talking: "Without land, we poor folk have no footing anywhere." Though Yun-tao was not old when his father first told him this, on the basis of his own experience he was able to grasp the relationship of the peasants to the land.

Chiang-tao puzzled that over: Without land . . . they have no footing.

But this prize plot had known many changes these few years. It had started south of Lesser Yen Village, under the southern dyke, a piece of land you wouldn't exchange for gold. Then the river swerved south, submerging it, and their family fell on evil days. Later, the Huto veered even further south, leaving their 'treasure trove' stranded east of Soching. When the water subsided their life returned to normal; but a year later the river changed its course again, inundating their field once more and bringing it south of Soching. Now this piece of land was like a granary. Their livelihood depended on it.

Yen Chih-ho often joked: "This plot of ours has legs — it moves!"

This was not a question of legs, though, but of Yen Hsiang and his son's good nature. After the flood receded and the river shifted, all the villagers wanted land near home, and the Yens' holding was squeezed further and further away. It was pushed to south of Soching, on the broad plain outside the southern dyke.

The soil here was black, with a fresh, rich tang. It raised fine crops, thanks to the years of work grandad had put into it. He himself had tilled it, handled it, trampled it. Now grandad had gone, leaving it to his children. Father had tilled it, Yun-tao had tilled it, and Chiang-tao was tilling it. As father spent so much time working as a mason, when Yun-tao ploughed, Chiang-tao led the ox; when Yun-tao sowed, Chiang-tao harrowed; when Yun-tao reaped, Chiang-

tao wielded a small scythe too, and he helped with the hoeing as well. Whatever the work on the land, the two brothers did it together.

The rising sun shed its golden rays on the wheat field. A northeast wind whipped the river into waves, rustled the willows on the dyke and dried the soil on the banks.

Yun-tao turned and found Chiang-tao dreaming again. "Chiang-tao! Are you hot?"

Chiang-tao looked up quickly and laughed. "No!"

"Why are you sweating, then?"

"Sweat doesn't mean I'm hot!" Chiang-tao was a stubborn, high-spirited boy, who would put up silently with any injustice, simply making a mental note of it for future reference.

Yun-tao laid down his hoe and pulled out a pipe. He struck a light and started to smoke, puffing hard as he waited for Chiang-tao to catch up and listen to a story. Yun-tao was an expert story-teller. On snowy days in mid-winter or during the New Year holiday, Yen's north room was always crowded with girls and boys listening to Yun-tao's stories. Chun-lan was bewitched by his tales. Today, as soon as he promised to tell a story, Chiang-tao made haste to catch up with him.

Yun-tao cleared his throat and began: "Long years ago, there was a fearful flood here. . . ." He looked across to Soching and the tall poplars on the dyke. "One evening there sounded a roar like the howl of the Heavenly Hound. Before mothers could snatch the babes from their breasts, they were carried off by the flood. It swept away mothers and fathers, wives and children, oxen, grain, everything! The river broke its banks neither east nor west, but dead opposite the main street of Soching! It turned the street into a river, submerged the whole of Soching and flooded the forty-eight villages around. . . . Go on hoeing!"

Chiang-tao shivered. "That was some flood!" Holding his hoe tight, he worked as fast as he could to keep up with his brother.

"Those who survived moved on to the roofs and trees. The old folk say: That year there were boats on the village

street and stoves were set up on the housetops. Frogs perched on the window-sills and croaked like mad. . . . Go on hoeing!"

To Chiang-tao this story sounded quite fantastic. He said sceptically: "Frogs aren't hens or pigeons. How could they perch on the window-sills?"

With bent back, his eyes on the hoe and the young plants, step by step Yun-tao moved on, weeding carefully. With a straight face he answered: "That's what our dad said. As the water came up to the windows, the frogs put their front legs on the ledges and croaked for all they were worth!"

Chiang-tao stared. "Heavens! Was our house flooded too? Oh, no, I wasn't born then!"

"In those days, our home was still in the lower reaches. . . . That year, the rollers were idle, not a grain was harvested! The whole plain was one vast sea. Folk couldn't sow a late crop or get in wheat: they had to make do with the bit of food that was left. They caught a few fish and shrimps and dried them in the sun, tiding over the winter that way. When spring came they picked herbs, dug up wild tubers, or exchanged a load of tubers for a handful of grain. Dad says that was a fearful year for everyone. . . . Go on hoeing!"

"That winter the water went down. In spring the men of the forty-eight villages worked for dear life to build a dyke. Because so many people had a hand in it and it took so long, they called it Thousand *Li* Dyke. East of Soching was silted up with sand. So were the marshes to the west — covered with golden sand." He looked over his shoulder. "See, that's why there is sand all over the place. . . . Don't stop hoeing!" Yun-tao had a lively sense of what the old folk must have suffered. When he spoke of the hardships of those years, his eyes smarted and his lashes were wet with tears.

Chiang-tao's hoe rose and fell in double-quick time.

"After the flood Soching was split into two with Greater Yen Village and Lesser Yen Village to the east. Because they couldn't live off the sandy soil, whole groups of men took their wives and children away with their donkeys or

ox-carts. Hungry refugees, they went to the county town to kowtow, go down on their knees and beg for relief. But they had to roam the plain, here today, there tomorrow. When they came to a village, they camped in the woods outside. In winter, they broke off branches to light a fire, and old and young huddled around it to sleep or boiled themselves a little watery gruel."

Yun-tao was too moved to go on.

Chiang-tao furtively wiped his eyes and heaved a long sigh. "What a shame!" The lad had a strong sense of justice. A tale of wrongs aroused his indignation, while any account of suffering made him shed tears. When Chu Chung had observed this several times, he tugged his beard and prophesied with a smile: "When that boy's grown, he'll stand up for the under dog!"

Seeing his brother's distress, Yun-tao hastened to add: "The men who stayed at home measured the fields, planted willows on the dyke and peach and pear trees on the sandy soil. The old folk say: 'For twenty or thirty *li* around, not a grain of rice was seen for three whole years. Not till seven or eight years later, when they had fruit to sell, could they buy grain. Not for ten years did they have a good square meal!' It's thanks to all they put up with, all their blood and sweat, that this is a fine orchard today! Life is a struggle, Chiang-tao. . . . Go on hoeing!"

Young as Chiang-tao was, this he could understand. In spring when the thaw began, they piled up earth under the pear trees, and slapped it till it was so slippery that no insects could crawl up. When the peach trees were in blossom, the girls and young wives took poles there to beat down caterpillars. In summer they picked the green pears bruised by the wind or spoiled by maggots, so that those left on the boughs would grow round and big. In autumn, after they had toiled for a year merchants came from far away to buy the crop. And some of the villagers wove willow crates to carry the fruit down the Huto to Peking or Tientsin, bringing back with them goods: new cloth and handy tools. If not for the hard work of their forefathers their generation would not be living so well. Yen Chih-ho

had told them this many times, yet the boys were always stirred afresh by this story. And today Yun-tao had repeated it to make Chiang-tao understand that land is the root and hard work the source of man's livelihood!

10

When the wheat was ripe, Chu Chung and his family moved into their new house; his wife was delighted to have a place of their own! After the Moon Festival came the autumn harvest, when Yen Chih-ho gathered his pears and Yun-tao took Chiang-tao to their "treasure trove" to reap two *mou* of red millet. The crop was remarkably good that year, its heavy ears as thick as the pile of a carpet. If you pushed one side the other swayed. It took the brothers till noon to get it in. Then they started home, not taking the road they had come by but walking east along the bank. As they were fording the river, Chiang-tao asked:

"Why didn't we cross higher up, brother?"

"Ever since Uncle Chu moved house," said Yun-tao, "each time he sees me weeding our 'treasure trove,' he quietly brings me food. Or aunty comes over, chattering, and insists that I go there to eat. Well, figure it out yourself! We're here all the time — how can I keep troubling them?"

Chiang-tao agreed.

"If we'd forded up there," Yun-tao went on, "I know Uncle Chu would have been waiting for us in front of the River God Temple."

When they had waded across, washed their feet and put on their shoes, they looked up and saw a man standing under the poplars. It was Chu Chung, who regarded them sternly in silence. Yun-tao smiled sheepishly as they walked towards him. Before they could speak, Chu Chung said:

"Now, Yun-tao, this isn't right!"

"What isn't, uncle?"

"Why don't you let me know when you're working on your land?"

"Oh, that! How can we, each time we weed or plough. . . ?" Yun-tao did not like to admit that they had been avoiding him.

"I saw there were reapers on that field of yours and guessed it was you and your brother. When you walked east along the bank, I came along the dyke. Come on, Chiang-tao! Your aunt's got some millet cakes for you!"

Chu was still looking grave.

Yun-tao grinned in some embarrassment, but said nothing. Chu was now in the prime of life, strong and stocky, with ruddy cheeks and a dark brown beard. As they reached his gate he called: "Here they are, mother! Let's have something to eat!"

Mrs. Chu came out, laughing gaily. "I thought the two of you were never going to cross our threshold again!" She took Chiang-tao's hoe and straw hat and hung them on the wall.

There were just three rooms to their house, and a new mud wall. Since it was hot inside, they set the table in the shade by the south wall. The courtyard was swept clean and sprinkled with water.

Still chattering, Mrs. Chu brought them millet cakes and red noodles with bean sprouts. Chiang-tao had eaten one bowl and then another, when an oriole in a cage on the wall started warbling. Without stopping to finish his meal, he went to look. He had never seen a bird like this before with its yellow beak and claws. As he stood there, staring, Chu lifted down the cage and handed it to him. At once Erh-kuei pounded over and snatched it away. Chiang-tao let go, and stood there at a loss.

"Erh-kuei!" cried his father. "Give that oriole to Chiang-tao and I'll catch you another."

Erh-kuei turned away sulkily. Chiang-tao blinked and said nothing.

"No, Chiang-tao," said Yun-tao. "I'll catch a nice bird for you. You leave this for Erh-kuei."

"Yun-tao!" exclaimed Chu. "This is just the time for catching chaffinches. Why don't you snare one for them? I don't like to see the children unhappy, but you can't tether

two donkeys to one trough. If we give Chiang-tao this bird, Erh-kuei will be unhappy. If we give it to Erh-kuei, Chiang-tao won't be pleased. When a man gets on in years, children mean a lot to him. After all, our main job in life is bringing you youngsters up."

In central Hopei, every spring when the wheat turns yellow, blue finches fly up from the south. And every autumn, when the cotton pods are splitting, red finches fly down from the north.

Yun-tao took a net and left the north street, followed by Erh-kuei, Chiang-tao and Ta-kuei. Turning off the road they saw Chun-lan at her gate.

"Where are you going?" She smiled at Yun-tao.

"Bird catching."

"Let me come too!"

"Better not! Your old man will give you another scolding."

"I don't care!" Chun-lan ran after them.

"Please yourself." Yun-tao turned back and threw one arm round Ta-kuei's shoulders. "I mean to catch a first-rate bird this autumn and trap a few weasels this winter. Then after a good New Year we shall have some spending money next spring."

"Fine!" said Ta-kuei. "We'll go to see an opera after New Year, and find a table just in front of the stage. . . ." He stopped, making believe he was at the theatre. Banging on an imaginary table, he called: "Bring a pot of good tea, one dish of peanuts and another of black melon seeds!"

Chun-lan slapped Ta-kuei on the back and made a face. "You're going to do yourselves well! You'll be thinking next of riding in a sedan-chair."

Ta-kuei looked from Yun-tao to Chun-lan. "You're nearly ready — the two of you — for that!"

Chun-lan blushed all over her face and raced ahead.

Talking and laughing, they reached a cotton field and spread their net at one corner. Yun-tao found some green stalks and gave each of them two. Then they ran in a semi-circle to the other end of the field to start beating.

"Beating birds is like fighting a battle," Yun-tao told them. "We must keep in the right formation. . . ."

Chun-lan giggled. "Just listen to you!"

"What would you say then?"

"Go on! Go on!" She laughed.

His four assistants deployed to start shouting and clapping.

"Do as I tell you," said Yun-tao. "I'll let you know whether to go fast or slow. No talking now — that only frightens the birds away. If they fly off here, they won't fall into the trap."

Chiang-tao and Erh-kuei closed their mouths tight and said nothing. Chun-lan and Ta-kuei kept quiet too, until Yun-tao and Ta-kuei started whistling tunefully to imitate the calls of different birds. Chun-lan followed suit. Then Chiang-tao joined in. The cotton leaves were the colour of rust and the pods had opened, white and fluffy. Beating the bushes and whistling, they advanced step by step along the ridges. Yun-tao kept bending to peer between the cotton plants. He saw a bird hopping along on two tiny feet, and followed close behind. Suddenly two birds took flight. His heart missed a beat, for he thought they were fine blue finches.

Near the end of the field, Yun-tao turned and called back softly: "I'll let you know when it's time to close in and attack!" He made Ta-kuei and Erh-kuei go slightly ahead to form a semi-circle in front of the net. Yun-tao's face was taut. "Quick!" They raced forward as fast as they could. "After them!" cried Yun-tao. "Make a din!" They chased forward, shouting, beating the plants as they ran and then the net. Some birds were struggling in its meshes. Chun-lan pounced on them, grabbing here and there. She caught a sparrow, a tit, and a magpie — not a single good songster. Neither Erh-kuei nor Chiang-tao wanted them. Chun-lan held up her captives, crying: "See! Out of luck again!"

They persevered, however, and at their third attempt Yun-tao caught a really fine bird. It had powerful claws and a long, pointed beak. It was a finch with a black crest

and white breast. At the sight of this rare bird, the blood rushed to Yun-tao's face and his heart beat fast. Upon holding it up, he discovered a red patch on its chest.

"Ta-kuei! Say!" His eyes were swimming and his voice trembled. "What luck!"

"Is that bird something special?" asked Ta-kuei.

"I should say so! It's a finch with a red breast." He examined its beak, and called Chun-lan and Chiang-tao to look. "This is called a red-breast! This is a red-breast I tell you!"

Chun-lan skipped and clapped her hands. "What a lovely creature! Look at the size of that red patch! What a colour!"

Ta-kuei screwed up his eyes and said gruffly: "Mother's! It's a fine bird all right!"

When Chiang-tao saw the red feathers—a blood-red patch down to the legs—he held out his hands. Erh-kuei reached out at the same time. Yun-tao promptly covered up the finch and held it over his head. "Listen, fellows!" he said. "If this were any other bird, I'd give you as many as you liked. But this is something special. I've trapped birds for so many years that the whole village calls me bird-crazy; but I've never seen a red-breast to equal this. I propose that Ta-kuei and I keep this finch, and sell it later at the market to buy an ox both our families can use." He turned to Chun-lan, Chiang-tao and Erh-kuei. "Each of you shall have new clothes!"

Chun-lan stared, round-eyed. "Is this bird worth so much?"

"It's worth an ox or a cart."

"Well, did you ever!"

Since no objection was made by Chiang-tao and Erh-kuei, Yun-tao carried the finch home, the four other young folk tagging after him.

Once home, Yun-tao directed Chun-lan, Chiang-tao and Erh-kuei to pluck sorghum stalks and make a neat little cage. As soon as the finch was put into the cage it fluffed up its feathers jauntily and flirted its tail. Staring with bright eyes, it flapped against the bars in an attempt to get

out. Yun-tao admired its spirit, but made haste to cover the cage with Chiang-tao's shirt. "We'll keep it covered till it calms down. We must tame the creature."

Yun-tao and Ta-kuei lost no time in finding Chu Chung to show him their prize. Chu saw at one glance that this was no common bird, and a slow smile spread over his face. "A beauty! A beauty!" he cried. "That patch of red is what's so rare."

Yun-tao said: "I was thinking of selling it to buy our two families a cart or an ox."

"Good lad!" said Chu. "Here we've just set up house and sown a few *mou* of land, but we can't afford a cart or ox." He turned back to the bird. "When your dad and I were young, we liked trapping finches too. The best finches are 'red-breasts,' 'pink crotches' and 'scarlet bells.' The more this red-breast moults, the larger that patch of crimson there will grow. By the time it's old, it'll be red all down its legs. I'd say it would easily fetch the cost of a cart."

"Is it worth so much?" marvelled Chun-lan. Her heart was singing over Yun-tao's good fortune. Now it was late, she must go home. She peeped out of the gate to see if the coast was clear, then ran home like the wind. The Donkey Man was smoking behind the house. When he saw Chun-lan slip in, he followed her quietly. "Where have you been?" he roared.

"Me?" Chun-lan tried to look unconcerned. "I went to see if the cotton is ripe or not."

"You're lying! You went to catch birds with Yun-tao. Aren't you afraid of getting a bad name—a big girl of nearly eighteen running wild all day?"

Chun-lan snorted indignantly. "Pah! If you're afraid of my getting a bad name, don't make me work in the fields."

"Do any other girls carry on like you?"

"You've no right to say that, dad!" Chun-lan pouted. "Do any other families treat their daughters like oxen or horses, yoking them to plough the fields?"

Crimson and panting with rage, the Donkey Man stamped off. After this quarrel, Chun-lan squatted moodily by the

porch to think. She and Yun-tao had been childhood playmates — why should they keep apart now? She conjured up a picture of Yun-tao's face, his two, great, flashing eyes. Picking up a straw, she wrote his name in the dust. Not till her mother passed by did she wake up to what she was doing and hastily rub out the characters with her foot, smiling. "What's come over me?" she wondered. "How silly!" Suddenly hearing the whirr of the loom in their outer yard, she went out, brushing the dust from her clothes. As there was no one in sight, she closed the gate and went to the weaving shed. Yun-tao had hung the cage on the loom and was whistling to the finch. She leaned unnoticed at the window for some time till he became conscious of two brilliant eyes fixed on him from between the bars. He stopped weaving at once, and with a jerk of his head flashed her a glance. "Come here, Chun-lan!"

"What for?"

"Come on! I've something to ask you."

"What is it? Tell me!"

"Come in!"

Seeing there was no one about, Chun-lan pushed open the door and went in. She walked over to the red-breast.

Yun-tao said: "I want you to sew a cover for the cage."

"All right. That's not hard. I'll make you one."

Yun-tao tore a length of cloth from the loom and handed it to her.

She measured the cloth against the cage. "Just wait. I'll make you something very pretty!"

"How pretty? Will you embroider it?"

Chun-lan held the cloth over her eyes. "For you — of course I'll embroider it!" She chuckled.

Behind her mother's back, Chun-lan dyed the cloth blue. And she sewed in secret whenever she had time. First she did the plain stitching of the cover, then on its top embroidered a blue patterned border. Next she took her casket from the cupboard, and opened a bag filled with odds and ends of bright silk. She had been keeping these to embroider slippers and socks for her babies in future. . . . But when she hunted through her album, she could find

no suitable pattern. She decided to embroider the red-breast, so that folk would know from the cage cover that here was a valuable bird. For this reason she ran in several times to have a good look at the finch, and kept a picture of it in her mind throughout her labour of love. The last evening, as she was stitching, the bird suddenly was transformed into a plump baby, the patch of red on its breast the baby's bright bib. In another second it turned into Yun-tao's face, its eyes exactly like his. Her heart was throbbing so with happiness that she had to cover her eyes and stop work for a while. She imagined she was at Yun-tao's side with his arm round her shoulders, just the two of them. . . .

She kept still till her face stopped burning. Then laughing softly, she tiptoed out to take the finished cover to Yun-tao. She found him lying reading by the light of a small oil lamp. "Look, Yun-tao!" she called. She spread the lovingly embroidered cover on the *kang* and turned his head to see it.

Yun-tao grinned in sheer delight. The bird Chun-lan had embroidered — its colour, eyes, and red breast — was exactly like the real finch, the living image! He exulted inwardly: "She's clever with her hands!"

"Why don't you say anything?" demanded Chun-lan. "How are you going to thank me?"

"When this bird is sold, I'll give you a pretty padded jacket!"

"Do you mean it? Well, I'll wait and see!"

The two of them sat on the *kang*, talking and laughing as they discussed his book, till Chun-lan's mother rapped at the door. "Chun-lan! What are you doing here so late? Come home to bed at once, you wicked girl!" Then, pouting, Chun-lan left.

II

When the reaping and threshing were over, Yun-tao and Ta-kuei set off with their two younger brothers to market, taking the bird cage with its handsome blue cover. Down

the slope they went and across the marsh, to stride lightly down the main street of Soching on their way to town. Near the cross-roads the ground before the shops was swept clean, and hanging from some old locust trees there were cages in which birds of different kinds were singing. There Feng Lan-chih was standing, smoothing his white beard with one hand while in the other he held a caged grey thrush. He saw Yun-tao and Ta-kuei coming and noticed the bird embroidered on their cover. "Hey!" he shouted. "What's that you have there?" He held out his hand.

Yun-tao stopped. "This is a blue finch."

Feng's elongated head was like a pitcher; his beard was long, his lips narrow, his voice rasping. That day he was wearing a black cloth gown, a blue waistcoat and a brocade cap with a red button. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"We're going to show our bird at the fair in town."

"What sort of bird is it that has to be taken to town?"

"I wouldn't know," said Yun-tao. "It's the first I've seen of this kind."

When Feng Lan-chih seized the cage and pulled off the cover, he had the surprise of his life. He hunched his shoulders and stared. "The cage doesn't amount to much, but the bird's not bad. I tell you what—I'll save you a trip to town. I'll give you half a peck of millet for it. Who embroidered this cover so neatly?"

"Chun-lan." Yun-tao reached out for the cage. "We're not selling for half a peck of millet."

Feng Lan-chih swung the cage away. His eyes were slits. "Now, now! What's the hurry?"

Just then Feng Kuei-tang walked up. "Let me see!" He scrutinized the bird from every angle, more and more taken with it, obviously loath to hand it back to its owner.

Villagers on their way to the fair stopped at the cross-roads to watch, scenting trouble.

Ta-kuei mistrusted the look in the eyes of Feng and his son. Suddenly tossing his belt to Chiang-tao, he shot forward, grabbed the cage and made off. Yun-tao, Chiang-tao and Erh-kuei ran after him. Feng Kuei-tang stared for a moment, at a loss. Then he turned and clapped his hands,

bellowing with laughter. "What a bunch of green horns! We were just having a joke!"

Meanwhile the four boys were racing, panting, to the highway not far from the village. They hurried down this to the river. Pausing on the small wooden bridge, Yun-tao sighed. "Bah! Poor families like ours. . . ."

Ta-kuei put in eagerly: "The proverb says: 'Don't show your gold and silver.' It's a fine bird, all right. I could see he wanted to filch it."

"That bastard has kicked our folk around long enough!" swore Yun-tao. "He drove Uncle Chu out to the north when he was nothing but a boy. And if our dad hadn't met Uncle Chu that day, he would have gone too. We mustn't forget that, brothers!"

"It's a hard life!" Ta-kuei panted.

Erh-kuei nodded, out of breath. Chiang-tao's thoughtful eyes flashed.

Carrying their precious burden, they soon reached town. There was a crowd inside the city gate and brisk business was being done. But without stopping in this busy quarter, they made straight for a small temple beyond the fuel market where bird-vendors were to be found.

If there are no fish in the river, you'll find them at the fair. The bird market had cages and birds of every description. There were traps made of *kaoliang* stems, with orioles in them. Some of these were hung on the trees, and if other birds alighted to sport with the orioles, they were immediately caught. Then there were cages of yellow bamboo, red carved lacquer and black ebony, holding thrushes, skylarks, parrots, blue finches and red. . . . An eagle, made fast by a small chain, was glaring with angry eyes and thrusting its predatory beak this way and that, eager to sink its talons in some of these birds!

Most of the men with cages were past middle age: they wore long gowns and caps and carried small combs for their beards. There was a sprinkling of younger men in caps with red buttons and black cotton gowns. Yun-tao took his stand on the temple steps, his left hand in his belt, the fingers of his right held out straight suspending the cage,

which was marked for sale with a straw. As soon as he pulled off the cover, the lively finch looked round with two bright eyes and straddled daintily on the perch; then raising its head and expanding its chest, it started trilling. Its song filled the entire market. Spectators crowded round and exclaimed in wonder. "A fine bird, that!" "Ha! What a marvellous voice!"

Up came a tall old man in a black brocade jacket, a long pipe in his hand. Shading his eyes from the sun, he stared intently, then stroked his white beard and held out his hand for the cage. The great patch of red on the bird's breast staggered him. He gulped and asked softly:

"For sale?"

"For sale," said Yun-tao.

"How much?" asked the old man slowly.

"The price of an ox!"

The old man waved his hand in protest. "Not worth it. . . . Too old."

"Look at that beak!" declared Yun-tao with solemn pride. "Look at those claws and that colour! This is a young bird."

The old man produced a spectacle case and put on his glasses for a better look. It undoubtedly was a young bird. He held up one finger, saying: "Ten strings of cash. . . ."

"You're having a free look!" retorted Yun-tao.

While this was going on, another old man walked up. He had an immense head, white beard and tremendous girth. He was wearing a grey gown. Slipping out a hand from its wide sleeve, he caught hold of Yun-tao's fingers. "This . . . this . . . how about it?"

The closer he pressed, the further Yun-tao recoiled, not understanding the sign language of the cattle market. The fat man whispered: "Fifteen!"

"Fifteen strings of cash?"

Before the fat man could answer, Feng Lan-chih stepped out of the crowd. "Fifteen strings?" he cried. "The bird's mine! I'll give twenty strings of cash!"

The fat man angrily stuck up his thumb. "I'll give twenty-five!"

Another customer pushed his way out of the press and swaggered forward. "Well! I've never seen such a pretty toy — I'll give you thirty!"

He and a dozen others reached for the cage just as Feng Lan-chih grabbed for it. Yun-tao held it as high as he could, propping up his arm with the other hand. When Chiang-tao saw the ugly turn things were taking, he sidled up to Ta-kuei and whispered: "Let's go! Come on!" Ta-kuei took in the situation at a glance. He rushed forward, shouting: "Out of the way there!" Scattering the crowd, he snatched the cage and pulled down the cover. "We're not selling," he said grimly. "We'll keep it ourselves."

When Feng saw that the bird was slipping through his fingers again, he laid angry hands on Ta-kuei. "A peasant should stick to an ordinary bird!" he cried. "How can *you* keep a finch like that?" He would not let go, but shouted: "Thirty strings! Thirty strings!"

By main force, Ta-kuei shook him off. "Mind what you say!" He glared. "If I throw this finch into a cesspool, it's none of your business! Peasants are as fond of good birds as anyone else. What's it got to do with you?" The cage in his hand, off he strode.

Yun-tao, Chiang-tao and Erh-kuei trooped after him, the four of them shielding the cage as they pushed through the crowd. By the city gate, Yun-tao found a shady spot and sat down to smoke. "We'd better sell it all the same, Ta-kuei!" he said. "The fields and orchard keep us busy all day — who's time to look after the finch? And if. . . ."

Yun-tao reached out for another look at the bird, but Ta-kuei whisked the cage away. "No! If no one else will look after it, I will!"

When first the red-breast was caught, Ta-kuei simply knew that it was a good bird — he had no idea of its rarity. Now everybody in town had confirmed its value. He held the cage tight, unwilling to let go. Not even for Yun-tao.

"Look here, brother!" said Yun-tao. "A bird like that eats eggs and beef. How can poor folk like us feed it prop-

erly? It needs live insects, but who has time to catch them?"

Ta-kuei tossed his head. "It can eat men's brains if it likes!"

Yun-tao knew how obstinate Ta-kuei was, and he bent his head to hide a smile. But Chiang-tao burst out laughing.

Pulling on his pipe, Yun-tao said: "See here! You've just got back. You've been eating *kaoliang*, not even millet, in order to build a house and get a few *mou* of land. Our pears aren't bearing well either this year, so we're all going round in rags. . . . Times are hard, brother. Why not sell the bird and all have a good New Year?"

Since Ta-kuei's arrival from the north he had taken Yun-tao's advice in everything, but today he turned a deaf ear. After some moments' silence he said stubbornly: "Give me this bird to look at and I shan't feel hungry even if I starve for three days!"

Yun-tao laughed. "All right, then. We'll keep it."

12

Feng stood on the temple steps, greatly disappointed, as Ta-kuei carried off the finch. He ordered the Carter to yoke the oxen and promptly set off in pursuit.

The Carter was a man after Feng's own heart.

He had a way with oxen. In fact it was said that he had a sixth sense where cattle were concerned. Without looking at the teeth, simply by the state of the hide, he could tell the age of any ox. He knew from the bones whether it was fast or slow. He could cure sick oxen, fatten lean ones. After he started working for Feng, the old landlord had bought this shabby, hulking cart for thirty dollars to be pulled by a team of three oxen. The inside ox was a great black bull with long legs and slender flanks, curving horns and big round eyes. From its speed it had the nickname "Horse's Despair." The two brown oxen before it were so plump that their tails jutted out from their haunches. The Carter groomed them every day till their coats shone,

and Horse's Despair had a small hat with red ribbons on it to keep off the sun.

As they were driving along the Carter remarked: "Most folk like mules or horses, but not I. Give me oxen every time. A horse will knock you flat or kill you with one kick. Oxen are mild."

"Bulls that toss men can be troublesome too," said Feng.

"I know how to deal with them," rejoined the Carter. "It's with horses that I'm helpless."

"A hundred men, a hundred different natures. It's the same with beasts — you have to know their ways."

That was true enough. The Carter was a case in point. The wildest bull, who tossed all who crossed its path, would flop down with tears in its eyes if he cracked his whip, not daring to utter a sound. But he could not handle horses. The Carter took great pleasure in feeding the oxen. Every night in his master's old fur jacket he sat up by lamplight, coughing from time to time as he sieved their straw. He spent the whole night in the cow-sheds. Now, with Feng Lan-chih in the cart, his eyes on the great bull he had groomed to the pink of condition, he gave a contented smile.

"Young folk like to make a splash. They prefer mules or horses to oxen."

"That's right," said Feng Lan-chih. "Kuei-tang keeps after me to sell this team and buy horses."

The Carter was shocked. He said: "You know the proverb: 'An old ox-cart has its use.' It's no joke changing a team of animals. Think of the cost! Besides, this cart — patched up — is good for another ten years. If you hire a coachman and get good mules or horses, you'll need a new cart too. In times like these, a sizable new cart must cost at least a hundred dollars."

"Old people always have thrifty habits," said Feng. "That's how a family rises in the world. But the younger generation is no good. Look at Kuei-tang — all he cares for is the latest fashion. He wants to go into business. He wants to sink wells and buy water-wheels."

Since Feng and the Carter were both ox-fanciers, they kept up a cordial conversation as they rode. On the outskirts of the village they came upon the Donkey Man carrying a load of dung. Feng's thoughts flew to the embroidered cover on Yun-tao's cage.

"Collecting dung, cousin?" he shouted.

Though both belonged to the same clan, this was the first time in his life that the Donkey Man had been called cousin by Feng. He could not believe his ears, and decided it must be the Carter who had spoken. Addressing him, he said: "Yes. I'm gathering some manure in my spare time."

"You'd better keep an eye on Chun-lan!" said Feng.

The Donkey Man realized his mistake. He hastily smiled and stepped forward to greet the landlord. "Of course," he stammered. "The girl's grown now. I must keep an eye on her, cousin! If anything's wrong, just tell me. I'll teach her a lesson!"

"All that worries me is this: don't let her lose face for our Feng ancestors!"

