

CHINESE LITERATURE



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JU CHIH-CHUAN

On the Banks of the Cheng

North, always north they streamed, along highways and byways. Troops, gun-carriages, mules, ox-carts and villagers with crates swinging from carrying poles or big packs on their backs, all headed north, leaving countless footprints in the mud as they passed. Now these depressions were brimming with rain water, but the road was deserted.

Then came a small contingent all alone. It was pressing steadily northwards at a slow pace.

This was the summer of 1947. A unit of the People's Liberation Army, having thrust into the enemy rear and wrecked the Kuomintang plan of attacking our key points, was now leaving southwestern Shantung. This was a strategic withdrawal. The enemy made frenzied attempts to intercept and overtake this unit, which had to withdraw rapidly across the Lunghai Railway and River Ssu to join the rest of the army. The main force had gone swiftly ahead. These score or so of sick and wounded men plodding slowly along in the rear were headed for the time being by Chou Yu-chao, assistant company commander of the guards. They had orders to reach their objective and rejoin the main army before dusk the next day.

Chou Yu-chao, the only experienced cadre in this group, also happened to be the one in the worst shape. Originally, he had been given the nickname of Big Bull on account of his size and

For information on the author see the article *A Woman Writer of Distinction* on p. 104.

strength, and he had come first in a cross-country race for men carrying full equipment. But two months of bad attacks of malaria had combined with a light head wound to reduce him to a shadow of his former self. Lending a helping hand to Young Yu of the Cultural Team, he was walking at the head of the men. Round his waist he carried hand grenades and a pistol tucked into his belt. Thin as he was, he looked a redoubtable figure. Chou was holding Young Yu to prevent him from falling and trying not to slip himself. His heart burned as he turned to look at the men behind and realized his own weakness.

Young Yu, leaning against Chou's shoulder, felt rather tense. He was the youngest in this group and the fittest. Apart from badly blistered feet there was nothing wrong with him. He was trying to read Chou's face to gauge the seriousness of their situation.

They had only one day and one night to cover the 120 *li* to their destination. Chou knew quite well what would happen if they failed to make it. They were leaving southwestern Shantung and its good people at the rate of four *li* an hour on the muddy road. Of course, they would be returning. Still, it was no joke pulling out. He was having fits of shivering, although big beads of sweat were running down his face. The malaria had hit him earlier than usual today.

Summer is a rainy season in the Shantung hills. Grey clouds hung low and heavy in the sky. There was not a breath of wind in the sultry air. The sound of approaching gun-fire heightened the tension.

The pad of swift footsteps made Chou look round and see two women overtaking them. They had probably also been left behind by their group. The elder had a large pack on her back and was clasping a wooden placard inscribed "Home of Honour."* The other, a tall young woman, well-built and with a proud bearing, held a baby in one arm while over her other shoulder hung a rifle from the muzzle of which dangled a bundle of pancakes. When Chou asked where they were going, she flashed him a smile.

"The same way as you!" she replied.

* A sign given to those who had a husband or son serving in the people's army.



"So you've given up your homes?" he said.

"What are our homes?" The elder woman smiled too. "We've got rid of everything which could be of use to the enemy. There are only a few *mu* of land. Let the enemy try to cart them away if they can!"

"The enemy won't find it any picnic on our land!" The young mother laughed. "You'll be fighting back before long. Then you must drop in on us for a cup of tea."

Still smiling, the women glided past. The pancakes tied to the rifle swayed till they caught the baby's attention, and he reached out a chubby hand to clutch at one.

The ground seemed to be heaving and burning under Chou's feet. Once the enemy set foot here, they would surely be trapped and burned to ashes!

"Commander Chou, I'm thirsty!" Young Yu could hardly stand the pain of his blisters, but he was not going to admit it.

"Same here! Let's put on a spurt. Once across the Cheng we'll find the going much smoother over level, sandy soil. We may even run into some villagers who'll give us a good square meal and plenty to drink. How do you fancy that?"

"Suits me!" Tears were standing in the boy's eyes. "But, company commander, you look very feverish!"

Chou was, indeed, burning with fever. He was longing for a glimpse of that river with its cool, silver water. Even a breeze would be good! But there was not a breath of air, although black clouds were converging overhead and the sky was darkening. The moisture in the stifling air made it hard to breathe. There was going to be a storm.

A few minutes later, sure enough, a howling wind sprang up in the hills and came careering down to batter them. Planting his feet deep in the mud, Chou raised his head to enjoy the cooling sensation of the wind on his face and chest. Hard on the heels of the wind came a flash of lightning and a great clap of thunder. Then rain started pouring down in bucketfuls.

"Take hands!" bellowed Chou to the men behind, his own arm round Young Yu. But his voice was swallowed up by the wind and rain. It seemed as if the fury of the storm would swallow up and destroy everything on earth.

The small band plodded doggedly on through the white sheets of rain.

It was still raining and the wind was blowing hard when, towards dusk, they reached the Cheng.

The river was in spate. There was neither bridge nor ferry-boat in sight, the turgid water was eddying in whirlpools. Some of the branches and flotsam from upstream spun round these whirlpools and were sucked out of sight. Others were borne headlong downstream. The river was rising so fast that the willows on the bank were half submerged.

"Step forward, those who can swim!" shouted Chou. "You'll help the others across."

The shouts that went up in response sounded like a declaration of war on the storm.

"I can swim too." Chou held out a hand to Young Yu.

"No!" Young Yu backed quickly away. Chou's outstretched hand and his comrades' shouts had put fresh life into him. His blood was racing. "Commander Chou," he said earnestly, "I can swim. Let me help one of the others across."

They prepared to cross. The rain had stopped as suddenly as it started, and the wind was dropping too. The water was inky black, the current was strong. Young Yu helped a man who could not swim into the river. After wading two or three steps they were out of their depth. Young Yu held his companion's head up with one hand while he struck out with the other. But almost at once the waves swamped them, the bag tied to his belt was swept away. His face white, gasping for breath as he floundered about, Young Yu yelled to the others on the bank, "It's no use! The water's still rising."

"Come back, quick!" shouted Chou, racing along the dike to keep up with them.

Under the darkling sky, Young Yu and the other soldier climbed out, dripping. The black, swift rushing Cheng stretched like a barrier before them which no one could cross. The stars came out and the moon. The men sat down on the bank to hold an emergency meeting. The water glinting at their feet seemed to hide wild beasts which might spring out to carry them off. The sporadic rifle fire behind them was coming nearer.

They decided to send two men to find out the shallowest fording place and get some food from the local people, while the rest of them stayed on the bank and tied their puttees and pack ropes together to make an attempt at crossing. Chou Yu-chao and Young Yu set off for the nearest village.

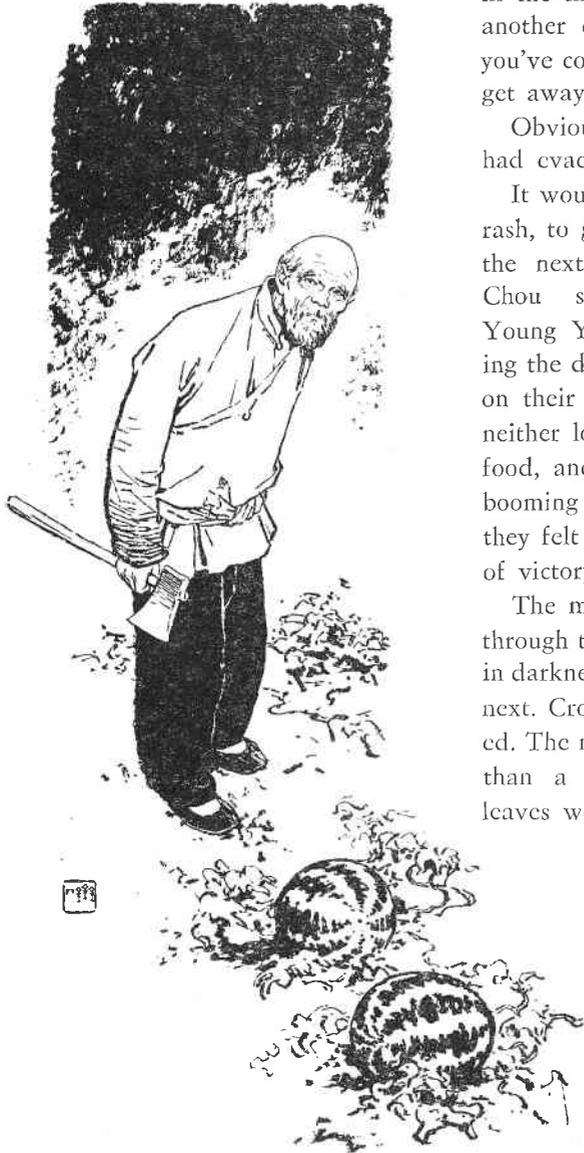
The village, a small one, was uncannily quiet, showing not a single light or plume of smoke. The threshing-floor had been swept clean, but there was no sign of life. As Chou led Young Yu warily up to a hut at the entrance to the village, he saw written boldly on the mud wall the words: Beware of the Mines! He pushed open the door, which was unlatched. There was no one inside. The light of the moon showed a plank propped up

in the middle of the room with another chalked inscription: "So you've come, eh? Well, you won't get away alive!"

Obviously, the whole village had evacuated.

It would be useless, not to say rash, to go on. They headed for the next village. On the way Chou started chuckling and Young Yu followed suit, picturing the discomfiture of the enemy on their arrival here. They had neither located a ford nor found food, and enemy guns were still booming away behind them, but they felt in good heart, confident of victory.

The moon was shining fitfully through the clouds. The earth was in darkness one moment, silver the next. Crops swayed as they passed. The maize was already higher than a man and its succulent leaves were rustling. The rumble of artillery fire in the distance made the fields seem more tranquil by contrast. But a sudden sound near by alerted Chou, who halted and held his breath. Yes, he could hear a series of thuds. Young Yu caught the sound too. Chou was immediately on his guard, for it was hard



to tell what this portended. Holding his rifle at the ready and signing to Young Yu to follow him, he tiptoed towards the sound.

The moon came out from behind the clouds, bathing everything on earth in a soft radiance. In the middle of the next field they could see a small hut, nothing else. But another thud sounded abruptly close at hand and a gruff old voice muttered, "Thirty-four."

Straining their eyes, they made out that there was a melon field just ahead, the round, glossy melons in it as big as wash-basins. And pacing through the field was a bare-headed, stooped old man, a glittering axe in his hand. He crouched down before a melon, tapped it a few times as if to see whether it was ripe, and then, having felt and stared at it for a while, slashed at it again and again with his axe and muttered, "Thirty-five." This done, he stood up and lumbered off to crouch down beside another melon and hack it to pieces. . . . He would not let the enemy have his melons.

Suddenly the old peasant squatted down to pick something up from the ground. For a long time he remained there motionless. Then he started sobbing quietly to himself.

"Grandad!" called Chou Yu-chao softly, walking over. The old peasant looked up in astonishment, then rose slowly to his feet.

He was an old, old man with long white eyelashes and snowy hair. There were tears on his face. After cycling Chou intently for a moment, he cried in a voice that trembled:

"Comrades, is it you?"

"Yes, grandad. We. . . ." Chou lacked the courage to complete that sentence. But the old peasant understood, for he nodded and after a pause held out his hand.

"Look at this, comrade," he said. He squatted down again to show them a damp slip of paper and a dollar note. With his other big gnarled hand he wiped his eyes.

"Two melons have gone, but this money was left under the vine." He spread the damp note carefully out on his knees. "They left money under the vine! . . . Will you read what this says, comrade?" He handed the paper to Chou, who managed in the moonlight to decipher the faint writing. "Grandad or grandma who grew these melons, we got so thirsty marching that we've

taken two and left you a dollar. Hope that's enough and that you don't mind. We were simply parched. X Company of the People's Liberation Army."

Having read this out Chou asked, "How long ago did they pass, grandad?"

The old man looked them up and down.

"You want to cross the river?"

Chou nodded and explained their position. The old peasant thought it over and declared:

"Never mind how high the water is. I'll see you get over tonight!" He took them into his hut, empty except for a big pack on the ground and, resting against it, a rifle and long pipe with tobacco pouch attached. Had they come any later, the old man would have been gone.

The men left by the river had not succeeded in crossing with a rope. The old melon-grower hastily called them all over, produced a basketful of sweet potatoes and lit a fire so that they could dry themselves and cook some food. This done, he disappeared.

Chou posted a sentry and told the others to rest. After a drink of water he went out. Young Yu lying on a heap of straw said nothing. He felt he should go with Chou, whose face was feverishly flushed, but his own legs seemed glued to the ground and he could not move. Sighing with mortification, he rested his head on the old man's pack and slept. Almost at once, or so it seemed, he was woken. His comrades were sprawled out sleeping, the moon was high overhead, and the rat-tat of rifle fire, which carried unusually clearly through the still night, was evidently much closer.

On the threshing-floor outside, in a patch of silver moonlight, the old man was sitting on a heap of door-boards. His face, set in serious lines, seemed carved from stone. Presently Chou Yu-chao came back from the river with a great coil of wet rope. Stumbling with weariness, he approached the old man and said softly, "Let's try again, grandad. Make the rafts a bit smaller."

The old peasant shook his head with a frown and said sharply, "You go and have some sleep." He added more gently, "You've a long way to march once you've crossed." With that he took

the ropes from Chou and pushed him towards the hut, after which he lumbered off again.

Chou sank down wearily beside the door. But soon he looked up at the sky and, resting his hands on the ground, raised himself with an effort to his feet.

"Commander Chou!" Young Yu scrambled up despite himself and, stopping Chou, said, "Let me go instead of you!"

Chou grinned at him. "All right, we will both go and find some way out." He scanned the sky again. Orion was sinking. In another three or four hours it would be light.

"We haven't much time. We've got to cross before dawn. Otherwise we'd have to turn back." He broke off to look at Young Yu. "If we stayed here as guerrillas, lad, would you be afraid?"

"With you, I'm not afraid of anything," replied Young Yu stoutly.

Their feet brushed the dew-pearled crops by the path, frogs were croaking lustily, all around was a sea of green. Yet tomorrow this quiet loveliness. . . . Machine-guns were rattling in the distance again.

"This time tomorrow the enemy will be here." Chou turned his head to wipe away a tear. "What you should have said, Young Yu, is this: With the people backing us, we're not afraid of anything."

Another strange sound reached them from the dike. Chou strained his ears to listen, then hurried to the spot with Young Yu. They found the old peasant hacking away with a hoe. Going closer, Chou saw a heap of earth beside him. The old man was cutting a ditch through the dike to the river. Stupefied for a second, Chou suddenly understood. He grabbed hold of the hoe, protesting, "Don't do that, grandad! . . ."

The old man answered calmly, "You're just in time. Fetch the other comrades and get ready to cross."

"Grandad, we'd die sooner than harm you folk." Chou was trembling with emotion. The old man said nothing, just eyed him narrowly.

"Where's your home, comrade?" he asked.

"North of the Yellow River."

"In the liberated area?" he asked solemnly.

"That's right."

The old man's brows contracted as he said, "Your home's liberated, that's good. Do you ever think of those places that aren't free yet? . . . I don't like the way you young fellows keep talking of dying." He snatched back the hoe, explaining reasonably, "The Cheng isn't too deep. It's just that these freshets are pouring down too fast. If I breach the dike to let some of the water out, the current will slow down and you can wade across."

"No, you can't do that!" cut in Chou in a tone that brooked no argument. Grabbing the hoe once more, he replaced the earth.

"You stop that!" bellowed the old man furiously.

Chou threw his arms around him, tears in his eyes.

"We're the people's army, grandad. We live for the people and we're ready to die for them."

The old peasant brandished his fist. "Talking about dying again! You sit down and listen to me." With a great sigh, he squatted down on the dike.

The firing had stopped, rather ominously it seemed. The Cheng was racing along below the dike, its glinting waves lapping the willows on the bank, whose tendrils were rippling softly in the water.

"The Cheng flows fast, everyone knows that," said the old man slowly. "I was born and bred beside it, I'm not afraid of it. In summer we boys used to jump into the river to bathe, or catch fish and play at water-battles in it. When it turned colder we caught shrimps here and dug for crabs.

"One summer there was such heavy rain that the river brimmed its banks, just like today. It was sweltering hot, but my folk wouldn't let me go swimming. One noon, when dogs' tongues were lolling out for heat and there was no wind to whip up waves on the Cheng, I slipped down on the sly for a swim, sure I had nerves and strength enough to be safe. The moment I dived in I found out my mistake. The river had become a killer! And there was no getting out. The current carried me off like a hundred powerful hands tugging at me and rushing me downstream. I was limp as a rag, weak as straw, tossed about like a cork. Soon all my strength was gone. What with all the water I'd swallowed, I was nearly done for. I had no fight left but gave myself up for lost. And then, of course, I sank. But that same instant a pic-

ture flashed through my mind. A year before, going to borrow something from my grandmother, I'd walked three or four *li* downstream and noticed an old tree growing out of the dike, shading the river and stretching one branch out over the water. It had struck me what a cool spot this would be for swimming in summer. Later the place had slipped my mind, but now I remembered that tree and it gave me hope. That hope steadied me so that my strength came back and I started fighting for my life. Somehow I managed to keep afloat till I reached that big tree and caught hold of the branch. . . . Too bad, it's withered now. What I'm trying to tell you is this: Hope isn't something you can see or grasp, yet it's mighty powerful. Without hope men can't live on, life has no meaning. Right now, you're the people's hope. So long as we have our Party and our army, even at the back of beyond we've something to fight for—we've hope. Landlords and reactionaries can rage and rampage, but we're not afraid. If there were nothing to hope for, we'd be afraid. Understand? . . ."

The Cheng was rushing and swirling at the old man's feet, pounding the banks and roaring like a savage beast.

"We understand, grandad!" In a flash, Chou Yu-chao had a clear vision of the future. Tomorrow this old melon-grower might be roaming the hills with his rifle; the young mother with the gun might be carrying her child through the rain; the clean, quiet village might be a mass of flames. But sooner or later the army would come back, the enemy would be wiped out, the old man would plant melons again, the baby would be taken to visit his grandmother, new homes would be built, new villages with the old names would appear. . . . Chou looked with shining eyes from the sky dotted with stars to the river and the white-haired old man. He was taking a silent pledge that so long as a breath remained in his body he would go forward, in order to fight back later with the army. He rose, picked up the hoe and with swift, sure strokes mended the dike. Strength had flowed back miraculously into his arms. Very soon the earth was firmly tamped down in the ditch.

The old man sat there in silence and did not stop him. He stared, frowning, at the inky black water. At last he stood up, saying, "All right. Let me have a look round. You wait here.

I'll be back in less time than it takes for two meals." With that he strode swiftly off.

The firing, which had stopped, started up again now more fiercely and much nearer. The men came out from the hut to the river bank.

Young Yu was sitting there as if in a trance. Ever since the day two years ago when he first put on an army uniform, he had looked on himself as a soldier. Now he suddenly realized there had been something missing.

The rain had ceased some hours ago, the water might be subsiding. Chou Yu-chao divested himself of his hand grenades, but before he could sound the river Young Yu leapt up, tore off his cap and thrust it into Chou's hands. The lad jumped into the river, followed by two other swimmers.

Far from subsiding, the Cheng was higher than ever, swollen by all the freshets from upstream. As the three swimmers climbed the dike again the old peasant came panting along with two middle-aged men, each with half a dozen poles over his shoulder.

"It's all right! I've caught two eels! They ran into the hills from the enemy just in time to be caught in my net!" The old man's spirits had soared and his long eyelashes were fluttering cheerfully. The two "eels" greeted the soldiers with a grin and without more ado started lashing the poles together. The old man had obviously explained what was needed and worked out the best way to cross the Cheng.

In less than the time for two meals, the old peasant had become a different man. As he worked he winked at Chou and said:

"See, comrade, the Cheng belongs to us. However wild it is, it must obey our orders. . . . You'll get across easy, comrades. But just let the enemy try to cross, and the Cheng won't treat them so politely!" He shook with laughter.

The east was a hazy white, it would soon be dawn. The three peasants had lashed the poles together in squares. While they carried them down to the water's edge, Chou Yu-chao divided his men into two groups, each with strong swimmers in it. Holding on to all four sides of the square, the first group entered the water.

The old man saw them off. His high spirits had given place to quiet solemnity. His lips moved for a second and he said decisively:

"I wish you a good journey, comrades! I'm too old to see you across. Don't forget our Cheng. Next year I'll be growing more melons for you to eat." He smiled and seemed on the point of saying more, but thought better of it and simply waved his hand.

The first raft was lowered on to the water and the swimmers, helped by one of the peasants, were impelling it vigorously towards the other shore. The current was so swift that soon the raft and men on it were no more than a black shape bobbing downstream. However, they contrived to inch across and gain the further side. When the second raft was lowered, Chou Yu-chao stood in the water looking up at the old man on the dike. This second brought him the conviction that they were not withdrawing but advancing. On their path forward he had received a cup of cold tea from an old man's hands, the comfort of girls' pure singing, hot boiled eggs thrust into his pocket by an old village woman. . . . The old woman had left her village carrying with her the placard "Home of Honour," the young mother had taken up a gun and fastened her pancakes to it, and to frighten the enemy they had left the message: Beware of the Mines! All these things merged in his mind into one vast, invincible force personified by this indomitable old man. Stooped, but with unshakable faith, he stood there alone on the dike gazing into the distance.

The sky was grey, the river a deep blue. It rushed on bearing the people's hope, the fighters' pledges. It flowed far, far away, to water all the fields of their native land.

The small contingent marched on and on with a faith that nothing could destroy. And a stooped figure stood, motionless, on the dike.

*Translated by Gladys Yang
Illustrations by Ku Ping-hsin*



CHANG TIEN-MIN

The Road Test

The mountain highway, swirling and rippling like a strip of red silk in a dancer's hand, was densely marked with many frightening signs and exclamations: "Dangerous cliff!" "S curve!" "Slow down!" "Danger!" and "Blow your horn!"

Young Liang, driver's assistant, was under a real strain.