"Ah!" The Donkey Man's face fell. "I'll give her such a hiding!"

The Donkey Man stepped aside to let the big cart pass. It trundled to Feng's mansion where the landlord jumped down, brushed the dust off his clothes and walked into the house.

Feng Kuei-tang was standing on the threshing ground. When his father had gone in he walked up to the cart. The Carter gave him a black look but said nothing. The sight of the big, ramshackle cart and the plodding oxen added to Feng Kuei-tang's wrath. "The safe is full of money," he muttered to himself, "yet he uses this broken-down cart. Think of the time wasted every year through this backward means of transport! He just won't figure it out!" Deciding to reason with his father again, he walked into the house. Once more he proposed his old plans for selling these slow oxen and buying mules or horses. As ill luck would have it, Feng Lan-chih was in no mood to listen. He flew into a rage, quoted all the Carter's arguments and completely silenced his son by his attack. Helpless in the face of this

conservatism, Feng Kuei-tang had to admit defeat for the time being.

As he was quietly withdrawing, his father called: "I've something to say to you!"

Suppressing his anger, Feng Kuei-tang came back. "What is it, father?"

"In all my life I've never wasted a dollar or had any extravagant tastes. My only pleasures are tobacco and birds. Yun-tao of Lesser Yen Village and Chu Chung's son, Takuei, have caught a rare finch but they won't sell it to me — even though I offered them thirty strings of cash."

"Is the bird really worth so much?"

"There's no fixed price for birds. This finch is actually worth more than that!"

Feng Kuei-tang reflected for a moment, then gave a laugh. "That's easy. I won't spend a cent — I'll get it for you."

That afternoon he sent their accountant, Li Teh-tsai, to Lesser Yen Village to ask Yun-tao for this bird. Carrying a long pipe, Li Teh-tsai ambled to Yen Chih-ho's house and told Yun-tao: "I've some business with you."

Yun-tao guessed his errand at once. "What's that, uncle?" he asked.

Li patted him on the back, eyeing him askance. "Didn't you catch a fine finch?"

"Not I. Four of us."

"Mr. Feng wants that bird. Hand it over."

"Uncle, don't the classics say: 'A gentleman does not take something others love'? My brothers are fond of that finch and don't mean to part with it." He nodded and winked.

"Pah! What do you kids know of the classics? Hand it over! Then I'll tell the master: 'Yen Yun-tao sends you this gift, sir.' And there's no knowing what that may lead to."

"Can't be done, uncle! Don't you know the saying: 'Do unto others as you would be done by'? We don't want to part with it, and that's that."

"That isn't the point. The ancients said: 'If you help others, others will help you.' Suppose he's angry and won't

rent land to you? Suppose you want to borrow money, and he won't lend it no matter at what interest?"

He started towards the house, but Yun-tao blocked the door, with outstretched arms. "It's the truth I'm telling you. The finch isn't here. Ta-kuei has it."

Li Teh-tsai glared in angry silence, then made off in search of Ta-kuei. He found Chu Chung standing by his gate.

"It's not often we have the honour of a visit from you, Mr. Li," said Chu. "What brings you here?"

"Yes, though we're neighbours, you haven't been to my house nor I to yours. Today I've come on a small matter of business."

"And what may that be?"

"Has your son caught a bird?"

Hearing this, Ta-kuei stepped out with the cage in his hand. "Who's asking about my bird?"

"Come here!" called Li. "Let's have a look at it." He took the cage, turned it this way and that and muttered contemptuously: "I don't think much of this."

"Then you've never seen a good finch," retorted Chu Chung.

"Old Mr. Feng has taken a fancy to this finch," said Li. "Give it to him!"

Ta-kuei stared indignantly. "What! That's easy to say!"

"He's head of Soching Village and dyke trustee," went on Li. "Why take offence if he happens to want this bird? You're just back from the north: you'd better keep in with him. Don't be too stubborn!"

Anybody else in Soching would have consented, but not Chu Ta-kuei. He stamped his foot and burst out: "I'm not giving it! He's not my ancestor. I've no call to show him filial piety."

"He may not be your ancestor, but he's master of the whole village," answered Li sternly, angered by this defiance.

Red in the face, Ta-kuei bellowed: "To me he's a local bully! He tries to get his dirty hands on other men's property, money and kin!" He stamped, took two steps forward and said angrily: "Now he wants to get his dirty hands on

my finch, does he? Wouldn't he like to swallow me and have done with it?"

Li Teh-tsai lost his temper and lunged forward. "Whose property has he taken?" he shouted. "Whose kin? Stop raving! Will you give me the bird or not?"

"You can bully other people, not Chu Ta-kuei!"

"Don't spatter your betters with filth! Who's bullying you?"

"You're trying to! But I've never knuckled under threats, neither in the north nor here!"

"Stop bragging. Will you give me that bird or not?"

Ta-kuei bit his lips. "No! I won't! That's final!"

"You dolts are as stubborn as mules, the lot of you! All right, I'll go back and say you won't give it up. You'll be sorry for this some day. Just wait and see." He stalked out, swaggered down the bank and skirted the marshes home.

Chu Chung glared at him till he was out of sight. "You were right, Ta-kuei," he said. "We'll see what he can do."

By now the whole village knew that Feng had tried to get hold of their rare bird. Yun-tao, Chun-lan and Chiang-tao hurried over.

"We won't give it him," said Yun-tao. "Let's see what he can do!"

"Don't give it him," agreed Chiang-tao. "Sell it, and buy me some books."

"Sell it!" said Erh-kuei. "At New Year we'll make padded gowns and have fire-crackers and everything."

Chun-lan said nothing but her heart was troubled. What if Feng tried to injure Yun-tao?

Chu stood on the bank smoking, observing the young people's indignation. After turning the matter over in his mind, he took the pipe from his mouth and wiped his beard. "You all saw what happened. Each of you must be very careful — understand?"

Ta-kuei lowered his head and mumbled: "All right!"

"We'll remember," said Yun-tao. "Don't be angry, uncle!"

"In future," warned Chu, "don't go to West Soching without some grown-up. If I hear that any of you has run

off on your own and passed Feng's gate, I'll give you a hiding you'll remember for days. Off with you now!"

While Chu was speaking, the boys hung their heads. When he had finished they scattered. Chu took his hoe to the orchard to find Yen Chih-ho. "This is a little thing in itself," he said, "but it may start serious trouble."

"That's about the size of it," said Yen. "We shall have to be on our guard."

When everybody had gone, Ta-kuei went inside to fetch the pulley and bucket. Then, the cage in his left hand, he went to water the orchard. He hung the cage on the small date tree by the well, lowered the bucket into the water, and sat down for a smoke. His pipe finished, he started work, pausing after turning the windlass a couple of times to whistle and look at his bird. He toiled there till it was dark, when he carried the cage home and hung it on the ladder during supper. After the meal, he and his father discussed the next day's work. As he had been on the go all day and was tired, the moment he lay down he fell asleep. He slept soundly until midnight, when in his dreams he heard a bird cheeping outside. Springing up, he stumbled, heavy-eyed, to the ladder. He put out his hand, but the cage had disappeared. Dizzily he staggered into the house. "Erh-kuei!" he called. "Get up! The cage has gone!"

Erh-kuei was up in no time, rubbing his eyes, and they made a frantic search. With quivering lips the boy said: "I bet some cat has got it!"

Their mother was awake by now. She lit the lamp to help look. The cage, torn to pieces, had rolled to one side of the gate, and the courtyard was full of feathers. Ta-kuei stared for a while, his head reeling, his whole body limp. "Ah," he sighed to Erh-kuei. "I fell asleep, and you didn't keep an eye on it."

"Didn't you tell me not to touch it? You and Yun-tao were going to look after it. I was asleep too."

Ta-kuei sat on the ladder and beat his breast. "What can I do now? . . ."

Chu Chung was spending the night on a pallet in the orchard. When he saw lights in his yard he suspected

trouble and hurried home to find them all staring at the broken cage. He thought gravely for some moments before sending Ta-kuei to Lesser Yen Village to knock up Yun-tao.

"What's happened, Ta-kuei?" asked Yun-tao, opening the door. "What are you doing here in the middle of the night?"

"I don't know how to tell you! Our red-breast has been eaten by a cat. Come and have a look!"

"Eaten by a cat?" After this startled question Yun-tao was silent, rubbing his forehead. He puffed out his lips and thought hard but said nothing. Most lads would have flown into a rage, stamped and sworn. But Yun-tao was a quiet fellow who never lost his temper or cursed. However provoked, he could control himself. "It's no use crying over spilt milk," he thought as he followed Ta-kuei.

Chiang-tao was quite put out. He hadn't had a chance to play with this finch or make a pet of it. He hadn't even had many good looks at it. Besides, it was such a valuable bird, but now they wouldn't be able to buy a cart, an ox, or padded clothes. All those lovely dreams had come to nothing. They found Chu Chung and Mrs. Chu standing in the courtyard. They looked at one another in silence, waiting for Yun-tao to speak.

The silence lasted so long that Ta-kuei could not tell what Yun-tao was thinking. With tears in his eyes he said: "Brother, what can I do? Times are hard — I simply can't make it up to you!"

Hearing this, Yun-tao slowly looked up and smiled. "Ta-kuei! How can you say a thing like that, with uncle and aunt here too! This was nothing but a little bird. But suppose it had been an ox you lost, that would have been just the same. How can you talk about making it up? We've always been friends — how can you speak like that now?"

At these words, Mrs. Chu and Erh-kuei smiled.

Chu, too, gave a laugh and said: "We poor folk don't set so much store by kith and kin. With us it's friends that count."

Ta-kuei slapped his chest and declared: "Yun-tao, after what you've said, in future if you go west I won't go east. If you go south I won't go north. If trouble comes, I'll count your family's difficulties as ours."

Chu stepped forward, deeply moved, his hand on his heart. He took Yun-tao and Ta-kuei by the arm. "Good lads! That's the way to talk! From today on you will be brothers. You'll need grit to befriend each other."

Chu bade Ta-kuei and Erh-kuei bring out stools, and made Yun-tao and Chiang-tao sit down. He himself sat on the doorstep and asked his wife for a taper to light his pipe. It was now the small hours of the morning, intensely cold. The stars were sparkling, hens were dreaming and clucking in the coop.

"In the snowy, windy north," said Chu, "I often thought of my old home and neighbours and the friends I had as a boy. That's why I came back. You and your father have helped us make a fresh start here. I shall never forget it, not as long as I live. . . ."

Yen Chih-ho had come up and stood watching at one side. Now he stepped forward and said: "After all, what's a bird? Boys, mind you remember this: it's not easy for us poor folk to make a living. You must stand up for the rights of people like us."

Yun-tao wiped his eyes and said: "We're all here. We shall remember what our old folk have said. We won't let ourselves be trampled on all our lives. And we brothers must stick together — we'll never part!"

Chiang-tao was so moved that he hid his head in his hands and crouched on the steps sobbing as if his heart would break.

When Chu saw how deeply affected the boys were, he hastened to strike a happier note. "I, for one, shall remember this, boys!" It struck him that though the loss of the bird had foiled their enemy, Feng might still plot revenge. "I'll be watching to see how you shape!"

"We'll see how much spunk the four of you have," said Yen.

The cock crowed and it was light. Mrs. Chu boiled water and prepared their breakfast.

Yun-tao was then twenty-one and Ta-kuei nineteen. Chiang-tao was thirteen, a few years older than Erh-kuei. They already knew something of life and after this adventure each, according to his own understanding and temperament, bore in mind what their parents had said.

This episode convinced Chu of Yen's loyalty. As for Yen, he admired Chu's straightforward, fair-minded ways. The friendship between the two families grew apace.

13

Sure enough, some time after the trouble over the finch, calamity overtook Ta-kuei.

After New Year an opera was performed, and Yun-tao asked Ta-kuei to go with him to West Soching to see it. Just in front of the stage were benches marked with white flags where soldiers in grey uniforms were sitting. During those troubled years the peasants used to avoid all troops like the plague.

"Let's sit further away," said Yun-tao. "Those are conscripting flags."

"What does that matter?" asked Ta-kuei.

"It's better to be on the safe side. . . ."

Before Yun-tao could finish, Feng Lan-chih darted out behind them and pointed to Ta-kuei. "That's the dog!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Seize him!"

Some soldiers in grey picked up their rifles and started running towards them. Yun-tao, quick in the uptake, took to his heels at once. But when he looked back he saw Ta-kuei staring wildly round him, at a loss. Yun-tao waved and called: "Run, Ta-kuei! Run!"

Ta-kuei turned and saw his danger. At once he started running. He had not gone far when two shots ran out over his head. When he halted, stunned, the soldiers grabbed his right arm and twisted it backwards. Crimson with

anger, Ta-kuei glared at them and bellowed: "What do you think you're doing?"

"This wasn't our idea," replied one soldier. "Village Head Feng says you're to be conscripted."

Ta-kuei spat. "Why me?"

Feng Lan-chih came wrathfully up. "It's your turn! There's no question about that."

The soldiers produced some rope and tied Ta-kuei's arms. Though he struggled, he soon found it was no use. He panted angrily.

By now the audience had fled and the orchestra on the stage had stopped playing. Above and below all was quiet and deserted. The soldiers led Ta-kuei off, followed by Feng. They dragged him to the school and fastened him to a pillar. The muscles on his cheek were twitching.

Yun-tao ran back like the wind to East Soching to tell Chu Chung what had happened. He expected his uncle to burst into a rage, but Chu was always calmest in a crisis. He tucked his pipe into his pouch and thought for some minutes. "I knew that bastard had it in for us."

Yun-tao stamped impatiently. "But what's to be done? You must find someone at once to beg him off!"

"It's no use. There are too many men in my house to suit that old bully. That makes him mad. He's done this to break up our family."

Just then they were joined by Yen Chih-ho, Chu Ming, Chu Hsing and Wu Pa, all round-eyed and dismayed at this fearful misfortune which had befallen their friend.

"Hurry up and find someone to beg him off," advised Wu Pa. "Make them leave him here. However much they want, we'll raise the money between us."

Chu Ming looked up, his lips trembling with indignation. "It's enough to drive a man mad! But what's to be done? Feng's household is full of young fellows, but this trouble falls on our Chu family."

Yen Chih-ho pulled hard on his pipe and said not a word. The matter was clear enough — what was there to say?

Yun-tao racked his brains for someone to help. Feng Kuei-tang was out of the question. Neither Feng Hung nor

Feng Hsi would listen either. He'd better approach Li Teh-tsai. Li was drinking in a tavern when Yun-tao went in to him with his request. Tipsily, the landlord's steward raised his cup. "Heaven!" he exclaimed. "So now you need my help! What about when I needed yours?"

Yun-tao stood there and blinked but said nothing.

"Speak up!" said Li.

Yun-tao looked him squarely in the eye and answered: "I've nothing to say. I suppose you're thinking of that bird."

Li thumped the table. "Right! Understand? It's too late! You can't get him back. He'll live out his life in the barracks and at the front. He won't come home to marry till his beard is white and he can't beget any brats."

Yun-tao shivered and said: "I'll find money and treat you to a pot of wine."

"Keep your money: it's none of mine."

Since Li refused so curtly, Yun-tao withdrew in dismay.

Outside he saw a man in a dirty old overcoat, faded army uniform and shabby boots. In his nervous state, he took this for another of the soldiers until he looked closer and saw it was Big Dog Feng. He went over and asked: "When did you start wearing army uniform?"

"Some years ago now," said Big Dog Feng. "I don't mind telling you: Move a tree and it dies, but move a man and he prospers. Things have looked up for me since I left Soching. I've been living on the fat of the land." His collar was grease-stained, a matted beard covered his jaw, and his neck was black either with hair or dirt.

"Are you an army officer?" asked Yun-tao.

Big Dog flipped one thumb and guffawed. "I won't boast. I'm just a bodyguard. But our commander counts on me for food, drinks and billets!"

Yun-tao eyed him, thinking of Ta-kuei. "We haven't met for a long time," he said. "Do come to my house."

Big Dog guessed what was wanted and followed without a word. When they passed the swamp, Chu Chung was at his gate and the sight of a soldier behind Yun-tao disgusted him. "In times like these it's hard enough to avoid them —

does he have to bring one home?" But when Yun-tao introduced Big Dog as a fellow-villager, Chu rubbed his hands and stepped forward. "I don't believe we've met. Come in and sit down."

Big Dog bowed and said casually: "What's a peasant's life? Dirt all the year round, the whole family hungry and cold! A man who shoulders a rifle lacks for nothing."

Chuckling to himself, he walked in. Once inside the gate, Chu Chung called: "Dust the table and make us some tea!" When Chu Ming and Yen Chih-ho heard a stranger's voice, they went to the door and ushered Big Dog in. Chu dusted the *kang* with his sleeve and invited the soldier to be seated. After a little conversation, Mrs. Chu brought in the tea. Chu Chung wiped the bowl with his handkerchief and filled it for Big Dog, saying: "When one man is promoted, all those connected with him benefit. The money you make must keep your whole family in comfort."

Big Dog looked smug. "I've come back for a look," he said. "I'm thinking of taking my wife with me next time to enjoy a bit of life, and of buying my old father and mother a sheepskin jacket apiece. Judging by what our chief says, I shall soon be a company commander."

Chu Chung looked him up and down, doubting the truth of this boast. But the fire was now singeing their eyebrows and they had to treat a dead horse as a live one. He invited Big Dog to a meal. While drinking, Big Dog looked at the crowd of young and old around them. "What's up?" he asked.

Chu squatted on the *kang*, plying him with wine and tea, and told him about Ta-kuei.

Big Dog was already tipsy. He said with a swagger: "That's easy. Don't you worry."

Chu smiled eagerly: "Would you put in a word for us?"

Yun-tao stepped forward and said: "Uncle Chu has only just come back from the north. Now Ta-kuei's in a tight corner — will you help out?"

Big Dog rammed a hunk of pork between his teeth. "That's easy!" he said with his mouth full. "One of my

visiting cards will do the trick!" He felt in his pocket for some time. "There now! I've forgotten my card."

"Yun-tao can fetch it for you," offered Chu.

But Big Dog, it seemed, had not brought any home with him. Yun-tao ran to the street to buy a white card, after which he found an inkstone and a brush. When the ink was ground, he dipped the brush in it and asked: "Shall I write Big Dog Feng?"

Big Dog hastily signed his dissent. "No, no! I have an official name, Feng Fu-kuei."

Having written this neatly on the card, Yun-tao surveyed it and asked: "What is your rank?"

This question took Big Dog aback for a moment. But then he reeled off: "Just write: Company Commander, Eighth Battalion, Twenty-eighth Regiment, Thirty-eighth Brigade, Forty-eighth Division!"

Yun-tao marvelled as he wrote at this sequence of "eights."

While Big Dog was eating he became conscious of Chiang-tao's bright round eyes fixed on him. "That's a lively-looking lad . . . who's he?"

"My brother," said Yun-tao. "May we trouble you to make a trip?"

Big Dog airily waved his hand. "No need!"

Yun-tao took Feng Fu-kuei's card to the school. When the sentry heard that a company commander had intervened, he went at once to Feng Lan-chih, and Yun-tao followed him. Feng took the card and looked at it, then glared at Yun-tao. "What Feng Fu-kuei? This is Big Dog Feng, that useless scoundrel." He flung the card on the ground and trampled viciously on it.

Yun-tao hurried home in dismay to tell Big Dog what Feng Lan-chih had said. Big Dog laid his chopsticks on the table. "The King of Heaven himself couldn't handle the head of our clan!" He got up and marched out.

They all stared after him and Chiang-tao followed him outside the gate, coming in again to say: "We should drag him back to spit out our wine and rice!" They looked at each other and could think of no way out.

Chu Chung could contain himself no longer. His heart was burning within him. He was choking with his lust for revenge. He walked in and out, unable to stand still. His father's voice was ringing in his ears. Striding to the door, he laid his hand on the chopper meaning to take it down and rush out with it. But he thought better of it. "I must take a longer view!" He sat down on the *kang* and smoked pipe after pipe. Having reflected for some time, he thrust out his fist. "All right! To pass through a low gate, a man must bow his head. We'll have to put up with it, that's all. Let him go and be a soldier. What they think spells ruin may be a blessing in disguise. I've always wanted Ta-kuei to have military training. This is just the thing for him."

At once Chu Ming, Yen and the others breathed more freely.

Mrs. Chu clasped her hands together and said resignedly: "Of course. Let him go. What is there to worry about?"

This set the whole room laughing. Yun-tao went to the sentry at the school and asked permission for Ta-kuei to spend his last night at home. The sentry declared this quite out of the question.

"If he runs away, I'll go in his place," said Yun-tao.

Since Yun-tao looked well-built and intelligent the soldier agreed, after making Ta-kuei sign a promise to return. Mrs. Chu found two eggs and made her son some dumplings. As he ate, his father said: "Ta-kuei! Who told you to go to West Soching? Don't you know the dirty tricks those landowning bullies play? You were a fool, boy. I've only the two sons, and it's not that I don't set store by you, but we poor folk need to learn how to handle guns. Later on you can strike a blow for us. So you needn't worry about going."

When Ta-kuei heard this he started blubbering. "How was I to know this would happen? Since we came home from the north, we've had nothing but knocks. Who told you to come home?"

Chu said: "You know the proverb: A trade is never a burden. Look at your Uncle Chih-ho. He started as a peas-

ant, but because he took the trouble to learn he's now a mason. If you learn soldiering, you may become an officer some day."

He said no more, but sat there in a study. Mrs. Chu took him the dumplings Ta-kuei had left, but he did not touch them.

Finally she pushed the bowl nearer. "Go on! Eat! The dumplings are cold."

"You eat them. I'm not hungry."

Mrs. Chu looked at him sternly. "What? Not hungry?"

"I'm too upset."

"I don't care how upset you are. You're just like a child — making a fuss over the least little thing! Here at home we live in a poor way. It'll do the lad good to see something of the world and learn to overcome difficulties." She put the bowl down in front of Chu. "Now eat that up! The idea, not eating because of a little trouble!"

Chu looked at her and without a word picked up the bowl.

His wife saw that all eyes were on her, and flushed. "You don't know him," she explained. "I have to keep an eye on him. It wouldn't do to let him have his own way."

By the time Chu had finished it was dark, and after a little more talk the others left. Then the family blew out the lamp and went to bed. Tomorrow Ta-kuei would have to make an early start!

Ta-kuei was a simple lad. In spite of this disaster, which meant that he must leave home to fight for the warlords, the moment his head touched the pillow he fell asleep. Chu tossed and turned, but could not get to sleep. Since his boyhood he had always carried out whatever he set his heart on. Having decided to go north, he had gone at once. He hadn't found it easy to make his way — it had meant innumerable hardships — but then he had been homesick. At the time of his marriage he had promised his wife that they would not leave her district, and he did not want to leave without her. He pleaded with her till she agreed to break up their home and go back with him. No matter how hard life proved, they would be home. Possessing no house or land, they had set about building a cottage. But no sooner

did they have a roof over their heads than Ta-kuei was seized by Feng Lan-chih for the army. So many troubles had fallen on his shoulders! Chu looked round the dark room and under his breath cried: "Heaven! Heaven!" His heart seemed to be splitting in two. He swore to himself: "Damn the bully! He wants to grind me down so that I never raise my head again!"

Thinking these thoughts, he could not sleep. His heart was burning, his whole body seemed on fire. He raised his head, but all outside was dark: the watchman in the street was sounding his clapper. He sank back on the pillow, reflecting that all he had in the world was these two boys and their mother — his wife's true, deep affection meant everything to him!

This was no more than the truth. Since boyhood Chu Chung had been on his own. He would trudge south one day and north the next, like a floating weed with no roots, with nothing to hold his affections. There was no one to make him shoes and socks, no one to sleep beside him. But ever since his wife came to sit on his *kang*, in winter he had a padded suit, in summer a cotton one. They might be patched or darned, but they were clean. At the right season he need not say a word — there they were laid out for him. When he came home after dark from the fields, there was a hot meal and water in the pitcher. No matter how far he travelled, as soon as he reached home her sympathy made him feel that half his weariness was gone. For twenty years now they had been man and wife without a single quarrel. They always shared one *kang* and Chu often thought: "With her beside me, I could be warm all winter without a padded coat and cool all summer without a fan. She makes a man forget hunger and cold." Late at night, if he could not sleep, the two of them often talked. Sometimes Chu said: "Wife, you're my good fairy! What should I do without you?"

"Good fairy indeed!" Mrs. Chu would retort. "A hard-working housewife, you mean!"

Now his wife was lying sleepless too. Her son had been seized by the army and must leave home tomorrow: her

mother's heart felt as if plunged in seething oil. In these years of endless fighting, who could tell if a soldier would ever come back again? Her heart kept missing a beat and then racing wildly. She thought of her own dead parents and her past.

Her mother had died as soon as she was born. Her father, too poor to keep her, had married her off at seventeen. She had barely given birth to a child when her husband died and left her a lonely young widow. On the sparsely peopled plains of the wild north there were many man-eating wolves. She managed as best she could. In broad daylight she kept the gate closed, and at night she bolted it firmly before she dared sleep. But there was no water in the vat, no flour in the pitcher, and because she had no milk the baby cried with hunger day and night. It was nothing but skin and bones, and soon it died. At night she wrapped the little corpse in a matting, and carried it out to the waste land, burying it in a shallow grave which she scooped with her hands. She sobbed: "Poor mite! You were born at an unlucky time. Your father died and your mother was too young to bring you up properly."

After losing her child she managed somehow to make ends meet for another year, by the end of which she was desperate. And the harder times were, the more she longed for a husband. She was not one of those women who want to remain a widow all their lives: she was eager to find someone she could depend on.

The head of her clan was a man with the heart of a wolf. Struck by her strength and good looks, one night he jumped over the wall and wanted to sleep with her. When she resolutely refused to let him in, he grew angry and determined to drive her away. He demanded two hundred dollars before allowing her to roll up her quilt and go to Chu Chung's house. After that she had someone to push the mill, carry water, see to the child if she had a headache or fever, and sweep the yard in wind or rain. They struggled for years to build up a home — and then Chu set his heart on going south again! She thought there was something to be said for leaving the scoundrelly clan head, in order to

have some peace. Today she had learned that all crows are equally black, all wolves eat meat. Feng Lan-chih was as bad as any of them! She grew more and more wretched.

When Chu knew his wife was sleepless too, he fumbled for the matches, sat up in bed and lit the oil lamp on the wall. Its ruddy flame flickered in the draught. It was still dark outside. No cock had crowed. He turned and said: "Wife! Are you poorly?"

"No. Just upset because the boy's leaving."

"We're all upset, but what good will that do?"

"A son leaving his mother's like a melon torn off the vine. Joining the army at a time like this. . . ."

Her words pierced Chu's heart as if they were iron spikes. For a long time he said nothing.

"When you wanted to come home, I let you have your way," said his wife. "But how are we to manage now? Feng Lan-chih is even worse than my clan chief!"

"I'm not afraid of him!" cried Chu fiercely. "Wait and see! Our day will come!" His wife made no reply, and when he looked she was asleep. He pulled the quilt over her, inexpressibly touched by her honest, kindly face. It was only thanks to her that he had the children. Thanks to her, they seemed a family. With her he need never be lonely. She had taken up the burden of life and helped him in all his struggles. Without her they would scarcely be able to manage at all, let alone have a decent life!

He had another look at Ta-kuei. The lad was sleeping soundly, his head on his arms.

Yun-tao went home that evening thinking: "If not for my asking Ta-kuei to see the show, he wouldn't have been caught." His heart was like ice. He went to the Donkey Man's house and knocked at the gate, which was opened by Chun-lan. Yun-tao walked to the weaving shed and lit the lamp, meaning to read for a while. But Chun-lan stood by the *kang* and would not go.

"Has Ta-kuei been conscripted?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Was it you who suggested going to the opera?"

"Yes."

Chun-lan pouted. "You should have known better than to go to West Soching — those people are brigands. And if you had to go, you should have kept a look-out instead of letting him be grabbed like that."

"If they've made up their mind to get you or make trouble, it makes no difference what you do. Who has eyes in the back of his head?"

They grieved in silence over their friend's fate, their hearts beating fast.

At dawn the next day Yun-tao went to see Ta-kuei, whose mother had cooked another good meal for him. After he had eaten, she made him put on new clothes and wrapped his old ones up for him to take. Ta-kuei took some of them out to leave behind, saying: "In the army you are given all you need."

His father, looking on, said: "Listen to me, Ta-kuei. You're not to be one of those soldiers who loot and rob. Mind you don't harm anyone."

Ta-kuei was seen off by his family, as well as Yun-tao, Chu Ming, Chu Hsing, Wu Pa and Chiang-tao. Yun-tao whispered to him on the road: "Brother, I'm to blame for this! Now you must leave! If all goes well, send me word and I'll come to see you."

"I'll do that," promised Ta-kuei. "I hope when I come back we'll meet again."

"Of course we shall!"

Ta-kuei's mother was just behind. When they came to the edge of the marsh she reached out and stopped him, to put some boiled eggs in his pocket. "Son!" she cried. "Little did I think, when we came here from the north, we'd fall into their clutches again! Away from home, you'll have to look after yourself. Mother won't be there to see to things for you. Be sure to wrap up well at night, so as not to catch cold. And never mind whether the food is good or not, you must eat enough. Men are iron, and food is steel. . . ." She brushed some tears away with the hem of her jacket, the first tears she had shed for years!

Ta-kuei's eyes were suspiciously bright, but before she could finish he said: "Why are you crying, mum? By the time you miss me, I shall be on my way home."

His mother laughed. "You make it sound very easy. In the army you're not your own master. If they want to beat you or swear at you, they can." Her voice trembled again.

"Well, I've legs, haven't I?" said Ta-kuei.

By this time Chu and the others were waiting for them on the west bank.

Yun-tao's eyes smarted as he looked on at this parting between mother and son. "Why did this have to happen to him?" he wondered. "Is this fate?" Chiang-tao's long black lashes quivered, but he remained silent. As for Erh-kuei he stuck close to his brother's side. They had never been parted before, yet now he did not know when Ta-kuei would be back. He sobbed the whole of the way.

Ta-kuei's conscription preyed on Yun-tao's mind. In neighbouring villages, there were many cases of arson and shooting by the military. Yun-tao became sparing of speech but increasingly thoughtful. Folk said: "There's a lad who knows his own mind." After working all day in the pear orchard, in the evening he would bolt the door of the weaving shed and light the oil lamp to read *Water Margin*, while Chun-lan and Chiang-tao at his side drew pictures or practised their writing. Besides telling them stories he taught them to use the abacus. In less than a year Chun-lan could rattle off a number of tales, and Chiang-tao's manipulations of the abacus beads sounded like horses galloping down the street.

(to be continued)

Translated by Gladys Yang

WANG YUAN-CHIEN

An Ordinary Labourer

General Lin and Colonel Liu got down from the bus, took the towel cloths from their necks and mopped their perspiring faces. Then they shouldered their bundles and hastened along the road towards the construction site.

Originally, they had planned to reach camp early, and go with their unit when it marched off to begin its two to ten shift. But the conference they had attended that morning had lasted longer than they expected. To make matters worse, their bus broke down on the road and was half an hour late; it didn't arrive at the camp until after three in the afternoon. Instead of getting off, they bought tickets to the next stop, which was nearer the dam.

"We've missed class," quipped the general. "Better hurry and do some make-up work or we'll be left back."

The mid-June weather was at its hottest in late afternoon. Powdery dust rose from every step on the scorched dirt road. The atmosphere was oppressive, charged; you had the feeling that you had only to strike a match and the air would burst into flame.

Supporting the bundle on his shoulder with one hand, in his other hand the general held a string bag containing his wash basin and other toilet articles. He walked with large strides. Even before they entered the valley, sweat had soaked through the back of his tunic. Beads of perspiration dripped from his greying temples beneath his wide-brimmed straw hat.

Colonel Liu, who had been trudging behind him, hurried a few steps to catch up. Panting, he proffered the small package in his hand and said, "Let me take that bundle, General. You take this. It's not so heavy."

"Forget it. You're no youngster either." The general looked at Colonel Liu and smiled. "We two are about the same."

The colonel was really having a difficult time. Not only was he aging, but he was quite stout. The heat was hard on him. The upper half of his body looked as if it had been boiled. Sweat was streaming down his cheeks.

"Perhaps you'd like to rest a while?" Colonel Liu suggested hopefully.

"Not necessary. I'll shift this bundle and I'll be fine." The general halted, removed the grey tunic, faded almost white with many washings, and hung it over his arm. Beneath, he wore only a sleeveless undershirt. He raised the bundle to his other shoulder and hailed a passing comrade.

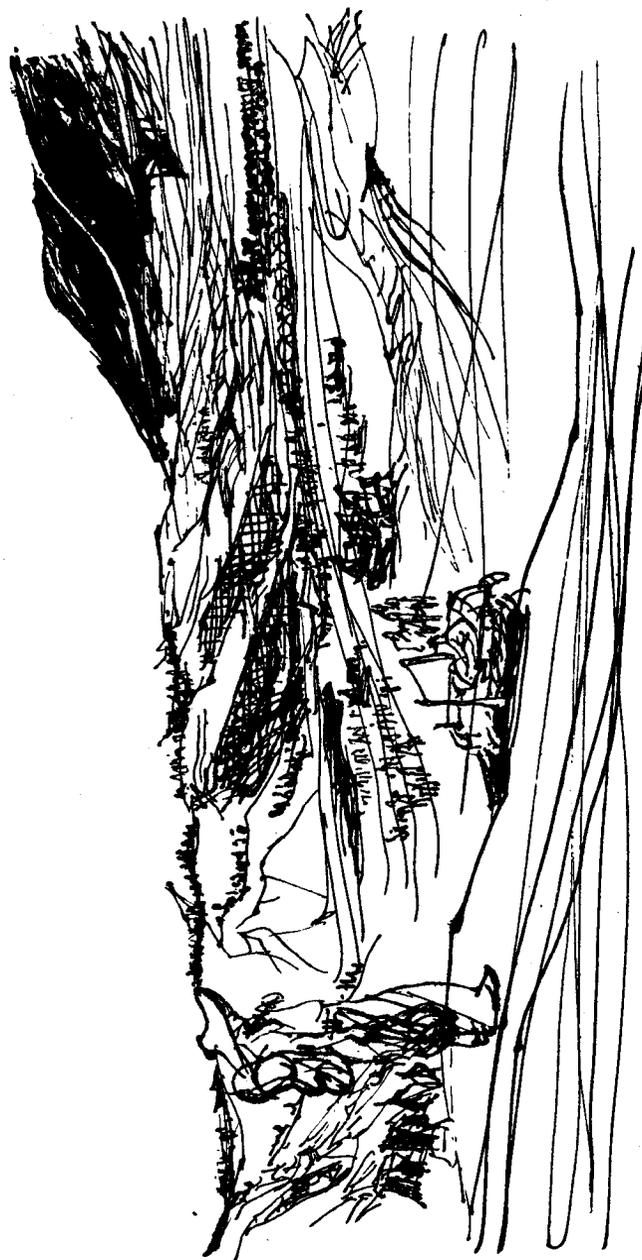
"How far to the dam site?"

"It's just ahead." The man pointed to a wooden arch.

Sure enough, stepping through the archway, they were greeted with the hum of voices and machinery, and the blare of loudspeakers. The whole panorama of the dam site unrolled before them. It was huge. A long earthen dam was rising upon the valley floor to link two mountains at either end. Conveyer belts, like endless pythons, carried earth and gravel up the slope of the dam. Atop the dam and at its base, people, trucks, bulldozers swarmed in continuous rapid motion. . . .

The general was stirred. He knew this place well. Nine years before he had wracked his brains here, helping prepare the campaign to capture and hold these mountains with their tombs of the ancient Ming emperors. More than once he had pored over battle maps of the area, and peered at every peak through his field glasses. To this day he still remembered the exact altitude of each.

But the old battlefield was completely changed. The enemy fortifications were long since gone. Where a small



branch of the Great Wall had been was only a white scar on the mountains. Even the little hill in the valley was now half its original size; its whole upper section had been removed and incorporated into the dam.

Whenever he saw construction going on in a place where he had fought or camped the general always felt a certain warmth, a kind of sweetness. Coming back to the Ming Tombs region today as an ordinary labourer, he experienced these emotions even more intently. His discomfort and weariness were completely forgotten.

The general and the colonel walked until they found a sign bearing the unit designation of the section they were to join. They had chosen this particular unit because working here they could get to know men with whom they usually had little contact.

Everyone was very busy. At the foot of a metre high ramp were a string of tip-cars on a small gauge railway. The People's Liberation Army men in this section were divided into three teams. One team filled the baskets with earth and gravel; another carried the baskets a distance of about thirty metres and mounted a ramp; a third dumped the baskets into the tip-cars.

Like an embarrassed tardy pupil, the general pulled the colonel to one side, and they quietly deposited their luggage. Then, adjusting their wide straw hats, they entered the section. They searched for tools for several minutes, but in vain. Finally, they discovered two empty wicker baskets. They each took one, and used it to carry earth, by hand.

This method proved to be quite awkward. It was slow, inefficient and hurt the hands. So as not to hold up others, they left the board walks and tramped through the sand. The general had made several trips from the basket-fillers to the top of the ramp when a bright, high-pitched voice hailed him.

"Hey, old comrade, how come you're going it alone? Don't you like team work?"

The friendly teasing brought a smile to the general's face. He looked around. The speaker was a round-visaged

young soldier of about twenty. He had a faint suggestion of down on his upper lip. The lock of hair protruding from under the peak of his cap was plastered by perspiration to his forehead. He was the picture of mischief. Toting two earth-filled baskets on the ends of a shoulder pole, he walked towards the general with a rhythmic gait. Grinning impishly, he revealed clean white teeth.

The general laughed. "I'm a new recruit!"

"Wait a minute." The boy deftly dumped the earth from his baskets, then ran and fetched a large deep basket from behind one of the gravel screens. Placing it down before the general, he said:

"Let's form a 'mutual-aid team' with this. What do you say?"

"Good," replied the general. He squatted and helped the boy remove the two shallow baskets and affix the suspension rope of the big basket to the center of the carrying pole.

Tightening the knots, the boy glanced at the general disapprovingly. "You won't do at all," he said in the critical voice of an old veteran. "You can't go around in just an undershirt the first day. You'll get a bad burn in this hot sun." After the general put on his tunic, the boy continued to impart the benefit of his experience.

"Drink plenty of water," he said. "And, in a little while, when the pickled vegetables come, eat a lot. At the end of the shift, be sure to empty all the sand from your shoes, or you'll raise blisters on the march back to camp. Wash your hands and feet in hot water before going to bed. We have very good conditions here. Every man gets two ladlesful of hot water. . . ."

Gazing gratefully at the boy's face, the general agreed to each of his recommendations. He liked this youngster very much. They began to chat. He learned that the boy's name was Li Shou-ming, that he was in a messenger squad and was twenty-one years of age. Li Shou-ming had joined the army in 1955; plainly he considered himself a veteran. The general learned a good deal from him about work here and conditions in his unit.

Chatting easily, by the time the big basket was tied to the pole, the two were old friends. The general affectionately called the boy "Young Li." And Young Li familiarly addressed the comrade in the faded grey tunic as "Old Lin."

They carried the basket to the gravel pit, where the shovellers filled it to the brim. Not satisfied, the general added a "steamed muffin" — piling in more gravel and sand to form a rounded top. This brought on his first argument with Young Li. As the general was crouching to get his shoulder under the front end of the carrying pole, Young Li pulled the rope knot half a foot along the pole towards himself. The general saw him.

"You mustn't do that," the general said reprovingly, moving the knot back to the center.

"I'm strong. A little extra weight won't hurt me." Young Li again pulled the knot towards his end.

"You're cheating because I can't see behind me." The general moved the knot forward. "Our total ages come to over 70, and mine is more than two-thirds of that number. The weight belongs on my side!"

Young Li was stumped.

The first argument was settled. But after two trips, another one arose. Young Li began it.

"This way is no good. You're not nimble enough. It's not safe. You're liable to trip over those baskets waiting to be dumped, and hurt yourself."

"It doesn't matter."

"Doesn't matter?" Young Li shifted to another point of attack. "Besides, you walk too slowly. You can't be our 'locomotive.' We hold up the teams behind us."

This time the general was stumped. It was true, because of old wounds in his side and legs, he couldn't walk very quickly.

"Come on, Old Lin, you handle the rudder. I'll take the prow."

Young Li finally triumphed.

In spite of their arguments, the two co-operated extremely well. With Young Li in the lead and the general counting cadence, they walked in an even, matched pace. They shared

the same piece of salted turnip, they drank from the same canteen. With each trip they made up the ramp, they felt this friendship "that forgot age" growing closer and firmer.

And each time they came down the ramp with emptied basket, Young Li gazed respectfully at the white rime of dried perspiration that formed a line on the general's greying hair along the rim of his straw hat. The old comrade certainly has a lot of drive, Young Li thought to himself. He must know that shovelling is easier, but he insists on carrying this heavy basket. . . .

The general was becoming very fond of the young soldier. On the back of his yellow sleeveless shirt was a big "5," and the boy carried earth with the same flowing restlessness he undoubtedly displayed on the athletic field. For instance, when you brought your basket to the top of the ramp, all you had to do was put it down behind the others and wait for it to be emptied. But Young Li always delivered theirs right to the very edge — to "make it easier for them to load the tip-cars."

And on the way down, he was always shouting orders and gesticulating. Or he grumbled and moved the baskets of those who hadn't put them in their proper places. He invariably carried back a few more empty baskets, in addition to his own. He had many criticisms. Either the car-loaders were too few — they were holding up the work. Or he would shout: "Watch how you fling those empty baskets. You're liable to hurt someone!"

The general found the boy's criticisms in complete accord with what he was thinking himself. He was learning to understand Young Li better with every trip they made. The general paid frequent visits to the lower ranks. Only the other day he had worked in his "experimental plot" — one of the companies. And he often chatted with the soldiers. But although he had used these methods for the past several years, they never gave him the comprehension of the average soldier's thinking and emotions which he got working together these few hours with Young Li. The boy's attitude of being one of the masters of his own society, his striving to do well, his sense of collectiveness. . . . The

general linked these with his "experimental plot" company, with his own work. . . . He became so immersed in his contemplations that several times he nearly stumbled.

Pondering, working, the general was surprised to discover that three hours had flown by.

At six-thirty, two cooks arrived with a large basket of steamed muffins and a pail of pickled vegetables. The tip-cars rolled off with their load and did not return. Evidently the men at the other end of the line were eating. Everyone promptly swarmed around the muffin hamper. The general squeezed his way through the cheerful crowd and took two muffins and two pieces of pickled turnip. Then he found a sand dune and sat down.

It was only then that he realized how tired he was. Not that hard work was new to him. By 1930, he had already put in three years pulverizing and carrying ore in a mine. And, of course, there were the long difficult years in the Red Army. But that was all years ago. Today, three hours of hauling sand and gravel brought home to him that he was not as strong as he used to be. The sun made him dizzy. His shoulders were red and swollen from the carrying pole. His back and legs were stiff, and the old wound in his side was beginning to hurt. A bullet had fractured one of his ribs when they were fighting the reactionary troops in 1935.

The general rolled over and let the hot sand bake his wounded side. The warmth was very comforting. He took a bite of muffin and lightly drummed his stiff legs with his fist. It doesn't matter, he said to himself. If I can stick it out today, tomorrow won't be any problem.

Lolling against the sand dune, he munched his muffin and gazed at the dam. Black rain clouds were racing from behind the mountain ridge and piling up over the construction site. Against the dark, heaving background, the dam looked like a battleship, floating majestically through stormy seas. Bursting dynamite, like volleys from artillery batteries, on the mountains at either end, sent smoke and dust sailing into the heavens. As if borrowing the booming explosions for rhythmic accompaniment, the loudspeakers were transmitting the brave strains of the popular song:

I'm a soldier, and I come from good plain stock.
Revolutionary battles have steeled me. . . .

The scene made the general very happy. A heavy voice drifted over from the other side of the sand dune. Someone was telling a story:

". . . That was what you call hard work. Earth, timber, timber, earth, all day long. No comfortable eight-hour shifts for us. We just kept at it. . . ."

"And did you get them done in time?" another voice asked tensely.

"Of course. Our divisional commander came and wielded a shovel right with us. How could we fail! The division C.O. and I shouldered a log together. He carried the front end. As we walked, Commander Lin called: 'Let's finish building these fortifications quickly, comrades! Make them so tight that the enemy won't even be able to get a drop of water through!' He certainly knew how to put things! . . ." The heavy voice paused. There was the sound of crunching pickled turnip, then the voice resumed: "Now that's the way we've got to build this dam — so that not a drop of water can get through! It seems to me—" A roar of laughter drowned out the rest.

General Lin smiled. He knew the engagement the man was talking about. Whether he had actually said those words, he didn't really remember, but they recalled to him the tense atmosphere of the time. He automatically looked at the big earthen dam again. He's right, the general thought. There are many similarities between those days and now.

The general was about to get up and take a look at the speaker, when a spray of sand dropped by his side. Young Li was coming towards him in leaps and bounds.

"So this is where you are. I've been searching everywhere." Young Li offered him a straw hat full of muffins. The boy took a swig from his canteen, then handed that to the general too.

The general drank, and asked, "Have you been looking for me long?"

"No. When I couldn't find you, I went to listen to our section chief tell a story."

"Ah." The general gazed affectionately at the boy's perspiring face. He handed Young Li his towel cloth and slightly shook his head. "Just look at you. This work is tiring enough without you dashing all over the place during the break."

"There's nothing to this job," Young Li replied excitedly, mopping his face. "We're doing a little work, but we've got tents to live in and we eat steamed muffins made of pure white flour. You call that tiring? The way the old Red Army climbed the Snow Mountains and crossed the marshlands on the Long March — now that was *really* hard." He took a bite of muffin and asked the general: "Have you heard the stories of the Red Army on the Long March, Old Lin?"

The general smiled, but did not reply.

"You haven't? I've heard lots of them." The boy grew animated. He forgot the muffin in his hand. "Our political instructor told us. The Long March was very difficult. When the Red Army crossed the marshlands, they ran out of food. They ate grass roots, and wild herbs. One comrade was so hungry, he boiled his leather belt and finished it off in one day."

Obviously, the youngster was embroidering the story. You couldn't eat tough leather belts like crisp cucumber. It had taken the general three full days in the marshlands to consume his leather sole. But, infected by the boy's ardour, he didn't bother to correct him. He only remarked, "Under those circumstances, what else could you do?" At the time, eating leather belts and soles had seemed to him entirely natural.

"What!" The old comrade's mild response aroused the boy's anger. Red in the face, he sputtered, "You-you-you don't have the least idea what our old revolutionaries went through!" He rolled over and lay with his hands pillowed beneath his head, furious, clearly determined to say no more to this unfeeling individual.

"Our old revolutionaries," he muttered. "So many gave their lives, they suffered so. Now they hand the country they won over to us and say, 'Do a good job of construction. Let everybody work and everybody enjoy the benefits!' If we don't do this right, how will we be able to look them in the eye? . . ."

The general turned and glanced at the boy's agitated face. A warm, tender feeling stole over him. Although Young Li wasn't fully clear about the nature of his responsibilities, through him the general could see one thing plainly: The glorious tradition of hard life and bitter struggle of the older generation of fighters had already been accepted as a precious heritage by the younger generation. This heritage educated them and inspired them to devote themselves to building socialism; under new conditions it was bursting forth into new blazing flowers.

Moved, the general said, "Recalling those times makes us want to work with greater drive than ever today!"

"Now you're talking sense." Young Li seemed a bit mollified. He ate his muffin, and leaned close and whispered in the older man's ear, "Our generals are the ones who really work hard. Have you ever seen them work?"

The general only laughed.

"Don't you believe me? I saw one once." Young Li set up abruptly and said in a confidential voice, "One night at three o'clock in the morning I was called up out of bed and given an urgent message to deliver to a general — our political commissar. I thought: He must be asleep. But what do you think?" The boy paused, then said with unconcealed admiration: "He was writing at his desk!"

"Generals have to work too. Wasn't it the same for you? You had to get up in the middle of the night."

"There you go again!" Young Li retorted in annoyance. "I had a couple of hours sleep already — he was working right along! . . ." Before he could say more, a big drop of rain struck his cheek. A wild gritty wind swooped down and rain fell in heavy white sheets, the drops raising little smoky puffs as they struck the powdery soil.



The storm was sudden and fierce. Men ran about looking for their raincoats and seeking shelter. In an instant, every place that offered some protection from the wind — the pits, behind the gravel screens, behind the sand dunes — was crowded with people. Young Li looked at the railway tracks and saw that the tip-cars had not yet returned. He pulled the general to his feet and led him in a short dash to a wooden lean-to. There they crouched, out of the storm.

The rain grew heavier, the wind blew harder. Someone had lost something and was shouting inquiries. Someone's straw hat went tumbling across the diggings like a runaway kite. Just at that time a wheeled tractor with a train of empty tip-cars, twisting and undulating like some legless centipede, came rumbling back to the loading place beside the ramp.

The comrades at the dam must be waiting, thought the general. We ought to load those cars. But the rain is so heavy. . . . Only a few comrades came out from their shelters and walked towards the ramp. But when the others didn't follow, they hesitated, and started to turn back. Young Li was bursting with impatience.

"Section chief! Section chief!" he shouted.

"The section chief has gone to a meeting!" someone replied.

The scene evoked a responsive chord in the general. This sort of thing often happened in battle. Everyone would know what ought to be done in a certain situation, and would be itching to do it. But because no one took the lead, an entire unit would remain immobile. At such a time, if someone said only one word the unit would immediately plunge into action. The general shook the boy's arm.

"Come on, Young Li. Let's go to work!"

"Right! But the section chief isn't here. . . ."

"We'll start anyway!" The general put his hand on the boy's shoulder and pushed himself to his feet. Then he pulled Young Li up.

"Comrades," he shouted. "Let's go!"

He came out of the lean-to and advanced, crouching, into the gale.

His cry was like a command. Everyone stood up. Two, then three more . . . came trotting out into the rain. Laughing, shouting, they followed the general towards the ramp. Some dashed on ahead of him. As he ran, the general glanced behind him. How many years is it since I've done this? he asked himself.

He was reminded of that day in the marshlands. They were also caught in a sudden rainstorm at dusk. Weak from cold and fatigue and hunger, the men had hurried towards a grove. He knew that if they didn't find drier ground to camp for the night, they would have to grope in the dark across treacherous marshes filled with bogs and quicksands. Then too he had called to his soldiers. Then too, responding, they had pushed on through the storm.

The general and Young Li were soaked to the skin by the time they reached the gravel pit. The gale flung raindrops and sand stinging against their faces. But they had no time for such matters. Seizing shovels, they energetically filled a large basket, shouldered the pole and hurried towards the ramp. Two men came running to meet them.

The man in the lead grabbed the end of the pole which the general was supporting as the "rudder."

"Commander . . ." he panted. Young Li couldn't hear him in the howling wind.

Peering at him, the general saw the red tabs on his shoulders. Behind him was Colonel Liu. Firmly, the general pushed the man's hand aside.

"I'm just a soldier here. You're the commander. . . . Comrade Section Chief, I have a suggestion. You'd better hurry and get things organized. It's hard to see in this storm. We ought to take special safety precautions!"

"Right." The section chief helplessly released the pole. "There was a meeting up at division. I just got back . . ." he explained lamely. Then he hurried up to Young Li at the pole's front end.

Grasping the boy by the shoulder, he pulled him to a stop and said in a low voice, "The general's getting on in years, and he's been wounded. You must take good care of him. . . ."

"General!" cried the startled Young Li. His heart began to beat fast; he didn't know whether it was because he was moved or tense. Rain seemed to have gotten into his eyes: they smarted. Hastily, he lowered his end of the pole and turned to face the general.

Meishan Mountain Reservoir →

by Chang Wen-chun

This painting is typical of the many traditional Chinese paintings that are appearing on modern themes today. In the true tradition of Chinese painting, the artist achieves a full harmony between crowds of moving people and their natural surroundings. He also adopts traditional methods in composition, colour and brush work. As a painter of his times, however, he expresses to the full the enthusiasm of the people in their work of large-scale construction.

梅山水庫
一九五六年三月
張之



“Young imp.” The general put a loving hand on the boy’s shoulder. Then he gave him a gentle shove. “Quick, take the rudder. I’m going to be the locomotive this time!” He bent and raised the front end of the carrying pole.

Young Li quickly took hold of the rear. He saw the general’s greying hair, wet with rain and perspiration. Young Li drew in a deep breath and moved the knot half a foot towards himself.

This time, the general didn’t notice. One hand helping support the pole on his shoulder, the other hand swinging free, the general straightened up and strode forward. He walked firmly, proudly.

That was how he had walked when he led his company across the marshlands. That was how he had walked when he had led his regiment to break out of the Japanese encirclement, and when he had led his division back through the Shanhaikuan Pass in the War of Liberation.

LIU TA-WEI

The Iron and Steel Regiment

Chang Yung felt as if he were in another world. Everything was so new, so wonderful. Although he had been away from home only a little more than a week, some absolute miracles had occurred. He was reminded of the prince in the fairy-tale who had explored the deep mountain cave; the prince thought he was in the cave only four or five days, but when he came out he found that thousands of years had expired. Of course that was only a fairy-tale. It seemed to Chang Yung that what he had just experienced would make much more astonishing reading than any story for children.

A week before he had been sent from his native village to the county town of Hsushui for a short course in iron-making. The morning following his arrival, he was suddenly summoned to the industry department of the county Party committee. As he entered the office of the department head, he and the man behind the desk recognized each other.

"So it's you!" they cried, almost simultaneously.

The comrade hurried from his desk to greet him. He warmly grasped both of Chang Yung's hands. "I never thought that this is where we'd meet again." He slapped the desk delightedly. "You're just the man I want for this mission. I'm sure you'll bring back the information we need."

Chang Yung was mystified. He recalled their last meeting, several years before, on the Korean front. He was little more than a boy then, a telephone operator in a communications company.

The line between battalion headquarters and the spearhead company had been cut. Craters pitted the less than one mile separating battalion from the foremost positions. Shells whistled overhead, and geysers of yellow dust kept spurting upward from the ground. Operators went out one after another to splice the telephone line. Each time it was repaired, explosives snapped it again.

Chang Yung was the only operator left in battalion headquarters when the commander received new orders from above. The commander had to transmit them to the spearhead company. Rather fretfully, he called:

"Telephone operator!"

"Here!" Solemnly holding a pair of pliers, a carbine slung across his back, young Chang Yung stepped forward and stood at attention.

When the battalion commander saw the childish appearance of the soldier standing before him, he changed his mind. "Forget it," he said. "Don't bother about repairing the line. I will go to the front myself, I'll be able to see how the spearhead company is doing while I'm there."

How can he leave the command post? There aren't any special circumstances. Why should he go to the front himself? wondered Chang Yung. What's the telephone for? If the line's cut, what's the telephone operator for?

"Battalion commander," he said aloud, "I don't agree with your idea."

The commander was startled. Then he smiled. "What do you think we should do?" And he added in a fatherly voice, "Your casualties have been heavy."

"Commander, I guarantee to repair the line within half an hour!"

He finally convinced the battalion commander to let him go. Braving the artillery fire, skipping from one shell crater to another, now crawling, now leaping, he reached the break in the line and repaired it—not in half an hour, but in fifteen minutes. The battalion commander transmitted his orders.

It wasn't until he returned to the dugout that Chang Yung discovered the wound in his left arm. The commander helped the medical orderly bandage it.

"Where are you from, youngster?" The commander had been wanting to ask that question ever since he first heard Chang Yung speak.

"Hsushui County, Hopei Province."

"A true son of an old liberated area!"

"Where are you from, commander?" queried Chang Yung. The friendly conversation made him forget his pain.

"Guess!"

"I recognized your accent long ago. You're from Hsushui, too. . . ."

Today, the two companions in battle were again face to face. Each told briefly what had happened to him since their parting. Chang Yung had returned to civilian life a year before. The battalion commander, now head of the industry department, had left the army only very recently.

Finally, their talk turned to the business at hand.

"It's this way," the commander explained. "The Party committee has decided that, in answer to the call of the Central Committee to overtake Britain, our whole county must go all-out in iron and steel-making. First, we're going to set up some small blast furnaces, the way they did in Tanghsien County, get some people like you together, and learn the Tanghsien method of making iron."

Chang Yung was stirred. That means the iron ore in those hills north of our village is going to be put to use at last, he thought.

"But now, something has come up. . . ."

"What is it?" Chang Yung was afraid he was going to lose his chance to learn iron smelting.

"This." The department chief picked up a *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) from the desk. "You see, it says here that the small native-style blast furnaces in Yangcheng County, Shansi Province, are producing good iron quickly and cheaply. We want to send someone to find out how they do it."

"You mean me?" asked Chang Yung, surprised and pleased.

"Right! You! This morning the county Party committee decided to pick a man from the technical training class. I didn't know that it would be you, old friend! I know that I can rely on you to accomplish the mission."

Chang Yung felt as if he were back on the Korean battlefield. "Commander, no, department chief," he said earnestly, "give me your orders."

"You leave today. Map out your own route. But you must be back in ten days, even if you have to crawl to get here. Bring back a design of the Yangcheng type furnace. You will be in charge of building them."

This time, when Chang Yung set out, instead of a carbine and a pair of pliers, he carried a knapsack and a letter of introduction.

The department chief took him to the railway station. On the way, he told Chang Yung the county's long-range plan for developing industry. In a field of sorghum near the station, three small blast furnaces were in the process of construction.

"There are only a few of them, now," the department chief said, "but just wait till next year. We'll have a whole forest of iron and steel furnaces of every kind, both native-style ones and modern ones. You study hard. You're going to be our engineer. . . ."

As he boarded the train, Chang Yung thought: Can a telephone operator become an engineer? Forget it! My job now is to get that design. . . .

He asked the conductor and several of the passengers about bus service to Yangcheng from Hantan, which was the nearest railway stop. None of them knew. But the conductor sent a telegram to the Hantan station-master. When Chang Yung arrived, he found a bus ticket ready and waiting for him. He thanked the station-master and hurried into the bus. It got him to Yangcheng the same night. He hadn't eaten or slept, but what did it matter! This form of travel was much more comfortable than night marches

in Korea. Besides, his mission was urgent. The entire nation was waiting for iron and steel to take the lead.

In Yangcheng, Chang Yung worked intensively. In three days he mastered the techniques of selecting the materials, building the furnace, mixing the ingredients, lighting and stoking the fire — right up to producing the molten metal.

He started for home. But heavy rain stopped the bus. The river had risen. There was no hope of the bus getting across that night.

March! Chang Yung said to himself. He seemed to hear the department chief's voice: ". . . you must be back in ten days, even if you have to crawl to get here." He knew they were waiting for him in Hsushui so that they could start building the furnaces. He couldn't delay.

Carefully putting the design in an inner breast pocket, Chang Yung walked all night through the heavy rain. With the quick, ground-consuming pace of the soldier, he crossed seven mountains and forded a dozen swollen rivers and streams, arriving at the railroad station as the sun was rising through the eastern clouds.

Taking his seat in the passenger coach, he calculated to himself. He had been gone seven days. In less than a day, he would be home. Chang Yung couldn't sit still. He was too excited. He stood by the door at the end of the car, wiped the moisture from the glass, and peered outside.

The train thundered towards Hsushui. Millet as high as a man, cotton, dark green maize with five and six ears to a stalk flew past in the fields. When the express neared the Hsushui station, Chang Yung couldn't believe his eyes.

Was he dreaming? A miracle had occurred in the sorghum field the department chief had pointed out to him a week previously. The chief had said that they would have a forest of furnaces a year from now. At the time, Chang Yung had thought the prediction too optimistic. But now, the forest was there already!

Big furnaces, little furnaces, hundreds of them, spread out on both sides of the railway. How could it be? So many furnaces in only seven days. Amazing! The furnaces stood neatly, like soldiers in ranks. The people operating

them were not professional workers, but ordinary peasants — and many of them were armed. Countless banners, redder than the molten iron, flapped gaily in the breeze.

Before the train came to a full stop, Chang Yung jumped down and rushed out of the station. The road from the station to town had been widened. Stranger still, there were now buses rolling from town into the countryside, the same handsome red and yellow two-tone vehicles he had seen in Peking.

The Hsushui streets were crowded. Some of the people obviously were from the big cities. Chang Yung's admiring gaze was caught by the neat files of young folk, a hoe in one hand, a rifle in the other, smartly shouting "One, two, three, four!" in cadence as they marched by. What was this? There were girls among them, too, also carrying darkly gleaming rifles on their shoulders. . . .

Thrilled by these many marvels, Chang Yung hurried to the industry department. Here, another strange thing happened.

"Are you looking for the regimental commander?" a messenger boy asked him.

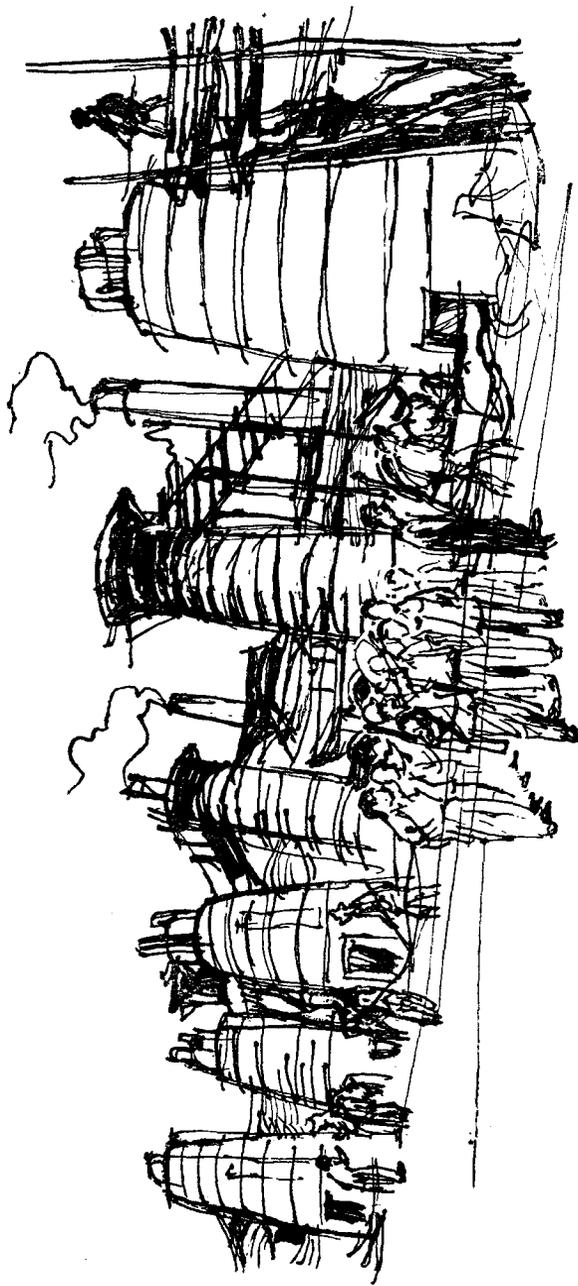
"No, I want the department chief."