Only the clouds, nothing but the clouds, were in a pleasant state of relaxation, drifting along the valley, climbing the mountains, seething in the blue sky between two mountains and changing into rare majestic shapes. The red leaves, washed by the clouds and the fog, glittered like dew-covered agate. Driving in a car one had a feeling that balls of burning fire were flying by. . . . The fiery red combining with the golden, white and

tender green of the oak, birch and pine made a colourful autumn scene.

Young Liang who usually had an interest in everything was blind to all this. At the moment he could see nothing. He was taking an exam. The drivers call it the "road test." After navigating a narrow lane and turns marked with sticks on both sides and proving his knowledge of the traffic regulations, an assistant driver has to pass a road test before he can get a licence.

Twenty-one years of age, of medium height, with a long face and pointed chin, the young man wore a soiled grey cap on his tousled head. His eyes were wide open, beads of sweat stood on the tip of his nose, his lips were compressed and there was a stain at a corner of his mouth. Young Liang was a capable and clever apprentice of the county transport section. Even as a boy he used to chase after the trucks and ask for "a lift." More than once he tasted the whip of a cart driver for having climbed up uninvited for the same purpose.

Young Liang was sure he would pass the exam, being a skilful driver who could surmount most ordinary obstacles. What's more, he had memorized every word of the Driver's Handbook and could answer any question put to him. Yet he was more than nervous that day. He flashed a glance at the examiner beside him. That was it. The examiner was no other than his own father!

Sitting erect in grave solemnity, the examiner, rough and round, was in his fifties. Highly regarded among the drivers, he was the supervisor of the county transport department. His work was to supervise the communication and transport sections, test candidate drivers, and inspect traffic and safety devices. He had the power to take away the licence of any driver who violated the regulations. In his youth he had been a carter. Later he became an apprentice to a truck driver. After liberation, he had been a team leader for ten years and was greatly admired by his fellow drivers.

Today, Old Liang wore a wrinkled new tunic and a new cap.

The relationship between the two in the cab of the truck was not revealed, one a prey to nervousness, the other, his brows knit-

ted, thinking of a difficult question. When the son succeeded in coping with the series of difficult problems, the father betrayed not a trace of pleasure or approval.

"Your reputation must not be blemished by this examination," thought the father to himself. As the old saying goes: One is always partial to his relatives. Not wanting to give rise to any suspicions, he had balked against testing his own son. But the office had insisted, just to show their faith in him.

His son was also afraid of a possible charge of partiality. The night before, unable to sleep, he had gone to his father and asked him to be particularly strict. They had reached an agreement on this easily. Thus, they unconsciously stiffened the requirements of the test, and it took them much longer to finish.

The result was still in doubt. His father had said, "I'll give you a good thrashing if you fail."

"A good thrashing!" thought Young Liang with apprehension. The colourful scene before him turned like a kaleidoscope. This happy lad, who usually achieved everything with little effort, now stared hard at the highway, his hands on the steering wheel, his foot on the accelerator and his ears tuned to his father's words.

"Faster," Old Liang suddenly demanded.

Young Liang instantly stepped on the accelerator and shifted into fourth gear.

"More speed!"

Fifth gear! The truck rolled along the highway at 45 kilometres per hour.

"Road block ahead!"

Young Liang slammed on the brakes. The truck skidded forward about a dozen metres.

"Suppose this were winter?"

"I wouldn't use my hand brake."

"Why not?"

"There would be ice on the road. Braking suddenly at a high speed might cause the truck to turn to one side and tumble into the valley."

The father said nothing. His son was right. His gaze turned to the scenery. On his left stood a mountain, on the right flowed

a stream flanked by sheer cliffs. Blue water roaring like tigers dashed below clusters of red leaves. They were approaching the highest peak of the Red Leaf Mountain. The place recalled to Old Liang a most frightening scene.

In his youth, as a carter for a wealthy man, he had often crossed this peak on a cart pulled by seven horses. Once, going down the slope, the brake rope snapped and he was thrown from the cart. Because of the narrowness of the road, as the cart gained in speed he was unable to get away from the horses in front and the cart behind. He was forced to run with it. Tearing down the slope the cart pushed the shaft horse, compelling it to gallop at top speed. Afraid that it might overtake the other horses and tangle the reins, Old Liang lashed the forward animals. "I'm finished," he thought. Fortunately, the cart was caught by a tree stump at a turn and stopped. After that, Liang gave up carting for ever.

He became an apprentice to the driver of the county's only truck. It was one run by charcoal. Every time they climbed the slope Liang the apprentice had to follow behind with a block of wood and a poker. For every few feet the truck advanced he had to put the block behind a wheel to prevent the vehicle from rolling back. Then he would poke the furnace to make the fire bigger. And the truck would climb a few feet more. Liang mounted the forty *li* of the slope like a religious pilgrim, kneeling at each step. . . .

Now, his gaze fell on the highway before him. The sun, climbing the mountain top, cascaded its golden rays on the road and the green truck. The red leaves turned semi-transparent and glittered in the sunlight. A mountain eagle was circling over the valley with spreading wings below the father and the son.

"A model for a driver," muttered Old Liang.

"What is?"

"The eagle."

The son looked puzzled.

"It flies high and steady, swooping down fast and accurately at a decisive moment," explained Old Liang. He stopped when he saw agreement in his son's eyes.

"Green Water Bridge," announced the son, fixing his gaze ahead.

A wonderful precipice loomed before them like a perching eagle of black stone. Its large head, on which a few maples grew like scarlet feathers, hung over the bridge.

The truck was nearing the bridge in the shade of the colossal precipice.

The old man's new cap vanished suddenly.

"Stop the truck," he commanded.

Young Liang's right foot instinctively moved from the accelerator to the brake. But it instantly drew back and returned to its former place on the accelerator. The truck rolled on to the bridge.

Stamping his feet the old man shouted: "My hat, my hat."

The truck went on. It crossed the bridge and stopped a dozen metres beyond.

"What's wrong, are you deaf?" the old man demanded. But he didn't get out and go back for his hat.

"It is forbidden to stop within fifteen metres of a bridge. No use yelling at me," Young Liang answered calmly, intelligence flashing in his eyes.

The old man remained on his seat silently for some time before he threw open the door and shouted, "Next candidate — Wang Teh-pao." Then he went to pick up his hat.

A dozen young men were waiting in the van of the truck. Young Liang left the cab as Wang Teh-pao climbed down from the rear.

"How was it?" Wang inquired.

"Pretty bad!" Wiping away the perspiration on the tip of his nose, Young Liang climbed on to the truck. He was immediately surrounded by others waiting their turn. They showered him with questions.

"We really sweated for you!" said a young man with a loud voice.

The truck started. Outstretching red leaves brushed against Young Liang's head. He pulled down a branch and stuck it in a corner of the truck. The red leaves rustled softly in the mountain breeze. . . .

II

Young Liang passed the examination.

His future was decided. That is to say: he would drive on the highway which was like a long, long ribbon. He would climb to mountain tops amid floating clouds and rippling peaks and dive into deep overcast gullies where dark water rushed against the rocks turning into rolling lambs. Four tons of weight he would carry, four tons of ginseng roots, deer antlers, grapes, grain, industrial products or daily necessities. The peasants would wait for him. Stroking the trade mark on the truck, they would ask, "Is it a Liberation?" "Right." "Made in China?" "Yes." Their admiring gaze would fall on the wonderful one who drove the truck. He would start the engine. Perspiring in the wind, behind the horn and the headlights, he would glide along as agilely as a mountain eagle. . . .

The little red driver's licence of the People's Republic of China, which he had won by sweat of his brow, ensured the realization for all this. Wrapping it in a piece of red silk, he put it in the upper pocket of his shirt.

Happy as a lark he waited eagerly for his turn. As soon as he heard, "Your turn, Young Liang," he flew away like a bird when its cage door is opened. He liked to take the turn of others too. Whenever somebody was ill Young Liang was sure to go to him, either straightforwardly or beating about the bush, and offer to take his shift. Never tired or sleepy, he liked to joke with his mates. He walked with a bouncing gait. It was the spring of his life, a time which defies all difficulties, a time when one is sure of victory. It is also a time when some people go off the track.

Since he was a driver with a licence he felt he should look like one. As soon as he got his pay he bought a pair of sunglasses. Whistling, he drove as quick as lightning. His horn sounded from the east of the county town to the west. His truck darted among people, horses and carts like a fire-engine. Young Liang drove as if he were doing a *yangko* dance.

Gradually, his son's behaviour reached Old Liang's ears. One day when he went to the transport section, after discussing the

safety situation the manager hesitatingly told him about Young Liang. The old man went away in silence.

A few days later, having some time at his disposal, Old Liang drove a cart with firewood for some government organizations.

His whip in his folded arms, Old Liang leaned against the firewood as his horse sauntered along. Suddenly a horn blew behind him. "My precious son," he thought. Recalling what the manager had told him, anger flooded his chest. Pretending that he had not heard the horn, he did not make way for the truck.

With unabated speed, its horn blaring incessantly like a fire-engine's, the truck tore by the cart. It slowed down only after it had passed. The door of the cab was thrown open and a head thrust out. Looking at Old Liang through a pair of sun-glasses, the driver demanded: "Are you tired of living?"

As Old Liang raised his eyes to the driver his heart contracted in spite of himself. The boy's insolence struck him like a blow.

The truck pulled to a stop. Young Liang jumped down and stood there in bewilderment. "It's you, father! I didn't know. . . ."

Old Liang stopped the horse beside the truck. Planting his whip in the shaft socket, he glared at his son.

"I didn't know it was you," mumbled Young Liang.

"Your behaviour would be all right if it were somebody else, eh?" said the old man sarcastically.

Skirting round the horse, Young Liang approached his father, "I didn't mean that. . . ."

Cocking his head to one side, the old man looked at his son. Somehow the sight didn't please him. Those sun-glasses. That's it. He snatched them off and dashed them to the ground. "Those glasses have blinded you."

Young Liang's eyes smarted in the sun. He shaded them with his hands. "Father . . . I. . . ." He stammered embarrassedly.

"You! What a bright one you are!"

Young Liang choked.

"Give me your licence," demanded Old Liang, his hand extended.

"You can't, father, you can't take it away. . . ." Young Liang's face turned pale with fright.

"Give it to me! Do you hear?" Old Liang persisted.

"I won't." Young Liang refused to submit.

"How dare you!" Old Liang sputtered. Young Liang retreated a step, his hand on his pocket as his father advanced to tear the licence from him. But the burning eyes of his father frightened him. With great reluctance he pulled out the licence wrapped in red silk.

Old Liang snatched it away, unwrapped the silk and took out his pen. From a leather pouch attached to his belt he extracted a seal. He was not going to take away the licence, Young Liang surmised. He would only record a violation of the rules. Young Liang's heart eased a bit. He quickly wiped the shaft with his sleeve, and blew the dust off to make a clean spot where his father could place the licence.

Old Liang turned to the violations page. Pen in hand he stared at it. What was he going to write? Which rule had Young Liang violated? He had not injured anybody, nor had he damaged the truck. The problem was very complicated. Young Liang had not lived up to his expectations as a driver. He had forgotten himself and considered himself high and mighty. But how could the old man put all this down? Besides, he had to consult his superiors before he recorded a violation. He shook his pen, raised it and scrutinized the nib. He discovered that he was surrounded by spectators. What did they think he was — a performing monkey?

Old Liang put away the pen, seal and the licence in his pocket.

"Quit hanging around," he said to the children around him. He took up the whip and adjusted the bridle.

Young Liang was at a loss. A child picked up the smashed glasses for him but he dared not accept them.

"Still here?" Old Liang shouted at his son, whip in hand.

Puzzled, Young Liang stood rooted to the ground.

With the help of one hand the old man jumped on the cart. He was about to start his horse when he turned to lecture his son.

"You think everything's all right once you've got your licence?" He slapped his pocket. "Far from it. A driver is taking a road test all his life. You're still a long way from the mark. . . ."

"Get up, there," he yelled at the animal, and drove off.

III

The Changpai Mountains, covered with the unmelted snow, was still chilly in March. White and hard it defied the arrival of spring. Every day workers cleared away the snow and ice on the dangerous parts of the highway on Red Leaf Mountain. On fine days, the snow melted a little on the sunny side making the highway as slippery as a piece of oil-smearred glass. The water froze again at night. The frost sprinkled on it in the morning made the snow chains on the truck useless.

But this had not stopped the traffic in the mountain area. Since spring was approaching the vehicles were busier than ever transporting best-quality seeds and all sorts of farm implements. There were more passengers too! Peasants like to go to the fair in town and visit relatives and friends before spring ploughing started.

After that episode Old Liang no longer heard anything against his son. He was more at ease. Was the son turning out to be the kind of driver he expected, a real driver? Old Liang asked himself. There was hope still if nothing more happened, if there were no more slips. . . .

One day, as Old Liang was returning to the office from inspecting a vehicle team on a work site, he received a telephone call saying that No. 4 truck had been in an accident on the Red Leaf Mountain. A casualty had been taken to the commune clinic at the foot of the slope. A team leader of the transport section had rushed to the scene of the accident. The person telephoning knew no more details.

Old Liang hurried to the section, picked up a truck, and drove to the commune. He was very agitated. No. 4 truck was the one shared by his son and another driver. The accident had occurred during his son's shift. Young Liang must have caused it. Who was injured? His son? A peasant? The truck might have tumbled down the ravine. The accident had happened at a dangerous slope beside a ravine, a place the drivers held in apprehension. It must be serious. It would be bad if his son was injured. It would be even worse if it were a peasant who had been hurt. An action might even be brought against his son in court. What a disgrace that would be to a veteran driver, a team leader, an old

supervisor like himself. That boy was born rash. Just give him a hand and he would climb up to heaven. He should have seen this and let him work in some other trade. It was too late now. The accident had happened. He had been deluded by his son's apparent good behaviour in recent days. Had he been too indulgent towards the boy? Was he wrong to have wanted his son to be a real driver and make a man out of him?

Old Liang began to climb the slope of the Red Leaf Mountain a little after nine. Before him stood a towering peak down which the highway cascaded like an icy river. A sheer cliff rose on one side and a deep valley flanked the other. A horse-cart road extended from the sharply pointed Kushan Mountain some distance from the slope and ran across the highway. There, where the two roads met, lay Young Liang's lifeless truck. Old Liang alighted to inspect it. The radiator was smashed, the front fender was crumpled, the green paint peeled. The rear wheels had slipped to the edge of the highway. If it were not for the big stones which stopped the front wheel the truck would have slid down and been smashed in the valley. The sight made Old Liang suck in his breath.

He had never imagined his son could damage the truck like that. It had been badly bruised and mangled. Even after being patched up, it still would be pitted and scarred like a small-pox victim. Wherever Young Liang would go, the repaired fender would bring contempt from other drivers. They would say, "He's had an accident." This is a serious blot on a driver's honour. Son, you're a failure.

What was this? Blood! Stooping down, Old Liang picked up a piece of broken glass with blood on it. Apparently the casualty was the driver. It was his son. Throwing down the glass, he hurried to the commune.

The commune clinic was situated in a compound of straw-thatched buildings. As he stepped into the door he found himself facing a girl in a white smock. He thought she was a doctor. In a rather intimate tone, she told him the injured person was Young Liang.

Old Liang's face changed colour. At a loss he stood glued to the ground.

"It's not serious," the girl added quickly. "Just some cuts on his arms and legs. Don't worry."

After making some inquiries Old Liang felt better. He decided not to see his son, but to check into the accident first. On learning that the team leader was having a talk with the peasants who had seen the accident, he turned to leave.

"Uncle, are you . . . ?" the girl inquired.

"His father. . . ." He threw back an answer outside the door.

"Aren't you going to see him first?" the girl prompted.

The old man was silent. He showed no sign of staying.

"You had better see him," urged the girl, staring hard at the heartless old man.

The girl had a full round face. Her big eyes, in which dissatisfaction was evident, looked at him appealingly. She was quite irresistible. Moved, Old Liang turned back.

The building was divided into small white compartments and a corridor. As she ushered Old Liang to his son she turned her head and blurted: "He's got plenty of grit." Smiling, her face flushed, she looked quickly away.

"What does she mean? This doctor. . . ." wondered Old Liang. He began to see the girl in another light. Then he smiled knowingly. He had been told that his son had a girl friend in a certain commune who was always waiting with a bucket every time his son stopped at her door for water. As he poured it into his radiator, she never failed to ask solicitously whether he had eaten. His headlights always found the girl with the bucket of water even in the dead of night or when he was behind schedule.

Old Liang looked at her again. Yes, he was quite sure now.

She opened a door. Love for his son welled up as he saw the bandage on the boy's arm.

The young people exchanged a glance. The girl screwed up her nose and withdrew. Old Liang sat down on a chair.

Sitting up, Young Liang hailed his father. With some effort he drew out a little package from under the pillow. He unwrapped the red silk and produced his licence, "You can take this, father. I've damaged the truck and had an accident. . . ."

"Anybody injured besides you?"

"I'm probably the only one. . . ."

Drawing aside the quilt the old man looked at his son's legs. "Badly hurt?"

Shaking his head the son thrust the licence into the old man's hand.

"Tell me the details. It might not be your fault," said the old man still cherishing a gleam of hope. "There might be some reason for the accident."

"It was all my fault," murmured the son.

"Was there some mechanical failure?"

"No. I was responsible. Reprimand me, the truck. . . ."

"All smashed. What a shame!" grumbled the old man. His hope vanished. It looked bad. This would be fatal to his son's career as a driver. And the state's property had suffered a great loss. He should confiscate his licence. Silent for a time, he looked at the licence in his hand and put it into his pocket. He must find the team leader. He stood up.

"Switch to another trade!" the old man murmured.

"What?"

"You can't be a driver," he shouted, there was a note of anger in his voice. He strode away.

"But, father, I can't do that, I'll start all over again. I'll apply again for a licence in a few years. . . ." Eagerly the son waved his arm.

"You. . . ." Turning at the door, the old man said in a quivering voice, "You are a stubborn one."

"What's the commotion? Oh, it's Old Liang." The team leader entered in a sheep-skin coat. At the entrance of the brawny team leader with the booming voice the room instantly became too small. Approaching Young Liang he shouted, "Good boy. Real guts," while slapping him on the shoulder. Young Liang was so hurt that he gritted his teeth against the pain.

Old Liang looked at the team leader in bewilderment.

"What's wrong, supervisor, didn't you know?" queried the team leader.

"What didn't I know? And why are you so hilarious?" retorted Old Liang irritably.

"Come, sit down, let me report," the team leader dragged Old Liang to a chair and told him what he had discovered.

Loaded with four tons of lumber, Young Liang had been driving his truck down the Red Leaf Mountain. In the morning the road, sprinkled with frost, was very slippery. Though he had stepped on the brakes lightly, the truck glided down the slope at high speed. He had sounded the horn when he approached the sharply pointed Kushan Mountain. Several sledges of the people's commune, carrying dozens of young people, were flying along the cart road. They had not heard the horn and entered on the highway just as Young Liang's truck reached the spot. A collision was inevitable. At this crucial moment Young Liang turned the steering wheel and ran the truck straight against the cliff. Before the people on the sledges knew what was happening they had crossed the highway safely.

Young Liang was giddy from the shock and the glass cut him. The truck was thrown back, its rear wheels were slipping down the valley. Young Liang stepped on the brake with all his might. It was no use. The wheels kept slipping. "Jump, quick," shouted the people on the sledges. Young Liang jumped down the truck, quickly thrust his padded coat under a front wheel, then collapsed. The people from the sledges helped to pull him out from under the truck. Some of them put a few big stones under the wheels to prevent the truck from sliding any further.

The unconscious Young Liang was taken to the commune. All the way he shouted, "The truck, save the truck. It's finished. It will tumble down the slope. . . ." Though he was told that the truck was saved, he kept on shouting.

As the team leader finished he patted Young Liang's head saying, "The life of a dozen people, you understand? A dozen people."

The story sounded to him like one about himself. It also seemed to concern somebody else. After a while he asked, "Then the truck. . . ?"

"Luckily, the truck has been saved."

"My boy," said the old man gazing at his son with love and admiration. He seemed to be saying, "How you frightened me just now."

Young Liang smiled awkwardly. His eyes were saying: My dear father, I didn't mean to. I only gave you my licence to save you the trouble of asking for it. . . .

"Have you questioned all the people who were present?" Old Liang asked suspiciously. The team leader laughed with his head raised.

Slowly, Old Liang took out the licence, wrapped it again in the red silk and gave it back to his son.

"What? You have taken away his licence? What a man you are, supervisor."

Ignoring him, Old Liang put the licence into his son's hand. As happy as could be, Young Liang held the licence like a long lost friend. You'll never leave me again, he said to himself.

"But remember," Old Liang said to his son, "the road test. . . ."

"Road test! What do you mean? . . ." exclaimed the astonished team leader.

"It's still not finished," said Old Liang.

His son understood him. "A driver takes it all his life," he said looking at his father.

"What secret language are you using?" shouted the bewildered team leader.

*Translated by Yu Fan-chin
Drawing by Tung Chen-sheng*

Writings of the Last Generation

JOU SHIH

Threshold of Spring

The first eight sections of this novel were published in the last issue. Invited by his old friend Tao Mu-kan, young intellectual Hsiao Chien-chiu comes to teach in the middle school in Fujung, a town south of the Yangtse River. The time is the twenties when China was ruled by warlords and the country was in a revolutionary ferment. Hsiao has wandered over most of China and now is quite willing to stay a few years in the little town. But as soon as he arrives he falls in love with Lan, Tao's sister. An emotional idealistic girl, she refuses the marriage proposal of a vulgar, wealthy young man and, throwing caution to the wind, reveals her love for Hsiao. Purely out of sympathy, Hsiao is financially helping an impoverished young widow and providing for her daughter's education. This has given rise to nasty rumours among the local gossips.

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As they entered the widow's house, she was lying on the bed with the baby in her arms.

"Don't come in, don't come in," she cried. "Let me make the leap alone."

"She's raving," Hsiao said to Lan worriedly. "Did you hear her?"

Lan nodded. She placed her hand on his arm. The woman shouted:

"Look behind you. There's a tiger. Oh, a tiger."