"That's right. He's our regimental commander now. You'll find him at the iron works by the railway station."

Chang Yung had been eager to go there the moment he saw the place. Now he flew to where the furnaces rose to the sky like a forest. Beneath a big red banner inscribed with the words "Iron and Steel Regiment" was a tent. He stepped in and reported to the department chief — his mission had been completed.

The chief (now, regimental commander as everybody called him) hugged him delightedly, then pulled out a bench and made him sit down. A little overcome by this unexpected but very familiar atmosphere, Chang Yung heard the commander say:

"We've been looking forward to your return. Our regiment has already constructed 200 furnaces of the Tanghsien County type. Now that you're back we plan to build two hundred more small furnaces — the kind you saw in Yang-



cheng. In that way, by the end of the month we'll be able to fulfil our quota of 30,000 tons of pig-iron!"

"Thirty thousand tons?" Chang Yung was astonished.

"Ah, you've just come back. You don't know that Hsushui County has organized communes. It's this way. The day after you left, Chairman Mao came to inspect our work here in Hsushui. He told us, 'People's communes are a fine thing.' Before you knew it, the whole county had formed communes. Not only that, but we set our iron quota several hundred per cent higher. I said we'd have an iron works here next year, didn't I? Well, the county organized a system of military type co-operation. Each commune sent a company of iron-makers, and we formed a regiment. We built all these furnaces in three days. Now it's up to you. You'd better rest a bit first. Go to that tent over there and have a bite to eat. Then you can tell us all about those Yangcheng furnaces. We'll start building in the afternoon. You can begin by constructing an experimental model in First Company. . . ."

As Chang Yung was leaving the tent, the commander called after him. "Wait a minute. I've more big news for you. All of Hsushui is taking part in the militia movement. The standing militia have been issued arms. I drew a rifle for you. Here it is!" The commander picked up a gun from beside his desk.

Chang Yung solemnly accepted it, with both hands. Needless to say, he was as happy as meeting an old friend. The commander told him:

"Your job has been decided upon. You'll be a technician attached to regiment. You're responsible for the construction of all the Yangcheng type furnaces."

While he was eating Chang Yung kept touching his rifle. A messenger entered the canteen tent and called:

"Comrade engineer!"

Chang Yung continued eating. The messenger walked up to him and saluted.

"Comrade engineer!"

"You've made a mistake. My name is Chang Yung."

"That's right — Engineer Chang Yung. Don't you know? At the inaugural meeting of our Iron and Steel Regiment your name was read out as regimental engineer."

Is it possible? Could a telephone operator become an engineer? Chang Yung remembered the question he had asked himself on the train. The messenger said:

"The commander asks you to come to a meeting and explain how to build Yangcheng furnaces."

"Right!" Chang Yung rose nimbly to his feet.

That was how our young engineer began his new life, his new job.

*Translated by Sidney Shapiro
Illustrations by Lu Chih-hsiang*

A Painting of Five Oxen

(see p. 226 of this issue)

Copper-plate reproductions of this famous painting by the Tang dynasty artist Han Huang (723-787), in its original size (142.2 cm. × 20.5 cm.), in full colour printed on 5 separate sheets.

Obtainable from any of the dealers
listed on p.243

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The Tashkent Spirit

APPEAL OF THE ASIAN AND AFRICAN WRITERS' CONFERENCE TO WORLD WRITERS

The following text was unanimously passed at the plenary session of the Asian and African Writers' Conference on Oct. 13, 1958

We, the writers of Asian and African countries, have gathered in Tashkent and discussed questions which are vital both for us, writers, and for the literature of the world. We are gratified that the writers of our countries inheriting the great humanist traditions of the ancient cultures of Asia and Africa continue their contribution to the cultures of the modern world and to the cause of human progress. We have met in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbek SSR, inspired by our faith in the future of our people and our literatures, inspired by the lofty ideals of peace and friendship among the nations of the globe. We are unanimous in our conviction that literature is closely linked with the destinies of our peoples, that literature can flourish only in conditions of freedom, independence and national sovereignty and that the elimination of colonialism and racialism are a prerequisite for the full development of literary creation.

Inspired by the same ideals which brought us to the conference of the Asian writers in Delhi, to the meeting of the peoples of Asia and Africa in Cairo, and moved by the Bandung spirit, we address ourselves to all the men of letters and all the cultural workers of Europe, America and

Australia, irrespective of the colour of their skin, nationality or faith.

Never before in history have the intellectuals of our great continents, inhabiting a territory stretching from Japan, Korea and China to Egypt, Ghana and Algeria, from Central Asia to Indonesia, from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic, gathered together in one place to represent the finest flowers of the new resurgent spirit of 1,500 million people. These people which constitute almost two thirds of mankind are the inheritors of the most ancient civilizations, and cultures. It was on the banks of the Huang Ho and Yangtse, the Indus and the Ganges, of Euphrates and Tigris and Amu Darya, Nile and Niger that man emerged for the first time from the darkness of prehistoric existence. He created material and spiritual weapons — he created the written language. It was in China, Egypt, India, Babylon and Greece that the first books were written. The peoples of Asia and Africa subsequently created cultures of the highest calibre and mankind is proud of the fruits of these cultures.

The further development of these great civilizations was curtailed not only by time or natural calamities but by the ruthless exploitation of our lands, by slavery in Africa, colonialism, imperialism and racialism—that most poisonous of weeds in the human garden. Our once free peoples were deprived of their freedom, robbed of their wealth and subjected to cruel oppression and cynical exploitation. They were humiliated and discriminated against, for the colour of their skins or for their racial ancestry. Attempts were made to force our people to forget their culture, their language and their past.

These attempts, however, could not liquidate our languages and our cultures although they did succeed in retarding and complicating their growth. The most significant writings of our countries in the last 200 years grew out of the struggle waged by the Asian and African peoples against foreign domination and colonial oppression; it is marked by an intense feeling of protest against these evils, as well as by an intense belief in the right of man to control his destiny and the right of all peoples to live in freedom. There is

a proud assertion in the writings of our times of the dignity of the individual and the dignity of the collective personality of every nation. In many of the best books of our times, in our best poems and songs there breathes the militant spirit of our peoples and their determination to resist foreign domination.

A great majority of the Asian peoples and some of the African countries have already been liberated. Peoples of these lands are free once again to develop their culture and their literatures according to their national traditions. But the colonialists still dominate a considerable part of Asia and Africa, where freedom is still denied and where economic and cultural aggrandizement still operates. And in these countries the struggle for the fulfilment of political and cultural freedom is still being fiercely waged by the people. We express our sympathy and support for all these enslaved nations in their heroic struggle. Under the cover of the cold war the colonial powers continue to foment fear, suspicion and hatred among us, to pile up armaments and to indulge in frequent testing of weapons of mass destruction, to threaten and blackmail our people.

The Tashkent Conference stresses the deep inter-connection of creative literature with the struggles of the people.

We as writers are fully conscious that the great and joyful endeavour of literary and cultural creation is possible only in conditions of freedom.

We are also aware that our life is completely identified with the life of our people. Their aims are our aims, their struggle is our struggle and we stand resolutely by them against the evils of colonial domination and the danger of nuclear war, for peace, and for unity and friendship among our peoples.

While we the writers of Asia and Africa wish to strengthen our cultural contacts with all countries in the world, including the western countries, we reject the division of culture into superior and inferior, eastern and western. We shall strive, therefore, for the inter-relation of all cultures and for the preservation of the entire precious store of world culture. We repudiate the attempts of imperialists

and colonialists to divide and disrupt our ranks and affirm our unity on common ideals and common aspirations. We call upon you the writers of the world to raise your voice against all human wrongs, against wrongs done to individuals and wrongs done to peoples — the wrongs of injustice, colonialism and exploitation. And we wish you to sing of the lofty qualities of man, of freedom, and of hope for the future of all our peoples and the peoples of the rest of the world. We writers are the conscience of the people. We are responsible for the fate not only of contemporary humanity, but of the future generations as well.

That is why we call upon you to fight against the literature of discrimination and hatred which poisons the minds of the adults and corrupts the souls of our children.

We call upon you to advance together in the quest for truth and beauty and freedom, to create literature which is linked with the life of the people, which helps them to fight for the victory of reason and the triumph of justice on this earth.

Long live the unity of Asian and African writers!
Long live the freedom and independence of all peoples!
Long live peoples' literature and peoples' culture!
Long live peace!

MAO TUN

A Noble Mission

Beautiful, fragrant Tashkent.

In the entrancing light of an autumn day were distant hills of ebony, darkly verdant trees. Plantains were still in leaf, roses put forth their last lush blooms. Chrysanthemums of many colours, dahlias, nameless wild flowers, on street corners, on small plots in front of homes, were woven together to form a bright variegated Uzbek carpet.

On both sides of the shaded avenue rearing up into the sky were white building with round pillars and colonnades in typical national style. Lofty and grand, these structures nevertheless gave one a feeling of harmony and joy.

Emerald skin and dark red flesh—this was watermelon. Honeydews of pale green with traces of lines like frost. Purple grapes, green grapes, some as big as dates, some as small as beads, glitter like precious gems. Pomegranates, pears, apples, and other delicious fruits, filled the air with their intoxicating aroma.

Thanks to Man, all this beauty and fragrance has become even fresher and more adorable.

This is man with a capital "M"! The whole Uzbek people!

In Tashkent, they have taken their fate into their own hands, wiped out the old system of exploitation, and through their collective labour and wisdom changed their land from a poor and backward country to the paradise on earth it is today. Now in the process of further eliminating the dis-

inction between town and country, between mental and physical labour, this great people is building a communist society.

It was these people, and the engineers of the souls of people like them — their writers, who, with the warmest ardour, welcomed their guests and colleagues from over forty different countries. Tashkent took on a holiday garb.

Every street was festooned with lanterns. Everywhere floated greeting-inscribed banners:

Long live the friendship and unity of the Asian and African people!

Long live the friendship and unity of the Asian and African writers!

Long live the friendship and unity of all the people of the world!

Long live world peace!

The imposing Navoi Theatre was handsomely decorated. Flags of more than forty nations fluttered on the roof. Navoi Square looked all the more attractive because of the newly built Tashkent Hotel, so rich in national flavour, directly opposite the theatre.

During the day, sunlight brought rainbow colours from the fountain playing in the square. At night, the lanterns and buntings gave the square the dreamlike air of a fairy-land. All this was reminiscent of Navoi's poetry. Reality and poetry, blended into one.

All day long, sometimes far into the night too, old grandpas and grandmas, boys and girls, working people of Tashkent and from neighbouring towns, gathered in groups in the square. They came to greet the historic meeting of the writers from more than forty different countries and to pay their respects.

Young Pioneers with their red scarves surrounded the smiling guests, holding out albums which they asked the visitors to autograph.

It was a magnificent sight, making one wonder whether the market fairs in Tashkent, a thousand years ago, when it was a stop on the Silk Road, were as gay and joyful.

Today on a completely new foundation, we are renewing the interflow between Asian and African countries. So began the historic first "gathering" of Asian and African writers. Today's interflow is an exchange of valuable experience; it is mutual support and friendship in the Asian and African writers' struggle for national independence, against colonialism and for the development of their national culture.

In two grand and elegant halls of the Navoi Theatre where the conference was conducted, a book exhibition was held of classical and contemporary literature of Asian and African countries, in the original and in translations. Here the delegates liked to linger, and here the photographers took many pictures.

On the rostrum of the conference sessions, by the round tables of committee meetings, the frank discussions and detailed analyses, although in different languages, were in fact spoken in a common tongue — a common opposition to colonial rule, a common accusation against the damage to national culture by colonialism, a common determination to safeguard national cultural traditions and increase cultural exchange on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

This was the first time that writers, representing the awakened Asian and African peoples, solemnly announced to the whole world:

"We are gratified that the writers of our countries inheriting the great humanist traditions of the ancient cultures of Asia and Africa continue their contribution to the cultures of the modern world and to the cause of human progress.

"We are inspired by our faith in the future of our people and our literatures, inspired by the lofty ideals of peace and friendship among the nations of the globe.

"We are unanimous in our conviction that literature is closely linked with the destinies of our peoples, that literature can flourish only in conditions of freedom, independence and national sovereignty and that the elimination of colonialism and racialism are a prerequisite for the full development of literary creation.

"The people's aims are our aims, their struggle is our struggle and we stand resolutely by them against the evils of colonial domination and the danger of nuclear war, for peace, and for unity and friendship among our peoples."

Participants to the conference, the delegates from different lands, used many new terms to describe this meeting and the spirit pervading it:

- A Bandung of literature
- A conference of Asian and African renaissance
- The Tashkent spirit

These new terms give voice in a concise but vivid way to the guiding spirit of the conference and the great purpose of all the delegates. On October 22, at the Soviet government's reception for the delegates to the Asian-African Writers' Conference in the Kremlin, N. Khrushchov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, referred to the Tashkent spirit. He said:

"By this term you mean friendly mutual understanding and collaboration among the masters of culture of the various peoples in the struggle for the great aims of mankind, the firm link between the writers and the lives of their peoples, the active participation of literature in the struggle for the freedom and independence of your countries and in the building of the new life where freedom and independence have already been won."

The delegates were delighted with this interpretation of the "Tashkent Spirit."

It was this spirit which prevailed at the Tashkent Conference, and it is this spirit which will leave a marked influence on the path of development of Asian and African literature and also, I may say without exaggeration, on the path of the development of world literature.

The call issuing from the Asian-African Writers' Conference is mighty and solemn, for behind the call stand 1,500 million people struggling for national independence and freedom and for the great aims of mankind.

Therein lies the historic significance of the Tashkent Conference.

Therein lies also the world significance of the Tashkent Conference.

With their struggles, the people are writing epics worthy of being sung. Writers who look upon the people's struggles as their own will help to win them.

In greeting the Tashkent Conference, let us hope that the next Asian and African Writers' Conference (the delegates to the Tashkent Conference unanimously accepted the proposal of the delegate from the United Arab Republic to convene the next conference in Cairo in 1960) will see an international situation more inspiring than ever because more countries in Asia and Africa shall have won national independence and freedom.

November 2, 1958
Peking

LIU PAI-YU

The Call from Tashkent

Writers from the two great continents of Asia and Africa, assembled at Tashkent, issued a powerful call to the whole world—the call of 1,500 million Asians and Africans as they march forward.

The Western bourgeoisie and colonialists viewed this conference of Asian and African writers with dismay. Before it opened, a number of slanderous columnists made a hysterical attack upon it in some Western bourgeois papers, clearly at the instigation of their masters. Perhaps because of this, what they wrote disclosed their genuine sentiments:

their dread lest this conference should oppose colonialism. By means of whips and munition, bloodshed and slaughter, they established their criminal rule through the length and breadth of Asia and Africa. But now a new, awakened Asia and Africa have risen to their feet. This does not suit the aggressors at all. The colonial system has been smashed into fragments like a piece of broken china, and try as they may they cannot conceal this fact. The Western aggressors' fears proved only too well-founded, for from Tashkent there issued a mighty call to mankind to struggle for justice.

It should also be pointed out that this call was a unanimous call despite great differences in the speakers' colour, language, and even beliefs. This was the voice of freedom, the voice of every man and every nation, voices from the Nile and the Niger, from the Yellow River and the Amu Darya. Some of the writers gathered at Tashkent were strangers to each other, who now clasped hands for the first time. They brought with them their people's wisdom and dignity, their people's hopes and determination. Many of them came from fronts where a bitter struggle against colonialism is being waged. When one recalls actual conditions today in Jordan and Lebanon, Algeria and Indonesia, Japan and the Cameroons, where the colonialists who harry the people with fire and sword are trembling before the fate they have brought on themselves, it is clear that if writers are the conscience of their nation their statements cannot but reflect the splendour of their struggle.

At this Tashkent Conference all the delegates earnestly discussed literature, but literature can flourish only on a soil where freedom and independence have been truly won: only there can it spread its wings. I would like to compare each individual's speech to a sparkling stream, these many streams together formed a mighty ocean which is sweeping and surging all over the world demanding freedom and liberation, opposing the cultural aggression of the colonialists, attacking the reactionary literature of hate which poisons and corrupts men's minds, demanding freedom for people to create their own literature, for poets to sing of

their countrymen's aspirations. In this way the Tashkent Conference could not be prevented from kindling a flaming torch, the light of which comes from the hearts of the Asian and African peoples. And this light can never be extinguished.

We judge our achievements dispassionately. But we could not but be moved when we heard Benjamin Matip from the Cameroons speak of the traditional wisdom in the literature of Africa. We could not but feel admiration when we heard William Dubois, the well-known American Negro writer of more than ninety and veteran of many struggles, call upon writers to dedicate themselves to the happiness of mankind. Here, too, I would like to mention our friend the Chilean poet, Francisco Koloanne, who greeted the conference on behalf of the people and writers of Latin America, including Pablo Neruda. He declared that the trail blazed by the Asian and African writers would be followed by Latin American writers; for he firmly believes that what has already been achieved over a great portion of the earth must inevitably be achieved elsewhere. Speaking of the world of letters, we should not forget that since time immemorial we of Asia and Africa have raised high the lamp of literature, a bright lamp of truth and wisdom which has never failed. It illumined the way forward for the spiritual civilization of all mankind, but it was stifled and trampled upon viciously by the Western aggressors. Now men are beginning to break their chains, new popular struggles have broken out, more powerful than a whirlwind. The Tashkent Conference acted as a signal to herald the glorious renaissance about to come to the continents of Asia and Africa, when a fresh and vigorous literature will flourish. This literature will make the moribund bourgeois writers of the West turn pale and tremble, lose their heads and rave; it will enable the genius of the people who have won liberation and freedom to blossom in full beauty. The literature of Asia and Africa will shine with a great light.

All the people of Asia and Africa placed high hopes in this Tashkent Conference. And we may affirm that we did not fail in our duty, for we know what constitutes the peo-

ple's strength and what the strength of poetry. In our appeal to writers the world over we declared explicitly: "Our life is completely identified with the life of our people. Their aims are our aims, their struggle is our struggle and we stand resolutely by them against the evils of colonial domination and the danger of nuclear war, for peace, and for unity and friendship among our peoples."

The Tashkent Conference has been described with good reason as "the Bandung of literature," for the Tashkent spirit is strongly opposed to colonialism, the call issued from Tashkent is strongly opposed to colonialism. Let those slanderous writers in Western bourgeois papers sink deeper into hysteria and despair confronted with this mighty truth. We believe that this call from Tashkent will continue to re-echo in men's hearts, carrying humanity forward to a new age when colonialism will disappear once and for all from the face of the earth.

YEH CHUN-CHIEN

A Festival of Asian and African Writers

TASHKENT

In next to no time after leaving the airfield our fast-travelling car had entered Tashkent. At last we were in the city of our dreams! When we flew from Peking across the Gobi Desert, the Mongolian steppes, Lake Baikal and boundless Siberia, we tried to imagine what Tashkent would be like. As it was an important station on the silk route which linked Asia and Europe in ancient times, we expected

to find an old city with a venerable air. To our surprise, it looked incredibly young.

Wide, tree-lined avenues stretched before us in all directions, but from a distance seemed like garden paths. This was due to the tall trees everywhere with their luxuriant foliage, though by the Chinese lunar calendar it was already late autumn. These trees overshadowed everything: all else paled by comparison. Even stately buildings seemed like cottages hidden in the woods. Sometimes only the corner of a wall could be seen, at others we could only glimpse a roof; and this was thanks to the sun high overhead without whose rays the roofs would have been invisible too. The Tashkent sun always looks like a smiling mirror.

The forest was hung with clusters of fruit, red, yellow and green. In the distance they resembled clusters of grapes, but upon drawing nearer we found that they were painted electric bulbs, trailing ribbons of various shades like coloured clouds or crimson petals. And chalked in white on these ribbons were greetings in Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Hindi, English and French: Tashkent's welcome to the guests from afar and best wishes for the conference of Asian and African writers. In this medley of colours, these charming greetings were like the stamens of a flower in blossom. The whole of Tashkent was in gala costume to welcome us, and we guests absorbed the peace, warmth and delight of the beautiful city.

Alighting from the car, we met a large group of Tashkent citizens in the square before the hotel. Having just finished work for the day, they had come in their leisure to see the visitors in the rays of the warm sun. They were as gaily dressed as the colourful city: an Uzbek artisan in a square blue cap embroidered with white flowers, a Russian textile worker with a lock of golden hair showing under her shawl, a Kazakh worker in a cotton jacket, a Kirghis carter in a round fur cap, and a Korean collective farmer in a woollen skirt. Their totally different features all bore the same expression: like the sun above us they were smiling warmly. To us they personified the welcome and friendship of the whole Soviet people.

"A Chinese! A friend!" cried an old lady catching sight of me. She let go of her grandson's hand and ran towards me with outstretched arms like a mother. I hardly knew how to respond to such friendliness. Hastily taking from my coat a medal of Chairman Mao Tse-tung, I pinned it on her jacket.

She examined it for some time before recognizing it. Then wringing my hand she exclaimed: "Ah, Mao Tse-tung! Tovarish Mao Tse-tung! A great poet!" She gave me such a smacking kiss on the forehead that many people nearby turned to stare.

In the doorway of the hotel I could not help looking back at this old lady who had displayed such excitement and enthusiasm. She was still standing in the square, gazing intently at Mao Tse-tung's medallion, oblivious to her grandson's questions and chatter. She seemed to have met an old, old friend after an absence of years.

GUESTS AND HOSTS

Our hotel was packed with writers of every nation, from the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union, from the Far East, from Southeast Asia, from West Asia, from Africa. There were guests too from Europe, Australia and North and South America. Their skins ranged in colour from creamy white to midnight black. Their costumes varied from the close-fitting Indian *shwani* to the big Burmese capes. Their stature, even, differed. For instance, Safronov, the Russian writer, seemed a giant, while two friends from Cambodia appeared like shy young school boys. But we all had one thing in common — our profession.

This meant there was no lack of subjects to discuss. Far from it, there was plenty to talk about. In the corridor, in the rest rooms, even by the cloak-rooms, you kept meeting small groups of people of different colours chatting together or having heated arguments. I was debating something once with a Negro friend from Africa when he suddenly broke off and looked rather angry. Seeing how

serious he was, I wanted to throw my arms round him — he looked so handsome. Naturally we soon started laughing again, and our argument helped us to become the best of friends.

There is an old saying in China: "Without a quarrel you cannot make friends." Many new friends were made after disputes, and some old friends gained greater understanding through arguments and drew closer to each other.

I was sitting on a sofa in the corridor one day reading the documents of the conference when a man walked past. By the time I looked up, I could see only his back and a walking stick. The back seemed familiar, but not the stick. Since here one could talk to anybody without an introduction, I went up to him. He turned and put out his arms. It was an old friend — the Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand! Of course even old friends may feel a little awkward after quite a lengthy separation. Two years previously when I saw him in New Delhi he was a vigorous middle-aged man but now he was using a stick. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him the reason when something else suddenly turned up to interrupt it. He had obviously changed a good deal: his hair was thinner than before, though his smile was as warm as ever. Apparently he was conscious of this change himself, for after a few words he remarked: "You are a typical Chinese, and I am becoming more Indian." This of course did not make any difference between us as friends, although sometimes we held divergent views on some subjects. But as friends, once each other's point of view was put on the table it is not difficult to reach an understanding, and this was always the case.

Not only was there agreement of ideas among us despite our occasional arguments, but we were one in our daily life as well. In the room opposite I had two interesting neighbours: the Cameroon writer B. Matip from Africa and Suitsu Kato from Japan. In appearance, habits of life and language, the two men had nothing in common; even in temperament they were unlike. One was graceful and sensitive as the African gazelle, the other calm and reserved as a Japanese chrysanthemum. I often wondered what two

so different men could find to talk about all day. But, strange to say, Matip and Kato not only had a great deal to discuss but their conversation was as animated as if they had always been neighbours in one village. They became our model for international friendship and solidarity.

This shows the benefits of collective life. And for this opportunity we representatives of more than forty countries in Asia and Africa (including some observers from Europe and North and South America) had to thank the hotel. We occupied literally the whole of it. I doubt if there was anyone else there. Speaking of this hotel, our thanks are due to the people of Tashkent, who built it specially for the convenience of the delegates to this conference as their gift to the conference. We were the first guests it received.

This hotel is a seven-storied building designed by the celebrated Tashkent architects Mithak Boulatov and Leonid Karach. It is not over-elaborate, but beautiful and comfortable. The air in the hotel is adjusted to a springtime temperature. The dining room, cafeteria and all the furnishings form one harmonious whole with the walls and the artificial marble of the stairs. It is a most successful example of the combination of national form with all the latest equipment. We were told that in order to make it as beautiful and functional as possible, the experts who constructed the Moscow underground were consulted.

This gift was typical of the Tashkent people's hospitality and the importance they attached to this writers' conference. It is also an example of the great attention they pay to literature and art, for they are a people with a splendid culture. The members of the collective farm outside Tashkent were not backward in this respect either. Each time I returned to my room after a meeting, I found fresh grapes, melons and cantaloupes on the table. This gift was sent every day. We Chinese are also a most hospitable nation, I dare boast, yet here I could do nothing. In the hotel, however, I suddenly made a discovery: the comfortable sofas and wooden furniture were nearly all imported from China. No wonder many delegates often discussed problems till two or three in the morning without leaving their seats—

they were sitting on comfortable Chinese sofas! Our Tashkent hosts were extremely understanding, but I wonder if they knew that a Chinese, a brother of the Soviet Union, was eager to share a little of their splendid reputation for hospitality.

THE SPIRIT OF THE CONFERENCE

The conference hall was opposite the hotel, in the opera house named after the great Uzbek poet Alishir Navoi. This was a magnificent building with a distinctively national style of architecture, the like of which I have seen in no other Eastern country. Our Tashkent hosts had converted this temporarily into a modern conference hall where every speech could be translated simultaneously into five languages: Uzbek, Russian, Chinese, English and French.

The conference hall was thronged by poets, playwrights and writers from Asia and Africa as well as observers from other parts of the world—more than four hundred people altogether. Among us were many critics and scholars too, men like Professor William Dubois from America and the Indian philologist Professor S.K. Chatterji, a brilliant interpreter of Tagore's works as well as a sinologist. It goes without saying that practically all well-known writers and poets of the Soviet Socialist Republics in the Far East and Central Asia were present also. To me this was a rare opportunity to meet the many writers whose names I had long known. Here I made the acquaintance of practically all of them. Not only that, I later had the honour to be received in the house of the famous Kazakhstan novelist Mokhtar Auezov.

As Sharaf Rashidov of Uzbekistan pointed out in his opening speech, this gathering of writers met to discuss one great common task—literature. Literature cannot be divorced from the people's destiny, from their sorrows and joys. It reflects their aspirations, their dreams and struggle for peace, happiness, justice and human progress. So the writers here naturally did not confine their discussions to

technical problems related to their craft only, but were eager to discuss the fountain-head of all writing—the people whom they represented. These peoples are very many. In the words of Rashidov: “We here represent the fifteen hundred million inhabitants of the Asian and African continents, that is to say, about two-thirds of the total world population.”

Long ago the inhabitants of the great continents of Asia and Africa created glorious cultures. But following the onset of colonialism, the majority of Asian and African peoples were enslaved, their cultures came under fire, and their languages were suppressed, so that some actually died out. Not only were the conditions for creating art and literature destroyed, but the subject peoples were even deprived of the right to preserve their national cultures. Even today many Asian and African nations are still struggling for these fundamental rights. Let me quote some statements made by different delegates to the conference to illustrate this point:

“At present African languages are forbidden at all the institutions and schools of Angola. The policy of assimilation is being pursued everywhere. The result is that the traditional African literature, the rich treasure-store of our culture, had still not found expression in written form. Colonialism has prevented the development of culture in Angola. To develop our national literature we must first and foremost liberate our people from the colonial yoke.”
— Mario de Andrade (Angola)

“Imperialism brings evil in its wake not only in the sphere of politics and economy but also in the field of culture. This can be seen in Africa, too, where national culture and literature are being stifled by foreign literature and culture.”— Abdel Hafez Abu (Nigeria)

“In return for the wealth which Africa presented to the West, the latter brought her fire and built prisons. Africa asked for enlightenment, and was given military bases. She asked for freedom, and imperialism brought her oppression and enslavement.”— Al Omar Senyonga (Uganda)

“Racial chauvinism is being increasingly implanted by the American imperialists in the African colonies, especially in the south of Africa. Laying claim to world leadership, America is committing atrocities against innocent Negroes.”
—Mohi Eldin Sabir (Sudan)

“Jordan is ruled by the henchmen of capitalism and British soldiers are trampling its soil. There is a battle between truth and deceit, between light and darkness. And the Jordanian writers will not lay down their arms until truth and light triumph over deceit and darkness.”— Abdul Karim Said Karim (Jordan)

These passages quoted make it amply clear that while many liberated countries in Asia and Africa are building up their national culture, many others are still living in the Dark Ages. In the words of the Cameroon writer Benjamin Matip: “The imperialists are using new slogans and signboards to perpetuate their rule in Africa. Being driven out of Asia, colonialism is now doing everything to preserve its shameless laws in African lands. That make the writer’s task all the more significant. Economic, political and social reality compel him to wage a struggle for the people’s spiritual emancipation from colonial yoke.”

It is true that social realities force writers to wage a struggle against colonialism hand in hand with their people. Since national independence and freedom are prerequisites for the development of a national literature, to fight against colonialism for national independence and freedom has become an urgent task today for Asian and African writers. Thus the first item on the agenda of the conference was, “The development of literature and culture in the Asian and African countries and their role in the struggle for human progress, national independence, against colonialism, in the struggle for freedom and world peace.” This truly reflects the demands of many Asian and African writers, and the main spirit of the conference. The Indonesian writer, Intoio, said: “The conference agenda correctly and truthfully reflects the thoughts and feelings of the Asian and African peoples. The ideas of the struggle for the progress of mankind, for national independence

against colonialism and for peace throughout the world, agitate the minds of millions of people. These ideas are closely linked up with the problems of literary and cultural development."

Asian and African writers are determined to fight for national independence, freedom and world peace—a condition necessary for the development of their national literatures and cultures. The head of the Pakistan delegation, Hafiz Jalandhari, emphasized this point. He said, "We consider that Pakistani culture should serve the cause of peace. We say that we and the other nations pursue the same aims. We are ready to fight for the cause of any nation—Nigeria, Algeria, China. Their cause is our cause and their struggle is our struggle." Bint As-shati from the United Arab Republic also laid stress on this. "The Arab writers are quite aware of their responsibility for the international situation. They consider that writers should continue their struggle until the world is rid of imperialism and racialism." Similarly, the head of the Indian delegation, Tara Shakar Bannerjee, said: "History has charged us, writers of Asia and Africa, with a special responsibility, for we possess the experience of civilization and have gone through the worst. We have personally experienced exploitation of man by man. We are convinced that love, tolerance, co-operation and good-will must replace hate and ambition for power."

Yes, the writers of Asia and Africa, like their compatriots, desire love, tolerance, friendship and co-operation. They desire mutual understanding and peace. But in order to gain these things they must first get rid of colonialism; because the colonialists invariably try to sow discord and hatred among peoples and create wars. For this reason the age-old cultural relations among Asian and African countries have been severed in modern times. The Philippine writer Manuel Cruz said: "This conference will be a step forward in promoting friendly contacts among Asian and African writers. To the Philippine writers it is most significant that this conference might assist in breaking down the artificial barriers that stand between the Philippine people and the rest of the nations." Efua Theodora Sutherland

from Ghana expressed the same view: "This opportunity to meet and discuss our common problems and learn more about each other was gravely needed by us all. . . . This we can achieve through mutual contacts such as this great conference in Tashkent." The Japanese writer Hiroshi Noma also said: "The Japanese writers cannot imagine life without peace . . . the Japanese writers consider it their duty to contribute to the struggle against the menace of a new war. An inspiring example for them is the effort exerted by the Soviet Union in its struggle for the relaxation of international tension."

These representative speeches show clearly what the writers of Asia and Africa hate and what their aspirations are. All are resolved to fight for their aspirations against what they detest, the oppression and exploitation of colonialism. This is the duty which no Asian and African writer with any sense of justice can shirk today, and the desire of the peoples whom they represent. So although the writers at the conference held different beliefs and views, this common wish and goal united them all. Mao Tun, head of the Chinese delegation, said: "The fact that the writers of Asia and Africa are meeting together today to hold this conference signifies the great unity of Asian and African writers." Unity was another important characteristic of the spirit of this conference.

This does not, however, mean that the writers did not discuss many technical problems relating to their craft. The delegates split up into five commissions and during the six days of the conference spent more than one-third of the time discussing a number of specialized problems, such as the problem of children's literature and its educational significance, women's contribution to literature, the development of dramaturgy in Asian and African countries, the relation between literature and the radio, the cinema and the theatre, the promotion of the friendly contacts between Asian and African writers. In connection with these problems the writers made many constructive proposals. One common demand was for the establishment of some permanent organization for Asian and African writers to

strengthen their relations. This proposal was unanimously passed by all the delegates at the closing meeting of the conference on October 13. It was decided to set up this office in Ceylon, and to hold the Second Conference of Asian and African Writers in Cairo in 1960.

This was another expression of the great unity of Asian and African writers.

Of course, Asian and African writers are a part of the writers of the world, just as the Asian and African peoples are a part of the peoples of the world. The solidarity of Asian and African writers does not mean a withdrawal from Western writers or from Western culture. On the contrary, it will promote unity among writers of the world and cultural interchange between East and West. This point was emphasized by the second important item on the agenda, "The culture of Asian and African peoples and its relation to the culture of the West." In the appeal to world writers, which was unanimously passed at the end of the conference, this was even more clearly specified. . . . "While we the writers of Asia and Africa wish to strengthen our cultural contacts with all countries in the world, including the Western countries, we reject the division of culture into superior and inferior, eastern and western. We shall strive, therefore, for the interrelation of all cultures and for the preservation of the entire precious store of world culture."

The unity of Asian and African writers will strengthen unity among writers the world over so as to "advance together in the quest for truth and beauty and freedom to create literature which is linked with the life of the people, which helps them to fight for the victory of reason and the triumph of justice on this earth." This is another important expression of the spirit of this conference.

The effect of the Tashkent Conference on the cultural life of the peoples of Asia and Africa will be as important as the political influence of the Bandung Conference. It stands for the awakening of the Asian and African peoples, the revival of their cultures, the unity of their intellectuals, and their burning desire to make an important contribution to the progressive culture of mankind.

MAO TUN

Chinese Literature in the Struggle for National Independence and Human Progress

*Speech at the Asian-African
Writers' Conference*

The Chinese writers' delegation is happy and proud to be taking part in this conference. Asia and Africa have been the cradles of magnificent civilization. Indeed, all our countries have made splendid contributions to human civilization. The fact that the writers of Asia and Africa are meeting together today to hold this conference signifies the great unity of the Asian and African peoples. We wish this conference every success—such a large, united gathering of Asian and African writers is unknown in history.

Today, when we gather in this beautiful city of Tashkent, we cannot but remember the world-famed silk route which passed through Uzbekistan. As early as the sixth century B.C. the industrious and indomitable peoples of Uzbek, Central Asia, Syria, Afghanistan, Persia and China made this road to link Eastern and Western Asia. During the second century B.C. the great Chinese traveller Chang Chien journeyed by this silk route to different countries in Central and Western Asia, establishing cultural relations

between China and other lands in the West Asia. And after maritime commerce developed the Chinese had peaceful and friendly relations, as well as cultural interchange, with virtually all the countries of Asia and Africa. Two thousand years ago the monks of Kan-chu in Uzbekistan's present-day Samarkand, those of Yueh-chi in Turkoman's present-day Amu Darya, and those of Parthia (now Iran) introduced Indian Buddhism to China. In the first century A.D. we started to translate Buddhist sutras into Chinese. The whole world knows of the two Buddhist scholars Fa Hsien and Hsuan Tsang, who went to India to seek Buddhist canons in the fifth and seventh century. They made a great contribution to the cultural relations between China and India.

Communications between China and Egypt are believed to have started as early as the sixth century B.C. China's contacts with Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Burma all date back about two thousand years, while cultural interchange with Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal, Ceylon, Thailand and other Asian and African countries started between the second and the seventh century. These friendly contacts had an influence on our culture and art, and helped us to understand and trust each other.

I hope, friends, you will forgive me for going back into this memorable history at such length; but bearing in mind our glorious traditional friendship, we cannot but feel indignation to think of the hardships suffered by all of us in the last hundred years. We all know that after the spectre of colonialism came to the East in the sixteenth century our peaceful, friendly cultural relations began to be destroyed. Colonialism brought cultural invasion! After the eighteenth century many countries among us were forced to accept what the Westerners called "civilization," and our own nations were slandered as "backward." Our literary masterpieces were excluded from the treasure-house of world literature. Since the colonialists did all they could to disrupt the unity and cultural contacts among the peoples they had enslaved, it was made very difficult for us to introduce and translate each other's best works. So much so, indeed, that even

at this conference we have to introduce our own literature and history to each other as if we were new friends. This is a fact we deplore.

Friends, allow me to take Chinese literature as an example. As early as the fifth century B.C. we compiled the *Book of Songs*, a collection of poems dating from the eleventh century B.C. onwards, the earliest source of the fine traditions of Chinese literature. Then the long poem *Li Sao* by our greatest poet, Chu Yuan (340-278 B.C.) was an immortal work which has served as a model for poets during the last two thousand years. Chu Yuan was followed by countless great writers: Ssuma Chien, Tao Yuan-ming, Tu Fu, Li Po, Pai Chu-yi, Wang Shih-fu, Kuan Han-ching, Shih Nai-an, Lo Kuan-chung, Wu Ching-tzu, Tsao Hsueh-chin and many others. These men's immortal works are loved and treasured by the Chinese people. They are priceless jewels in the treasure-house of world literature; but like so many classics of numerous countries in Asia and Africa they have not had the recognition they deserve. What is the reason for this?

The reason is very simple. Like all truly great men of letters of any land, these Chinese writers and poets loved truth, loved the people, loved peace and opposed aggression; therefore their works are hated by the colonialists who invade other countries and oppress other peoples.

While destroying the civilizations of the East, the Western colonialists exported their "new culture." What sort of literature did they bring us? As our great writer Lu Hsun pointed out: "These stories of private detectives, adventurers, English young ladies and African savages serve only to stop the itching of those bloated after too much food and wine." Works like these are aimed at making the oppressed grow decadent. After the Second World War some new items were added: the more degenerate American rock-and-roll dancing and debased American films.

But in the twentieth century the East has awakened. The Asian and African peoples have begun to shake off colonial domination and risen to fight. The writers of Asia and Africa, faced with the historic need to oppose colo-

nialism, defend peace and protect national independence, have made outstanding contributions in their new literature. In 1919 the Chinese people, under the influence of the October Revolution, launched the revolutionary movement against imperialist aggression and feudal warlords known as the May the Fourth Movement. Thus the new literary movement of China was born at the same time as the people's revolution and became one of its fronts. Our great modern writer, Lu Hsun, was the founder of this new literary movement. And after the Chinese Communist Party was set up, China's new literature grew and gained strength under its leadership, being thoroughly anti-imperialist and anti-feudal in spirit.

In the thirty years between 1919 and 1949, opposition to imperialism and feudalism run like a red thread through the new Chinese literature. Opposition to imperialism and feudalism are the two inseparable halves of one single whole. The works of Lu Hsun, Kuo Mo-jo and many other noted writers sounded like a clarion call, and inspired countless intellectuals to join the revolution. This was especially true during the war to resist Japanese aggression and the early part of the War of Liberation, when their works proved powerful weapons to beat Japanese and American imperialism and their lackeys and to uphold national independence. During these thirty years China's writers, led by the Communist Party and together with the Chinese people, played a glorious part in defending national independence and aiding the liberation of all China. This is something of which Chinese writers are proud.

In 1949 the Chinese People's Republic was born, and Chinese literature entered upon a new stage. This new stage had actually started in 1942, with Chairman Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature*. This work marks the direction of literature followed by Chinese writers for the last sixteen years. Since many of our friends must have read this work, there is no need for me to introduce it in detail. Its basic message is that writers must merge themselves with the labouring people, literature must serve the labouring people.

This was a further development of our new literature after the May the Fourth Movement. Since 1942 many Chinese writers have shared the life of the people and established very close relations with them, sharing their joys and sorrows. This accounts for the appearance of such notable fiction as Chao Shu-li's *Rhymes of Li Yu-tsai* and *Marriage of Hsiao Erh-hei*, Chou Li-po's *The Hurricane*, Li Chi's long poem *Wang Kuei and Li Hsiang-hsiang*, and the opera *The White-Haired Girl* by Ho Ching-chih and Ting Yi. After the establishment of the Chinese People's Republic in 1949 we had such novels as *Sanliwan Village* by Chao Shu-li, *Flames Ahead* by Liu Pai-yu, *Defend Yen-an* by Tu Peng-cheng, *Son of the Working Class* by Wu Yun-to, and such plays as *The Long March* by Chen Chi-tung, *Dragon Beard Ditch* by Lao Sheh and *Bright Sky* by Tsao Yu.

All these works are part of a new socialist literature. They use popular language and enter into the feelings of the people to praise their struggles and victories, their courage and intelligence, their hard fights and achievements, reflecting fully the great changes in New China at the time of its birth and after its establishment. These works are loved by the people, and serve to educate them. The circulation of most of these books runs into tens or hundreds of thousands, or even millions, and this is a proof of their popularity.

Friends, China is a multi-national country. The minority peoples have rich cultural heritages, as well as the Hans. The Uighurs as early as the third or fourth century created the beautiful long poem *Tovaduasi*; the Mongolians at the beginning of the eleventh century produced the epic *The Story of Geser*; Tibetan literature started to develop in the ninth century and its ancient drama is excellent; the Thais have an old tragic love poem *Erpen Samlo* which was handed down orally from generation to generation; the Yis have *Meiko*, a poem of more than eleven thousand lines about the origin of man and his struggle against Nature. The other minorities also have beautiful legends, poems and other folk literature. After the birth of New China, all nationalities started to edit and

publish their best works of literature, and many have already been translated into Chinese. New literature is developing among the minority peoples too, and many promising new writers have appeared. The Mongolian poet, Sayntsoqt, and the Uighur dramatist, Zunun Kadr, are well known throughout China. Their works are an important part of present-day Chinese literature.

Permit me, friends, to say something about the developments in Chinese literature during the last year. For this has been a year of wonders, a year of unceasing miracles. In our economic construction we have had the Great Leap Forward, producing one miracle after another in agriculture and industry. The great Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi, in his famous poem *Farhad and Shirin*, describes how his hero — a Chinese prince — could work: "He did more in one day than other men in three years." Then the poet admires his "superhuman strength": "This was not mere strength but wonderful art! The world has never seen such miracles." The poet Navoi has become a prophet, only in this case it is not a Chinese prince but ordinary Chinese workers and peasants who are achieving miracles. Between last October and this April, China's peasants built irrigation works to increase the area of irrigated land by three hundred and fifty million *mou* — over one hundred million *mou* more than the total area brought under irrigation in the thousands of years before liberation. The highest rice yield during one season has surpassed sixty thousand catties a *mou*. This year's total grain production will be double that of last year. The production of steel has leapt from five million odd tons last year to over ten million tons. Since this autumn agricultural co-operatives all over China have joined together to establish people's communes. This movement is still going forward by leaps and bounds, and we calculate that by next spring there will be communes all over the Chinese countryside.

In such historical conditions, our literature, too, is developing with unprecedented speed. This is primarily true of the literature created by the people. Since this spring nearly all factories and villages in China have shown great

enthusiasm for art and literature. There is poetry everywhere. When Kuo Mo-jo visited a village nestling among fruit trees and saw all the walls and doors covered with songs and paintings by the peasants themselves, he was moved to write: "Ten thousand fruit trees in the orchard, ten thousand poems on the walls!" Such villages of poets can be found everywhere. Many agricultural co-operatives have writers' groups, while in the factories and mines workers are setting up literary clubs. In some factories each section has its writing group. In addition to poetry, the workers are writing stories, plays and other forms of folk literature. These writings, which arise directly out of their work, particularly during the overwhelming Great Leap Forward, continue our ancient literary traditions. There is genuine and modest working men's feeling in them, a great heroism and optimism. One worker said: "Wherever there is labour, there is poetry." Poetry and labour are closely integrated.

And a peasant wrote: "On all sides there are miracles and poetry." China has become a land of poetry.

During the last year more than seven hundred writers have gone to live in villages, factories, mines or in the army; for they know that unless they live among the masses and understand their ideas and feelings, they cannot give an adequate and truthful picture of the spirit of the working people or reflect in their writings this great period in history.

So this year's literary harvest is better than usual. The novels include *Upheaval in a Mountain Village* by Chou Li-po, *Tempered Steel* by Ai Wu, *In Time of Peace* by Tu Peng-cheng, *Keep the Red Flag Flying* by Liang Pin, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* by Chu Po, *Red Sun* by Wu Chiang, *Bitter Herbs* by Feng Teh-ying and *Song of Youth* by Yang Mo. Our new plays include Tien Han's *Kuan Han-ching* and Chin Shan's *Red Storm*, as well as many good one-act plays and poems. These works, which breathe revolutionary heroism, were widely acclaimed as soon as they appeared.

Chinese writers love their country, love the labouring people, love world peace and the liberation of mankind. They realize that every effort they make is inseparable from the consolidation and prosperity of their motherland, from the defence of world peace and the advancement of human progress.

But the imperialists are opposed to peace. When the American imperialists reached out their talons to threaten the independence of Korea and the safety of China, Chinese writers took their stand with the people, and together with the Koreans waged a just war to preserve their national independence and protect world peace. During and after this war, our writers produced many outstanding works on the war to resist American aggression and aid Korea, works which proved influential in arousing the people to defend world peace and oppose aggressive war. In the winter of 1956 when the British and French imperialists invaded Egypt, Chinese writers again, together with the Chinese people, expressed their condemnation of the imperialists and with their pens supported the just struggle of the Egyptian people and hailed their victory. In this struggle Chinese and Egyptian writers established a revolutionary friendship. On July 14 this year, when the Iraqi people's revolution succeeded and the American and British imperialists then invaded Lebanon and Jordan, the Chinese people set afoot an even greater revolutionary campaign to aid their Arab brothers. After news came of the armed intervention in Lebanon and Jordan by the Americans and British, poems and posters appeared on the walls of all big cities, every newspaper carried poems and cartoons, every literary magazine put out special numbers; the walls were covered with paintings, and actors gave public performances on the streets. . . . Through all these poems, paintings, articles and plays, millions of voices were raised in one angry roar: "Support the Arab people! American and British troops must get out of the Arab countries!" The recent provocative action of the American imperialists in our Taiwan Straits aroused tremendous indignation among our people and the peoples of the world. Now all men and

women, old and young, in China, have risen up to resist the American imperialists' aggression and threat of war. More than three hundred million Chinese have taken part in demonstrations, and Chinese writers have mobilized all their forces for this sacred struggle, defending their motherland and peace with the weapon of literature. No provocation can intimidate our people. We are confident that victory must be ours, for we have justice on our side and are defending peace.

At the same time we know that the writers of Asian and African countries, together with their peoples, have by just words and deeds supported the Chinese people during the war to resist America and aid Korea as well as in the struggle against the American imperialists' provocations in the Taiwan Straits. Here let us express our heartfelt thanks to you and through you to the peoples of Asia and Africa!

Dear friends, the defence of world peace, the preservation of national independence, the resistance to colonialism—these have become an irresistible force throughout the world today. In this great and solemn struggle the peoples of Asia and Africa and their writers have entered into closer, more friendly cultural relations. The exchange of visits among writers of Asian and African countries has greatly increased. During these nine years we have had mutual visits of many cultural delegations. And a large proportion of these delegates were writers. The literature of Asian and African countries is widely read in China. In these nine years we have translated two hundred and sixty-seven works, classical and modern, from Asian and African countries, printing more than five million copies. The Chinese people have also held big meetings to commemorate many great writers of Asia and Africa like the ancient Indian poet Kalidasa and the ancient Iranian poet Saadi. Kalidasa's famous drama *Sakuntala* was actually produced in Peking with great success. All these activities have assisted our understanding of the countries of Asia and Africa, consolidating our friendly

co-operation and strengthening our unity. Not only is the cultural exchange between China and the rest of Asia and Africa completely restored today—it is on a larger scale and more thoroughgoing than ever before. This has made a great contribution to the peace of Asia and Africa as well as the whole world.

But, friends, the Western colonialists have not yet abandoned their wild schemes to enslave the peoples of Asia and Africa; colonial culture is not yet completely eradicated. We of Asia and Africa must further strengthen our unity, till we finally drive away the ugly spectre of colonialism. For only then can we establish a firm and lasting foundation for peace and friendly co-operation among all Asian and African countries. As the representatives of our respective lands, let us, writers of Asia and Africa, first unite firmly together. The Lebanese poet Jusuf Said has written aptly in *The Baker*:

Unless we unite to work out our common destiny,
Others will bully and oppress us;
Let our work-worn hands for ever grasp each other!
Let us fight, brothers, shoulder to shoulder!

Since this conference has met to exchange views on literature and to strengthen our unity, allow us to express the following wishes:

Long live the friendship and unity of the peoples of Asia and Africa!

Long live the unity of the writers of Asia and Africa!
Long live peace in Asia, Africa and all the world!

CHOU YANG

Eradicate Poisonous Influence of Colonialism on Culture, Develop Cultural Exchange Between East and West

*Speech at the Asian-African
Writers' Conference*

I am extremely happy to be able to talk in this historic city of Tashkent, on the subject of "The Cultures of the Peoples of Asia and Africa and Their Relation to Western Culture." Not far from here is Samarkand, one of the chief stations on the old route between Asia and Europe. This road ran all the way from ancient Changan—China's present-day Sian—to Rome. Very early in history men of Asia and Africa travelled to and fro along this road for purposes of trade and cultural exchange. By the first and second centuries A.D., it also began to be used as a trade route between East and West. As commerce expanded, a brisk cultural traffic grew up between East and West. These economic and cultural relations continued for over ten centuries, but were disrupted when capitalism arose in the West and launched economic and cultural aggression against the East.

Today we writers of the two great continents of Asia and Africa are once more discussing the question of cultural

relations between East and West. This marks a new age in the history of mankind. Now, on a new basis, we are developing friendly cultural relations among the Eastern countries, and with the West as well. The peoples of Asia and Africa have awakened and stood up. We are advancing steadily under the banners of peace, democracy, national independence and socialism. We of Asia and Africa want to defend and develop our national cultures. At the same time we want cultural exchange with other nations. After the liberation we Chinese have become our own masters, the possessors of all the cultural wealth of our people; we treasure our own national culture, and respect the cultures created by the peoples of other lands.

National cultures, the outcome of different nations' intellectual activity, are part of the common riches of mankind. They tend to blend with each other, and through intercourse they are further enriched. The cultural history of our Eastern countries eloquently demonstrates this. Take Chinese art, for example, which is familiar to all of you. The famous Buddhist sculptures at Yunkang and the wall paintings at Tunhuang owe much to the influence of the Indian Gandhara art. Similarly the murals in the Ajanta caves in India have certain features in common with the Chinese wall paintings from the Six Dynasties to the Sui and Tang dynasties. During the Yuan dynasty the Chinese astronomer Kuo Shou-ching improved the Chinese calendar after studying Arabic astronomy. In the Ming dynasty China's famous pharmacologist Li Shih-chen made use of many drugs and methods of treatment brought to China by the Arabs in ancient times to enrich his celebrated *Pen Tsao Kang Mu (Materia Medica)*. After the Chinese arts of paper-making and printing were introduced to the Arab people, along with the compass and gunpowder, they contributed to cultural development and productive techniques in the Arab world.

Similarly, when the civilization created by the peoples of the East came into contact with that of the West, it hastened the development of the latter. Chinese paper, silk, gunpowder, the compass and the art of printing were

taken by the Arabs to Europe, and contributed to the rapid advance of Western culture, science and technique. Arabic mathematics, medicine and astronomy played a similar role in Europe. Indian literature also exerted no small influence on European literature.

Numerous incidents of a similar nature in history prove that despite difficulties in communications and great differences in languages and customs, the peoples of East and West made every effort to promote cultural exchange, and refused to hold back or stand still on account of natural obstacles.

The poet of imperialist Britain, Kipling, in his lines "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet!" which have been quoted so often, actually states but one historical fact: the Eastern peoples are unwilling to bow to domination and cultural aggression by the Western colonialists. Their hatred of foreign aggressors is intense. But among the peoples themselves there can never be any feeling of ill-will. They are always willing to live together in friendship.

After coming to the East, the Western imperialists by political oppression and economic exploitation undermined the economic foundations of the Eastern countries and the national cultures built on these bases. They even undermined the national languages, retarding their development. They used political force to reduce the national languages to an inferior position, and deliberately made a privileged class of those who received their colonial education, so that these people would be their willing servants. In China we called such men "foreign lackeys" or compradores. On the colonial economic base they created, the imperialists built up another type of culture—a feudal-compradore culture, produced jointly by the native reactionary feudal and compradore classes. This spread its poison widely. It induced in Eastern peoples a sense of their own inferiority, made them fawn on their foreign rulers and despise their own compatriots and national cultural tradition, and this facilitated control and exploitation by the imperialists.

During the last half century the American imperialists have followed in the steps of the European colonialists, doing the same things in a more vicious way. They export great quantities of a debased and decadent "culture," a compound of degeneracy, pornography and violence. Through the medium of yellow films, crime fiction and comic strips, they have been trying hard to spread their rotten, decadent culture on a large scale through many areas in the East in a deliberate attempt to poison the minds of Eastern peoples — especially of the younger generation.

While seeking to destroy the civilization of the East, they try their utmost to disseminate the very dregs of feudalism in Eastern culture. The two things go hand in hand. The negative, so-called "spiritual civilization" of the East is one of the cankers they have been doing their best to propagate, in order to paralyse the fighting spirit of the Eastern peoples and leave them intoxicated with this empty, passive "spiritual civilization" contented with the world as it is, with no desire to advance, no determination to resist oppression; leaving them like sheep ready to be led to the slaughter-house. This is of course what the colonialists are trying their best to achieve. And the reactionary feudal-compradore ruling class, acting in accordance with the will of their foreign masters, promote this with great enthusiasm, spreading its pernicious influence among the people. Our great writer Lu Hsun, in many of his biting and penetrating essays, lashed out, with a heavy heart, against this so-called "spiritual civilization." Through the unforgettable character of Ah Q in his celebrated work *The True Story of Ah Q*, he exposed and gave a profound analysis of the philosophy of negative, spineless "spiritual victory." Ah Q is a poor peasant. He is crushed and humiliated wherever he happens to be. Because his political consciousness is low, though he longs to revolt he does not know the right direction to take, and he is not resolute enough to struggle. Each time he is beaten, he finds some ridiculous argument to console himself with. He imagines himself a father beaten by his son, a senior beaten by his junior, a wise man beaten by a fool — this is nothing to get

worked up about! And finally he convinces himself that he has won "a spiritual victory." This kind of "spiritual victory" actually does not and cannot solve any problem. And in the end he is shot by the reactionary ruling class. Of course, Ah Q was only a negative type of the working people. But the industrious and courageous Chinese people, after a long and unremitting struggle for freedom and independence, have shaken off the spiritual shackles put on them by the imperialists and feudal reactionaries, and finally won an historic victory of world significance.

The shameless Lin Yu-tang, long disowned by his people, is one of those who energetically advocate the so-called "spiritual civilization" of China. He is a typical product of the Chinese feudal-compradore culture, and a mouth-piece of the feudal-compradore class. He brings out in sharp relief the negative aspects of Chinese life and culture, praising and idealizing them. The Chinese he describes have no sense of responsibility to society but seek personal enjoyment as thoroughly selfish individualists. This is a supreme distortion and insult to hundreds of millions of courageous, hard-working Chinese. It is unfortunate that not a few people abroad regard him as a Chinese writer. In no way can he represent Chinese men of letters.

Ever since the new cultural movement of May the Fourth of 1919, the Chinese people have been fighting this feudal-compradore culture, while at the same time absorbing from the West scientific knowledge and democratic and socialist thought; for we know that only in this way can our genuine national culture develop. And only when we have a genuine national culture of our own can we talk of cultural exchange with other lands, foster a true understanding between peoples, and promote world peace and a flowering of human culture. Only by taking this point of departure can a two-way cultural relationship develop in a normal manner.

Our cultural contacts with the West, just as with the peoples of the East, have had a fine tradition. We treasure this tradition because it has played an important role in promoting mutual understanding between East and West.

The French philosopher and writer Voltaire wrote in his *Essai sur les moeurs*: "The princes of Europe and the men of commerce have, in all the discoveries in the East, been in search only of wealth, and the philosophers have discovered there a new moral and physical world." He also said: "If, as a philosopher, one wishes to instruct oneself about what has taken place on the globe, one must first of all turn one's eyes towards the East, the cradle of all arts, to which the West owes everything." It was, therefore, a matter of course, that he began his *Essai sur les moeurs* with a long chapter on China. He had a high opinion of the moral concepts of the Chinese.

Goethe had the same deep appreciation of Chinese culture. In his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* we find that early in his youth he took an interest in Chinese art. In his *Conversations with Eckermann* he made several references to Chinese culture and the Chinese, of whom he said: "Only that with them, life is clearer, purer, more moral; they everywhere appear as sensible folk, good citizens. . . ." To him the Chinese were a highly civilized people. That he made a careful study of Chinese novels, poetry and drama is evident from his diary. He also expressed intense interest in ancient Indian literature. Eastern cultures broadened his vision, enabling him to overstep the narrow geographical confines of Europe and study questions from the viewpoint of human culture as a whole. On January 31, 1827, he said to Eckermann: "I see more and more that poetry is a common possession of mankind. . . . The expression 'national literature' does not mean much now, the age of 'world literature' is at hand, and everyone should endeavour to hasten its coming." Of course here he was not denying "national literature," but refuting the narrow view of those who considered their country's literature as the sole one in the world. Indeed, he had great respect for the literary achievements of other lands. He drew new inspiration from the writings of far-off China. His concept of "world literature" should be understood as an aggregate of the best works of literature of all nations in the world, which constitute the "common possession of mankind."

It is only by respecting the cultural achievements of other lands that a people can absorb the finest qualities of others to enrich their own culture. And it is only on such a foundation that normal and effective cultural relations can be established between the people of different countries. In this respect, outstanding men of letters in the East and West have set an excellent example for us. Despite all the man-made obstacles created by the colonialists, the people and the outstanding men of letters among them have always done everything in their power to bring about cultural exchanges. This also shows that the people have an urgent need for such exchanges, because they help to enrich their spiritual life. In various countries many celebrated translators and authors in modern times and in the present era have translated literary works of other lands. They have made a great contribution to promoting cultural exchange between peoples, and deserve our respect and admiration.

While resisting the cultural aggression of the imperialists and opposing feudal-compradore culture on our own soil, the Chinese people have absorbed much of the best of other cultures — including those of the West. During his time, Lu Hsun devoted much energy to translating some of the best works of Russian, Soviet, east and west European and Japanese literatures. In science and philosophy, just as in art and literature, we have absorbed what is useful from the West. Naturally, taking over does not imply copying or transplanting. We absorb the essence of the culture of other countries on the basis of our special national conditions and needs, and assimilate it for the creation of our own. Since liberation we have rid our soil of imperialism and the poison of feudal-compradore culture, and we are today carrying on cultural exchanges systematically and on a large scale. We are modestly learning from the strong points of other peoples. First and foremost we are learning from the advanced experience of our great socialist neighbour — the Soviet Union, the first socialist country to appear in the world where there is no exploitation of man by man. The splendid new culture created by the gallant Soviet people has raised

human civilization to a higher level than ever before in history.

The imperialists do not want to see any genuine cultural exchange between different peoples. They are doing all in their power to separate peoples, to create misunderstanding and stir up strife in order to facilitate their control and exploitation of their colonies and dependencies. When the colonialists ruled the East it was impossible for the writers of the great continents of Asia and Africa to sit down together at a conference like this—in fact no such conference has ever been held. It would have been even more unthinkable to discuss cultural exchange between East and West, for in those days it was only permissible for the Western colonialists to force their colonial culture on the people of the East. But now the times have changed, and the situation has changed too. Since the year before last when we held our first conference at New Delhi, many other Eastern countries have won independence and freedom, and many peoples are even now still engaged in heroic struggles for liberty and independence. That is why we have more writers here today, representing a greater number of countries. Socialist culture and resurgent national culture have appeared in the East today. These cultures are lively, full of vitality, moving forward by leaps and bounds. The liberated Chinese people are working with tremendous zest to build a socialist society. In their selfless toil they cannot suppress their passionate love for their motherland and for labour. This enthusiasm has found expression in poetry and painting. We in China today are now experiencing an age of rapid development and bold creation in art and literature. Since my colleague Mao Tun has already spoken of this in his report, I will not go into it here. This new situation makes us all the more eager, on a basis of friendship, to bring about closer cultural ties and genuine cultural exchange among the people. Such an exchange of culture will undoubtedly greatly stimulate the development of the national cultures of the East as well as the West, enrich these cultures, promote mutual understanding and friend-

ship among nations, thereby making an important contribution to the advance and cultural prosperity of mankind.