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She was virtually weeping. Hsiao walked over to the bed. "Snap out of it," he urged. "It's me—Hsiao."

The baby was suckling at her breast, which rose and fell with her heavy breathing. Hsiao turned his eyes away and stared dejectedly at the foot of the bed. Little Tsai-lien came to her mother's side. "Mama," she cried, half weeping. The widow slowly turned towards her, a look of comprehension gradually appearing on her face. Seeing Hsiao, she pulled up the quilt to cover the baby and her bosom.

"You're here?" she said.

"And Miss Tao Lan is with me."

Lan nodded to the widow and asked: "Are you feeling better?"

"I'm all right," the woman retorted weakly. "Just thirsty."

"Would you like some tea?"

The woman didn't answer but her eyes filled with tears. Lan searched the room at random for a tea-pot until Tsai-lien produced one for her. There wasn't a drop of water in it. Lan went out with the little girl to brew some tea.

"Thank you and Miss Tao for coming," the widow said with a sigh. "I'm not really sick. I just became very warm and dizzy. Tsai-lien got alarmed over nothing. Did she call you?"

"We wanted to see you anyway."

The woman's tears fell on the baby's hair. She brushed them away with her hand. She didn't speak. The baby continued suckling.

"You shouldn't nurse the child when you're feverish," said Hsiao.

"I haven't anything else to feed him. Besides, I'm all right."

Hsiao stood brooding.

By dusk, the woman was able to get out of bed. Hsiao and Lan returned to the school.

That evening Lan sent Hsiao another letter. From the number on the letter it appeared that this was her fifteenth. Hsiao sat down beside the lamp and spread the missive on the desk.

My Dear Big Brother: In my twenty-odd years I've been simply like a fish in a dark pool. Except for my own, I knew nothing of human misery in this world. Now, thanks to your tutelage, I am learning the true meaning of life.

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For some reason I have come to love little Tsai-lien's family as much as you do. What a warm, agreeable, courteous woman that widow is. Although my temperament is somewhat different from hers, I would like her to be my sister, and use her experience to temper my crude and ignorant emotions. Oh Heaven, why have you taken away her husband? Can the Creator of all things truly want people to suffer so? Even if she is able to stand the suffering, I still want to curse Heaven.

Big brother, great man, I want her to be my sister. From now on, we must help one another more.

As to the rumour, my brother spoke to me about it tonight at dinner. He had some wine as usual, then said unhappily: "There's a chill wind blowing outside." My brother has nothing but contempt for the rumour-mongers, and I hope you won't take it amiss. After another drink of wine, he said:

"They judge a gentleman's virtue by their own pip-squeak standards."

But he claims the person who wrote that poem is not anyone in the school. I argued with him, and insisted that it must be a certain Mr. Moneybags, who is always changing his clothes. My brother was ready to take a vow that it is not. We were both so positive my mother had to laugh.

Mr. Hsiao, I'm sure a man of your intelligence won't be upset by the pip-squeaks. Please don't think of leaving us. Your sincerity and honesty is sure to prevail in Fujung some day. May you continue to enjoy our school's dull food for a long time to come.

Your younger sister Lan

Hsiao's mind was blank. It was as if all of his thoughts had been driven out by her emotions. Finally, he took a sheet of paper from the drawer and wrote:

I seem to be spinning in a whirlpool. I've never had that sensation before. It's making me dizzy. Can I be dreaming?

You remember what Tsai-lien's mother said when she was raving. Can a tiger really be creeping up behind me? Is there no alternative to having it kill me? For it seems to me that no matter what happens I can't let that poor widow "make the leap alone."

I've figured everything out. I thought all during dinner. I'm brave, I'm going to fight. I have a pistol ready. When the real tiger comes I'm going to aim at his head and shoot. Lan, don't think me savage. You have to kill a wolf differently than you kill a dog. Do you know why that woman fell ill? What she said in her delirium will give you the answer.

I'm not upset. I wish you happiness.

Your bold elder brother Hsiao

Finishing the letter, he went to bed. He considered himself very staunch.

The next morning Tsai-lien came to class. Carrying her school bag, she ran up to Hsiao and told him:

"Uncle Hsiao, mama says she's all better. She said to thank you and Sister Lan."

Several teachers were seated in the room, Fang Mou among them. Listening with bated breath, careless smiles on their faces, they watched Hsiao and the little girl avidly. With apparent deliberateness, Hsiao asked:

"Is your mama out of bed yet?"

"Yes, she's up."

"Has she eaten any gruel?"

"Yes, she has."

"Did she finish the medicine Sister Lan gave her last night?"

The child didn't seem to understand.

"I don't know," she replied. Hsiao kissed her cheek, and she ran out gaily.

The following evening, Hsiao was pacing his floor uneasily. Although it wasn't particularly warm, the room felt very oppressive. A sheet of stationery lay on his desk, as if he were preparing to write a letter. But he just kept walking back and forth. He was about to open the door and let some fresh air in to cool his fevered brain when Chien entered, as if at Hsiao's invitation. Loudly dressed, smiling and obsequious, Chien asked softly:

"Were you going out, Mr. Hsiao?"

"No."

"Are you busy?"

"No."

Chien glanced at the desk.

"Writing a letter?"

"I'm trying to, but I can't think of what to say."

"Who is it to?"

As Chien said this, his eyes roamed the room, as though seeking Hsiao's correspondent. Hsiao retorted promptly:

"To Lan."

The pretty young man took a chair and sat with his eyes cast down, like a bashful girl. Hsiao asked him:

"Have you some news for me, Mr. Chien?"

Chien raised his head and smiled.

"News?"

"Yes. Rural gossip."

"How could there be any gossip? Mr. Hsiao is respected by everyone in town. Although you've been here less than two months, your fame is known even to the little boys who tend the water buffaloes."

Hsiao smiled politely. He wondered what his rival in love was up to. Could he actually mean well?

"I'm fortunate to be here," Hsiao said.

"If that's how you feel, I hope you will remain for good."

"For good? May I?"

"Become a native of our Fujung Town," said Chien. After a pause he asked: "Would you like to build a home here?"

Hsiao's heart beat joyfully. "What do you mean?" he countered.

"I've heard something to that effect. Please don't misunderstand." His manner was still quite soft. Hsiao laughed coldly.

"That's good news. Whom do people say I'm going to marry?"

"Of course you have someone in mind."

"No, there's no one."

Chien also laughed. "You're concealing a very charming woman, a rare and excellent woman."

Hsiao smiled coolly. "Really? I haven't made a choice yet."

Chien hesitated. "People say you're in love with Tsai-lien's mother. She's very attractive. In West Village everyone commends her wifely qualities."

"Nonsense. I love someone else." Hsiao was rather angry, but he covered his emotion with a smile.

"Could you tell me who it is?" Chien asked coyly.

"Lan, Tao's sister."

"You love her?"

"Yes," Hsiao replied forcefully. Chien fell silent. Hsiao asked with a laugh:

"Are you in love with her too?"

"Yes. I love her more than life," Chien retorted mournfully. Hsiao smiled. "Does she love you?"

"She used to," Chien replied slowly.

"And now?"

"I don't know."

"I can tell you, Mr. Chien. Now she loves me."

"You?"

"Yes. It's just as well. If she loved both of us at the same time we'd have to fight a duel. Would you like to do that, Mr. Chien?"

"Fight a duel? That's not necessary. Can't you give her up for the sake of our friendship?"

Hsiao brooded for several moments before replying: "She doesn't love you. I can't force her to, can I?"

"She used to love me, Mr. Hsiao, before you came." Chien was virtually weeping. "She loved me. We were almost engaged. But then you came and she fell in love with you. That first night you arrived, she loved you as soon as she set eyes on you. But I, the discarded lover, how am I supposed to feel? You can imagine, Mr. Hsiao, I feel worse than if I were dying. I love her desperately. I think about her every minute of the day. At night I see her in my dreams. Now she loves you. I've known it for some time. But I thought you loved Tsai-lien's mother. Now I know you love Lan too. There's no way out but to kill myself—"

"Why tell me all this?" Hsiao impatiently interrupted. "If you love Lan, propose to her. What's the use of talking to me?"

"I beg you," Chien pleaded. "Whether I shall be happy or miserable all my life depends on you. If you agree, I'll be grateful even after I'm dead, even if I become a pauper."

"Gather your courage, Mr. Chien, and tell that to Lan. How can I help you?"

"You can, Mr. Hsiao. Just stop corresponding with her. Mr. Tao wants her to quit teaching. If you don't write her, she'll love me again. I know from past experience. My life's happiness is in your hands. You're a man who wants to save the world. Save me first, Mr. Hsiao, save me from suicide."

"This time it's different, Mr. Chien. She wouldn't love you again."

"It's not different, Mr. Hsiao. I beg you not to write her any more letters."

He fell silent. Hsiao looked at him angrily. He hadn't believed that Chien was so crafty, so weak. Hsiao seethed inwardly. Chien's pleas were like water pouring through a breach in a dyke. After an interval, he heard Chien say:

"And, Mr. Hsiao, I'll help you to the utmost to build a home with Tsai-lien's mother."

Hsiao jumped to his feet. "Say no more, Mr. Chien. I'll do whatever has to be done. Now, please leave."

He opened the door and rushed out himself, his anger bottled inside him. Hsiao ran all the way to the school garden and leaned against an evergreen. It was a chilly night. He seemed to want to melt himself into that cold air. With an effort, he controlled his racing mind and soothed the pointless anger the young dandy had aroused. He laughed scornfully.

After Hsiao stood there for nearly half an hour, he felt dull, chilled. Slowly he turned and went back to his room. Chien, that useless child, was already gone. Frowning, Hsiao pondered a while, then dropped wearily into bed.

"Release me, love," he sighed, "Let me go."

Sunlight, like golden flowers, showered the world. Harbingers of spring danced everywhere—in the clouds, on the trees, in

the flowing streams, in human hearts. Tsai-lien's baby brother had been sick for several days but now he was getting better. The widow, sitting on the edge of the bed, thought in silence. She wore a forced smile. Her worries had eased somewhat. Hsiao sat on a small chair. The little girl dashed playfully about the room. The atmosphere was less dreary than usual.

Suddenly someone entered and stood panting in the doorway. It was Lan. The little girl called her name and rushed up to her. Lan asked slowly:

"How is the little boy?"

"Somewhat better, thank Heaven," the widow replied.

Lan leaned over the bed and gazed at the baby's face.

Hsiao rose and rubbed his hands together. "Now that you're here I can go back."

"Wait a few minutes. We'll go back together."

"You needn't come again today," the young widow said to Hsiao. "If anything happens, I'll send Tsai-lien for you."

Lan looked around, as if investigating, and said: "Let's go, then."

The little girl followed them to the door, hating to see them leave. They shook their heads, indicating that she should go back and walked away.

"Where do you want to go now?" Lan asked Hsiao.

"To the school, where else?"

"Wait a while. Let's take a walk by the stream. I want to talk to you."

Hsiao agreed.

He looked at her. She dropped her gaze and asked: "Has Chien requested anything of you?"

"What? No."

"Please don't deceive me. It's not in you to lie. Why be different where I'm concerned?"

"What's wrong, sister?" Hsiao asked innocently.

"I'm miserable when you treat me like this," she retorted listlessly. "Chien has become my most hated enemy. He's ruining my reputation and yours as well. He's the source of all the rumours about us. I have proof. He has nothing better to do than invent other people's 'secrets.' Disgusting creature."

"Let him. What has it to do with us?"

"You've probably forgotten. Last night he sent me a letter. I nearly died when I read it. Was there ever such a shameless man?" She paused, then resumed coldly: "My whole family has turned him down. Why did you tell him to gather his courage and propose to me? Out of friendship for him, or what?"

Her tone was reproachful. Hsiao grew serious. With burning eyes, he demanded: "What are you saying, Lan?"

She took out a letter and silently handed it to him. They had reached the cool shade of the stream bank. New leaves were budding on the trees, which cast their shadows on the pale green grass. Spring was quietly draping the countryside. They sat down. Hsiao opened a sheet of tinted stationery and read:

Dear Lan: You must listen to my plea. I have talked things over with the man you love and he has consented to give you up to me. Of course he has another sweetheart. He loves you no longer. Lan, dear, you are mine.

I have decided if you refuse me to become a monk, or kill myself. I don't want to live without you. I have already told you in my previous letter how miserable I've been this past month. Please be kind.

This winter I'm planning to visit America. I hope you'll go with me. When that man and the widow marry I shall present them with five thousand dollars.

The letter closed with "Yours respectfully," and was signed "Chien."

Hsiao laughed and said to Lan — she was staring angrily at the grass: "Does his request bewilder you?"

She made no reply.

"Didn't you tell me that whenever you receive a stupid letter you just laugh and throw it in the waste-paper basket? Can't you do that now?"

Tears in her eyes, Lan retorted: "He's insulted me. How could you discuss me with him?"

Hsiao felt very badly. Hadn't Chien insulted him too? He hadn't wanted to talk to Chien. And Lan now blamed him, as if he were a murderer who wished to kill her. Hsiao couldn't help being hurt. Moving closer to her, he said:

"Put yourself in my position, Lan. You would have spoken to him the same way. I know your character, emotions and aspirations. Don't you believe me?"

"I believe you, from the bottom of my heart. But you shouldn't have talked with him. It was only because we didn't pay any attention to his rumours that he tried a soft approach on you. Why did you fall for it?"

"I didn't. If I thought you loved him in the least, or that he had any attraction for you, or that you weren't a girl of strong will, I would never have told him to propose to you." He paused. "Lan, let's not talk about him."

Resting both hands on the ground, Hsiao hung his head. His heart felt ready to burst.

Lan said slowly: "But why didn't you. . . ?" Her voice trailed off.

"Why didn't I what?" He forced a smile.

She tried to smile also. "Figure it out yourself."

They both were silent for a long time. His voice trembling, Hsiao said: "I've always thought there's no better relation between a man and a woman than a platonic one. You don't believe it possible? You don't believe that people can genuinely love each other? Ah, I don't know what kind of person I'm going to be, or what the future holds in store. Circumstances may change me. A huge whirlpool may suck me in. That's why I've wanted you to be my sister, to keep me from being too lonely, to help me correct my mistakes. Doesn't that seem best?"

"Yes," she said. But her "yes" sounded as if she meant "no."

"Love, I don't want," he continued dismally, "and I haven't even thought of marriage. That's why I didn't reply immediately to your letters, Lan." After a pause, he went on: "Life, life, what is it? Even when I'm with friends merry-making together, I feel sad and lonely. A man like that shouldn't have a family."

Lan said softly: "You can deny yourself a family, but you can't deny love. What else is there in life?"

"I don't deny love. Don't I love a little girl like a sister, and a big girl — like a sister? I don't want to enjoy a more colourful type of love."

Leaning close to him, she said shyly: "But people are only human, Hsiao. They all have the same desires."

He dropped his eyes. They both laughed.

Basking in the gentle sunlight, they were deep in their own thoughts.

"I hope you'll always remember me," Lan said.

"I hope you'll do the same."

12

As the sun moved, Time, attached to its heels, moved with it. Two days elapsed.

Hsiao was passing a ball around with a group of students on the playground. Their laughter shimmered like the sunlight of this third lunar month in spring. As noon approached and the students were started leaving, Lan appeared at the playground entrance. A mischievous student called:

"Mr. Hsiao, Miss Tao is looking for you."

Hsiao gave the ball he was holding to a student and, panting and perspiring, trotted over to Lan. Neither of them spoke. As if Lan were leading him, they went to his room.

"Have you had your lunch?" he asked.

"No. I've just come back from Tsai-lien's house," she replied dispiritedly. He was washing his face.

"How's the little boy?"

"The little boy is dead."

"Dead?" he cried, dropping his wash-cloth in the basin.

"Two hours ago when I went to their house, he was breathing his last. His throat was blocked, he couldn't see. His mother and Tsai-lien were weeping, and it was the sound of their weeping which sent off the soul of that adorable child. I clutched his hands, trying desperately to think of something. But before I could think of anything, I felt his hands grow cold, I saw their colour fade. Heaven, I gripped his hands tightly, as if I thus could keep him from going. But it was no use. The Creator must be blind, or he would have been touched by the sight of that broken-hearted mother. Lying on the bed, she held the dead baby in her arms, and wept like a woman bereft until she fainted. Finally two neighbours came in. They raised her up, tried to soothe her, but to no avail. Her baby would never

awaken. May his little soul rest in peace. He's left the love of his mother and sister. May he know eternal peace. All his mother's weeping can't bring him back. What does he know of her tragic suffering?"

Lan paused, her eyes full of glistening tears. Hsiao asked: "How is she now?"

Dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief, Lan came a step closer. She hesitated, then slowly proceeded:

"She wept for a full half hour. We put her, half-fainting, on the bed. I gave some money to the neighbours and told them to buy a small coffin and arrange for the burial. 'Don't bury him,' the mother cried. She had wept so much, her voice was weak. 'Leave him here by my side. He couldn't stay in his home alive, let him remain here dead.'

"All my efforts to calm her were in vain. Finally, I just went ahead. I dressed the child in fresh clothes. They weren't exactly new, but they had a bit of colour and they weren't torn. Children love new clothes. Never having had any, naturally he wanted to leave. Then I put a little hat on his head. He looked very neat. The coffin and the funeral people came. 'Leave him here a few more days,' the mother cried from the bed. 'Just a few more days.' We didn't listen to her. Two men carried the baby away in the coffin.

"Darling Tsai-lien, tears in her eyes, asked me: 'Where are they taking my little brother?' I answered: 'To Paradise.' She said: 'I want to go too.'"

Lan fell silent. Then she said:

"It was tragic. That poor widow. She had been barely eating for days, and now, to top it all, she's lost her precious baby. She's terribly thin. Though she still has the little girl, Tsai-lien can't really comfort her."

"I'd better go over," Hsiao said gravely, "and bring the little girl here to the school."

"It's no use. She won't want to leave her mother now."

"There's just the two of them at home?"

"After the neighbours left I sat for a while, but the room seemed so empty I couldn't bear it." Lan lowered her head. "Such misery and pain for that poor woman. How is she going to live?"

"Remarry," Hsiao replied dully. "That's the only way." His mind confused, he paced a circle within the room. In a heavy voice he continued: "Find some reason that will convince her to remarry. You talk to her, Lan. I don't want to go to their house any more. I have no way to help her. My method has lost its power. I don't want to go to their house any more. Please bring the little girl to the school."

"I've been thinking of asking them to our house for a few days," Lan said softly. "Everything in her present surroundings reminds her of her dead baby. Later, we can think of some way to help her. I can't talk to her about remarrying now, and she wouldn't consider it — her baby has just died."

Neither of them said any more. Both were deep in thought. Tsai-lien, that unfortunate child, slowly pushed open Hsiao's door and appeared before them. Tears in her eyes, she was carrying her school bag.

"You've come to class?" Hsiao asked, astonished.

"Mama says I must." The child commenced sobbing. "She says I must study. She says it's better for me to be with Uncle Hsiao."

"Is your mama still crying?"

"No. She says she's going to see little brother, and bring him back."

Hsiao's heart throbbed with apprehension. "Does she mean to kill herself?" he asked Lan.

"She must be thinking of it," Lan retorted tearfully. "I would too, if I were her."

"Let's take Tsai-lien home. I'll just have to screw up my courage. I must see that woman whose life has been chewed by wolves, I must find out what is in her mind. If you can convince her to move to your house for a few days, that would be excellent. Let's go back with the child."

"I'm not going." Lan shook her head. "Not now. You go ahead. I'll join you there in an hour."

"Why?"

"There's no need for us to go together."

Hsiao understood. Taking Tsai-lien by the hand, he hurried out. Lan emerged from the building and watched them disappear down the road to West Village.

The woman was arranging old clothes. The torn little garments which the baby had worn she cast to one side. Tsai-lien's clothes she folded and placed on the table. It was as if she wanted to throw all of the baby's things — even his footprints — into the river, and neatly rewrap Tsai-lien's life again. Thus, pain could be obliterated and happiness could spread its multi-coloured wings before her. She didn't weep; she had no tears left to shed. Unemotionally, she arranged the clothes, occasionally sinking into a reverie, dreaming of what the future held in store:

— The boy is dead. Only the girl is left.

— What use is a girl? She is no help.

— I have no property, no savings.

— I need a man's help. But that is impossible.

— A man like him. Impossible.

— I've ruined his reputation. It's always like that.

— In order to be true to my husband, I must watch him suffer.

— He can be happy. He can marry.

— But me . . . I'm finished.

Tsai-lien quietly entered and stood by her mother. The widow was unaware of her arrival. "Mama," called the little girl. There were tears in her eyes.

"Didn't you go? I told you to go to school." The young widow frowned. She was too weak for anger.

"Uncle Hsiao brought me home."

The woman looked. Hsiao was standing in the doorway. She dropped her gaze and didn't speak.

Standing where he was, he spoke one sentence. It seemed to be something he had first pondered over for a long time:

"What's past is past."

The woman didn't seem to understand. She did not answer.

Hsiao stared urgently at her. In her face he could see only weariness and pain, nothing else.

"Don't think any more about the past. You must consider what you will do in the future."

The young widow raised her head and replied slowly: "That's exactly what I am doing, sir."

"You ought to —" He came closer.

She spoke so softly that she was hardly audible:

"It's only right."

Very weakly, very gently, he asked: "Then what do you intend to do?"

Her voice was still soft. "I'm finished."

Hsiao drew closer still. Placing his hands on the little girl's shoulders, he said: "To be blunt, I'm afraid you've got a bad idea."

She couldn't stop her tears. In a louder voice she cried: "I will always be grateful for your kindness, sir. Every minute I live, I'll remember you. But how can I thank you in this lifetime? I can only wait until I re-enter the world as an ox or a horse, and serve you devotedly."

"Please don't talk like that."

"I mean it from the bottom of my heart. Before I had hoped that when my boy grew up we could repay you. But now he's dead and my plan is ruined." The young woman wept, wiping her eyes.

"You still have Tsai-lien."

"Tsai-lien. . . ." She glanced at the little girl. "Will you take her as your servant?"