Finally I wish to say that while we are gathered here to discuss cultural exchanges between East and West, the United States is carrying on aggression and threatening war in the Taiwan Straits. The Chinese people stand ready to deal telling blows to the aggressors. U.S. imperialism has now become the most dangerous enemy of world peace and the progress of mankind. Chairman Mao Tse-tung said recently that it is the task of the people of the whole world to put an end to aggression and oppression by imperialism, particularly by U.S. imperialism. The Chinese people are making a great effort to fulfil this task; we Chinese writers will always stand resolutely with the people in the forefront of the struggle against imperialism. Every victory won by the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America in their struggles for national independence, are looked upon by us as our own victory. We know very well that so long as imperialism exists, there can be no peace for the world, no guarantee for national independence and freedom, and cultural exchanges between the peoples of different countries cannot be fostered to the full.

Let all of us writers, who love our motherlands and peoples, unite and struggle against aggression, to safeguard peace, to oppose colonialism, and all remnants of it, and build our own national, new cultures and promote cultural exchanges between our lands.

From Our Guest Book

A number of Asian and African writers who took part in the Tashkent Conference, came to visit China shortly after the event. They have been kind enough to write us a few lines on their impressions of the conference, which we print below.

U Tho Nyunt

(BURMA)

As I was one of the members of the preparatory committee for the conference, I had the opportunity to witness the great triumph of the conference from beginning to end. I take much pleasure in saying that it was a great success.

Tashkent Conference was a fair field, with no favour or disfavour for anybody. Everyone had the right to say whatever he thought right. But it is a heartening thing to note that we raised our voices with singleness of heart in declaring that colonialism and imperialism are the worst hindrances to the development of human culture and progress; we condemned colonialism and imperialism and appealed to all the writers of the world to raise their pens against all such human wrongs and injustices.

All well-intentioned and fair-minded people, all honest intellectuals, all intelligent statesmen who are capable of judging right and wrong will agree with us.

M. Cameron Duodu

(GHANA)

Many of Ghana's sister nations in Asia and Africa have trodden the same path we are taking. They have had to make good the ruins left as a legacy by colonialism. Their problems have been identical with ours. The chance to meet them on an intellectual ground and discuss our problems freely with them was of immense importance to us, and we were the first to realize that.

And I am glad to say that our hopes were not in the least abashed. Our elder brothers of Asia and Africa were all too ready to give us the benefit of their experience. The spirit of free exchange of ideas—what has become known as "The Tashkent Spirit"—was of tremendous benefit to us and we are extremely grateful to all our friends.

Apart from the informal exchange of ideas, the Tashkent Conference came to some definite decisions which will greatly enhance the solidarity of the Afro-Asian nations and contribute in a grand way to the liberation of all enslaved peoples. Our united voice called on all the writers of the world to renounce, unequivocally, the evils of colonialism and armed intimidation. These are of great import to the attainment of world peace. So were other decisions reached.

M. Diop

(SENEGAL)

As we all know, Africa had a glorious civilization in the past. As early as 2,000 years B.C. civilization began in Africa, but after the seventeenth century, adventurers and European colonialists invaded the continent and started a slave trade. The arrival of imperialism brought disaster to our civilization; monopoly capital suppressed all that promotes progress in our culture and made use of what served their purpose in feudal culture to control our people. Utilizing religion and superstition, they also imported

into Africa all that is decadent in European culture and in this way attempted to rule Africa by a mixed culture.

However, at this time a new force has sprung up. Capitalism gave birth to the working class, and a people's culture developed. In Africa two different cultural trends developed side by side, the decadent mixed culture and the people's culture. The Asian-African Writers' Conference at Tashkent will greatly enhance the strength of the new people's culture; it will promote a renaissance in Africa.

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji

(INDIA)

To my mind this conference, apart from the opportunities it allowed to members participating from different parts of the world to get to know each other and each other's culture and ideas more intimately, it had a great significance for Humanity. An important section of the human race, the African peoples — particularly Black Africa to the south of Sahara consisting of some 100 millions of our brothers and sisters, has been the neglected child of the human family, and his lot has been to be most barbarously exploited and abused and ill-treated by some of the other peoples of the world — particularly by the colonial and imperialist powers of western Europe from the beginning of the modern age. But we are glad to see that Africa is up and doing, and as fellow-sufferers, Asia extends her hand of friendship and brotherliness to Africa. The calling of African writers specially to a conference of Asian writers, which was first inaugurated by India at Delhi two years ago, is a new kind of gesture which has translated this conference to a higher region of the union of the souls of two continents — Africa and Asia. The writers of the different nations, including some from outside Asia and Africa, have in clear terms denounced colonialism and imperialism and racialism and exploitation of man by man. By mutual contacts the peo-

ples of Asia and Africa will profit in the intellectual and spiritual planes. This has been the great significance of the Tashkent Writers' Conference.

A. H. Abu

(NIGERIA)

During the many centuries of their long history, the peoples of Asian and African countries have created a great number of monumental literary works. It was only with the advent of imperialism and colonialism that these glorious works began to be suppressed. The Tashkent Conference marked a new era in restoring and renewing the glories of the peoples of the two continents in literary and cultural fields: of this there is no doubt. With the steady growth of cultural relations, the peoples of Asia and Africa will learn more about each others' life, and thus increase mutual understanding.

In these past few days since my arrival in China, wherever I have been and whatever I have seen has convinced me that the people of this great country are skilful and industrious. The brilliant achievements attained by the people in industry and other fields in the short time since their liberation, show that a prosperous future lies ahead of them.

A. D. Alazhari

(SOMALILAND)

The Tashkent Conference was a magnificent and unprecedented historic event. There, the representative men of letters of two big continents, Asia and Africa, gathered under one roof. The Conference came to a successful close and we all hope that the spirit embodied in our appeal will be carried out and that the writers of Asia, Africa and the whole world will continue to deal blows at imperialism and reaction, now in their death throes.

The Somaliland writers ask our brother writers to show solidarity for our cause. It is the imperialists' wish to isolate us from the writers of other countries and to prevent the world from knowing the tragic situation of our people. Our country is torn into five parts, each dominated by a foreign power. I appeal to writers of the Asian and African countries to bring to light our just cause and expose the evils of imperialism and colonialism.

U Kyi Mya

(BURMA)

Because many countries in Asia and Africa suffered from the ravages of war, the writers of these two continents understand the value of peace; and because many countries have been under imperialist rule for hundreds of years, they understand the importance of freedom.

The imperialists classify human beings as superior and inferior according to the colour of their skin. The Tashkent Conference proves there is no such distinction and writers from Asia and Africa with yellow, white, brown or other coloured skins gathered together in close unity. They use their literature and art to build freedom and peace for mankind. Our Tashkent Conference scattered the seeds of friendship to all parts of the world.

We hear that the imperialists who once ruled and oppressed the Asian and African peoples and their lackeys slandered our conference as a communist gathering manipulated by a few. But facts show that it was a conference of unity with writers of different ideas, beliefs and schools taking part.

The Asian-African Writers' Conference held in Tashkent makes me think of the *dapo* flower of Burma. This is a pretty fragrant flower symbolizing peace and happiness. The Burmese people call it the "flower of peace." Our Tashkent Conference is a *dapo* flower in the cultural world of Asia and Africa.

V. Cruz

(ANGOLA)

The Tashkent Conference pointed out a noble mission for writers still under colonial rule and wiped out any feelings they may have had of despair and bitterness. That is to say, it has changed their conception that the evaluation of a literary work is valid and worthwhile only when it comes from certain quarters of imperialist countries.

Furthermore, the conference removed for ever the distance created by the colonialists between the writers of Asia and Africa. Our writers became more friendly; they were able to make personal contacts in an atmosphere of friendliness and joy. The conference enabled every writer to know that all their Asian and African colleagues are against reaction and that they all wish to work for a better life for mankind. It strengthened the writers' confidence, enabling them to see that those struggling to make literature rich, more powerful and better liked by the people are and never will be working alone. They are not isolated individuals without support.

The first things I saw in China were fields, buildings and mountains, but it was the Chinese people who made the deepest impression upon me. In China the average man, the ordinary citizen, feels happy and free because he has complete confidence — and with good reason — in his ability to master life and realize his aspirations. On top of this, he feels an intense desire to see his fellow man in other parts of the world also devote himself to peaceful work, and bring enthusiasm and beauty to mankind.

Ananta Toer

(INDONESIA)

The writer is the engineer of the soul. I hope the decisions of Tashkent will be a starting point in the shaping of the soul, the soul of Asia and Africa. For the past few

centuries it can be said that this soul of Asia and Africa was the victim of imperialism, colonialism, and racial discrimination, as well as the victim of exploitation of man by man. The Asian and African writers oppose these social phenomena which hold back human progress and happiness.

I am very glad of the opportunity to visit Peking after the conference. Though Peking is a small dot on the map of Asia and Africa it has in fact become a beacon guiding the people in friendly co-operation and peace and in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism and racial discrimination. . . . The Indonesian people give their full support to China's demand to liberate Taiwan which is a further development of the struggle against the enemy of all mankind.

Ali O. Senyonga

(UGANDA)

As a delegate of Uganda, I am proud to have taken part in the Tashkent Conference where I was able to speak on the situation in my country and the circumstances of my fellow writers, suffering under the cruel suppression of the colonialists and deprived of the freedom to express their ideas. I gained courage and inspiration from the Conference and am grateful for the feeling of solidarity shown us by brother writers.

I was also glad of the opportunity to meet Chinese writers who enjoy freedom in a land where the people are busily engaged in building mankind's best future. The Chinese writers support the struggle of the African peoples. This is because they know that our struggle is their struggle and our aim the same as theirs. We are brothers and are close to one another because we have a common enemy — imperialism.

It is a joy for me to come to New China after the Conference. New China is indeed new — everything is new and fresh, the buildings, trees and flowers, and above all,

the people. I am impressed by the industrial progress of China, a progress which delights all. I know well that what I see in China today, I will be able to see in my own country in the future.

Kulab Saipradit

(THAILAND)

The Tashkent Conference proclaimed the important role of literature in establishing national independence, human freedom and the safeguarding of peace and friendship of mankind. At the same time, the Conference showed clearly that any nation which has lost its independence will suffer political and economic interference and oppression and its literature and culture will be hindered and suppressed until they decline. Instead of serving the masses in creating a beautiful life, literature becomes only a kind of poison which the people consume day by day quite unconsciously. That is why writers with a correct stand on life and literature naturally desire to struggle for the independence and freedom of the peoples of the world. Without independence and freedom the great strength growing out of a national literature and culture will not be born.

I am very happy to see that China has discovered the value and great power of literature and is using it to serve construction. In the near future, I dare say, through its achievements, the sky, the seas and high mountains will bow low before the industrious, hard-working and intelligent Chinese people.

Maung Kyaw Zin Nyunt

(BURMA)

On October 7, 1958, writers from Asian and African countries met in the ancient city — Tashkent. At this time, an old Burmese legend came to my mind:

Long, long ago there lived an old father who had many sons and daughters. They all lived together happily and every day cooked their meals with a big pot. Later came a bad man who instigated trouble between them; the happy family of brothers and sisters scattered. Heart-broken, the big pot also cracked into many pieces and each brother and sister took one broken chip before they drifted east, west, south and north in many directions. After a long, long time, they became the present Chinese, Japanese, Burmese, Indians, Africans, Arabs, Ceylonese, Cambodians, Thais, Vietnamese, Koreans, Philippines, etc. During his lifetime, the old father once prophesied about the new world: One of these days his sons and daughters will come together again and each with a chip of the big pot, a symbol of unity, will make it whole again. When this day comes, peace will reign on earth.

Just as told in the beautiful legend, today the brothers and sisters of Asia and Africa have come together with their "chip" of solidarity. At the Tashkent Conference they declared unanimously they will make the big pot whole again. Let the colonialists and imperialists, threatening world peace, tremble as they did after the Bandung and Cairo conferences. We writers of Asia and Africa tell them in one voice: Mankind must not be enslaved! We want peace for the world!

S. Ousmane

(SENEGAL)

The Tashkent Conference is a conference of genuine solidarity without any racial hatred. Before the conference met, the Western capitalist press said that it would mean the Asian and African peoples will group together to attack and depreciate Western culture whether English, French or Italian. But the truth is no hostile feelings were shown at the Tashkent Conference to any national culture,

Western or otherwise. All were regarded with equal friendliness.

In addition to writers from Asian and African countries, writers from Italy, Turkey and Brazil attended the Conference as observers. One, a French writer, said he believed the achievements of the conference would also exert a good influence to the healthy development of Western culture.

At the conference, we met representatives of the Chinese writers, free writers of an independent country. To us, China is an outstanding example. The imperialists brought us much suffering and left their brutal mark upon our land. China was also once oppressed and exploited. But in China today I can no longer see any scars left by the colonialists. In the past some people used to say it would not be possible to construct a country without the imperialists' money, but we see now that the enthusiastic Chinese people, full of drive, are successfully building their country.

We know when a country is not independent economically there is no real independence. That is why we respect all the more the Chinese people's achievements in the material as well as in the spiritual field. Their success has a world significance.

Notes on Literature and Art

WANG CHAO-WEN

Wall Paintings by Peasant Artists

An exhibition of reproductions of wall paintings executed by peasants in Pih sien County, Kiangsu Province, was held in Peking in autumn, 1958. The exhibit was representative of the new people's art which is emerging in all parts of China, an art noticeable for its verve and scope. Counties like Funing, Pih sien, in Kiangsu Province, Tunglu in Hopei and dozens of others have gained nation-wide fame as "mural-painting counties." In half the villages in Pih sien County every house is decorated with wall paintings and in some places each household has as many as four or five paintings on its walls. In the short period of 45 days in the summer of 1958, 183,000 wall paintings and posters were created in Pih sien County alone.

The artists who made these paintings are peasants. Only a few of them had any previous contact with art even as art lovers and the overwhelming majority had never touched a paint brush before. In the past, there was not a single professional artist in the entire county of Pih sien. Now there are more than 15,000 art enthusiasts who are trying their hands at painting.

Having freed themselves completely from the shackles of exploitation, the working people of China are today their own rulers, making it possible for every aspect of the revolutionary cause to advance by leaps and bounds. That this is particularly true in the field of agriculture is proven by the unusual bumper harvest this year. It is a

glorious period in the lives of the Chinese people, a period stimulating to the rich imagination, colourful ideas and creative abilities of the people. The masses are fired with the urge to express themselves. Some have done so through folk songs, while others have overcome the restrictions of artistic conventions and begun to paint. In a short time the number of artists has snowballed into a startlingly big figure. This phenomenon has no parallel in the history of art.

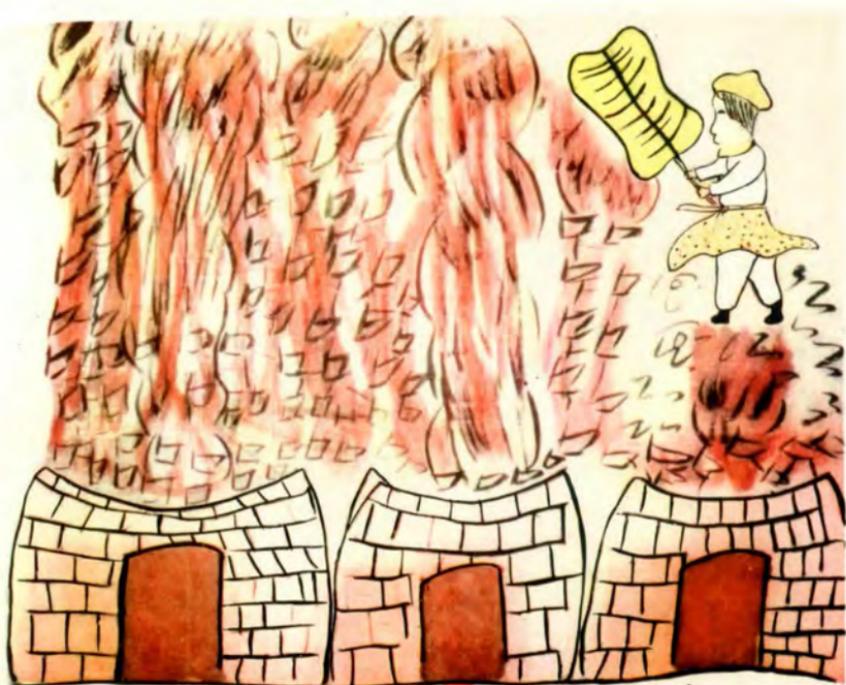
The creative abilities of the people are remarkable. The paintings of the Pih sien peasants warrant attention both because of their quantity and excellent artistic quality. Actually, if the peasants were merely seeking a functional art form to serve their needs, such as popularizing the tasks of digging ditches, collecting manure, tree planting, pest control or the technical revolution, they could have used existing paintings and reproduced or adapted them. But they are not content with mere imitation. They prefer to undertake the laborious but rewarding task of artistic creation themselves. Indeed, paintings so created are best able to mirror the fight to increase production now taking place in the countryside. Though these works may be far from mature in technique, they have more mass appeal than mere imitations of professional paintings. Created with the purpose of aiding and hastening production, these paintings often go beyond the reality of today and express the artists' dreams and hopes of a magnificent future.

Guided by the Communist Party's policy, life in our country is improving at a flying rate. The people never rest on their achievements. Yesterday's dreams become today's reality often while they still seem to be unbelievable dreams. This cannot be depicted by copying old pictures or by relying on existing styles, therefore, the peasant artists have dared to be bold enough to create new art forms. Perhaps they have no understanding of the terms revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism, but because the spirit of these terms abounds in the life they lead, their creations cannot but give full expression to revolutionary romanticism and realism.

The images depicted in the people's works of art are not products of pure fancy, but are drawn from reality. In Pih sien, where for centuries no one dared to transform dry land into rice fields, 90,000 *mou* have been converted. A new county town with a population of 20,000 has sprung up where a small hamlet of a dozen households had been. At night, bright flames lit up the countryside, flames from the peasants' blast furnaces, incinerators for the preparation of fertilizer and coke ovens. Changes of such magnitude can be reflected only through such art forms as those used by the peasants in Pih sien, forms both unrestricted and rich in revolutionary romanticism.

The bumper harvest of maize has caught the fancy of the peasant artists. They have painted hundreds of pictures that express their pride and delight—a cob too heavy for one man to carry; a peasant climbing a ladder to pick a cob off a giant stalk; an enormous cob dangling from the iron arm of a crane; a long goods train completely filled by a single cob; a few cobs piled up to form a mountain so high it reaches the sky; an aeroplane flying through the air crashes into a stalk of growing maize; a cob so big that telephones are attached to both ends; or the charming picture of Monkey, the all-powerful hero from the classic novel, *Pilgrimage to the West*, looking helpless when confronted by a giant cob. An artist's conception is often the most important factor determining the success or failure of a painting and these paintings are good illustrations for those interested in art of what can be done when artists dare to dream and give creative expression to their fancy. Some professional artists adhere rigidly to the accuracy of outer appearances at the expense of the essence, a method which is futile and feeble for expressing real life. Now a new style has been found to reflect the new reality. Without new creative forms, strange as they may be, it would not be possible to mirror the fast changing scene of contemporary life, nor would it be possible to appeal to the people.

If these peasants' paintings were viewed only from the technical angle some of them would seem crude. However,

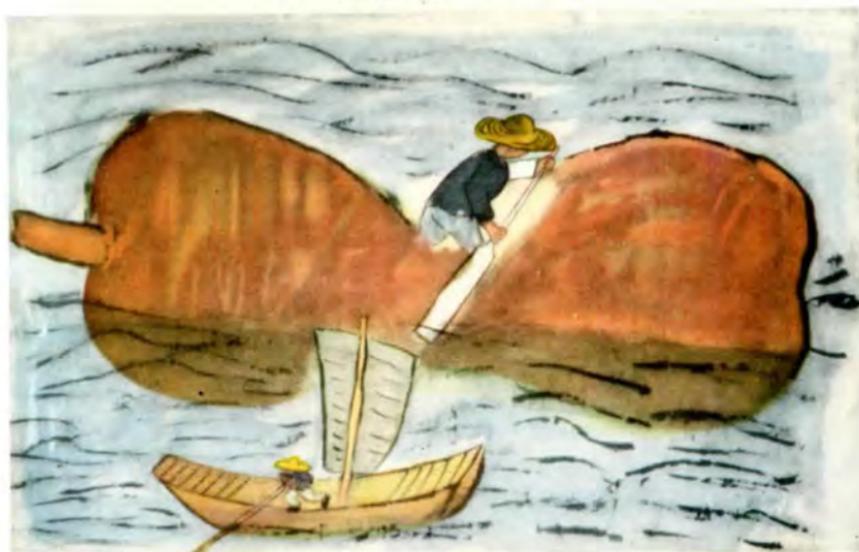


新华社

烧肥处一吹可出2,000,000斤
孙悟空作伴火泼山!

Our Fertilizer Incinerator Is Like a Flaming Mountain

A Pumpkin Big As a Boat



this in no way diminishes their tremendous power. Just as a person who cannot speak a language fluently may nevertheless have very significant things to say, such paintings as *Manure Piled Sky High* and *The Big Fat Pig* have a powerful and positive effect all their own. The people depicted in these paintings are transforming nature. They convey the fighting spirit of the men and women creating miracles today and give us a truthful picture of the labouring people's joy and spirit. They are far superior to works empty in content and feeble in expression, which aim at a superficial likeness to reality but lack true vitality. In the painting, *The Ox Is the Farmer's Treasure, Take Good Care of It at All Cost*, the artist sketches the back of the veterinary with a few rough strokes and succeeds in expressing her genuine devotion to the care of the animals. Peasants, with their urgent desire for self-expression, understand themselves better than anyone else and this understanding helps them find artistic expression.

Another salient feature of art by the masses is the integration of lyrical yearnings with the actual task of painting. Peasant artists, unhampered by individualistic considerations, find there are no incompatible contradiction between their desire to express their feelings and the political task — to popularize the General Line; to build socialism by exerting our utmost efforts, pressing ahead constantly to achieve greater, faster, better and more economical results. The General Line embodies the people's ideal for the future and they are eager to see this ideal materialize in reality. The peasant artists, depicting what they see and feel, may not consciously attempt to create poetry, but their handiworks cannot but be beautiful, with a lyrical quality that touches the heart. To express the pride and joy of a person who has collected a great amount of manure means more than simply drawing a gigantic heap. The peasant artist, to express his own feelings, paints the flame of the fertilizer incinerator, so high that even Monkey with his magic fan cannot put out the flame. This is poetry in graphic form, art true to its name: this is lyricism unattainable by those professional painters who

think that exercises in sketching can be considered works of art.

Sixteen years ago, Chairman Mao Tse-tung pointed out that we must give attention to the budding sprouts of mass literature and art. Today, nurtured in new soil and bright sunshine, these sprouts are growing into massive, luxuriant trees which will soon blossom and bear rich fruit. The artistic creation of the masses, as represented by the Pih sien wall paintings, has an unlimited future. It will certainly occupy an important place in modern Chinese art.

PA JEN

Some Recent Outstanding Novels

In the last two years in the field of Chinese literature, some excellent novels reflecting the people's life and the spirit of the age have appeared. Indeed, 1957 and 1958 saw a bumper harvest of novels. I would like to speak briefly here about a few of the books most widely acclaimed, which reveal the general trends in modern Chinese fiction.

Tracks in the Snowy Forest by Chu Po is distinctively Chinese in style and romantic in spirit. It deals with the beginning of the War of Liberation in 1946, when some defeated Kuomintang troops in northeast China fled to the mountains near the border to join the brigands, landlords and local bullies there, and made use of the difficult terrain to put up a desperate resistance. A scouting unit of some thirty soldiers of the People's Liberation Army struck right through the snowy forest to the enemy's lair, attacking the Kuomintang bandits who outnumbered them by ten to one. They overcame natural barriers and smashed one enemy stronghold after another, until they had wiped out all the Kuomintang forces. This novel gives a superb

picture of the heroism and determination of the people's soldiers and their intelligence and tact, while fully exposing the enemy's degeneracy and savagery. Yang Tzu-yung, one of the finest characters in the novel, is an experienced scout who disguises himself as a bandit, enters the bandits' headquarters and gains the confidence of their wily chief. Other convincing characters are intrepid Liu Hsun-tsang and brave, patient Sun Ta-teh. The bandits are well drawn too. In fact the whole picture is clear and colourful, and the book's strong revolutionary romanticism combined with the traditional style of story-telling and thrilling plot make it most absorbing reading. An excerpt of this novel was published in *Chinese Literature* Number 6 in 1958.

Another novel about the Chinese people's War of Liberation is *Red Sun* by Wu Chiang. This story takes place in 1947 when the People's Liberation Army in Shantung wiped out Chiang Kai-shek's crack 74th division. Here instead of adventures like those in the last book we have a description of regular warfare and one whole campaign. The plot is well-constructed and the characterization of officers and men on both sides is excellent. This is an outstanding war novel.

Bitter Herbs by Feng Teh-ying is set against the background of a mountain village in eastern Shantung where guerrillas led by the Chinese Communist Party in the anti-Japanese bases fought against the invaders and Chinese traitors. The story centres round one peasant family, that of Feng Jen-yi, and the heroine of the book is his wife, a simple but great woman and mother. Another skilfully delineated character is the cunning and cruel traitor Wang Chien-chih who sneaks into the revolutionary government to carry out sabotage. The novel is packed with suspense. At one point the Japanese round up all the men and tell the women they will spare their husbands but the others must die. For the good of the cause some wives let their own men die, pretending that Party organizers and army officers are their husbands in order to save the revolutionary leaders. In such dramatic scenes the author brings out the noble quality of the people and the unity of the army and the peasants.

The revolutionary wars are one great theme of modern Chinese literature, but many other aspects of the revolution, including the struggle of progressive intellectuals in the cities and of peasants in the countryside, also provide rich material for modern Chinese writers. The central figures of Yang Mo's *Song of Youth* are some young intellectuals. This novel deals mainly with the patriotic student movements between the large-scale Japanese military invasion of China's northeastern provinces on September 18, 1931, and the great demonstration of Peking students on December 9, 1935, who, led by the Communist Party, demanded that the Kuomintang reactionary government abandon the policy of non-resistance towards Japanese aggression. It reflects the different paths taken by young revolutionary intellectuals and gives a vivid picture of the changes in their ideas and feelings. The heroine is Lin Tao-ching, around whom unfold the magnificent and ceaseless struggles of this period. At the beginning of this significant period in history, Lin Tao-ching is looking for individual emancipation, but later she demands national liberation. Thus from an individual struggle she advances to a collective one, and finally with the help of the Party she becomes one of the leaders of the December the Ninth student movement which starts in Peking University. These young intellectuals are depicted and analysed in the light of communist thoughts.

Keep the Red Flag Flying by Liang Pin reflects the class struggle and anti-imperialist struggle in the north China countryside and cities during the ten years from before the 1927 revolution to after the September the Eighteenth Incident. Two peasant families, Chu and Yen, are persecuted for three generations because they oppose the local landlords. Some of them have to fly and spend years away from home, but they persist in their struggle and the third generation takes the path of revolution. The author writes with moving sincerity of how young intellectuals in town and countryside matured in the struggle. Yen Chiang-tao, a peasant's son, is brave, considerate and loyal to the cause. Chang Chia-ching, who grows up in a city, has equal courage

and fighting spirit, and turns his back on his own reactionary landlord family to join the revolution. Educated and helped by the Party, these young men are steeled into fearless revolutionaries. In the villages they start a movement against an unreasonable tax, in the towns they call upon workers, peasants and students to resist Japan, and they lead the student movement to oppose the Kuomintang policy of non-resistance and surrender of the northeast provinces. The novel abounds in human interest and local colour with its descriptions of the solidarity of the oppressed who unite as one to fight against rapacious landlords and the national enemy. Starting with this number, *Chinese Literature* is publishing this novel in serial form.

Since the high tide of socialist construction in China in 1956, tremendous changes have taken place in the country with great victory on the industrial and agricultural fronts. Chou Li-po's *Upheaval in a Mountain Village* is a truthful and penetrating study of the complex contradictions and tremendous changes that took place during the co-operative movement in agriculture, especially the changes in men's minds. The heroine of this novel, Teng Hsiu-mei, is a government worker who goes to the countryside to help in the co-operative movement. Though young, she is cool-headed and hard-working and gets on well with the villagers. Thanks to her, to Li Yueh-hui the steady, loyal Party secretary who has the trust of the people, as well as to the efforts of peasant activists, agricultural co-operatives are successfully launched in that township. The novel reveals great insight into the thoughts and feelings of many different characters of different classes, and the incidents and descriptions are true to life.

Tu Peng-cheng's *In Time of Peace* has as its background the construction of the Paochi-Chengtuo Railway. This line links the northwest with the southwest and crosses mountains more than four thousand metres above sea level. The author describes one team of workers and their heroism in overcoming a flood. The plot is simple but excellently handled, for through the fight against the flood the author shows

his characters' different reactions and the sharp clash between communist and individualist ideas. He succeeds in creating lovable characters with noble moral qualities like the team-leader Yen Hsin, the old engineer Chang Ju-sung, the young woman engineer Wei Cheng and the government worker Liu Tzu-ching.

Another novel about industrial construction is Ai Wu's *Tempered Steel*. This story centres about an emulation campaign in a steel plant in the northeast, China's iron and steel base. It shows the conflict between advanced and backward workers, their family life, love affairs and other activities. The young steel worker Chin Teh-kuei, an expert at his job, risks his life to prevent an explosion and exposes a counter-revolutionary's sabotage. Ai Wu is a veteran writer of the May the Fourth period, a past master at descriptive detail, and he gives us an excellent picture of the life and actions of people with the fine moral standards of this new society, showing the full and varied life of China's workers and their selfless spirit.

It is evident from these novels that many different aspects of life are reflected in modern Chinese literature, with workers, peasants and soldiers as leading figures. These characters stand in strong contrast to the individualist heroes of bourgeois society who fight only for their own happiness and desires; for these new heroes display courage, revolutionary optimism, resolution and moral integrity while working for the collective. These new men and women are the masters of their own fate, who refuse to submit to circumstances or to be daunted by them. On the contrary, they are giants who rise above circumstances to transform the world. Their stories inspire men to transform their own lives and give them faith and courage in their work. That is why the new novel which portrays new people found itself so immensely popular with the masses.

JACK CHEN

Iraqi Art in Peking

The members of the Iraqi Cultural Delegation to China were very modest and sincerely apologetic about the "lack of polish" of the exhibition of Iraqi paintings which they brought with them to Peking. But really there was no need to apologize for this brilliant display of colour and passionate artistic affirmation of beliefs that blazed from the walls of the Palace Museum.

This was a small exhibition, one hundred and eight canvases in all, representing fifty-five artists now actively at work. But it does give a comprehensive idea of the general trends of the new Iraqi art—that is, art created immediately after and under the inspiration of the July 14 Revolution, 1958. These hard-hitting denunciations of tyranny and whole-hearted support and praise of the revolution on the part of Iraqi artists have won the admiration and sympathy not only of their Chinese colleagues but also of the thousands of Peking citizens who went with great eagerness to see these paintings. And besides there were pictures of Iraq's sunny landscape and beautiful folkweaves, embroidered caps, metalware, and peasant-made pottery that in its simplicity holds preserved an ageless classic beauty of form. These too delighted Chinese visitors who, like the Iraqis, are zealously taken up with the works of peace and creation that are integral with resolute determination to preserve peace and freedom.

Under the feudal regime with its slavish subservience to imperialism, the officially preferred style in Iraqi art was a dull imitation of the old Paris Beaux Arts school, divorced from the national tradition and life of the people. It was only after the Second World War that Iraqi artists began to revolt against these artistic swaddling clothes. There was a great deal of creative experimentation, both lively and serious exploration in colour and design. Artists plunged

in to explore the artistic traditions rooted in the people through the ages. A progressive realistic art began to develop. But with the rulers of the country firmly wedded to reaction and Iraq a prison for its peoples, an artist risked liberty and perhaps life itself if he dared publicly to express the forthright progressive, and still more the revolutionary sentiments that were spreading among the people, in a form loved by the people. This inevitably held back the growth of a realistic art armed with the techniques of realist pictorial representation and closely linked with the popular masses. Now, as is demonstrated by this exhibition the situation has radically changed.

Iraq was for thirty years under British domination. The economic inroads made by imperialism, the flooding of the country with shoddy, mass produced goods and general impoverishment of the masses, put a heavy pressure on the splendid handicrafts of the people, the potters and metal workers, weavers and designers, and these suffered a decline. This exhibition, too, shows the resolution of the Republican government to carefully preserve and foster the folk arts.

The July 14 Revolution in which the Nuri Said regime was overthrown by the revolutionary movement led by Brigadier-General Kassim flung open the doors to progressive national trends in the political, economic and cultural life of Iraq. It sparked a burst of activity among artists. Most of the works shown in Peking were done in a white heat of emotion within a month of the event. Their central interest, of course, is as a contemporary artistic reflection of the temper of those days by both the veteran artists of Iraq and the younger generation. They range from the realistic treatment of the masses in arms in the gouache drawings of Sidik Ahmed to symbolic canvases of resurgent Iraq by Kassim Najji or Akram Shukri. Khalid Al-Zadir actually painted his allegory of the Baghdad Pact as a sort of bloody vampire, before the July Revolution, but of course, he could not exhibit it then. Immediately after July he painted his new allegory of liberated Iraq: a man supporting a dove of peace in one hand while in the

other he holds a scimitar to defend the rights and riches of Iraq indicated as oil wells and plantations in the background.

Another interesting aspect of the exhibition is that there seem to be a link between some of the murals at China's Tunhuang grottoes and the disposition of forms in Ismail Al-Shekry's *Open Air Cafe*. Iraq was at the western end of the ancient Silk Road and Tunhuang at its eastern end. Cultural traditions flow deep. Just as the influence of Tunhuang can be seen to this day in modern Chinese art, is it surprising to find its early Iraqi prototypes reflected in modern Iraqi art? Tarik Mathloom, one of the younger generation of artists, has studied and consciously sought inspiration from the murals of ancient Iraq, with effective results in his designs for mural paintings, particularly his *Battle at the Bridge* showing the demonstration of the Bagdad people in 1948.

In the *Sheik* by Suheil Al-Jaza'iri, a student of the Art School, the artistic approach is unaffectedly realistic. It makes no bones about the artist's social standpoint and direct vision. The Sheik smokes his *narghiela* at his ease on his verandah while hundreds of peasants toil in the fields for him under a lambent sun. Eissa Hana also treats this theme, but in a spirit of caricature: an enormous bloated Sheik, like a puffed-up white elephant, takes up most of the canvas.

It is not surprising also that in treating such direct revolutionary themes several artists have taken a cue from poster art as in Kadhum Haidar's forest of the hands of the people, the *Hands That Have Destroyed Imperialism*.

It was welcome too to see pictures of the people at their ordinary tasks and amusements. Fathiel Abbas shows us a colourful Bagdad street, Faraj Abbu portrays a sun-baked hill village, Hafidh Drubi, a *Washerwoman*.

It is clear even from this compact show that the events of July 14 liberated Iraq artists as it did the whole country. The prospects now are bright. Iraq's art has a rich background of traditional talent and techniques. A revolutionary purpose inspires it. This is well expressed in its

eager approach to new themes, in its optimism and humanity. One can be confident that its creative artists will forge this rich amalgam into art fully worthy of the ideals that inspire it—service to the nation and to reality.

The paintings at the Peking exhibition were first seen in Bagdad at the exhibition that celebrated the birth of the new Republic. The Chinese embassy there suggested that they be brought to Peking as a first introduction to the art of Iraq. It was a happy idea. So it was organized by the Iraqi government and the Cultural Delegation of the Iraq Republic led by M. Abuod Zalalah, which brought it to Peking.

Set out in two of the halls of the Palace Museum together with many photographs of the old and new Iraq, the exhibition was opened by Vice-Premier Chen Yi on November 3. It was seen by many thousands until it closed on November 24.

MAO TUN

Rambling Notes on Literature

— *On socialist realism and other subjects* —

Some time ago I made use of my spare time in the evenings to read thirty-two articles on socialist realism published in the eight main Chinese literary magazines between September 1956 and August 1957. While reading these articles I was struck by some ideas which I jotted down. I have now sorted out these notes for publication in five sections. Two main questions are raised in my article: the relationship between the author's method of writing and his outlook on life, and the struggle between realism

and anti-realism. I believe that the revisionist ideas which appeared in some of our literature not so long ago were connected with these two questions. That is why I have taken them for my chief topics of discussion.

1. Preliminary Survey of a Formula

Those over sixty, like myself, have probably read and believed in the theories that literary trends in the world (actually in Europe only, for books containing these theories are written by European scholars from the standpoint that "Europe is the world") developed in the following order: classicism, romanticism, realism, neo-romanticism. (This final term was later abandoned in favour of various other new-isms.)

By classicism we mean the type of formalistic literature and "theory" prevalent in Europe, especially in France, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, modelled on ancient Greek and Latin literature. Because this differed from genuine classical literature and theory, such as Aristotle's *Poetics* or the works of Horace, certain literary historians dubbed it pseudo-classicism. In other words, fake curios. From time to time in the history of literature writers of fake curios appear; this was the case in the west, also in China. But in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe pseudo-classicism was so much the fashion and so influential that it dominated the world of letters.

We must give some explanation of this formula of the order of development of literary trends before we can discuss whether it conforms to the facts or not. According to this formula, romanticism is the revolt from classicism or, more correctly, from pseudo-classicism; realism is the revolt from romanticism; and neo-romanticism or any other new-ism is the revolt from realism. The term "revolt" implies a swing away from one extreme, a further development and advance. Briefly, then, the theory of those scholars who "discovered" this formula is that romanticism

negated pseudo-classicism, and realism negated romanticism, but neo-romanticism again negated realism.

Here, perhaps, we need a very short explanation of the meaning of "neo-romanticism."

Though the term neo-romanticism has been little used since the nineteen twenties, its phantom still remains—the half dozen or more "isms" generally described as "modernist." One of these is "surrealism," which in fact means to escape from, distort or oppose reality. To my mind, this term "surrealism" more or less conveys the nature of the "modernist" school. In this sense the "modernist" school differs a little from the "neo-romanticism" of half a century ago, when the term was applied both to the early symbolists and the early works of Romain Rolland.

This formula, classicism—romanticism—realism—neo-romanticism or modernism, which seems on the face of it to explain how one trend develops into another, is in reality nothing more than a fine shroud for a corpse, the corpse of formalism which is the essence of pseudo-classicism. Viewed superficially, the modernists are opposed to any fixed medium of expression—this is indeed their boast—they advocate originality and freedom from rules, are against depicting the mere appearance of things but boast that they can reveal the spirit in an original and striking manner. In fact, however, all they do is to distort the true appearance of things to give free expression to their personal fancies or illusions; they abandon the finest traditions of art on the pretext of opposing outworn techniques; they create a new formalism under the pretence of combatting the naturalistic imitation of outward appearances. It is, therefore, not without reason that we call the various schools of modernism "abstract formalism" as distinct from the formalism of pseudo-classicism.

To my mind, the source of the modernists' ideas is subjective idealism, their method of writing is anti-realist with nothing in common with romanticism either, their schools started on the eve of the First World War and flourished till after the Second World War in the capitalist countries

of Europe, and they reflect the mental confusion and horror of reality of the declining bourgeoisie. If this is correct, then modernism cannot negate realism: it can lead only to decline and retrogression in literature and art.

It may be objected that the above analysis is only vulgarized social science, but those who claim this have unconsciously been enslaved by bourgeois idealism. Those who believe that realism is out of date while the modernists are pioneers in exploring a new field of art (this view suddenly became fashionable again in Europe in 1956 and was even echoed by some hitherto progressive writers) are simply repeating some of the old fallacies of bourgeois scholars regarding the historical development of literary trends.

* 2. The Struggle Between Realism and Anti-Realism in the History of Chinese Literature

To try to use one formula to express the development of all literary trends past and present is foolish. Nevertheless, let us make an attempt on the basis of historical fact to explore the laws guiding this development.

Recently doubts have been raised regarding the struggle between realism and anti-realism in the history of literature, on the ground that this widely accepted theory is a dogmatic adaptation of the formula that the history of philosophy is a struggle between idealism and materialism. It will be worth our while to start from this problem. Especially since those who hold this view insist that artistic trends have their special laws of development, implying that literature and art prosper and decline quite independently of society, springing fully-fledged from their authors' heads, unrelated to and uninfluenced by any ideas of the time.

Let us first consider our own literature.

It is true that the history of Chinese literature shows nothing equivalent to the romantic movement which arose in France during the first half of the nineteenth century.

However, the struggle between realism and anti-realism in literature is not mainly expressed in the conflict between romanticism and realism: positive romanticism can be said to have the same purpose as realism, though of course the two are not to be confused, while passive romanticism alone can be bracketed with anti-realism. An exaggerated emphasis on the contradiction between realism and romanticism was merely a fad of bourgeois scholars in the past. But it would be inconsistent with the facts to ignore the sharp struggle between realism and anti-realism in Chinese literature simply because we had no romantic movement like that of France in the first half of the nineteenth century.

That the *Book of Songs** contains two clearly different types of poems not even the old Confucian scholars denied. One group expressed unorthodox ideas or discontent and sorrow, while the other comprised orthodox hymns, odes for feasts and other songs. Judging by their content, these two groups are quite distinct and were obviously written for quite different people. The first category were made either by labourers to express their hard lot, by slaves to voice revolt, by petty officers to complain of conscript duty, by soldiers to vent their longing for home, by young people to tell their love, or by patriots to satirize or denounce evil rulers and nobles. In any case, all were written for some definite purpose and had a bearing on the fate of the majority of oppressed and injured, declaring that conditions were intolerable. The aim of the second group was very clear too. These were to praise the virtue or martial prowess of the slave-owners' ancestors, to boast of their government and their slaves' loyalty, or of their achievements and sagacious rule. Many of these odes were used during sacrifices to the gods or during feasts by the nobles and landowners.

In each case the audience for whom the songs were written not only determined the views put forward in them but also their mode of expression and their language. The

* China's earliest anthology compiled in the fifth century B.C.

first group used the folk-song form with its similes and traditional openings, the second was more didactic. Though most of the poems of the first type have four-word lines, there is considerable variety, even more so in the construction of stanzas; but the songs of the second type are mechanically constructed. Strangely enough, the literati of the past considered this monotonous style as "stately and elegant" and expressed unbounded admiration for it! The differences in language are equally marked. The first type of song uses fresh, lively, colourful and musical language very close to the vernacular, while that of the second is archaic, difficult and lifeless.

To illustrate my point, let us compare four songs all dealing with husbandry: "They clear away the grass, the trees," and "Very sharp the good shares" (both from the Hymns), "The big field brings a heavy crop" (from the Festive Songs) and "In the seventh month the fire ebbs" (from the Folk Songs). Although the language of the last has not the vivid sparkle of some of the love songs, it is infinitely fresher than that of the other three. Similarly, a marked difference is evident between the language of "Fair, fair, cry the ospreys," so highly praised by Confucian scholars, and that of the love songs dubbed licentious. I would say that the language of some of the best folk songs, outstanding both as regards content and form, comes nearest to the vernacular of the people. Examples are: "Fallen leaves, fallen leaves," "Wind and rain, chill chill!" "I beg of you, Chung-tzu," "Out in the bushlands a creeper grows," "Chop, chop, they cut the hardwood," "Big rat, big rat." On the other hand, the ceremonial odes and hymns use pretentious, pompous and insipid language. Some of the best of the Festive Songs, like "An ornament here, a decoration there" and "We plucked the bracken, plucked the bracken," fall somewhere between these two main types, while songs in the same section like "Thick grows the star-thistle," which describes sacrificial rites, for all its "stately splendour" obviously cannot compare with the two just cited. The principle that content determines form is well proved in the *Book of Songs*.

The differences in language observable in the two types of poems in the *Book of Songs* can also be found in later works of literature, marking the different audiences for whom the works were written.

This short analysis reveals two different methods of writing in the *Book of Songs*. We can call the first method realist; and while some people may not agree to call the second anti-realist, at least it is "not realist." In my view most of the second type were in fact anti-realist, and paved the way for later anti-realist literature. Their direct descendant was the *fu*, a euphuistic form of writing in the Han dynasty.

Let us examine the *fu* to see what it really is.

It is generally agreed that this form of writing originated in the state of Chu during the Warring States period and reached maturity in the Han dynasty; but the euphuistic literature of the Han dynasty was rather different in appearance and nature from the works of Hsun Ching and Sung Yu.* The language of Han dynasty *fu* directly followed the tradition of the hymns and ceremonial odes of the *Book of Songs*; indeed, it went even further, deliberately trying to achieve an effect of grandeur by the use of strange, recherché words. According to Liu Hsieh,** its themes were "palaces and hunting parks, actions and feelings, animals and plants—in fact everything under the sun." The examples left to us are most disappointing, however, for very few of them express their author's feeling, and eulogies outnumber genuine criticism. So although Liu Hsieh defined this form of literature as: "a feast of colour, a broad range of subjects and a record of the writer's sentiments," we find no genuine expression of feeling here, nothing but descriptions of objects. Of the *fu* listed in the *Han Dynasty History*, eighteen deal with birds and beasts, cattle and in-

* Famous writers of the third century B.C.

**Famous literary critic in the sixth century. See Sung Su-liu's essay on his literary criticism in *Chinese Literature* No. 5, 1958, P.132.

sects, thirty-three with instruments, utensils and plants; "The Imperial Park" by Ssuma Hsiang-ju, "Hunting" by Yang Hsiung, "The Two Capitals" by Pan Ku and "The Two Royal Cities" by Chang Heng* are well-known descriptions of palaces and hunting parks, and best exemplify this type of writing. But even so, as Tso Ssu of the third century pointed out, the *fu* of these four famous writers contain inaccuracies, for various of the fruits and trees, as well as instruments and utensils, were wrongly attributed. It seems then that *fu* are not much good for truthful descriptions either. This forces us to conclude that "a feast of colour" is the salient characteristic of Han dynasty euphuistic literature. Indeed some passages read like small dictionaries of strange terms, but there is no special merit in such preciousness. As those three noted Han dynasty writers of *fu*, Ssuma Hsiang-ju, Pan Ku and Yang Hsiung, were all masters of language, it is not surprising if they used recondite and archaic terms; but they created such a tradition of preciousness that Yang Hsiung, poking fun at it, said: "It is like carving tiny insects, work no able-bodied man would undertake." The same satirist assured Huan Tan that anyone who had read a thousand *fu* could write one of his own. This was no more than the truth, for euphuistic literature was produced by this method, produced on a large scale too. It is said that in the reign of Emperor Cheng** more than a thousand *fu* were presented to the court.

We have reason to conclude that in very few of the Han dynasty *fu* did the author express his personal feelings, as in Chia Yi's*** description of the ill-omened bird, not to say his views on the people's hard lot. This form of literature dealt mainly with the luxurious and degenerate way of life of emperors and nobles, or with curiosities from distant lands. It was a highly formalistic court literature, designed to divert the rulers. Apart from the absence of

* Famous writers in the Han dynasty.

**32-7 B.C.

***Famous Han dynasty writer of the second century B.C.

criticism and the expression of popular sentiment, there were even few direct eulogies. I suppose the rulers of the time would have considered these too disgustingly hypocritical; all they asked of this orthodox form of literature was some amusement to while away the time.

That was how the Han *fu* became anti-realist. This does not mean that there was not some relatively good writing in this genre, but it was not typical of the orthodox literature of that period, the essential spirit of which was represented by the thousand odd *fu* presented to Emperor Cheng.

We can also say with reason that the encouragement of such anti-realist, formalistic literature was consistent with the thought control practised by the Han dynasty rulers, and supplemented this policy.

Here perhaps we may make a digression. Though no reliable records remain of the educational system of the Chou dynasty, it is known that scholarship was in the hands of a few members of the ruling class, while those outside their small circle had no access to it. Confucius, descendant of a minor ruling-class family in decline, was the first man with the courage to oppose this taboo. He gave public lectures, treating his pupils alike irrespective of their social status provided they paid their fees. In this respect, Confucius was most progressive. During the Warring States period, different schools of thought contended; King Hsuan* of the state of Chi conferred titles on the spokesmen of different schools, treated them well and organized large-scale debates at Chihhsia which went on for days and months—the participants were called Gentlemen of Chihhsia as a mark of respect. But after the First Emperor of Chin united China,** the situation changed. The Chin rulers did a good thing in unifying the language and systems of measurements, but they did a foolish thing in imposing thought control. They established the system of "Learned Men,"

* 342-328 B.C.

** In 221 B.C.

setting up an office and inviting representatives of different schools to carry out research there in order to continue the traditions. These men were not allowed to propagate their views publicly, however. They could merely accept some students. This method, which to the casual observer appeared to be preserving the hundred schools of thought, actually made philosophy a lifeless thing; for any school of thought not applied in practice and separated from the people was bound to become fossilized, fit only for the museum. So this system of "Learned Men" was in fact a form of thought control.

The Han dynasty followed the example of the Chin, going even further. The different schools of thought were abolished and Confucianism made the sole orthodoxy. Pedants anxious to please the court turned Confucius into a spurious superman, half human and half divine; while such Confucian scholars as Tung Chung-shu, who were influential in the Han dynasty, actually interpreted the sage's teachings according to their own wishes and the need of their times.

The reflection in literature of this rigid thought control and of the prevalent mysticism and pedantry encouraged and supported by the ruling class was the formalistic *fu*, the orthodox literature of the Han dynasty. This, we must say, was a step back from the realist tradition of the early prose and the *Book of Songs*.

However, some of the literati, members of the landowning class, opposed this retrogression. Yang Hsiung, who started his career as a euphuist, was one of these. But he made the mistake of simply imitating the ancient prose writers. Wang Chung after him was more intelligent: he opposed both the formalistic court literature and plagiarism of the ancients. He believed that literature should "convey ideas and record facts," educate the people and serve a practical purpose. He was unable, though, to start a movement.

But since this was a class society with a literature representing the views of the ruling class and serving its needs, there had also to be a literature representing the

oppressed people and created by them. This was evident from the *Book of Songs*, and the Han dynasty was no exception to the rule.

In the Han dynasty, Ssuma Chien inherited and carried forward the realist tradition of early Chinese prose. His monumental *Historical Records* was literature of a high order. Its language was forceful and free, and the characterization better done than earlier histories like the *Tso Chuan* and the *Warring States Anecdotes*. Ssuma Chien's contemporaries also considered his *Historical Records* as literature; thus Pan Ku with acute discernment ranked Ssuma Chien and Ssuma Hsiang-ju, a writer of *fu*, together as the two great masters of literature.

But as Ssuma Chien's work was an official history, it could not be widely known at that time. What really influenced the men of the Han dynasty was the literature produced by the people themselves, the folk songs later known as *yueh fu*. (*Yueh fu* originally meant the imperial conservatory with its musicians and singers where folk songs were collected and performed for the entertainment of the emperor, and in this way preserved and handed down.) These *yueh fu* continued and further developed the realist tradition of the ancient *Book of Songs*. According to the *Han Dynasty History*, 138 songs from north and central China were preserved, but this can only have been a fraction of the folk songs of that time. The content of these songs, their themes and standpoint, as well as their artistic form, language and rhythm, are utterly different from the euphuistic literature of the court.

It may be asked why, if the folk songs of that time expressed discontent and hatred for the ruling class, the emperors should collect them and have them set to music for use on festive occasions?

A word of explanation is needed here. By all accounts an office of this sort existed as early as the Chou dynasty. The songs were collected not for their literary but their political value, so that the rulers might study the views in them. In other words, the function of this office was

to collect information from various parts of the empire—the information in these folk songs. By reading these, the emperor could understand what his subjects were thinking and consider what political measures to take. It was probably only those rulers who were confident of their own power who dared to face reality and seek to understand the people. That is why later historians, loyal subjects of the ruling class, always noted that this office to collect folk poetry existed during periods of prosperity but not of decline. For in an age of decline the ruler would not have such confidence but would be hyper-sensitive, a nervous wreck, shutting his ears to the voices of revolt. During the heyday of the Han dynasty the emperors kept up the ancient tradition, but they—especially Emperor Wu*—fully appreciated the artistic merits of these folk songs too. Since they were by now rather bored with the “state music” inherited from previous dynasties, they let their ancestors' spirits listen to these monotonous airs during sacrificial ceremonies while they enjoyed the folk songs with their strong local colour set to music in their conservatory. History affords many instances of such inconsistency on the part of feudal rulers: before the Bourbons in France tottered to their ruin they also enjoyed the bitter satires of Voltaire.

In that case, someone may ask, do you mean that the literatures of two hostile classes can co-exist in peace and not interfere with each other?

Naturally peaceful co-existence is out of the question, but the struggle need not take the form it did on February 25, 1830, in France, nor is Théophile Gautier's flaming crimson waistcoat a necessary adjunct. For here in China, although 1,700 years ago the feudal empire already had a glorious culture, we had not invented printing, theatres, newspapers or schools of the type we have today, even though there were as many as thirty thousand students in the imperial college. Without these things it was hard

* 140-87 B.C.

for the popular realist literature to extend its influence; but neither could the pernicious anti-realist literature which served the ruling class have such a direct and widespread influence on the people either. In a vast feudal empire with poor communications and different local customs and traditions, the struggle between popular literature and that of the feudal rulers would not take the form of open clashes. The struggle went on, however, and ended for the time being in victory for the people's realist literature. This victory can be seen from the fact that for a whole generation, during the Chienan period* in the reign of the last emperor of Han, all the outstanding poets, including that important political figure Tsao Tsao,** followed the tradition of the *yueh fu*, learning from these songs and drawing inspiration from them. These men, the founders and supporters of a new feudal dynasty who were contending for power in an empire torn into three, had no respect for the Confucian philosophy which had dominated the Han dynasty for four centuries. Still greater was their contempt for the formalistic court literature. They used the *yueh fu* themes, forms and even titles; they were the precursors of the later poets who wrote "new *yueh fu*," and the expression "new *yueh fu*" became almost synonymous for "realism."

Tsao Tsao and his two sons, thanks to their literary talent and political position, effectively defeated the stereotyped court literature of the Han dynasty, creating a new literary style later known as the Chienan Style. The closest parallel to this is the overthrow of the formalism of the Six Dynasties court literature by the new writing of the early Tang dynasty.

Both Yang Hsiung and Wang Chung consciously opposed the anti-realist trend of the literature of their time; but as Wang Chung was a thinker, not a man of letters, and had

*196-220.

** Famous general and statesman of the Three Kingdoms period and founder of the kingdom of Wei.

no influential position, he could not start a movement. Since Yang Hsiung won fame as a euphuist, his attack on formalism naturally carried weight; but unfortunately he took the path of imitating the ancients. Though he opposed the formalism of his time, he himself adopted another type of formalism. This attempt to combat formalism with formalism was obviously doomed to failure.

The position in the world of letters between the middle of the third and the beginning of the seventh century, from the Wei and Tsin to the Tang dynasty, can be summarized as follows: though these four hundred years produced a few great poets, the literary output as a whole was disappointing. The great majority of the ruling-class writers followed in the steps of the Han euphuists, using precious language to describe the life of the nobility. They were indeed even worse, for the Han court literature despite its artificiality nevertheless possessed a certain grandeur, but that of the Six Dynasties was effeminate and trite. Before the Chienan Style vanished completely, the literature of the Wei and Tsin dynasties had some merits though it had lost the earlier vigour. Already it showed a tendency towards formalism, being somewhat devoid of content and laying too much stress on artistic technique. (I am here referring to the general trend. Certain individual poets were exceptions, but they could not change this main tendency.)

It is worth noting that the few outstanding poets during these four centuries all drew inspiration from contemporary folk songs. Such was the case with Yu Hsin and Pao Chao,* two poets highly praised by Tu Fu** in one of his poems.

These four hundred years were perhaps the most troubled period in Chinese history. North China was overrun by nomadic tribes, there was constant fighting and the people's sufferings were indescribable. Although the region

* Poets in the sixth century.

** Famous Tang dynasty poet (712-770).

south of the Yangtse appeared slightly quieter, it was not at peace. The class struggle continued to develop, but the power always fell into the hands of a few ambitious adventurers, and several dynasties were established without any change for the better. Men had no positive ideals to encourage them: the whole tone of that society was unhealthy. Scholars either became escapists or degenerate hedonists. By saying this, I do not mean to deny the outstanding achievements of individual writers and thinkers of that period. We should not forget that even in that age a struggle took place between materialism and idealism and efforts were made to combat formalism in literature, mainly in poetry. But at the same time we must bear in mind that the predominant literary trend, accepted as orthodoxy during that period, was escapist, metaphysical and effeminate formalism.

We should also remember the vogue of euphuism at that time. This style was used in every kind of writing: whether historical records, philosophical treatises, literary criticism or documents on public and private business. This made a break in the excellent tradition of early Warring States prose and the writings of Ssuma Chien, and widened the gap between written Chinese and the vernacular.

It may be as well at this point to consider the question of how the written language and the vernacular grew apart, a problem which arose early in Chinese history. Some scholars have put forward the theory that during the Shang and early Chou dynasties there was little difference between the written and spoken language. The *Book of History* seems archaic to us today, yet it was couched mainly in the vernacular of that time. The main point made by those who hold this view is that a gap between the vernacular and the written language appeared because the latter's speed of development could not keep pace with the changes in spoken Chinese; and the method of recording speech—mainly the syntax and vocabulary—was highly conservative, this conservatism being the fault of the privileged élite which had the monopoly of writing. I describe the speed of development of the written language as slow, because the

written Chinese of the Shang and Chou dynasties contains many general terms but very few auxiliary words. And I call the method of recording speech conservative because in the early prose dating from before the Warring States period for a long time the syntax and even the number of words in each sentence remained unchanged. Hence I think we may assume that by the end of the Chou dynasty the gap between the written "classical" language and everyday speech was already quite wide. Progressive intellectuals of the time gave up the archaic, monotonous "classical" language and created a new prose closer to the vernacular. Thus the disciples of Confucius recorded their master's words and actions in lively, figurative speech. This trend was carried further and reached its height in Ssuma Chien's prose. We may also assume that the prose of the Warring States period developed further on the basis of the vernacular of the Yellow River Valley; but as paper and pens had not yet been invented, characters had to be incised on bamboo or wood, or written with a pointed article and lacquer on silk. The difficulties inherent in this type of writing meant that to save labour and material writings based on the vernacular had to be more compressed and concise than actual speech. This is why the written language of that time was still somewhat different from the vernacular.

All these complex factors interacted over a long period of time, while the deliberate imitation of the classics and their influence on later scholars made the gap between the written and spoken language ever greater. The Han dynasty saw such an attempt to word even public and private documents—especially government edicts—"in classical" Chinese that sometimes not even the local officials could understand them. During the Six Dynasties euphuism was established and reigned supreme for several hundred years, till the free prose of the Warring States writers and Ssuma Chien, based on the vernacular, had virtually died out. Though the outstanding poets of the Six Dynasties consciously opposed the court poetry and took their inspiration

from folk songs, seeking for originality, they did not openly attack euphuistic prose. Neither did the early Tang writers who opposed the court poetry of the Six Dynasties start a movement to revive the ancient prose tradition. It was not till after the revolt of An Lu-shan and Shih Ssu-ming* that Han Yu** initiated his "Classical Revival." By "classical" prose he meant the tradition of the Warring States writers and Ssuma Chien. Han Yu's views on reforming prose were bound up with his championship of Confucian orthodoxy against the heterodoxy of Buddhism and Taoism: he put the philosophy first and the language second. As he himself said: "I am bent on following the ancients not simply because I admire their style but because I admire their Way." This limitation in his thinking meant that his aim was solely to imitate the earlier prose and not to create a new prose close to the vernacular as the early writers had. The name "classical revival" given to his reforms by former historians is therefore quite appropriate. However, we must not underestimate his achievements either. There were classicists before his time, in the Sui and early Tang dynasty, but they did not consciously start a reform movement as Han Yu did. We must give him the credit for regenerating prose.

We should also note that the Classical Revival opposed formalism. The revolt of An Lu-shan laid bare all the shortcomings of Tang dynasty politics; the economy declined and class conflicts grew sharper, while anti-realist literature — notably in poetry — gradually appeared again. This reflected the disillusionment and escapism of certain literati in those troubled times.

Of course, Pai Chu-yi's*** campaign for "new *yueh fu*" was an attempt to counteract these unhealthy tendencies and revive the realist tradition of the early *yueh fu*, the people's literature which had inspired so many great poets before him. However, the efforts of Pai Chu-yi and his

*755-761.

**Famous Tang dynasty prose writer (768-824).

***Famous Tang dynasty poet (772-846).

friends came to a stop in the forties of the ninth century. (Pai Chu-yi died in 846, Yuan Chen in 831, Wang Chien and Chang Chieh about 830.) Meanwhile the Classical Revival of Han Yu had not ended with the originators' death (Han Yu died in 824, Liu Tsung-yuan in 819), but went from strength to strength till it overcame the three-century-old fallacy that euphuism alone was pure literature and restored free prose to the realm of art. The Classical Revival and "classical prose" were carried forward by Ouyang Hsiu* and others in the Sung dynasty and gained universal recognition, while in the Ming dynasty Li Meng-yang** and his adherents used them to oppose the formalistic court literature of their day. So from Han Yu to Li Meng-yang, the positive significance of the Classical Revival was that it combatted the effeminate or pompous formalistic literature which flattered and glorified the ruling class and was quite cut off from reality. The literati's struggles against the prevalent anti-realist trends also hepled the realist literature which was growing among the people—the popular chantefables of the Tang dynasty and the drama and fiction of the Sung, Yuan and Ming dynasties. All these writers from Han Yu to Li Meng-yang, however, could not escape the same contradictions themselves. Although opposed to formalism, they were guilty of another sort of formalism.

Han Yu tried to liberate prose from the fetters of euphuism, because the latter was too unlike everyday speech; and this had a progressive significance though he himself was not aware of it. As he said, he did so not simply because he admired the ancients' language but because he admired their Way. But precisely because Han Yu himself did not understand the true significance of this liberation or, to use his own words, this "return to nature," he naturally had no clear idea of his aim and method. As a result, he made the mistake of taking ancient prose as his

*Famous Sung dynasty writer (1007-1072).