Hsiao grew rather angry. "You women really have no brains. An infant less than three years old dies — what of it? Your husband was twenty-seven or twenty-eight when one shot from a cannon carried him off."

"But, sir, how am I going to live?"

He paced the room. Unable to restrain himself, he said: "Remarry. I urge you to marry again."

The young woman stood up quickly. It was as if she had never heard of such a thing. Hesitantly, in a low voice, she asked: "Remarry?"

Hsiao sat down. Then he rose again. "I think that would be best," he stammered. "What's the point in suffering alone for the rest of your years? Choose someone you like —" He didn't go on, for he had the feeling he was saying the wrong thing. This pure woman might think he was proposing.

Indeed, her heart beat violently and her breath came fast. She stared at him fixedly and exclaimed in a broken voice:

"You . . . you are my saviour. You're as beneficent as Heaven. I'll never be able to repay you. Without you, we three would have been dead long ago. My poor doomed little baby wouldn't even have lasted until today."

Trying to lead her off this theme, he said: "People must learn to endure their pain and continue living."

"Or die and get it over with," she countered solemnly.

Hsiao shook his head. "That's no way to think. Don't you care about Tsai-lien?"

The little girl was standing between them, watching them in turn as each of them spoke. Now the mother hugged her to her breast and said:

"You are too good to us, sir. Let us serve you all your life."

"What?" Hsiao was startled.

"Let my little girl and me become your servants."

"What do you mean?"

"Will you accept us as your servants, benefactor?"

Shedding tears, she seemed about to kneel before him. Hsiao was extremely moved. Evidently the life or death of this unfortunate woman was in his hands. Controlling himself with an effort, he forced a smile.

"We can talk about that later. I'll do my best to help you and Tsai-lien. That's something I can do." Meanwhile, he was thinking: If I wanted a wife, why shouldn't I marry her?

He looked at the young widow. He didn't know what she was thinking. Her face grew even paler, her eyes glazed, and she fainted to the ground.

Tsai-lien rushed to her side, crying: "Mama, mama."

Her mother didn't respond, and the child wept. Very agitated, Hsiao felt the young woman's forehead. It was icy cold and beaded with perspiration. He picked her up and laid her on the bed. She mumbled something.

"How are you? How do you feel?" he asked agitatedly.

"I'm all right. It's nothing," she responded weakly, panting slightly. She rubbed her eyes as if she had been sleeping. The little girl, weeping by the bedside, cried:

"Mama, mama."

Hsiao also stood there. He was in a dilemma. Hanging his head, he couldn't think of what to do. In a voice trembling like a plucked string the young woman said:

"Tsai-lien, if anything happens to your mama, you stay with Uncle Hsiao. He's very good to you, the same as a real uncle."

"Why must you talk like that?" Hsiao asked unhappily.

"I've been feeling very low these past few days."

"You've had a terrible blow, you're over-tired."

"When the baby got sick, I couldn't eat a mouthful of food. Since he's died, I can't even swallow a sip of water."

"That's very wrong. You look at things much too narrowly."

The young woman didn't reply. She fell into a doze. After a while she opened her eyes and gazed at him. With a forced smile he again felt her forehead. It was a bit warmer, and she had stopped perspiring. He took her pulse. It was extremely weak.

"You'd better have something to eat," he advised.

"I don't want to eat."

"That's wrong. Do you want to starve to death?"

She also forced a smile. The young man continued:

"If you think that I mean well by you, you must believe me. Everyone has to die, and mothers often lose children. But if every mother who lost a child starved herself for weeks, we'd soon have no mothers left. All our lives we struggle against fate. We must conquer it, and fight to the very last moment of our existence. If you listen to me, you'll be all right."

As if only half understanding, the young widow smiled wryly and said in a soft voice: "Please go home, sir. I know you're very busy. I see things clearly now. I'll do as you say."

Hsiao took her thin hands in his. The room was very quiet. The door opened and a young woman came in. Hsiao put down the widow's hands and turned his head. The little girl also rose from her mother's bosom.

14

Lan walked up to Hsiao and asked: "Haven't you gone yet?"

"She fainted," he said. "I had to stay a while."

Turning to the widow, Lan took the hands Hsiao had just relinquished. "How are you feeling now?"

"Better," the widow replied with an effort. "I've been urging Mr. Hsiao to go back to the school. I'm afraid he hasn't had any lunch."

"It doesn't matter," said Hsiao. "But I'd like some tea. When she fainted, I couldn't even find a cup of hot water."

"Let me make some," said Lan. "Tsai-lien probably hasn't had any lunch either. It's already three o'clock."

"The poor child has been standing by, hungry, all this time."

Lan went into the kitchen, filled a kettle with water and lit some kindling. She crammed the stove with wood, as if she couldn't wait for the water to boil. The wood was green and filled the room with smoke, bringing tears to her eyes. From the bed, the widow instructed Tsai-lien:

"You tend the fire. How can you let Miss Tao do it?"

The child ran over to the stove. The water was already bubbling. Tsai-lien found some tea leaves, which were mostly stems, and steeped them in two cups. She set these before the guests.

The atmosphere of the room changed. It was as if the fate of every one of them had to be decided within the next hour. The little girl stayed close to Lan, her eyes fixed on her mother's face, as if this woman was no longer her mother, as if her mother had died at the same time as her little brother. And the unfortunate young widow, whom God had evidently ordered to drain the dregs of human bitterness, now quite naturally, though with a wry smile, gazed with her deep quiet eyes at Lan, seated on the edge of the bed. Then she looked at Hsiao, who was standing by the window, head down, staring at the floor. It was as if she wanted to open up their bodies and lives and fuse them together into one. Their very garments seemed tinged with the glow of good fortune. Tsai-lien could have a place with them, she could grow up with the hope of a decent future. And so, the widow smiled.

For nearly a quarter of an hour, a grave and tragic air pervaded. Finally, Lan spoke:

"I want to invite you to live at my house for a few days. Everything you see here hurts you. What's the good of ruining your health? It's hard on the little girl too. She weeps with

you and starves herself with you. Her little body won't be able to stand it either. Stay with me a few days. Just lock this place up."

Lan's voice was low and gentle. The widow replied:

"Thank you. I really don't know how to repay you for your kindness. I don't think of the past any more, I think only of how to show my gratitude."

After a pause, she said to Tsai-lien: "You go back with uncle and aunt. I haven't been able to cook for you. As for myself, I don't feel like eating."

Tsai-lien looked up at Lan, and Lan gave her a smile and hugged her close. Then Lan asked the child's mother seriously:

"Are you trying to starve to death?"

"I won't die so quickly."

"Then come to my house for a few days."

The widow thought a moment. "I can't walk. My legs are stiff and sore."

"I'll get people to carry you," Lan replied, imperiously as any queen.

"No, don't, thank you. My baby has just died. It wouldn't look right for me to run off to somebody's house. Let's talk about it again a bit later. I'm very tired. I want to get a couple of days' good rest."

None of them spoke. After a while, the widow said:

"Please go back, both of you."

Hsiao looked through the window at the sky. There was nothing they could do. He and Lan departed with Tsai-lien. Neither of them said anything till they left West Village. Then Lan confessed:

"I don't feel easy about leaving that woman alone."

"What's the alternative?"

"Do you think she'll be all right by herself?"

"I don't know how to save her." His tone was morose.

Lan was upset. "I'll visit her again the first thing tomorrow morning."

Tsai-lien went home with Lan. Hsiao returned to his room in the school.

The more he thought about the young widow, the more he felt she was in danger. Hsiao was extremely uneasy, as if he were responsible for any trouble that might occur.

He didn't eat—he wasn't hungry. For a full hour he sat pondering. At dusk, Ah Jung came in and lit the oil lamp. In its light Hsiao quickly wrote these few lines:

Beloved Lan,

I don't know why, but all the aggravations of a lifetime seem concentrated in this moment. I feel like a murderer. I've killed a person, and so I too shall soon be killed.

In the next three days I must rescue that poor woman by some proper method that gets to the root of the problem. I have thought it over thoroughly. Lan. If in the end I can't conceive of any better way, I'm going to marry her. You must be happy to hear this, for I know you are just as concerned about her as I am.

The day after tomorrow, I'll go and tell her. Dear sister, I'm afraid that's the only way. It will be best for us, too. Please don't misunderstand.

What more can I say? May happiness and honour descend on the three of us.

My most affectionate wishes.

Hsiao

He hastily sealed the letter and asked Ah Jung to deliver it. Still seated in his room, he smiled bitterly.

In less than half an hour, a little student brought him a note in reply. Panting from having run so fast, the child exclaimed:

"Mr. Hsiao, Mr. Hsiao, Miss Tao asks you to go to her house right away. Tsai-lien is crying all the time; she wants to go home."

"Very well." Hsiao nodded. As soon as the student left, Hsiao opened the note. It read:

Mr. Hsiao,

Your decision has struck me like a thunderbolt and left me trembling. Is it absolutely necessary that you take this course? If it is, then go ahead.

Your pitiful Lan

Hsiao read the letter several times. He could sense the hidden reproach in it, but his eyes continued to stare at Lan's fine elegant handwriting, as though seeking to probe the deepest recesses of her heart.

Shortly before seven, he draped a coat over his shoulders and trudged to Lan's home.

Tsai-lien had already finished eating and gone to bed. The little girl was completely exhausted. Lan and Hsiao could only smile wryly when they met. It was nearly half an hour before Lan said:

"I know you, but must you do this?"

"I can't think of any better way."

"Do you love her?"

Hsiao said slowly: "Yes, I love her."

Soberly, but with a trace of mockery in her face, Lan demanded: "You must answer me: If I kill myself, what will you do?"

"Why do you say that?" He came a step closer.

"Please answer me." Her voice was cool.

"Can it be that God wants all three of us to die?" he cried agitatedly.

After a silence, Lan laughed coldly. "I know you don't believe in suicide. The fact is that I want to live — just for spite. I'll live alone till I'm eighty, and I'll still live on. Only when the Angel of Death comes and buries me, and mourns for me — an old, old woman — only then will I be finished." With tears in her eyes she exclaimed: "Of all the people around me, you are the only one who knows my heart. Now you're no longer my big brother, and I'm alone. But that's all right. I was meant to be alone. I'll be able to wander all over the globe. Why shouldn't a girl travel? Or I can shave off my hair and become a nun. Though I don't believe in idols, I can become a nun if necessary."

Hsiao hung his head. He was stunned.

"Must you talk like that?"

"I say what I please."

"Why must you think such thoughts?"

"Because I am conscious of my loneliness."

"No, there is a glorious and ideal future ahead of you. And you're mistaken about me, Lan. I have no beautiful wings on my shoulders."

Lan gazed at him dejectedly. "You're doing the right thing, brother. Now go home." But she took his hand as if unwilling to let him leave. After a while she released it. Turning her face away, she said: "Go. Love her, then."

Hsiao was speechless. He dazedly left Lan's house and stood outside her compound gate. The night was pitch dark. For a while he didn't know where to go, as if there were no roads anywhere. Raising his head he looked up at the Great Bear.

"Man is a hopelessly complicated creature," the Great Bear seemed to be saying angrily. "We will never clearly understand him."

15

When Hsiao returned to the school he found a group of teachers having an animated discussion in the reception room. Some were laughing loudly, as if they were men of unlimited freedom. To rid himself of his depression, he approached them. But although they continued their gay chatter, he couldn't utter a word. They were a bucket of water and he was a drop of oil — it was impossible for them to blend. Almost immediately, Tao entered. He seemed to be looking for Hsiao, but he addressed his words to everyone:

"It's very strange," he said in an extremely dissatisfied manner. "I'm completely in the dark. Mr. Hsiao, who advocates freedom from ties, I now hear is planning to get married. My sister Lan, who is a great proponent of love, tonight has suddenly begun talking of freedom from ties. Hsiao, what is this all about?"

The others immediately fell silent. All heads turned to Hsiao. With a smile, he replied:

"I don't know myself."

Fang Mou promptly questioned Tao: "Who is Mr. Hsiao going to marry?"

"You'd better ask Hsiao that," replied the school principal.

Fang Mou at once did so, and Hsiao countered: "For that I can only refer you to the future."

The teachers laughed. "A shrewd reply," someone remarked, "that tells us exactly nothing."

"And I, the elder brother, am thoroughly confused," Tao confessed with a sigh. "When I went home just now, Lan was weeping. I asked my mother what was wrong. She said my sister has announced she'll never marry. But why? I asked. Because Mr. Hsiao is going to get married, my mother said. Isn't that odd? What has one thing got to do with the other?"

"It's not odd at all," said Hsiao. "I'll tell you about it later on. Right now, I'm not too clear myself." He rose as if to leave. Both men were silent for a moment. Then Tao said slowly:

"Old friend, you've been acting too hasty lately. Such a method is bound to fail. That's my sister's way of doing things. Why should you emulate her?"

Hsiao paced the room. "But I knew I would fail before I even started," he replied with a forced smile. "Not that I wanted to fail. I just knew that I probably would. Do you believe me?"

Tao shook his head. "I don't understand a bit of this."

At that moment, as Hsiao's auditors were suspiciously pondering over the remarkable news, Ah Jung announced an old woman who was seeking Mr. Hsiao. Hsiao hastened forward to meet her. It was the old woman he had seen on the boat who had told the story of Tsai-lien's father.

"What is it?" he asked her.

She was trembling so with fright, she couldn't speak. After looking over everyone in the room, she cried:

"Where is Tsai-lien, sir? Her mama has hanged herself."

"What!"

"I suddenly remembered that she hadn't eaten anything for two days," the old woman said, breathing hard, "so I heated up a bowl of gruel and took it over. It was a bit late because I straightened up the house first. Her door was bolted, so I called Tsai-lien, but no one answered. Alarmed, I peeked through a crack. *Aiya*, she was hanging from the beam. I dropped the gruel. It spilled all over the ground. I rushed out of the gate, yelling for help. Four or five men came and broke in the door. They cut her down, but it was too late. She looked awful. We couldn't save

her. She was dead. I've come to ask your advice, sir. What can I do about her burial? She hasn't any close relatives."

The old woman again gazed around the room. "Where is Tsai-lien? She ought to go home and weep for her mother." Stricken and afraid, the old woman was quite upset.

The listening teachers were petrified. Hsiao said: "Don't call the little girl. I'll go."

He set out quickly, as though he still could save her. Tao and Fang Mou and two or three others followed.

None of them spoke. The only sound was the tread of their footsteps upon the road as they hurried towards West Village. The fields were silent, dark. Far off, the shrill hoot of an owl could be heard. The teachers were filled with sadness and pity for the young widow.

Four or five men neighbours were grouped around the bed on which she was lying. Hsiao and the teachers came forward. "Unfortunate woman." The words were in Hsiao's mouth, but he did not utter them. He stood in silence, tears rolling down his cheeks. Looking at the widow's face, he frowned miserably and covered her with a quilt from head to toe. Retreating to the door with the men neighbours, Hsiao arranged with them that she be buried the next day. He also hired two of the braver women to stay with the body during the night.

Everyone fell silent.

Hsiao was still in bed when Lan rushed into his room the following morning.

"What exactly happened?" she demanded. There were tears in her eyes.

"It ended in tragedy. . . . The little girl?"

"She doesn't know yet. She keeps saying she wants to go to her mama. I think I ought to take her to see her mother for the last time."

"As you like. I'm getting up."

Lan departed.

Hsiao took the day off and saw to the young widow's burial. He behaved like a husband, except that he didn't cry much.

They buried her on the hillside. After the lime was spread, Hsiao returned to the school. It was already five in the after-

noon. Tao and Lan — she was holding Tsai-lien — were waiting. For a while none of them spoke. The little girl, weeping, asked:

“Uncle Hsiao, will mama wake up again?”

“No, dear child.”

“I want to go to mama, I want to go to mama.”

Embracing her, smoothing her hair, Lan, also weeping, assured the little girl: “She will wake up, of course she will. She’ll wake again in a few days.”

The sobbing child quieted down. In a low voice Hsiao said:

“I’ll take her to the grave. That will help her remember her mother’s death in later years and teach her something of death’s significance.”

“It’s too late today. She wouldn’t understand much anyhow. Even my brother doesn’t understand the significance of the widow’s suicide. Don’t take the little girl.”

Lan’s honest brother only smiled.

As Lan rose to take Tsai-lien back to her house, Tao spoke:

“You’ve had a hard time these past few days, Mr. Hsiao. It’s as if you came to our Fujung Town not to teach but to suffer. Have dinner and a few drinks with us tonight. They’ll soothe away some of your cares. Your future is bound to be happier.”

Hsiao did not reply.

“Please come,” Lan urged. “I’d like a drink or two myself. I feel absolutely stifled.”

And so they strolled to Tao’s house through the dusk. Dinner was soon ready. But to Hsiao, this meal lacked the naturalness and gaiety of the previous one. It was more like a commemorative meeting.

He drank a lot of wine. Smiling slightly, he didn’t refuse a single cup Tao poured. Lan, also smiling, watched him drink. They had been talking idly of school affairs for about half an hour when three or four teachers arrived, Fang Mou among them.

Lan, who had finished eating, gave up her seat and made room for them at the table. After a cup of wine Fang Mou announced rather drunkenly:

“Well, now Fujung can have some excitement for half a month. The suicide of Tsai-lien’s mother has shocked everyone. It’s really an item for the newspapers. ‘Mother dies rather than live without her son.’”

“She was a very good woman,” Tao said. “Actually, she was forced into her grave. Tragic. Pitiful.”

“The news of her suicide has spread all over town,” said another teacher. “Everyone on the street is talking about it. Some sigh. Some weep. Many say she martyred herself for her departed husband. Some ask what is going to happen to Tsai-lien. Your fame has spread throughout our town, Mr. Hsiao. Everyone wants to see you.”

“Mr. Hsiao is certainly admirable,” said Fang Mou. “But his efforts were in vain.”

“Why do you say that?” Hsiao asked suddenly.

“They were going to freeze to death that day of the snowstorm. Luckily, you happened along. But now the baby is dead and so is the young woman. Doesn’t that prove —”

“Are you trying to say I saved them because I hoped for some sort of reward?” Hsiao angrily interrupted.

Lan laughed. Red in the face, Fang Mou stammered:

“Don’t mistake my meaning. I’m speaking only out of respect for you. Before, many people in our town had the wrong idea, because you were always going to the young widow’s house. Now, I’m sure they understand.”

“Again I ask — What makes you say that?”

Fang Mou hesitated. Finally he couldn’t restrain himself, and he blurted: “They thought if you and the widow were really carrying on, with the baby out of the way, you could get together more often. Why should she kill herself? Now they see there was nothing between you two at all.”

Hsiao’s chest felt ready to burst. He drained a cup of wine and murmured:

“The minds of evil gossipers, the words they speak. . . .” He didn’t finish. He turned his eyes to Lan.

Silently she lowered her head.

When he went from Tao’s house into the cold night wind some time later, a chill ran up his spine. He put a hand to his forehead. It was burning hot. He took his pulse. It was very

rapid. He clenched teeth. Can I be ill? he wondered. Plodding listlessly, he seemed to have no strength, like a coward going into battle for the first time.

He quickened his pace, knowing that the night wind soon would pass. Halting by the bridge, he listened to the soft flow of the water. He wanted to go down to the edge of the stream and sit there till he cooled off. But he seemed to lose interest, and hurried back to the school. There was a smile on his face, and in his heart as well. Though he had no particular plan, he wasn't at all depressed. He had to smile at this place. He thought of how he had changed since his arrival in the second lunar month, changed in spite of himself. He had been just a small cog between two big wheels. Whenever Lan or the young widow moved, he moved with them.

Back in his room, he started to check the students' exercise books. But he shivered violently. He was dizzy, and perspiration broke out on his back. He closed the door, but didn't lock it, undressed, and got into bed.

It's only a spring chill, he thought. I won't really get sick.

By one o'clock in the morning, he had a raging fever. He woke up, knowing that he was ill. He drank a cup of hot water. Now he couldn't sleep. It wasn't the illness that troubled him but some of the small questions arising from it: Will it keep me tied down in this town? If I leave before I'm better, will I be able to take Tsai-lien along? . . . Hsiao calmed himself with an effort. He didn't want to think too much.

The following morning, Ah Jung brought him boiled drinking water. A few minutes later, Lan pushed open the door.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"I ran a fever last night," he replied from the bed. "But I'm all right now." He asked her what time it was.

"Exactly eight."

"Then I'd better get up. I have class this morning."

She looked out of the window. A few students were reading beneath a tree. Hsiao sat up. His head spun, his ears rang and his eyes darkened. He fell back against his pillow.

"I can't seem to get up, Lan."

"What's wrong with you?"

"I'm dizzy."

Another teacher came in. He asked after Hsiao's health, urged him to stay in bed a day or two, and went out. Fang Mou entered. He too chatted idly, recommended rest, and also left. They both seemed to be investigating, although their purpose was hard to fathom. Lan sat on the edge of Hsiao's bed, tending him as if he were a child. Half tenderly, half distantly, she scolded:

"You take everything too seriously. That's why you suffer. You ought to relax a little. You're ill now and I shouldn't be asking this, but I must. Did you really mean it last night when you told me you were going to resign from the school? I'm an impetuous person. You know that."

"Everything is all right," he assured her. "You don't have to worry about a thing." He placed his hand on hers.

"How hot your hand is," she said, almost unbelievably.

She gave him a drink of water and asked whether she should call a doctor. He said no, and she talked to him about Tsai-lien. Thus the minutes passed. She gave him all of her time.

About ten o'clock he had another chill. His whole body contracted. A group of students walked in.

"How is Mr. Hsiao, Miss Tao?" they asked Lan.

"A bit cold."

The students crowded around his bedside. They wanted him to go down to the playing field and exercise. That would warm him up.

"I don't have the strength," Hsiao said.

"We can't stand here and watch you shiver," cried one of the students. "We'll carry you down."

The students' proposal was naive, laughable. Lan couldn't get rid of the noisy youngsters who filled the room. But she thought it would cheer Hsiao up. It went on this way for an hour, until the school principal entered. Then most of the girls and boys hastily left. But one or two diligent students remained, asking Hsiao about a difficult point in their lessons. He gave them an explanation in a weak voice.

Tao scolded him, "You're sick but you don't rest."

Hsiao laughed. "It will probably kill me."

"Brother," Lan said to Tao, "Mr. Hsiao won't be able to teach for another week. You'd better find someone to sub for him. Let him get some decent rest."

Hsiao didn't comment.

"All right," said Tao. "But I've got a better idea. You ask Mr. Wang on my behalf."

"If you can find someone to take my place for a week, that will be fine," said Hsiao to Tao with a smile. "I'll be better soon. But even if I recover tomorrow, I want to tour your famous Nufo Mountain before I resume class. This is a good chance."

"Of course you can, but it would be better if we went with you. I'd like to make a contract with you to teach here for three years. We can travel every summer vacation. Why do it when you're sick?"

"I'd rather go now. Who can tell about the future? Satisfy this little whim of mine. Why put it off so long?"

"In that case, brother," said Lan, "let's arrange a spring outing. Though I've been to Nufo Mountain before, I'd like to go again. We can get ready to leave in the next few days."

"I'd prefer to go alone," said Hsiao.

"What fun is travelling by yourself?" brother and sister asked, surprised.

Slowly, deliberately, Hsiao retorted: "I like being by myself. My childhood days of enjoying travel in a group are over. Now I feel that only when wandering alone do I have real freedom. You like a certain cliff—you can sit upon it as many hours as you wish. You can sleep beneath any tree you choose or camp beside any stream. In other words, you can do as you please. But if you're with another person, he's bound to say you're queer. That's why I want to go alone, so that I can be free."

The other two thought and said nothing.

"Please find a substitute for me as quickly as possible," Hsiao added.

Tao agreed and departed. The room was very still.

In the afternoon, after teaching her second class, Lan again came to Hsiao's room. She asked him how he felt.

"Much better, thanks."

"Have you had anything to eat?"

"I don't feel like eating yet."

"Not even a little bit?" She sent Ah Jung out for two apples and half a catty of candy. When they arrived, she peeled the apples and cut them into thin slices. Her manner was very loving. He ate the candy and the apples. His limbs were weak, and his body felt as if it had been melted by the sun. A tender melancholy suffused his heart. He remembered how his elder cousin had looked after him when he was very ill at the age of fifteen. He said to Lan with a smile:

"You're just like my cousin, ten years ago. I won't call you sister any more, I'm going to call you cousin. How will that be?"

"Whatever are you talking about?"

Hsiao didn't reply. She asked: "Are you thinking of your past?"

"I'm thinking of the cousin who raised me."

"Why? You're a person who doesn't care about the past."

"Whenever the present doesn't go smoothly, it's easy to recall the past."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing."

"Do you still want to tour Nufo Mountain?"

"Yes." He put his hand on her arm and said in a louder voice: "If my cousin were still alive. . . . Only now, you are my cousin."

"Call me anything you like, as long as I can be near you."

Hsiao raised her hand to his mouth and kissed it. He looked miserable.

"Why did I have to meet you?" he demanded. "I never had so little will power as I do when you're around."

"It . . . it's the same with me," she confessed, shyly dropping her head.

"But you must know," he said seriously, "I have ideals, a goal. I don't want to. . . ."

"What don't you want?" She was breathing hard.

"To get married."

"Don't say it, don't say it." Blushing, she hastily covered his mouth with her hand. "I don't want to hear that word either. There's no reason why people can't live free and untrammelled."

A few days later, after he had recovered, Hsiao decided to leave. Carrying his small suitcase, he was crossing the playground when Tao came running up. Panting, Tao cried:

"I beg you not to go today, old friend. Wait another few days and I'll go with you. Last night, after we got home, my sister wept. She's very displeased with me. She says I'm not good to my friends. She abused me till I was dizzy. I entreat you, old friend, don't go."

"The bow-string is taut against the arrow," Hsiao replied coolly.

"My mother also thinks it's wrong," Tao continued. "She says she never heard of a person who's been ill going off on a long journey the day after he gets out of bed."

Hsiao smiled. "You mean you don't expect me to return?"

"How could I?" Tao retorted hastily. "Don't talk rot, old friend."

"Well then, it's now seven o'clock. I can't delay any longer. I've ten *li* to the pier, and the boat leaves at eight." Hsiao strode off.

"Let me escort you to the pier," Tao shouted after him.

Turning his head, Hsiao called back: "It's better for you to teach another hour's class than to rush through a round trip of twenty *li*." He marched away.

Hsiao walked very quickly. The sun shone in the milky white morning air, and a slight breeze blew, but he was not impressed with the beauty of the rural scene. All that remained of the emotions he had experienced when he arrived in early spring was a kind of sadness. Peasants were going to the fields with their hoes. Hsiao wondered whether he too should become a tiller of the soil.

As he was passing through a little village, he saw a young woman coming towards him, carrying a child. For a moment he thought the widow and her baby had returned to life, and he halted and stared. The young woman went past him slowly, head down, talking to her child in a low voice. Her resemblance to Tsai-lien's mother was striking. She even wore the same troubled expression.

How many women and children are there like that in this vast land of ours? Hsiao wondered. Save the women and children! Again he strode on at a fast pace.

He boarded the boat as it was raising anchor. No sooner did his foot hit the deck than the boat set sail. Panting, he shouted to the receding shore:

"Good-bye sweetheart, friend, little brothers and sisters."

Hsiao entered the ship's saloon. The vessel was bigger than the one he had come on. Part of the voyage was at sea. They wouldn't reach Nufo Mountain for at least four hours. There weren't many passengers. Some were pilgrims, going to the mountain temple to burn incense.

Tao waited for his friend. But by the third day Hsiao had not returned. Minute by minute the day passed, with no news of Hsiao. Tao was very upset. When he got home that night, Tsai-lien was weeping by Lan's side and demanding to know where her Uncle Hsiao was.

"Is he dead?" the child cried. "Why doesn't he come?"

Tao's mother also thought it strange. But Tao and Lan said: "Wait till tomorrow. Tomorrow he's sure to come."

By three the next afternoon, there was still no sign of Hsiao. But the postman brought a letter from him, bearing the mailing address: "Rear Monastery, Nufo Mountain."

Startled, Tao quickly opened it. Perhaps his friend had fallen ill there. He certainly couldn't have become a monk. Unfolding the sheet of letter paper, Tao scanned it hastily with eyes that virtually burned. Hsiao's irremediable action disappointed and hurt his faithful friend deeply. The letter read as follows:

Dear Old Friend,

I arrived here safely two days ago and by now have probably visited all the points of interest. It's a fine place, simply another world. But I am merely "passing through." I have no desire to remain.

You know the scenery here well, so I needn't relate my impressions of the sea, the cliffs. I want only to tell you why I shall not return to Fujung.

From the day I set foot on your soil I felt a strong sympathy for that young widow who killed herself, as if drawn by some

supernatural power. Why? I'm not entirely sure. But society likes excitement. It enjoys scrabbling with its hairy hands in people's hearts. And so she and Lan and I suffered, we were wounded to the utmost spiritually. I could have shrugged it off. I have always considered baseless slanders and jealousies things to my credit. Your sister is like that too. Gossip doesn't bother her a bit. But when, after the death of her baby, the widow committed suicide, how was I supposed to feel? For as you know, old friend, she did it out of love for me and your sister.

Lan is an angel from heaven. She wrapped me in the multi-hued silken fibres of her love and I became her prisoner completely. I'm a fortunate man. I dreamed of myself as a splendid tower, a tower in which your sister alone resided. Often, pacing my room, I didn't hear the school bell ring. Only when the students ran to my window and shouted my name did I know it was time to start class.

"Wake up," I would say to myself. "Be reasonable."

And to myself I would reply: "That's right. She's only a sister to me."

But after Tsai-lien's mother died, everything changed. We were pressed from all sides, as if some huge army were closing in. I was in danger of being killed by wildly flying arrows. That being so, how could I accept your sister's love? Should I have followed the dictates of my heart, or of my mind? When I could no longer use reason to cope with the situation, I took the only other alternative — flight.

Now I have broken out of the encirclement. I'm again the person I was two months ago — a lone wanderer. Wind ruffles my hair, frost falls upon my chest. Standing on an isle in the vast sea, I sing and laugh, throwing the sound of my voice against the elements.

As to Tsai-lien, I must impose upon you. But I know you will take good care of her. As soon as my life is settled again, I shall send for her. I want to keep her always by my side.

My luggage I also leave with you temporarily. Fortunately, there's nothing in it of any value. I shall have it picked up when I send for Tsai-lien. If any of my books interest you

or Lan, please feel free to read them. I don't believe I'll study music any more.

This afternoon at five, I take the boat for Shanghai. Where I'll go from there I haven't decided. People say the light is in the south. I'd like to see that light. But wisdom, they say, is in the north. So perhaps I'll go north and plant beautiful flowers. An unattached young man like myself changes with the situation.

Originally I intended to write this letter to your sister. But although I thought and thought, I couldn't think of what to say. I hope you will say a few words to her on my behalf. I'm sure with her intelligence she'll understand why I left without saying good-bye. I hope she will take good care of herself.

More later on.

Hsiao

When he finished reading the letter, Tao said to his colleagues: "Mr. Hsiao has gone to Shanghai. He won't be coming back."

"He won't be coming back?"

Everyone was astonished. Even the students and Ah Jung crowded round.

Quite disturbed, Tao returned home. Lan greeted him with the question:

"Is Mr. Hsiao back yet?"

"Read this letter." Dispiritedly, he handed it to her. She took it with trembling fingers. After reading it, she was silent for a moment, then said with tears in her eyes:

"Brother, please go to Shanghai and bring Mr. Hsiao back."

Tao was stunned. His mother entered and asked what was wrong. Lan said:

"Mama, Mr. Hsiao is not returning. He's gone to Shanghai. He hasn't a penny with him. Even his clothes are here. It's brother who let him leave. Now I want brother to bring him back."

"You do me an injustice, Lan," Tao retorted angrily. "It's your temperament that drove Mr. Hsiao away."

"Then I'll go myself. I'll take Tsai-lien with me," cried Lan, agitated and enraged. "I can't live here any longer under these circumstances. I'd have to kill myself too."

"What are you saying, daughter?" her mother asked, weeping. Turning to her son, she instructed: "Take a trip to Shanghai. Poor little Tsai-lien has no one. You must bring him back. I'm willing to let Lan marry him."

"How am I going to find him among all those millions of people in Shanghai?" Tao asked slowly.

"You'll have to go," his mother repeated.

"This proves you're not loyal to your friends," Lan asserted. "Do you mean to say you couldn't find him if you really wanted to?"

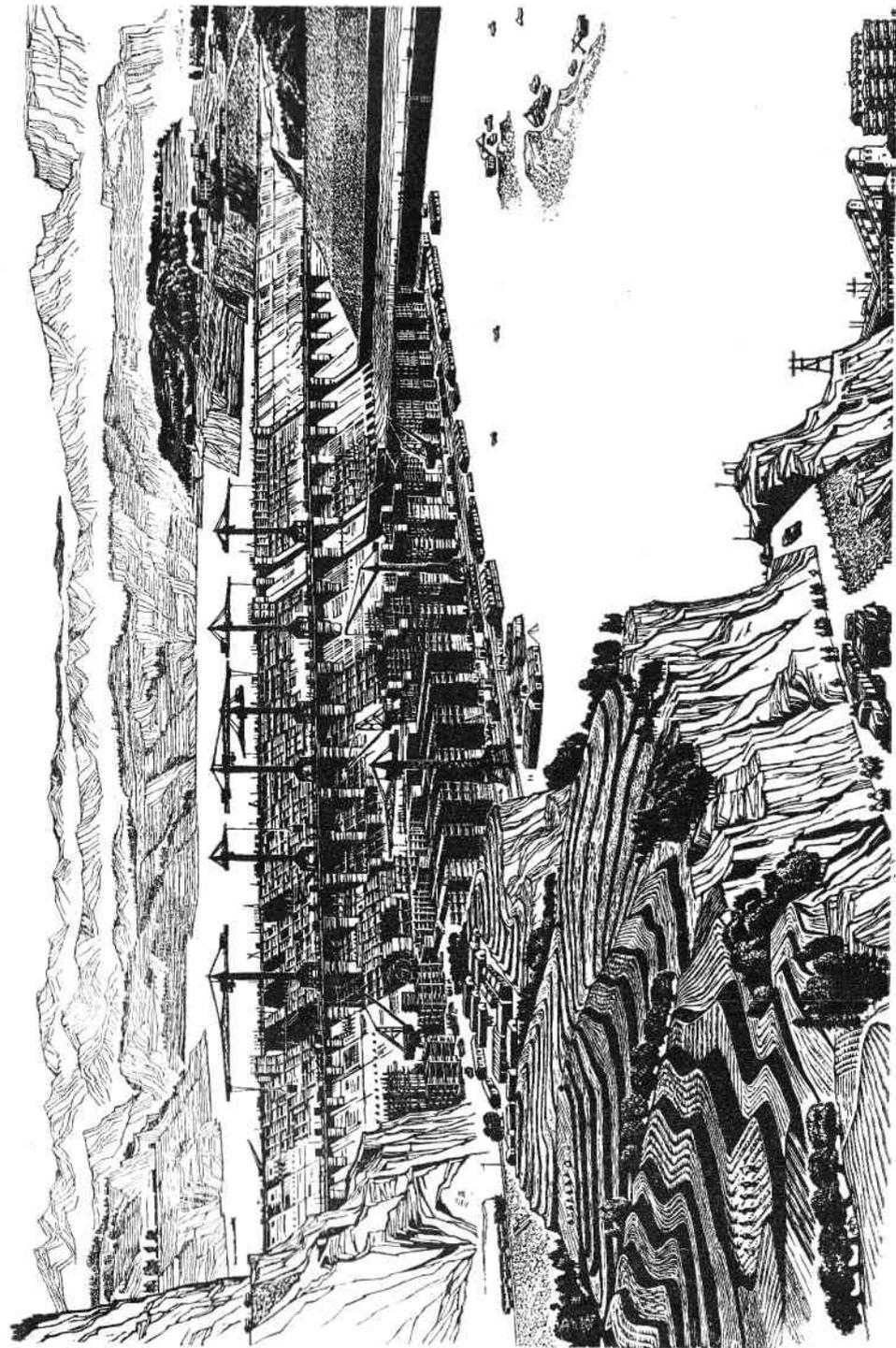
Honest Tao's anger dissolved into laughter. Looking at his sister, he said:

"The best thing would be if you went along with me."

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

A Construction Site (woodcut) ►
by Feng Chung-tieh

Feng Chung-tieh, born in 1917 in Szechuan, has been a woodcut artist for thirty years. Most of his recent works, chiefly in black and white, depict our national construction.



Selections from the Classics

SSUKUNG TU

The Twenty-four Modes of Poetry

1. The Grand Mode (雄渾)

Full play makes firm the outward flesh,
True substance gives inward fulness;
Returned to the Void, to the Absolute,
Grandeur comes of strength amassed;
Embracing all creation,
It spans infinitude,
Where surge the darkling clouds
And never-ceasing blow the rushing winds. . . .
Transcend the outward form
To grasp what lies within;
Useless to strain for mastery,
Once yours it is a never-failing spring.

2. The Unemphatic Mode (冲淡)

It dwells in quiet, in simplicity;
For inspiration is subtle, fugitive;

It drinks from the fountain of Great Harmony,
Flies with the solitary stork above;
Gentle as the breath of wind
That brushes your gown,
Or the rustling of tall bamboos
Whose beauty you long to convey;
Met by chance, it seems easy of access,
At your approach it withdraws
And, when you grope for it,
Slips through your hands and is gone!

3. The Ornate Mode (織穠)

The glint of rippling water,
Lush, distant green of spring,
And deep in the quiet valley
Glimpses of a lovely girl;
Peach trees are laden with blossoms
On wind-swept banks in the sun,
And the path winds, shaded by willows,
Where in flocks the orioles sing.
The further you press on,
The clearer your vision;
Infinite surely is the scene,
For ever changing and for ever new!

4. The Grave Mode (沉著)

Green woods, a rustic hut,
And at sunset the air is clear,
As I stroll alone, bare-headed,
Hearing the fitful chirping of the birds.
No wild swan comes
With word from friend far away,
Yet in thought we are as close
As in days gone by.
Wind from the sea, an azure sky,
The moon is bright above the bank at night,
And I seem to hear your welcome voice,
Though the great river lies ahead.

5. The Lofty Mode (高古)

Immortals borne upon pure air,
Lotus blooms in their hands,
Win through annihilation
To soar to trackless space;
Over the eastern Dipper rises the moon,
Sped by a beneficent wind;
Above Mount Hua the night is blue,
And men hear the clear toll of a bell. . . .
Stand then apart in purity of heart,
Break through the confines of mortality,
Aloof as the Yellow Emperor and Yao,
Alone at the source of the Great Mystery.

6. The Polished Mode (典雅)

A jade wine-pot brimming with spring,
A thatched hut to enjoy the rain,
And there sits a worthy scholar
With tall bamboos upon his left and right.
White clouds are scattering after rain,
Birds race past in the deep stillness;
Then pillowed on his lute in the green shade,
A waterfall cascading overhead,
As petals fall without a sound,
The man, serene as the chrysanthemum,
Sets down the season's glories —
Here is something well worth reading!

7. The Refined Mode (洗煉)

As if mining gold
Or extracting silver from lead,
Give your whole heart to refining,
Make skimming off the dross a labour of love.
As spring water pours into deep pools,
And ancient mirrors give a true reflection,
One who is spotless and immaculate
May fly back on a moonbeam to the Truth.
Then raise your eyes to the stars
And sing of the hermit,
Today pure as flowing water,
His past life bright as the moon!

8. The Vigorous Mode (勁健)

The spirit wings as if through empty space,
And like a rainbow soars the vital force,
Rushing down sheer mountain gorges,
Swift as clouds before the wind!
Drink deep of Truth and feed on strength;
Store up simplicity within;
So will you be vigorous as the universe,
For this is to conserve your potency.
Be coeval with heaven and earth,
A co-worker in their miraculous mutations,
Make Actuality your goal,
And take as your guide the Finite.

9. The Exquisite Mode (綺麗)

Innate nobility of mind
Sets little store by gold;
Colours laid on too thick must pall,
But light shades gain in depth.
Mist clearing by the stream,
Apricot blossom crimson in the glade,
A stately house beneath the moon,
A painted bridge in green shade,
A golden goblet brimming with wine,
A lute played for a friend. . . .
Take these and be content,
For here is beauty enough to gladden the heart!

10. The Spontaneous Mode (自然)

Stoop and it is yours for the taking,
No boon to ask of neighbours;
Just follow the Way
And one touch of your hand brings spring,
Simple as finding a flower in bloom
Or watching the new year in!
No true gain can be snatched away,
What is seized is easily lost.
Like a recluse in the lonely hills
Gathering duckweed after rain,
May you become aware
Of the infinitude of all creation!

11. The Pregnant Mode (含蓄)

Not a word said outright,
Yet the whole beauty revealed;
No mention of self,
Yet passion too deep to be borne;
And a true arbiter has the heart
To guide us as we drift,
Like wine bubbling over the strainer,
Abrupt return to autumn in blossom-time,
Dust whirled through space
Or foam flung up by the sea. . . .
So the motley pageant converges only to scatter,
Till a myriad shapes are resolved at last in one.

12. The Untrammelled Mode (豪放)

Free to study Nature's mysteries,
He breathes the empyrean;
His spirit grounded in Truth,
Sure of himself, he casts off all restraint.
Wide sweep the winds of heaven,
Grey loom the hills out at sea,
And with true strength imbued,
All creation spread before him;
He beckons sun, moon and stars,
Leads on the phoenix,
Drives the six tortoises* at dawn,
And washes his feet in the stream where rises the sun.

13. The Evocative Mode (精神)

That they might come back unceasingly,
That they might be ever with us!
The limpid pool clear to its depth,
The rare flower just opening,
The cockatoo of verdant spring,
The pavilion in the willows' shade,
The stranger from the blue hills,
The cup brimming with clear wine. . . .
The living spirit travels far,
Untainted by dead ashes;
Such miracles of Nature,
Who is there to compass them?

* According to legend, these tortoises supported the earth.

14. The Well-knit Mode (縝密)

The trail runs true
Yet seems beyond our ken;
And before the image takes shape
Strange changes come to pass.
Water flows, flowers blow,
The sun has not yet dried the limpid dew,
While travellers with far to go,
Tread with light steps and slow. . . .
Writing rid of redundancy,
Thoughts free from stagnancy,
Are like the spring that makes all green
And clear as moonlight on the snow.

15. The Artless Mode (疎野)

Abide by your nature
To grasp Truth untrammelled,
Rich with what comes to hand,
Following your bent.
Build a hut below the pines,
Read poems bare-headed,
Knowing only dawn and dusk,
Forgetful of time. . . .
Then, if happiness is yours,
Why must there be action?
In this utter abandonment
Attain your end.

16. The Distinctive Mode (清奇)

Clumps of slender pines
At whose feet clear water flows,
Bamboos muffled in dazzling snow,
Fishing-boats in the reach beyond;
And a scholar peerless as jade,
Strolling in search of seclusion,
Stays his steps to gaze
At the empty infinity of blue above. . . .
Then strangely soars the spirit as of old,
Too ethereal to recall,
Like moonlight at dawn
Or autumn in the air.

17. The Devious Mode (委曲)

Green and twisting the track
That leads up Mount Taihang;
Misty the veins deep in jade,
Faint the fragrance of flowers.
Like year-long toil in the fields,
Or strains of a Hunnish pipe,
It starts up again when you think it done,
Seems hidden but is then no more concealed.
Like the eddying ripples in water,
The circling flight of the roc,
The Way has no set pattern,
But fits both square and round.

18. The Natural Mode (實境)

Choose plain words
To voice simple thoughts,
As if, meeting suddenly with a recluse,
You have a revelation of the Truth.
Beside the winding brook,
In the green shade of pines,
One man is gathering firewood,
Another playing the lute. . . .
Follow your natural bent
And wonders come unsought;
So at a chance encounter
You hear rare music!