**Famous Ming dynasty writer (1472-1529).

goal and trying to reproduce it. He saw that the classical prose was more natural than euphuistic prose, but failed to realize that the reason for this was its affinity to the vernacular. I must point out here that when I speak of the ancient vernacular, I mean the language in common use at that time, not any particular local dialect. Yang Hsiung in his work on dialects made a detailed study of the difference between the standard language and dialects, ancient and modern usage, the dialects spoken over a large area and those used in a small one, as well as the mutual influence of different dialects, their variations and so forth. Yang Hsiung, eight hundred years before Han Yu, was the first man to oppose euphuism; but though he had studied the development of the language and the relationship between the spoken and the written language, he also took the path of "classical revival." In Yang Hsiung's case this is easier to understand, for the standard language of his time was not so different from that of the Warring States. But by Han Yu's day, more than a thousand years after the Warring States period, the syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation of standard Chinese had changed so enormously that the classical style which Han Yu wished to restore was just as difficult for ordinary people as the euphuistic style. Yet this Han Yu failed to realize or to consider. Therefore from our point of view, while he opposed formalism he was guilty of a different kind of formalism himself and made the same mistake as Yang Hsiung.

Han Yu's influence was remarkable, however. In restoring the ancient prose style and breaking the supremacy of euphuism, he made a great contribution to Chinese literature. To ignore this would be a denial of history.

It was due to Han Yu's great prestige that later scholars used classicism to oppose formalism. And it is not strange that after seven hundred years the two famous groups of "Seven Scholars"* of the Ming dynasty did the same.

* The "First Seven Scholars," led by Li Meng-yang, lived in the beginning of the sixteenth century; the "Second Seven Scholars" headed by Wang Shih-cheng lived in the middle of the sixteenth century.

I pick these Ming dynasty scholars out of many classicists who succeeded Han Yu, because not only were their stylistic reforms significant but—and this is more important—when they opposed the Chancellery Style they were consciously attacking the anti-realist type of literature which was pompous and stately, ambiguous and polite. Their movements therefore played a progressive role in combatting formalism and anti-realism.

How did the Chancellery Style arise and become the orthodox way of writing of that time? It grew up in the relative peace and prosperity of the fifteenth century following the mass persecutions and executions of literary men in the Hung Wu and Yung Lo periods (1368-1424). Such persecutions were not confined to these two reigns, as a matter of fact. Practically every Ming emperor killed scholars. If we look up Ming dynasty history, we can see that most scholars with any reputation and moral rectitude came to a sad end: at the very least they were bastinadoed or sent into exile to die far from home. During this time the examination system fettered the scholars' minds and made them devote all their energy to the Confucian classics, at the same time tempting them with official positions till most of them fell gladly into the trap. The Chancellery Style was "stately and decorous," but frankly speaking had no genuine content. This flat, empty way of writing aimed at flattering and glorifying the rulers was used by the literati in self-defence and as a ladder to officialdom. Although a few outstanding writers spurned this style, on the whole it carried all before it. The Chancellery Style was orthodoxy, the main stream.

By the end of the fifteenth century, however, the situation had changed. When the Ming dynasty failed to resist foreign invasions or to maintain a sound economy, while the rulers remained as despotic and degenerate as ever, no scholar with any right feeling could tolerate that empty, hypocritical literature. It was under these circumstances that the classical revival of the "First Seven Scholars" started. Before Li Meng-yang and his associates launched

this movement, Li Tung-yang and others had opposed the Chancellery Style, but their coterie was too weak to effect any real change. To cure a grave disease strong drugs are needed. The "First Seven Scholars" were extremely radical and proposed that "prose must be modelled on that of the Chin and Han dynasties, poetry on the best poems of the Tang dynasty." But their classical revival was not restricted to literature, for it had great significance for political reform and the liberation of ideas. Eight hundred years earlier, Han Yu had said: "I am bent on following the ancients not simply because I admire their style, but because I admire their Way." This "Way" was Confucianism, for he lived at a time when Buddhism and Taoism were also in fashion. But Li Meng-yang and his friends were in a different position: the Sung scholars' Neo-Confucianism was supreme and the *paku* essays of the civil service examinations were good for nothing but quoting the sayings of Confucius. Orthodoxy in thought and behaviour held the scholars in leash and prevented them from thinking of the political situation or from entertaining heterodox ideas. And it was precisely this Confucian orthodoxy that Li Meng-yang and his friends opposed. Thus although

A Painting of Five Oxen

→
by Han Huang

Han Huang (723-787) was a famous Tang dynasty writer, musician and artist. In *Chinese Literature* Number 2, 1955 we reproduced his *Garden of Literature*. This painting of oxen is simply but strikingly drawn in a vigorous, spirited style. The meticulous treatment of certain details, such as the oxen's eye-lashes, reveals the artist's mastery of his medium and this method of selective emphasis is part of the fine tradition of Chinese painting.



these Ming classical revivals appear similar to that of Han Yu, they were different in substance. Whereas Han Yu wanted a classical revival to defend Confucianism, the aim of Li Meng-yang and his group was to overthrow the Confucian orthodoxy of the Ming dynasty and return to the older, pre-Sung Confucianism.

But owing to the different times and circumstances, Han Yu could openly expound his views while Li Meng-yang and the "Second Seven Scholars" headed by Wang Shih-cheng dared not do so. Instead they had to use literary reform as a pretext, and speak in veiled and ambiguous terms. Their mental conflict led to contradictions in their theory. Li Meng-yang in the preface to his poems admitted on the one hand that true poetry came from the people, but explained on the other that this applied to folk songs only while ceremonial and festive songs and hymns must be written by literary men, and a poet should combine the best of both. His style was modelled on the early poets and the vigour and rich music of his lines were refreshing, but the meaning was not profound, for he dared not touch on fundamental political and social problems. His prose also was an imitation of earlier writers and he used an archaic style to disguise the poverty of ideas. His reform movement opposed formalism, yet he ended by achieving another sort of formalism: this was the contradiction and tragic fate of them all. The "Second Seven Scholars," headed by Li Pan-lung and Wang Shih-cheng, did exactly the same thing. Their aim was a classical revival, yet in the end they produced a new formalism.

To pass a fair judgement today, we must neither exaggerate the importance of the two groups of Seven Scholars nor underestimate their influence.

These men lived through three reigns which covered a whole century. There were many great writers during the same period who opposed their views, authors of masterpieces which surpassed anything the Seven Scholars wrote yet did not exercise such a great influence. As noted before, their movements had significance for political reform

and the liberation of thought. Their aim as writers — to tell the truth, record true facts and express true sentiments — accorded with the demands of the people who were dissatisfied with the government. The political abuses, the sufferings of the common man, the timidity of the literati, all signified that a great upheaval was needed to arouse the country, and this was the historic task which the two groups of Seven Scholars shouldered. Li Meng-yang's famous and caustic dictum expressed the will of most rebellious scholars: "Lie and deceive men rather than rob men of faith in the true Way. Dissemble and seek fame rather than rob men of their sense of right." The First Seven Scholars lived during the time of Liu Chin,* the eunuch who did so much to stifle the scholars' sense of right, and from the historical records we can see what a reign of terror he imposed. The Second Seven Scholars lived when Yen Sung** was in power and men of letters fared no better. Constantly threatened with the bastinado, exile, execution and the extermination of their whole clan, the Ming scholars finally produced men as stiff-necked and intrepid as those of the Tungling School.*** We must admit that this change from "fawning like cats" was brought about by the two groups of Seven Scholars. (I should explain here that of course not all Ming literati were so spineless. I am speaking of the general trend. There were men of high moral integrity in every reign, but many disgraceful anecdotes also exist about the Ming scholars. One, for instance, won promotion by presenting the emperor with aphrodisiacs, to the envy of other courtiers, and even boasted of this when he was in office. Another presented silk slippers with his name embroidered on them to the emperor's favourite concubine. Such behaviour was even

* Liu Chin was in power between 1506 and 1510.

**Yen Sung was in power between 1542 and 1562.

***Scholars headed by Ku Hsien-cheng, Kao Pan-lung and others who gave lectures at the Tungling College in Wusih and criticized the government. They were persecuted and suppressed in 1625 and 1626.

worse than "fawning like cats," though admittedly the cases just cited were extreme.) This explains the spread of the Seven Scholars' movement throughout the empire, despite contradictions in their minds and in their literary theory and practice. Contemporary writers who opposed the Seven Scholars' views on literature corrected their faults yet discarded their chief virtue (i.e. tell the truth, record true facts and express true sentiments). At least they dared not put this into practice. So in fact they were escaping from reality.

We must also point out, however, that the writers of both groups of Seven Scholars did not reflect much reality either: their poems and prose contain no reference to the serious problem of the peasants in their day. This illustrates the discrepancy between their theory and practice. The Ming dynasty literati, including the first and second Seven Scholars, did not take up the glorious task of carrying forward the realist tradition. Just as in the Sung and Yuan dynasties, this was accomplished by anonymous writers among the people. (I do not deny that there were great writers at that time who produced good work by absorbing nourishment from the realist literature produced by the people.) Since this fact is generally known and recognized, I shall not dwell on it. Here again the theory that in class society there exist two types of culture is borne out by the facts.

(to be continued)

Steel-Making Writers

We have produced many literary works depicting the lives of iron and steel workers or using iron and steel as a theme, but never before have writers taken direct part in making steel—and not just a few but all the writers. We think that this collective participation is an event of great significance in the literary and artistic life of China.

On October 10, 1958, the Chinese Writers' Union set up their own steel furnaces in the courtyard of an ordinary house in the east city of Peking. From that day onwards a team composed of writers, poets, researchers in foreign literature, editors of literary magazines, and staff members of literary organizations entered into exciting work to produce steel, working in shifts, twenty-four hours a day. The role of general adviser to the team fell on Ai Wu, author of *Tempered Steel*, a novel about a steel plant. However, although Ai Wu had spent some time in a steel plant before he began to write his novel, he had not learned the technique of steel-making, nor had any of the other members of the team.

The members of the Writers' Union first spent a day visiting the steel works of other organizations, then they began to build their own simple, economical furnaces. They produced steel which was up to standard on their first day. On October 22, the writers produced a total of 1,056 cattles of steel in 19 hours using crucibles, low temperature puddling furnaces and a reverberatory puddling furnace. Their record at present is two heats of high carbon steel with an 0.86 per cent carbon content.

The news that writers are making steel aroused the interest of our foreign friends. Several foreign correspondents went for an on-the-spot visit. A few would not believe that the writers could really make steel until they had seen with their own eyes the steel ingots and the analysis charts.

Several foreign authors visiting Peking after the Tashkent conference of Asian and African writers: Ananta Toer from Indonesia, Maung Kyaw Zin Nyunt and U Kyi Mya from Burma,

Kulab Saipradit from Thailand and Diop and Ousmane from Senegal also visited the writers' steel works. After listening to an explanation of the production processes, they immediately removed their coats and jackets and put on overalls. Together with the Chinese writers, Mao Tun, Shao Chuan-lin, Tsao Yu, Ko Pao-chuan, Yen Wen-ching, Kuo Hsiao-chuan and many others, they began to work by the furnace. As he puddled the steel, the Senegal writer Ousmane said, "This heat of steel we are making with the Chinese writers is steel of unity, steel to safeguard world peace." He also expressed the wish to learn steel-making so that when he goes back to his country he can make weapons to deal blows at imperialism.

That day a total of 3,600 cattles of steel were produced in 14 hours.

The Chinese writers look upon their steel-making not only as their part in helping to realize China's annual target of 10.7 million tons of steel, but also as an important means of transforming themselves into communist workers who integrate mental with physical labour. The Writers' Union's "steel mill" is progressing well. At present they are turning out about 1,000 cattles a day, using their home-made furnaces. Soon modern converter furnaces would be installed. By then the writers will be producing two tons a day, or even more.

Chinese Works in the Art Exhibition of Socialist Countries

The Art Exhibition of Socialist Countries opened in the Moscow Central Exhibition Hall in December, 1958. Chinese exhibits number more than 270 items including traditional-style paintings, water-colours, oils, sculptures, woodcuts, engravings, cartoons, New-Year pictures, posters, picture-books and book illustrations. Most of these are new works. The striking thing about these exhibits from China is the way in which they reflect contemporary life. Prominently displayed are pictures of the vast projects of socialist construction and Chinese leaders working on construction sites. Many paintings were executed after the artists themselves took part in

such work as the building of the Ming Tombs Reservoir. Examples are *A Panorama of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, a collective work by the Peking Studio of Traditional Painting; *Chairman Mao on the Ming Tombs Reservoir Site*, a traditional painting by Li Chi; *Chairman Mao Is Working with Us*, an oil-colour by Wang Shih-kuo; *Fighting Against Nature at the Reservoir*, an oil-colour by Ai Chung-hsin; *Race to Finish the Reservoir*, a woodcut by Li Hua; and *The Construction Site of the Ming Tombs Reservoir at Night*, a water-colour by Li Hu.

One group of exhibits reflects the tremendous development of people's communes in China. Kuan Shan-yueh's traditional painting *A Mountain Village in the Great Leap Forward* makes an interesting use of the possibilities of the long horizontal scroll to include in one organic whole countless scenes from village life: collecting fertilizer, improving tools, using new farm implements, water conservancy and various cultural activities. Another traditional-style painting, *The Splendour of the People's Commune* by Chen Lin-hsiang, gives a general picture of the new life in the countryside after communes are set up. *Free Meals*, a collective work in the traditional style by the Nanking branch of the Chinese Artists' Union, shows us one of the canteens which are a feature of the new people's communes, where meals are served without charge, freeing the labouring people once and for all from the threat of poverty and hunger. *The Happy Home*, by Wu Tso-jen, reflects another aspect of life in the communes, the realization of the age-old dream as stated in the ancient Chinese classic *Book of Ceremony*, that "The lonely, the widows and widowers, the old and infirm shall all be well cared for."

Other exhibits showing typical scenes in China today include *Fighting for Iron and Steel* by the Kiangsu Traditional Painting Studio, an exciting portrayal of the mass movement to make steel which has swept the country. The traditional paintings, *Meishan Mountain Reservoir* by Chang Wen-chun and *Moving Mountains and Filling Up Valleys* by Li Sheh-ching, reflect the superb heroism of the labouring people in their fight to transform nature. Among the serial-pictures exhibited are four paintings entitled *A General Joins the Ranks* by Chang Ju-chi, which tell the story of a general in the People's Liberation Army who chose to serve as an ordinary soldier and was commended for his all-round performance in his company. Shao Yu's *General Election* is a fine water-colour which, thanks

to bold, strong coloration, succeeds in conveying the gala atmosphere of an election day. Specially noteworthy among many fine landscapes, flowers and birds, and paintings of still life are the famous artist Chi Pai-shih's *Peony*, Huang Pin-hung's *A Scene in Huangshan*, Pan Tien-shou's *Lotus*, Yu Fei-an's *Peony*, Li Ko-jan's *The Town of Luehyang* and *Orchid Pavilion*, Li Chun's woodcuts *Snow Scene* and *Dawn*, Ku Yuan's water-colour *Shaohsing Opera* and Chang Kuang-yu's water-colours *Taihu Lake* and *Wusih*. These artists, widely as their styles differ, are alike in seeking to convey the beauty of their country.

Among the older exhibits are works which have proved popular during recent years, like the sculpture of Liu Hu-lan by Wang Chao-wen, which brings out the unflinching courage of the girl revolutionary; *Hard Times* by Pan Ho, a sculpture expressing the revolutionary optimism of the people's army; *To Urumchi* by Ai Chung-hsin, an oil-painting of how the people built highways and changed the course of rivers in their battle against the elements on snow-capped Mount Chilien. Another oil-colour, *Tunnel Warfare* by Lo Kung-liu, pays tribute to the miraculous fight put up by the people of central Hopei against the Japanese aggressors. Tung Hsi-wen has done two popular oil-paintings: *Inauguration of the People's Republic of China*, which depicts the establishment of the Chinese People's Republic on October 1, 1949, when Chairman Mao in Peking declared that the Chinese people had stood up, and *Spring Comes to Tibet*, illustrating the new life of the Tibetans. The traditional painting by Wang Shen-lieh, *Eight Girls Throw Themselves into the River*, was inspired by a heroic episode in the resistance to the Japanese in the northeast when eight girls preferred death to surrendering to the enemy. Other favourites with highly individual styles are *Winnowing the Barley* by the young wood-engraver Li Huan-min; *The Western Chamber*, a New-Year picture by the woman artist Wang Shu-hui; Liu Chi-yu's serial-pictures *Monkey Creates Havoc in Heaven*; Chang Kuang-yu's illustration for the folk-tale *The Peacock Maiden*; Lu Tan's illustrations for the autobiography *Kao Yu-pao*; and Ku Pin-hsin's illustrations for Lu Hsun's *The True Story of Ah Q*.

Our artists in the traditional style after many years of groping and continuous efforts and experiments, are now well on the way to solving the problem of how to use the traditional

methods to represent modern life. There is little disharmony now between the old artistic conventions and modern scenes portrayed, as we can see from the paintings exhibited.

This art exhibition reflects present conditions and artistic achievements in the socialist countries, and by giving artists a chance to learn from each other will no doubt lead to a greater flowering of socialist art.

New Film Festival

In October, 1958, to celebrate the ninth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, more than one hundred films produced in 1958 were shown in Peking, Shanghai, Changchun and other cities.

Among the new films, those to give the most forceful picture of the spirit of the age and present-day conditions in China were the news-reels and documentaries, one notable example being the full-length, broad-screen film in colour, *Long Live Labour*, dealing with the construction of the well-known Ming Tombs Reservoir. The broad screen and technicolour proved an effective medium for unforgettable shots of the selfless enthusiasm of the men and women working at breathless speed and magnificent scenes of the reservoir under construction. The high light of the film comes when Chairman Mao Tse-tung and other government leaders take part in the labour, a deeply moving episode. *Workers, Peasants, Traders, Students and Soldiers* is a documentary showing the "great leap forward" on all production fronts, thanks to new inventions and technical innovations. The scenes dealing with industrial worker include the triumphant completion of the Wuhan Iron and Steel Works' blast furnace No. 1, which daily produces 2,000 tons of iron and went into production ahead of schedule. This film also tells the exciting story of how students of the Institute of Aeronautics built their plane Peking No. 1—they succeeded in spite of inadequate equipment because they worked as a team and used all their ingenuity. The section devoted to soldiers reveals China's great military strength and her people's determination to liberate Taiwan. Other outstanding documentaries

are *Striding over the Highest Heaven*, *Coral Island* and *Master of Time*.

The most noteworthy films shown during this month, however, were the documentary-feature films, a new type of film for China. These include *Huang Pao-mei*, *Big Waves*, *Men of Steel*, *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* and *A Thousand Strides Forward a Day*. All these are based on true stories and many shots are taken from real life, but in such a way as to form true works of art. These films have the merit of a documentary as they reflect the latest developments in China's rapidly changing society; at the same time their lively plots and vivid characterization are typical of feature films. The most successful of these documentary-feature films is *Huang Pao-mei*, the true story of a young woman textile worker and national labour model. By portraying typical episodes in the process of reforming methods of work, the film shows man's nobility and the heroine's high ideals and fine character. Huang Pao-mei's struggle to do a good job is the basis on which the story unfolds. As this film used the bold method of taking as actors Huang Pao-mei and her model team as well as other textile workers and Party functionaries in the mill, their behaviour and reactions to different events appear completely natural, increasing the realism of the film and its emotional impact. *Men of Steel* also gives us a magnificent portrait of a worker, depicting a fine old man who loves his factory as if it were his home. This film has no involved conflicts or plot, but the old worker's colourful personality and his communist selflessness reflect new human relationships.

Some short feature films were also shown at this festival. Concise and topical, these mirror different incidents in this great age. The popular comedy *A Thousand Strides Forward a Day* consists of three short features: *A Wall Poster*, *On the Train* and *General Leap Forward*. *A Wall Poster* has as its background the technical reforms in the countryside, and through the developments in one village and the way in which a girl and her mother put up posters to criticize the brother's conservatism, we see a new kind of family relationship. The new human relationships are even more profoundly depicted in *On the Train*. A village woman goes to town to buy a water-pump during a drought and loses her money through carelessness; fellow passengers see her distress and take money out of their pockets to make up the lost sum. Meanwhile an-

other passenger finds the lost money and sends it to the factory to buy a pump for her.

Good feature films on the revolutionary struggle formed a significant part of this festival. For example, *Daughters of the Party* portrays a woman Communist during the Second Revolutionary Civil War. *The Everlasting Beam* describes heroes of the underground struggle in Shanghai before liberation. *Ordeal by Fire and Iron* reconstructs the story of some revolutionary martyrs, and *Heroes with the Courage of Tigers* depicts brave men and their fight against Kuomintang bandits. All these films were well received.

This festival of new films makes clear the way in which the Chinese film industry is trying to serve the needs of the age. These films not only reflect the new characteristics of our time, but have evolved new methods to express them.

Literature of Asia, Africa and Latin America in China

The Chinese people have a deep interest and love for the literature of different Asian and African countries. During the nine years since the birth of the People's Republic of China, nearly three hundred books from more than twenty countries of Asia and Africa have been translated and published in China, each having gone through at least two to three reprints.

Among the classics already published in Chinese are: Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* and *Meghaduta*, Sudraka's *Mrcchakatika*, and King Siladitya's *Nagananda* from India; *The Arabian Nights*, Muhammad al-Busiri's *Qusidat al-Burda* and Ibn-al-Muqaff's *Kalila va Dimna* from ancient Arabia; Omar Khayyam's *The Rubaiyat* and Saadi's *The Gulstan* of Iran; the *Book of the Dead* and *Ancient Stories of Egypt* from Egypt; Kahilil Gibran's *The Prophet* from Syria; selections of songs and poems of Afghanistan; selection of the Kyogen comedy of Japan; the *Life of Chun Hyang* (Chun-hyang-jun) of Korea; the Vietnamese poet Nguyen Du's *Kim Van Kieu*; *Knight of the Tigerskin*, *David of Sassoon*; and selected poems by Rudaki, Djambul

and others from the Asian republics of the Soviet Union (Georgia, Armenia, Tadjik, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan). The new translation of *The Arabian Nights* has now been issued in three editions of 80,000 copies since its first appearance more than a year ago, plus a special edition for children. Two translations of *Sakuntala* were put out in 20,000 copies; it has also been published in some of our national minority languages. The Youth Art Theatre staged it in Peking and other cities. *Life of Chun Hyang* has appeared in 45,000 copies, and was performed by the Shaohsing Opera Company of Shanghai. Other local theatres also adapted and performed it.

The Chinese people respect modern and contemporary writers of the Asian and African countries, especially those whose works truthfully reflect the life of the people. Among the important authors introduced in China are Tagore, Premchand, Tara Shankar Bannerji, Mulk Raj Anand, Krishan Chandar, Harin Chattopadhyaya, Baren Basu, and Khwaza Ahmad Abbas of India; Natumi Saseki, Ishikawa Takuboku, Kobayashi Takiji, Miyamoto Yuriko, Shiga Naoya, Tokunaga Sunao, Takakura Teru and Ema Shiu of Japan; Cho Ki Chun, Han Sul Ya, Li Ki Yung of Korea; Tu-Huu; Vu-Huy-Tam, Nguyen-Dinh-Thi, Nguyen-Huy-Tuong, Nguyen-Van-Bang of Vietnam; D. Natsagdorzh, D. Tarva, T. Damdinsuren, C. Lodoidamba, D. Sange, Rinchen of Mongolia; Marah Rusli and Abdul Muis of Indonesia; Mahmud Temur of Egypt; Hikmet and Sebakhatin Ali of Turkey; J. Khanna of Lebanon; M. Dib of Algeria; Olive Schreiner of South Africa; and many others.

It is planned to publish in Chinese collected works of Tagore, Natumi Saseki, Kobayashi Takiji, Miyamoto Yuriko, Cho Ki Chun and other authors. Already printed or soon to be printed are nine volumes of Tagore, three volumes of Kobayashi Takiji, four of Miyamoto Yuriko, including all their important works. Publishing houses in Peking have put out in large quantities works from South Africa, Algeria, Afghanistan, United Arab Republic, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Pakistan, the Philippines and other countries. These works are all very realistic and are universally liked by the Chinese readers. For instance, the recently published *Selections of Arabian Stories* include the works of Iraqi writer Mahmud Temur and twelve other authors of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. All of these stories portray the Arab people's struggle against imperialism and feudalism. *Salah Asuhan* by the

Indonesian writer Abdul Muis sharply presents the contradiction between the Indonesian people and the imperialists.

With the growth of cultural relations with Asian and African countries, China will continue to introduce more of their literature. The People's Literature Publishing House has set up a long-term plan in this respect. A series of Asian and African literary works will be edited and published, including all their well-known ancient and modern writings. This plan will probably be fully realized within five years, as the spirit of the Big Leap Forward in China today is pushing ahead every sphere of work.

During recent years the literature of Latin American countries also began to attract the attention of the Chinese readers. The two most familiar Latin American poets in China are Pablo Neruda of Chile and Nicolas Guillen of Cuba. Their poems often appear in the magazine *Yi Wen* (World Literature) and other Chinese periodicals. The People's Literature Publishing House has recently edited and printed a collection of Neruda's poems and essays, translated by the well-known Chinese poet Yuan Shui-pai. The collection include Neruda's famous poems *Let the Rail Splitter Awake* and *Song of New China*.

The name of Jose Mancisidor, the famous progressive Mexican writer, is not strange to the Chinese reading public either. His novel *En la rosa de los vientos* about the struggle for land and freedom of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Mexico is available in Chinese. Another of his novel *El alba en las simas* about the grasping of Mexican oil by American imperialists will also be put into Chinese.

The poems by the Guatemalan progressive writer and poet Miguel Angel Asturias are greatly loved by the Chinese readers. His short novel *Weekend in Guatemala* has been translated into Chinese and will be published very soon. His famous long novel *El Senor Presidente* is already in the list of translations.

Jose Eustasio Rivera, the Colombian writer of the older generation, is known to the Chinese readers through his famous novel *La voragine*. The Peruvian classic writer Ricardo Palma's *Tradiciones peruanas* and the Argentine classic writer Jose Marmol's *Amalia* and Ricardo Guiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra* will be translated into Chinese soon.

The Venezuelan progressive poet Carlos Augusto Leon's poems, under the title of *Cuaderno de Paz*, have also been published in China. *Dona Barbara* of Romulo Gallegos, another Venezuelan progressive writer, Argentine writer Alfredo Varela's *El rio oscuro*, Haitian author J. S. Alexis' *Compere General Soleil*, Cuban writer Lydia Cabrera's *Pourquoi*, Brazilian writer Alina Paim's *A hora proxima*, Mexican writer Alfredo D. Gravina's *Fronteras al viento*, Costa Rican writer Carlos Luis Fallas' *Mamita Yunai*, short stories by the Chilean writer Baldomero Lillo and the Ecuadorian writer Joaquin Gallegos Lara will all be printed in the near future.

Owing to the upsurge of national liberation movements in Latin America, Chinese readers are all the more eager to read literary works from there and, through them, learn more about the Latin American people's struggles and life past and present. Plans for publishing literary works of Latin American countries have been greatly enlarged. The People's Literature Publishing House has a long-term plan to put out systematically the literature of Latin America in the form of a series.

The Forty-First Anniversary of the October Revolution Celebrated

Eight organizations, including the Chinese Writers' and Artists' Association, the National Committee of the People's Political Consultative Conference, the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, the Women's Federation, the Chinese Scientists' and Technicians' Association and the Peking Sino-Soviet Friendship Association held a great gathering on November 6, 1958 in Peking to celebrate the forty-first anniversary of the October Revolution and the glorious victories of communist ideology throughout the world during these forty-one years. Reports were made at the meeting by Lin Po-chu, member of the political bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and vice-chairman of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association, and P. F. Yudin, Soviet ambassador to China. After their addresses,

splendid performances were given by the Chinese People's Volunteers' Ensemble, just back from Korea, and the Soviet Azerbaijan State Ensemble, now on a visit to China. Two scenes from the *Swan Lake* were presented by the Peking School of Dancing. Peking writers and artists and other literary and cultural workers joined in this celebration.

A Soviet Film Week opened in fifteen of China's major cities on November 7, sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association. The films shown included *The Communist*, *The Ulianov Family*, *Stories of Lenin*, *1918*, *And Quiet Flows the Don* and *Light of October*.

In honour of the occasion, Peking theatres produced two Soviet plays, *Flame of Youth* by B. Gorbatoov and *The Snow Queen* by Y. Swartz based on Hans Andersen's folk-tale, as well as *Friend and Foe*, a new play by the Chinese playwright Yueh Yeh.

From November 7 to 25, an exhibition of graphic art by Peking and Moscow artists was held in the Peking Art Exhibition Hall. This was sponsored by six organizations in China and the Soviet Union, including the Chinese Artists' Union and the Soviet Artists' Union.

All the literary journals and newspapers throughout the country devoted large space for the occasion. *Renmin Wenxue* (People's Literature), *Wenyi Bao* (Literary Gazette) and *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) carried contributions by such well-known poets, prose writers and artists as Tsang Keh-chia, Kuang Weijan, Yuan Shui-pai, Shao Yu and many others on the great October Revolution.

Peking Writers and Artists Visit the Fukien Front

In October 1958 a group of thirty-two writers and artists from Peking went to the Fukien coast to pay their respects to the units of the People's Liberation Army who were carrying out punitive actions against Chiang Kai-shek's clique entrenched in Taiwan, Penghu, Quemoy and Matsu. Chinese writers and

artists actively support the fight connected with the liberation of these islands and are eager to play what part they can.

Upon their arrival in Foochow, the provincial capital of Fukien, a meeting was called at which they read out the letter to the officers and men at the front from ten literary and art organizations, and presented flags and gifts to the troops, the airmen and militia at the Fukien front. Performances were also given by such outstanding artists as Mei Lan-fang, Ma Ssu-tung and Tai Ai-lien; while the painters made a large picture on the spot of the navy, the army, the air force and the militia.

The group then visited the officers and men at the front lines and coastal islands. They went to the air bases, visited the people's communes and their militia along the coast.

Many of the items performed were newly composed during the journey. Thus Tien Han, the well-known playwright, wrote two songs: *The Bulwark of the South* and *Visiting the Troops*; the poet Tien Chien wrote two poems, *Fire!* and *In Praise of the Army*; Chen Chan-yun and Chen Hsiao-yu composed a poem *Langyu Island*; Lu Chi set to music a battle song for the troops; Tao Tun wrote a ballad *Singing of Heroes*, and Li Yun-chieh another entitled *The Fukien Front*.

The visit of these writers and artists to Fukien coincided with a tour by an ensemble composed of the State Peking Opera Company, the State Pingchu Opera Company, the Peking People's Art Theatre, the Peking Youth Art Theatre and the Central Song and Dance Ensemble. These artists visited the front lines, the trenches, the airfields, the ships, the hospitals and coastal islands, and gave several hundred performances. In order to make on-the-spot records of the heroic deeds of troops and civilians at the front, they made use of local material to compose dozens of new items including *The Hero Wang Pang-hsien*, *Under the Longan Trees*, *Brave Sailors* and *Red Amoy*. The Peking Opera Company alone produced twenty-five new items within a fortnight. These items received an enthusiastic welcome from the troops in the front lines, on the airfields and aboard ship. The performers not only worked day and night to entertain the troops, but in their spare time the women mended clothes while the men helped the soldiers carry timber and repair dugouts.

All units of the ensemble received many written pledges from the troops as well as letters of thanks and poems to express their appreciation of these friendly performances. Some men presented the visitors from Peking with melons they had grown themselves and flower vases made out of enemy shells.

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