19. The Poignant Mode (悲慨)

A gale whips up the stream,
Trees in the forest crash,
And one in deathly anguish
Has called in vain for aid.
A hundred years slip by like water flowing,
Rank and riches are now cold ashes;
The Truth is ebbing away from day to day,
What hero, what talent, have we?
The fighter fondles his sword,
His heart flooded with grief,
As dead leaves patter to the ground
And rain drips on grey moss.

20. The Vivid Mode (形容)

Only the pure of heart
May recapture the Truth,
For this is seeking shadows on water
Or painting the glory of spring.
The changing shapes of wind-swept clouds,
The vividness of herb and flower,
The roaring waves of the ocean,
The rugged crags of mountains,
All these make up the great Truth
In one subtle medley of dust.
He who abandons the form to catch the likeness
Is true master of his craft!

21. The Transcendent Mode (超詣)

Finer than the essence of the spirit,
More subtle than the secret springs of motion,
It is like floating on white clouds
Borne off by a fresh wind.
Afar, it seems at hand;
Approach, and it is gone;
Yet this inkling of Truth
Turns men from vulgar ways,
Like tall trees on rugged mountains,
Spring sunlight on green moss. . . .
Dwell on it, ponder it;
Its faint music eludes the ear.

22. The Ethereal Mode (飄逸)

Aloof from the world of men,
Apart from the vulgar crowd,
Like the stork on Mount Hou,
The cloud at the peak of Mount Hua,
A man of worth, his heart at peace,
Radiant with vital force,
Can ride the wind on a reed
And sail over the infinite.
Seemingly intangible,
Its echo is heard;
It is there for those who understand
But escapes those who would seize it.

23. The Light-hearted Mode (曠達)

A man may live a hundred years,
And yet how short a span,
When joys are all so brief
And griefs crowd thick and fast!
Far better fill your cup with wine
And stroll each day among the misty vines
That flower above thatched eaves,
Or call on friends through the fine, drizzling rain;
Then, when the wine is drained,
Take up your cane and stroll off with a song.
Death comes at last to one and all:
Above us looms the southern hill!

24. The Flowing Mode (流動)

Whirling like water-wheels,
Rolling like beads;
Who can express
The animation of insensate form?
Immense, the axis of the earth,
Ever-turning, the pivot of heaven;
Let us grasp their clue
And blend with them into one,
Transcending the mind,
Returning again to the Void:
An orbit of a thousand years,
This is the key to my theme!

*Translated by Yang Hsien-yi
and Gladys Yang*

Ssukung Tu's Poetic Criticism

The Twenty-four Modes of Poetry by Ssukung Tu (A.D. 837-908) is a set of twenty-four poems dividing poetry into different categories and illustrating these with vivid images. This remarkable work has exercised a considerable influence on literary criticism in China.

Ssukung Tu was born in Yuhsiang County in the province of Shansi. He was working as a secretary in the Board of Civil Affairs in Changan when at the end of the ninth century the peasant insurgent army led by Huang Tsao took the Tang capital by storm. Ssukung Tu was captured and well treated by the insurgents, but instead of joining them after his release he made his way home despite the hazards of the journey; and when Emperor Hsi-tsung set up a temporary capital in Fenghsiang, Ssukung Tu rejoined the government. At the age of fifty-five he gave up his post and went home to live in retirement, away from the widespread upheaval and unrest. Before long General Chu Wen, who had betrayed the peasant forces and surrendered to the Tang, staged a coup d'état and made himself emperor, overthrowing the Tang dynasty. Ssukung Tu refused a summons from Chu Wen to serve in the new government, and starved himself to death.

Wu Tiao-kung, born in 1914 in Kiangsu Province, is now teaching in the Chinese Department of Nanking Normal College. He specializes in classical Chinese literary criticism.

Like many men of letters of his day, Ssukung Tu was a convinced Confucianist who believed that only when the Confucian way was carried out would the state be well-governed. However, he lived at a time when generals were carving up the empire, the central government had little authority, politics were corrupt and great disorder reigned. Unsuccessful in his career and with little to hope for, he deplored the fact that "Confucian scholars have no authority, the military abuse their might, and the sage's way is spurned." Finally he took the way out chosen by many scholars, seeking refuge in the escapist philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism.

Such ideas naturally find expression in his poetic theory. For example, he speaks of "transcending the mind, returning again to the Void," for he was seeking a world devoid of sound, colour and all activity, utterly divorced from reality, where he might find subtle understanding and ineffable beauty. Other references to the world of his dreams, his outlook on life and the poetic beauty he admired occur in the following lines:

The trail runs true,
Yet seems beyond our ken; ("The Well-knit Mode")
Knowing only dawn and dusk,
Forgetful of time. . . . ("The Artless Mode")
Not a word said outright,
Yet the whole beauty revealed;
No mention of self,
Yet passion too deep to be borne. ("The Pregnant Mode")

But because he grieved to think that "the Truth is ebbing away from day to day" and wanted to voice his sorrow for his country, he expressed himself also in a poignant vein. Thus while propounding such modes as the unemphatic, pregnant, transcendent and light-hearted, he also advocated the grand, vigorous, untrammelled and poignant. In other words, he was for a variety of poetic modes and against restricting himself to any single one. But he set most store, certainly, by the unemphatic mode.

Three main features emerge from *The Twenty-four Modes of Poetry*: an analysis of poetic moods and styles, appreciation of supersensual satisfaction, and emphasis on the simple and unadorned.

Ssukung Tu's preference for certain poetic modes had its origin in earlier poetry. When he summed up previous experience and the laws of poetry, he was largely influenced by Tang poets like Wang Wei and Wei Ying-wu, who excelled in finding images from nature to express their own moods. A poet is often endowed with a sensibility which enables him to perceive in a flash the spirit and beauty of natural scenery—"Nature kindles his emotions." So his mood when he writes harmonizes with the scenery and becomes one with it, and this is called "the poet's emotions enter into the scene." These methods of expression, employed by ancient Chinese poets, gained ground both in theory and practice during the eighth century. Ssukung Tu summarized this experience by affirming that poetry should have an emotive connotation and that specific images should hold an infinite beauty capable of affording endless satisfaction.

His theory also owes something to Yin Fan, another literary critic of the Tang dynasty who believed that poetic images should be evocative, suggesting far more than appears on the surface.

On the basis of his own experience of writing and his analysis of earlier views, Ssukung Tu evolved his theory of the different moods and styles of poetry. He studied the distinctive use of images by different poets and their effect upon readers; he expounded the nature of poetry by examining a variety of styles, which he illustrated by means of appropriate images and scenes. Some of these twenty-four poems shed light on the poet's appreciation of beauty; others deal with language; yet others are concerned with prosody and aesthetics.

The study of aesthetics is extended to embrace natural beauty too, linking artistic appreciation with scenes from real life. Thus "The Ornate Mode" starts with this picture of the countryside:

The glint of rippling water,
Lush, distant green of spring.

It ends with the conclusion:

The further you press on,
The clearer your vision;
Infinite surely is the scene,
For ever changing and for ever new!

Similarly, "The Polished Mode" opens with a description of the cultured pursuits of a scholar who is enjoying the rain with a pot of wine in his thatched hut, resting on his lute; and it ends by pointing out that such scenes, translated into poetry, have even greater charm.

This use of vivid imagery not only reveals the contents and specific features of different modes of poetry, but helps to deepen the reader's powers of appreciation.

We might say that Ssukung Tu's ideal in poetry is the attainment of supersensual satisfaction, for this concept runs through the entire work. For instance, when treating of the Grand Mode, he speaks of transcending the outward form to grasp what lies within, meaning that a poet should not simply record and understand superficial appearances but penetrate beyond these to the heart of the matter. In connection with the Unemphatic Mode he explains that elusive beauty is the most evocative.

Met by chance it seems easy of access,
At your approach it withdraws
And, when you grope for it,
Slips through your hands and is gone!

In other words, when you read a subtle poem, at first you may fail to feel its elusive beauty and think it rather simple; when you read more carefully, you realize there is something more, but its flavour still escapes you; groping may give you a superficial understanding; and when you grasp the full significance it may prove different from your preconception.

Ssukung Tu's descriptions of the complex process involved in poetic appreciation prove that the beauty of poetry transcends images and senses, so that a true connoisseur must penetrate beneath the surface and try to put himself in the place of the poet. They also show that poetry affords supersensuous satisfaction just because it conveys the spirit of the poet, without which there would be no subtle nuances. This is what Ssukung Tu has in mind when he writes:

He who abandons the form to catch the likeness
Is true master of his craft! ("The Vivid Mode")

Poetry owes its spirit to the poet's character. "The roaring waves of the ocean, the rugged crags of mountains" in the same poem gain their vigour because they are imbued with the spirit of the poet. Even when there is no explicit mention of his emotions, these are naturally revealed by the images he chooses. Ssukung Tu sums this up in the lines:

Not a word said outright,
Yet the whole beauty revealed;
No mention of self,
Yet passion too deep to be borne. ("The Pregnant Mode")

This penetrating formulation stresses the conciseness of poetic expression.

Undoubtedly, the subtle undertones of poetry should arouse many associations in the reader's mind and afford him rich enjoyment; but Ssukung Tu tends to exaggerate the complexity of this, implying that the poet's true meaning can never be fully grasped. Thus when speaking of the Transcendent Mode he says, "Dwell on it, ponder it; its faint music eludes the ear." This seems to introduce an element of mysticism into poetic criticism, which is incorrect.

Another thread running through his writing is his emphasis on unadorned simplicity. He believes that "Colours laid on too thick must pall, but light shades gain in depth." Even splendour is best seen in simplicity. He is for describing true feelings in polished and concise language, aiming at simplicity of content as well as form. To him the beauty of form and content is one, as seen in the following image:

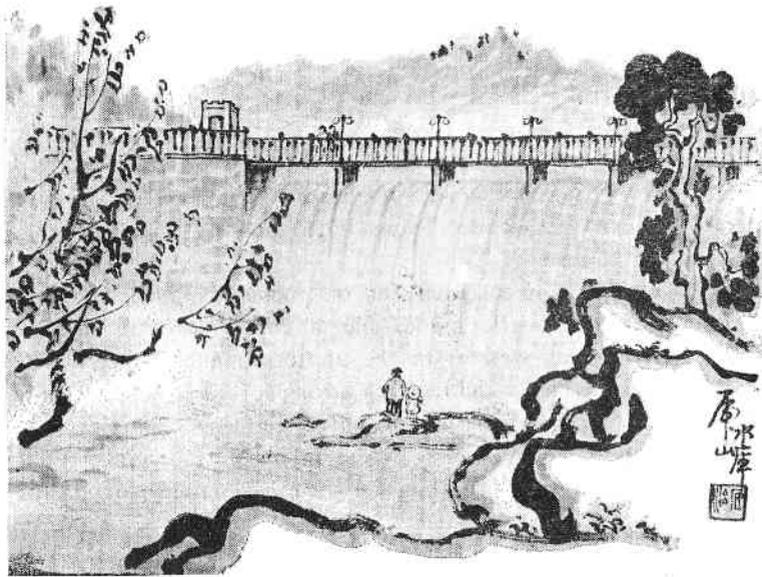
Choose plain words
To voice simple thoughts,
As if, meeting suddenly with a recluse,
You have a revelation of the Truth. ("The Natural Mode")

A poet should not cudgel his brains to produce involved ideas and abstruse diction, but his poetry should have an indescribable flavour when carefully savoured. Of course, this deceptive simplicity he admired cannot be achieved without painstaking effort.

Ssukung Tu's emphasis on simple beauty shows his opposition to bizarre, difficult or over-ornamented poetry. This is what he meant by, "No true gain can be snatched away, what is seized is easily lost." ("The Spontaneous Mode") This remark still holds true today. However, his stress on simplicity involved certain passive and nihilist Taoist ideas, and was a reflection of his escapist philosophy.

This brilliant and original set of poems exploring the laws guiding different poetic modes has a contribution to make to creative writing as well as to the appreciation of poetry. That is why Ssukung Tu has had such a strong influence on the history of Chinese literary criticism. To give but two examples, when Yen Yu of the Sung dynasty wrote in his notes on poetry that "there is a limit to words but the meaning should go on," and when Wang Shih-chen the Ching dynasty critic spoke of the fine essence of poetry, both men were influenced by Ssukung Tu's ideas. Even today this work written more than one thousand years ago still gives us much food for thought.





Essays

LI CHIEN-WU

Climbing Mount Taishan in the Rain

Many times in the last few decades I have gazed at Mount Taishan* in the distance from the train, sorry that we had to flash by without stopping.

Li Chien-wu, theatre critic and essayist, is a research fellow of the Institute of Literary Research of the Academy of Sciences.

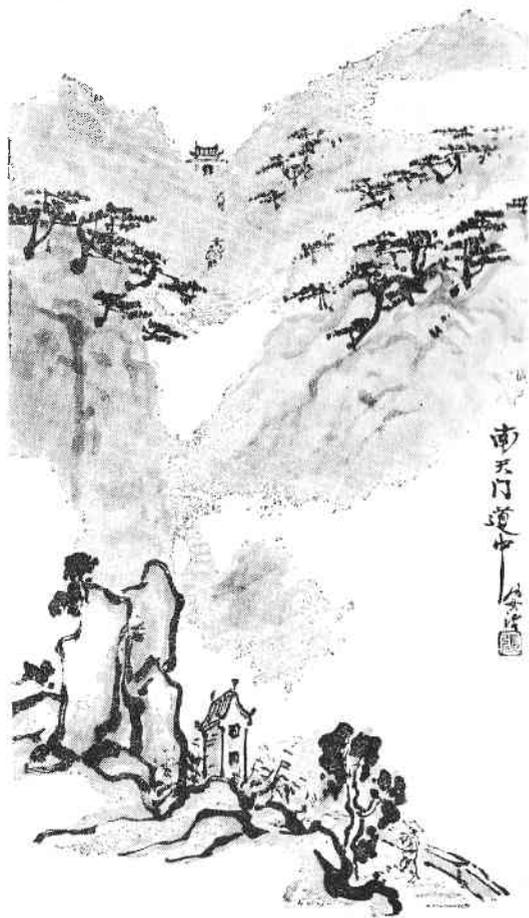
*Mount Taishan, in the province of Shantung, is one of China's five famous mountains. 1,532 metres high, it is noted for its magnificent scenery.

But when at last I had a chance to climb the mountain, Old Man Heaven was in a bad mood and made it rain. The fine, steady rain fell not on to the earth — or so it seemed to me — but into our hearts! The sky was grey, our spirits were low. We had agreed to make an early start, but as soon as our party assembled it started to pour. Should we wait for the weather to clear? How depressing it is, the uncertainty of “waiting”! By half past eleven, however, the sky had lightened and I urged the young people with me to make a start. At once they put on their rucksacks and we set off for Tai Tsung Arch.

A grey haze, like smoke or mist, was shrouding the whole great mountain from head to foot. Hoary Taishan looked more precipitous. Once through the Tai Tsung Arch, we were drawn by a thunderous roar to the huge dike of Tiger Mount Reservoir. Seven torrents were rushing through the archways of the bridge like seven glittering rolls of cloth of gold cascading on to the jagged rocks below and scattering snow-white bubbles like a string of broken beads on the swirling water. Skirting Tiger Mount we walked on to this bridge and looked down on the placid reservoir on one side, only slightly ruffled by the wind and seemingly too indolent to stir, while the tumult on the other side sounded like the thunder of ten thousand horses' hooves beneath that sumptuous cloth of gold. Cloth of gold is a convenient comparison, but in fact it was more like filmy gauze over an exquisite pattern, the transparent white gauze resting lightly on transparent amber patterns.

Now the rain was pelting down and we stopped to shelter in the Shrine of Seven Worthies behind the Temple of the Queen Mother. The central figure of the statues of the Seven Worthies is the Taoist immortal Lu Tung-pin, flanked by his friends Iron-crutch Li and Ho Hsien-ku, while ranged on the east and west are his four acolytes. The two boys standing in their niches and the old man opposite the Willow Spirit have extraordinary vitality. The unknown sculptor who made them obviously had a profound understanding of people, for these very different figures are amazingly lifelike.

Through a world of rain, we started up the Stone Road and climbed the three flights of steps which lead to the First Heavenly



Gate, the Arch of Confucius and the Stairs of Heaven. Soon the rushing of mighty waters fell behind us, and the imposing Red Gate barred our way. It was a joy to walk through this long tunnelled gate and see the mountain loom into sight again. We toiled up past a stream which poured down towards the Tiger Mount Reservoir. This stream was our companion all the way to the Second Heavenly Gate. Springs and freshets from sheer peaks and ragged spurs had mingled to sweep down towards the valley, and their plashing gurgling grew by degrees into a thunderous roar. Sometimes wind parted the clouds sufficiently for us to glimpse the Southern Heavenly Gate towering mistily above, as if not far

away, with the Eighteen Flights of Steps coiling up towards the summit like some great, grey snake; but most of the time black clouds hemmed us in, making pinnacles and crags seem a landscape painted in ink and water-colour.

We forked off from the main road to see the famed Valley of Stone Canons, where over a *mu* of gleaming rocks, under water, are carved in characters a good foot square with quotations from the Diamond Sutra. The lapse of time and the action of the water have made many of these inscriptions illegible.

When we joined the road again the rain had stopped and, sweating from our exertions, we were glad to take off our raincoats to cool down. Oddly enough, as it happened, we were just then

entering a cypress grove, so dark and shady that the sky which had cleared was obscured again as if dusk had fallen betimes. We actually started to feel a little chilly, and did not wonder that this place is known as the Cypress Tunnel. Putting on a spurt we soon reached the Heavenly Tea-pot Tower and Mount of the Yellow Escarpment, whose orange sandstone accounts for the amber colour of the water below.

Looking down from the stone archway by the Second Heavenly Gate, I experienced mingled sensations of pride and fear. Pride because I had already climbed half-way up, fear that I might not manage the other half! The clouds had thinned and mist was rising as we went on, stopping frequently to rest. But our difficulties seemed to be over, for ahead of us stretched a smooth declivity, along which the young folk bounded while I followed cheerfully behind.

Almost before we knew it we were ascending again. The mountain was steeper now, the gradient much sharper. Yet the road was still so wide that only when you peered over its side did you realize that you were on the edge of an abyss. No sound could be heard from the racing streams below. To the west I saw what appeared to be a white girdle about two feet across fluttering in the wind; but this was a waterfall out of reach on the other side of the ravine. Marvelling at the scenery, we found ourselves in front of a stone bridge where, to our surprise, we were bathed in a fine spray of rain. This proved to be another waterfall, and we could not keep clear of it though we hugged the far side of the bridge. This cascade, nearly thirty feet across and of no great height, fell with a roar like thunder on to the weird boulders beneath, flinging spray far and wide. After this, the stream veered to the right, and the murmur of its waters was with us all the way to the Southern Heavenly Gate.

Once over the Bridge of Cloud Footsteps, we were on the path leading up to Taishan's main peak. Although the Southern Heavenly Gate was closer now, bends in the track hid it from sight. Wild flowers of every form and colour were growing in glorious profusion all around, as if to beautify the rugged rocks. Most imposing and inspiring, however, were the pines on these dizzy heights. Thrusting strong roots deep between the crevices of the rocks, they raised gnarled trunks and branches to the sky,

contending with the angry elements or sporting with the breeze and white clouds. Some of these noble trees grew out at an angle from the mountainside, as if leaning out to gaze down; some awaited travellers like great dark green umbrellas; some seemed exultant, glorying in their strength. Each in its different way convinced you that here were the true masters of Taishan, for mountain and trees would be incomplete, unthinkable, without each other. Mist was drifting through the pine-clad crags, it would soon be evening. I lost track of the number of steps we climbed as we toiled painfully yet with pleasure up flight after flight, dragging one foot after the other. When at last we reached the top of the Slow Eighteen Flights, I felt I had been climbing all my life. Leaning against the Arch of Ascending Immortals, I looked up at the Sudden Eighteen Flights rising like a long ladder to the Southern Heavenly Gate. The newly hewn steps were too narrow to tread in comfort. I took hold of the iron railing and the arm of a younger friend. Halting every ten steps or so to catch our breath, we managed to reach the top by seven o'clock.

My heart was pounding, my legs were palpitating, but I had reached the summit! And I marvelled at my own achievement when I saw those neat tiers of stone stairs stretching endlessly down. . . . I walked light-heartedly down Heavenly Street, like a man without a care in the world. The small lodging houses there bore no name but displayed different signs: a broom over the door, a couple of parrots in the window, a baton, or a golden ox. The larger lodging houses had tea-tables set out, the smaller ones nothing but a *kang*. This row of buildings backed on the steep mountainside and overlooked the abyss.

The rocks here defied description. They were shaped like lotus petals, elephant heads, old men, recumbent tigers, hump-backed bridges, pillars. . . . Some bore no resemblance to anything known, but glowered black and motionless, blocking your way. Countless legends have grown up round Taishan in the course of centuries. At the Altar of Sacrifice, you cannot but recall the days when the emperors of old performed grand sacrifices here. A boulder on a barren promontory is pointed out as the spot from which "all beneath heaven appeared small" to Confucius. Then there is a pool where, according to ancient legend, the Jade Maiden washed her hair. And from the Cave of White Clouds, so tradi-

tion has it, fleecy clouds used to be poured out over the peaks. Flocks of white clouds still float through the mountains today. Sunlight falling on their molten silver turns them into a sea of gold or sets them ablaze, and sometimes they seem to be consumed by fire and vanish to reveal the earth below.

We missed seeing the glorious sunrise on Taishan. The best season for that is the clear, sparkling autumn. But our compensation was the sight of the waterfalls in the rain. Two days later, on our return journey, they were far less impressive; for the smaller cascades had disappeared, while big waterfalls had become small ones. Following the West Valley, we climbed more peaks and ridges, passed through the fragrant apple orchard, and lingered for a while by Black Dragon Pool. Here mountains and water combine to form a picture of harmony and infinite variety, a landscape with a beauty all its own.

*Translated by Gladys Yang
Illustrations by Chang An-chih*





YEN CHEN

Peony Park

Seven years ago in late spring, on a business trip to Anhwei, I happened to be caught in the rain on Lion Mountain. The local people never leave home without an umbrella at this time of year, but being new to the district I did not know this. The rain was no more than a drizzle, yet it fell so steadily and persistently that soon all Lion Mountain was veiled in mist.

The ceaseless rain washed the flagged path spotlessly clean. On both sides lush bamboos pearled with raindrops made a green haze as far as eye could see, while clusters of peach blossom in the valley below glowed like clouds of dewy crimson mist through the rain. The hazy green and patches of misty red seemed like paint newly splashed on rice paper, saturating it little by little. Glorious, life-giving showers of spring!

Yen Chen is a young poet. Two of his poems *The River Lien in Moonlight* and *A Midnight Call* were published in *Chinese Literature* No. 9, 1959. He is the author of an anthology of poems called *Songs from South of the Yangtze*.

As I climbed the path I heard faint footfalls behind and turned to see an orange umbrella overtaking me through the light rain. This umbrella, held in front like a shield, covered the whole upper part of its owner's body, leaving nothing visible but a pair of legs coated with the red mud peculiar to these hills, which left distinct red footprints on the stone steps.

Caught in thunderstorms on the north China plain, I had more than once shared an umbrella with some stranger on the road, and I assumed this would be quite in order in the rainy Yangtze Valley. With this in mind, I greeted the stranger. The umbrella was tilted to one side and there, to my surprise, stood a girl of fifteen or sixteen. She was holding the umbrella in her right hand, some newly opened white peonies in her left. Her red jacket was spattered with raindrops, and beads of moisture were clinging to her short hair. After eyeing me uncertainly for a moment, she bypassed me abruptly and hurried on without a word. A few steps further on, however, she turned round with a laugh, dropped her umbrella on the flags, and proceeded swiftly up the steps ahead.

I saw her enter a thatched hut beside the path, but by the time I reached it she had gone. There was no one inside but a white-haired old man smoking a bamboo pipe.

"Just leave the umbrella, comrade," he said. "You can wait here till the rain stops."

"Where's that girl?" I asked, eager to return the umbrella to its owner.

"What girl?" He seemed puzzled, then smiled. "You mean Peony? Can't you see the tracks she's left?" With his pipe he indicated the clear red footprints on the path by the back door.

I had heard something about the marvellous peonies that grew on the steep summit of Lion Mountain. And this unexpected encounter with a girl called Peony, who was moreover carrying peonies, reminded me of those stories.

"Is it true, uncle," I asked, "that you have some rare kind of peony up here?"

The old man looked grave and abruptly laid down his pipe. He raised his head to stare gravely at the rain still falling outside and the shifting clouds on the summit of Lion Mountain.

"Plenty of folk grew peonies on Lion Mountain, but only one family raised really fine ones," he told me. "And that was fifteen or sixteen years ago." The old fellow sighed. "A young couple lived in this valley in those days, Chang Keng and his wife Pai Mei. By working from dawn till dusk, they managed to clear a small patch of rocky hillside and planted several dozen tree peonies there. Husband and wife, they tended those trees more carefully than most folk tend their children, weeding, hoeing, loosening the soil and adding humus. . . . In wind or rain, from early till late, they kept hard at it without resting for a day.

"Then the communist-led New Fourth Army came and organized a Peasants' Union to resist Japan and reduce rents and rates of interest. Young Chang Keng was a good fellow, so we made him chairman, and that work kept him too busy to mind his trees — Pai Mei had to look after them all on her own. But those were stirring times and Pai Mei didn't grudge the effort. Sometimes in spring, to catch pests, she crouched out there all night by the trees. She knew just how many branches each tree had, the day it started to sprout, the number of leaves. The year after the New Fourth Army came, it was like a miracle: overnight each tree of theirs produced flowers bigger than a rice bowl with the silver glimmer of snowballs! The whole village was filled with fragrance. And believe it or not, the same night that the flowers opened, Pai Mei had a baby girl! For two years after that the trees went on producing the same big blooms. Everybody who saw them was absolutely amazed."

Suddenly lightning flashed high up on the mountain, sheet lightning that seemed to split the sky and filled the cottage with lurid light for a second. Then thunder crashed. As if stirred by the storm, the old man went on more quickly:

"Before the peonies opened the year after that, the New Fourth Army left. And no sooner had it gone than the big landlord from down below brought troops up here to seize Chang Keng. They tried to force him to give the names of the peasants in the union, and to get him to write a confession. When he refused, the old devil had him tied to a tree and stabbed him three times, stabbing at his heart! But Chang Keng didn't cave in. He burst his ropes and fought his way, dripping with blood, to the landlord. He grabbed the knife from him and

killed the brute, then dropped down dead himself. Pai Mei knelt by his side and wept all night. The next day she was out of her mind!"

The old man broke off abruptly and we sat facing each other without speaking while a great clap of thunder shook the cottage. As its rumbles died away in the distance, he continued in a low voice: "After that, sometimes Pai Mei laughed, sometimes she cried. She used to run up to the mountain top in the moonlight and sit absolutely quiet on the great boulder there, or rush up and down the whole night long, barefoot, with tousled hair. . . . No one had the heart to grow peonies here after that. And those marvellous trees stopped flowering."

"What happened then?" I asked.

"Well, we all helped to bring up the little girl, and we raised money to try to cure her mother. But it was no use. Since the liberation she's become a little better. She doesn't rush about outside, but her wits are still wandering, except for a few lucid days each year when she sees the peonies flower."

"What about the daughter?" I asked.

The old man's face cleared. Puffing slowly on his pipe, he answered with a smile:

"That's the girl who ran up the path ahead of you."

"Peony! You don't say?" That accounted for the white blooms I had seen in her hand. . . .

In April this year I went back to Lion Mountain, arriving this time just after a shower of rain. Our bus bowled quickly along a smooth new road, past clouds of peach blossom and willows like a green mist, till the familiar peaks of Lion Mountain loomed into sight. The first thing I noticed after alighting at the new bus station was a large signpost with red characters on it saying, "Peony Park." The arrow pointed straight up Lion Mountain. I exclaimed in astonishment to my companion Secretary Kuo.

The view from the summit quite took my breath away. The whole mountain top was covered with tree peonies. The red and white flowers had just opened and a warm spring breeze was wafting the scent far and wide. They were a dazzling sight, swaying in the wind. From a distance it looked as if a coloured cloud had settled on the mountain top. There must have been thousands of trees, and girls in their late teens were busily hoeing

and manuring the ground. A woman of forty or more, in blue denims, with abundant black hair, caught sight of us and moved towards us with a smile.

"That's Pai Mei," Secretary Kuo told me. "The new technical adviser in our local pharmaceutical college."

"Pai Mei!?"

"Yes, Pai Mei," he assured me. "Do you know her history? She was ill for a long time, but now she's better."

Now Pai Mei stood before us and I was struck by her fresh, youthful appearance. There seemed no need to ask how she had recovered her health. It was clear enough from the smile on her face that this was thanks to the strength and vitality of our new life!

My thoughts flew to Peony, the shy, wilful girl who had left her umbrella for me in the rain. When I asked news of her, her mother smiled.

"She's studying in Peking. She'll soon graduate," she answered briefly.

Looking at the blooms stretching like diaphanous clouds towards the horizon, at the red that dotted the hillsides far and near, I recalled how the girl had climbed up and up without halting, leaving those clear red footsteps on the stone path.

The sun was high in the sky, and the flowers on Lion Mountain glowed in the sunlight. The girls' bright skirts combined with the newly opened peonies to form a dazzling picture!

*Translated by Gladys Yang
Drawing by Huang Chung-chun*

Li Chi as played by Hao Shou-chen ▶
photo by Li Wei-min

This face design was painted by Hao Shou-chen (1886-1961) when he acted the role of Li Chi. He had been an actor for 68 years in the Peking opera. After liberation he became president of the Peking Opera School. He made significant innovations in the *ching* role, and started a school of his own, which has had considerable influence on later actors. See *Face Designs in Chinese Opera* on p. 95.



Notes on Art

AH WEN

Face Designs in Chinese Opera

Actors in the traditional Chinese theatre usually paint their faces with a variety of patterns to indicate the character of the role they are playing. This method of make-up is a special art.

On the classical Chinese stage, real life is not reproduced as in photographs, but use is made of artistic exaggeration and generalization in accordance with clearly defined rules based on realistic principles. In the course of centuries, Chinese actors have evolved a distinctive form of stagecraft acceptable to the people, and created a set of conventions for the singing, elocution, dancing gestures and other component parts of the performance based on the various typical features selected from real life. Face designs are one of the modes of expression evolved, a special way of bringing out character.

The main types of role in the traditional drama are *sheng* (gentleman), *tan* (lady), *ching* (rough fellow or warrior), and *chou* (clown or rogue). Different rules govern the performers in these roles, who are also differentiated from each other by their make-up. The *sheng* and *tan* are only slightly touched up, with emphasis on the lady's hair-style or heightened colour on the face, but the facial designs of the *ching* and *chou* are much more exaggerated, different designs and colours being used to symbolize their personal qualities. In the case of the *ching*, in particular, to emphasize the warrior's height and strength, the forehead is generally elongated, the face design extending to the

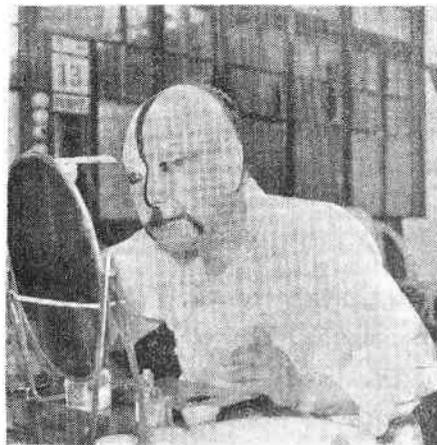
crown of the head and to both ears. The face designs in Chinese opera are mainly employed for these *ching* and *chou* roles.

The vivid colours of the face patterns make an aesthetic appeal to the audience and indicate the character of the role, reflecting the popular opinion of various historical figures. For example, Li Kuei, a brave man in the *Heroes of the Marshes*, has his face painted black to indicate his rough character combined with stern resolution and a sense of justice. Three darting flames over his forehead symbolize his fiery temper, and the tips of his eyebrows are made to slant slightly downwards, the corners of his mouth slightly upwards, to convey that this resolute character has great charm.

The colourful patterns must give artistic exaggeration to facial expression. Works of art in themselves, they are not just vivid designs but an integral part of the performance, combining with the distinctive method of singing and the dancing movements of Chinese opera to produce a strong dramatic effect. And it goes without saying that though the face designs indicate character, the actor must have a deep understanding of his role and interpret it convincingly.

Face designs have a long history. They may owe their existence to the masks worn in battle by some generals of old. We know that the Prince of Lanling in the sixth century was a brave warrior with gentle, girlish features, who wore a ferocious-looking mask in order to strike awe into his opponents, and who won many victories. Actors wore similar masks when they showed how the prince rode to battle, using song and dance to celebrate his valour.

During the ninth century, in the Tang dynasty, actors started painting their faces to heighten the



Hao Shou-chen making up



Hsiang Yu as played by Hao Shou-chen, was a general of the 3rd century B.C. Here he is depicted with a tragic expression when defeated

colour. In the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), the wearing of masks was abandoned and red or white designs were drawn on the face to distinguish good characters from bad, indicating praise or censure. After the fourteenth century face designs multiplied, fresh colours were introduced and the patterns became more complex, vivid and exaggerated.

Face designs owe something, as well, to classical literature and its detailed descriptions of heroes and villains. Thus the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* introduces the brave general Kuan Yu in this way: "His face was ruddy in colour, his eyes bright as those of a phoenix, his eyebrows like silkworms." Li Kuei in *Heroes of the Marshes* is described as a swarthy, stern-looking fellow. Word sketches such as these often formed the base of face designs; however, the artist who created a pattern never



Tsao Tsao in middle age, played by
Hao Shou-chen

restricted himself to the description in a book, but used colours and forms with greater imagination to produce much more powerful effect.

The early face designs made use of only three colours: black, red and white. Red symbolized loyalty and justice, as in the role of the general Kuan Yu; black stood for straight-forwardness or roughness, as in the hero Li Kuei; white indicated cunning and treachery, as in the case of Tsao Tsao who usurped power in the third century. Later, to dif-

ferentiate various characters and bring out more complex traits, several colours were applied to one face, combining realism with exaggeration. Purple indicates steadfastness or integrity, yellow shows impetuosity or boldness, blue suggests resolution and daring, green means stubbornness and a hot temper, and gold and silver are used for supernatural beings. The introduction of additional colours led to an infinite variety of patterns.

China has several hundred types of local opera with different face designs and a different use of colours. For instance, General Huang Kai in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* has a purple face in Kiangsi opera but a red face in Peking opera. Ma Wu, a general of the first century, has a green face in Hankow opera, a blue one in Peking opera and a red one in Kiangsi opera. These discrepancies arise from different interpretations of the characters.

Although definite rules govern the face designs, an actor is free to make certain innovations on the basis of his own interpretation of the role. The late Hao Shou-chen, an exponent of Pe-

king opera, introduced many innovations of this kind. When he depicted Tsao Tsao, he created different patterns for different periods of his life. Tsao Tsao in early manhood had a broader forehead and his eyes slanted slightly upwards to create an effect of spirited ambition, while the fineness of the black lines on the face showed that he was still young and did not have many wrinkles. Tsao Tsao in his prime had a lower forehead, level eyes and thicker lines, indicating increased experience and steadiness. In his old age he had an even lower forehead and his eyebrows, painted light grey, were thicker and broader, showing signs of old age, while the sagging corners of his eyes suggested failing eyesight and lax muscles.

In this number we reproduce a photograph of Hao Shou-chen in the role of Li Chi in *The Trial of Li Chi*. This character is an intrepid outlaw who quarrels with Wang Liang, one of the literati. Wang's servant stuns Li Chi with a blow from a stool so that he is caught by the authorities. Li Chi's facial patterns are twisted to show that he has been beaten and his face is contorted with pain during the trial. The straw on his hair suggests that he has stayed in jail.

Since the classical Chinese theatre is a product of feudalism, its form and content could not but be influenced by feudal ideas, and some face designs are in poor taste. During the reform of the old drama after liberation, the good designs have been preserved while unhealthy features have been eradicated.

PAN CHIEH-TZU

“Manifestations of the Pure Land”

The Tunhuang caves of Kansu in northwest China are a treasury of sculptures and frescoes, some of the best of which are found in the Mokao caves.

A traveller coming from a distance to this valley in the wild desert sees at first nothing but a grey cliff pitted with caves. But step inside and you find yourself surrounded by coloured sculptures and frescoes which fill you with amazement and awe. The Mokao caves are among the earliest cave temples in China. Work on them started in A.D. 366 and went on till the fourteenth century. During these ten centuries innumerable artists and sculptors toiled to produce glorious shrines in this sheer stone cliff.

The best period was in the Tang dynasty between the seventh and the tenth century, when, according to the records, Mokao already had more than a thousand shrines magnificent with painted frescoes and coloured sculptures. Centuries of exposure to the wind, sun and sandstorms corroded the stone, and more damage was done by men, so that many of the shrines were destroyed. But after liberation the Tunhuang Research Institute set about the work of restoration, and at present 480 caves are preserved. These stretch for two kilometres from south to north, and in places there are as many as four tiers of caves in honeycomb

Pan Chieh-tzu, a painter in the traditional style, is an editor of the magazine *Art*.

formation, where we can see frescoes and sculptures dating from the Tsin to the Yuan dynasty.

My first sight of these ancient treasures of art simply took my breath away. The 480 Mokao caves boast more than 1,400 undamaged statues and tens of thousands of small Buddhist images, while the frescoes, if set together, would extend for 25 kilometres. Here I shall not attempt to do more than record my impressions of the frescoes in Cave No. 172.

The Mokao caves are a product of Buddhist art, which used religious images to reflect ten centuries of life in China. A good illustration of this is *Manifestations of the Pure Land* in Cave No. 172, painted in the eighth century, the best period of mural painting in China. Here 120 frescoes based on scenes from Buddhist lore glorify the happiness and splendour of the land of Buddha and illustrate Buddhist legends. This reflects the religious beliefs popular during that period, for of the ten sects of Tang dynasty Buddhism the Pure-land School had the greatest number of followers. We read that the monk Shan-tao, a zealous advocator of this school at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, directed the artists who painted three hundred frescoes of the Pure Land, or Sukhavati, the Western Paradise free from death and sorrow, where Buddha dwells. This was obviously a most popular theme, for many outstanding Tang artists, including the great master Wu Tao-tzu of the early eighth century, illustrated this theme in frescoes in different monasteries.

The *Manifestations of the Pure Land* in Cave No. 172 draws from descriptions in the *Sukhavati Vyuha Sutra* to depict the hall where Buddha expounds the truth. In the centre sits Amida Buddha on his lotus throne with Avalokitesvara and Mahasthama on either side, and around them hosts of saints, arhats, guardian angels, yaksas and bodhisattvas. In front of Buddha's throne are musicians and dancers, and a dance by two angels is taking place in the foreground, while dozens of musicians are playing different instruments on both sides. There is a pool where lotus is blooming, and birds are sporting over the water. Behind Buddha are two bodhi-trees and pavilions and towers connected by covered walks. In the sky bodhisattvas ride on coloured clouds holding sacred symbols and musical instruments, while apsaras scatter

flowers. The whole mural, centred round the Buddha, is a magnificent and sumptuous presentation of the Western Paradise.

At the same time this splendid paradise mirrors the real world in which the artists lived by idealizing and romanticizing the pomp and luxury of the feudal nobility. The images of Buddha and the saints are based on human beings, and their size and exalted position reflect the strict feudal hierarchy of the Tang dynasty. The music and dancing testify to the vogue for such entertainments in that age, while the pavilions and towers are similar to princely mansions. Because the artists inevitably introduced images of their own day into these religious paintings, they give us a glimpse of historical reality.

Viewed as a work of art, this fresco marks the zenith of Buddhist art in the Tang dynasty.

Buddhist art, as soon as it was brought to China, began to blend with traditional Chinese art. The early Tunhuang frescoes of the sixth century depict legendary figures with certain characteristics of Han dynasty painting and certain foreign features. The whole technique is rather simple and lacking in polish.

But the composition, characterization, line drawing and use of colour in the *Manifestations of the Pure Land* show that Buddhist art has been thoroughly assimilated into China and reached maturity here. The whole composition is magnificent and most complex. The rules of perspective derived from ancient Chinese architecture are applied to create a feeling of great space and depth; and hundreds of figures, flowering trees and birds are so skilfully arranged in this space that it looks impressively full without any crowding or confusion. Symmetry gives the whole mural solemnity and dignity. And huge though the fresco is, the artists have not skimmed a single detail but used meticulous skill to depict Buddha in this highly complex setting. The line drawing, accurate and fluent, shows the freedom acquired by long practice and a powerful sense of rhythm. Bold use is made of strong mineral colours and the artists produce a vivid effect by striking colour contrasts, yet all these varied shades are subordinated to the basic greens and blues. The aim is not merely a decorative effect but the use of colour

Manifestations of the Pure Land (details) ►



to bring out the blissful solemnity of paradise, and this adds greatly to the impact of the painting.

The beatitude pictured in this paradise differs from the early Tunhuang murals which emphasize asceticism and abnegation. This fresco, with its praise and affirmation of man's material life on earth, is a product of its time. The prosperous feudal economy and relative social stability of the Tang dynasty enabled the nobles and landowners to amass considerable wealth, and there was an atmosphere of general peace and prosperity. The folk artists who painted this fresco transplanted the legendary Buddhist paradise to the world of men, and so we see religious aspirations interwoven with earthly desires. Here are evident the longings for worldly pleasures after death of the rich patrons who paid for these shrines, as well as the realistic outlook on life and yearnings for a better future of the humble artists of the middle ages. These craftsmen were naturally influenced by religious ideas and, thanks to this religious colouring of their knowledge of real life, they succeeded in creating a superb combination of mundane pleasure and heavenly peace.

The Tang temples were public art galleries in the sense that they attracted thousands of religious believers and so moved them by works of this kind that they would give anything to attain the Buddhist paradise shown here. Even today this great work's artistic splendour has not diminished with the passing of time but is drawing ever larger crowds to enjoy its beauty.

FANG WEN-JEN

A Woman Writer of Distinction



Since the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, a great number of new writers have emerged in China. Most of them were born in the twenties and grew up during the War of Resistance Against Japan, plunging into that struggle and into the subsequent War of Liberation. When the fighting ended, they took part in socialist construction. It is only natural, therefore, that the characters and scenes they depict are richly imbued with

the spirit of the time. That is why modern Chinese writing shines with a splendour all its own.

Ju Chih-chuan is one of these writers. Her first short story dates from 1950. In 1958 her lyrical story *Lilies*, describing the close relationship between the army and the people, attracted considerable attention among literary critics as well as the reading public. Since then she has given us more than twenty stories, all of a fairly high level, now included in the noteworthy collections *Tall Poplars* and *The Maternity Home*. Quite a few of these stories have been printed in this journal.

Ju Chih-chuan's works are inseparable from her life and struggle. Roughly they can be divided into two categories. Those of the first category such as *Lilies*, *On the Banks of the Cheng*, *A Third Visit to Yenchuang* and *Comradeship*, describe war and village life in the past, and present many unforgettable images of fighters and peasants. The other category, represented by *A Promise Is Kept*, *The Warmth of Spring* and *The Maternity Home*, describes agricultural co-operation, the establishment of people's communes and life in factories after the liberation. The new type of peasants, workers and housewives in these stories are vividly portrayed, their characters emerging through incidents in their family life and daily work. In stories where women are the chief characters, she shows how their feelings and outlook are affected by changing family relations and other momentous social developments. Ju Chih-chuan has a fine eye for detail. Delicacy and a lyric style are her basic attributes. Her writing is highly distinctive.

At present Ju Chih-chuan lives in Shanghai and is busy writing a short novel called *By the Sea*. Not long ago I went to see her and she obligingly set aside her work to grant me an interview. Sitting on a small bamboo stool, she seemed so much at ease herself that I soon felt at home. And she gave frank, spirited answers to my questions.

She did not talk directly about her writings but first recalled her childhood and girlhood. Born in 1925, she lost her parents at an early age. Hers was a hard, poverty-stricken life, with only four years of schooling. Rather quizzically she told me, "At school what I liked best was literature. Reading Hsieh Ping-hsin's *To Young Readers*, I longed to become a well-known writer like her. But because of my own lack of knowledge and ability, I knew this was an unattainable dream." She was in a cruel predicament, as she went on to explain. "Because I had no parents, my childhood was spent in a cold, bleak orphanage, a real epitome of the old society. The 'philanthropists' who ran institutions like this did so simply as a means of winning prestige and raising funds — in other words, to get high official posts and wealth for themselves. We orphans were the object of exploitation. In fact we were free child labour. When I grew older I counted myself lucky to have a hand-to-mouth job, attending

the sons and daughters of well-to-do families in a primary school as their teacher. I was too crushed to think about literature!"

However, Ju Chih-chuan would not put up with such a life. When she was eighteen she left Shanghai with her fourth brother, braving a snowstorm to go to the anti-Japanese base in central Kiangsu set up by the Chinese Communist Party. She joined a cultural troupe in the New Fourth Army. It was the year after the publication of Chairman Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*. Her fellow workers were studying that important document, and art and literature in the liberated areas were developing along new and popular lines. For the first time Ju Chih-chuan realized the great power of literature and art. *Revenge in Blood and Tears*, *The White-haired Girl* and other operas exposing the oppression of the peasants by the landlord class moved the fighters so much that they vowed to avenge the sufferings of the people. All this deeply impressed Ju Chih-chuan, who began to love revolutionary literature.

So life and the struggle paved the way for her literary career. As this was war time, the members of the cultural troupe were required to do some other work in addition to their own tasks. At one time Ju Chih-chuan headed a group of stretcher-bearers at the front. She also cooked for the fighters. Then she was sent to the villages to take part in the land reform. During the last stage of the War of Resistance Against Japan and all through the War of Liberation, she was not idle for a day but occupied with a variety of tasks.

"Those six fighting years from '43 to '49 were invaluable to me as a writer," she emphasized. "The people's selfless devotion to the revolution was an inspiration to me."

Since the liberation she has had various jobs, including teaching railway workers, doing propaganda work in the mines and joining in the agricultural co-operative movement. This rich experience has helped to broaden her views.

"Experience of life is essential to us," she told me with a smile. "And accumulating it is like making a snowball—the further you roll it, the more substantial it grows! I was very lucky to have a small part in the revolution, living and fighting side by side with the people. Today whenever I meet peasants, I can understand them fairly well and usually see eye to eye with

them. No writer can present life by means of artistic generalization until he or she understands the people's feelings and longings."

It was in 1955 that she became an editor of the Shanghai *Literature Monthly* and began to take up creative writing in all seriousness. She wrote quite a number of stories which attracted wide attention. In 1958, China's socialist construction surged ahead with the Great Leap Forward. Ju Chih-chuan was so deeply stirred by the people's tremendous enthusiasm that she was often constrained to get up in the middle of the night to put in writing the new events she had witnessed during the day.

"In those days so many people and things filled my thoughts!" she said. "I thought of the comrades who laid down their lives in the war for a beautiful ideal. Now step by step that ideal was being realized. All I saw and heard of housewives was food for thought too. In the past their chief concern had been the well-being and comfort of their husbands and children; but now, one after another, they took up work outside the home to build a better life for everyone in the country. And as soon as they developed this public spirit, the intelligence and grit which had lain hidden so long like gold in sand began to shine in the sunlight! That was the idea I tried to express in *The Warmth of Spring*.

"Most of my short stories are about women, probably because I'm one myself and so have a particular interest in the subject!" She chuckled. "But the fact is, I do find women's part in life today most impressive. During the war and in the present period of peaceful construction, I have come across so many women doing all sorts of jobs. To my mind, Chinese women have a character of their own, combining extreme warm-heartedness and consideration for others with a tenacity and determination to overcome difficulties which make them fight to the finish. These are the characteristics I am eager to bring out in my heroines."

"That must be why all your stories about women are so well written," I remarked.

She smiled wryly, as if to disclaim the compliment. Her gay, somewhat blunt manner contrasted rather strangely, I thought, with her discerning artist's eye and discrimination, her ability to probe the human heart and register the whole range of its emotions. These qualities are very evident in her writing. Her forte is using

psychological changes to build up character, and she does this by a judicious selection of detail. Her psychological insight and attention to detail are brilliant and masterly.

"If any of my short stories are worth reading at all," she interposed seriously, "that is thanks to the help and support I've had from the Shanghai Writers' Union. In 1958, when I had written only very few stories, the union relieved me of my editorial duties so that I could go and live among the masses, and gave me useful advice. When I turned out more stories, the union got other writers and critics to discuss them — questions of style, theme and so forth. The concern and guidance of some of these veterans helped me to raise the level of my work. It meant a lot to me, for instance, when, soon after the publication of *Lilies*, Mao Tun commented on it in his article *On Recent Short Stories*. Later my work was reviewed by the literary critic Hou Chin-ching, and other veteran writers like Wei Chin-chih. I learned a good deal from their warm encouragement and the strict demands they made.

"I often think how lucky writers of my generation are, compared with writers of the last generation who found it hard to make a living. If we have any problems in our life and work, the Writers' Union is only too glad to help solve them. What we should be concerned to have is a sense of responsibility towards our readers, for that will make us write works that are useful to the people."

This last statement lingered in my mind long after I had left. It is true that, like many other young writers in New China, Ju Chih-chuan seeks nothing else but to write works that are useful to the people.

Reviewer's Diary

WANG YANG-LO

Chinese Translations of Latin American Literature

It is more than forty years since the first translated work of Latin American literature was introduced to China. In 1921, the well-known literary journal *The Short Story Magazine* published *Queen Mab's Veil*, a story by Rubén Darío of Nicaragua. In 1923, the same magazine published Shen Yen-ping's translation of *The Last Throw* by the Brazilian writer Aluizio de Azevedo. However, since China's reactionary government never encouraged interchange of culture among nations, many fine works from Latin America remained unknown to the Chinese people. In 1949, after the establishment of our Republic, great importance was attached to translation and publication of Latin American literature and this work is now proceeding in a planned and systematic manner.

The national literature of the Latin American countries was born at the same time as the revolutionary movement for independence on that continent. We have published the selected poems of José Martí, great poet and national hero of Cuba during the period of the struggle for independence. This selection includes representative works from his main anthologies

Wang Yang-lo is an editor of the People's Literature Publishing House whose translation of *An Outline History of Cuban Literature* by José Antonio Por-tuondo was published recently.

Ismaerillo, *Versos sencillos* and *Versos libres*, and the poems are filled with passion and revolutionary romanticism. Another writer of the independence movement introduced to China is Antônio de Castro Alves, a revolutionary poet who strongly opposed the feudal system and the use of slave labour in Brazil. His selected poems in Chinese come from the collections *Espumas fluctuantes* and *Os escravos*.

The romantic literature that flowered after the movement for independence is represented by the Peruvian writer Ricardo Palma. More than twenty tales from his *Tradiciones peruanas* give Chinese readers a picture of life in Peru during the colonial period and present many heroic tales of the revolutionary struggle.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw a growing realism in Latin American literature, as writers chose different themes and different approaches to reflect the true situation in their society. Works of this period now introduced to China include *Os sertoes* by Euclides da Cunha of Brazil, which describes a great peasant revolt in the Brazilian interior at the end of the last century, revealing the mighty revolutionary strength of the oppressed people of Latin America. Another famous realist novel of this period is *La vorágine* by the Colombian writer José Eustasio Rivera, which exposed the cruel exploitation of the workers by the imperialist agents and big landlords. *Gouverneurs de la Rosée* by Jacques Roumain is a novel about the agrarian struggle in Haiti, while the short novel *Los caciques* by Mariano Azuela describes the democratic revolution in Mexico. Another book very popular with young Chinese readers is *Cuentos de la selva* by Horacio Quiroga of Uruguay. More recent publications include the *Selected Short Stories* of Baldomero Lillo, more than ten stories about the life of coal miners by this noted Chilean realist writer. Another revolutionary writer, César Vallejo, well known for his depiction of the life of Indians in Peru, wrote a novel with an anti-imperialist theme entitled *El tungsteno*, which will be published this year on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death.

The bulk of the Latin American literature translated into Chinese is the work of contemporary writers who express their people's fervent demand for liberation and revolution; for such books

make a special appeal to Chinese readers. Works of fiction of this category include *En la rosa de los vientos* and *El alba en las simas* by José Mancisidor of Mexico; *Martin no roba nada* by Álvaro Yunque; Alfredo Varela's *El río oscuro* dealing with the hard lot of the workers; Raúl Larra's *Le decían el Rulo*, the story of a newspaper vendor who gradually learns the meaning of revolution; and the same novelist's *Gran Chaco* about the reactionary government's attempt to deceive the Argentine peasants. The last four works are from Argentina. These four books are from Brazil: *A marcha* and *Mistérios de São Paulo* by Afonso Schmidt, *Histórias de tia Nastácia* by José Bento Monteiro Lobato and Alina Paim's *A hora próxima* describing a railway strike. Three other well-known works by contemporary writers are *Weekend en Guatemala*, a collection of stories by Miguel Ángel Asturias about the U.S. imperialists' dastardly plot to overthrow the democratic government of Guatemala; *Mamita Yunai* by Carlos Luis Fallas of Costa Rica, who describes the cruel exploitation of the Latin American people by U.S. monopolists; and *Compère General Soleil* by the Haitian writer Jacques Stephan Alexis tells the story of his people's struggles. Other well received novels include *Fronteras al viento* by Alfredo Dante Gravina of Uruguay, its theme the struggle on a cattle ranch; Ramón Amaya Amador's *La cárcel verde* about Honduras workers on a banana plantation who are exploited by the U.S. monopolists; Enrique Gil Gilbert's *Nuestro pan* describing how big landowners deprive the peasants in Ecuador of their land. Jorge Amado's *Terras do sem fim*, *Seara vermelha* and *São Jorge dos Ilheus* were also translated. In addition, a collection of short stories, totalling 200,000 words, presents works by seventeen writers of ten Latin American countries.

In the field of poetry, *Cuaderno de paz y otras poemas* by Carlos Augusto León of Venezuela has been very well received. We also find Chinese translations of the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén's *Collected Poems* and *El sudor y el látigo*; and Pablo Neruda's *Collected Works*, *Las uvas y el viento*, *El fugitivo* and *Que despierte el leñador*.

Following the victory of the Cuban people's revolution, prominence has been given to Cuba's new literature. Since 1960 we have published *Nuestros rugidos*, *Cuba sí*, *yanquis no* and

Venceremos, three collections of revolutionary poems by Latin American poets, the majority of them Cuban poets. These poems fully reflect the revolutionary spirit in contemporary Latin American literature. Pablo Neruda's *Canción de gesta*, written by the Chilean poet after his visit to revolutionary Cuba, has also been published.

José Soler Puig's *Bertillón 166* was the first novel describing the underground struggle of the revolutionaries to be published after the Cuban revolution. In 1960, when the Cuban committee for cultural relations with foreign countries, La Casa de las Américas, held its first contest for Latin American literature, this novel received a prize. This book, with its vivid description of the self-sacrificing fearlessness of the revolutionary people of heroic Santiago, has been well received in China. To celebrate the second anniversary of the victory of Playa Girón, a Chinese translation was published of Raúl González de Cascorro's *Gente de Playa Girón*, which was awarded a prize in 1962 at the third contest organized by La Casa de las Américas. And Chinese readers have been deeply stirred by this collection of stories depicting the Cuban people's heroic resistance to the U.S. mercenaries' invasion, and their resolute defence of their socialist revolution. *La Bandera* is a collection of twenty-three stories by eighteen writers, including Jesus Castellanos of Cuba. These stories depict the poverty of the Cuban people in the last half century, their armed struggle in Sierra Maestra and their new life since the victory of the revolution. *Bosquejo histórico de las letras cubanas* by José Antonio Portuondo is a concise account of the glorious revolutionary tradition and national style of Cuban literature and the first Latin American history of literature to be published in China.

Other prize-winning works at the third contest organized by La Casa de las Américas include Fayad Jamis' collection of poems *Por esta libertad* and Daura Olema García's novel *Maestra voluntaria*, both of which will be published in Chinese this year. Jamis' poems written since the revolution describe the new life and call on his compatriots to defend the revolution, and his long poem *La Victoria de Playa Girón* is a magnificent tribute to the Cuban people's fight at Playa Girón. Daura Olema García's novel — her first work — is written with beautiful simplicity and,

through this truthful and moving story of a girl studying in a training school for voluntary teachers in Sierra Maestra, it reflects the ideological remoulding of young Cuban intellectuals during the revolution. Onelio Jorge Cardoso's *La rueda de la fortuna*, a collection of stories about Cuban peasants and fishermen before the revolution, is now being translated into Chinese.

Translated works of drama from Latin American countries include *Cañaverál* by Paco Alfonso, who describes the struggle of sugar-cane workers in Cuba before the revolution; and the allegorical play *Esopo* by the Brazilian playwright Guilherme de Figueiredo, who voices the determination of an enslaved people to win freedom. Then there is *El centroforward murió al amanecer*, a satire by the Argentine playwright Agustín Cuzzani. All three of these plays have been staged with signal success in China. A more recent publication is *Santa Juana de América* by Andrés Lizarraga of Argentina, who deals with one episode during the war of independence, taking as his heroine a peasant girl who led partisans to fight the Spanish colonialists.

The introduction of translated works of literature from Latin America has only just begun. As the friendship between the Chinese people and those of Latin America grows, and with it cultural interchanges, more rapid advances will certainly be made in this field.



Chronicle

New Works on Art and Literature

More than thirty theoretical books on art and literature have been published in recent months by the Peking Writers' Publishing House, the Chinese Drama Publishing House, the Chinese Cinema Publishing House and the Peking Publishing House.

The Writers' Publishing House has a particularly interesting list of new publications. They include *On History and Historical Dramas* written by the well-known novelist Mao Tun, following the discussion on the writing of historical drama. This discusses the question of how to produce a work of art which is at the same time true to history. Mao Tun calls for historical dramas that do not merely record history, but are works of art; that may be fictitious but do not invent or distort history. *On Reading "Yuan Mei's Notes on Poetry"* consists of 77 notes written by the poet Kuo Mo-jo when re-reading the notes on poetry written by the eighteenth-century poet and critic Yuan Mei. He made a critical study of the work from a Marxist point of view, pointing out particularly the unwholesome elements contained in the book. *On Narrative Poems* by the woman critic An Chi is a collection of ten essays analysing works by the contemporary poets Li Chi, Wen Chieh, Kuo Hsiao-chuan and others. *Poetry and Our Heritage* by the poet Feng Chih consists of 28 essays written from 1953 to 1962 on foreign and Chinese writers. There are also works on creative writing such as *The Appreciation of Poetry* by Ho Chi-fang, *On Creative Writing* by Tang Tao and *Rambling Notes on Literature* by Wei Chin-chih.

The Peking Publishing House has published a collection of 49 articles written between August 1961 and August 1962 by Wu Han, a historian and prose writer. These articles also contain his views on historical drama.

Discussions on Diderot's "Paradoxe sur le comédien," published by the Chinese Drama Publishing House, is a collection of 16 articles by actors, critics and others engaged in theatrical work on the art

of the theatre and acting. The discussion arose out of differences of opinion on Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*.

The Chinese Cinema Publishing House has published *The Art of Film-making* by the well-known director Chen Li-ting; *Artistic Expression in Films* by the well-known director Chang Chun-hsiang; *Notes on Film-making* by the critic Huang Kang; and *The Artist in Films and Drama* by the well-known artist Han Shang-yi.

A Photostat Edition of a Classical Novel

A handwritten transcript of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* in 120 chapters dating from the Chien-lung era (1736-1796) and first discovered in 1959, has been published in a photostat edition by the Chunghua Bookstore, Shanghai.

Previous editions of this classic novel, written by the eighteenth-century novelist Tsao Hsueh-chin, are based on the 80-chapter manuscript copy or the printed version of 120 chapters. The 80-chapter version is generally regarded as an early copy of Tsao Hsueh-chin's unfinished novel. The 120-chapter version was first published by Cheng Wei-yuan in 1791 and reprinted in 1792. It combines the first 80 chapters by Tsao Hsueh-chin with 40 more chapters generally ascribed to Kao Ngo.

How the novel was expanded from 80 to 120 chapters is a perennially intriguing problem that has still not been solved. Chou Chun, a scholar of the eighteenth century, in his *Notes on Reading the "Dream of the Red Chamber"* mentioned seeing a 120-chapter manuscript copy of the book in 1790. That was probably the version used by Cheng Wei-yuan as the basis of his 1791 edition. The present 120-chapter photostat edition of the handwritten copy discovered in 1959 and dating from between 1746 and 1796 is therefore extremely valuable for research on how the novel was written and revised.

The photostat edition also contains a commentary by Fan Ning, associate research fellow of the Institute of Literary Research of the Academy of Sciences, in which he expresses the opinion that this version is one of the drafts made by Cheng Wei-yuan and Kao Ngo who revised the book. The texts of the first 80 chapters are basically the same as those of the current 80-chapter version, but all other

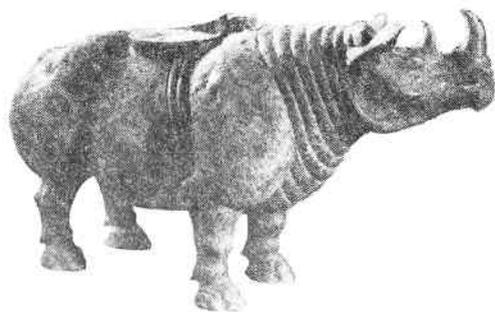
transcripts are incomplete while this newly discovered text is a complete one. Fan Ning also expresses doubts, based on his study of this manuscript, whether the author of the last 40 chapters was really Kao Ngo.

Bronze Libation Vessel Found in Shensi

A 2,000-year-old bronze libation vessel in the shape of a rhinoceros—a rare shape for this type of vessel—was recently discovered in Touma Village, Hsingping County, Shensi Province. Experts tentatively assign it to the Chin dynasty (221-206 B.C.) or the Western Han (206 B.C. - A.D. 8).

Weighing 13.3 kilograms, the vessel is 34.1 cm. high, 58.1 cm. long and 20.4 cm. wide. It is a two-horned rhinoceros of the African species. The two eyes are made of black glass balls (the left eye is slightly damaged), and the whole body is covered with a gold-inlaid cloud pattern. The wine was poured into the vessel through an oval-shaped opening in the back of the rhinoceros. The opening is closed with a bronze lid with a ring in it. The animal is no mere utilitarian object. It is modelled with a lively artistic skill. Its tail is thrust slightly upward, its head is raised and it looks straight ahead, as if it had heard some noise and is alert to danger.

It was a common practice in ancient China to cast bronze ritual vessels in the shape of an ox, sheep, cock, phoenix, stork, elephant,



Gold-inlaid bronze libation cup

tiger or deer, but the rhinoceros shape is most rare. Experts therefore regard this new find as a most valuable one for the study of ancient Chinese handicrafts and art. It was discovered by Chao Chen-hsiu, a member of a people's commune, while digging in a field, and he immediately presented it to the Historical Museum in Peking, where it is now preserved.

Two Painting Exhibitions

Recent exhibitions in Peking have included one of traditional style Chinese water-colour paintings by Lin Feng-mien and one of paintings in western water-colours by Pan Ssu-tung. They were both sponsored by the Union of Chinese Artists.

Lin Feng-mien is well known among the older generation of Chinese artists. In his early years, he studied oil painting in France. Since his return to China he has been a teacher of painting and has created an original style of his own which combines western and traditional Chinese techniques. The 75 paintings on show include landscapes, still life, scenes from the opera and portraits. Most are recent works. Richly poetic, rich in colour and extremely decorative, they have gained him many new admirers in the capital.

Pan Ssu-tung, a professor of the Chekiang Institute of Fine Arts, is a veteran painter in water-colours with a versatile mastery of this medium. He made several tours of the south of the country in recent years and the hundred water-colours exhibited are the fruit of these tours. With a broad range of themes: industrial construction, water-conservancy projects, city life in Shanghai, rural landscapes . . . they are a running commentary on the new face of China. Peking gallery-goers appreciated them especially for the feel of the time which they convey.

Exhibition of British Water-colours

An exhibition of British water-colours sponsored by the Britain-China Friendship Association was held in Peking recently. On display were 150 original paintings by 97 artists including Cozens, Sandby, Chrome, Girtin, Turner, Constable, Cotman, de Wint, Bonnington, Palmer and Steer. It was an excellently selected and

arranged show including most of the great names in British water-colour art and giving a comprehensive idea of developments in the art from the time of Francis Place (1647-1728) to the mid-twentieth century. Enthusiastic Peking art-lovers flocked to see it. The newspapers published reviews written by Associate Professor Chang An-chih of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the woodcut artist Wang Chi and others. Chinese artists, as these articles pointed out, could find much in these paintings to learn from in regard to the use of colours, composition and techniques. The exhibition went on to Shanghai from Peking and will later be seen in Nanking, Sian, Chungking, Shenyang and Canton.



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by *Wang Hsu*

Chieh Chen-kuo was originally a miner of the Kailan colliery in eastern Hopei Province, who took part in the big strike and armed uprising of the Kailan miners which broke out in 1938. Later he became the leader of a workers' guerrilla force and threw himself heart and soul into the War of Resistance Against Japan. His breath-taking exploits against the invaders and their puppets swiftly made him a legendary hero whose very name struck panic into the enemy. This book tells of the complex and intense struggle waged by Chieh Chen-kuo and his comrades in their countless guerrilla operations. The author has brought into high relief the intrinsic quality of the hero's unstinted and burning loyalty to the Party and the people.

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